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JOURNEY UNDER  
THE CRESCENT MOON



JOURNEY UNDER  
THE CRESCENT MOON

by

NINA EPTON

LONDON  
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1949

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TO  
THE EMIR ~~ABD~~ EL KRIM  
(THE LION ~~OF~~ NORTH AFRICA)

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE MOGHREB (i.e. Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco which have been under French influence for 118, 86 and 36 years respectively) is less known to the West than the remote lands of India and China, about which a continuous flow of literature keeps us steadily informed. Yet there at the foot of Europe, seven hours' flight from London, lies Tangier, the doorway to this chain of countries whose inhabitants, more than any other, form a bridge between East and West.

The story of the North African campaign has been written. Graveyards of white crosses lie in silent, serried rows beside the crescent in the lonely desert sands, to mark where Christians fought beside Muslims in defence of a common ideal: liberty. But whereas we fought for a liberty which was a long-acquired part of our heritage, the North Africans fought in the hope of regaining from the European, after the battle was won, at least a promise of future freedom from foreign domination—a freedom which had been extolled in the inspiring annals of their conquerors themselves, in the *Droits de l'Homme* of France.

Now that the tumult of battle is over and the war correspondents have returned home to deal with intricate domestic issues, few travellers remain to describe the people of North Africa and their little-appreciated struggle to break through the death-grip of colonialism, which is hanging on, desperately, blindly, to an obsolete conception of the relationship between races.

It would be a great pity if the correspondents had to return to North Africa in the near future to report on a colonial war. What is, then, going on in North Africa? It will become increasingly obvious, upon reading the following pages, why this extremely important territory is not so well known, for here too an iron curtain has been drawn.

The question was often asked of me (particularly by the police), "Why have you come to Morocco?" since my journeys in the Moghreb started by that country. I really cannot claim to have entered the country as a spy, in spite of rumours to this effect and the treatment that was meted out to me

accordingly. I entered it, to begin with, as a traveller interested in things Islamic, following on beyond the path of the Alhambra and the trail of the *canto jondo* which the Moors have left in Spain. But the voices of the present proved stronger than the voices of the past. The suffering and the struggles of to-day roused emotions more intense than those engendered by a merely passive contemplation of yesterday's glories. And so, actuated by the past and prodded by the present, I journeyed on, and listened to what the people had to say. It would obviously have been easier to write about a British possession than about a French sphere of influence (where our motives are inclined to be misconstrued). Nevertheless, for the very reason that France and England are allies, bound to one another both by treaties and by intangible bonds of friendship, I believe it is all the more important and urgent to reach understanding on fundamental questions of policy. As Emile Wahl wrote to his countrymen on the state of Algeria in 1897: "*On doit la vérité à l'avenir et aux hommes de bonne volonté.*" A future of good relations between countries can only be built upon a solid foundation of truth.

Pierre Loti was able, years ago, to write about "India without the English"; much as I would have preferred to write about "North Africa without the French," it is quite impossible to do so in a territory where nineteenth-century imperialistic policies and racial prejudice have, until now, tinged every aspect of life.

There comes a time in every game when the trophy passes into other hands. We in Great Britain who have been brought up on the playing fields are perhaps better equipped to give up and shake hands while still remaining friends. The French find this more difficult. They, who long ago abandoned the divine right of kings to reign over their destinies, still believe that Providence has destined them to lead the world in a civilizing mission which they try and force upon peoples who have their own culture and civilization. It hurts them, for instance, to think that these people should actually prefer to use their own language rather than French. They who are individualists and lovers of freedom consider it humiliating to grant freedom to others. They invoke a conception of "honour" and "prestige" based on a military rather than an ethical code. "Nationalism" is being studied by the psychologists of to-day as a new growth—another "ism" whose

mysterious causes and effects have not yet been tabulated and classified. This twentieth-century microbe has been incubating for a long time, and we are apt to forget how well we have prepared the medium in which it develops so freely. The neutralizing vaccine of freedom is still in our hands to administer: in one or in several doses, but, like old-fashioned parents who hesitate to give their children the latest drastic remedies, France prefers to hold back and watch them decline. Fearful lest they be lured away from her, she is vainly trying to retain them by force. The disadvantages and dangers of inhibitions and frustrations, which they understand so readily in so far as individuals are concerned, are forgotten as soon as they extend to the wider sphere of overseas communities. "And after freedom—what?" is the classic question posed by the dominating foreigner to the subject race, just as the tyrannical parent asks: "And after coming of age—what? You still need to be guided as we think fit." The answer, however, is not for them to give. The ball has passed on, as life itself, in its eternal evolution towards the "irrevocable end," to quote a Tlemcen poet.

This book, however, is not so much about North African "nationalism" as about their nationalists as human beings, and the environment in which they work and fight to live as free people.



Part I

MOROCCO

*Respectfully dedicated to His Sherifian Majesty, Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef III, Sultan of Morocco, and to Si Allal el Fassi.*

THE WALLS OF MOROCCO

A BARREN, BURNT COAST, with occasional white huddles of houses crouching below hostile cliffs. Seen from the ship, dark green slopes hollowed the mountains, straggling stony paths between the hills led alluringly away beyond the horizon. Africa! One conjured up visions of the old pirate days when galleons patrolled these seas, pirates of Sallee on the Barbary Coast, taking Christian captives to rot away in the dark holds of their ships. There was a slight mist in the distance, and then we saw, floating uncertainly like a mirage, the proud white Kasbah of Tangier and its wonderful bay, fringed with palm trees. Tangier, once capital of the Roman province of Mauretania, once the dowry of Catherine of Braganza, finally abandoned by the British in 1684 to the Sultan Moulay Ismail, ever a highly-coveted prize, and now part of the International Zone of Morocco since the Treaty of Algeciras in 1906, which divided the country into three zones with artificial frontiers: the international zone of Tangier and its hinterland (population approximately 200,000), the French, and most important zone of all, with its 7,610,303 Muslim population,<sup>1</sup> and the small Spanish zone,<sup>2</sup> running parallel to the Mediterranean coast. Tangier has always been a hornet's nest of spies and international intrigues; to-day, it is the meeting-place of Arab nationalists from the three zones of Morocco.

Is the ancient Sherifian Empire really decadent? Or is the

<sup>1</sup> This figure is taken from *Introduction à la Connaissance du Maroc*, Casablanca, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 98 for details of this zone.

young nationalist movement operating a timely blood transfusion that will result in its ultimate revival? If so, will this follow the age-old pattern of a holy war against the infidel Europeans, or will it contain the germ of something new, destined to draw East and West together at last? Only by following those stony paths, only by questioning the people who live in those remote dwellings, would the answers be found.

Morocco: Moghreb-el-Aqsa, Land of the Farthest West, the Arabs had called it when no more westerly west was known. And there it had stopped, while other continents were discovered and developed, and other civilizations rose, finally returning to invade this proud and independent territory. Moghreb-el-Aqsa. It had not changed its name, it had barely changed its way of life, but it still had vigour enough in its aged veins to produce vital men: men like Abd el Krim, whose fame and courage very nearly triumphed over French and Spanish armies only a bare twenty years ago; nationalist leaders like Si Allal el Fassi of Fez, who had been banished by the French to Equatorial Africa for the past nine years; and a reigning Sultan who, it was whispered, secretly favours the Nationalists.

As the sun tore apart the veiled city, minarets appeared through the fine haze, traces of past splendours, of the dynasties who had built the stout walls which had protected Morocco from prying eyes for so many centuries. Now, these walls were crumbling.

Invasions there had been before, but most of them barely penetrated into the interior, or Berber country, where one can still find prehistoric dolmens and cromlechs; it is said that the Berbers may be the descendants of a white Mediterranean race, themselves the ancestors of the Celts. There are legends, too, about Atlantis, the mysterious land that once joined Morocco to the continent of America.

Romans, Vandals, Byzantines occupied the coasts of Morocco before the Arabs finally conquered the country. Here, in the eighth century, the first Sherifian dynasty was born. Sherif Idris, who descended directly from the Prophet Mohammed, accomplished the no mean feat of welding the wild Berbers into a federation, and his name is still revered at Moulay Idris, which is dedicated to his memory. There were great Sultans in the later dynasties too: the Almohades, the Almoravids,

men like Sultan Yacoub el Mansour, who built the Giralda Tower in Seville, the Koutoubbia Tower at Marrakesh and the Hassan Tower of Rabat. There was Ahmed el Mansour, who invaded Timbuktu in 1579, and Moulay Ismail, from the dynasty of the Tafilalet oasis, who tried to turn Meknes into a copy of Versailles. But from the beginning of the nineteenth century anarchy, revolt and internal trouble brought about the fall of this strange empire with its nomadic sultans, whose adventurous spirit urged them to wander round their territories, bearing the State documents on horseback, among their glittering retinue. The history of Morocco has always been filled with intrigue and poetry, with love and warfare, with murder and caprice, with strength and with slavery astutely and gracefully mingled in an inextricable pattern.

In 1873, Moulay Hassan came to the throne and tried to conclude a rapprochement with France, who, ever since her conquest of Algeria in 1830, had been slowly encroaching upon Moroccan territory. Revolt, however, blazed up after his death under his son, Abd el Aziz. His brother, Moulay Hafid, rebelled at Marrakesh, and a massacre of Europeans at Casablanca provoked the landing of a French expeditionary force. In 1907, Abd el Aziz, accused by his countrymen of having sold his country to the French, abdicated and was succeeded by his brother, Moulay Hafid. The progressive occupation by the French went on, until finally Moulay Hafid abdicated and signed a protectorate treaty with France in 1912.

But now, as these dim figures floated up the corridors of memory, reality approached—the Morocco of to-day—and I eyed the figures by the quayside with curiosity. They were still wrapped in the folds of the past: there was an immensely tall, lean Riffian in a brown *djellaba* (hooded cape), a long-haired, bearded corsair in a torn white shirt and damson trousers tucked in at the knees; Arab women draped in heavy white cloth with gauze hiding their faces below the eyes and tied so tightly that they could hardly breathe.

Abdeslam, the guide who seized my luggage as we disembarked, spoke a smattering of English, French and Spanish. We drove along the shore, with its palm trees, white villas and hotels, and a soft-spoken Arab said there were no rooms available, but if I cared to leave my luggage he would keep it for me with pleasure. We walked back along the sea front

to the *soko chico*, in the Arab part of the town. I asked Abdeslam whether he was observing Ramadan, for it was the time of the yearly fast. He smiled. "Naturally I am." The Moroccans are very orthodox, and I wondered at the fortitude of these people who carry on their occupations through the heat of the day without either eating or drinking, from sunrise to sunset, for a whole month. Abdeslam sighed. "Hardly anyone comes to Tangier nowadays. The place is full of refugees. There are Spanish Republicans, Poles, Central Europeans." He spoke readily about the political situation, and informed me that Si Allal el Fassi, the nationalist leader, had just been released from his exile and was now in Fez or in the mountains beyond. Fez, the age-old centre of political life in Morocco. Swift, light-footed Abdeslam was typical of the voice of the *souks* (market-places)—that mysterious murmuring voice which can be heard all over Morocco, a voice growing in intensity, attempting to reach the outside world. Abdeslam spoke too of the Tangier Nationalist newspaper *La Voix du Maroc*, which had been suspended for a while, but had now reappeared. The Director, he said, a Mr. Ahardan, could be found working in his office under the banner of Nationalist Morocco, the five-pointed star.

We walked slowly through the narrow streets and winding *soko chico* where people swarm in their never-ending struggle for existence: the prophet-faced Arabs sitting cross-legged in corners, while impish, dark-skinned boys in rags pattered in the shadows with water melons under their arms, their little black toes making strange incisions in the dust; the Jews, in their long black *kaftans*, walking in earnest discussion with the Arabs; and, most astonishing of all, the auburn-haired Berber babies strapped behind their mothers, their brown (sometimes green) eyes darting in surprise to see a foreigner in their midst.

In the *soko chico* we found a small hotel kept by a Spaniard, where I rented a room overlooking the bay, up two flights of stone steps. From the balcony I could see the white walls of the Kasbah, with its flat roofs rising gradually to culminate in the minaret of the mosque with its coloured tiles shining in the sun. Abdeslam watched my face while I was making up my mind about the room, and then, when he saw that I obviously liked it, he nodded, at a respectful distance, to the Spanish hotel-keeper. Abdeslam's face was a curious mixture

of mobility and immobility: one moment impassive except for the deep, searching eyes, the next moment full of extreme benevolence and dignity. Down below us, the donkeys with panniers full of charcoal patiently waited for customers, while their masters squatted on their heels beside them and gossiped with their neighbours. Abdeslam guided me to the Consulate ("You must be in order with the authorities," he decreed), but it was closed; and then to the British Post Office. One of the peculiarities of Tangier and its international administration is that whenever one wants to send mail to a specific sphere of influence, it must be done through the corresponding post office. There are post offices for Great Britain, France, Spain, the United States, and they are all situated at a great distance from each other. Walking through the dusty roads, past European villas with gardens full of bougainvillæa and hibiscus, I saw a tree with graceful sprays of ferny branches and orange-coloured flowers. They were so beautiful that I stopped in the middle of the pavement to exclaim: "Look, Abdeslam. How lovely they are!" The words were still in my mouth when Abdeslam was already halfway up the tree, showering whole clusters of flowers at me, while the passers-by tiptoed in the shadows underneath, hardly glancing at the blossoms which brushed gently against their feet. Pleasant though he was, however, I did not wish to have a permanent guide, so I dismissed him when we returned to the hotel. "Then you will return to the Consulate all by yourself to-morrow?" he asked. "I am afraid so." Abdeslam resigned himself. A little later, as I was sitting writing in my room, there was a soft knock at the door. It was Abdeslam again, with the subversive *Voix du Maroc* in his hands. He placed it gently on the edge of my bed, smiled mysteriously, and softly closed the door behind him.

On the sea-front, among the palm trees, a young Moorish girl sat on a bench gazing at the sea. I obeyed a sudden impulse to run down and speak to her. She started slightly as I approached; I noticed that her eyes were almond-shaped and that she wore a very thin, almost transparent, veil (the prettiest girls often do). She raised her small hennaed hands, her eyes smiled, but alas! she could only speak Arabic. . . .

A steady stream of donkeys was passing out of the town in the direction of the markets. Before I knew where I was, I had become a part of that solid mass of ambling humanity

whose faces ranged from golden brown to black, whose clothes, worn with dignity and grace, were the colours of a rich palette, from pale pink and blue to mauves and yellows; there were Berbers in brown-and-white skull caps who resembled the muscular figures on Etruscan vases, and fat old women who no longer needed veils to hide their charms; Negroes from the Sudan in coloured caps striding along with heads erect—all marching towards the softly tinted mountains where the sun was setting, bathing the scorched countryside in golden vapour.

From the hill-top came the sound of a low sobbing like an incantation; at first I thought it came from a mosque, until the mourners came in sight, and then I realized it was a funeral procession. The coffin, with its pink, white and gold trappings, was being carried shoulder-high by four stalwart Sudanese, followed by several veiled women and ragged men, all raising their voices in a strange, low-pitched wail; the passers-by stopped and turned towards the coffin gravely as it disappeared from view.

Here, on the outskirts of Tangier on the long road to Fez, the little Moorish shops huddled together, sometimes no bigger than cages, and occasionally one came across a Moorish café, with Arabs squatting on mats, throwing dice. When the shops ended, fields of maize appeared, miserable wooden shacks, and a winding road. There were no Europeans here. "To strangers and wayfarers be kind" says the old Koranic proverb, and so I mingled among the people and followed them, losing myself in narrow lanes and deepening arches, as I came back to the *soko chico*. There was a small square with a solitary tree, lit by a dim lantern, where merchants crouched on the earth before mounds of brilliantly coloured spices. Arab music came from a café, the air was full of incense and fumes of frying oil and then, at last, the long-awaited signal, the gunshot fired from the mosque, announcing the end of the day's fast. Nobody stirred or manifested undignified haste. Bowls of soup were steaming, the flat loaves of bread were neatly piled up, and there was hot food in the pans cooking over charcoal fires; and so people would go on eating until sunrise. Long, furtive shadows wrapped the Kasbah in mystery. The Neffari's flutes pierced the night with their shrill notes; they always play at regular intervals, throughout the nights of Ramadan. Through the open door of the mosque,

I saw hooded figures in prayer and heard the slow chanting of the Koran. The street led along a white wall over which rose the spears of slender, dark cypresses; sweet-smelling shrubs intoxicated the air with their perfume. Long-eared donkeys stumbled unsteadily; two little girls with pigtailed tied in silk were playing ring-o'-roses; a black-robed Jew stood in a doorway with folded arms, gazing meditatively on some unseen object in the distance. The night was full of sounds. Nobody sleeps in Tangier. From the European part of the town came the sounds of cabarets, with their accompaniment of laughter and castanets. From the Kasbah came the quavering sounds of the flutes and the persistent rustling of crickets. The harbour was alive with thousands of lights. The whole Kasbah was stealthily stirring with long flowing robes that seemed to possess no more consistency than butterflies' wings. They hid among bluish-white walls and rounded arches; wandering peacefully through those narrow alleyways, one noticed that the passers-by had steady eyes and walked gracefully and firmly through the night.

The next day, I went to pay a visit to Mr. Ahardan, in the meeting-room of the Nationalist centre, with its framed photographs of nationalist leaders: Si Allal el Fassi, Ouazzani, Naciri. He spoke quietly in broken Spanish, and manifested surprise when I asked him to talk to me about the Moroccan situation. He seemed to think, like many more of his countrymen, that the outside world was well informed about what was happening in Morocco and how eagerly they were striving towards their independence. I told him that this was far from being the case, and I asked him to explain how the country was being administered under the present régime—especially the French zone, since I was going there first.

"Well," said Mr. Ahardan, "you no doubt know that France was anxious to round off her possessions in North Africa, after she had conquered Algeria in 1830 and established her protectorate over Tunisia in 1881. She then began to take up the Moroccan question seriously, but England, Germany and Italy were all following her movements closely, not, needless to add, from any particular sympathy for us, but merely because of our important strategic position at the entrance to the Mediterranean. Morocco was made to serve as a pawn on the European political chess-board. With the advent of your King Edward VII, a policy of *entente cordiale*

was inaugurated between Great Britain and France. A series of political deals were then engineered behind the scenes: the secret Convention of 1904 between France and Great Britain, by which it was agreed that Great Britain, on the one hand, was to have a free hand in Egypt and France, on the other hand, was to pursue her course undisturbed by Britain in Morocco. France then concluded a further agreement with Spain, who had had interests and possessions on the Mediterranean coasts for centuries. The Germans, uneasy about their intentions regarding Morocco, applied pressure on the Sultan to convene an international meeting at Algeciras. This took place in 1906, but it was already too late for the Germans to accomplish anything, in view of the previous secretly concluded agreements between Spain, France and Great Britain. The General Act of Algeciras stipulated, however, that "reforms based upon the threefold principle of the sovereignty and independence of His Majesty the Sultan, the integrity of his dominions and economic liberty for all" were to be introduced in Morocco. German competition was eliminated by a treaty concluded on November 4th, 1911, by which Germany was granted appeasing concessions in West Africa. At last, on March 30th, 1912, France signed a Protectorate Treaty with the weak Sultan Moulay Hafiz. But," emphasized Mr. Ahardan, "in spite of the treaties, the Sultan, under French administration, is neither sovereign nor independent. Moroccan integrity has been disrupted by dividing the country into three zones—French, Spanish and International. Economic liberty so far has meant exploitation of the country for France's benefit. Since the war, however, American interests in Casablanca and elsewhere are beginning to worry the French, who have an almost hysterical fear that their privileged position here will be usurped. First and foremost, they have taken umbrage at the support we are getting—only moral, so far, it is true—from the Arab League in Cairo. Azzam Pasha, Secretary-General of the League, is very interested in the North African question. Next, perhaps, in order of importance, they are afraid of the Anglo-Saxons. They fear the consequences of Great Britain's 'liquidation of her Empire,' as they call it, upon us; they fear American economic infiltration; but they *say* that they fear Russia most of all, and that the Soviets would take over if the French were to leave North Africa. Bah!" Mr. Ahardan shrugged his

shoulders. "That danger is remote: but it is good propaganda these days. It makes us smile, however, because the French Communists are allowed more liberty in Morocco, and indeed, all over North Africa, than we are—we, the people of the country. They can hold meetings, publish papers, found welfare societies, and so on, whereas all this is denied to the Nationalists. There are very few Moroccans in the Communist Party here—about 7 or 8 per cent. at the most, I should say. Next-door, in Algeria, where there are more workmen, it is a little higher: about 15 per cent. perhaps. But we Nationalists have nothing to do with them. Islam and Marx do not mix."

"What sort of a government did you have before the French came?" I ventured.

"It is a fact," admitted Mr. Ahardan, "that we were undergoing a governmental crisis: but a government did exist. In Marshal Lyautey's own words: 'We found in Morocco,' he wrote to the French Government in 1920, 'a State and a people. It was indeed going through a period of anarchy, but this was governmental rather than social.' Our present Government was, and is, called the 'Makhzen.' The Sultan is our religious and temporal head, assisted by his Ministers, the Grand Vizir—Vizirs of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Finance and War. In the country, the Makhzen is represented by governors: Pashas and Caids, and by Councillors (*djemaat*) who used to represent the collective interests of the population. Nowadays, however, the French administration has superimposed itself in every domain. The Makhzen is a mere puppet organization. It was supposed to be reformed. The new Resident-General has plans, they say. Do not forget that the protectorate was imposed upon us for the avowed purpose of introducing reforms—for which we have been waiting for thirty-five years! Moreover, judging from what has been happening in Algeria and Tunisia next-door, who have both had longer experience of the French than we—well, we may wait for yet another century and the position will only worsen, in the sense that we shall be even more subordinate unless we watch our step carefully. As things are now, the French Resident-General is the only intermediary between France and any foreign Power. He approves and enacts all the Sultan's decrees (*dahirs*). Most *dahirs* end with the words: 'The measures to be taken for the execution of this *dahir* are left to the discretion of the Resident-General.' Of course, the

French issue *dahirs* themselves and the Sultan merely serves to sign them. He protests occasionally, but his powers are limited. To whom can he appeal? There is still that convention between Great Britain and France. The United States, however, did not recognize the Protectorate—they were not a party to it—and now they are interested in having bases in North Africa. Maybe that will serve as a balancing factor in our favour, unless, of course, it plunges us into the middle of another conflict against Eastern Europe. How is Morocco administered? The French Resident-General, who resides at Rabat, is directly responsible to the Quai d'Orsay in Paris. In practice, he is the Viceroy, assisted by numerous councils, and his political briefs are transmitted to the heads of the various regions through the Direction of Political Affairs, an important body which combines various functions, the most important being that of 'intelligence' and 'security.' There are three civil regions in Morocco: Casablanca, Rabat and Oujda; and three military regions in the more southern areas where the Berbers predominate: Fez, Meknes and Marrakesh. These are commanded by generals who combine, following the system instituted by Lyautey, both military and administrative functions. Then, finally, there is the military region of Agadir, down south. There is, in the French zone, a Direction of Sherifian affairs which acts as a kind of liaison between the French and the Sultan's Makhzen. It deals with protocol within the Palace, with lands known as *habous* according to Islamic law—which are inalienable areas, proceeding from charitable endowments—and with the bureau which presides over Berber justice, for the Berbers have a legal system of their own, varying from tribe to tribe, which has never been codified. The French have always been careful to keep the two legal systems separate.

“There are other departments, all controlled by the French: finance, agriculture, commerce, education, etc. The Pashas of the towns and Caids in the country are supposed to be selected by the Makhzen from a list of three names submitted by the French Direction of Political Affairs. The role of these Pashas and Caids is limited to supervising the application of French decrees, the police, *tertib* (or tax-collecting) and acting generally as information officers to the French. Usually they are quislings, chosen from among illiterate people; sometimes they cannot even sign their own names properly! There are

exceptions, of course—useful exceptions, fortunately for us. You will understand, of course, that I cannot mention names.

“The French retain all the external paraphernalia of the Sultan’s Court, such as the Royal Parasol and the Nubian bodyguard; but all this is a farce. The Sultan is virtually a prisoner in a gilded cage. But the hot blood of Morocco is stirring in its veins,” concluded Mr. Ahardan. “Morocco is anxious to lift her head and join the other Arab countries in their federation within the great brotherhood of Islam.”

He then escorted me downstairs, raised his hand in the Muslim salute, and once again I was back in the streets of this strange town, with its shops full of shoes from Spain, tinned fruits from America and cosmetics from England—administered by seven Powers, so that justice becomes inextricably complicated; an international zone of suspicion between nations, with international police and international crooks. Here all languages are spoken, banknotes pass rapidly from hand to hand in the cafés and over the exchange counters in the streets, the last hoarse sounds of swing music cease at three in the morning and the earliest notes before dawn in Ramadan are those of the Neffari, as they come knocking at the doors of the faithful, announcing the *seuhar*, or last meal before sunrise. Here was the cross-roads between a crude, materialistic West and a backward, petrified East. The East, however, not having forgotten its heritage, still retained something of its original soul.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL

THE NIGHT PORTER woke me up at five in the morning to enable me to catch the first train to Rabat. A Tunisian acquaintance had given me the address of a Muslim family there, and I had despatched a telegram the day before, hoping that perhaps one of the daughters would come to meet me at the station.

It was dark when I rose, and the lights of the harbour winked at me with a debauched glare. Heavy-eyed, I dressed hurriedly, seized my suitcase and ran to the railway station. Passports were being collected. The Europeans were anxiously watching the clock and wondering whether they would have

time for a quick coffee. The Arabs, of course, did not have this preoccupation, since for them just another day of Ramadan had dawned. The Arabs were carrying large, embroidered leather handbags over their shoulders; some had inlaid embossed coffers that belonged to the realm of ancient mariners' legends.

At last the lights went up in the tiled hall, the booking-office opened with a snap: the Europeans pressed forward, using considerable physical force, while the Arabs retained both their patience and better manners. I recalled how the hotel proprietor had assured me that "Mademoiselle will have priority, of course. She is European"! There were four classes on the train, but no restaurant car for any of them and no prospect of food until we reached Petitjean at two in the afternoon. When at last we did reach Petitjean, the buffet was bare. Better-seasoned travellers had brought their own bread and sausage with them.

The countryside was parched and arid. For a few miles outside Tangier, fresh green maize fields contrasted oddly with streaks of yellow earth and deep, winding courses of dried-up rivers. In the distance, the Riff mountains shone with a shell-like translucence. Occasionally, men in white, with wide straw hats, raced past on wiry, grey-blue horses, and there were people, bent in two, tilling the fields. Then the maize disappeared and gave way to black soil between clumps of cactus and rows of cypresses. A small white outpost among the trees marked the dwelling-place of a colonist. All this gave the country an air of desolation, but the station at Rabat, administrative capital of French Morocco, was a perfect model of a modern station, with its broad flights of marble steps, spacious halls and coloured tiles.

At the top of the steps, my new Moroccan friend, Leila, was waiting for me a little shyly. To my surprise, she was dressed in European clothes, and with her chestnut hair and large golden-brown eyes she could easily have been taken for a European. She spoke perfect French and quite good English—picked up from the radio and American films. Her father, she explained, was an Algerian who had come to Morocco at the beginning of the French conquest. Leila escorted me to one of the two "possible" hotels in Rabat, and later called for me with her elder brother, Mehdi. Together we sat on a terrace at a café on the main boulevard, and Mehdi informed me that he was

going to an American university and would later, he hoped, become an American citizen. I asked him why he wanted to leave Morocco. "It's a long story," he said. "We can do nothing here. It is quite a job to get an education; they do everything they can to keep us backward and ignorant. Arabs are not encouraged to go to secondary schools. There are no universities; no scholarships for French universities. Arabs can never hope to attain high positions here. They can only be servants, shoe-shiners, bank clerks, underpaid officials in subordinate positions. When I come back from the States as an American citizen, I shall be free. I shall take up political journalism and work for the independence of my country, but the sooner I can get out the better. This is no country to live in." A Frenchman at a neighbouring table seemed to be following the conversation with interest. Leila looked anxiously in his direction.

"Be careful, Mehdi," she said. "Better speak in English."

"I don't care who listens in," sniffed Mehdi. "It's only the truth." But I noticed that he lowered his voice. I expressed genuine surprise. Having been brought up in France, I had noticed less racial prejudice there than in Great Britain. Mehdi laughed. "Racial prejudice!" he exclaimed. "I could go on giving you examples until to-morrow morning. But let me give you just one—of an incident that occurred only yesterday. I went to one of the local picture-houses and a French lady was shown to the seat beside me by the usherette. She immediately protested, however, when she saw me. I suppose my skin is a little darker than a European's. And she asked for a seat somewhere else, 'not beside an Arab,' she stipulated. The French think they are at home here—that Morocco is a part of their country. I was discussing this with one of my French friends the other day. We were at college together. He declared most emphatically: 'After all, my dear fellow, Morocco *is* France.'"

Leila chimed in: "You see, they send such mediocre French people out here. I too have always heard that there is no racial prejudice in France itself. Out here it most certainly exists. As soon as they come out here, they treat us automatically as if we were inferior races. They are not even polite about it. They say 'tu' to everyone, even to Arab women of good family; they will call them 'Fatima'—a name usually given to servants; and they call the men *bikos* or *mètèques*."

As we crossed the road to the walled Arab part of the town—or *medina*, as this is always called—for the traditional mint tea, which is never served in a French café, Mehdi pointed to two Arab boys who were displaying carpets. “Look,” he said. “That’s all they think we are good enough for—carpet-vendors! I tell you, the word ‘Arab’ for them is synonymous with shoe-shiner or carpet-vendor.”

Before parting, they invited me to dine at their house the next evening. It was my first visit to a modern Moroccan home. The white walls surrounded a garden full of perfumed jasmine, a fountain, a summer-house and a wide, tiled terrace where M. Benchennouf, the father, was pacing up and down in his red, tasselled fez. There too, sitting demurely on wicker armchairs, were Leila and Mehdi and another beautiful eighteen-year-old daughter, Chedlya.

M. Benchennouf, upon receiving me, stressed that I had come to a Muslim household, and he began to speak about Ramadan. Perhaps it was hunger that made him pace up and down so impatiently, for the cannon had not yet gone off from the mosque. “Ramadan has been instituted,” he said, “not so much as a penitence, but as a means of understanding the nature of hunger and poverty, and to enable rich and poor to share alike in the trial. Sometimes the harvesters in this hot season cannot bear the ordeal, and on my farms, even during Ramadan, I take them food and water, for if they like they can make up for the days lost during Ramadan in the cool of the winter: this is permitted to manual workers. This year Ramadan is very hard, because it falls in August. Next year it will be harder still. In every year there is a difference of thirteen days. Ramadan next year will be an hour longer.”

As with most religious observances that involve stern discipline, I was soon to find out that Ramadan was adhered to most strictly by the masses, who suffer doubly from its exactions, since they have to work hard during the fast. For them it is not so easy to take a siesta.

M. Benchennouf was still speaking when an apparition in pale blue and white robes emerged from the far end of the terrace. “*Voici Maman!*” the girls cried. Madame Benchennouf welcomed me in her faintly guttural French; and when she sat down I watched her, entranced, as she arranged the folds of her ample gowns: blue silk underneath, long sleeves, a

high, embroidered collar, an embroidered white muslin gown over the blue. Her sleek black hair was tied into a green scarf; she wore gold ear-rings and innumerable diamond rings and bracelets. She was tall, well built, with round black eyes and high cheek-bones—and she was very fair-skinned.

A soft-footed Negro servant came to announce that dinner was served. We went to the dining-room, where the dinner service was from Sèvres, "although," as M. Benchennouf explained, "before the French came, all the best Moroccan families were proud to possess silver trays and tea-sets from Manchester, England. Free trade is difficult now, for although in theory the 12 per cent. import duty applies equally to all countries, since Morocco is supposed to have an 'open-door' policy, there are a thousand and one ways in which French merchandise is passed into the country with more facility."

I lost count of the dishes that were served, but I remember that there were two kinds of soup: a Moroccan soup, thick and nourishing, the *harira* of Ramadan, the other Tunisian, with celery and red pepper; then came meats, Tunisian salad, rice with burning hot peppers, a semolina sweetmeat, melons and iced *orgeat*, which we sipped outside in the cool of the evening. *Orgeat* is made of crushed almonds, milk and sugar. And this was followed by Turkish coffee. The moon had risen, and now it played on the white garden wall and the cypresses and the masses of jasmine. Other flowers, that only open at night, began to exhale a heavy, soporific perfume.

Madame Benchennouf had been flitting in and out of the kitchen or attending to the younger children, but now she returned to question me on feminine topics: dresses (for sometimes she wore European clothes; when she did, as I saw later, she lost much of her personality), the price of food, travel. "I cannot travel," she sighed, "for I have too many children. And yet you young people are quite right to want to be independent. When I was in Paris years ago, I met two women who were living alone in their own flat." She emphasized "their own." "Their husbands had gone. I have never had such a lovely time in all my life. We went out to the theatre every day, and on shopping expeditions. It was adorable!"

Typically enough, it was the material side of Western civilization which tempted and lured her—the large, shiny motor cars, jewelled wrist-watches and, by no means least,

the film stars! During my visit, she prevailed upon me to write a fan-letter to Errol Flynn, which we did in great secrecy, closeting ourselves away from the rest of the family for fear they should find out! Madame Benchennouf was not an educated woman. She had been married young to an old man, to whom she had borne six children. She had also had several miscarriages, quite a common occurrence among North African women. She made up for her lack of education, however, by a considerable natural ingenuity, an uncanny perspicacity and awareness of other people's unspoken thoughts and intentions—and a vivacious sense of humour which translated itself into a talent for mimicry. Listening to Madame, and watching her gestures, was to see Moroccan life and its people, from the dignity of the notables and the intrigues of the Court to the gossip of the harem. Temperamental, changeable, tyrannical, domineering in the household, easily moved to tears, Madame was an epitome of the worst and the best in Moroccan character. Sudden fits of great generosity alternated with jealous suspicion of her daughters' greater independence and freedom of movement. She spoiled the younger children passionately, but did not allow them to run out and play on the beaches lest they should catch cold or sunstroke—depending on the season. In many, many ways she reminded me of my own Andalusian grandmother, who had preserved some of these Moorish characteristics, but beneath the pettiness of a thwarted personality lay a great power; it would flash from her eyes as she sat erect on the divan in the splendour of her trailing robes, and at such moments she was truly regal and worthy of her noble ancestry.

“Are there many other Moroccan girls like you? I mean, as Europeanized?” I asked her daughters.

The girls burst out laughing. “I think we are the only ones,” they said quietly. “Some people are very shocked, but then they know that we have lived in Tunisia, and we are looked upon as foreigners. When we first started to go out on bicycles, we caused quite a sensation. Sometimes we visit Mother's relatives in the country; they are very old-fashioned. We try to persuade our cousins to remove their veils, for the Koran does not order women to go about veiled; and then we do their hair for them in the modern style, and we make them run about and play instead of sitting still and growing fat.”

Chedlya confided that her greatest ambition was to travel.

"I am ready to go anywhere at a moment's notice. Life is so dull here. There is nothing for us to do. We buy all the foreign magazines we can lay our hands on; we listen to the wireless; Mehdi buys all the swing records he can. Father shakes his head and says he cannot understand why we like such noise, but we tell him that after all we belong to another generation."

"We liked having the Americans here," Leila interrupted. "They were such fun and so nice to all the Moroccan children. One day an American took about twenty little Arabs into a café and ordered ice-creams for them. They had never tasted any before in their lives. Well, the French waiter refused to serve them, so do you know what the American did? He knocked the waiter down, and all the children looked on and clapped. Oh, it was wonderful!"

Mehdi chimed in: "And do you remember when the American dropped his wallet from a hotel balcony in the main street, and one of those little Arab urchins picked it up and was about to take it to him when a French policeman saw him and followed him? He thought the boy was trying to steal the wallet, and he came up behind him and knocked him down. But when the American came down the stairs and met him it was the French policeman who got the worst of it!"

"Of course, they were always thinking our garden was public property," smiled Madame Benchennouf, "but they and the English did a great deal of good. There was a time during the war when the children in the streets were all dressed in a combination of English and American clothes, but the French said the clothes had been stolen, and they removed them as soon as the Allies left."

Leila and Chedlya had been brought up in a French college, and this accounted for their perfect knowledge of the language. But the Arabic side of their education had been neglected, so, to make up for this, a private tutor came to the house once a week to teach them Arabic literature. He was a quiet young man with a grave face, and he brought an anachronistic aura with him from the *medina*. He arrived, leisurely, about an hour or two after the appointed time, but he loved teaching poetry so much, and time meant so little to him, that he usually remained in the house for the rest of the day. Soon I began to learn all these things, and the way in which they lived, for Madame Benchennouf had insisted that I leave the hotel to go and stay with them in their house.

## THE BATH-HOUSE

THEY SAID THAT NO ordinary bath could compete with the *hammam*. It may be true, for nothing was so purely Moroccan as bathing in the bath-house. To please her mother, Chedlya had donned her *djellaba* and veil, and I remember how her green eyes sparkled as we walked down the street, preceded by her servant Saida, who was loaded down with rugs for us to lie on in the *hammam* dressing-rooms. She also carried a brass bowl with soap, towels, combs and cosmetics. The Europeans turned their heads to look at us as we passed, surprised to hear a veiled woman speaking such fluent French, and to see her walking alongside a European.

Within the white-washed *hammam*, a dark woman squatted on a rug, blinding in her profusion of ornaments: long golden ear-rings (they may have been copper), bracelets and rings. We shook hands with her, paid the few francs required for a bath, and she smiled up at us, speaking in rapid Arabic. We undressed behind a curtain in a little recess, donned bath-towels to cross over into the dark, steamy *hammam* within, and then Saida took the towels from us, gave us the brass bowl, and we tripped naked across the hot stone flags into the furthest and steamiest room at the back of the hall, where a dozen women, accompanied by their small daughters, were busily scrubbing themselves in a circle of wooden water-tubs. We chose a dark corner. I sat down on the stones and then jumped up again—for the stones were extremely hot. No one paid attention to me except for one small girl who combed her dark shining hair and watched me thoughtfully, with owlish eyes—her only adornment a slender gold chain round her chubby neck.

In the half-light, naked women passed backwards and forwards. A beautiful Negress came towards us, bringing water-tubs and squares of cork wrapped in cotton, with which she proceeded to scrub us thoroughly—rather a painful experience. Chedlya informed me that the young Negress was once employed in the harem of the Pasha of Marrakesh, and excelled in her attainments. First, she rubbed your back with great circling sweeps, up and down, round and round, and then she passed on to the legs, arms and feet, occasionally throwing boiling tubfuls of water over you, so that you gasped

for breath. Then she took *rasoul* in her hands. *Rasoul* is a kind of earth which is used in place of soap or shampoo, and with this your hair is anointed until it becomes a muddy, sodden mass. We moved into the adjacent room after this, where it was cooler, and where we were rinsed; and here more tubs were emptied over us, over our heads. It took a long time to remove all the *rasoul* from one's hair, but the results made it well worth while. More and more women were flocking in. There was a hubbub of voices, a clanging of brass bowls and continual screaming from the children. Chedlya sang some plaintive Arab songs, and some of her friends came to us and exchanged local news and gossip. Fat women, thin women, filling the place to overflowing: the older women with their enormous breasts falling to their knees, the young ones more shapely; but the shapeliest of all were the Negresses, and their muscles were the firmest. Here, where all the women were completely unveiled, it was possible to observe the different types at close quarters. None were very beautiful; nearly all of them had bad teeth and rather ugly mouths. The colour of their skins varied from a pearly cream to gold, from bronze to jet black.

After being thoroughly rinsed, we retreated to the dressing-room, utterly exhausted. We lay on the rugs which Saida had prepared for us, until so many women peeped in to see if they could come and undress that we decided it was time to return home. We had been in the *hammam* for nearly three hours, we discovered. At home, lunch was waiting for us: long, spicy *kebabs* on spikes, fresh salad, endless slabs of watermelon. Although it was Ramadan, Chedlya was eating again. She told me that women were allowed to abstain from fasting when they were ill, or during menstruation, or when they were expecting a child. Leila, however, was still keeping to the fast, although she looked pale and exhausted. Moreover, she had the fortitude to serve us at lunch, which she had even helped to cook.

## THE CAIDA

UNHAPPILY, THE FOREIGNER in Morocco is always committing involuntary offences against the *caida*, the traditional etiquette of the people which is a closely woven part of their art of life. To them, we appear loud, blunt and vulgar, and

to us they seem hypocritical and insincere. Neither judgment is quite accurate. Our clothes, like our ways, are as straight and direct as our speech and manners; theirs are curved and flowing, like the gentle arabesques of their calligraphy, and so are their processes of thought.

The dangers of not observing the *caida* were shown to me by an incident which took place in Fez. After considerable difficulties and opposition, an enthusiastic Frenchman succeeded in founding a Franco-Arab college. He was anxious to learn the reaction of the local Pasha and notables, invited them to the college, and asked them for their opinion and suggestions. In doing this, he committed a grave sin against the *caida*. To express a blunt opinion directly in public is simply not done. There was dead silence; no one knew quite what to do. At last one of the notables answered: "Everything we have seen is very fine, but perhaps it would be a good thing to have a professor of Arab calligraphy. I notice that this had not been provided for, and I would recommend a most excellent professor who will do honour to your college." The other notables warmly endorsed the suggestion, which permitted them to comply with the *caida* and at the same time please their host, who was furious at the thought of being saddled with a doddering old professor of Arabic calligraphy, whom he had not provided for and did not wish to provide for. Nor were the notables really anxious to have one, but since they were obliged to say something, they could at least recommend a person whom they knew, thereby doing him a good turn. They say that the French director is now extremely careful in his dealings with the Moroccans.

The *caida* extends to such simple things as greetings, which have a deeper significance than they have for us. A Muslim *salaam* is a greeting which refers to one's entry into Paradise. For a Muslim, greeting somebody is to wish him happiness in his future life. Therefore, they cannot greet infidels in this way; for Christians and Jews the spiritual *salaam* is dropped and in its place they invoke a temporal *slama*.

*Salaams* are always used in the plural, even when addressed to an individual, for account must be taken of the two guardiar angels who watch by a man's side, one to the right and the other to the left. So too when you enter a mosque or a sanctuary, the *salaams* are in the plural, for holy places are always crowded with angels.

Again, at the beginning of a letter or a book, the phrase 'Glory to God' must appear. At the beginning of a meal, they must pronounce the word *Bismillah* which means "In the name of God."

Importance is attached, among the poorer people especially, to auspicious signs and omens. To be auspicious, a commercial transaction should be concluded to the satisfaction of both parties, and the conclusion is always marked by a final rebate at the end of a deal known as *Bab Allah*—"God's door." So when you buy a donkey, for instance, having settled on the price after an interminable debate, there must always be a "God's door," so that it may be open; otherwise, the door will remain closed, the beast will suffer, becoming halt or ill; some accident or the other would be sure to befall it. To them, our system of price-tags appears to be the height of vulgarity. For the same reason, a workman or servant will prefer a small fixed wage to which are added "auspicious gratuities." The Moroccan attaches a superstitious value to anything supposed to bring him good fortune. One day in Casablanca, a small beggar girl approached me, perfectly self-possessed, with a little black pigtail hanging demurely down her back. I happened to have a new English threepenny bit among my change. I gave it to her with some French coins, and she singled it out immediately and held it closer for inspection. I said: "That is an English coin; not like the French ones. You cannot buy anything with it. But keep it. It will bring you luck." She nodded and darted away to her veiled mother, who was standing at a distance, and showed it to her, talking excitedly. The mother took it up in her hand, smiled and nodded, tucked it carefully away in one of the many folds of her white *haik*, not even troubling to count the French coins I had given the child!

The Moroccans salute one another by placing their right hands lightly on their hearts and making the faintest of bows. In a more formal greeting, they will also touch their foreheads, signifying: "You are in my heart. You are over my head." Friends who have not met for a long lapse of time will embrace each other on the shoulder. Only the most intimate friends shake hands.

The hallmark of customary behaviour is called *h'shouma*, which may include many things: among them reserve, timidity and modesty. *H'shouma*, for instance, prescribes that it is

impolite to refuse anything which has been offered to you three times in succession. An invitation to lunch, according to the *h'shouma*, is not valid unless it has been proffered three times. You must always avail yourself of the services of a third person if you want anything done—the intermediary assumes immense significance in Morocco. "No" should never be said brutally, even to a beggar; and it is lawful to refuse a beggar by saying, "God will provide."

Etiquette follows the well-bred Moroccan from the cradle, and courtesy is demanded of all. Once, in a Moorish café in the *medina* of Fez, I saw three men squatting on straw mats as they played at cards, while the owner of the café plied the bellows to the burning charcoal beneath the kettle. More customers were gossiping outside. I waited for my glass of mint tea to be brewed, and asked whether they had any cakes—preferably my favourite *cornes de gazelle* (gazelles' horns). The owner said he had none, but he would fetch some from a shop next-door. He returned, however, with four macaroons wrapped in old copies of Arabic newspapers. There were no others, he said. Some children belonging to the men who were playing cards sidled up and fixed the macaroons with loving eyes. I offered them a couple, which they accepted with a shy "*Barak Allah Fik*" ("Thank you"). Forgetting about the *cornes de gazelle*, I started reading a newspaper, when suddenly I heard a little thump on the table in front of me. The child's father was unrolling several yards of turban, and there in the heart of it lay a couple of *cornes de gazelle*.

## THE RESIDENT-GENERAL

ALL THE ARABS I had met so far spoke highly of M. Eirik Labonne, the new Resident-General. "At last," they said, "we have a Resident-General with plans for reforms who seems to have a genuine desire to help us." What kind of a man was he? He had only been in office a few months, but from the moment he arrived he had made his presence felt. A democrat, former French Ambassador to Moscow, and ex-General Secretary at the Rabat Residency, he had also been Resident-General of Tunisia in 1938.

On the way to the Residency, you pass Lyautey's tomb—Lyautey, the pioneer of modern French Morocco. It is a simple tomb in a small enclosure of Islamic severity, placed in an exquisite garden. All around lie the white offices of the Residency and its departments. The marble tomb, surmounted by a cross, bears the banners of France and of Morocco and an inscription in French and in Arabic.

The Residency, at the end of a majestic drive, was guarded by Senegalese, and our reception was a very formal affair: a servant in white robes advanced noiselessly to take my coat, another bent forward for my invitation card, a third escorted me towards a young French officer whose duty was to conduct guests on to a cool terrace overlooking the gardens and the sea. The rooms were in Moorish style, large and high. There were Rabat carpets and Safi pottery, immense flower-vases, and at every door an inscrutable, white-turbaned servant stood silently waiting. In this modern adaptation, the cool beauty of a Moroccan palace had been so perfectly recaptured that one unconsciously adapted oneself by walking with slow, gliding steps and speaking in subdued tones. The guests were sipping un-Islamic dry Martinis on the terrace: there was a General *en route* for Washington, Madame Labonne, and the Resident's private secretary. Our Martinis and polite conversation were soon interrupted, however, as the tall, grey-haired Resident entered the room. He shook hands stiffly all round, and behind the forced smile it seemed to me that the grey eyes drew a little closer. The Moorish *décor* hardly suited the high collar and black suit, the long narrow face and faintly whimsical expression of this Presbyterian-looking gentleman of Icelandic stock. He ate little, touched neither fish nor meat, and drank water. There was nothing about him of the suave diplomat; he was determined and straightforward, almost dogged in his persistence. The turbaned servants flitted to and fro like shadows. Between courses, I mentioned that I had been hearing a great deal about the Resident's intended reforms. The first thing that he had done (in agreement, of course, with the Quai d'Orsay) had been to bring back the Nationalist leaders from their exile. Next, he had allowed an Arabic paper to be published, and he was now on the point of abolishing the Direction des Affaires Politiques which was a much-criticized vestige of the Arab bureaux tried out in Algeria a hundred years ago. These

political and economic reforms were announced by M. Labonne on July 22nd, 1946, before the Government Council, a purely consultative body composed of three colleges: the first group consists of representatives from the Agricultural Chamber, the second includes delegates from the chambers of commerce, and the third, salaried officials (the native "notables" included in the Moroccan section of this Council are appointed by the Protectorate authorities and meet apart—at least, they did so until further reforms were introduced later by General Juin in 1947). M. Labonne planned a unified Government Council which was to include both French and Moroccan representatives, and elected assemblies (municipal, regional and central). He intended to revise this regional organization which had divided the country up in accordance with purely military considerations, so as to return to a more rational pattern. Trade unions, open so far to Europeans only, were to be extended to Moroccans. To begin with, these were to be made available only to industrial workers and business employees. Education, which had been so neglected, was to be developed. In the economic field, new dams were to be constructed, lead-mines exploited, coal-mines developed. Two entirely Moroccan companies were planned: a navigation company and an airways concern.

When these reforms were alluded to at table, the guests wriggled uncomfortably. There was an uneasy silence, broken by the General, who began to complain of the heat; and then the Resident's clear-cut voice broke through the silence: "Really, so you have been hearing about my plans, Mademoiselle? But they have been badly received, I am afraid."

"By whom?" I ventured. There was another uncomfortable silence. The Resident glanced with a scarcely-concealed smile in the General's direction.

"You know, reforms are never well received," the Resident went on. "Nevertheless, I am determined to go ahead with them. The country must progress. I am determined to see that it does. If we work slowly, the operation can be performed without pain, for there is a balance to be established between industry and agriculture in Morocco."

A little while later, when we were discussing the Arab League, he turned quickly and said with tremendous emphasis: "It is important to remember that Morocco is neither Arabia nor France. You must never forget that!"

I remarked that I had found the Moroccans extremely friendly, but he shook his head and answered: "One can never get to know an Arab." But he nodded a little later when I spoke of the lack of educational facilities which the Moroccans without exception complained of most bitterly.

It was time, said the Resident, that Great Britain and France concerted their policy *vis-à-vis* Islam. They would be much stronger if they were to do so.

"*Monsieur le Resident*, I would be grateful for your views on what you would like others to know about Morocco."

He smiled his odd smile and said: "Tell them what you see. Tell them everything you see." And that was all.

Alas! Poor M. Labonne! His reign was destined to be a short one.

That same afternoon, I called on M. Balafredj. The Secretary-General of the Istiqlal Nationalist Party is a director of a Muslim college in Rabat. He is a *Licencié-ès-lettres* and *diplômé* of the Paris Sorbonne, and he had also been the General Secretary of the Action Marocaine, who, in 1930, presented a programme of reforms to the French Government which did not go as far—at that time—as to claim total independence for Morocco, but merely requested that greater opportunities be afforded to Moroccans in the administration of their own country. Nothing happened, however. A few years afterwards, in October, 1936, encouraged by the advent of the Popular Front Government in France, the Action Marocaine submitted fresh demands: liberty of the Press, political amnesty for the leaders who had been imprisoned, a reorganization of Morocco's judicial system, trades unions, social legislation for Moroccan workmen and, above all, the "abolition of official colonization." Again, no satisfaction was given, and finally the three leaders, Si Allal el Fassi, Ouazzani (who has since founded a party of his own, the Democratic Reform Party) and Mohammed el Yazidi were arrested. A state of siege was declared at Casablanca. There were riots, and the French Residency was astonished to see what proportions nationalist feeling had taken. The leaders, upon orders from the Quai d'Orsay, were released, but a year later, after a fresh outburst of riots, they were exiled by Resident-General Nogues. The Action Marocaine was dissolved and the leaders deported, but the party went on gathering momentum and began to be favoured by the highest circles, including the

Sultan and his entourage. Now, it has re-emerged under the name of Istiqlal (Independence).

M. Ahmed Balafredj had recently returned from his exile in Corsica, where he was deported in 1943. We sat on a low divan in his house—a beautiful, modern Arab villa—and discussed certain articles that had recently appeared in the French Press concerning Morocco. M. Balafredj was an earnest, thoughtful-looking man in his thirties. He was dressed in European clothes, and spoke perfect French. His outward calm and temperate speech did not conceal, however, a fundamental firmness of purpose which years of struggle had sharpened to the pitch of obstinacy, with a tinge of bitterness and scepticism that came from prolonged contact with Europeans. The conversation drifted on to M. Labonne's reforms. M. Balafredj thought that they did not go far enough. "They do not refer to independence," he said. "The word is never even mentioned and the Moroccan Nationalists want this point discussed as a very preamble to any reforms." I remarked that M. Labonne himself seemed to be finding difficulties with his own administration. It was not possible for him to go so far. M. Balafredj smiled incredulously. Could it be possible? he seemed to think. I alluded to France's achievements in Morocco, and repeated M. Benchennouf's words: how, only thirty years before, the roads were insecure and infested with brigands, and the sovereignty of the Sultan was so limited that he was continually at the mercy of the tribes. M. Balafredj admitted this gravely. "Oh yes. And we shall need European technicians, capital and assistance," he said. "My party definitely wants Morocco to follow the pattern and example of European countries. Our programme advocates better educational facilities, a more equitable distribution of property, the splitting up of large domains [referring also to the large estates of the Caids and Pashas, who have received them from the French] and freedom of the Press and of association. Now we are like an underground movement and have to rely on pamphlets for our publicity." He could not give me any precise estimates as to party membership, since it has no legal existence and therefore no records (they used to keep records, he told me, but their lists were discovered by the French in 1944, and in view of the reprisals that followed, they have since deemed it advisable not to keep them up to date). He did say, however: "We know that the

whole population is with us." I still could not see, from a practical standpoint, how reason alone was going to triumph over French tanks and planes and machine guns. "Maybe the United Nations," said M. Balafredj hopefully—he and his companions quoted freely from the Atlantic Charter. It was quoted to me afterwards on many occasions. Never had I heard so much about it. Here in North Africa, it had really been taken seriously.

M. Balafredj and the Nationalists were not at all impressed by M. Labonne's reforms. They believed, they said, that the new regional divisions would revive the individualism of the tribes and would disunite the population, which is already separated into three zones. They did not appreciate the Resident's *écoles foraines*, which were intended to teach the Berbers French instead of Arabic, and they believed that there would still be difficulties in practice when it came to admitting Arab students to the colleges of the metropolis. They said that so far Morocco could only boast of six doctors, one chemist, three engineers and about a dozen lawyers.

As for the economic reforms, they thought that the industrialization plan would have to be floated on a loan which the Moroccan taxpayer would be the first to have to contribute to, and that the profits, so far as they were concerned, would be infinitesimal. French and foreign capitalists would come in to exploit the country. Since M. Labonne's arrival four months ago, 477 new companies had been formed, and they were not impressed by the fact, either, that the new companies were obliged to offer some seats on their boards to Moroccans, or that Arab capital was to be put into the navigation and air transport companies. On paper, the shares in these "mixed companies" are divided as follows: 15 per cent. for the French investor, 35 per cent. for the French Government, 15 per cent. for the Moroccan investor and 35 per cent. for the Moroccan Government. Since, however, the Moroccan Government does not have any available capital, the French Government "provisionally" takes over its shares. As a result, France actually owns 85 per cent. and Morocco only 15 per cent. The French administration grants loans of as much as 60 per cent. of the value in boom periods, to assist French enterprises. The savings banks supply credit to small and medium-sized commercial and industrial concerns, but 90 per cent. of these are French.

One of the Moroccan Nationalists' principal, immediate objectives, and one to which they are devoting a considerable amount of time, thought and private funds, is the education of the people. Schools are being built (mostly with materials bought on the Black Market, for they receive no encouragement or official support from the French, to whom Moroccan, or "Nationalist," schools are taken to be, first and foremost, anti-French). One of the most urgent needs is for more textbooks. So far there are only one or two Moroccan printing presses, and Egyptian books are not allowed into the country. There are evening classes for adults in most of the large towns, lectures on elementary political science and international affairs, and the people are responding with enthusiasm.

The two Nationalist parties, Istiqlal and the Parti Démocrate de l'Indépendance (leader: French-educated, ex-journalist Ouazzani), vie with one another in this war against illiteracy. The main difference between these two parties, in so far as political objectives are concerned, is that whereas the Istiqlal wants to obtain independence first before subsequently discussing any treaty with France, economic or otherwise, Ouazzani believes in a transition period, at the end of which Morocco will be better fitted, he thinks, to assume governmental responsibility. The Istiqlal, on the contrary, fear that any transition period will be used by the French to gradually withdraw more and more power from the Sultan into the hands of a selected oligarchy favourable to France, the ultimate effect of which would be to bind Morocco inextricably to the metropolis. Ouazzani's is the smaller party, but, for obvious reasons, is less frowned upon by the French than the Istiqlal.

M. Balafredj told me that the Istiqlal leader, Si Allal el Fassi, was spending Ramadan quietly with his family in the mountainous district near Fez. Having arranged a letter of introduction, he counselled me to contact a M. Ahmed Mekouar in Fez, who would take me to him. He would also, he added, telephone this gentleman that very night, to inform him of my impending arrival.

We stayed up late that night in the scented garden of the Benchennoufs. Leila and Chedlya nodded gravely and clapped their hands when I told them about my visit to the Residency and how favourably impressed I had been with the new Resident-General. How they wished, they said, that they could accompany me to Fez; but they dared not, for their

father was away on business, and so they could not ask his permission. Although they wore short skirts and no veils, they were nevertheless brought up strictly, and had to obey their parents.

Chedlya had decked herself in a long Moroccan dress of cream brocade glittering with gold embroidery. The love-birds chirped in the cages suspended in the trees, and as Chedlya leaned back in her wicker armchair, she sighed: "I just cannot imagine life without a garden, without fountains and singing birds and flowers. This is where I am happy." And then she added softly: "The dream of an Arab is a garden."

## THE HEDYA

ONCE A YEAR THERE comes the great feast of the Hedya, which celebrates the end of Ramadan with great pomp and splendour. The French respect the festival, in which the Sultan plays the principal role, as they also respect the three others: the Aid Kebir, during which a whole sheep is sacrificed, and which falls fifty days later than the end of Ramadan; the Mouloud, which marks the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet, a feast of great beauty in Morocco, since the Sultan is a direct descendant of Mohammed; and, finally, the Achoura, which falls in the first month of the lunar year and is celebrated by bonfires.

At the Hedya, which is also known as the Aid Seghir, the children receive presents, there is general rejoicing, the Resident-General calls at the Palace to pay his respects to the Sultan and, early in the afternoon, long before the solemnities begin, the people begin to crowd into the *mechouar*, the enormous open space in front of the royal Palace.

It was a truly magnificent spectacle: fierce tribesmen on horseback, displaying rows of medals, old men in white capes, whole families in their classical draperies, which had been extra well washed and pressed in honour of the Sultan. Large French and American staff cars moved turbulently through the crowd, children cried, donkeys stumbled, whole busloads of people were being parked beside the royal route; immediately they came to a halt, up they clambered on to the roof for a better view—a view which they knew by heart, but

enjoyed seeing over and over again, just as we enjoy seeing the annual Lord Mayor's Show. Besides, one does not see the Sultan every day. In fact, he has become so popular that the French prefer not to parade him too often.

In the square, the French had set up an immense tent for "distinguished visitors," but it was not quite large enough to hold everybody—including the "gate-crashers." A French colonel shouted: "The American colonel wishes to have a seat." The old gentleman with the red rosette in his buttonhole kept silent. "Monstrous! Disastrous my dear fellow, that there should be no seat! Absolutely disastrous! And an American of all people!" The French colonel was beside himself. The gentleman with the red rosette and the pointed beard retorted stiffly: "I am not in charge of the organization. I was merely instructed to act as interpreter!"

Some of the distinguished visitors who had arrived late were surreptitiously making their way from under the cordon behind which the police were vainly trying to contain them; gradually edging forward, the most enterprising among them began making desperate signals to those of their friends who had contrived to reach the awning of the presidential tent. The confusion increased, and, taking advantage of their increasing numbers, the distinguished visitors slipped under the cordon and made an undignified dash for the tent. There were groans of protest from the outnumbered and outwitted police. In the midst of this disorder, the Resident-General's car came on to the scene. As always, M. Labonne was dressed in his top hat, black suit and high collar—he looked like a sudden apparition of Daddy Longlegs. A little self-consciously, he walked towards the tent, where he took up his position beside Madame Labonne. There was a flutter of excitement as the ladies began to discuss Madame Labonne's hat. A long pause, and then one of the younger princes arrived in company of a French officer, in a small carriage pulled by four piebald ponies. The young prince (aged about ten) solemnly alighted and came up to the tent in his little white *djellaba* and red fez, and bowed to the Resident-General and to the guests before taking up his seat in the front row. He sat stiffly for a few minutes, a perfect model of good behaviour, but soon childish curiosity increased to a pitch which rendered his pose unbearable and he turned round to have a good look at the audience, and yawned openly at the slowness of the proceedings.

Caids and Pashas had assembled in long rows at the far end of the *mechouar*. Square boxes of symbolic gifts were hoisted up on donkeys, ready to be presented to the Sultan. About a dozen thoroughbred horses were also waiting to be presented to His Majesty. The tribesmen, astride their magnificent steeds, with exquisitely embroidered saddle-cloths, looked superb. There was a sudden stir at the Palace gates as his Imperial Majesty, Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, advanced slowly through the horseshoe archway, a lonely white figure on horseback, sheltered by the imperial green parasol. On foot and on either side of him walked venerable, bearded guards, gracefully wafting the flies away from the imperial presence with sheets of white cloth. Behind them came the Imperial Black Guard—fifty stalwart Negroes in crimson uniforms, with black and white turbans, on pearl-grey horses. And then followed the most unexpected object of all. The French officer leaned forward and pointed to this strange vision. "*Le voilà!*" he exclaimed. "*Le voilà! Le carrosse de la Reine Victoria!*" Yes, there it was, all red and gold and rickety, wheels grating, empty, paraded by four Moroccan guards, with no horses in the braces: the state chariot presented to the Sultan of her day by Queen Victoria. It looked so incongruous in the procession that we were touched rather than amused and wondered why it was that at the end of Ramadan the Sultan should have chosen this emblem of another country with which to dignify the proceedings. Probably the Sultan had thought it very striking, but, since coaches are not used in Morocco, no doubt the Court was puzzled as to how to show it off to best advantage. It had, however, been considered worthy of this solemn annual parade.

Now the Caids and Pashas advanced, bending low in homage to the Sultan, who, as he passed M. Labonne, slightly—ever so slightly—inclined his head. Sidi Mohammed passed by, the small, drawn face filled with melancholy and grandeur and an immense dignity. The eyes of the foreigners followed him with interest. I remembered the Moroccan proverb: "Everything is suspect, and everyone who has the itch scratches himself." The regal figure in the spotless white cloak passed out of sight and the young French officer leaned forward again: "He looks serious, doesn't he? Of course, that's all part of the protocol. But—did you notice?—he hardly saluted the Resident-General when he passed by. *Really!*"

## FEZ THE ANCIENT

FEZ WAS THREE HUNDRED kilometres away, another six hours' journey. From the train, one saw unending sandy plains, low hills, a few orange groves, small primitive villages of *noualas* with their conical, thatched roofs, goatskin tents inhabited by nomads, rows of blue cactus plants growing against cypresses. There were curious trees tufted with yellow spikes at the end of their branches, stiff as hairbrushes, but when I asked what they were, the old colonist beside me in the compartment answered: "They are not trees. They are only cactus flowers, and they grow like that only once every few years."

A dull orange-red glow shone in the misty distance, coming closer, moving with startling speed across the plain, until suddenly there was a hot, choking sensation in my mouth and I felt as if the entire train had been plunged into an oven. The old colonist jumped up and shut the window. "The *chergui*!" he shouted. The *chergui* was the hot, dry wind from the east, closing upon us with tongues of flame, blurring the landscape, sweeping over the fragile *noualas*, catching up the heavy folds of the men's capes as they toiled in their small patches of land; and soon all was dust, with faint white outlines of men bent against the storm under the overcast sky. It was magnificent and terrifying.

The *chergui* was still blowing in intermittent gusts when we reached Fez. In rather a dishevelled state, I drove to the Residency. Instructions had been phoned from Rabat that I was to be the guest of the Commanding General of the region. He was occupying a magnificent palace, once a sultan's abode. I found other guests there when I arrived. Among them was the Commanding General of Meknes, who had spent long years of his life in the Middle East and had developed definite views on subject races. He mentioned the latest news from India. I said something to the effect that I was glad that India was getting her freedom. He snorted. "That is a completely commonplace view," said the General. "These people are not capable of governing themselves. We are always up against the same difficulty—their entirely different conceptions of morality and citizenship. They don't think as we do. They only consider power as a personal means

of enrichment, and however hard we try to educate them along European lines, it always fails. I am deliberately against educating them in Europe. Granted, we should establish Franco-Arab colleges and universities; but to send them to French universities is an atrocious mistake. They are worse than ever when they return to their own country afterwards. We just do not speak the same language!”

“How would you solve the problem, General?”

He paced up and down the room, shrugging his shoulders. “Well, we need these countries, of course, for economic and strategic reasons. I believe we should do all we can for them. We should try to better their conditions and instruct them. I do not believe we shall ever be able to change them fundamentally. Please do not conclude that I despise the Arabs. On the contrary, I consider them superior to us in some respects; but our morals are different, and I do not believe we shall ever be able to bridge the gulf.”

The other General interrupted: “I think you are being pessimistic. I believe we *can* bridge the gulf, little by little; but it is a very slow process, far from finished yet.” Saying this, he shook his head, emptied his beer glass and remarked that the fountains outside gave a “false sense of coolness.”

The apartments reserved for me had once belonged to a sultan’s favourite. There were three separate entrances—two looking down on the courtyard and a third on to a private garden filled with flowering shrubs. The bedroom was long and narrow; the bed a large carved four-poster weighed down with cream brocade cushions and striped gold-and-green gauze curtains. There were divans and armchairs and Moorish mirrors in glass frames, a chest of inlaid mother-of-pearl and a delicate sixteenth-century watercolour depicting twelve Arab musicians seated round a table. On the tables lay gold brocade covers and blue-and-green Fez pottery. And one sank ankle deep into the carpets. There was an enormous bathroom (where the cold water flowed at a temperature of 60°) and, of course, the inevitable cunningly hidden staircases and steps, so ideally suited to amorous intrigue, which are part of every Moorish palace. An impassive *valet de chambre* in turban and babouches brought coffee and toast on embossed copper trays in the morning. On little blue saucers lay white pats of butter as round as the full moon. The fountains played incessantly in the courtyard, iced beer and mint tea were

mine for the bidding, but still it was so warm that no one dared to venture into the glare of the day. The cushions, even, were too hot to lie on. In such heat, brains move sluggishly. A car was sent for me, and a guide in the person of fat old Mohammed, one of the rare people who knew the labyrinths of Fez *medina*. They said he was the oldest *tirailleur* in the Moroccan army, and had been in every *baroud*, or fight, that had taken place during the last forty years. He looked as though he could take part in many more.

I had already been in many *souks*, or Moorish markets. There was the *souk* of Tangier with its feasts of colour, there was the *medina* of Rabat with its Hassan Tower, but the *medina* of Fez was unique. For Fez is ancient and noble, a voluptuous and subtle charmer, overpowering the soul, lulling one's senses with its poison—for poison it must surely be that weakens all ties with the outside world and drugs you with forgetfulness of all previous life. Here there is no sense of time or space. Here magic carpets are woven, love philtres are brewed; magicians and sorcerers stalk through narrow, winding streets by daylight, to disappear suddenly as though by enchantment into the recesses of those white walls. No one can spend a night during Ramadan under the moonlit ramparts of Fez, submitted to the aphrodisiacal influence of Arab music, and still remain entirely European. Something has happened. Part of the soul of Fez has become imprinted on your soul. There are many voices in the *souks*: the chant of beggars crouching in the corners by the fountains; the sighs of veiled mothers; the shouts of weaving-masters as they direct the children who hold their threads; the prayers rising from mosques five times daily; the laughter of women gossiping at the tomb of St. Moulay Idriss, where criminals still seek sanctuary; the voices of the Berber tribesmen from the hills as they order their long lines of patient donkeys to the right or to the left according to the intonation of their voices; there is the solemn voice of the Caid, erect on a tall mule, as he brushes past the dust-laden *djellabas* of the pedestrians, and of the whispering Nationalists who urge their countrymen to regain their pride and claim back their country from the foreigners; and, finally, there is the voice of the foreigner himself, separated by barriers of centuries, to whom the voices of the *souks* sound strange and unreal and remote, for he lives in a town apart where there are no visible walls or

ramparts, but which is, nevertheless, much more difficult to besiege. Meanwhile, the imperial city, white and compact within its crenellated walls, rising gently on a hill fringed with olive trees and willows, and surrounded by mountains, glowed like a coronet of pearls on pale green velvet. Along the powdery roads leading into town through its vast horseshoe gateways, white-robed peasants marched majestically beside their donkeys. Between crumbling mounds of earth and tortured cactus plants covered with egg-shaped tumours rose the anonymous tombstones of the Muslim cemeteries; here, every Friday, the veiled women come to enjoy their weekly conversations in the presence of their dead. Lean camels graze on thick burned grass; they are kept for their meat, for the earth here is too hard on their tender feet and nobody uses them for transport. Once inside the immense gateways, you turn your back on the twentieth century; the streets are only wide enough for three or four people to walk abreast. In the box-shaped shops the owners sit cross-legged among their wares, or fan themselves in the shadows of a windowless recess. Here is a man hammering metal; here is another patiently tracing traditional designs on leather. Every trade has its own specific area. From the tanners' quarter rises an odour of stale cheese and rotting carcasses. A bloodstained goatskin is being dragged into a workshop. An old man stirs an immense basin of blue dye. The sun shines through a trellis of leaves where herbalists sit behind pyramids of fresh green mint. Outside the Quaraouine University, where scholars have pored over the Koran since the eleventh century, two students pass, immersed in gentle discussion.

There was much to learn and admire in Fez: the mother washing her child's feet in the blue-tiled fountain; the blind man being helped on his way by the crowd—in this country, every hand is outstretched to help the needy wanderer; the sick man on a donkey, whose arms cling to the two friends who walk beside him; the beggar child who looked up, with shaven head and pigtail tuft, to admire the coloured candles being taken into the sanctuary of Moulay Idriss.

A man sitting beside a basket of fine white flour tempts you to enter the mysterious darkness of his cave. Inside, you find a prehistoric hydraulic mill, fed by the river which runs below. A man crouches in the darkness, holding a sieve with which he separates the flour from the bran. A little way

down the street a fat cloth-merchant chatters into a telephone, as he sits on the counter of his shop, with his plump bare feet dangling in mid-air. He lets himself down gently into his *babouches* as we approach, and takes us up an obscure flight of steps to visit his workshop, which consists of small cubicles, each with its separate loom, arranged round a central courtyard open to the sky. Everything is falling to pieces: the ceiling is a mass of cobwebs; a solemn white bird glares down reproachfully from its perch on a corner-stone. Four men are working in each cubicle. Small boys sit on the floor, winding coarse flaxen thread. You ask the owner how much the workmen earn. He shrugs his shoulders and says it depends on their skill; they are paid by the yard, but some materials take longer to weave than others. We stop some of the workmen and ask them what their average earnings are; some say they earn about 5s. a day, some a little more. Labour, said the proprietor, is becoming expensive in Morocco. It was not the same before the war, he adds. The craftsmen have their own ideas about work, and sometimes they will go away for a week or two without notice, because it has suddenly occurred to them to go and visit a distant cousin in the country; then the work stops, orders can no longer be delivered on time, and it would be impossible to deal with them on European labour lines. A Moroccan business-man whose shoes are manufactured by workmen in the *medina*, but whose shop was in the European quarter, 5 kilometres away, told me that whenever he asked for a quotation for 1,000 items, he knew he would be charged more than if he only ordered 100; so he places ten orders of 100 items between ten different suppliers. "It is better not to pay them all at once," he said. "Pay in instalments, so that there is always a carrot dangling in front of the donkey."

On the fringe of the *medina*, the potters sit half-naked on boards placed over trenches, turning the wheels with their bare feet, shaping with agile fingers the large calabashes in which the housewives of Fez keep their oil, sugar and camel-meat preserves. The *amin* (head man) of the potters deals directly with the French civil administration. He is supported by a council of experienced potters, who advise him. The *amin* of the tanners informed me that there were two kinds of tanning: some deal in heavy cowhide, others in light goatskins and sheepskins. In spite of the pestilential odour and the pools

of dye dripping in between the cobblestones, the tanners' quarter is extremely vivid with its brown vats of tannin and dark-skinned Berbers and Sudanese whose rippling muscles shine in the pitiless sun as they lift and drop the hides with the regularity of bell-ringers. On one side lay the pale green-and-white sodium vats, and on every roof little draped figures stood up against the sky, now laying out skins to dry, now dreaming into the distance.

In the University of the Quaraouine, learning is derived solely from the antique source of the Koran. Through the open doors, we could see the students squatting on straw mats round their professors, each group in a separate cell. And in the *medersa*, or college, next door, half-naked youths bathed in the fountain, while turbaned heads peered from the galleries above.

Above the heads of the coppersmiths eternally hammering in the darkness of their little forges towers the Quaraouine Library. Here works Ben Shoucroun, a converted Jew, a little man in a striped *djellaba*. All day long, with the help of one voluntary assistant, he files and pieces together innumerable precious manuscripts which have lain neglected for centuries, slowly decaying and falling into dust. The French have taken an interest in the Library, and have built new buildings to house these treasures. A few years ago, the manuscripts were lying in a heap of rubble in a corner; many had been stolen; more were resurrected from private collections. The room where they are now kept is separated from the profane world by a heavily studded door. Ben Shoucroun complained that many works were missing, the damage was often irreparable, but there were many books which still remained to be translated and enjoyed by students of ancient Arabic literature. He had found, among others, an old book of cookery recipes, compiled by an Arab who lived in Andalusia during the eighth century. Many refugees from Spain had come to Fez after the expulsion; there was even a whole quarter known as the *Quartier des Andaloux*. Ben Shoucroun showed me how the Arabic script had developed from the long, parallel curves of the ancient Andalusians to the neat, finely-rounded calligraphy which distinguished a Koran copied for a sultan a hundred years ago. The calligraphy had hardly changed through the years, the only difference lay in the colour of the inks, and even this was infrequent. He was

fond of those ancient and yellowing copies of the Koran, preserved under lock and key in strong leather cases, copies in which the name of Allah was inscribed in letters of gold and the illuminations were so delicate that, in order to really appreciate them, they had to be observed under a magnifying glass. It was the beauty of mosaics and Oriental carpets, a beauty inspired by the flood-tide of flowers with which Allah Himself adorns the hills in springtime. The flowerlike Arabic script, which lends itself so easily to embellishments, had never blossomed more fully than in these old Korans preserved in the mediæval Quaraouine by Ben Shoucroun of the wrinkled fingers.

It was market day and many people were descending to the town from the hills. We wandered into the out-patients' department of the one and only hospital for natives. With room for about 800 beds, it was the only native hospital for miles around. (Out in the *bled*, or the countryside, there are emergency clinics visited once a week, they say, by a doctor, and in the *medina* of Fez itself, a town of about 200,000 inhabitants, there are only four clinics with a daily average attendance of about 250 patients each.) Here the nurses were Franciscan nuns aided by whatever Arab girls they could train, together with three doctors and a radiologist. In the whole of Morocco there are only a dozen Moroccan doctors. "But we hope to train more," explained the French doctor at the head of the hospital, adding: "We need them so badly, and all the help we get is from the nuns, for no French nurse would come here for so little pay. Nurses' salaries here are even lower than at home."

In the clearing-room, the patients were being sorted out by a harassed young doctor, who said he could spend no more than ten seconds with each patient, for otherwise he would be overwhelmed by the magnitude of his task. They had devised a system by which index cards, distributed among the patients, directed them either to "light ops." for minor surgical interventions, or "X-rays" for the radiologist, or to the pharmacy for medicine. "People often come in on market days to ask for an aspirin, just an excuse to see the hospital. I suppose it amuses them," said the house-doctor. I could not help but admire the doctors who work such long hours with little pay and little thanks for their patience and perseverance under trying conditions. The heat, the smell, the cries of the rabble

were quite overpowering. He told us that there were few epidemics, except occasional bouts of typhus: the Moroccans suffer mostly from tuberculosis and syphilis—the latter being “their constant companion throughout their lives.” Tuberculosis takes a heavy toll in the crowded *medina*, where early child-marriages and the practice of keeping women veiled and of eating from the same dish are contributory factors. They suffer from cataract and conjunctivitis due to the heat and dust, but these ailments are dealt with in another hospital. Malaria and fearful bulbous tumours are commonplace. The head doctor planned, he said, to extend the hospital, and he was anxious to build a nursing-home for the better-class Arabs, who would never consider staying in an ordinary hospital. There was no children’s ward. “The mothers,” he said, “would never consent to leave their children with us.”

In some of the more up-to-date wards, there were tiles reaching above the level of the beds, a necessary precaution in a country where the patients pass the time of day spitting on the wall. This habit tends to make ordinary whitewashed wards extremely dirty. The windows were closed, it was stifling, and some of the patients were trying to keep cool by lying *under* the beds. The maternity ward was far from full, because most of the Arab women prefer to follow traditional methods, making use of the local midwife, with the result that infantile mortality is very high. It is not surprising really that they should not be anxious to go to a foreign hospital, staffed by people who cannot speak their language, and whose manners are brusque and different from their own. Nothing has been done to spread notions of elementary hygiene among the people; there is no ante-natal care. For a total population of 8 million in Morocco, there are only 166 official doctors and twenty-three hospitals equipped with 5,000 beds. In 1946, Budget expenditure on public health and hygiene reached the peak figure of 5 per cent. of the total budget! The few doctors there are, however, are greatly appreciated by the Moroccans, and many of them, like the doctors I saw in the Fez hospital, are entirely devoted to their superhuman task. They ask for more equipment, for more assistance; it is not their fault if it is not supplied to them by the Government.

Leaving the hospital, we came to the “red light” district. Here you find young girls who are taught the inevitable gestures and mannerisms, which they apply automatically

and without intelligence, a French resident told me. They are supple, feline little animals—nothing more, he said. The men start their sexual practices early, but with them it is more a question of pure sexuality than sensuality; their desires are easily satisfied and dismissed with rapidity. The majority of the clients were French soldiers. The Nationalists claim that the French introduced prostitution into North Africa. Judging, however, from the mixed colouring of the Moroccans, ranging from white to pitch black, there is no doubt that their concubine slaves have contributed to the population. I was told by an English resident who had known Morocco before and since the advent of the French that in the pre-occupation days the Moroccan “reserved quarters” were conducted with grace and dignity. The “guest” could, if he wished, merely sip mint tea in beautiful surroundings and admire the gorgeous costumes of the young ladies without going any further. Nowadays, the “reserved quarters” are as large and sordid as barracks—indeed, he added, “in Casablanca, the ‘quarters’ were built before any housing scheme was dealt with. Short skirts, drunkenness and vulgarity have made their appearance in the wake of the civilizing mission of the Europeans.”

The Jewish population live in a separate enclosure called the *mellah*, and many of them have remained extremely orthodox to this day. The Arabs declare that their relations with the Jews are more or less satisfactory, but others remembered that as recently as 1944 the Jews had to lock themselves within their gates. Once, in Casablanca, I came upon an Arab woman insulting a Jew because he had accidentally touched her skirt as she passed. The total number of Jews in Morocco approximates 264,000. They were received into the country, say the Moroccans, at a time in their history when the Christian nations were chasing them from their homes, and they were never molested in Morocco. The modern elements among the Jews, concentrated for the most part in Casablanca, are inclined to “co-operate” with the French for practical, material purposes, and this tends to produce friction between Jews and Arabs. They are not, however, numerically powerful enough to create a problem.

With regard to the Palestine problem, although Moroccan sympathies lie inevitably on the side of the Arabs, the Sultan has reminded his subjects in recent official speeches that they are Moroccan above all, whether they be Muslim or Jewish,

and that they have always lived in harmony. His Majesty is evidently anxious to avoid any possible source of internal disruption caused by the Palestine issue.

## SI ALLAL EL FASSI

AT THE RESIDENCY, I was constantly escorted by officers—courteous, no doubt, but omnipresent. The General had graciously organized a complete sight-seeing programme for me, but I was getting anxious to meet the man whom I had really come to see, Si Allal el Fassi. I decided to speak to the General and frankly confess my desire to meet the Nationalist leader. It was fortunate that I did so, because I discovered subsequently that even before I set foot in the Residency, the General had been informed of my intentions by his intelligence service, which seemed to indicate that M. Balafredj's telephone conversation from Rabat had been overheard.

One night after dinner, referring to my luncheon at the Rabat Residency, and to M. Labonne's *carte blanche* to report on everything I saw, I said that I intended to sound all shades of opinion in the country and therefore proposed to visit El Fassi. The General's face darkened slightly, but he merely remarked scornfully: "This fellow is of no importance whatsoever. He will try and stuff you up with all kinds of nonsense. He will try to convince you that there is such a thing as 'public opinion' in Morocco. This is an absolute fallacy. There is no public opinion. The *fellahin* in the fields don't think; they are not educated—not advanced or even interested enough. El Fassi and all the other discontented elements are simply people who have received some education from us. I assure you that they do not have the people's welfare at heart. They are either prophets or profiteers."

We did not mention the name of El Fassi again. Once the General said: "Of course, you are free to go wherever you like. You do not have to adhere strictly to the programme I have arranged for you."

After a little difficulty, I found M. Mekouar's house in the *medina*. He was not at home the first time I called, however, and so I left M. Balafredj's letter of introduction, with a note to the effect that I would call again on the following day at

the same time. This was just before lunch and a time when my absence would be less noticed. The next day, when I called again, M. Mekouar was in. A little Negro servant escorted me down the marble steps to the *patio* where M. Mekouar was standing, waiting. He was a middle-aged, clean-shaven man with keen grey eyes. Shaking hands, I said: "I suppose it will be difficult to go up to Immouzer to see Si Allal el Fassi?"

Quietly, he replied: "There is no need to go so far. Si Allal el Fassi is here."

A few moments later, Si Allal el Fassi entered the room. He was the most legendary man in Morocco. Looking at him with curiosity, I wondered: "Is he really one of those 'prophets or profiteers' that the French General has spoken of so scornfully?" It was difficult to place him in either one of these categories. In his early thirties, frail, pale-skinned, with penetrating blue eyes, there was an earnestness in his face which still showed signs of suffering. He did not give one the impression of being a fiery leader, but simply of being a genuine patriot, reasonably moderate, fully alive to the difficulties that lie ahead for his country, but determined to overcome them. He said: "The French are not fanatics. Some of them are beginning to understand the position, and I think they will end by realizing that they must return us our independence, which was removed from us by the Treaty of 1912."

He went on: "The Moroccan peoples are not as advanced as yours, but there are already sufficient elements among them capable of assuming the responsibilities of government. We are aiming at a parliamentary constitution under the Sultan. It will not be very different from the Constitution of Great Britain. The Sultan agrees with us in principle. As for public opinion, people do not require to be university graduates to justify their desire for freedom in their own country. A doctrine or a faith is sufficient, and little by little they will be educated."

I thought privately that it would take a considerable time before the Constitution of Morocco even remotely resembled the Constitution of Great Britain, and I wondered whether Si Allal and Ahmed Balafredj were not being rather optimistic when they talked glibly about the splitting up of the feudal domains. How would the haughty Sherifian notables react to

these ideas once independence had been achieved? I thought of the proud Caids I had seen on horseback in the streets of the *medina*, passing magnificently and arrogantly by as the poorer people on foot flattened themselves against the walls. Would *they* consent to abandon their prerogatives? I thought of some of the younger and more modern elements among the Moroccans, whom I had found so attracted by the superficialities of the West, and their love of things material. Would *they* be willing to work unobtrusively in all humility among the milling masses of peasants to better their conditions? There were others, I knew, who were ready to sacrifice everything they had for their people. Who would win the day? Only the future would tell.

I then broached the subject of religion and asked Si Allal whether there would be opposition to reform from the orthodox members of the Faith. Did the professors of the Quaraouine University, for instance, approve of these new currents in the country? El Fassi smiled.

"I am a professor at the Quaraouine myself. Of course, there are elements of 'the old school' in every country, but our party aims at reform. In England, you had your Reformation, which enabled you to retrace your steps and recover the purity and simplicity of your faith at the source; this is exactly what we want to do with our Islamic faith." A little later, he said: "You should come and stay with us. My family would be pleased to welcome you. There is nothing wrong with this house. You will find all you want. There are bathrooms." He wanted, obviously, to prove that Moroccans are modern and that I would therefore feel at home. I was touched, and at the same time a little saddened by this indirect allusion to the general European conception of the Moroccans. It was difficult to explain that there were dangers in moving from the Residency and installing one's self with the "opposition." Nothing would have been more pleasing or more illuminating. I promised, however, to return to see him when I returned from my visit south to Marrakesh, after Ramadan.

The General did not mention the subject of El Fassi until the last day of my visit, when, on the eve of my return journey to Rabat, sipping coffee in the salon, the General suddenly leaned forward and asked: "I trust you have seen all you wanted to see in Fez?" I thanked him sincerely for his many kindnesses and for those of his subordinates who had shown

me round. He flicked the ash off his cigarette, and asked again, quite casually: "By the way, did you see El Fassi?"

"Yes," I answered.

The expression of utter surprise on his face was perfectly genuine. There was another and much longer silence.

"And how did you find him?"

"He made a very favourable impression upon me, and not the least in his moderation towards the French. Here is a man who has just returned from nine years' imprisonment, an ardent patriot, confronted with the opportunity of expressing himself to someone from a country which knows little about the aspirations of the Moroccan people. He might have spoken forcibly—even bitterly. On the contrary, he stated the case for Moroccan independence simply, but firmly. This inner strength and moderation seems to be shared by all the Nationalist leaders I have met so far."

The General flicked his cigarette impatiently. "That too," he commented, "is a form of propaganda. What is his programme?"

I expressed surprise at his interest in a man "of no importance," as he had qualified El Fassi earlier on. "If you *are* interested to know what his programme is, why don't you ask him up to the Residency and talk it over with him?" I suggested. "I know that El Fassi would be willing to."

The General laughed sarcastically. "Good gracious! I would never dream of giving him the opportunity to consider himself of that much importance," he declared.

We left for Rabat at sunset. The General was going to see the Sultan, and I made the journey back with him. A hush descended upon the hills and plains. Soon the stars appeared, brighter and more scintillating than the European stars that shine down to us through the mists, and red flames rose outside the *noualas* on the warm, burnt sienna earth. The women were busy preparing the unleavened bread for the evening meal, for soon their fast would be over. A shepherd mustered his little flock of sheep by the roadside and slowly advanced towards the village with long strides, gazing towards the hills. This was Biblical country. It was in settings such as these that the Old and New Testaments and the Koran were first inscribed in the hearts and minds of men. These people are possessed of a deep religious gravity, a serene quality of calm and contentment, blessed with the peace which the

Western world and all its chromium comforts cannot give. In the towns, we came across little groups of people squatting round lamps with their naked children, eating the *harira* soup, laughing, gossiping and playing tambourines. Occasionally, from some dark corner of the ruined walls of Meknes, built by Sultan Moulay Ismail, a low disembodied chanting could be heard, as if the very walls themselves had stirred to life.

The General peered anxiously through the darkness: "Careful, Mustapha," he said to the Muslim chauffeur. "Mind you don't run over the children," as the headlamps flashed on to curly black heads and serious dark eyes. The children filled the road, loaded with green water melons, coloured sweets and sticky mounds of *cebekya*, a sweetmeat twisted into curved strips and coated with honey. Or else they squatted amid rags and lice, under the light of the moon and the protection of Allah, living their lives in brotherhood, linked by the bonds of faith and of poverty—bonds which are usually, alas, only found at this humble level!

I would have liked to peep inside one of the tents which we were passing. "If you do," said the General, "you will get a wrong impression of these people. You will be shocked by their poverty and believe that we have done nothing for them. But in fact many of them possess considerable wealth, though they may have few material possessions. They are nomads, or semi-nomads, moving down from the hills every year with all their belongings."

At Khemisset we halted; the General wanted to call on one of the local Caids. "Will you come shooting with me soon?" asked the Caid after he had greeted the General effusively. Then he added: "I have no friends in Fez, you know. I am loyal to the French."

The General glanced at me quickly, and later he said: "Thank goodness that we can rely on *some* loyal elements in this country!"

## A *DIFA* IN EL GLAOUIS PALACE

THE TRAIN FOR MARRAKESH was so crowded with Arabs and Arab soldiers that we thought we would never be able to board it. There was no order on the station platform; an Arab sergeant brandished his cane; the red-faced French

railway officials shouted themselves hoarse. And when at last the *rapide* left the station, we were quite exhausted by the heat, the scuffle and the dust that poured through the cracks in the closed windows. The Europeans fanned themselves in despair, but even that operation demanded a certain amount of energy. As for the Arabs, they silently folded the hoods of their *djellabas* over their faces, and remained utterly immobile throughout the journey, immersed in a cataleptic trance. There were no blinds; the heat was intolerable. The fertile, wheat-producing plains of the Gharb soon disappeared and were replaced by arid desert, watered occasionally with the ravines of *oueds*, or rivulets, whose shallow blue trickles of water shone fitfully in the sun. Camels began to appear against the skyline. Donkeys and peasants walked slowly down powdery tracks. We stopped for seven hours at Casablanca, a town of which the French are proud, for it has been wholly developed by them since 1912, a town of colonial villas, boulevards, cafés; there were, also, the inevitable beggars, the equally inevitable Americans in jeeps, and expensive shops full of Parisian clothes. You could eat anything you wished—providing you had the money. The plain menu was marked 50 francs, but the long list of “supplements” at 150 and 200 francs each could make the check mount to incredible heights. In spite of the heat, the town was clean, and there were few fleas.

As we approached Marrakesh, the earth turned salmon pink, deepening as it reached the walls of the town, with its belt of majestic palm trees and the haughty Koutoubbia Tower facing the snow-capped Atlas mountains. A city of splendour—“*Gueuse et reine à la fois, j’ai des loques splendides*,” as a French poet wrote. The city of the oasis, the capital of the desert, spread out like a coral necklace offering at the feet of the Atlas, the door of the Sahara, the domain of El Glaoui Pasha, known as the “King of the Sahara,” the richest, most powerful and most mistrusted of the Pashas of Morocco, and a great friend of the French (who generously pay out a few million francs each year to enable the gouty old gentleman to atone for many excesses in the healing waters of Vittel in France).

Wandering round the ruins of the domed sanctuaries of the local Holy men (or *marabouts*), avoiding the swarms of grasshoppers at your feet, you follow the peasant who is bringing

monkeys and camels to town, or stand idly by the women drawing water at the fountains. From the fresh, green plantain trees, ellipses of shadow fall like petals on the white cloaks of the travellers, and you wonder: "Have I been here before?" Marrakesh is different from Fez and from any other town in North Africa. It is more African. It possesses the magic of heathen incantations in the beating of the *nakkos*, the drum-beat which seems to echo the rhythm of life, of the pulse, of creation itself. Marrakesh has the savagery and the voluptuousness of a black mistress, indifferent to the workings of the mind, with little use for the soul. Have I been here before? The Chleuh girls dance, the song of the flutes and the tambourines and the snake-charmers overcome you with an unaccountable intuition that you have reached the birthplace of the entire human race—a warm, caressing birthplace, far removed from the cold flints and caves and prehistoric sites of our northern skies.

That night, the French General of the region of Marrakesh, a peppery, overfed, obese little man, had arranged for the traditional *difa* (banquet) to take place in the palace of El Glaoui in honour of Prince Otto of the Habsburgs, who was travelling in Morocco with his sister. Since I had turned up at the same time, I was included in the party. El Glaoui was then indulging in his annual cure at Vittel, but his eldest son, Si Brahim, a polished and delicate-featured young man of about thirty, acted as host. He had been educated in France, and had returned to marry one of his cousins. They said that he had been an admirer of Lucienne Boyer, the French *disease*, and that he had the complete collection of her records. In his snow-white *djellaba* and fez, he looked extremely pure and princely. It is difficult to persuade oneself that any person attired as the Archangel Gabriel could be anything but virtuous, although the French declare that the Moroccans are most definitely "a vicious lot." "Ah! He is back home, now," whispered a French officer with a knowing look. "*Il est bien dans le bain maintenant*—no more nonsense."

As our cars drove up outside the palace, a row of about fifty turbanned lackeys drew themselves to their full height, their shadows dancing on the walls like a mimed scene from *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Once within the enormous carved gateway, you wind your way through a maze of apartments and staircases, more doors and still more steps,

and all the way along motionless Negroes stand by the wall. At the end of a long, carpeted passage, the master of the house steps forward to greet you. You are led into a hall for *aperitifs* and olives and salted cakes spread on small brass-topped tables. Si Brahim touches no alcohol (in our presence), but alcohol flowed freely among the guests. Then we were wafted into yet another hall, where the *difa* proper was to take place. Along the terrace outside, rows of dishes capped with conical raffia covers were being watched over by swarms of Negro servants.

We sat on leather cushions round the low table, while the servants brought silver bowls, towels and kettles of cold water, so that we could rinse our hands before eating. The food is eaten with fingers only: the first three fingers of the right hand may be used—or, rather, the thumb and first two fingers. After the meal, the silver bowl is passed round again, this time accompanied by soap. The fingers must be clean. You cannot tear into a plump pigeon carefully wrapped in boiling tomato pulp, and share it with your neighbours, unless they are scrupulously washed.

Soup, served in blue bowls with long wooden spoons, was followed by *pastilla*, which is the *summum bonum* of all Moroccan culinary art. The Spanish *paella* is only a degenerate, far-removed relation of this wonder. The *pastilla* which was served to us that night was as large as the top of a table. Underneath the almost transparent, flaky layers of pastry were delicious surprises in the form of tasty morsels of chicken, vegetables, meat of all kinds. It was as complex in flavour as a Chinese dish, and the hall-mark of a civilized race. Si Brahim told us that General Patton had so appreciated the *pastilla* when he visited the Palace during the war that he sent his Negro cook back for a fortnight to the royal kitchens to learn how to make them. The Negro made three *pastillas* a day, and El Glaoui would send for them himself, taste them, and make careful note of his progress until the time eventually came when he could almost compete with the Palace cooks themselves.

It is the custom at a *difa* for the host to select tasty pieces from the dish in front of him with his own fingers for the guest of honour, smiling and bowing as he presents it. This is both a charming and a useful custom, for it gives novice guests a rest from dipping their fingers into meat; nothing

is so difficult, once you have plunged into roast meat, as to determine where your own legitimate piece ends. You take hold of a filament of meat, which spreads as quickly as a tear in burnt cloth, encroaching on somebody else's territory. In this predicament, you either give up the quest altogether, leaving the spoils to your neighbour, and start again in some other part, or else you pursue the filament's course to its cartilaginous end, breaking it off as best you can with a sharp wrench or twist of the fingers. A minimum of acquired dexterity is necessary for this delicate operation. Less famous, but more plentiful than the *pastilla* (which is costly and requires an enormous quantity of ingredients), are the *couscous*, made of semolina rolled into small firm balls, steamed in saffron and spices, served with a top layer of vegetables and meat—or as a sweet, with bowls of hot milk and brown sugar.

As usual at a *difa*, there were innumerable courses. When it was over, we were conducted into the gardens to repose in a state of satisfied semi-consciousness on cushioned divans laid out in the mosaic *patio*, with shadowy figures in the background. These shadowy figures emerged as the Pasha's Court orchestra and dancing girls of Berbers and Chleuhs. Little is known about the Chleuhs. They have their own language, many of them are fair, and their dances consist mainly of intricate and very energetic foot movements. When they dance barefoot on a mosaic *patio*, the sound is as sharp as the crack of a whip. Behind them and a little to one side, an old man sat beating a drum. This is similar to the Berber instrument, and they also have drums and tambourines called *tabels* and *rababs* which resemble distant cousins of the violin, though the players sit with the instruments in front of them.

Once again I was struck by the diversity of Berber features: they vary in height and in colour and in the shape of their head, some negroid, others more European, others still with a curious Asiatic cast. And so they danced, their faces impassive, their bodies swaying with slow, aquatic movements, alternately chaste and unchaste, with downcast eyes, winding in and out of the shadows of the palms, headbands gleaming, veiled throats aflame, small waists sparkling in the light of savage jewels. And all the time, the merciless beat of the drums. The flow of conversation had ceased long ago; the atmosphere was tense. We were all strangely silent, surrounded

by the all-pervading primeval warmth which emanated from the dancers. Now they were singing a hunting song, extolling the subtlety of an able hunter who insinuated himself stealthily into the forest like a mountain stream, in search of his prey. Si Brahim translated softly, a faint gleam in his large brown eyes. "This song can apply to other things too," he said. The rubicund French colonel was listening sleepily, ready to burst at any moment in this heat. He would probably have given anything to be able to unbutton his tight-fitting white coat, but he sat perfectly upright, plump little hands grasping his knees. His collar was too tight, his eyes were popping out of their sockets in a fixed, pained stare; he was obviously terribly bored, because he had brought hundreds of visitors before to these command *difas*. Other French officers were yawning politely behind perspiring hands. The poet sang again—a fable this time. There was a time when the fowls of the plains were as powerful as the eagles who reigned in the hills; and none could vanquish the other. One day the fowls decided that they no longer needed a king, and so they killed him, each fowl taking the law into its own hands. Then the king of the eagles declared war on the fowls, and swooped down upon them. The fowls, weakened by their lack of leadership, were soon beaten, and that is why, to this day, they are afraid of even drinking water without first looking up at the sky, for fear the eagles will swoop down again. ("A rather undemocratic story," remarked Prince Otto.)

The servants brought mint tea, which stimulates rather than calms the nerves. It was to a scene like this that William Lempriere, the British surgeon from the garrison at Gibraltar, came in 1791, when he attended the Sultan and wrote his amusing book, *Tour from Gibraltar to Tangier and thence over Atlas to Morocco, including a Particular Account of the Royal Harem*. A request had come from the Sultan's eldest son for the services of a British doctor. Lempriere was delighted at the prospect of an adventurous journey, for at that time very few Europeans had penetrated into Morocco and fewer still had seen Marrakesh, the capital. He knew no Arabic, however. So a search was made among the Arabs at Tangier for an interpreter, but without success. When all else had failed, a proclamation was announced in the Jewish synagogue of that city, calling upon any Jew who knew both English and Arabic to come forward. A Jewish fruit-vendor, who was on a few days'

holiday from Gibraltar, obligingly stepped forward, not knowing for what purpose his talents were to be employed. He was taken into Lempriere's service against his will and in spite of his family's lamentations, and thereupon Lempriere set out upon his journey in knee-breeches and powdered wig, only to find later that the ladies of the royal harem thought he powdered his hair as a precaution against vermin.

Lempriere was a staunch Britisher, demanding his cut of roast beef wherever he found himself, and he lays heavy stress on the discomforts of the journey. Once he was in danger of losing his life. Having treated the royal Prince, he was suddenly summoned by the Sultan to Marrakesh. "I now discovered," he wrote, "that my journey to Tarudant was a private affair, settled between the Consul and the Prince, and that the Emperor, who at that time was not on the best of terms with the English Court and who had already dropped all communications between his dominions and the garrison at Gibraltar, was highly displeased that an Englishman should be introduced unknown to him for the purpose of attending his son in a medical capacity; that the Moorish physicians, out of pique, had persuaded the Emperor that European medicines were too potent for the Prince's constitution, and that in reality his son was in extreme danger under my care." Fortunately for Lempriere, an analysis of his medicines by the Court Physician was found satisfactory. He waited for a few days at Marrakesh, and when he was finally summoned to the Court, "the Emperor, after surveying me minutely and with the greatest attention, accompanied with no small share of hauteur, demanded from my interpreter in a very stern manner if I was the Christian doctor who had been attending Moulay Absulem. I desired him to answer that I was. 'How came you into my country; and were you sent by order of your King or by whom?' To render my visit of more importance, I answered: 'By order of Government.' 'Where did you learn your profession and what is the name of the person who taught you?' I informed His Majesty. 'What is the reason that the French surgeons are better than the English, and which do you think are best?' I answered: 'The French surgeons are very good, but it must certainly be allowed that the English are in general superior, being more scientifically educated.' The Emperor then observed that a French surgeon had come into the country and in the course of his practice

had killed several persons. His Majesty next asked in a very austere manner: 'What were the reasons for which I had forbidden Moulay Absulem the use of tea?' My reply was: 'Moulay Absulem has very weak nerves and tea is injurious to the nervous system.' 'If tea is so unwholesome,' replied His Majesty, 'why do the English drink so much?' I answered: 'It is true they drink it twice a day, but then they do not make it as strong, and they generally use milk with it, but the Moors make it very strong.' 'You are right,' said the Emperor; 'and I know it sometimes makes their hands shake.' 'Later, Lempriere, now a success, was asked to examine the Sultan's favourite. The lady modestly hid behind a curtain while Lempriere felt her pulse. Lempriere insisted that she should show him her tongue. No precedent for such an outrageous demand could be found, but in the end the resourceful lady hit on a brilliant idea; a slit was made in the curtain, through which her tongue was triumphantly thrust forward!

Suddenly, the plump Colonel, who could contain himself no longer, jumped up from his divan and announced that he thought it was time to return. Si Brahim rose gracefully to escort us to the door; the Negro servants stood to attention, unmoving, their eyes strangely riveted as they gazed in front of them, through mirrors, mosaics and crystal chandeliers. Outside, the Colonel sighed with relief and mopped his humid brow. 'After an ordeal like that, I absolutely insist on a brandy and soda.'

In the morning, the city resembled a mirage with its pink walls, and the white tombs of the Saadian kings born on this fiery edge of the desert, where two great dynasties of Berbers settled after their conquests in the south. After them, came the Almoravids of the eleventh century, who founded Marrakesh. Then Sultan Youssef ben Tachfine united Morocco for the first time, and pushed his frontiers into Algeria and as far as Muslim Spain. He was followed by the fierce Almohades from the Great Atlas, who wrenched the empire from the Almoravids and in their turn assumed mastery over Spain. It was through them that the Andalusian civilization penetrated through the whole of Barbary. But soon, like the locusts, came the invasions of the Beni Hilal and the Beni Solem, destroying all before them. The Saadian kings, who had extended their domination as far as Timbuktu, perished ultimately in the middle of anarchy. Now, in Rabat, a Sultan of the Alaouite

dynasty holds precarious and limited power. For how long? The walls are crumbling—crumbling fast in the hot desert winds.

## THE BERBERS

MY FELLOW TRAVELLER ON the road back from Marrakesh had been in Morocco for twelve years, and there was nothing he liked more than talking about the Berbers or the strange habits of his servant Fatima, who put philtres in his morning coffee to make him like her and never dispense with her services.

“Let me tell you,” he said, “about the strange customs that surround the birth of a child. These people believe that the child is moulded in the womb by an angel, as a sculptor models a statue out of clay. (And talking about sculptures, although it is forbidden to strict Muslims to make an image of clay, there are tribes near Azrou who make the strangest of realistic statuettes, omitting no detail of the human anatomy.) When a Berber child is born, the angel inscribes its destiny on the forehead. The women of Marrakesh will make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sidi Ben Nfais, who is the father of deliverance. This they do in the ninth month. The local *mokkadema*, or ‘witch,’ as we would have called her in England about two hundred years ago, will fasten seven small stones to their abdomen, and these may only be removed after the child’s birth. They will buy candles decorated with strips of coloured paper on the day of their pilgrimage, but the candles will not be lit until after the birth.

“You have noticed that the maternity wards in the hospitals are only half full? The country midwife still plays her role. The Berbers are afraid of *djinns*, so that at the time of child-birth the midwife will spread out a sheepskin on the earth and scatter salt in the four corners of the room and into the courtyard and water-closets, to drive the *djinns* away. She will then prepare a sachet of spices and hang it over the mother’s head, and beside the mother she will place a schoolboy’s slate, so that the child may be anxious to become a scholar. Or perhaps she will hang an olive-twigg from Mecca, or a rosary from Mecca, or a spindle of wool or some flour, these being signs of wealth. When labour begins, they start praying to the

saints who facilitate childbirth. Sometimes the midwife will beckon the unborn child with her forefinger.

“If labour is difficult, seven newly baked flat loaves will be placed on her abdomen; these are reputed to absorb all pain. If loaves are not available, eggs can be rolled over the abdomen with the same effect. When the child is born, the first name he hears is ‘Allah,’ for she whispers into his ear: ‘*Allahu Akbar*’ (‘God alone is great’). She will then go on to make a little speech, saying: ‘You will grow big and forget; you will be happy; you will learn to read.’ Then she will smear a little sugar on the baby’s tongue, so that its life may become sweet. The child is thereupon smeared all over with oil and rolled in henna powder, which is considered to possess many virtues. A special woollen shirt is thrown over its head, to be worn for seven days: afterwards, it will become a talisman. It is then swaddled, the midwife puts on its first head-band, called the *cheddada*, and five lines are traced on it in kohl to avert the evil eye.

“During confinement, the father goes to a friend’s house or waits in the *souk* for a messenger to bring him the good tidings. The midwife prepares special dishes which are served to the mother and the child, and the child’s eyes are smeared with a strange concoction in the preparation of which enter seven coloured strands from a carpet, since carpets are always the loveliest objects in a house or tent. Later, the mother will go to a *hammam* for a bath of purification. The evening of the sixth day after confinement is usually reserved for the bath, and on the seventh day the child receives its name and is presented to the *djinns*.

“Now the child is welcomed into the home. A sheep is sacrificed, milk and dates are eaten, the child is given a silver bracelet, the mother wears her best clothes, two large candles are lit, the midwife pours holy water from a shrine over the child. Yeast is placed on its back so that he will grow, as dough swells under the influence of yeast. Then the child is paraded round the house, ear-rings are put on it, and on the fortieth day it is presented to the holy saints who are the protectors of the region; and finally it is consecrated to the guardian saint.

“The hair is shaved, and this is part of the act of consecration, because every saint favours a different hair-style; that is why all the children have such varying coiffures. Some will

have all their hair shaved except for a tuft in the middle of their head, while others have a tuft over their ears. Circumcision does not take place until the age of seven or eight.

“A Berber will say to his new bride, ‘Thou shalt be the guardian of the hearth and shall stay as the tent-peg.’ A woman’s life is believed to be closely related to the seasons, to earth and to Nature. She will be carefully watched in the spring, for fear that she will fall into mischief in spite of herself. Autumn is considered best for weddings, as at such a time the bride will participate in the fullness of the earth and be as fertile as the crops.

“The bride used to be carried to her husband’s home in a special chair, not unlike a cage, covered with silk draperies. Once at home, however, she soon gains the upper hand.

“Among some of the tribes, healing dances are still performed. Europeans are never allowed to be present at these. The Sultan has restricted the savage self-mortification dances of the Assaouia in Meknes. But diabolical possession is cured by the brotherhood of the Guennaoua. The *mokadema* sits on a pile of cushions, wearing a black tunic and a black hat trimmed with feathers. Three candles, red, green and white, are placed before him, and a tray of incense and milk and dates, which are always used in Moroccan ceremonies. The *mokadema* then strikes a few notes on an instrument called a *gemb*i and begins to meditate, while one of the acolytes pours milk on to the earth for the benefit of the *djinn*s. Then Negro musicians come running forward, striking their instruments and breaking into a sacred dance. The patient’s clothes are now unloosened, and he is wrapped in a wide white tunic and a green *kaftan*. Slowly, under the influence of the music and perfume and incantations, he advances in a hypnotic trance towards the centre of the circle. The priest exhorts the evil spirits to leave him and at that moment he joins in the sacred dance until he falls exhausted at the feet of the *mokadema*. Meanwhile, the dance continues as before, but the *mokadema* takes no more part in the ceremony. He merely sits aloof, surrounded by his acolytes, but he still dominates the situation and prevents the dancers from losing control.

“The Berbers say there was a time when God in His mercy allowed men to know the hour of their death forty days in advance, so that they could prepare for it; but this knowledge disturbed them so much that they wasted away and were

almost skeletons by the time the Angel of Death appeared before them, and the ants complained that they did not have enough to eat. So God decided not to forewarn the people, and to make the Angel of Death invisible. The soul flies away from the body in the shape of a bee and the same soul that wanders abroad in sleep, haunts its mortal house for three days after death and hovers round the tomb for forty days before taking up its abode in the *Barzekh*, which is an immense beehive in the sky. Here each bee-soul has its accustomed cell, from which it will descend to its tomb every Friday, the day when the women go to the cemeteries to visit the tombs of their dead. The soul resides in the heart, which is the only part of the body to which Satan can never gain access. The hour of death is written on the forehead of every human being. The dead speak among themselves in the cemeteries for seven days after the burial. When a man dies, he is called three times by name, to make sure he is not just sleeping, and so that they can make certain that the soul has not left the body in its short wanderings. A veil is placed over the faces of the dying, lest the soul be saddened by the faces of those weeping. And, finally, there must always be a ceremony of mutual forgiveness.

“Bread is considered to be sacred; and the Moroccans also believe in *kimia*, a magical process by which food can multiply itself. And this *kimia* is visible in the small, phosphorescent light which can be seen flickering over food; this must never be mentioned if it is seen, in case it disappears. It is never visible when other people are present. Whoever sees it must gather it carefully and place it in whatever he wants to have increased.

“The Moroccans love flowers and trees so much that when a man dies it is customary to announce his death to the trees in the garden who begin to weep and wither away. The olive tree is sacred above all, for it has the name of God written on every one of its leaves. When harvest-time comes, the owner of a field cuts the first sheaf of corn, binds it with unspun wool and hangs it on the chief beam which supports the roof of the *kheima*, or tent. This is known as the ‘sheaf of blessing.’ Like men, trees pray during the day and sleep at night.

“Who are these Berbers? Resisting invasion after invasion, they have retained their hold on Morocco, curiously impervious to all that modern civilization means. Are they really the

descendants of a white Mediterranean race, a branch of the great Celtic family? They have no written traditions. Their languages—the principal ones are known as Tamazirght and Chleuh—are written in Arabic characters, when they are written at all.

“Although the Berbers are Muslim, they have adapted the new religion to their own way of life. Whereas the Muslims make little or no dividing line between the religious and the temporal, the Berber makes a marked distinction between them. Their society is primitive, the idea of race and nation being wrapped up in the family unit. The family is the centre of everything. Several families make up a clan, several clans make up a *douar*, or village, several *douars* a tribe, and the tribes themselves are organized into confederations. The blood-tie is all important. In the south, the tribes are known as Ait Lhassen—Ait meaning ‘the son of’ and Lhassen being any one of the many names. In the north, they would be called Beni Lhassen, Beni meaning ‘son of.’ Among them, the word ‘brother’ applies not only to the children of the same parents, but also to members of the same tribe. The name of the tribe is the name of their common ancestor, and all members of the brotherhood consecrate their loyalty to one another in blood. By breaking the same bread, a sense of brotherhood may also be engendered.

“To these wild men, members of other tribes are considered as strangers and aliens. It is impossible to change one’s tribe without the intervention of a ‘protector’; having changed one’s tribe, it is still not possible to exercise any rights for a considerable time. Within his tribe, the Berber has little individuality: he belongs to a communal cell in which everything is pooled and shared. It follows that the whole clan assumes responsibility for the crimes committed by its members, and if a member of one tribe murders a member of another tribe, the affair is settled on a collective basis between the tribes.

“They have their regular tribal meetings. The village *djemaa* (meeting) is attended by the notables only, men who have acquired distinction through personal merit, or who possess personal power. These assemblies are not held regularly, but only when circumstances demand them. They have legislative, judiciary and executive powers. They decide on everything: they can even modify the unwritten legal code which has

been consecrated by custom. Chiefly they deal with questions related to the economic life of the tribe—hiring of land, pastures, communal lands, water rights, the changing of market sites. They will settle private disputes, first by methods of conciliation, and, if this fails, by an arbitrator known as an *anezzarfou*, who specializes in the traditional tribal codes; yet he is not a magistrate. In some tribes, there are families who for generations have specialized in settling disputes.

“Most tribes elect a chief, who is known by the Arab name of ‘sheikh.’ He is empowered to rule over a period of a year, but his functions and activities are jealously watched by the notables of the *djemaa*. Among Berber tribes, war was so normal that it was regarded as the accepted state of affairs; from time to time, short intervals of peace were declared. Yet there are bonds between the tribes. There is an institution known as the *touiza*, for instance, by which farm-tools are exchanged, and irrigation works are planned in common between tribes.

“In the years prior to the French invasion, the Berbers had started to make efforts to centralize their powers. In the south, the greater Berber caids supported Moulay el Hafid against his brother, the Sultan Moulay Abd el Aziz, and against Hammon, chief of the Imalizen family. Their battles were long-drawn and only came to an end in 1934 with their final subjugation by the French.

“The classical abode of the Berbers is still the black goat-skin tent, or a tent made of thick strips of felt which swell during the rains, keeping the tent waterproof. The tents of the richer Berbers are enormous; you can enter them on horseback. Sometimes you will hear a Caid mentioned as being ‘the son of a large tent,’ meaning that he comes from a powerful and influential family. The tents are divided into two by a curtain: on one side live the men, on the other the women. The only luxury lies in the carpets and cushions which adorn the tents, but even the tent-cloths, saddle-cloths, grain sacks and blankets reveal a bright and primitive art. Often you will find one of the tents reserved for a Koranic teacher, and perhaps this tent will also be used as a mosque; but the Berbers are not overscrupulous about their devotions.

“In the south the Berbers have developed a certain measure of intellectual life, necessarily widely influenced by the Muslims. They have an epic poem of ninety-six verses based on the

story of Joseph's betrayal by his brothers, but no other works of the first magnitude are known.

"Berber women are more independent than the Arab women. Indeed, they could hardly escape independence, since they toil with the men in the fields and ride on horseback or on camels. Berbers are monogamous, but divorce is easy. Very often a band of 'divorced women' will group themselves into 'free societies' of dancers and musicians who live troubadour fashion, wandering round the countryside. Berbers are not noted for their fidelity and there are a number of pointed couplets on this theme in their literature.

"The Berbers are becoming increasingly Arabicized and nationalism is penetrating into the remotest villages of the interior. The dividing line between Arab and Berber is far thinner than the occupying European Power finds it convenient to admit."

#### WITH APOLOGIES TO THE GENERAL

I REMEMBER HIM SITTING at the terrace of the Bolimar at Rabat, sipping an *aperitif* reflectively, very military and upright, with clear blue eyes and hair greying at the temples. He had a determined jaw, and he cut an impressive figure in his white tropical uniform. A strange relationship had developed between us. I was his guest at the Residency, yet I was ardently anti-imperialistic in outlook. Twenty years my senior, he believed fervently in the old colonial pattern; he constantly professed his love for the Moroccans, yet detested Arab inefficiency and Arab music, abhorred having to eat with his fingers at *difas*, and nearly had an apoplectic stroke when I announced my intention of staying overnight in a Muslim household. He believed he was contributing to the greatness of France by helping to maintain her Empire. He was appalled by Great Britain's action in quitting India, and refused to believe that British public opinion could possibly be behind the Government. He also detested the radio, although he was good enough to put one at my disposal at the Residency. When I learned, through this medium, that Jawaharlal Nehru had been appointed Premier of the Government of India, I asked permission to send a cable of congratulations. The General frowned. "Are you sure it is quite necessary?"

He was very upset. The interminable quarrels continued. He could not—did not—want to understand that there was a new movement in the air. At eleven at night he would switch off the light in his office, and his heavy, determined steps echoed across the *patio* until they came to a standstill in the beam of light from my lamp on the writing table. "Still at work? And to think I have lent you a typewriter to write all these unpleasant things about me!"

"But they are not all about you. They are mainly about Morocco."

"Strange that you cannot see reason. Impossible to convince you that France is doing good work in Morocco."

Then he would talk briefly about his plans to modernize Fez, while still preserving its ancient character. "It will be entirely new and modern. And do you realize that all this will take place in a region which is half the size of Great Britain?"

I would say: "But most of your plans are made in the interests of the French colonists. Inevitably you must think of your own people first. However good your plans are, they will never be welcomed by the Arabs, because this is not your country any more than this is your palace. I feel so embarrassed here. My place is in the *medina*, where the people live." And it was difficult to say these things, because he was scrupulously honest and fair, according to his lights.

"There is a Franciscan orphanage," he said on one occasion. "I would like you to see it. Perhaps that will convince you that there is great devotion among French nuns for Arab children, for the little girl orphans there are brought up as Muslims. Otherwise, it would be impossible for them to get married. When they are fifteen or sixteen, Muslim prospective mothers-in-law are allowed to visit the orphanage and choose brides for their sons. They generally appreciate these girls, who have been taught housekeeping and sewing by the nuns. You may even approve—you who approve of nothing—of their *point de Fez* embroidery. Please go there."

The Mother Superior showed me into her parlour, with its low divans and large crucifix hanging on the wall. She was a grave, parchment-faced woman with piercing grey eyes. She too explained that the little girls under her charge were brought up in the Muslim faith.

"What prayers do they recite?" I asked wonderingly.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I do not know. Their own, I suppose."

"But who gives them religious teaching?"

She looked at me indignantly. "Well, you do not expect us to teach them the Koran, surely, do you?" Rising with the air of an injured angel, she took us through the aseptically clean orphanage, where the babies slept in pink-and-white cots. They were of all colours (the babies) from pale amber to ebony, and the blacker they were, the readier they smiled. There were dining-rooms where the children ate around low tables with square mats to sit on. There were even wooden spoons.

"Do they not eat with their fingers as other Moroccan children do?"

"Certainly not," was the answer. "If they ate with their fingers there would be far more work for us to do and we haven't enough helpers as it is."

In the dormitories were gaily-coloured, cretonne-covered mattresses in rows on the floor, and Moorish bathrooms next door. Some of the children in the classrooms were poring over their sewing, busily embroidering exquisite table linen; the more expert among them working at high speed, deft fingers pricking the cloth with the regular "tick tick" of the needles. The smaller girls were engaged on bordering hems.

The Mother Superior told me that the sheltered life they led in the convent made it hard for the girls sometimes when they married and had to submit to the tyranny of their mother-in-law. They returned occasionally with their children to show them proudly to their friends at the orphanage. They centred all their affections on these children—the only thing they had to love.

In the chapel, white-veiled nuns were reciting their litanies before a blazing altar. The Mother Superior whispered: "The children are much nicer when they are small. When they grow up, they are not so attractive—atavism, you know."

Later, I asked some Moroccan women why they had no orphanages of their own. They answered: "The French will not allow us to have Muslim orphanages; but really we have never felt the need for them. According to our religion, foundlings left on the doorstep are a gift from Allah, and we are bound to accept them into our household and bring them up. Some will become servants, but others, if they are

intelligent, will be brought up like our own children and go to school with them."

One evening I went to an Arab cinema in the *medina*. It was the only cinema in the town, and the film was in Arabic—from Egypt. The General, when he heard of my intentions, shook his head and asked whether he could make a practical suggestion. He disappeared, and returned a few minutes later with a tin of D.D.T. powder which he had carried all the way from Italy, bearing the label: "For protection against body-crawling insects." "Come and tell me all about the film later." He smiled mischievously. "I shall be working in my office when you return."

The performance had already started when we arrived, but the Moroccan ushers managed to squeeze us in beside two veiled Moroccan ladies and their husbands in the front row of the balcony. The hall was quite clean and the D.D.T. powder turned out to be unnecessary. As for the film, it was easy to follow the progress of the plot, for it moved at snail's pace. The actors were attired in European clothes, except for the fez; the love story was extremely naive, and was frequently interrupted by long bouts of Arab songs. At one point, the heroine sang a song lasting for fifteen minutes, during which time she waved a telegram just received from her absent lover. The love scenes were extremely monotonous, and consisted mainly of interminable exchanges of soulful looks. One wondered whether the lovers would ever kiss, but just when the great moment seemed imminent, there would be a further long interval of singing. Our patience, however, was rewarded towards the end of the film—that is, about three hours later. The lovers kissed for a fleeting moment as they sat on a garden bench against a bowl of gold-fish, and the audience, including ourselves, clapped long and wildly.

All day long, the donkeys of Fez trotted beneath enormous loads of bamboo cane or charcoal or vegetables. They were not always well treated by their primitive Berber owners, and sometimes the General would remark gravely: "Surely the little donkeys of Fez go straight to Heaven when they die." He also informed me that a soft-hearted American lady by the name of Mrs. Amy Bishop had founded the "American *fondouk*" of Fez for the treatment of neglected donkeys. This was directed by an original gentleman by the name of Guy

Delon, a French Muslim. A French Muslim in an American donkey hospital sounded most intriguing. We found it a little beyond the town, on the main road overlooking a small river. The donkey hospital, a bronze plate informed us, had been founded in 1929. It consisted of stables, offices, a veterinary room, grouped round a spacious courtyard. A rather astonished Arab boy led us to an office where, sitting behind a desk, thoughtfully fingering a voluminous Koran, sat M. Guy Delon. He rose to his full, lean height and greeted us with long, bony fingers. He was thin, fair-haired, and his blue eyes were as limpid as a child's. We found him busy extracting passages from the Koran relating to kindness towards animals which he intended to publish in leaflet form and distribute in the *medina* among the sullen donkey-owners. I refrained from asking him whether they were literate enough to appreciate his efforts. Behind him lay a case of instruments which resembled mediæval instruments of torture. They were samples, he explained, of implements employed by the Berbers with which to goad their donkeys. It was a lonely life, and he was glad to see visitors. He had seen very few since the war, but the work had carried on with an interruption of only three days. He then took us to see the donkey patients: emaciated creatures, with bones showing through the flesh, and immense tumours. Some had broken legs; others were covered in sores. He showed us the foot-baths and the operating table and ambulance. Every day he wandered through the *medina* in search of donkeys requiring to be removed to the *fondouk*. In 1945 he had had 18,000 donkeys treated—a figure which did not include occasional camels, horses and dogs. In one of the whitewashed outhouses, we caught a glimpse of an upright piano against the wall. M. Delon explained that this was his only diversion. At our request he sat down and played some of de Falla's dances. He told us, too, that there was an Andalusian orchestra in Fez which played *flamenco* tunes, sung in Arabic. It is said that many of the inhabitants of Fez still keep the keys of their homes in Andalusia, from the time they left Spain.

M. Delon had started life in the Navy, but having by some accident stopped at Morocco, he had fallen under its spell so completely that he had remained there ever since, spending long years with the Berbers in the hills. He is an

Arabic scholar and had turned to the Islamic faith "because," he told us, "he had been so impressed with the sense of brotherhood among the people." He knew several French writers, including André Gide and de Montherlant. Alone among the Europeans I had met so far, he seemed, not only to understand, but to love the people of Morocco.

One evening, towards the end of my stay in Fez, Prince Otto, who had joined the guests at the Residency, was engaged in an after-dinner conversation with the General. "I believe," he began rather diffidently, "that Fez is the town of the Nationalist leader, El Fassi?"

The General lowered his eyes, flicked his cigarette and replied curtly: "Yes. It is."

Prince Otto leaned forward. "Tell me," he said, "would you say that this man El Fassi is sincere?"

Once again the General flicked the ash from his cigarette, hesitating before replying; and then, very quietly, he answered: "Yes. It is my belief that he is sincere."

The smoke curled up from the General's cigarette; the air seemed suddenly to grow heavy and dense with questions. The General's eyes were fixed on mine, and Otto again leaned forward to pursue the matter further. The silence deepened between us all, and when I looked again, the Prince was sitting back in his chair, a clock chimed, and no more questions were spoken.

## EL FASSI AGAIN

OCCASIONALLY, DURING MY stay in Fez, I would slip down from the Residency to the Place Gaillard, where M. Mekouar lived, guarded by a little Negro servant who would motion me to wait at the bottom of the marble steps while he waited for the bidding of his master.

Like the other Nationalists, M. Mekouar was a man of few words, grave in speech, reserved and preoccupied. You felt that there was only one idea dominating his mind—an idea which was for ever grappling with him, leaving him no peace. He had been tortured in Fez during the 1944 repression—hung by the feet for three hours—and it was remarkable that at his age he had been able to survive and carry on as actively with his

mission. His eldest son, a medical student from Bordeaux, was staying with him at the time. The son smiled as he watched his father answering telephone calls, giving orders. "He always wants to do everything himself." A dark-skinned girl brought out the tea and gave me some jasmine flowers. I began to make a necklace out of them as we talked, and he observed me with interest: "I have never seen that done before," he remarked. Like all North Africans, he was intensely interested in the subject of flowers.

El Fassi, he informed me, was speaking at a private meeting at Rabat, but he was expected back at two or three in the morning. "What a life!" the son interjected. "Secret meetings, hidden printing presses, long motor rides in the middle of the night! Yet, he must do these things if he is to work for the independence of Morocco."

M. Mekouar smiled faintly, and invited me, on behalf of El Fassi, to spend the following Sunday with him and his family in the hills of Immouzer du Kandar. "We shall leave here by car. Try and be here at ten in the morning."

The next step was to break the news to the General. Oddly enough, he too was driving up to Immouzer on the Sunday to spend the day with his daughters. He asked me whether I would like to go with him. I declined as gracefully as I could, saying that I had already accepted an invitation to spend the day at Immouzer. A slight flush came to his cheeks. "Don't tell me you are going to see the Nationalists there again?"

"I am afraid so."

"I really cannot understand you," he fumed. "If you really must meet the Nationalists—and I have never forbidden you from seeing them—then by all means see them in Fez. But in Immouzer! That would really be too blatant."

"You really have no right to forbid me from accepting their invitation."

"But at Immouzer!" groaned the General. "Do you realize what that means? You are placing me in a difficult position. Immouzer is a small hill-station. Everything becomes known. Just imagine what will happen. Everybody knows you are staying here as a guest of the Residency, and then they will see you being paraded about by the Nationalists. What will they think? Of course, the Nationalists will want to show you off."

"I don't think they are that kind of a people," I objected.

“You are judging them according to Western standards. But they haven’t got our mania for publicity—yet.”

“Nonsense! I shall be placed in a ridiculous position. Just think what would happen if we met, say, just outside the swimming-pool, since that is the only place to go to at Immouzer, and we’ll just face each other—a ridiculous position!”

He was becoming more and more affronted; it was necessary, my British instincts told me, to agree on a compromise.

“Will you allow me to go if I promise to be very discreet and keep indoors?”

The storm blew over on these conditions. The General drew a large map out of his drawer, put on his spectacles and began to study it carefully, moving his finger from the large dot marked Fez to the south-west towards Sefrou, and beyond this to a lake high up in the middle Atlas called Dyat Ifra. On the map, the lake was a blue speck among brown curves of mountains.

He said: “This is where I have arranged a Berber *difa* for you on Monday. I hope you are not meeting your Nationalist friends on that day too? It will be a magnificent spectacle, I assure you. We should reach the lake just before nightfall.” Folding the map carefully, he enquired: “At what time will you be coming down from Immouzer on Sunday?”

I shook my head. “I have no idea. They did not say anything. Perhaps I shall stay there for the week-end.”

He stared at me incredulously.

“Do you realize what you are saying? It is utterly preposterous!”

“Why?”

“It simply isn’t done to stay overnight with Arabs. What on earth are people going to say?”

“You mean the Europeans?”

“On the contrary, I mean the Moroccans. You will be utterly discredited in the eyes of the Moroccans. No European ever stays in their houses. It has never been done before, and must not be done.”

He was more furious with me than he had ever been. It was impossible to believe that he really wanted to bridge the gap. He knew nothing of how the people lived, except from hearsay, since he had never lived with them in the intimacy of their own homes—and obviously never would. How could he ever hope to understand them?

“You cannot and will not understand,” he went on, “that these people have a different ethical code from ours. Their morals are different. I assure you it is not safe to spend the night with them.”

It was useless to pursue the subject; we were both too angry to carry the conversation further. I did not see the General on the Sunday morning. He was due to leave for Immouzer at eleven, and I had an appointment at the Mekouars' at ten. The old-fashioned, dusty motor car was waiting, but we changed cars at a garage outside the town. Some of the previous occupants of our first car disappeared, and others came in. It was all rather mysterious, but I did not dare ask too many questions.

Immouzer, up in the hills, was a very small residential station, with a little rivulet running through the park and the famous swimming-pool alluded to by the General right in the centre of it. There were two cafés at which Europeans were already seated drinking their *aperitifs*. El Fassi's little daughter came up to greet us shyly as we alighted. She was about nine years old, with a freckled complexion, auburn hair, and she was dressed in European clothes. Her grey eyes were deep and thoughtful like her father's, and although she knew French, she was too timid to speak.

El Fassi's white-washed summer house lay in the park on the brow of a hill overlooking the valley. He came forward to greet us before we reached the door, his frank open face beaming, his eyes sparkling with friendliness, and then he led us upstairs, where a number of visitors were already reclining on cretonne-covered divans. Each guest carefully removed his babouches before entering the room and stepping on to the straw mat. There were business-men among them, a lawyer, two medical students on vacation from French universities, and two Berber tribesmen with almond-shaped eyes and flowing beards, and an “early Assyrian” cast of countenance.

The lawyer, Maître Bahnini, was the first Moroccan to be received at the French Bar. His brother was one of the professors at the Royal College of Rabat, where he taught the young Prince. I asked him about the juridical system in Morocco and whether there were any modern trends developing in North African Islamic law. “The juridical authority in Morocco,” he told me, “is His Majesty the Sultan, who administers

penal and civil justice in his capacity of temporal ruler, through the Pashas and Caids who are the regional and local governors. In his capacity of religious leader (Imam) the Sultan enacts religious laws through the Caids. The latter only deal with questions pertaining to Muslim personal status (questions of marriage, divorce, inheritance and land tenure). The Moroccan Jews have their own Rabbinical courts. As a matter of fact, the juridical system was supposed to be reformed by the French administration—this was specified in the 1912 Treaty—but the French controllers, in the name of the Pashas and Caids, have unlimited competence in juridical affairs. The Muslim courts have no codes or written procedure. Judgments are left to the ‘equity’ of the judge and to his personal opinion, plus pressure applied by the French controller. The *dahir* of October 31st, 1912, instituted a Moroccan Ministry of Justice, to execute sentences and control the courts. Later, in 1914, another *dahir* divided Morocco into a Berber zone and an Arab zone. The territories included within the Berber zone were excluded from the jurisdiction of Islamic courts and laws, and followed the tribal customs. On May 16th, 1930, a further *dahir* established this Berber policy, which aimed at accentuating the racial differences that exist in Morocco. As you have already heard, this *dahir* gave rise to a lot of trouble. On the one hand, you see that the Moroccan juridical system is completely out of date, and on the other hand, it is maintained as such and controlled by omnipotent French agents, under cover of Moroccan puppet chiefs. Most of these puppets—the Pashas and Caids—are illiterate and greedy.

“On March 16th, 1944, the Residency decided to introduce some reforms. It instituted three commissions: first of all, a ‘Code Commission,’ which was supposed to remedy the absence of written laws and to draft a penal code to be followed by a code of criminal procedure. This commission held one inaugural meeting and was never heard of again.

“The second commission, ‘Commission Consultative de Justice,’ was entrusted with the ‘examination of the problem of separate powers.’ Contrarily to what is generally assumed, the principle of the separation of powers is known to Islam, and the Muslim judge is independent from the executive power. The reforms planned by the French administration limited the principle of the separation of powers to civil

and commercial laws only. Moreover, their application was confined to the larger cities. The penal competence of the Pashas and Caid— which is at the root of the evil— remains untouched. There are no public prosecutors for Moroccans, no rules of procedure for the courts, no defence for the accused. Sometimes an accused person can appeal against a judge's sentence, but the man with the biggest bank balance wins the day. Punishment for criminal offences varies according to the locality, to the power of the local Governor— or, rather, the French controller— and, above all, to the culprit's personal means and the position of the victim. Political charges, such as private conversations complaining about the actions of the protecting Power, are always dealt with directly by the controllers. Punishments range from the death sentence to life sentences, hard labour, fines, etc. It is not infrequent to hear of people being beaten up. As I said before, the Caid is not chosen from among the most sensitive or cultured members of the community. Then you hear the authorities say innocently: 'See what primitive people these Moroccans are! What would happen if we weren't here to protect the people from their corrupt, venal chiefs?'"

The Berber tribesmen sat in a corner of the room and said little. They had never, it appeared, been in such close company of a foreigner before, and they just looked and wondered. When El Fassi tried to rouse them later and asked them about the *chraa* (Muslim legal system), they responded readily enough. One was a potter, and we saw him later standing in the marketplace with his jars and earthenware bowls. Lunch was then served, after which M. Mekouar promptly fell asleep, for it was a very large lunch. I asked El Fassi whether meals were usually of these dimensions, and he smiled and told me frankly: "Not really. But to-day we have special guests." He then suggested that a carpet be laid out on the roof so that we could admire the scenery and breathe the fresh mountain air. El Fassi pointed out that from the roof we could get an excellent view of all the people passing below, and we could compare the sturdy gait of the Berber women to the uncertain, faltering steps of the Fassi ladies up from town. He pointed to the summer house of El Kitani, with whom the General was lunching that day, and whom I was to visit the next morning: El Kitani, head of a religious brotherhood, and a friend of the Europeans. Si Allal was loth to talk about himself. Finally,

we persuaded him to tell us about his beginnings. He said that he had first taken an interest in reforming Islam at the age of twelve. He had studied at the Quaraouine University, where he later became a professor. "But they still keep to an antiquated curriculum, and they only teach orthodox subjects: Muslim law and theology." The students from Paris crowded round. Few of them had heard anything about El Fassi's boyhood. He was exiled in 1930 at the time of the formation of the Nationalist Party—after the *dahir* separating the Arab and Berber zones of the country. He went to France and Spain. I had seen a photograph of him taken with other students during his exile in France; in the photograph he wore European clothes and it was impossible to recognize the young exile in this older man in his flowing Arab cloak. His leadership was now tacitly accepted, but there was an air of democratic give and take between himself and his followers. Yet he was an aristocrat to the finger-tips. He never gave way to violent propaganda, never attacked the French openly, and if he listed Morocco's grievances, he would soon turn to wider issues, for he was interested in poetry and music. During his exile, he had written two books of poetry in Arabic. He had composed a Moroccan national anthem, which they all sang for me—softly at first, then with increasing passion in their voices. He talked about the British: "The thing I admire most about them," he said, "is their solidarity." Then, turning to his companions, he added with a smile: "I am afraid this is one of the things we have yet to learn."

It was a beautiful day. The young people wanted to go out for a walk. I had already explained to El Fassi under what conditions I had been permitted to come and see him at Immouzer, and he had readily understood.

"How can I go for a walk?"

"Nothing could be simpler—you could wear my wife's *djellaba* and veil. Then nobody will recognize you." At that moment, he looked as mischievous as a schoolboy. Ben Aboud, one of the medical students, went downstairs with him in search of a *djellaba* and an embroidered veil, which Madame Fassi helped me to tie on, amid general laughter. The hood of a *djellaba* is not easy to put on. It has to be brought right over the face and then folded back; the folds at each side of the forehead are then secured by two large silver pins. The veil has to be tied tightly beforehand under the eyes, and

knotted at the back of the head. Madame Fassi was her husband's cousin—rather dark-skinned, with heavily kohled eyes and hennaed hands. El Fassi drew her hands gently towards him and showed me the designs traced in henna for the feast of the Hedya—the finger-tips painted with a peculiar mark called “birds’ heads.” Madame Fassi laughed shyly and hid her hands behind her back.

We walked into the street. At first it was awkward to walk in the long gown, afraid as I was of tearing it, but at last I found that by taking short steps and walking very straight I gradually became accustomed to my new clothes. We listened to the Berber shepherds calling to one another on the hillslopes, and to the bells of the cattle as they meandered along the banks of the rivulet. The sun was setting. El Fassi was breathing heavily and looked very tired: the effort of climbing the hill had weakened him. He looked frail, a man whose main impetus came from his will-power. His eyes were strangely bright. We descended towards the park, where some French Scouts were playing in a band. There were no Moroccan Boy Scouts; they had been disbanded from the moment they had asked permission to greet El Fassi on his return from exile.

It was a unique sensation to wear the *djellaba* and walk among the crowds, realizing for the first time what it was like to be despised and treated as an inferior by the Europeans, who regarded all veiled women as though they belonged to the servant class. I was continually jostled by them and made to feel their superior presence.

When we returned, Madame Fassi summoned us into a sitting-room downstairs to eat *yoghurt* and brown sugar. We had been invited by one of the business men to dine at his house that night. The crickets were chirping as we made our way up to his house, and from the distance came the muffled sound of drums and plaintive voices singing. Pure grape juice flowed freely, as one dish after another was brought to the table. El Fassi whispered across to me with his mischievous schoolboy smile: “We shouldn’t have eaten that yoghurt, should we, if only we had known all this was coming?”

After dinner, the men played cards, but they did not gamble, as this is forbidden by the Koran. They played with Spanish cards, in which clubs are presented by coloured batons and yellow stars replace our diamonds. I left them for a while to

visit the women in their apartments. The mistress of the house was young and beautiful—at least twenty years younger than her husband—with flashing eyes, and hands demurely folded over a green-and-gold trailing dress. Her lovely dark eyes became troubled and searching when she asked whether I had seen the misery of the people, and how frustrated they were. She had five children, and she wanted them to be properly educated, but there were no facilities. I observed that she spoke to her husband and her brother in tones of perfect equality. I asked if she thought it was wrong for a woman to travel round the country by herself as I was doing. She laughed a little shyly, and darted a quick look at her husband. “I suppose it is all right—for you,” she said. “But I could not do it, of course.”

I joined the men, who had finished playing cards. El Fassi was earnestly discussing with M. Mekouar a newspaper they were going to try to bring out shortly. It was nearly midnight, and we had a long drive ahead of us. El Fassi grasped my hand and we smiled sadly. “Tell people abroad the truth. That is all that is necessary,” he said. “The rest we will see to ourselves.” In quieter tones, he added: “Goodbye. Next time you pass this way, *inch’ Allah*, you will be entering a free and independent Morocco.”

## SHERIF ABDELHAI EL KITANI

SHERIF ABDELHAI EL KITANI was often mentioned in Morocco; he was the head of the religious brotherhood of the Kittanyians, famed for his collection of rare books (half of which had come to him by devious routes from the Quaraouine University), for his Arabic scholarship, and for his firm support of the French. The brotherhood had been founded by his own brother, Mohammed el Kebir, in 1890. The brotherhood is strongest round Fez, where there are about 14,000 members. There are many other religious brotherhoods in Morocco. They flourish particularly in Berber country, for the Berbers lean towards the unorthodox developments of Sufism, and to the more ancient cults: saints, candles, pilgrimages and rosaries please them better than the more puritanical rites. There are twenty-four religious orders in Morocco.

According to a recent census (which makes no claims to accuracy, for the heads of the orders cannot always be relied upon to give the exact figures of their followers), there are altogether a quarter of a million members. The most important order is the Tidjanyians, with about 47,000 followers; the smallest order of them all, the Heddaoua, has no more than 159 members. Most of them are frowned upon by the Sultan, who belongs to the Alaouite dynasty and who is the sole religious leader. Yet the *marabouts*, or heads of orders, play a great political and religious role in the country. Some of them, like Abdelhai, support the French, while others are directly opposed to the foreign Power.

The fame of Si Abdelhai el Kitani spreads right across North Africa—for different reasons. He sat waiting for us at the far end of a courtyard, in his library. Sherif Driss, dark and bearded, rose as I entered. He had been appointed to act as interpreter. We shook hands in European fashion. He then introduced me to the Sherif el Kitani, an enormous man, wide in girth, with crafty blue eyes, a pink complexion and white *favoris*. He sat down heavily in a huge Victorian armchair, rested his plump feet on a stool, and opened the conversation by bidding me welcome, saying how much he admired Great Britain, "especially the Conservatives." It was an odd statement, for I recalled the General's sympathy for the Conservative Party. I replied by informing him that another party happened to be in power at the moment. The interpreter's eyes twinkled as he translated the words to El Kitani, who replied that he was well aware another party was installed in power, but the British were known for their solidarity (they seemed to be known for little else!), and whether they turned Conservative or Labour, their solidarity would remain. "And is that not true of all countries," I asked, "except those who have lost their soul?" He frowned faintly and extended his plump hands, observing that we were a cold-blooded people and could see things clearly. "Pray tell His Excellency that we are not quite as cold-blooded as he imagines," I said, hotly, "for cold-blooded people do not love their country. Patriotism supposes a certain amount of warmth."

I then, turning to safer ground for a moment, asked the Sheikh whether, as a leader of the Islamic faith, he could say something about Islamic views on tolerance. He remarked that

the same question had been put to him by the Pope, whom he had had the honour of seeing in Rome. (This memorable occasion had left an indelible impression on him, and he never missed an opportunity of referring to it, I had been told.) He assured me that, according to the tenets of Islam, tolerance was a virtue to be cultivated. He recognized the leader of the Christian religion as a great Prophet. Christians were certainly not to be despised.

He had invited me into his library, he said. Why? It was known that he was proud of his books. And suddenly he volunteered to show me some of his rare manuscripts, and he smiled and spoke of a letter written in the hand of Queen Victoria to a former Sultan. Would I translate it for him? He asked Sherif Driss to show me the glass cases of illuminated manuscripts, remaining seated until we came to a case containing rare specimens of old Korans. Then he rose, came towards us and commented upon them, bending over the books with paternal pride and affection. He had a passion for books. Over the door hung one of his own poems, in which he wrote that "kings could keep their kingdoms and their power, but for himself there was no consolation so great as that of a rare book." As we bent over the old Korans, he observed quietly that qualities of the spirit seemed to him to be lacking in the younger generation which had arisen. I said that in my own country there appeared to be something in the nature of a religious revival—the incipient signs, at least—but that in any case social justice was uppermost in many minds. I mentioned our attitude towards India. He frowned, but made no comment.

In the adjoining room were rows of photographs of El Kitani at various conferences and religious meetings from all over the Near East. A servant came in with the mint tea and cakes. I asked about Queen Victoria's letter, and this was proudly produced from its leather case. It was no more than a long, friendly letter accrediting the British Ambassador of her day to His Majesty the Sultan, and signed: "Your most affectionate friend, Victoria." There were, I noticed, two other letters in the leather case. The Sherif mentioned casually that they were the first and the last letters written by Moulay el Hafid, addressed to El Kitani's brother, El Kebir, the founder of the order of the Kittanyians. The first letter was long—three pages of Arabic script—but the last letter consisted

only of six lines. I was interested to know what it said, since Moulay el Hafid, the last independent Sultan of Morocco, had signed away his country by the Protectorate Treaty of 1912. Sherif Driss looked embarrassed and turned towards El Kitani, murmuring to him in Arabic. El Kitani, the perfect actor, gazed forward unmoved as he replied. Sherif Driss then asked me: "Which letter do you want translated—the first?"

I said: "No. The second, please." Once again Sherif Driss turned for advice to the Sheikh, who muttered inaudibly, but continued to observe me closely. It was another of those moments when time stands still. Sherif Driss translated slowly, turning half-apologetically in the direction of the Sheikh, who was reputed to know no French, though it was only too evident from his expression that he could follow the drift of the conversation. It was an interesting letter, in which the Sultan declared that he could not abdicate before his own people, and so the only course left to him was to go to Tangier and there surrender to General (at that time) Lyautey. His weakness and his refusal to consult his own people no doubt facilitated the establishment of the Protectorate.

The Sheikh looked at me gravely; the time had come for plain speech. He said: "When you return to your country and talk about Morocco, you must not attach too much importance to the agitators who are always shouting, but have not the true needs of Morocco at heart. Unfortunately, there are Communist elements among them," he declared solemnly. "And may I tell you that Communism is the gravest danger to the world. The Arab League was created by the English. Yet it is a good thing, and it is my hope that by recourse to the Arab League we shall be able to set up a wall against Communism. Let me give you a message for your country and your people," he added importantly. "It is this: may the British realize the danger and fight against Communism."

I told him that I had met no Communists in Morocco in all my wanderings. Instead, I had met simple patriots.

He said: "No doubt there is so much good in you that you see no bad in others." And he added that he hoped I was not too impressed by the Nationalist leaders "whom I had most certainly met." He continued: "Never forget that Morocco is

composed largely of Berbers, and the Nationalists do not pretend to speak for them."

I was growing increasingly impatient by the turn of the conversation, so obviously French-inspired, and, pointing to the little brass-topped Moorish table in front of me, I said to Sherif Driss: "Please tell His Excellency that the pattern of Morocco is like the pattern on this table. There is only one design, yet it is composed of many intricate details, and each one is essential to the whole."

The Sheikh nodded gravely and stared into the distance. There was a long pause. "The ultimate ideal of humanity is still a long way off," he remarked. "The ideal will come into being at the right moment. It is an ideal which is shared with very little difference between all the great religions. The time will come when there are no oppressors and no oppressed, no protectors and no protected peoples." It was odd that he should have pronounced those four last words, and it was odder still to receive from his hands two books on Islamic administration in Arabic which he hoped I would arrange to have translated into English. "And if you succeed," he said, "please kindly let me know and send me some copies." He inscribed the books carefully, asked a few questions about modern English literature: have we a poet as good as Shakespeare just now? And then he rose in his elephantine grandeur to bow me out. The Nationalists say that El Kitani is a traitor to the cause. The French, who appear to use him for their own ends, do not admire him.

## THE LAST DAY

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, I went down to M. Mekouar's house to bid him and his family goodbye. In the women's apartments, Madame Mekouar was presiding over a tea-party, attended by twelve Moroccan ladies, beautiful in their long, multi-coloured robes. There was Madame Mekouar's eldest daughter, a round-faced girl of sixteen, who spoke French volubly. There was a Madame Larzouai, the wife of a rich merchant, who surprised me by bursting into perfect English: she was born in Manchester and had had an English governess.

There was a sophisticated, fair-skinned girl with the most modern Parisian hair style. And on the divan opposite sat a row of shy schoolgirls, all of whom were working for their *certificat d'études*, or primary certificate. They complained that their classes were conducted by inefficient teachers who did not take any personal interest in them, and seemed, in fact, more anxious to retard their studies rather encourage them. In spite of their youthful appearance, the eldest of these girls were married and were nearly all mothers of large families. They repeated how anxious they were for better schools, and they insisted quietly that there was continual racial discrimination between Europeans and Moroccans with regard to food supplies and allocations of clothing material. These complaints did not only come from poor *chaouchs* in tin-can towns! Madame Larzouai told me how she had been travelling recently with her husband and her sisters-in-law, when she happened accidentally to push a Frenchman who was standing in front of her in the queue. He immediately turned round and insulted her husband shouting: "Can't you look after your Fatimas, you?" Madame Larzaoui added: "I presume he thought we were all my husband's wives! They never really try to find out how we live or what we are really like."

I asked them how they spent their lives.

"Like all the other women in the world, we suppose," they said. "The only difference comes from the different opportunities we all have. We look after our households and our children. We visit our friends. Occasionally we go to the pictures. We read all the books we can lay our hands on; they are mostly French, because we have no modern Moroccan authors. You see, we have no modern life of our own; we live among borrowed plumes. And we cannot create until we have an atmosphere of freedom."

I went down to M. Mekouar's room. He was talking to a man who had just come in from Sefrou, who said that he had seen large vans of carpets going up to the hills all morning. He had stopped to enquire what it all meant and was told that it was for a "command *difa*" arranged by the General for a British journalist. I smiled inwardly. The General had alluded to the *difa* as if it were to be a spontaneous affair. It was the last of his strategies, but I must admit that it was very artistically produced.

As we drove out from the Residency that evening, the General, I noticed, looked tired and worn. At Sefrou we paused while he inspected some troops, and I admired the modern swimming-pool among the trees. The sun was setting as we penetrated into Berber country and the hills were shrouded in dark blues and purples. Small prickly shrubs grew by the roadside: the road itself soon disappeared to become a mere track winding through wild, inhospitable country. At Dyat Ifra, the mountain lake, the sky lost its wild glaze and turned to a melancholy blue; wild ducks, disturbed by the sound of our cars, skimmed over the lake. Somewhere in the bush a jackal set up its funereal howling. On the further side of the lake, hundreds of lights gleamed from below the low oblong awning of a goatskin tent. There was a muffled sound of horses' hooves drawing nearer and nearer, until six magnificently mounted horsemen appeared before us to escort us to their tent. In the gathering darkness, they came to us in a cloud of dust—their long cloaks trailing behind them. The General's eyes were bright and eager. Long rows of horsemen stood on either side of the tent, handsome young animals, superb in their manhood, and when the General alighted from the car, he surveyed them proudly with a smile of ownership. Under the awning of the tent, which was large enough to be entered on horseback, stood the young men and women who would later take part in the *ahidous*, or improvised dancing and singing for which the Berbers are famed. They screamed their shrill welcome: a strange, tremulous cry from the back of their throats, hurled into the stillness of the night. An uncanny, animal cry.

Caid Lhassen, our host, approached us with his brother. Both were bearded, olive-skinned and handsome. They greeted us smilingly, with low bows, and led us into the tent.

There were low leather pouffes and cushions, and as we sat down the Caid took up his position opposite us, to attend to all our wants—he knew no French, but it was difficult to believe that he could not read our thoughts. The servants poured out red wine and white, while the abstemious Caid drank water. The servants, not being used to serving wine, filled our glasses as if it had been water. Dishes began to appear. First the famous *mechoui*, roasted sheep served whole, with little saucers of spices, and *kebabs*. From under a corner

of the tent a row of bright little eyes peered out at us. They belonged to the Caid's children, who were observing from afar their father's quaint foreign guests. Then the *ahidous* began, the men and women forming themselves into a circle round our table, beating drums, humming in nasal tones, in a chorus, their bodies swaying from right to left.

"What are they singing about?"

The French officer, who was acting as interpreter, leaned forward and translated: "They are singing a love song. 'Now that my heart has become accustomed to yours, you are leaving me. If I had but known, I would not have allowed myself to become ensnared.'"

At midnight we tore ourselves away, again escorted by the Berber horsemen, this time led by the Caid Lhasen himself. The night was filled with the scent of sweet-smelling herbs and, when the horsemen had gone and we ultimately lost our way, I looked back and still saw—or thought I could see—the flickering torches, the dancers in their bright clothes, the soft brown eyes of the Caid and the horsemen plunging through the darkness. The General was silent.

I bade farewell to him shortly afterwards at the Residency, where the Negro soldiers clicked their heels and stood to attention. In what had been Marshal Lyautey's office, where the grandfather clock ticked heavily in the sultry atmosphere, Mustapha brought us cold tea. The silver fountain splashed shrilly in the courtyard, and the General began speaking: "You are very rebellious," he said. "And for the last time, I beg you to understand what the French are doing for Morocco. Do you remember how the *chergui* was blowing the day you came? And how rebellious you were even then? And how thirsty? I never expected to have to receive such an obstinate visitor at the Residency!"

For the last time, I said, rather sadly: "This was not the place for me. I have said so before; but surely you realize now how right I was. I should have gone to the *medina*. But, General, if you had been born an Arab and a Moroccan, you too would be a Nationalist now."

He looked thoughtful.

## TIN-CAN TOWN

MODERN NORTH AFRICAN SLUMS, where superfluous native humanity is bundled together out of the way, are particularly well-camouflaged outside Rabat. Indeed, you can spend quite a long time in this beautiful white city and never even be aware of their existence. I would never have found them if it had not been for M. Ben Aboud and a solemn-bearded gentleman, a judge, who had escorted me round the ruined ramparts of Rabat and the famous Chellah Gateway, overlooking the river valley. We had gone through the pine-scented forests, and away in the distance we caught sight of the glimmering sea. It was then, just beyond the cemetery, that I saw what appeared to be a village of model beehives—rather larger than beehives, perhaps, from a distance, white and rounded at the base with top-heavy, pyramid-shaped thatched roofs—and people were walking to and fro among them. The hives were huddled together in serried rows, and they followed the shape of the earth they had been dumped on, sloping gently towards the sea-front. The ensemble was tightly packed into an area about the size of an average English field, hedged in with jagged palm branches. Each little hive was separated from its neighbours by a palm hedge.

“What is that? A leper colony?” I enquired.

“Haven’t you seen any of our *bidonvilles*—tin-can towns?” exclaimed M. Ben Aboud. “Well, let us take you down to show you.”

There were no roads; just a few paths across the dunes and a track along the sea-front leading to the town. I noticed as we approached that there were other, similar, beehive colonies further along the coast. A few single-decker buses, rusty and worn, alive with people hanging on to the sides and squatting on the roofs, passed by in a cloud of dust. People watched us with curiosity as we drew nearer. One or two of the men recognized my friends and came up to shake hands and to peer at me. They were mostly of Berber origin—people who had come down from the hills. Some of them had once possessed little properties, or their fathers had before them, but they had been dispossessed, and were now reduced to eking out a living by begging in the towns or selling a few miserable prickly cactus fruit. Some had jobs as *chaouchs*, or porters, in

the town; *they* were the salaried upper class of tin-can town. Their little compounds, which sheltered the entire family and their domestic animals, contained a few rags and boxes and jars, from what one could make out in the shadows, for they had no window. The entrance to each beehive was covered over by an old curtain or a piece of sackcloth. In the tiny patch of earth which served as a garden, some of the more enterprising members of the colony had grown a few withered vegetables. Children with shaven heads, except for the demure middle tuft of hair, sat playing in the mud. They had no toys. I suddenly realized that I had not seen a single North African child playing with a real toy. Some of the children had sores and were whimpering, but all of them looked up and smiled as we passed and ran up to the tiny, rickety gate to watch us go by.

In the centre of the colony, a fruit and vegetable market was in full swing. The vendors squatted by their miserable, minute heaps of figs and spices; their clients appeared to buy their wares by handfuls or even half-handfuls. Millions of multicoloured flies settled and buzzed angrily on the heaps of refuse exposed to the sun, on the dying fruit at the vendors' feet, on the donkeys' large, sad eyes, and on the children's toes as they pattered through the filth. Right in the centre of the compound was a fountain where the women toiled incessantly, carrying and fetching pitchers of water: the children carried smaller jars, carefully, for they were well aware that water was precious.

Even to live here, however, one required to have a little money, for rents are comparatively high—as much as 500 and 600 francs per month. This was better than next-door, where the rows of dwellings were made out of old tin cans and petrol tins. The tin-can hovels were much more draughty. I wondered, too, what they would be like in the winter, when the bitter winds blow across from the Atlantic. It was surprising that there should not be more epidemics, with so many thousands of people living in such primitive conditions. The sun and the rain, and the fresh air, no doubt, coupled with a high infantile mortality rate and probably frequent deaths from sheer want and exhaustion, accounted for the fact that the population, such as it was, went on existing from day to day in a curious, mummified state of preservation. Nobody had any flesh to spare here, and sharp shiny shins gleamed in

the sun, which seemed to take a sadistic delight in showing up the protruding bones and tightly stretched skin on arms and legs.

These were the last dregs to which humanity could sink. This was the slimy mire, the human residue which could never rise, but only crawl out its existence under the burning sun until it rotted away, as worms confused with worms. One walked through them dully, hardly aware of their presence or of the fact that they were human beings too—as one walks over an ant-hill and crushes myriads of small, insignificant insects. One sensed vaguely that here were people who ate and drank when they could, and slept and managed to procreate. Here they were, collected into one vast colony, as lepers separated from the rest of humanity, unwanted, uncared for, almost sub-human, rejected by the rest of the human race.

Tin-can town has a strange fascination—the terrifying call of the abyss. I made up my mind to return alone and to wander unhampered through the dusty paths.

The next day, I found my way back again, I do not quite know how, for it seemed to be miles from the town, and I did not know what it was called or indeed whether it had a name at all, for it seemed so completely anonymous. But I felt that if I followed the sea-shore, sooner or later I would be bound to reach it. I came upon it at last—or a replica of it—for it was not the same one as yesterday's. Women stood at the wicker-work gates with babes in their arms, chatting and gossiping as women do.

It was a holiday, the end of the fast, the day on which everybody is supposed to wear new or fresh clothes, as we do for Easter. It was pathetic to see the efforts that had been made, even here in this outlandish place, to comply with tradition. The children were clad in clean rags, and those who could afford a clean *djellaba* had put one on. The women had put on their jewellery: poor little tin crescents and medals strung on a piece of cord or even wire. I passed two women standing together by a gate. The elder one was carrying a plump child of about a year old. I patted his tiny leg as I passed and the mother smiled—a proud, maternal smile. The father, who was digging in the plot round the shack, noticed the friendly gesture and came running up to the gate. Would they allow me to photograph the child? I asked.

They laughed and nodded eagerly. The father could speak a little French, but his wife knew none. She touched me lightly on the arm and invited me inside the compound, and told her husband that she wanted to change the child's dress and wash its face. The husband explained all this to me gravely, and sent the younger woman, his sister-in-law, to fetch some fresh mint from the market, so that he could prepare me some really good mint tea. Here in tin-can town, as everywhere else in North Africa, and especially Morocco, the traditional hospitality was being observed. The father ushered me into the miserable shack with the grace of a prince inviting me into his palace, and I was privileged to sit high up on the bed while the rest of the family squatted on the ground below, round the low, brass-topped table. The mother dandled the baby on her knee, while the second child, a serious little boy of about three, cast enormous, deep grey eyes up at me and clutched my shoes with interest. He had obviously never seen any shoes before, and he looked at them, and then at his mother's *babouches*, with a puzzled and completely baffled expression on his face.

The shack's only furniture consisted of the bed, the table and a chest in the corner which appeared to contain the family's wardrobe and the tea canister. There was a partition at the far end of the shack where the sister slept. The father sat and broke up lumps of sugar and stuffed the fresh mint into the pot of boiling water and tea. Glasses were brought out of the family chest and placed on the table with much ceremony. He told me, while he was preparing the tea, that he was a *chaouch* in the town, but that he had travelled during the war. Yes; he had been to France and to Syria, and he wanted to travel more. He had thought of going to America, although it was a bit far away. Did I know how he could go about it? He was not satisfied living in Morocco, he said. Living was difficult. There was no outlet. But Great Britain or America—now, that must be very different. Was there work for him in a country like England, he asked me? He did not like the spirit in his own country, he added. People were jealous of anyone who "got on." Little by little, cautiously, after noting my reactions, he mentioned that it was difficult for a Moroccan in his own country, because there was no freedom. He had ambitions, the *chaouch*. He frowned at his wife, who was pretty enough in spite of the tattoo marks down

her forehead and across her chin, and informed me that she was lazy and would not learn French. He then looked at her sister and sighed. "Women are strange," he remarked, a trifle woefully. "I don't know what I have done, but ever since this morning they refuse to talk to me, and to-day is a holiday too." Although the wife knew no French, she understood his expressions and laughed mischievously as she glanced at her sister. I suddenly realized that he was the first Muslim hen-pecked husband I had met.

Looking out upon tin-can town, I wondered whether Communism had made any inroads upon this population. Here, obviously, was a natural breeding-ground for Marxism. There is a strange contradiction in terms here, as elsewhere in North Africa. On the one hand, the French declare that if they were to leave, the door would be open to Soviet infiltration, and yet they allow the French Communist Party a freedom which is denied to the Nationalists. The Communists are allowed to hold meetings and print papers. In Rabat, there is *La Voix de la Ville*; and *L'Espoir* in Fez and Marrakesh. There are Communist-inspired movements, such as La Jeunesse Communiste Marocaine, L'Union des Femmes du Maroc, L'Association France-U.R.S.S., Le Secours Populaire Marocain, Le Comité d'Aide à l'Enfance Malheureuse. *Le Petit Marocain*, organ of the Confédération Générale du Travail, is particularly violent. Their programme in Morocco is very similar to that of the Nationalist Istiqlal, but with one important difference: whereas the Nationalists, for obvious reasons, are circumspect about their own feudal lords and notables, the Communists make no bones about the necessity of a "purge" of all those who have collaborated with the occupying powers, France and Spain. In spite of the differences between them, however, the Communist Party sent a delegation to the Sultan's palace in 1946. They were received by His Majesty, who took the opportunity of reaffirming his love for his people and for democratic principles, under the ægis, he was careful to add, of Islam.

Although the Nationalist leaders declare that Marxism and Islam are incompatible, there is no doubt that the Communists' action certainly does not hinder them. It was the Communist Party who supported the Algerian Muslims during the debate on the Statute at the National Assembly in Paris. Whatever their ultimate objectives may be (these are reputed to be

dastardly), the fact remains that they are the only people who have taken an interest in the people. Who else has started *Comités de Secours* (social assistance)? True enough, the Moroccans themselves could not, since all the movements they start are immediately banned as being "politically inspired!"

The *chaouch* spoke to me about the rationing system. Here, too, there is racial discrimination. Forty-three items are listed on European ration cards, he said, but only eight of these appear on Moroccan ration cards. He showed me his card, and the eight items listed were bread, sugar, oil, tea, cornflour, cotton textiles, soap and charcoal. It is true that Moroccans get from 300 to 400 grammes of oil and 600 grammes of sugar a month (that is, in the towns; in the country districts they get less), whereas Europeans get 250 grammes of oil and 400 grammes of sugar, but butter and lard are distributed exclusively to the Europeans, and there is no sweet ration for Moroccan children, no jam and no chocolate. Everybody was supposed to register for clothes, but these were only given to the Europeans, with a few exceptions in the case of Moroccans who had been of "special service" to the French.

Labour conditions are far from satisfactory. The average Moroccan labourer works from ten to twelve hours a day. The *dahir* of December 24th, 1936, instituted labour laws, but these were restricted to European workers. Until 1946, no unions could be organized by any person other than a Frenchman. Wages range between 50 and 100 francs a day. There are no paid vacations. French unions reported to the French administration in September, 1947, that 4,800 francs a month represented a minimum living wage for a Moroccan worker. Now, the average is about 2,000 francs a month. The French authorities also invoke the absence of a Moroccan civil register (of births, deaths and marriages) as an excuse to enact special legislation regarding family allowances for Moroccan wage-earners.

The *chaouch* looked at his small son, Lhassen, with pride. He was going to send him to a Franco-Moroccan school, he said. He wanted him to be educated, and to "get on in the world." In the meantime, however, he slapped Lhassen smartly for pulling at the teapot. The small Berber darted indignant eyes, overflowing with tears of anger, at his father, and rubbed his sore baby hands. Quickly repenting of his action, the

father threw him a lump of sugar, but, stung to the quick at the affront, the proud child pursed his tiny lips in disdain and hurled the sugar back at his father with a look of profound contempt on his puckered face. He sat in his tattered clothes, with his little tuft of hair falling on to his right shoulder, and in his dark eyes flashed the spirit of pride and independence characteristic of his indomitable race.

## SPANISH MOROCCO

SPAIN STARTED TO TAKE a more serious interest in Morocco when she finally lost her South American possessions in 1898. It was, in a way, a means of deflecting public opinion at home from the humiliation suffered abroad; it was also a means of getting rid of her surplus, gold braided officers, who could hardly be expected to resign themselves to garrison life at home on small pay. Spain, having learned nothing from her previous failures, started all over again in Morocco, using the same methods, the same martial law and dictatorial administration that had ultimately caused her downfall in South America.

Spanish Morocco enables a small percentage of officials to amass a considerable fortune fairly quickly, and no questions are asked. As for actual contributions to the economy of the mother-country, the zone can more or less be written off as a loss. Spanish Morocco has above all prestige value for Spain, and Spain, be it remembered, attaches great importance to prestige. She has had, however, to content herself with one of the poorest and least fertile regions of Morocco. There is no doubt that she got the worse part of the bargain officially sanctioned at Algeciras in 1906. Had she played her cards better, she could have obtained more. When England and France concluded their private agreement in 1904, it was realized that Spain's geographical position and her age-old possessions along the Mediterranean coast, i.e. Ceuta, Penon de la Gomera, Alhucemas, Melilla, etc., gave her the unavoidable right to be a party to any arrangement about Morocco. A secret convention was therefore drafted separately in which the proposed extent of the Spanish zone was defined, at the same time giving the French Government a free hand to

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negotiate the demarcations. The original proposition included the fertile plains of the Gharb north of the Sebu River and even Fez. But the French conducted their negotiations so skilfully that in the end the Spanish were content with a much smaller sphere of influence. They were subsequently extremely annoyed to find out that they could have had a much larger share. To this day, therefore, Spain has no direct treaty with Morocco on the subject of her zone of influence. She depends entirely on her agreement with France, a transaction to which neither the Sultan nor the Moorish Government were parties. All relations with diplomatic representatives of foreign Powers are vested in the French Resident-General, who acts as Minister of Foreign Affairs for the whole of Morocco. Spanish Morocco consists of an area 338 kilometres wide and 100 kilometres deep. According to recent statistics, it includes a population of 914,067 Arabs, 14,734 Jews, 715 foreigners and 62,438 Spaniards.

The Spanish "control system," as applied to their zone of Morocco, follows a line once adopted in South America and applied by France in the southern zone of Morocco. The legal pretext for this violation of the Protectorate Treaty is found in Article 1 of the Franco-Spanish Treaty of 1912, which states that the zone of Spanish "protection" is to be governed under a High Commissioner and his Secretary-General. Moroccan authorities, it adds, will act under the control of the High Commissioner or his assistants. "Control," translated into action, means "direct rule." This "control system" has changed many times in the course of the last thirty-five years. At one time it was entrusted solely to the military authorities. Then part of it was conceded to Spanish consuls. This became a source of permanent conflict between the Spanish civil and military authorities. On November 18th, 1934, a Presidential decree established the present system, at the request of General Capaz, who decided to try to put an end to such an unsatisfactory situation—purely from the Spanish point of view, of course. The Spanish zone was then divided up into five regions: Djebala (capital, Tetuan), the Western Region (capital, Larache), Gemara (capital, Xauen), the Riff (capital, Villa Lucemas), and the East, now called "Ker" (capital, Nador).

Each region is governed by a regional controller, who

supervises the local Pashas, Caid, etc., and each region is divided into districts, according to their importance. All Moroccan affairs are concentrated in the hands of the Chief of Native Affairs, and the personnel of this bureau is composed almost entirely of military elements. The Delegate of Native Affairs is at the same time the Commanding Officer of the Khalifian forces, of which the officers are all Spanish, and also Commanding Officer of the armed *mohaznis* (military police). A military atmosphere pervades the whole of the zone. At sunset, when the bugles sound from the barracks, all Arabs are obliged to stand to attention; and, of course, they must salute any Spaniard in uniform, as they are constantly reminded by kicks and buffets. There are about fifteen prisons in the Riff region alone, and all of them are full.

The Department of Native Affairs corresponds almost exactly to a Ministry of the Interior. The Director is usually a general of the Spanish army and the sub-director a lieutenant-colonel. It is divided into three sections: Political, Information, and Public Security.

The Political Section controls the Makhzen (Moroccan Government, Prime Minister and Ministers of Justice and of the Habous). The Makhzen has absolutely no authority at all. They cannot make any appointments—not even that of a simple porter. They act as liaison agents between the Spanish authorities and the Moroccan public and are mere puppets divested of every vestige of power.

The Information Section, closely connected with the political department, is a chain of spies and agents which extends right through the country and watches over all Moroccan political activity.

The Public Security Section is also entirely in the hands of the Spanish and is in charge of all police organizations and armed *mohaznis*. The Moroccan Prime Minister's role is limited to having *dahirs* copied and to signing orders given to him by the Direction of Native Affairs. Finance, public works, native affairs—all are handled by the Secretary-General and the Spanish High Commissioner.

The High Commissioner appoints all Government officials. Only in the case of the Grand Vizir (Prime Minister) and of the Ministers and Pasha of Tetuan does he advise the Moroccan Government, after consulting Spain. The High Commissioner, who is in charge of the preparation of the Budget, sends the

estimates to Madrid at the end of May each year, after it has been discussed by a special council. (This council is held under his own presidency, and consists of the Grand Vizir and the Spanish directors of the different departments. The Grand Vizir is merely a figurehead. Very often, the Prime Ministers appointed by the Spanish authorities do not understand the language, so that they do not even know what is being discussed during these council meetings!)

Education in the Spanish zone is just as much of a bugbear as in the French zone—even worse. Nothing at all was done during the first years of the Protectorate; in Tetuan, the capital of the zone, there was only one Hispano-Arabic school until 1934; and there were never more than fifteen students in it at a time! In 1935, the Moroccans managed at last, after many obstacles had been put in their path, to establish their own secondary school: the Free Institute. Before that, they had already established two free primary schools: the National School and the Welfare School. The Free Institute was a success from the start, and parents sent their children there from all over the Spanish zone; the school was subsidized by the citizens themselves. The Spanish authorities, after trying to devise means to close the school or impose their curriculum, at last decided to grant an official subsidy to the school, hoping thereby to make it more amenable to their demands. In the first year, they gave 80,000 pesetas to the school. This was then reduced to 40,000 pesetas in the second year, and to 20,000 pesetas in the third year! The Institute has since refused any more assistance from the Spanish and has reverted, as before, to its own revenues, derived from citizens' subsidies.

In view of the lack of educational facilities in the zone, the Moroccans tried to send some of their young people abroad to find out what was happening in the Near Eastern universities. This vanguard, paid for by their families, set out in 1929 for Egypt and Palestine, and later formed the nucleus of modern Islamic education in Spanish Morocco. During the Spanish Civil War, Spain was anxious to spread propaganda in the Near East, and she sent a cultural mission to Cairo, where the "House of Morocco" (Bait al Moghreb) was established. The monthly costs amounted to 1,000 Egyptian pounds, and these were paid for by the Moroccan Government. A second mission, chosen from among the graduates of the Free Institute in Tetuan, was also sent out to Cairo, but at

the end of the Civil War they were recalled. During the Second World War, owing to difficulty of communications, many of the students were stranded in Cairo. Some of them managed to continue their studies even then; one of them, for instance, turned himself into a dancing-instructor for British troops, and this enabled him to go on paying for his studies.

There is a Moroccan Administration for Education in the Spanish zone, but this is entirely in the hands of the Spanish, who concentrate on their own needs in Spanish education. There is also the important-sounding High Council for Islamic Education, which frequently submits lengthy reports on the necessity for more primary schools, compulsory education, etc. These are carefully noted in the Minutes of the Council and passed on to the Spanish delegate—and no more is ever heard about them! There is also a High Council for Religious Studies, which has no budget—not even for furniture or stationery!

The Sheikhs in the religious schools receive a salary of 7,200 pesetas a year, which is equal to one-half of the wage of a third-class Spanish teacher in a primary school; the Moroccan administration has made repeated requests to the department of education for the situation to be looked into, but here again nothing ever happens. Occasionally, the students themselves go on strike and demand better conditions; the Department promised on one occasion to reform the schools. The solution they hit upon was to reduce the number of students by 20 per cent., in order to improve the situation of the remainder!

Compulsory primary education was ordered by decree in 1940, but this only applies to Spanish education (the Spanish primary schools in Morocco, incidentally, are far better than the schools in Spain). No school has been built for the Moroccans since 1935. The Moroccan *Baccalauréat*, or secondary school diploma, is not recognized either by Spanish or by Near Eastern universities. There is a Polytechnical Institute which is supposed to qualify students in agriculture, commerce, nursing and teachers for primary schools. The Board of this Institute is entirely Spanish. Although it is stipulated by decree that access to the Institute is limited to students having obtained their Moroccan *Baccalauréat*, in fact this is not so: anybody is admitted, and the standard is consequently appallingly low. As a result, the students who actually possess

their *Baccalauréat* are ashamed to go to this Institute. Scholarships are granted mainly to Spanish and to Jewish students. Broadcasting, public libraries—all are in the hands of the Spanish. Games, parades, athletics, etc., all start off with a Catholic religious service.

Legislative authority, which is supposed to be in the hands of the Khalifa, as Viceroy of His Majesty the Sultan, is in fact confined to the High Commissioner who has the right to sanction every law. The Grand Vizir merely signs the texts sent on to him by the Spanish juridical office.

The governors of the zone (Pashas and Caids) have both executive and juridical powers; they are usually chosen, as in the French zone, from among the most illiterate and primitive elements of the Moroccan population. Since no written laws or legislation exist, they are free to follow the most primitive practices; it is not unusual for them to torture Moroccan citizens for quite trivial offences (all questions pertaining to Muslim personal status, of course, come within the competence of the Islamic courts). There are no criminal laws or penalties defined. As for these Sharia Courts, as they are called, they are an absolute anachronism. They have no codes, no written rules of procedure, their officials are poorly paid; the whole system reeks of corruption and bribery.

For a short time, during the Civil War, after direct representation by a Moroccan delegation sent to Madrid for the purpose, the Moroccans were actually allowed to elect their own municipal councils. This freedom, however, lasted for the brief spell of six months, after which the Spanish authorities resumed their direct supervision of the municipal system, its members and the decisions taken by them. The Reformist Nationalist Party has on several occasions asked for municipal councils based on free elections.

As for the economic and social situation of the zone, for every 100 pesetas exported, the zone has to import 344 pesetas; the deficit for 1945 amounted to 351 million pesetas. Seventy per cent. of the towns and villages do not even possess a post office; there is no automatic telephone system; only 4,070 Moroccan children out of 283,000 attend school; and for a total of 1,326,000 inhabitants, there are only six hospitals and 625 beds. All banks are Spanish or foreign; credits are nearly always exclusively granted to Spanish nationals. *Keif*, a dangerous drug similar to *hashish*, is being grown in the

zone, and is even encouraged by the authorities. In 1943, they grew *keif* over an area of 42 hectares, which produced 540,000 pounds of *keif*; in 1946, 446 hectares were cultivated and yielded approximately 883,000 pounds. In 1944, lands cultivated with rice were reduced by half so that more *keif* could be grown.

“Directed economy,” a feature of the Franco régime, applies equally to the Spanish zone of Morocco. A Central Committee in Tetuan takes charge of all import and export trade. It also issues ration cards for food and clothing, and distributes rationed goods to a group of traders, most of whom are connected with high-ranking Spanish officials and their friends. In the capital, the importation of grain is granted exclusively to four big Spanish companies; oils and fats are likewise restricted to three merchants. Other merchants remain in the market if they accept the Black Market prices imposed by the importing group. The Tetuan traders decided, in view of all this, to form a union to defend their interests: that was in 1945. As a result, the Central Committee decided to distribute the imported goods among all of them, but they were required to accept whatever they got, and so the most profitable lines were reserved to the same clique as before, and the rest of the goods were dumped on the traders who had protested! Elsewhere, in the rural areas, the governors take their share, and it is impossible for anyone to compete with the authorities.

In the Riff, a prolonged drought caused 22,000 victims during the winter season of 1946-7. Abd el Krim's tribe—the Beni Uriaghel—who were 70,000 strong before the Riff campaign, have now dwindled to about 30,000. The victims of the famine were kept in open-air camps, and died of starvation, typhus and exposure. Their condition was so appalling that several foreign consuls, including the British Consul, were at last moved to protest. They did a lot to relieve the refugees, but this assistance was frowned upon by the Spanish, who threatened all the people who had received help from them, so that they dared not come back for more. The Moroccan population wanted to establish a civilian relief committee, but this was forbidden by order of the High Commissioner in December, 1946.

The Spanish zone is rich in minerals. These are prospected by eleven Spanish companies, in which Moroccans hold no

shares. The *Compania Minera del Rif* exports 80,000 metric tons of iron ore every year: this is the main source of foreign currency in the zone. The same thing applies to the fishing industry. There is no legislation for Moroccan workers, who earn much smaller wages than their Spanish colleagues.

Here are some figures taken from the 1947 budget of 211 million pesetas (of which 57.75 million go to support the Army—about 100,000 troops): 4,000,000 pesetas have been earmarked for the First (Moroccan) Ministry and 50,000,000 for the Spanish Department of Native Affairs (24 millions are put aside for wages alone); 7,000,000 pesetas for the new Moroccan Ministry of Education and 11,000,000 for the Department of Spanish Education (remember, too, the difference between the size of the two populations), 728,000 for the new Moroccan Ministry of Finance and 8,323,000 pesetas for the Spanish Department of Finance. The 3,934 Spanish officials absorb between them 53,000,000 pesetas from the Budget, whereas the 5,069 Moroccan officials get 25,000,000 pesetas. One-third of the Budget is spent on public security.

This, then, is the background against which the Nationalist Reform Party has flourished, under the leadership of Abd el Khalek Torres and his able lieutenants, such as young Mahdi Bennouna, who managed to get to the United States and pass through Great Britain in the early part of 1948, to be greeted, upon his return to Tangier, by a refusal from the Spanish authorities to allow him to go back home to Tetuan.<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of Tetuan protested at this measure, whereupon a state of martial law was declared; Spanish troops fired upon the crowds, and hundreds of Moroccans were arrested and thrown into prison. The Nationalist Party is in close contact both with Cairo and with His Majesty the Sultan of Morocco. They are determined people and they mean business, however much the Spanish try to convince themselves, like their French neighbours, that "these Nationalists merely represent a few ambitious, discontented elements of the population who cannot pretend to speak for the majority." It is not, of course, difficult to be discontented in Morocco under prevailing conditions, and public opinion, without a doubt, is well and firmly behind the Nationalist leaders.

<sup>1</sup> Desperately ill, suffering from lung trouble and asthma, Bennouna tried to get to Casablanca to see a specialist, but was arrested by the French, imprisoned for a night and sent back to Tangier.



*Part II*

*THE MOGHREB OFFICE, CAIRO*

A VISIT TO THE EMIR ABD EL KRIM

THERE WERE RUMOURS then in Morocco about bringing back the aged Emir Abd el Krim from his exile on the island of La Réunion. The General had mentioned it too, adding: "Oh, we might as well bring him back to die in his country. The old tiger can't have many teeth left now." Twenty years away in a tropical climate could not, obviously, have improved his health. I asked the Moroccans whether the Riff people, from where the Emir originated, still remembered the famous campaign of 1921-6, and what kind of reception they thought the Berber Rip van Winkle would have. There was another point, too: what would the Sultan say? How would he react? His uncle and predecessor had certainly not been on the best of terms with such a powerful and commanding rival. But at the very mention of his name before a Moroccan, something of the old fire returned—a spark of hope, an almost unconscious standing to attention at the memory of the valiant mountaineer who had kept French and Spanish armies at bay for such a long time. Abd el Krim was born in a little village on the Riffian coast, in the Spanish zone of Morocco. His people had been leaders of the Beni Uriaghel tribe for some time, and his father was greatly respected among the tribes for his great intelligence and valour. The Spanish were progressing slowly in their arid area; they had not even begun to exploit the possibilities of their zone, and especially the mining prospects. A few German engineers had evinced an interest in the matter, however, and their findings also interested Abd el Krim's father, who was ready to adapt himself to modern ways and techniques. He sent his youngest son to study at the Mining Institute of Madrid. Mohand, the eldest son, who was destined to become the leader, was sent to the Quaraouine Islamic University at Fez to qualify as a *cadî*. Upon his return home, he was engaged by the Spanish to

teach their officials the Berber language. Abd el Krim took advantage of this to learn European languages for himself, and also the language of European diplomacy. W. B. Harris, *The Times* correspondent, who followed the Riff campaign in Morocco and who knew Abd el Krim well, wrote of him that he was a "proficient letter-writer and had developed a flair for publicity which he used to a great extent during his subsequent campaigns"—first in his campaign against the Spanish in 1921 (he had been imprisoned by the Spanish in the spring of 1921, after a personal quarrel with one of their officers; then he escaped, swearing to have his revenge), and later, when fighting valiantly against the combined Franco-Spanish forces, he was finally obliged to sue for terms, ending by his capitulation in 1926. This publicity abroad did not fail to provoke sympathy, particularly in Great Britain.

The effect that Abd el Krim and his tribesmen had upon a modern European army can be assessed from Marshal Pétain's report on the subject, after his visit to the front: "The brutal fact is that we were unexpectedly attacked by the most powerful and the best armed army that we have ever met with in our colonial campaigns: keen, vigorous, skilled in the use of their arms (all obtained solely from contraband trade!) and exalted by their successes in previous years." The arrival of further important reinforcements from France soon put an end to these successes, however.

On May 25th, 1926, two French officers, sent by Colonel Corap, galloped up to Abd el Krim's quarters at Snada and persuaded him to sign a letter which read: "To Colonel Corap: I have received the letter by which you grant me security. I have decided at this moment to come to you. I ask for the protection of France for myself and for my family. I will advise you of the hour of my arrival. It will be before midday." It was only after three hours of heated discussion that Abd el Krim agreed to sign the letter. "In the early morning," writes W. B. Harris, "he mounted his horse and bade goodbye to a little group of his brave Riffis who advanced respectfully to kiss his stirrup. They asked for further orders, but he shook his head sadly and rode on, into the night and exile. It was the exit from the Moorish stage of a very remarkable man."

And now, twenty years after, the stage was being re-set for his return! What was the real motive behind it all? Did the French authorities believe it would be a clever diplomatic

move, in view of the Sultan's recent rebellious pronouncements? Did they believe it would be useful to have the Emir, aged as he was, at calling distance, in case of need? If they did, they displayed a singular lack of perspicacity and lack of geographical knowledge when they decided to bring the Emir and his family on an Australian ship, through the Red Sea, past Aden and Port Said, where the North African leaders were conducting such an active campaign in favour of independence. *If* they had decided to bring the Emir back to Morocco, it might have been different. As it was, they had decided to keep him under supervision in the South of France, the refuge *par excellence* of ex-political stars, such as Marshal Pétain—oh, irony of Fate!—and the exiled Tunisian Bey, Moncef.

The temptation was great, the opportunity unique, the publicity value incalculable. The North African leaders of the Moghreb Office, recently reinforced by Si Allal el Fassi, who had also managed to elude the French police and fly to Cairo, decided to act, and they organized the sensational escape of the Emir and his family at Port Said which was to prove such a humiliation and source of irritation to the French. The Emir, placing himself under the protection of King Farouk of Egypt, sought sanctuary in Cairo. Almost immediately upon landing, he declared himself to be a loyal subject of the Sultan of Morocco, thus dispelling any cherished hopes that the French might be entertaining on the subject.

What was the Emir like now? Had his ideas evolved with the times? And what exactly was the Moghreb Office doing in Cairo? I decided to go and find out. I wrote to Si Allal el Fassi in Cairo, and announced my visit. The Moghreb Office detached one of its English-speaking members, Mohammed Fassi, whose special function was to "deal with the foreign Press," to act as cicerone during my stay. Cautiously, in view of the fact that No. 10 Darih Saad, the headquarters of the organization, is closely watched by the French, who had lately reinforced their personnel at their Cairo Embassy, it was decided that I should be accommodated in a private flat, thus dispensing with the necessity of filling up hotel forms and having to contact the police. The members of the Moghreb Office are past-masters at eluding the police, due to extensive personal experience in the course of their extraordinary careers. Little by little, I grew to know them: first, officially,

at the Office where they made the usual speeches and declarations that are proffered to all journalists who visit them; and later, as we left the office atmosphere in the cool of the evenings to sail down the Nile in a *felucca*, or to mount a camel near the Pyramids, I got to know them as human beings, and to appreciate them as such.

There were about sixteen North Africans at No. 10 Darih Saad when I arrived; the Tunisians were in the majority. Habib Bourguiba, the Tunisian Nationalist leader, head of the Neo-Destour party, had led the way for the others when he decided to take a tortuous route to Cairo in 1945, and appeal to the other Arab countries, and the world in general, from a safer and a freer vantage point. At that time, the rest of the Arab world was more or less indifferent, and unaware of what was happening in North Africa. Even the Egyptians, moulded as they were to French culture, language and customs, found it difficult to believe that their co-religionists in North Africa were being treated as inferiors by the same people who had proclaimed "liberty, equality and fraternity" for all ever since 1789.

One often hears the Moghreb Office people referred to as the "Cairo agitators." What are they really like?

First, my faithful guide, Mohammed Fassi, who came on board at Port Said to fetch me, and who was the last person (with Dr. Thamer, the Director of the Office) to see me off from Cairo Aerodrome when I left for Tunisia. Mohammed Fassi had arrived from his native Spanish zone of Morocco about a year before, thanks to the intervention of Azzam Pasha, Secretary-General of the Arab League, who negotiated directly with the Caliph of the Spanish zone, asking him to send a Moroccan delegation to the Cultural Commission of the League in Cairo. Further negotiations were entered into with the Spanish authorities, and after a considerable lapse of time and discussion, because the Caliph wished to send Mohammed Fassi and Ben Abboud, who were accused of "extremism" by the Spanish Residency, it was agreed that the two should leave for Cairo in February, 1946. That was the first official delegation sent from the Moghreb to establish contacts in the Near East with the Egyptian Government and the other representatives of the Arab League. Mohammed Fassi and Ben Abboud, who had already had long talks with the political exiles in Spain—Thamer and Slim

especially—soon got into touch with Bourguiba and prepared the *entente* between the various groups of Tunisians, Moroccans and Algerians that was to end by the constitution of the “Moghreb Office.”

It was not Mohammed Fassi's first visit to Egypt. From Tetuan, he had been to a secondary school in Palestine, and from there to Cairo in 1930. He then completed his engineering studies at the American University at Istanbul in Turkey. For a time after returning to Tetuan in 1938, he took up a post as engineer in the Public Works Department of Tetuan. At the same time, the National Reform Party of the Spanish zone (leader: Abd el Khalek Torres), asked him to organize a junior section of the movement. In 1940 he gave up his engineering career to devote himself entirely to political activity, and was designed to become the Director of Education in the zone. Like many other Moroccans from the Spanish zone, Mohammed Fassi has the Andalusian wit, the keen sense of humour with a slight sarcastic bent, the gaiety, sensitivity and extreme sentimentality of the southern Spaniard. He speaks English fluently with an American accent he acquired at Istanbul, walks with a rapid, nervous gait, and his slight, wiry frame is a tangle of nerves and energy. Mohammed Fassi is in his early thirties, and he has had experience of the world. He is a perfect example of the modern Arab, mingled with Andalusian blood, yet there is a certain shyness about him which makes him unsophisticated and endearing. Like most North Africans, he is gentle with children and women, and he loves poetry and music. It is needless to add that these subjects are not part of the Moghreb Office curriculum, and it was only on rare occasions during the unruffled voyages down the Nile, for instance, that Mohammed Fassi, Dr. Thamer and Taieb Slim would try to recall their songs and poetry, and realize with a pang that “we have forgotten the beautiful things of life. We are so engrossed with the work of the present. It is a pity.” And they would shake their heads regretfully as we passed the bent figures on the riverside silently engaged in their evening prayer, and the moon rippled, darting silver spangles from the top of our sail to the dark waters below. Taieb Slim is Tunisian, and fair, with blue eyes—of Greek origin. His brother, Mungi, whom I was to meet later in Tunis, is a member of the Neo-Destour Executive. Dreamy Taieb, who loved the silence of the desert,

had the grace of Tunisia imprinted in all his gestures, and slow, rhythmic speech. His activities had been mainly concerned with the student movements in Paris, where he was elected Secretary-General of the North African Muslim Students Association in 1937, 1938 and 1939. He returned to Tunisia in 1939, just one month before the declaration of war, and was prevented from going back to France by the French authorities in Tunisia.

In Tunisia, he linked up with Dr. Thamer, who was then directing the Destour Office. Watched by the police, he tried to escape to the Tripolitan frontier with Thamer in 1940 to avoid being arrested, but both were stopped at Ben Gardane and accused of plotting against the security of the State. He was condemned to twenty years' forced labour, twenty years' exile and to the confiscation of his property. Liberated in 1942, however, with other members of the Destour, he was earmarked for propaganda in Europe. First, he went to Rome and, after several months there, to Berlin—from where he hoped to get to Tetuan or to Switzerland. However, the Germans were not in a hurry to grant the necessary visas, and he had to wait for six months before finally reaching Paris. Both in Berlin and in Paris, he carefully avoided taking part in any activities. Just before the Liberation, he managed to cross into Spain with Thamer, where he stayed until, after a fresh series of adventures and escapades—which included, I believe, a dip in the Bidassoa in the night—he reached Cairo with Thamer. Each member of the Moghreb Office is assigned a specific task, and Taieb deals with the French language bulletins of the Office and also with the foreign Press. I learned later in Tunisia that he had been sentenced to death in his absence.

Dr. Habib Thamer, Director of the Moghreb Office, is so quiet, so phlegmatic, that he could easily be taken for a member of the British intelligence service. Slim, fair and bespectacled, Dr. Thamer (who is a doctor of medicine) methodically shuffles and reshuffles the Moghreb Office cards, carefully placing those elements that go together on one side, and just as carefully segregating the more unruly ones from the rest. It is no mean task to organize an office of leaders, each with his own strong personality and different background when outside, the watchful eyes of the French Embassy and its emissaries, and the Press are ready to seize upon the first signs

of a split between the parties, and of a cleavage that would justify their claim: "It is impossible for Arabs to get along together for any length of time. Sooner or later, the division will come. A federation of North Africa by North Africans is a pure myth."

Dr. Thamer led an active life among the North African students in Paris, and he was twice elected President of the Association des Etudiants Musulmans Nord Africains. He also presided over the Paris Destour section in 1936; but in 1938 returned to Tunis to practise medicine. His professional work did not last long, however, for Tunisia at that time was in a state of siege. The 500 cells of the Destour had been declared illegal and the leaders imprisoned. Thamer started to reorganize their Fifth Political Bureau and underground activity, which spread all over the country. This was to continue during the first part of the war and until the Allied landing in Africa.

After the Franco-German Armistice, Thamer published a first *Manifesto*, claiming independence for the three North African countries, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In July, 1940, he was to have led a delegation of Tunisian notables before the Bey to ask him to proclaim the independence of Tunisia, but he was arrested by the police before he reached the Palace. A few days later, however, he was set free, thanks to the personal intervention of the Bey himself. He was arrested again in 1941 and stopped at the Tripolitan frontier at Ben Gardane, together with Taieb Slim. Both were sentenced to twenty years' hard labour and banishment. From his prison in Tunis, Thamer managed to contact some of his friends, who organized another team to carry on with the work. Then, in December, 1943, thanks to the insistence of the Bey, Resident-General Admiral Esteva released all the imprisoned Destouriens, including Thamer. At that time, German troops were in Tunisia, and Dr. Thamer was approached by the authorities with a view to "collaboration." Dr. Thamer, however, following the attitude adopted by the Bey, maintained strict neutrality. He became President of the Destour and tried, together with the Bey, to persuade the Germans to bring the Destour leaders who were imprisoned in France back to Tunisia. This enabled Bourguiba and his friends to return in the month of March, 1943. Thamer took advantage of the comparative freedom which the Germans granted the

Nationalists to reorganize the party on a sound basis. He toured the country, organized meetings and cells, helped to institute the Red Crescent and the Destour Youth Movement (more than 40,000 young people joined the movement in four months).

A little while before the arrival of the Allies, Dr. Thamer brought the party leaders together and suggested that several of them should be detached and sent out to Europe and the Near East to organize propaganda abroad. He foresaw that, with the advent of the French, there would be immediate repressive measures and that their work would be curtailed. Dr. Thamer himself was included in the "foreign group" earmarked for work abroad. First of all he went to Rome, then to Berlin, and on to Paris. He waited, however, for the end of the hostilities before embarking upon any systematic plan of campaign. For two years he lived in Spain as a political refugee, and there he contacted the Spanish Moroccan leader, Torres. Together they outlined the plan of their future activity in the Near East.

Finally, after a number of adventures and a long wait for visas, Dr. Thamer joined Bourguiba in Cairo. His adventures, and those of Habib Bourguiba—who trekked, disguised as a Bedouin, all the way from Tunis to Cairo—would probably fill a book. But the leaders are not anxious to publicize "sensational" stories. They do not want to dwell upon this aspect of their activities since they have quite enough to do as it is, disseminating factual information about their respective countries. In fact, the Moghreb Office has coined a special word for escape stories which Mohammed Fassi confided to me on one of those moonlit evenings in the course of which the barrier of reserve dropped from him so easily. "We call it Sinbadism," he said. "And it is one of our unwritten rules not to mention these exploits or adventures—as you call them—of our various Sinbads. We have plenty of them in our Office, and that is not what we want to talk about." They lead a strange life, these political refugees, with a code and a method of their own. Most of them have had the same experiences of police, prison, hide-and-seeek with the French and Spanish authorities. Nearly all of them seem to have a complete disregard for their own personal life and safety. They work hard, often with small funds, because money does not come through easily from home. They work quite literally "with their coats off,"

and they do not try to impress. They live in private rooms, or small hotels. Some are grouped together in a villa, as Si Allal el Fassi, with the Moroccan members of his party. They did not seem to mix much with the Egyptians, but kept to themselves and to their work. At whatever time of the day or night one called at No. 10 Darih Saad, Dr. Thamer was sure to be there, writing or telephoning, surrounded by papers. I never saw him in a temper. He looked after the group medically too—in a severe sort of way. I remember that Taieb was suffering from the heat—as we all did in the middle of the summer in Cairo. He complained to Dr. Thamer about some internal disorder and asked for his advice. Dr. Thamer merely smiled and said: "I think, Taieb, that you are exaggerating. You are quite well." Later, however, when I complained about the same trouble, he put me on a strict diet; but it was obvious that he was so used to a hard life and strict discipline that it irritated him to see signs of weakness in others. Sometimes we would leave the office early and explore the outskirts of Cairo. If we happened to find a pleasant spot, we would telephone the doctor, who would inevitably be found at the office, and ask him to join us. Mohammed Fassi would then give him long, detailed instructions as to what means of transport to take, for the doctor, he said, was hopelessly absent-minded and quite capable of taking a train going in the opposite direction, but sooner or later the doctor would appear, smiling faintly, and never once did he refuse to join the party. Only once did he demur: when we announced our intention of spending the whole night on a *felucca*. About three in the morning, he sat up and declared: "I am not as young as I used to be and this boat gives me cramp. I *must* sleep in my own room." On another occasion, we wandered in a desert region where some Muslim Brothers were camping. It was a beautiful night and slowly we lapsed into silence, gazing up at the sky, each one of us immersed in our private thoughts and contemplation. This was a time when, as Mohammed Fassi put it picturesquely, we "lived in our Little World." This "Little World" was the sanctuary of our most intimate thoughts and feelings—those that could not be shared. Down below, where the tent lights flickered and a few dogs barked, the Muslim Brothers grew suspicious and thought, apparently, that we must be bad characters—perhaps deserters—and they decided to make an investigation. Two

of them approached us stealthily, and one of them even whispered something to the effect that it might be a good idea to throw a stone or two in our direction. Happily, the other Brother did not share his opinion. When they drew close, they stood up, leaning on staffs, and addressed Dr. Thamer, who had not stirred. "What are you doing here?" they enquired.

Dr. Thamer answered quietly: "We were admiring the stars until you disturbed us."

The Muslim Brothers answered gravely: "It is a good thing to contemplate the stars." And from then on we became good friends—even stopping by their tent on our way back to partake of their coffee and slices of water melon. We asked them and the boys round them if they could sing, but they shook their heads. Taieb and Mohammed Fassi started to sing Abd el Krim's famous marching song—with considerable emotion. Dr. Thamer accompanied them a few bars behind time, and rather out of tune. The younger Brothers did not seem to know how to take this, but they listened attentively and poured out more coffee. They were too young to have heard much about the Riff campaign.

Before I left for Tunisia, Dr. Thamer wrote three letters of introduction for me in Arabic. One was for the Secretary-General of the Destour Party in Tunis, lawyer Salah ben Youssef (the letter requested him to put every facility in my path, and to arrange a journey through Tunisia). The other two letters were for Moroccan Nationalists in Rabat and Tangier. "They will not compromise you too much, even if you are searched and the letters are found," said Dr. Thamer. I wondered, being new to these methods, whether it would not be wiser to conceal the letters. I thought of many ingenious places and suggested them to Dr. Thamer, but he shook his head emphatically. "No," he said, "it is better not to be too ingenious. Better just to carry the letters in your handbag loosely. If they are discovered, *eh bien, tant pis*. But do not try to be too clever. It does not work usually." He knew, of course, and I was to remember his counsel later on in my wanderings.

One of the most striking personalities among the leaders assembled in Cairo was undoubtedly Habib Bourguiba, President of the Tunisian Destour Party: dynamic, indefatigable, impulsive, ardently, almost fanatically, sincere—the man

whose name is known and loved all over Tunisia, as I was to discover later. Of modest origin, Bourguiba was born near Monastir in 1903. He was educated first at the Sadiki College in Tunis and then in France (where he married a Frenchwoman, and where he studied law and political science). He returned to Tunisia in 1927 to practise law, wrote for the Nationalist papers, became editor of two of them, and little by little, after infusing new life into the Old Destour Party, he became its Secretary-General and then its President. Now he acts in the name of Moncef Bey himself, who delegated powers to him from his exile at Pau in France. But it was Habib Bourguiba the *man* I was interested in, Bourguiba, the *bête noire* of the French—and yet their only hope, for he has always been ready to meet them and discuss with them, on a basis, however, which so far they cannot accept, since its inexorable prelude demands the independence of Tunisia.

I was to meet paler imitations of Habib Bourguiba subsequently—in his own country, Tunisia. None of them, however, had the same vitality, the same magnetic quality, the same power of oratory. Hours slipped by one after the other as Bourguiba sat in his little office at No. 10 Darih Saad, talking to me about the Tunisians and their plight.

His programme included a lengthy list of social reforms, of educational plans, and schemes for the industrialization of the country, and for its exploitation along modern methods, with modern equipment. The plans sounded expensive. But Bourguiba was perfectly sanguine about the facility with which he would be able to find foreign capital, equipment, financial assistance. "If the French don't want to co-operate with us," he said blandly, "then we will call upon other nationalities—the Swedes, Norwegians, English." He came from the people, and would not forget the people. He was one of the first, he told me—in fact, he was *the* first person, he insisted—to have gone down to the villages and spoken to the people and organized them and instilled political ideas into them.

He knew how to speak to them, and they had always supported and defended him. The warm, affectionate streak in his nature, his emotionalism, his sincere love for his people, transcended his failings, for he has the defects of his qualities: his quick, sudden likes and dislikes, his impatience with

those who prefer to follow a slower, more cautious path. Fortunately, Dr. Thamer is there in the background as a restraining influence. The doctor would slip into his office at times in the middle of an impassioned harangue. Silently, he would sit down in a corner and listen. This invariably had its desired effect and acted as a brake upon the effusiveness of the leader. Bourguiba, with a map of Tunisia in front of him, saw in imagination whole cities springing up like mushrooms in the place of arid plains. He also was inclined to see an ocean full of ships laden with arms and ammunition, coming to anchor either off Libya (if only the British would let them pass) or the southern territories of Tunisia (provided the French military were not too observant); but his fleet, however, tended to scuttle away rapidly as soon as Dr. Thamer entered the room. His moments of wishful thinking passed rapidly, and he would glance up at Thamer guiltily, with the expression of a schoolboy caught playing truant. For all his education and bitter experiences—for Bourguiba knows the inside of many a prison—there is not a trace of hate left in the man. There is a naïve quality about him, and at bottom a deep desire for a rapprochement. If the French were less suspicious, less complex in their mental processes, maybe they could see it—maybe they could use it to their advantage. Bourguiba is obviously capable of playing with fire, and of getting burned, but he is ready to take risks, and his courage has been proved. His fiery, unconquerable nature has kindled response in the heart of thousands of his countrymen, and for that alone, whatever history may decide about him later, he deserves a niche all to himself in the Tunisian pantheon.

Another fiery orator, though in a different vein, is the Spanish Moroccan leader, Abd el Khalek Torres. As his name implies, he comes from Andalusian stock, and perhaps that is the word that best describes Torres: he is essentially, and in every respect, an Andalusian. Tall, broad and dark, his personality easily dominates an audience; his rich voice booms out and delights in the rhetoric dear to Spanish ears. He loves life, and his loud, spontaneous laughter contrasts with the intellectual intensity of Bourguiba or the more sophisticated chuckle of Si Allal el Fassi. He is big-hearted, and lovable, easily moved and easily hurt, quick to respond to sympathy. There is a slight tendency to braggadocio about him which marks him straight away as a "Latin"; he is very

Europeanized and would be perfectly at home in any capital. But of the three, if he could speak the language, Si Allal el Fassi would suit the northern psychological climate best: his calm, the mystic aura which surrounds him, the gentle quality and the mischievous, friendly twinkle, and a certain Presbyterian severity would suit the tonality better. El Fassi's background is perhaps responsible for this: his sheltered upbringing, his education at the ancient Quaraouine University of Fez, his aristocratic ancestors—all tend to endow him with a slightly monastic, ascetic outlook. How soon, if ever, he will lose this in the completely different surroundings of Cairo it is difficult to tell. He keeps a little aloof from the other members of the Office; at first they did not quite understand him. Mohammed Fassi, however, with his warm perspicacity and easy manners (which reflect the American influence in his education), penetrated this artificial reserve sooner than the others and helped to interpret him to his colleagues. It was a change to see Si Allal in European clothes and to be able to see and speak to him freely. There was no need here for mysterious interviews and disguises!

The Emir was in hospital at Alexandria at the time, but Mohammed Fassi arranged for me to go and visit him there. He spoke about him as if he were a member of the family—the great Moghreb family that was growing so steadily in Cairo. The Emir was sitting in his private *salon*, surrounded by an entourage of the faithful—including his eldest son, a young man of twenty-five, dressed in European clothes. The Emir, however, was in traditional garb, and as he rose to greet us the first thing that struck me was his small stature and the extreme delicacy of his small, white hands. In spite of the twenty years' gap and the grey hair and beard, one could still recognize the features of the man whom one had seen in photographs of the Riff campaign, his head slightly tilted to one side in a quizzical, interrogative way. His eyes were small, grey and piercing. They were the youngest part of his face—alive, intense, narrowing sarcastically or widening into a smile. There was no hauteur, no arrogance, but in spite of the simplicity of the gestures, a quiet and very real dignity. Very occasionally, when caught unawares—which was not often—I noticed a half-shy expression on his face, and remembered that he was probably still not accustomed

to talking to women journalists—they did not exist during the Riff campaign, and since then he had lived in an unchanging world. Mohammed Fassi introduced me and gave him a rapid account of my interest in North Africa, and how I intended going from Cairo to Rabat. The Emir smiled and nodded approvingly, and spread his hands wide on his lap. I told him in French how I had read about him and admired him, for years, and from afar, never imagining that one day I would experience the thrill of actually meeting him. Again he smiled, a trifle sadly, and gazed reflectively into the distance. In spite of his triumphal return, and the solicitude with which he was surrounded, the consideration and affection bestowed upon him by King Farouk, his Court and the members of the Moghreb Office respectively, there was still a tinge of bitterness and melancholy, which had settled into his face during those long years of exile, and caused the small firm mouth to droop. Mohammed Fassi had told me about the reception they arranged for him at the Moghreb Office upon his return, how they had sung Abd el Krim's marching song as he entered through the gate. He told me how the old Emir had stopped upon hearing the familiar words and tune—for the first time in twenty years—and how moved he had been. I looked at him, and recalled many stories of his famous campaign: the courage, the brain were still there—vigilant, ready for action—and all the firmness and the tenderness of the North African was stamped upon his face, that curious mixture between Oriental subtlety and Occidental virility that make the North Africans such a unique people.

The Emir spoke a little haltingly at first, but little by little, as the conversation warmed up, and he had decided in his own mind that the visitor was well disposed towards him and his cause, his French improved, and he spoke it quite fluently, occasionally stopping for want of the right word, which he would ask his entourage, snapping his fingers impatiently. I asked the Emir whether at any time, during his exile, he had ever thought that one day he would be able to return home. He nodded gravely, and replied: "Yes; always, at the bottom of my heart, I knew that one day I would return. I did not know how, and at times I was inclined to despair, but the feeling remained." Apparently, he had never been in communication with any emissaries from North Africa or the Near East, as some of the papers had suggested, and the first

he heard about the planned escape was when the Moghreb Office envoys boarded his ship at Port Aden.

The Emir, I found, was perfectly in agreement with the idea of a federation of North Africa as foreseen by the leaders of the various nationalist parties. He was prepared to assist them, he said, in every possible way. I asked what exactly did that imply, and he laughed boyishly. "It can mean many things," he said, a look of cunning creeping into his face. "I am prepared to be a peaceful ambassador for our cause, here and abroad. I am prepared to travel wherever they want me to, or else, if negotiations fail, and our case, submitted to the United Nations, is still shelved by those countries who still wish to dominate us, well then, I am ready to act as military and strategical leader. But I hope," he added, "that it will be possible to negotiate; it would be more civilized." There was irony in his voice as he pronounced the word "civilized."

The diplomat in the Emir turned to the question of Communism and the division of the Western world into two blocs. "We could be useful," he suggested. "Our people are good fighters, as they have proved on more than one occasion. We are ideologically opposed to the tenets of Communism. Our strategical position in North Africa could be used to advantage again, in the event of a war between east and west. But we want our independence. We do not want to fight again for imperialism without being sure of our independence first. If they refuse—well, we shall have to turn to our enemy's enemies, won't we?"

We spoke about India. The Emir was not well informed on the question; he explained several times during our conversation that he had been deprived of news during his long isolation and that he was rather out of touch on many questions. Still, he added, he was catching up as rapidly as he could, and he asked questions from everybody who came to see him, and from all the journalists who came to interview him, so that he could form some idea of current opinions. I asked what he thought about the division of India, and he said: "How is it possible for the Muslims who eat beef to live side by side with people who do not? All these things give rise to trouble. It is not possible. But what *do you* think? Maybe I am not familiar with every aspect of the question." The Emir, again like many other of his countrymen—even those

who had not been in exile—displayed a disconcerting contradiction in terms: opinions of extreme naïveté and intransigence, offset by sudden periods of doubt and dependence on outside counsel.

The Emir's opinion of Great Britain, for whom he expressed admiration, was that of most North Africans, who take the example of India as a precedent in colonial history unsurpassed to date, while at the same time expressing astonishment and irritation at Great Britain's allegiance to France: "that weak, corrupt, degenerate ally." There is no doubt about it, France has "lost face." The North Africans cannot bear the idea of being dominated by an intrinsically weak people—this hurts their pride terribly. They saw the French defeated in 1940; they saw them bow to the victor and "collaborate," as their own most despised elements have collaborated with the French; they have seen their feet of clay, and the loss of prestige is irreparable. Great Britain, in spite of her many faults and her own record of imperialism, has displayed courage and fortitude—and foresight—but why, they ask, does she support such a useless ally? Does she really think that France will ever be able or willing to help her? What good would France be in another war? Had Great Britain not seen how weak she was before the Germans? And the Resistance? They laughed about that: it was nothing, they said—nothing in comparison to the attitude of the majority; and even the Resistance, such as it was, was directed and led by the British. "Tell Great Britain we Arabs want to be her friends," said the Emir, "but not if she continues to uphold France's empire."

I enquired whether the Emir was tired of talking. After all, he was having medical treatment, and our conversation had been interrupted two or three times by a nurse who wanted to give him an injection. "No; I am not at all tired," he said—and, indeed, he did not look it. Conversation, the clash of ideas and opinions, seemed to stimulate him, as no doubt the clash of armour stimulated him physically in battle. His face lit up, he looked years younger—the droop at the corner of the mouth was no longer visible. This was the Emir Abd el Krim of the old days, the legendary Abd el Krim, of whom the French generals who had fought him said: "*Ce fut un grand type.*" There was something about him which the other leaders do not have—as yet. Abd el Krim is a greater person.

The main reason for this, perhaps, is that he has proved his worth in battle as an unquestioned leader of men. He has that famous campaign behind him, surrounding him with an aura which the others cannot aspire to. There is a grandeur and a strength about him that inspire confidence and affection—the secret of all great leaders. There was the same difference between Abd el Krim and the other nationalist leaders as—all due proportions respected—between Mr. Churchill and Mr. Attlee or the other members of his team. One may agree with Mr. Attlee and disagree entirely with Mr. Churchill, but the latter will always remain the lion. Abd el Krim is the North African lion. Later, I asked whether I could see his children; he smiled, and told Mohammed Fassi to take me next door. There they were, the eleven of them—and his eldest wife, a parchment-faced woman, a typical Berber, dressed, no doubt, exactly as she was when she left the Riff twenty years ago. She looked almost as dynamic as the Emir, and Mohammed informed me that she too knew how to use a gun—and *had* used one during the Riff campaign. I could well believe it.

The children, ranging between the ages of eight or nine and twenty-five, were strong and sturdy and beautiful. I asked one of the boys, aged ten, to write out a list of their names and ages for me, to help me remember. He smiled mischievously before starting the list, fountain pen poised in mid-air: “You realize, of course, don’t you, that my father has two wives?” The youngest wife, he said, was in Cairo at the time—looking after two other children. There was not enough room for them all in the hospital. I noticed that there were several English textbooks in the room, as well as Arabic, and the children told me that they were learning Arabic and English. So far they only knew their native tongue, Berber, and French; very little Arabic, but they were learning quickly. They were all friendly and smiling, full of life, and very excited at the prospect of being able to do more or less what they liked, and mix with so many different people.

The Emir treated Mohammed Fassi like a member of his own family: there was that father-son relationship between leader and follower which is so marked in the East.

The French were complaining about the Emir’s “political activities.” As a refugee in Egypt, he was not supposed to indulge in any. A French journalist who had preceded us

remarked on this, but the old Emir calmly remarked: "Well then, in that case, why do you trouble to come and interview me here?" Later, the Emir lent his name and prestige to the Liberation Committee of the Arab Moghreb, formed under his Presidency, and which unites all the nationalist parties of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco on the basis of the following pact:

"The Moghreb is Arab and Muslim.

"The Moghreb is an indivisible part of the Arab world; it is natural, therefore, that it should participate in the Arab League on an equal footing with other Arab countries.

"The independence of the Moghreb means independence for Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

"Our sole aim is independence.

"No negotiations are possible with France and Spain in the framework of the present régime.

"No negotiations are possible until independence is proclaimed.

"Parties who are members of the Committee can have contacts with the French and Spanish governments so long as the Committee is kept informed of the progress of the talks as they proceed.

"The independence of one of the three countries does not absolve the Committee from the obligation to work for the liberation of the other two.

"Our cause is thus entering a decisive phase; we form a united bloc of twenty-five million people. We hope, however, that the French and the Spanish will not oblige us to shed blood. We trust that past experience will have proved to them that violence will not stifle our voice."

The time had come to leave for Tunisia, and to bid farewell to the Moghreb Office. Bourguiba asked me if I could smuggle some presents in my luggage for his wife and relatives in Tunis. He had not seen them for some time, and he was especially anxious about his son, who, he hoped, would soon be joining him in Cairo. Most of the exiles of the Moghreb Office heard from home by devious routes: letters often took weeks to reach them, but what joy when they arrived! It was at moments like these that one realized the immensity of their personal sacrifices, for, in spite of all that has been said and written to the contrary, home life and family ties are very

strong in North Africa, and I have always seen great tenderness displayed to womenfolk and to children.

Dr. Thamer and Mohammed Fassi came to the airfield with me. More would have come, but we did not want to attract attention. No doubt the French had their eyes upon me already, especially since I had seen the Emir Abd el Krim. We only guessed, but we guessed right.



*Part III*

*TUNISIA*

*To Habib Bourguiba, the leader, and to Slimane, my faithful guide.*

THE DESTOUR PARTY

SEVEN HOURS' FLIGHT FROM Cairo, the great black blobs of desert behind us, and the lights of Tunis were flickering uncertainly in a cluster round the bay. A trim young air hostess started to collect passports. The atmosphere was gay, luxurious and carefree, for Air-France had provided us with an excellent dinner, accompanied by champagne. As the plane swerved suddenly to a downward dive, I instinctively clutched at my handbag, with its precious letters of introduction. Would I share the same fate as the last British journalist to pass this way only two months before, and who never was allowed any further than the Tunis airport? A half-emptied bottle of champagne rolled over and over and babbled idiotically to itself in a corner.

2.30 a.m. A scented breeze blew in as the aeroplane door swung open and steps were brought for us to alight. Lazily, the passengers extricated themselves from the depths of their comfortable, cushioned seats and made their way to the buffet. A solitary Tunisian police officer came up to inspect papers and scrutinize the passengers bound for Tunis. As we walked back with him to the offices, I plied him with questions, enquiring, among other things, about hotels: which one would he advise me to go to, for I was new to Tunis and knew nothing about the city. The police officer remarked laconically that the Majestic was as good as any, as he examined my passport, and my face, carefully. "Is Cairo calm these days?" he asked.

I smiled. "Is Cairo ever calm?"

We both smiled, for different reasons.

“What is Abd el Krim doing these days? Is he writing for the papers?”

“Don’t you receive Egyptian papers here?” I asked innocently. “Oh no; the Emir doesn’t write. He is in hospital, I believe. Of course, what he will do after remains to be seen!”

“It is the fourteenth of July to-day,” remarked the officer. “No doubt, being a journalist, you will be interested in the processions. The Bey and his Guard are always very picturesque.” Presumably, that summed up just what they were: picturesque; their presence, a necessary symbol, of course, would add the “colonial exhibition” note which is part of the Empire’s trappings—a rather jaded note, however, like the Bey Sidi Lamine himself, whom I was to see later in the day in the European quarter of the city (he dares not appear in the Muslim quarter, for the Tunisians will only pay homage to the rightful Bey—Moncef, the exile of Pau).

After an interminably long delay, the police officer stamped my passport and allowed me to pass. The Customs officials were half-asleep: there was no trouble there either.

As the Air-France car sped through the silent, empty streets, I remembered the advice that Dr. Thamer had given me before I left Cairo: “The police do not actually start their rounds before 7 a.m., so be sure to go out before that time if you want to contact the Destour people without being followed.” Dr. Thamer had not been sure of Salah ben Youssef’s address, since the latter was obliged to move fairly frequently, but he had given me the Slims’ address in the *medina*. I had verbal messages to give to Taieb’s mother, whom he worshipped, but no letters, as this would have been too dangerous. One had to remember that Taieb had been sentenced to death in his absence. Taieb had told me that his brother Mungi was the “politically-minded” member of the family. Hedi, the younger brother, was in business and had nothing to do with the Party. Somebody, evidently, had to attend to the family’s material needs: underground politics are hardly a paying concern. The more politically active you are, the more chances you have of suddenly disappearing. Life becomes a gamble. I was to find the same pattern all over North Africa, the same “division of labour” within the family circle, between the “active” members, liable at any moment to be separated from their kith and kin, deported, arrested, imprisoned, and the “working” members, who quietly assumed the usual

family responsibilities in their absence. Few among the younger active members dare to marry or found a family, in view of their precarious existence. They live a life apart, rarely confiding their movements or plans to the other members of the family; but everybody tacitly understands and no questions are ever asked. If the mothers and sisters wonder at times, or become anxious after an unusually prolonged absence, they do not show it outwardly; the sadness is in their hearts and in an undefinable expression deep down in their eyes. They are stoic, these women; theirs is the long weary suffering of those who wait—a suffering which is best understood by women everywhere.

Groping along the walls of the *medina* at dawn, I hardly had time to notice the whiter walls, the wider streets than those of the Moroccan *medinas*, but the *souks* were more modern, the European influence had crept in much closer, and the Muslim quarter itself was not separated from the rest of the town by the same thick ramparts. There was less of an Oriental atmosphere and comparatively fewer people were dressed in Arab clothes.

Salah ben Youssef, Secretary-General of the Destour, was difficult to find, all the more so since nobody seemed particularly anxious to confide his address to me. They eyed me suspiciously when I asked, and a mask of indifference crept over their faces, or else, anxious not to bear the responsibility themselves, they would direct me to a person—usually a grocer or local storekeeper—who “might” know where he was living. At last, one pock-marked grocer, huddled up in a corner of his shop, asked me whether I came from France. I replied most emphatically: “No. I come from Cairo—from our friends in Cairo.” He looked at me searchingly, and actually believed me. He began to smile slowly and understandingly.

“That is good,” he said, and he directed me to a house nearby where Salah ben Youssef’s secretary lived. He, in turn, escorted me to a villa where the newly-wed Secretary-General of the Party was spending his honeymoon. It was still early in the morning, and Salah was sitting reading an Arabic paper on the terrace, sipping black coffee. I immediately handed him my letter of introduction, and Salah lost no time in organizing my stay in Tunisia. He was an energetic, buoyant and boisterous person, very obviously a leader—impulsive and outspoken.

“How are they all in Cairo? What are the boys doing?” he asked. “I must introduce you to my wife. Did they say anything to you about my marriage when you were there? I don’t believe they like the idea, you know. Several of us have been getting married lately, and I think the Cairo boys are inclined to believe that we are neglecting our duties and becoming bourgeois and lazy. Not a bit of it, I assure you. We are still ready at a moment’s notice to make any sacrifices that they may ask of us. But when do they want us to do something? Things are stagnant just now. If they want us to organize a *coup de force*, all right; we’re ready. But I think the idea is to concert our efforts and wait for the great moment. Much better, anyway. Have some coffee.” He talked on, called the servant, got up and went out in search of his wife, who appeared presently—a pleasant, auburn-haired young woman in a Parisian negligée. He told me that she had been a Girl Guide Captain before her marriage, and that she was “very modern.” So I could see from the easy way in which she spoke and behaved. Madame ben Youssef certainly does not keep *pardah*—indeed, there seemed to be more emancipated women in Tunisia than in the neighbouring countries, although I was to meet them at many different levels of “modernization.”

“Thamer says in his letter that he wants you to go down south,” said Salah, tapping the letter of introduction with his pipe. “Very hot down there just now, you know. Still, if you’re prepared to suffer a few discomforts, we can arrange it. Unfortunately, though, we have been having trouble with the cars lately. There isn’t one available, except a couple we’re constantly using on the job. Transport is the problem in this country. Once you’re off the beaten track, it becomes very difficult indeed—and very uncomfortable. However, we’ll see what we can do. I shall give you a guide—somebody who knows where to go and the people to contact. Otherwise you’ll be rather lost, and it’s no joke down south, I can tell you. There are hardly any hotels at all, but we can put you in touch with Party members who’ll put you up. Let’s finish breakfast; and then come along with me to Party headquarters in the rue Bab Souika—same street where Habib used to have his practice, you know. How is Habib? What do you think of his trip to America? Do you think he will be going to Great Britain? Sticky, eh? Yes, I thought so. Those

countrymen of yours are too friendly with the French. Some allies you've got there, though; yellow right through. And by the way, have a good look at the French Press while you're here. You'll find quite a crop of anti-British articles in it. Allies? Bah! Where are you staying in Tunis? The Majestic? I know the proprietor. I'll come back with you and tell him to look after you properly; keep a room for you while you're away, too. When do you want to leave? After to-morrow? We'd better fix it up at the office: see what suggestions the boys have to make. What's that you say? Documents? Oh yes; we've got plenty of them. See what you want down at the office. Better tell you something about the Party too. Wait a minute till I get the car out." Exuberant Salah spoke perfect French. His wife told me when he was out of the room that he had been imprisoned only a year ago for about a month after the Party congress of August 23rd, 1946, which ended by a resolution advocating complete independence for Tunisia. Most of the Party leaders had been detained at the same time, but not for long. "Of course," added Madame ben Youssef a little wistfully, "one never knows when they are going to be popped in again, does one?"

Salah was waiting at the gate in his car, and we drove into town at a reckless speed, past the Residency in the main square and into the rue Bab Souika, past a house with a copper plate on the door marked "Maître Habib Bourguiba, Avocat," to the offices of the Party just a few blocks further down. The rooms upstairs were small and bare, overcrowded with groups of young Tunisians, some standing, some sitting on benches, reminding one of a Labour Exchange. (I thought, too, of the India Independence League's dingy little offices in the Strand, and I wondered, pursuing the simile, whether Bourguiba would one day be able to transfer his office to the Residency as easily as Mr. Krishna Menon had moved into the India office.) Inside, I met some of the officials of the Party and I was introduced to an ardent-looking young professor—Professor Ali Belhouane, who had been in prison at the same time as Salah and a few times before, I believe—and to a middle-aged gentleman who specialized in the distribution of free soup to the starving Bedouins further south. There were others, too: earnest-looking people, and Mungi, an older edition of Taieb, who wrung my hand warmly several times because I had just come from Cairo and from seeing his brother. He was quiet, like

Taieb, and although he appeared to be dreamy, he is one of the most active members of the Executive of the Party. Salah installed himself in a large revolving chair and gave a few orders; he wanted a map of Tunisia, and documents; and would somebody fetch Slimane, who would, he said, be a perfect guide, because he knew the country well and yet was not too well known to the police, so that we would attract less attention. I asked him about the Bedouins, and the gentleman in charge started to tell me about them, but was soon interrupted by Salah, who brandished a fat report on the economic situation of Tunisia. The middle-aged gentleman waited patiently, while Salah talked about the legal system in Tunisia, before continuing with his story of the soup-distributions. He was never able to finish his story, but, as he said, with a resigned smile, "After all, you will be seeing it for yourself very shortly." Salah had assembled several members of the Party round the map and was already tracing an ambitious voyage for me, north, south, east and west. I then asked them to tell me about the origins of their Party, the Destour; and here in résumé is what they told me:

"We never accepted the Protectorate of France. After 1881, there was a quickly-quelled active resistance, centred more particularly round the town of Sfax, the capital of the south. After that, the Tunisians had to content themselves with passive resistance, as we lacked both arms and organization. Obviously, the French had found the Tunisia of 1881 easy to overrun. The country was in a state of chaos, politically and economically; one of the pretexts for the establishment of the Protectorate, apart from the so-called 'frontier incidents' between the Tunisian and the Algerian border, was to reform the state of our finances, the Bey having incurred heavy debts with France which he was unable to repay. The Beylical system of Government, with its unique law of succession, devolving always upon the eldest member of the family, is a vestige of the ties that bound Tunisia to the Caliphate of Constantinople. These ties, however, were more spiritual than material. Nevertheless, the Turks have left their imprint upon Tunisia, as well as the Greeks and the Italians. It has always been a melting-pot of races, as you can see from the diversity of types in Tunisia."

The first organized political party, after the establishment of the Protectorate by the Bardo Treaty of 1881, followed by

the Convention de la Marsa in 1883, centred in 1904 round Ali Bach Hamba and his paper, *The Young Tunisian*. This was merely a beginning, and Bach Hamba and his friends did not accomplish much, except to rouse people from their fatalistic acceptance of the situation. Incidents occurred, however; and this led to the expulsion of the group. Later, during the First World War, Tunisia was declared to be in a state of siege, and all Nationalists were automatically interned. Again there were risings in the south, in 1915 and 1916.

One of the exiled leaders, Thalbi, submitted a memorandum to President Wilson in 1919, claiming independence for Tunisia, and he also published several pamphlets denouncing France's administration in Tunisia. It was in May, 1919, that the word "Destour" was mentioned for the first time in connection with the Tunisian Nationalist Party. The word "Destour" in Arabic means "constitution." This was used by a delegation of notables who presented themselves before the French Residency in Tunis, demanding a "new constitution for Tunisia." A delegation was sent to the Bey in June on behalf of the Tunisian people. From that date, the Destour Party was officially formed. It included ex-students from French universities and, later, members of the older generation, or "Old Turbans" as they were called.

The first nine-point programme did not even mention the word "independence." It therefore did not go as far as Thalbi's memorandum to President Wilson. The object at that time was to work progressively and gradually: to ask for reforms within the framework of the French administration, because the Destour Party realized that a demand for complete independence would antagonize the French people. Their first programme made the following demands:

1. A Legislative assembly composed of Tunisian and French members, elected by the people, free to form its own agenda and having wide budgetary powers.
2. A government responsible before the Assembly.
3. Complete separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers.
4. All Tunisians possessing the same qualifications as French candidates should be eligible for Government posts.
5. Equality of pay for both Tunisian and French officials.

6. All local councils to be elected.
7. Education to be made compulsory.
8. Tunisians to be allowed to share in the buying of land from the Direction of Agricultural Affairs and Public Allotments.
9. Freedom of the Press and of association.

This nine-point programme was submitted to Resident-General Lucien Saint by a delegation of forty Destourians on June 6th, 1921. The new Resident-General agreed with seven of the points, but made reservations with regard to the first two.

It was not long before the separation of powers and a new Ministry of Tunisian Justice were put into effect. Lucien Saint also put an end to the state of siege which still existed in Tunisia and allowed Thalbi to return to Tunis. With the freedom of the Press, about twenty national newspapers were published, and the Destour Party flourished—to the point of gaining sympathy at Court with Prince Moncef, who was to become Bey in 1942.

From 1922, however, the situation changed considerably. The Court espoused the cause of freedom with so much fervour that the Bey threatened to abdicate if satisfaction was not given to the claims of the Destour Party. This move preceded President Millerand's visit to Tunisia in 1922, and was intended to force an issue. Lucien Saint went to the Palace in person to persuade the Bey to reconsider his decision. At the same time, he promised him solemnly that his claims would be considered, and he insisted that the object of the President's visit to Tunisia was precisely to study a programme of reforms on the spot. The Bey allowed himself to be convinced. Crowds of demonstrators were parading in the square in front of the Palace and in the town centre. In order to avoid bloodshed, and in view of Lucien Saint's promises, the Bey gave way. President Millerand's visit went off without any incidents, and without any tangible results for Tunisia. The Destour, on the other hand, was due to undergo its first phase of repression. The aged Bey died suddenly, and a series of decrees were issued by the French authorities, forbidding all political meetings and putting an end to the freedom of the Press. Sheikh Thalbi, the founder of the Destour Party, left Tunisia to pursue his activities and propaganda in the Near East.

He left in 1927 and only returned in 1937, by which time, however, the Party had progressed along different lines. The older members of the Destour Party, deprived of their leader, limited their activities to a few underground meetings and telegrams of protest. This apathy did not satisfy the younger generation, who grouped themselves round the Press; first one paper, then the other, was suppressed by the Residency. The *Liberal* was suspended in 1927; the *Tunisian Standard* followed suit in 1929, and was replaced by *La Voix du Tunisien*. Habib Bourguiba was connected with this last paper, and just about the same time both Bourguiba and Tahar Sfar submitted Tunisia's case to the Congress of the League for Human Rights, held at Vichy in May, 1931.

In 1933, the older members of the Destour Party decided to reorganize themselves, and they issued a new Charter, as follows:

"The Constitutional Liberal Party of Tunisia, at its national Congress of May 12-13th, 1933, after having studied the political activities of the Party during the thirteen years of its existence, believing that the so-called policy of collaboration has entirely failed in this country; that the political and economic situation of the world at the present time and the relations between colonizers and colonial peoples have now entered upon a new phase; that the dependence of the colonies upon the metropolis has led to the economic under-development of the colonial peoples; that in these circumstances and in answer to the country's wishes the mission of the C.L.P. is to lead the Tunisian people towards their emancipation, proclaims that the aims of its political activity is to ensure the liberation of the Tunisian people and to give the country a stable statute in the form of a constitution which will safeguard the Tunisian nation and preserve its identity through—

- "1. A Tunisian parliament, elected by the people.
- "2. A government responsible to the Parliament.
- "3. The separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers.
- "4. The extension of the Tunisian code of justice to all residents in Tunisia.
- "5. The granting of public and civil liberties, without discrimination, to all Tunisians.
- "6. Compulsory education for all.

“7. Economic safeguard and in general all measures necessary to the country to enable it to rise from its present material and moral morass and take its place among the civilized nations of the world.”

Habib Bourguiba and his friends, who had formed a group called “Action Tunisienne,” found the slow methods of the Old Destour unsatisfactory. A special Congress was convened in 1934 to settle the dispute between the two groups, but the older members did not even attend, so the Congress resolved to replace the Executive Commission by a Political Bureau composed of a President (Dr. Materi), a Secretary-General (Habib Bourguiba) and four members. This marked the beginning of the Neo-Destour Party. At first, the new Resident-General, Peyrouton, adopted a more or less conciliatory attitude towards the Party and allowed them to publish an Arabic paper, *Al Amal*. But the Party’s rapid extension and success soon caused him to change his mind and resort to violence. On September 2nd, 1934, the principal Destour leaders were interned. The entire country revolted at this measure, and there was an outburst of riots all over the country. This went on until Peyrouton was recalled to France in 1936.

The French Government again decided on a change of policy, and Peyrouton was replaced by Armand Guillon in 1936 on the eve of the advent of the Popular Front in France. Guillon granted a general political amnesty as soon as he arrived in Tunis, and he re-established the freedom of the Press and of association.

The Neo-Destour Party, realizing the importance of an active campaign in France itself, and relying upon the liberal ideas expressed by the French Popular Front and by M. Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, soon discovered that however liberal the new French Government might be, there were limits to what it was prepared to concede. It therefore adapted itself to the circumstances and agreed on a policy of deferment, independence still remaining its ultimate objective, to be obtained by a gradual process. For the first time in its history, the Destour presented a programme in an acceptable form. Its immediate demands were submitted to the Popular Front Government as soon as its leaders returned from exile, and included such claims as putting an end to official colonization

in Tunisia, complete reorganization of the fiscal system, compulsory education, the eligibility of Tunisians to all administrative posts, including positions of authority, adequate relief for the sick and aged, and a campaign against usury. The Party also insisted that the Great Council should be replaced by a Tunisian parliament with responsible Ministers.

Habib Bourguiba was sent to Paris in August, 1936, to discuss the execution of this programme with the French Government. He persuaded Pierre Vienot to go and investigate the whole situation on the spot.

The French Under-Secretary of State outlined French policy towards Tunisia in a speech in which he ascribed the cause of the Tunisian troubles, *inter alia*, to "indecision and irresponsibility in governmental and administrative affairs, a tendency on the part of certain French nationals to put their personal interests before the greater interests of France, the discrepancy between the budgetary resources and the number of civil servants, the excessive privileges granted to certain beneficiaries and, above all, the extreme poverty of the *fellahin*."

The whole country, declared M. Vienot, needed to be reorganized in every sphere; and he added that this reorganization would include the "effective participation of the Tunisian people themselves in the management of public affairs." This speech raised new hopes among the native population, and alarmed French colonists, who intimated their disapproval to the French Resident and to the Blum Government in France.

And so no fundamental reforms ever took place, with the exception of certain social decrees of the Popular Front Government relating to paid vacations, etc. The French colonists in Tunisia were opposed in every way to the social policy of the French Popular Front, and strikes and riots again broke out all over the country.

Between 1938 and 1942, a new wave of repression swept over Tunisia. The Government issued a decree forbidding any public meetings. Legal proceedings were instituted against Party leaders who tried to organize meetings and who wrote "subversive articles". Many of them were arrested. On April 9th, 1938, in particular, when Professor Ali Belhouane was arrested for "subversive speeches" made during a demonstration, a clash occurred between the police and the people.

Similar incidents took place all over the country, and a state of siege was declared in the areas of Tunis, Grombala, and Susa until August 13th, 1938. All the leaders of the Neo-Destour Party were arrested and accused of plotting against the security of the State.

The Tunisian students in Paris formed a Defence Committee for Tunisian Liberty and held protest meetings against the repressive measures being taken in their country, but their action met with little response from the French public.

In Tunisia itself, the Party went underground during the Presidency of Dr. Thamer, and organized a series of incidents and acts of sabotage which kept the country in an almost permanent state of agitation. An investigation committee was sent out from France, presided over by M. Lagrosillere. This was followed by President of the Council Daladier's spectacular tour of North Africa in 1939, when the whole population turned out to demand Bourguiba's release, the establishment of a Tunisian parliament, and a national government.

This general agitation continued right through the war, in spite of the state of siege and the threats of General Blanc, who was in command of all Tunisian troops. The repeated acts of sabotage forced the Government to take drastic measures: saboteurs were sentenced to death on the spot, the concentration camps were filled to overflowing with Nationalists. The Franco-German armistice of 1940 gave the Destour Party the opportunity of claiming independence from France, since that country was no longer in a position to fulfil its missions as a protecting Power. A delegation of Neo-Destour members submitted a petition to the Bey on July 20th, 1940, demanding the release of Bourguiba and his friends, and denouncing the Protectorate treaty as obsolete. Similar petitions were presented to the Bey's representatives in all parts of the country. Resident-General Esteva answered by arresting all the members of the delegation before they reached the Palace, but, thanks to the Bey's personal intervention, they were released after a few weeks. During this period, acts of sabotage and riots were multiplying, and so, finally, Dr. Thamer and the members of his Political Bureau were arrested in January, 1941. Up till then they had always succeeded in escaping during periods of repression. Altogether, six different underground Political Bureaux of the Destour

Party succeeded one another between 1938 and 1942. Finally, on June 19th, 1942, His Royal Highness Mohammed Moncef Bey ascended the throne of Tunisia. He was well known for his patriotic sentiments and agreement with the Destour Party, and on August 2nd, 1942, Moncef Bey submitted a list of sixteen claims to Marshal Pétain, inspired in the main by the Destour 1936 programme. The French Government once again made promises which were never kept.

On November 9th, 1942, Germano-Italian forces occupied Tunisia. Thanks once again to the Bey's intervention, all political prisoners were liberated and Dr. Thamer again assumed the leadership of the Party. The party was reorganized, an Arabic newspaper was published and a Youth Movement formed. The Destour joined with the Bey in demanding Bourguiba's release from his prison in Marseilles. He was ultimately set free and despatched to Rome, where he was detained by the Italian Government for several months, owing to his well-known sympathy for the democracies. Bourguiba and his friends emphatically refused all proposals made to them by the Axis Powers, and they were only allowed to return to Tunisia in April, 1943, three weeks before the collapse of the Axis.

On May 12th, 1943, Tunisia was liberated. France took advantage of the situation to try to suppress the Nationalist movement once and for all on the pretext of "collaboration" with the Axis Powers. The Bey, who had always proclaimed his neutrality and refused all Axis advances, was arrested by General Giraud on May 14th, 1943, and transported by air to Laghouat in the Algerian desert. Later he was sent to Pau in France (October, 1945), where he is still in exile. Any person whom the Government wished to get rid of was accused of collaboration with the Axis. Hundreds of people were executed and thousands were thrown into prison. Bourguiba and some of his friends managed to escape from this fresh outburst. Once again the Destour Party reassembled its forces. After trying in vain to come to some understanding with the French Government, it launched a new offensive on a grand scale. Rallying all Tunisians to the cause, it issued a manifesto demanding self-government for Tunisia. But the French soon stopped all this activity. Bourguiba, who had become the President of the Party and who was for all practical purposes confined to Tunis by the police, decided to leave the

country for Egypt, where the Arab League had just been formed, in order to rally the rest of the Arab world to Tunisia's cause.

Tunisia's renewed claim to independence, passed in the form of a resolution at the National Congress of August 23rd, 1946, sums up the position and desires of the Tunisian people:

"Whereas, before 1881, Tunisia was an autonomous State bound by spiritual rather than political ties to the Caliphate of Constantinople;

"Whereas the sovereign rights of Tunisia were internationally recognized and expressly acknowledged in a number of treaties concluded with foreign powers;

"Whereas France, after taking up the question of Tunisian independence with the Ottoman Government, imposed a French Protectorate on Tunisia in a treaty signed under duress by Sadiq Bey and never ratified by popular consent;

"Whereas the Bardo Treaty neither denied to Tunisia her membership in the community of nations nor ignored the sovereignty of the Tunisian State in either external or internal relations;

"Whereas, after sixty-five years, this Protectorate which, by the spirit and the letter of the Bardo Treaty and the Convention de la Marsa, was to have been a provisional and purely protective régime has degenerated until to-day it has become a régime of colonial exploitation in which the guardian State systematically robs its ward both of sovereign rights and material resources;

"Whereas in practice, instead of confining itself to its rightful sphere of control, the guardian State has taken the place of the ward in the conduct of public affairs and has annihilated the authority of the Tunisian administration;

"Whereas, since the beginning of the Protectorate, the guardian State in Tunisia has followed a policy which impoverishes the indigenous people, robs the Tunisians of their best lands, makes over to State officials, who are for the most part French, more than two-thirds of the Budget, which is not under Tunisian control and is maintained by a system of taxation burdensome, not to the wealthy, but to the masses, imposes on Tunisia a monetary, Customs and commercial policy detrimental to Tunisian internal economy and to its foreign exchange position;

"Whereas this policy of impoverishment is the result of a

policy of French colonization, by means of colonists, officials and of naturalization (French citizenship having been offered to Tunisians, Anglo-Maltese, Wrangel's White Russians, Spanish Republicans and now even to Italians), the aim of which is to increase the number of French citizens and thus to bring about the de-nationalization of the country;

"Whereas, owing to its financial extravagance, this policy of French settlement has from the outset rendered the Protectorate incapable of fulfilling its responsibilities to the Muslim population in the spheres of nutrition, housing, public assistance and education;

"Whereas, in the circumstances, the guardian State has neglected human welfare in favour of the dominating capitalist interests and has failed in that civilizing mission in which she seeks to justify the establishment of the Protectorate;

"Whereas the guardian State has further failed on the level of security since it handed over Tunisia to the Axis Powers, notwithstanding that its Tunisian ward had consistently defended the cause of France and the Allies;

"Whereas the sacrifice of human life and the contribution thus willingly made to the war effort, though completely forgotten after the War of 1914-18, undoubtedly justify the claim to freedom which Tunisia makes to-day;

"Whereas in general the French administration of Tunisia has consistently violated the spirit and the letter of the treaties and whereas one of its most serious violations is the deposition of our well-beloved Sovereign, Moncef Pasha Bey, an act which justifies the Tunisian people in their growing condemnation of a régime they can neither accept nor tolerate;

"Whereas, moreover, the interests of a guardian State cannot stand in the way of a people's imprescriptible right to determine their own destiny;

"Whereas colonial empires, rightly held to be a cause of rivalry between Powers and a source of international conflicts, have been solemnly condemned by the United Nations, which have set among their avowed aims 'the right of all peoples to determine the form of government under which they will consent to live,' and 'the restoration of sovereign rights and autonomy to those who have been forcibly deprived of them'; and

"Whereas this new doctrine has been clarified and affirmed in the course of different international conferences (Mount

Tremblant, Dumbarton Oaks, Hot Springs, San Francisco) and whereas France among other colonial Powers has acknowledged the principle that 'no nation has a permanent and imprescriptible right to rule over subject peoples';

"Taking all these considerations into account, the Tunisian National Congress—

"Declares that the Protectorate is a régime politically and economically utterly incompatible with the Tunisian people's sovereign rights and vital interests, and that it has not justified its boasted civilizing mission;

"It affirms that after sixty-five years' experience this régime of the exploitation of man by man has pronounced its own rightful doom;

"It proclaims that independence, immediate, total and unconditional, is the only way of atoning for past wrongs and safeguarding the future destiny of a great people; and

"It proclaims the imprescriptible right of the Tunisian people to regain their inviolable independence."

## TUNISIANS AT HOME

AN UNDERSIZED YOUTH, with closely cropped hair, wearing a pair of wide blue trousers that appeared to have been made out of a piece of sailcloth, stepped unobtrusively into the room and shook hands with Salah. "Ah, here is Slimane, your guide," said Salah, presenting him to me.

We shook hands gravely. I admit that I was disconcerted. I remember, to my shame, the thought that flashed through my mind at that moment: "Thank goodness that nobody I know will see me travelling through the country with this strange individual; but oh, what an ordeal it is going to be!" How wrong I was. For Slimane, whom I grew to know so well on our arduous travels together, was one of the purest and most beautiful souls I have ever been privileged to encounter. He was twenty-two years old, and an ex-school-teacher. At the age of seventeen, he informed me proudly, he had been the youngest member of the Destour to go to prison. I think he was imprisoned for about one year. Sometimes I sensed that he almost regretted it had not been a longer

spell, for when he spoke about the "veterans"—men who had been in gaol or on hard labour sentences for years—a note of envious regret came into his voice. These were the men whose unflinching courage he admired and in whose company he lived. He came from an excellent Tunisian family, was widely read, and I do not remember asking him one single question to which he could not give an immediate answer. Why had he been imprisoned? I asked. Oh, of course, there had been a good reason, he admitted. He had been caught in an act of sabotage, hacking away at telegraph poles. He told me all about it, quietly, in his low, sweet voice, and his face remained angelic. Looking at him, it was almost impossible to credit him with any act of violence. "The Tunisian is a woman" goes a contemptuous saying. They are perhaps more delicate, more artistically inclined than the Algerians or the Moroccans, but they are none the less virile for that, as is proved by their courageous resistance against oppression.

Salah spoke to Slimane gravely, knowing how he could trust him, and Slimane stood and nodded, like a soldier taking orders. He was officially appointed guide, counsellor, initiator into Tunisian ways and customs, and general treasurer for the journey. Besides all this, he appointed himself porter when the heat became so unbearable that I could not carry my own suitcase. He thought of everything, down to the most trivial and practical detail: it was he who bought extra towels for me in the *souks* before we left for the interior, where hotels were poor and provided none; it was he who carried a heavy volume of Gauthier's *History of North Africa* in his own suitcase for me to read when I got bored on a long train journey; it was Slimane who saw that I was constantly supplied with films for my camera, and daily papers when available. Never once did he lose his patience or show any evidence of fatigue, even though there were days when I for one was curt and short-tempered, tired to the point of exasperation of the heat and the sand and the dust and the vermin. Faithfully, he accomplished his mission, ever friendly, yet with a grave reserve which he himself diagnosed as a symptom of "having grown up too quickly." He had witnessed much in his young life, but it was not easy to persuade him to speak about himself. During his encounters with the police, he had seen people tortured: he had seen human beings pumping water into other human beings to

“make them speak”; he had seen these same human beings tearing the finger-nails off their fellow creatures; he had seen them pass electric currents through their genital organs; but of these things he spoke little and did not even wish to speak at all. It was surprising, therefore, that he should not have been more embittered than he was, but then I had been accepted as a friend—in fact, I was one of the first foreign friends whom Slimane had ever had, and he was touched to the point of tears that somebody from a far-away country should have come all the way to see them and take an interest in his people. He confided to me, towards the end of my stay in Tunisia, that this thought quite awed him, and he was so sincere, so childishly pathetic, that one felt humbled and wordless in the face of such candour.

Before setting off for the south, we had several social calls to make in Tunis. The Slim family wanted to arrange a dinner, so did Professor Belhouane and his wife; and there was Madame Bechira M’Rad to see—daughter of the Sheikh of that name, one of the most active feminine members of the Party, who had even wanted to found a women’s counterpart of the Destour, but had been prevented from doing so by the many obstacles put in her path by the authorities. She too, however, continued to work underground, and I was extremely anxious to meet her. As these various hosts and hostesses were not yet “organized,” however, since my arrival had been sudden and unannounced, Slimane took me out himself on that first evening. There were two places he was particularly anxious to show me: these were the village of Sidi bou Said—a typically Muslim village, he said, by the sea—and Carthage by night. It should have been “Carthage by moonlight,” but unfortunately the night was pitch black. All that could be seen of Carthage, alas! were groups of modern villas, gravel paths, a vulgar restaurant on top of a hill overlooking the bay, with the radio playing at full blast, and perspiring French and Italian families at dinner: hairy men in shirt-sleeves consuming vast quantities of spaghetti, “frites” and red wine, with heads well bent over their plates and elbows wide apart as they ploughed through the heaped platefuls of food before them. So that was Carthage. Sidi bou Said, at least, had preserved some of its Oriental charm; it had, in particular, a Muslim café at the top of twenty white steps, and on each of the steps sat a picturesque Tunisian

invariably engaged on what appeared to be one of their favourite pastimes—making posies of jasmine flowers, which they stuck, when finished, behind their right ear. Each jasmine flower was carefully removed from its stalk beforehand and attached to a stem of fine fibre; sometimes, they add a coloured centre to the bouquet, an orange or blue button. Their fingers moved lightly and as deftly as a woman's, but there was nothing feminine about their physique, and to watch their stern, sallow faces one would not think it possible that they could be so attached to a delicate flower like the jasmine.

I asked for tea, and the waiter brought a bright red variety—very strong and scented with geranium.

We went back to Tunis by train; there was a one-track railway all along the coast, leading to the various villages and beaches of the suburbs; they were filled to overflowing, mainly with greasy, loud-voiced Italians. I had forgotten, until Slimane reminded me of the fact, that Tunisia had always been disputed both by the French and by the Italians, of whom there are practically even numbers in the country—about 100,000 of each. Many of them, he told me, have been expropriated by the French since the end of World War II, and their large farms and properties taken over, but there are still many left. It was just another community to complicate the pattern of this small country, with its 200,000 Europeans, 1,200,000 Arabs, and 1,600,000 Bedouins. Tunisia's coast, however, is very different from those of Algeria and Morocco, for it is dotted with little townships all the way down to the south, and in each town there is a bourgeois élite, politically conscious, staunch upholders of the Nationalists' aspirations. The coast, moreover, is turned towards the east—towards progressive countries like Syria and Lebanon, from whom they have derived much of their modern Islamic culture and with whom they entertain friendly relations. Syria has on more than one occasion raised her voice in favour of the Destour Nationalists, although the French retort that "Tunisia concerns France alone." In contact both with the East and with the West, Tunisia has always, all through her history, been more open to foreign influence than sullen Algeria or proud Morocco.

Professor Ali Belhouane had asked us to stop at his house on the way back, and have coffee with him and his wife. We took a horse and cab for as far as it could penetrate into the

*medina*, and then Slimane conducted me for the rest of the way on foot through the narrow, badly-lit lanes until we reached the Professor's spacious house. Inside, in spite of the Arab architecture, the furniture was of the modern French variety—probably expensive and most certainly vulgar. The light, varnished wood, the bright blue velvet cushions, straight legs and angles were all ugly and soulless. The Professor's young wife advanced to greet us. She was dressed in a Tunisian gown, rather like a Regency style dress, with a high waist and puffed sleeves. She was smoking—rather ostensibly I thought—and she offered me a cigarette. She looked surprised and a little disappointed when I informed her that I did not smoke. Apparently she had never heard of a European woman who did not smoke, and I noticed that she exchanged an astonished look with her husband.

Professor Belhouane, who teaches at the Tunisian College of El Zeitouna, is an ardent patriot and has often been to prison. He is certainly not an advocate of half-measures, and I could easily imagine him indulging in violent action. His eyes blazed when he spoke about the French and their "suppression of Tunisian liberties." But with him too, as with many others, one sensed that the impulsive, effervescent exterior could easily be tempered if only they had confidence. This readiness to respond to sympathy is a potent psychological factor which does not seem to have been considered or sufficiently appreciated. But then the Tunisian or Algerian or Moroccan side of the question has always been exposed (necessarily, owing to the circumstances) through the medium of clandestine meetings or a virulent nationalist Press; it is the bottled-up introvert, either as an individual or as a social group, who is predisposed to excesses. The occupying authorities do not condescend to cross their domestic thresholds, and therefore have no insight into the workings of the "native" mind and heart. The heart, especially, is completely overlooked. The doors might have been opened to them if they had really wanted to, and many grievances could have been smoothed out in a less violent, abstract atmosphere. Now the sand-glass is nearly empty. There is not much time left for a change of heart.

Education—or, rather, the lack of it—in Tunisia, was one of Professor Belhouane's understandably favourite topics. When the Tunisians mention the vast numbers of children who

have no school to go to, the French authorities invariably turn round and say: "But when we arrived, was the situation any better? We have improved it." To which there are at least two answers: One is that the population, when the French appeared on the scene, was much smaller, and, secondly, if we look up our own European records on the numbers of children attending school about the same period, one sees that we were rather backward ourselves (in London, for instance, *circa* 1870, only one-third of the city's children attended school).

The educational problem in North Africa, however, is closely and inevitably linked with the political situation of the country. The French have always insisted upon an inculcation of their own language and culture, and the North Africans have always held back, for fear of losing the last shreds of their personality and heritage. The Tunisians, in spite of their complaints, are better off than the other North African territories, since they have managed to a certain extent to hold on to their own cultural institutions. Before the Protectorate, Tunisians learned their language, Arabic, in the traditional primary schools, or *kouttabs*, then in the *zaouia* and the Zeitouna Mosque; later, a military school and a college where modern languages and science were taught prepared Tunisians for Government office. In 1883, a Directorate of Education was instituted with the object of creating an *école unique*, both for the children of French colonists and for Tunisian children. This, however, had no success with the Tunisians, since French was the compulsory language and Arabic was not taught at all. All the examinations prepared the pupils for French diplomas only. In view of the resistance of the politically minded students returning from foreign universities and the impact of the modern Turkish movement upon the Tunisians, as well as the development of El Zeitouna along modern lines, the French administration decided to introduce the study of Arabic into the *écoles uniques*—this, however, in a measure still considered insufficient by the Tunisians.

Primary education in Tunisia is given at the present time in four kinds of establishments:

First of all, in the old-fashioned *kouttabs*, which are under no special supervision and of which there are about 1,800 in the whole country, attended by about 36,000 children.

Then there are the free, subsidized national schools called "modern Koranic schools," where Arabic and French are taught in varying proportions, and of which there are about fifty, with an attendance of approximately 13,500 children.

Thirdly, the "Franco-Arab schools," where French is taught in the proportion of about two-thirds to one-third Arabic in the curriculum. About 51,000 pupils attend these schools.

Lastly, there are the "French schools" attended by about 44,000 children, with a curriculum identical in all points to those of French schools in France.

Tunisian children who frequent schools of the second, third and fourth categories can only go on to their secondary school education once they have passed the same kind of entrance examination as the French students. This is obviously more difficult for children whose mother-tongue is Arabic.

This underlying principle, that French must be the "first language," inspired the resolution passed in 1944 by the Federation Française Nord-Africaine, according to which: "The Congress is opposed to any plan of reform in which the teaching of Arabic is predominant, because it should always be borne in mind that French is the current language used in Tunisia. The study of Arab literature should not take up too much time, and should only be introduced after two or three years of schooling, since this study is neither profitable nor advisable for young children."

In any case, Muslim children are accepted only in French schools when there are "available vacancies." The net result is that whereas all French children go to school, and 62 per cent. of all foreign children, only 8 per cent. of the Muslim children are catered for in this respect.

In the country areas there are thirty primary boarding schools open to non-Muslims of every nationality, but it has not been possible to open more than one Franco-Arab boarding school (at Ain-Draham) for the children of Muslim workmen and labourers who live far from any town.

The French are always referring to Muslim girls' lack of education and to the difficulty they have in persuading Muslim parents to send their daughters to school. First of all, it must be remembered in this connection that the Tunisians are very loth to send their daughters, future wives and mothers, to schools where foreign, i.e. French, influence is predominant. It was only when the Government decided to reform these

girls schools in 1944 that they really decided to frequent them. Muslims themselves were forbidden to open schools of their own up to 1945. Now one has been opened, and in nine months' time the attendance has risen from fifty to 250 girl pupils.

In Tunisia, the Italian schools taken over by the Government have been reopened for the benefit of Italian children and with the view of imbuing them too with a French education.

"What is our programme?" Professor Belhouane smiled. "Of course, we have a programme—and a realistic one too. Yes; I know that we are often accused by the French of not having any constructive programme—that we are out to destroy and not to build, etc. We are not quite so primitive and primary, I assure you! As regards education, we have submitted a concrete plan. Needless to add that it has not been taken into consideration so far. In a few words, the main ideas are as follows: We realize quite plainly, you see, that the Tunisian Budget has its limitations and that we shall have to plan methodically and progress gradually. Firstly, we suggested a loan for a period of ten years and of which each part would enable us to institute 1,000 new classes a year. Next, the transformation of the *zaouias*, or religious endowments left specifically for the founding of schools, into primary schools after the necessary agreement has been reached with the Habous Administration. We estimate the total of these *zaouias* at about 500. Then the establishment of four teachers' schools at Susa, Sfax, Gabes and the Kef, and the establishment of a training branch at the Zeitouna which could supply an average of 200 to 300 teachers a year. Finally, higher salaries for teachers; they are so badly remunerated at the present time that they are loth to take up the profession. It would be quite feasible to accomplish all this, we are convinced, without being inordinately ambitious or unpractical."

## THE MONCEF BEY AFFAIR AND THE NEW REFORM

AT THAT TIME the political situation in Tunisia seemed to be dominated by the Moncef Bey affair. One heard it discussed and ruminated from all angles by Tunisians and Frenchmen alike. There is no doubt that when Moncef Bey ascended the

Beylical throne in June, 1942, the Tunisians had the highest hopes. The Sovereign had on several occasions given proofs of his sympathy for the Destour Nationalists. As soon as he announced his intention of restricting the excessive rights which the French had arrogated, the two groups of the Destour merged together in one bloc. The line adopted by the Bey was to show intransigence towards the French Residency and at the same time act in such a way as not to compromise himself *vis-à-vis* the Axis Powers. The Bey refused to agree to the Franco-Italian condominium over Tunisia, which was proposed by Reynaud and Daladier (who had hoped at one time that by so doing they would woo Mussolini to the Allied cause). It was after the Allied landing, however, that the Bey's position became extremely delicate. On the eve of the landing, on November 7th, 1942, President Roosevelt sent a telegram to the Bey asking for free passage for his troops through Tunisia. Moncef was hardly in a position to agree to this, since the French troops were by no means under his authority, and his own guard of about 1,000 men, in their antiquated uniforms, could hardly be taken seriously. The Bey sent a guarded reply through the Consul, reaffirming his neutrality and expressing the pious hope that his country and people would be spared from the horrors of war. On the other hand, both Berlin and Rome tried to apply pressure on the Bey, who still maintained his neutral attitude. In the circumstances, it was about the only thing that he could possibly do. The Allies, however, did not see the situation in the same light, and General Giraud, scenting an excellent opportunity of getting rid of a troublesome sovereign, persuaded General Eisenhower that the Bey should be deposed for having collaborated with the Axis. The French also reproached Moncef Bey with having sent Tunisian workmen to Germany. Moncef declared that this was untrue, but Resident-General Esteva was probably not so innocent on this point. It is also said that the Bey decorated several Axis officers in Tunis. "Against my will," said the sovereign, and here again he was no doubt acting under orders from Esteva. However, from his exile in Pau, the sovereign kept in touch with his people and their leaders, and he never missed an opportunity of sending encouraging telegrams all over the Near East—even to Bourguiba himself, in whom he had complete confidence. In Cairo, the Moncef Bey Committee was formed by Abdelaziz

Hussein, Cultural Attaché to the Arab League. A Tunisian White Paper was submitted to the French Minister in Cairo in 1946 bearing the signatures of Sheikh Fadhel ben Achour of the Great Mosque, Salah Farhat, and the Husseinite princes. In the meantime, Moncef's cousin, Si Lamine Bey, who had been forced to succeed him on the throne, dared not venture far from the precincts of the Palace. He was fully aware of his unpopularity.

There is no doubt, from a legal point of view, that France, in deposing the Bey, violated the Bardo Treaty, which expressly stipulates that "the Government of the French Republic will constantly support His Majesty against any danger which might threaten his throne or his dynasty." Lamine Bey, in an interview published by an Algerian newspaper (since the subject is taboo in Tunisia), declared that he would, if the French Government ever requested him to, give up his throne in favour of his exiled cousin. He would probably have been quite pleased to do so, the Tunisians say.

Since then, many things have happened: Moncef Bey died in exile in France on September 1st, 1948, and so, according to Beylical law, his brother, Sidi Lamine, is now his rightful successor. There is every indication that the Bey has taken sides with the Destour Party. Recently, for instance, he strongly opposed the Resident-General's avowed intentions of appointing two French delegates to represent Tunisia in the French Parliament, and the Secretary of the Destour is a frequent visitor at the Bey's palace.

New reforms have been proclaimed—stop-gap measures similar to those being applied in Algeria and Morocco, and with the same results. What do they consist of?

For a year after the Moncef Bey affair, nothing much happened. The Residency, on the one hand, and the Destour, on the other, seemed to be waiting to see who would make the first move. Finally, Resident-General Mast decided to call Salah ben Youssef up to the Residency for an informal exchange of views. Salah immediately repeated the Destour's demands for independence in the name of their absent President, Habib Bourguiba. The Resident retorted that he did not believe this opinion was shared by the majority of the Tunisians. He thought, he said, that the "notables" would have to be approached. (Note the continuity of beliefs shared by the Resident-Generals of all the North African countries: the disbelief in nationalism, the eternal hope in the notable

class, always productive of a good quisling crop.) Salah understood from this suggestion that he could go ahead and call a general meeting. Hence the famous 1946 Congress, which gathered everybody in Tunisia from the top-ranking members of the Destour, professors of the Zeitouna, ex-Ministers of Moncef Bey, to the rank-and-file members, and which resulted, as we have seen, in a high-sounding resolution and in mass arrests before the close of the conference. The entire country protested by organizing strikes and protest meetings. An atmosphere of general discontent prevailed, and Resident-General Mast again tried to avert a storm by persuading the Quai d'Orsay to allow him to announce some reforms. These reforms were announced by the Resident at the end of September, 1946, but they had little effect upon the Tunisians, who had already been promised "reforms" so many times before. The programme was presented to them couched in the familiar language of veiled threats (almost identical terms were used a few months later in Morocco by General Juin when he announced his plan of reforms). The Resident declared that "I am convinced that you will realize that Tunisia must live side by side with a strong and liberal France. . . . The Government was obliged a few days ago to reaffirm its resolve not to allow the limits fixed by Treaty to be surpassed."

At the end of 1946 nothing had happened in the way of reforms, but two unfortunate incidents had still further aggravated the situation. After the stirring Congress of August, 1946, Bey Si Lamine deposed Sheikh M'Rad from his functions (this high religious authority was the father of the energetic Madame Bechira M'Rad, whom I have already alluded to). This caused a number of incidents and demonstrations. Then General Mast was suddenly recalled to Paris. Nobody knew exactly why, but there were scandalous rumours. The effect of his recall just at the time when a programme of reforms was about to be put into effect had a very bad reaction upon public opinion.

The General was replaced at the beginning of 1947 by M. Jean Mons, ex-Cabinet chief of Léon Blum. As soon as he arrived, a delegation of Tunisian municipal councillors, ever optimistic at the arrival of a new Resident-General, submitted a plan, as is their wont, asking for an improvement in the status of the Arab electors and for more elasticity

in the administration generally. About the same time, a severe drought was affecting the country, especially the Southern Territories, for the fourth or fifth year in succession, and famine was again decimating the unfortunate Bedouin population. Habib Bourguiba, from Cairo, launched an intensive campaign in favour of the victims, and Azzam Pasha, Secretary-General of the Arab League, travelling round the Near East, collected funds, the first person to subscribe being King Farouk of Egypt. An Egyptian ship, the *Emira Fawzia*, was chartered by the Egyptian Red Crescent (the equivalent of the Red Cross), and it set sail with a relief mission presided over by the Rector of Cairo University, Mansour Fahmy Pasha, carrying grain and foodstuffs to Tunisia. The French, exasperated by what they thought was a purely political move ("Why can't the Egyptians raise money for their own *fellahin*, who live in such miserable conditions?" they said), prevented the *Emira Fawzia* from entering the Bay of Tunis, and, finally, the cargo had to be dumped at Tripoli. A little while after, Abd el Krim's escape confirmed France's view that Egypt was definitely adopting a hostile attitude and was determined to pose as the great liberator of North Africa and Arab countries generally.

While I was in Tunis, the long-promised reforms were announced all over again, this time by the new Resident-General Mons. All the members of the Destour listened to his speech intently, not hoping for much, but still, nevertheless, hoping. Their patience seemed to be quite inexhaustible.

The reforms dealt principally with the Tunisian Cabinet. Until then the Prime Minister, who was appointed by the Bey, could not choose his own colleagues. These were appointed by the Bey upon the "suggestion" of the Resident-General. From now on, the Prime Minister (whose powers are severely restricted, since he is directly under the control of the Resident) will be able to name his colleagues. Further, more Tunisian Ministers have been invited to participate with the French in the Great Council. So far there were only four Tunisian Ministers: the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Education, of Justice, of Social Affairs. Now there are to be Ministers for Agriculture, for Commerce and Home Industries, for Public Health and Works. The Finance Department, however, is still firmly in the hands of the French.

The man selected by the Residency to be Prime Minister

of Tunisia was a certain Maître Kaak, ex-student of the Sadiki College and the Aix-en-Provence Law Faculty, recently appointed President of the French Bar in Tunisia (a special decree having been promulgated to the effect that henceforth Tunisians are eligible to this high office). Maître Kaak, Salah told me—for he knew him personally—had always been a great friend of the French, and was very “Old Destour” in his opinions. His appointment met with the immediate and general disapproval of the Tunisian people. Their opinion was scrawled in French and in Arabic over the walls of the town, and right under Maître Kaak’s nose in the Dar el Bey Palace, where I went to see him. The appointment, of course, had to be arranged through the Information Department of the French Residency in Tunis, who were not particularly anxious to be helpful in other respects.

The young man who received me at the Residency was suspicious, and some of the things he said to me could even be interpreted as being definitely hostile. I had been to the Statistical Bureau of the Residency to obtain information about the number of schools in Tunisia: the pupils who frequented them, the number of Tunisian and French pupils who passed the Baccalauréat diploma, the number of hospitals and beds, etc. The Statistical Department, five in a small office, were rather vague about figures. They told me that their *Year Book* was in course of publication and that they had no available figures, but they would do their best to extricate some from their original drafts. The results, however, of five people working on identical problems from rather blurred, pencilled drafts, did not always concur, and the *Chef de Bureau* grew more and more impatient with his subordinates. “But it is impossible!” he exclaimed as he scrutinized the figures submitted to him on a scrappy piece of paper by one of his four assistants (the figures related to the number of pupils admitted to the Baccalauréat). “It is impossible, my dear fellow. There are far too many ‘admitted.’ Try again.” When it came to the number of beds in the hospitals, the *Chef* looked a little perturbed. “I don’t want you to take my figures,” he said, “because they don’t tally with those of the Social Service people. No; better ask the Information Department to give you the pamphlet issued by the Social Services and take their figures. I don’t want to be involved in this.”

Maître Kaak was seated moodily at the far end of a very

long office when I called upon him; he looked extremely gloomy and pessimistic. I spoke with him for half an hour. He was an interesting and versatile person to talk to, for, apart from his political and legal activities, he was also interested in Tunisian music and is the President of a well-known musical society. He had known the Baron d'Erlanger, author of one of the standard works on Arab music. Maître Kaak was, however, Europeanized; tall, lean and sallow, his narrow grey eyes, crumpled between wrinkles, were both observant and crafty. He did not want to dwell on the political situation. Things were difficult and delicate, he admitted. His own position seemed rather precarious.

"You have formed a ministry under the Resident. Does that mean you agree to join the French Union?" I asked him.

Maître Kaak denied this emphatically. "No, no," he said. "That would not be possible, anyway, without a referendum. There would have to be general elections."

"And your relations with the Nationalists—what are they?"

He looked at me uneasily. "Ah! So you are *au courant*, I see. Well, of course, we have the same ultimate objective: independence for Tunisia. We both agree on that. But I believe we still have a long way to go. We still have a long apprenticeship in statesmanship to go through before we are able to take the reins for ourselves. This is a small country, you know. We are placed in a difficult position."

"Yes," I agreed. "You are a small country, but you are surrounded by other countries, by other Arab states which form a belt round the Mediterranean, and should another Power intervene——"

For the first time, Maître Kaak smiled. "Ah, that is the all-important phrase, Mademoiselle," he said. "If another Power were to intervene. . . . But, in the meantime, we must go slowly and carefully. We are not strong. We lack the means."

"Well," said Salah later, "Kaak has realized his ambition. He has worked for it, I must say. There he is now, Prime Minister of Tunisia. But for how long? Nobody supports him!" Even the Bey soon after, following the example set by the Sultan of Morocco, refused to sign the decrees presented to him by Kaak for his signature, and he even went as far as to complain that the latest reforms do not go far enough—an unheard of audacity on the part of the usually silent, placid Si Lamine.

And then there was a spot of trouble with the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, or U.G.T.T., founded by Fadhel ben Achour of the Zeitouna, and directed by Ferhat Hached.

Tunisia is the one country in North Africa which can boast of an Arab trade union. Again one asks: For how long? Because the French authorities frown upon it and suspect it—quite accurately, of course—of pro-Nationalist sympathies. I went to see Ferhat Hached and was impressed by his undoubted qualities of leadership—his sincerity, his broad outlook. Hached is in his early thirties; fair, blue-eyed, square-jawed, with shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, for he too was dressed *à l'Européen*; and he spoke fluent French. He was obviously accustomed to talking to large crowds of people—simple people—and his forthright, direct language had a virile tang of common sense about it that one does not always find in other more political leaders. He told me that his union grouped at least 80,000 members; that he had tried to become affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions, but that the French Confédération du Travail had constantly opposed this move. There were, he said, three rivals to his organization in Tunisia: the C.G.T., the C.F.T.C. and the U.S.T.T., whose total membership does not amount to a quarter of the Nationalist U.G.T.T. Even at that time, however, he was afraid that trouble was in store for them. Nor was he wrong. Only a few weeks after our interview, trouble broke out at Sfax. Negotiations had been going on between the various trade unions and the Residency on the minimum monthly wage for workers: the U.G.T.T. asked for a minimum of 5,300 francs; the Residency decided on 4,800 francs, whereupon the U.G.T.T. declared a general strike. The French immediately requisitioned the private railway line of Sfax-Gafsa which leads to the phosphate mines. Motorized Spahis were sent out to occupy the station of Sfax. The French Press reported that as the motorized units appeared they were “attacked by hand grenades and bottles hurled at them by the strikers, so that the Spahis had, of course, to reply.” The reprisals resulted in twenty-six people killed and 150 wounded, according to the official statistics. The French explained the lack of any losses on the French side by the fact that the strikers had used hand grenades left behind by the Italians during the war, and that most of them did not explode. The explanation seems a little too simple, and the pretext too

obvious. Openly accused of "political manœuvres which have nothing whatsoever to do with workers' claims," the U.G.T.T.'s days are indeed numbered.

Before leaving for the south, I forsook my Tunisian companions one evening to wander round alone in the European quarter of Tunis with its many cafés, blaring radios, noisy tramcars. Sitting alone on the terrace, one was constantly molested by the "civilized Europeans." I took refuge in a small restaurant. Opposite me sat a French Tunisian, a business-man who had lived in the country all his life. I soon heard all about his private affairs and opinions. He took me to be a French journalist, and I did not contradict him. Had he known I was British, of course, he would obviously not have been so outspoken. He complained bitterly about most things: the Government's policy with regard to Tunisia as a whole, the Residency, the Tunisians. Bah! The Government in Paris knew nothing about the country; if they did, they would act differently. There was no policy, he said, or, worse still, it was constantly being modified. Nobody knew where they were. One day they decide to be firm; the next day they give in. "We French Tunisians do not feel protected out here," he complained, "yet we alone have made the country what it is. But do you think we are given any encouragement? Why, not at all! And then these Residents they send out. . . . Take General Mast, for instance. Spent his entire time dabbling in the Black Market. Why, planes left every day for Paris full of tomatoes and foodstuffs which were sold on his behalf in France. His wife was just as bad, worse even, because—" And here he indulged in some petty scandal-mongering. "No wonder they have been able to buy themselves a château in Paris on the proceeds. But what do you expect? All that leaves a bad impression on people—not least on the Tunisians, who are always ready to jump at our throats, the ungrateful wretches!"

"What about the Nationalists, the Destour," I enquired innocently. "Are they strong?"

The business-man looked round furtively before replying to my question in lowered tones: "Yes, Mademoiselle; indeed they are strong—*ils sont très forts*. But we are not afraid"—his attitude did not seem to be particularly valiant, however—"because, you see, *we* have the arms. That is the important point. So long as we have the arms, everything is all right. With force on our side, they can do nothing."

## THE LAND WHERE IT NEVER RAINS

SLIMANE CALLED FOR ME early the next morning. The once-daily train to Susa left Tunis at 5 a.m. We each carried a small suitcase, filled with the strict minimum of necessities: a change of shoes was perhaps the most important item, as we were soon to discover, for the corroding sun and infiltrating sands split and tore and burned mercilessly through cloth and leather. Many were the pairs of sandals we were to leave behind us rotting in the desert!

We would call on some "friends," i.e. Party people, at Susa, Slimane explained, and they would help us to get inland to the Bedouin country and to the famine areas.

From the train, hour after hour, we passed olive groves and vines: chiefly olive groves, and the further south we journeyed, the more wrinkled and withered their silvery green leaves became, the more twisted and gnarled their venerable trunks, for we were approaching the dry lands of the south, where for the last four years it had not rained.

At Susa, we met a lawyer "friend," who escorted us to a chemist's—another "friend"—and the two of them together took us round the town to see the free soup distribution among the Bedouins who had in desperation come to town, and to an orphanage kept by an old Muslim lady who had lost her only son. "Since Allah had called back my boy," she said, "I took it as a sign that He wanted me to devote my attention to those who have no parents to look after them." The orphan boys, about fifty in all, looked clean and well-fed. The old lady had sold her private property and built a modern home, with spacious dormitories, a large refectory, bathrooms and a recreation ground, with the proceeds. She stood, with her kindly brown face aglow and her ample, motherly form swathed in black crêpe, beside her adopted children to be photographed. Modestly, she remained in the background. She spoke softly, in her own tongue, and was pleased that a European had called to see the children.

Our lawyer friend took us to lunch by the sea after we had inspected several blocks of new flats built for the French people who had been blitzed out of their homes during the war. Further away, on the dunes, beside refuse heaps and among the pungent fumes of a sardine-canning factory,

several rows of minute prefabs., Arab model, had been built for the Tunisian air-raid victims. I walked into one of them alone. The women were squatting in the little *patio* peeling vegetables and pounding them with a primitive pestle and mortar. They looked up and smiled at me and we nodded greetings to each other. I asked them, in gesture-language, if they objected to my photographing them (in case they had some prejudice I did not know of), but they laughed, revealing their pearly white teeth, indicating assent.

We saw the local trade union people, of the U.G.T.T., and the little office where the Destour section met. The lawyer, who was only about thirty-five, was quite white at the temples. When I commented on the fact to Slimane, he whispered back that the lawyer had only recently returned from a period of five years' hard labour in the south, for he was an active Nationalist. He was not being molested by the police for the time being, however, and he had reopened his practice. Some of the local Destourians were going south to-morrow, he told us, to distribute a carload of free bales of cloth among the Bedouins of Kasserine, a little market-town in the steppes. We could catch the early afternoon bus from Susa and get there via Kairouan. No doubt, more "friends" at Kairouan would provide a car of some kind once we got there, to take us to Kasserine.

After lunch, we strolled down by the seashore, where a few nomads had pitched their tents. They had wandered from the steppes of the interior, miles away, and now they were stopped by the waves of the sea lapping at their feet as they crouched, immobile outside their tents, gazing into the distance. A low chanting came from the first tent, where the figure of a man rocked backwards and forwards despairingly. He was a very old man, and he sat huddled up outside a mangy goatskin tent, clutching an ancient lute that, like its master, had seen better days. The hot wind was blowing large gritty particles of sand inside the tent, over the bundle of rags in the corner, on the long-necked earthenware jar that contained the old man's precious water ration for the day until a compassionate neighbour called at sunset to refill it. For he was blind and alone.

He was singing to himself as we approached the dusty road by the sea—the long, long road that stretches down the Tunisian coast, from the biscuit-coloured ramparts of Sfax to the luxurious green oases of the south, where the palm trees

exhale a perfumed freshness for the benefit of sun-weary travellers. "What is it he is chanting?" I asked the lawyer, who knew and loved the Bedouin tribes that were camping in the neighbourhood.

He stopped and listened for a while as the old man went on improvising, unconcernedly plucking at his plaintive lute.

"To-day, the old sorrow has returned," he sang. "The old sorrow that I thought had left me. Gone with the hungry ones into the desert. But the old sorrow has found me again; it enters my heart like a warrior storming a citadel. It has climbed into the towers and fettered all my thoughts, until I am bowed down in pain. The old sorrow speaks into my ear, and tells me of my dear ones that cannot find the corn or the green maize, of them that die by the roadside, forgotten, of those whose bones fly with the desert winds, as far as the holy City, Kairouan—the most Holy Kairouan."

His voice trailed off and he stopped suddenly and raised his head. For the first time, he seemed aware of our presence. "It is only I, Hadji," said the lawyer soothingly.

"There is a stranger with you," said the old man, placidly. "Has she been to Kairouan?" The old poet, full of the woes of his brethren, the semi-nomadic Bedouins, was particularly anxious that the "stranger," as he called me, should see the plight of "those who had not found the corn or the green maize."

The old man, I was told, was one of the few surviving Bedouin troubadours who improvise lengthy epics on topical subjects. I asked my friends whether anybody had taken sufficient interest in his work to transcribe it, but they thought not. "The age of poetry is over," they said, a trifle sadly. "The Bedouins are too preoccupied with finding their daily bread to think of songs and poetry."

There are over 1,000,000 Bedouins in Tunisia, about one-third of the entire population, although nobody knows exactly how many there are. It is difficult to take a census. The optimistic Bureau of Statistics in Tunis sent out a questionnaire at the beginning of the year to find out just how many nomads there are. One of the questions on the list was: "Do you live under a tent?" The response, however, was negligible. The Bedouins do not understand questionnaires.

How is it, I enquired, that these hardy people should be reduced to such a pitiable state? The immediate answer is:



*(Photo: J. Belin)*

The Sultan of Morocco, H.M. Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef



*[Photo: J. Belin*

MOROCCO  
View of Fez



*(Photo: J. Belin)*

MOROCCO  
Berber women of the interior



*(Photo: J. Belin)*

MOROCCO  
A Moroccan lady goes shopping in the *souks*



*[Photo J. Belin*

MOROCCO

Southern Morocco: typical scene



*{Photo: Selim Youssif, Cairo}*

Si Allal el Fassi, leader of the Moroccan Istiqlal (Nationalist) Party



MOROCCO  
A fountain in Fez



Fez, Morocco



MOROCCO

A Berber fantasia



MOROCCO  
A street in Sallee



MOROCCO



A Berber *ahidous*

PLATE I, P. 1



TUNISIA

Hammamet, near Tunis



*Photo: Shelbourne Studios, New York*

TUNISIA

Habib Bourguiba, leader of the Tunisian Destour (Nationalist) Party



MOROCCO  
*The souks of Fez*



*Photo: J. Belin*

MOROCCO

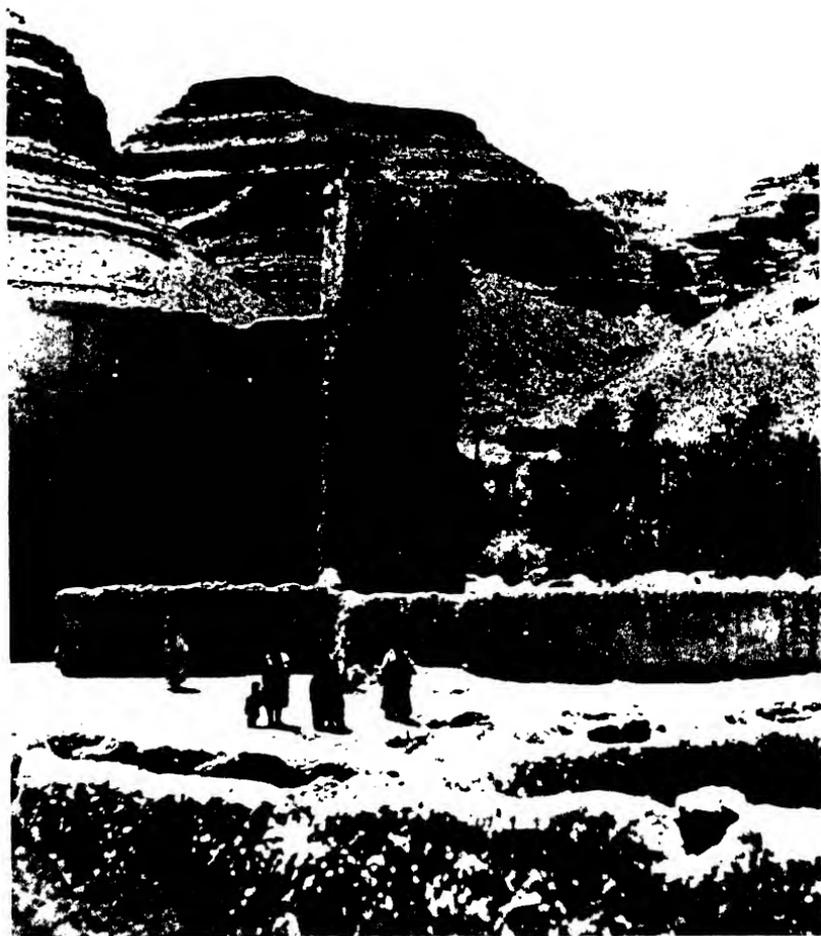
The Tanners' quarter of Fez



*Photo: J. Belin*

MOROCCO

H.M. Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, Sultan of Morocco, followed by the Imperial Parasol and the Imperial Black Guard, at the ceremony



*Photo: J. Belin*

A typical corner of southern Morocco



MOROCCO

One of the author's Moorish friends



In Tin-can Town: a Berber woman and her baby son



*(Photo: J. Belin)*

MOROCCO  
A Berber dance

four or five years of consecutive drought that has made barren wastes of the great steppes that extend over central and southern Tunisia. But some of these Bedouins used to possess property of their own—little fields and plots which they cultivated in their own way, but which assured them at least of a stable living. Now the drought has reduced them to tatters. They wander in ragged groups, on mangy camels, towards the more fertile plains of the north, but these are now owned by progressive modern farmers—mostly French, who have not got enough work for so many unskilled labourers.

Most of the grazing grounds, reserved for the nomads by religious grants, called *habous*, have been absorbed by these modern farmers. "The solution of the problem," the French colonists told me, "depends on an overall hydraulic and economic plan for the country. This means capital and equipment, and so far we lack both. The fact of the matter is that the whole land question has been grossly mismanaged from the start, and a short-term policy followed which, by depriving thousands of Tunisians of their livelihood, has resulted in a complete disruption of Tunisian economy, as was foreseen by the more enlightened and disinterested French economists in Tunisia before the beginning of the century."

When the French arrived in Tunisia in 1881, they found the land administered according to Muslim law. The Regency was composed of various categories of estates, labelled "private estates of the Tunisian State" or "*habous* legacies," administered by a special Tunisian department, and the "collective domains." It took all the juridical skill of the French experts to wrest the lands progressively from the Tunisians, aided and abetted, it must be admitted, by the weakness of the Beylical government and the venality of many high-ranking Tunisian officials.

In 1881, the "private domains of the State" extended over 350,000 hectares in different parts of the country. These lands had belonged either to defeated tribes or to princes who had incurred disgrace at Court and whose property had been confiscated. These lands were subsequently rented out at low prices on a permanent or temporary basis and, in the centre, they were used as grazing grounds by the nomadic tribes. This was the case, in particular, of the vast Sialine domain, which extended over 200,000 hectares, and which the Bey Sadok started to sell off in the year 1871. These were

ultimately sold off in portions to colonists at the price of 10 francs per hectare, in virtue of the decrees dated February 8th, 1892, April, 1905, and June 18th, 1918. Most of the buyers were connected with the French administration; they included MM. Boucher (Senator), Cechery (ex-Minister), Mougeto (Senator), etc. These lands have now been cultivated and have brought a considerable amount of prosperity to the region of Sfax. The association of "French capital and native labour" advocated by P. Bourde, one-time Director of Agriculture in Tunisia, has brought wealth, chiefly to the French colonists, since 100 of them have obtained 113,000 hectares of land, whereas the Tunisians have managed to hold on to 33,000 hectares, divided up into an infinitesimal number of small portions. The management of the "private State domains" was entrusted to the Direction of Agriculture and Colonization, who sold off (as from January 13th, 1898) large portions of land which were bought up by the colonists on very favourable terms, i.e. half of the cost to be paid in cash, and the remainder, without interest, three years later.

Once the State domains had been exhausted, another portion of the country was bracketed with the State domains. These were called the "Forest Areas," and were composed mainly of uncultivated or bushy ground from which the occupants were driven away. In the north, 70,000 hectares of Forest Areas were soon placed in the category of State domains and handed over to the colonial settlers. In 1938, they amounted to over 992,486 hectares. By this means, thousands of people were turned out of their homes and domains.

Next, the inalienable *habous* lands had to be brought in somehow by circumventing Muslim law. This took a little longer, because the French authorities hesitated before taking a step which was bound to offend Tunisian religious feelings. They had already tackled the problem more directly in Algeria, and had aroused considerable indignation among the natives. On the other hand, there was the danger of confining the pastoral nomads to the dry Southern Territories and preventing them from coming up to graze in the more humid regions of the north. In the end, however, all these scruples were overruled. The first step was taken by the decree of May 23rd, 1888, completed by the decree of January 22nd, 1905, which allowed colonists to obtain *habous* lands

by using the *enzel* method, by which the land was *rented*, but, finally, the *enzel* rent was declared redeemable in twenty annuities. It was also possible to exchange *habous* land against a piece of property of the same value, either in kind or in money. The administration of the *habous* was officially requested on November 13th, 1898, to place the public *habous* lands at the disposal of the Direction of Agriculture, "so as to facilitate the colonization and peopling of the Regency." This was an unequivocal admission of official French agrarian policy in Tunisia. Since then the *habous* administration drafts an annual list of portions of land which are affected to the State domains, and from there they pass into the hands of the colonists. Private *habous* lands were also expropriated little by little, and altogether a further 36,000 hectares were added to the State domains up to 1938, whereas private colonization obtained, by means of the *enzel* method or by exchange, a further 150,000 hectares.

One last source remained: the thousands of hectares, chiefly confined to the Southern Territories, called "collective lands," which belonged to tribes, or fractions of tribes or families, whose demarcation, unfortunately for them, was not very strictly defined. They too were used as grazing grounds for the tribes; indeed, the whole rather vague structure of Tunisia had been originally designed to accommodate a rural population which was nearly always on the move, and obliged to be, because of the irregular rainfall and their nomadic way of life. Little by little, the jurists of the Protectorate issued decrees designed to bring these territories into the State domains. First, by a decree dated January 14th, 1901, they affirmed "the Tunisian State's imprescriptible rights over the whole of the collective territories." On January 1st, 1907, a Commission composed of ten civil servants was instituted, four of whom were Tunisians, whose terms of reference were to define the conditions in which these collective territories were inherited, transmitted from one person to another or between tribes. In the words of a Tunisian official of the time: "We have been publicly spoliated. We have been betrayed. We have had our hands forced. We have had to consent, for what else could we do? The Government is the master. We were afraid, and so we obeyed. And then—at least, so we were given to understand—we had only to give up a strip of land, 1 kilometre to the north and 1 kilometre to the south of the

new railway line, but instead they have taken from us an immense tract of land which extends in some points as far as 10 kilometres on either side of the track. Every day we are invaded a little further, and on territories which are indispensable to us, and for which we have received no indemnity. Now we are even obliged to pay them grazing rights! Our tribe, whose numbers are constantly increasing, is obliged to fight desperately for its livelihood."

The Frachiches, the Madjeures, the Zlass and Soussis—tribes from the alfa-producing regions—were all dispossessed in the same way. When the Caid Hammama questioned the people under his administration as to how they had acquired their lands, they replied innocently: "When we first opened our eyes, this is the land we saw. We saw our parents possess it as their parents had before them. What more can we say?" (This is quoted from the Dumas Report, prepared by the Commission of Inquiry.)

As a result, masses of people left the rural districts to encumber the urban centres, while thousands more were condemned to live a life of permanent, precarious nomadism.

A few years later the official Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission of Economic Studies "recommended that further areas be added to the State domains." "It is necessary," he wrote, "that the departments interested should concert their efforts so as to incorporate into the State domains all unclaimed territories that the demarcation procedure laid down by recent texts allow us to add to the private domains of the Regency. These include all the territories which still do not belong to the State and which could be taken over, or those territories which have a legal status, such as the forests, *habous*, collective lands, and those which can be legally converted." This "legal conversion" brought in vast areas of land, which were ultimately sold to the colonists. A "Direction of domains and of colonization" dealt with the allocation of the 50,000 hectares bought over each year, which were sold on very favourable terms to the French settlers. The equipment for this land was subsidized by the State, and important loans (20,000,000 francs' worth in 1920) contributed to "official colonization." Some of these domains were redeemable in twenty years only. In spite of all this assistance, however, the French did not respond too readily. It was mainly for them, however, that roads and railways were built, and schools and public

buildings. There are only about 5,000 French colonists in Tunisia, but the extent of their domains is quite out of proportion to this number. The Tunisians exploit about 1,000,000 hectares of land, against the Europeans' 3,000,000 hectares. Land in Tunisia, according to the 1938 figures, is divided up as follows:

|  | <i>Per cent.</i> | <i>Hectares</i> |
|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Arable land . . . . .                              | 32·6             | 2,934,000       |
| Prairies and pastures . . . . .                    | 1·1              | 100,000         |
| Arboriculture . . . . .                            | 4·4              | 630,000         |
| Grazing grounds and uncultivated<br>land . . . . . | 50·5             | 4,320,000       |
| Woods and forests . . . . .                        | 11·28            | 1,016,000       |

Eight-tenths of the grazing grounds are untransferable lands on which live thousands of natives who, when drought comes, are absolutely helpless.

The result of this officially adopted agrarian policy has been disastrous. A whole population, deprived of their means of livelihood, is threatened by slow extinction from lack of food. Dr. Burnet, reporting in 1939 on the food situation in Tunisia, wrote: "Is it correct to say, as many do, that the Tunisian population, and in particular the country people, are used to these low rations? We can only say from personal experience that this is by no means true. Under-nourishment is found in 40 per cent. of all families." Nowadays, the percentage must have gone up by leaps and bounds.

Those who are rich enough to have artesian wells bored in their grounds have perfect replicas of the Garden of Eden flowering round their houses, full of melons, tomatoes, and fruits of all kinds. Those who are rich enough: that is to say, the French Civil Controllers and the local *Caids* appointed by them from among the most docile and obedient elements. They, in turn, exercise an oppressive and tyrannical rule over their countrymen, collecting bribes as quickly as they can, fear and greed being the dominating impulses in their lives.

In every town and in every village we passed, from one end of Tunisia to the other, two buildings stood out, overshadowing all the rest, two symbols of the ruling power: one was the Police Court and the other the Public Works offices. In the centre of a crowded city or the space of a desert homestead, there they stood, side by side, proudly bearing the *tricolor* of

France, white, trim, complacent. The Public Works buildings were sometimes almost amusingly self-important, situated as they were miles from any dam or constructional work of any kind. The overstuffed Police Courts were more sinister. Public works absorb considerable sums of money. They lend themselves to many speculations or, more vulgarly, to many a "combine." "Many important fingers dabble in Public Works' pies," as a French resident whispered knowingly to me. There was that curious affair of the dam at XX, for instance, which had to be repaired three times at enormous cost in the space of only two years. It was said by people in the know that these repairs had been, to say the least, superfluous.

Outside the thick walls of Kairouan, a long row of ragged bundles and water-jars marked the reserved spots in the soup-queue. It reminded one of the pathetic bundles outside the London Underground stations during the blitz. It was early in the morning and the soup-distribution did not start until 1 p.m., but there were so many to serve. We walked around the inner circle, where volunteers were busy preparing the soup, lighting the fire, filling large, dirty-looking cans with the various ingredients that went into the making of the soup: chick peas, oil, beans, potatoes, and the inevitable spices that convert an ordinary vegetable soup into a North African soup.

A few miles out of Kairouan, in the little market town of Kasserine, the Tunisian Destour party members had arranged to give out some cloth to the enforced nudists. It was a great event. We followed them in their rusty Ford, bumping along the narrow, dusty tracks, past the Roman ruins of Sbiedla and the village of Hedjab, where Roman stones and friezes adorn some of the Arab houses. We alighted and were taken to see the rivulet that makes the gardens fertile, and a peasant gave us some large, fleshy figs. They do not often see strangers in Hedjab, but they like to hear all about what is happening in the outside world.

An hour later, the sun was beating down in the market square of Kasserine, where hundreds of emaciated Bedouins were patiently waiting. They were not very pleased to see me taking photographs of them, for they were afraid of being laughed at. They are a proud people, not used to receiving charity, and it hurts them to be reduced to such a state of servitude and helplessness.

The bales of cloth were cut into pieces and carefully laid upon a table in a small white-washed outhouse. Then, one by one, the Bedouin women, with their children hanging on to their skirts, came up to receive their share. They looked lovingly at the new piece of cloth, a whole piece big enough to wrap round their bodies and make a *foutah*. It was coarse cloth, and probably would not last long in the summer sun and the winter rains, but at least it was new and clean and there were no holes in it.

Several of the older women came up to me and held out their rags sorrowfully for my inspection. "Look," they said, "look how we are clad. Cannot something be done for us?" They took me to be some important official. Only one woman complained bitterly; the others implored; some kissed my hand, and tears ran down their cheeks. The men stood aloof and maintained a dignified attitude, while the children smiled shyly and touched my skirt wonderingly.

Later, at lunchtime, we watched them queuing up for the free soup. We saw the children go first and raise their little hands for the heavy plate. With tiny, faltering steps, they toddled off to some shady corner, and carefully sat down, cross-legged, slowly, so as not to spill a drop of the meagre daily soup ration. They did not start eating the soup too quickly, however; they looked at it for a few seconds, first thoughtfully, and gently dipped their wooden spoons into the mass, peering at the chick peas, which were extricated with gusto by little hooked fingers and eaten slowly, one by one.

I noticed a child of about eight leave his plate of soup to help a toddler of three or four, who found his plate too hot and was sobbing bitterly, afraid that it would slip from his hands on to the stone floor. The elder child took his plate for him and put it down beside his own, and found him a little piece of dry bread.

As I watched the never-ending stream of Bedouins and the sad-faced men ladling out the plates of soup, one of the members of the *Destour* came up to me. "Free soup is not a solution," he said. "And even this will have to be stopped soon, for we have hardly any funds left. If they hadn't been such a resistant people, they would have died long ago."

A resistant people, a brave people—and a gentle people, too. The despairing gesture of the woman who held out her rags, the anxious look of the mother whose fifteen-month-old

baby was crippled with rickets, the helping hand of the little child, the deep wrinkles furrowing the scaly brows of the two- and three-year-olds were outward expressions of a suffering so intense, so deep-seated, that, looking at them and through them, one transcended time and space to reach a face-to-face realization of suffering pure and simple—the very fount, as it were, of suffering humanity itself. It petrified one, it numbed the senses, this saturation-point of despair.

## FROM KAIROUAN TO THE PHOSPHATE MINES

THE SUSA-KAIROUAN BUS jerked along the dusty tracks of the great plain in the centre of which stands the holy city of Kairouan. The sky was overcast, the atmosphere as heavy as lead. There was no horizon, but from time to time we thought we could discern the fanciful, distant figures of a mirage, suspended from the sky, as if Nature, bored with the monotony of her own desert creation, had superimposed a pantomime of her own setting on to the never-ending landscape of sandy plain. Occasionally, a haughty Bedouin astride a lean camel passed by and looked down upon us with a superb disdain. More often, we passed small groups of Bedouins on foot—whole families walking between two unknown poles, miles from anywhere. There were overturned tanks, too, rusting by the tracks, crumpled up into devilish, distorted shapes, reminders of the latest war, and pieces of twisted barbed wire blown hither and thither by the desert winds. We passed dried river-beds with their thin covering of lichens, just big enough to have a discernible green colour, like some far-off vegetation spied on Mars. These rivers disappear into salt lakes, or *chotts* as they are called—that is, when they flow—and in the autumn they are subject to sudden floods, turning the plain into a sea of mud. And then, in the distance, we saw the battlemented brick wall, flanked with buttresses and round towers, of Kairouan the Holy. Above the walls and well behind them, the slender silhouette of minarets—countless minarets, alive with a thousand welcoming lights in the gathering darkness, as is the custom during Ramadan. The lights of a minaret against the curved shadows of palm trees

behind a crenellated wall set in a limitless expanse of desert, and the distant chant of the *muezzin*: that was grandeur indeed, and as we approached Kairouan a sudden tremor seized us, that exquisite combination of physical and mental excitement which precludes the attainment of a long-desired objective, that rare period during which the unfulfilled imagination sends the blood tingling through one's veins with an agonizing pleasure-pain of anticipation.

Leaning forward on our narrow seats, we gazed speechless and awed, as the high walls drew nearer and the white mounds of the outlying cemeteries humped the stony ground. The moon shed a spectral light on the domed *marabouts'* sanctuaries, and we could hear the sound of voices on the other side of the wall.

So this was the town built in A.D. 670 by Sidi Okba, Commander of the Prophet, to give his troops a base of operations and to keep an eye on the Bedouin tribes around, whose mosque, one of the largest in the whole of North Africa, contained materials from ancient Carthage. This is the town which reached the zenith of its prosperity under the Aghlabids; and here it was that the Ambassadors of Charlemagne were received at the Castle of the Moat just outside the town. This was the centre of learning, of science, the home of celebrated professors, such as Asad al Furat, of the Ibn Rashid school of medicine founded by the Jew Ishak Imran, physician to Zidayat Allah II. This was the town, surrounded by cultivated lands and orchards, of which wrote the old historians and which was destroyed by those Vandals of the East, the Hilali Arabs, in 1057. As our bus passed noisily into the town, and we eagerly craned our necks forward, the inevitable police station, followed by a cubistic Public Works building, brought us back to twentieth-century reality and we leaned back with a sigh. The enchantment had suddenly subsided.

Slimane and I had planned to leave almost immediately for the south, as we were behind schedule, but lack of transport delayed us. It was no hardship, however, to be delayed in the holy city, with its beautiful mosques, which Christians are exceptionally allowed to visit. One was supposed to obtain permission for this from the French Civil Controller, but a few words in Arabic whispered into the guardians' ear by Slimane opened most doors. A local watchmaker, a staunch Party man, was our guide. He was waiting for one of the Destour cars to come back from some mission or the other

before lending it to us. In the meantime, he took us to the edge of the immense cisterns built hundreds of years ago during the Aghlabite Dynasty, since fallen into disuse. And he showed us the parched earth stretching for miles around, with bony camels and Bedouins peopling the landscape. We saw the one small, overcrowded hospital, and we tripped barefoot over exquisite carpets in a moonlit mosque where shadowy figures chanted the Koran and lamps burned among the heavy, embroidered draperies of Sidi Okba's tomb. The wooden ceilings in compartments are a mixture of Byzantine and Oriental, and the plaster arabesques of Hispano-Moorish inspiration. There is a chapel, too, dedicated to an Indian Muslim prince whose name seems to have been forgotten. Outside, the beggars ran after us for alms; a cat, too weak to stand, looked at us with glazed eyes and toppled over after a supreme effort; I wondered, as I passed by, how long it would take for the small, shrivelled body to disintegrate, and I thought of all the people who had lain down to die in these plains of famine, forgotten, as the old poet had lamented, with no tomb to mark the spot where life had left them.

They told us, when we returned to the hotel, that the police had been making enquiries about us. Our watchmaker had also noticed police informers following us, but he had not mentioned it before.

We met a student that night at a friend's house, who had just returned from Paris for his vacation. He was studying to become a printer and was very pompous with Slimane, who listened politely while the student explained how he was going to revolutionize the publishing business in Tunisia when he had finished his studies. He was full of scorn for the "backwardness of the Tunisians," and extremely bored with Kairouan, where "there was nothing to do and no girls to go out with, no dancing, no swimming, and rotten old films at the local flicks." His hair was carefully oiled, and he was immaculately dressed in perhaps a rather too loud European sports jacket. I noticed Slimane looking down at his own blue sailcloth trousers a little ruefully, but, in spite of considerable provocation on the part of the modern student from Paris, he kept his temper smooth and unruffled. I also remarked that he refrained from alluding to the Destour and its activities in the student's presence.

When the party vehicle—it would hardly be called a car—

arrived at long last, panting from its last journey, our watchmaker friend, who complained that business was slack and that he had nothing to do, accompanied us most of the way to the phosphate mines of Matlaoui. Our vehicle broke down halfway to Gafsa, and we hitch-hiked on a lorry, with the temperature at boiling point and the sirocco bending the palm trees in two. Here we were confined to the railway station hotel for a whole day. A young Tunisian doctor paid us a visit there and surreptitiously ate a few figs in the seclusion of our rooms; for it was still Ramadan, and if any of his people had caught him in the act of eating, his life wouldn't be worth living any more, he told us, as he devoured the figs. He thought Slimane was very fortunate to be travelling "on business," and therefore not obliged to keep to the fast. He, too, had recent memories of Paris. They emerged from his pocket in the shape of two mauve and faintly perfumed letters. As for Gafsa, "Well, it might be picturesque and all that, and the oasis was magnificent, but it palled after a very short while," he confided to us. Life was just a cat-and-mouse game, anyway, with the authorities. Married? Oh yes; he had made that big mistake—just because he had nothing else to do and his parents had insisted. His wife was quite a charming girl, but he couldn't talk to her about the subjects he was interested in. She just wasn't educated enough to understand, and it was too late for him to try to educate her, he said in reply to Slimane's suggestion. Hence, he explained, the necessity for consolation and the mauve, perfumed letters. The auto-rail, we were informed, had been derailed by the sandstorm, so we would have to wait until the morning before pushing on to Matlaoui.

The sirocco was still sweeping across the plain as we stepped out at Matlaoui—or Philippe Thomas, as the tiny station had been re-baptized in honour of the French scientist who had discovered the adjacent phosphate mines for the enrichment of his countrymen. He himself remained more or less permanently impecunious, although the State decided belatedly to grant him an allowance—just about a year before he died. It was a desolate place: a station, a square with a brand new statue of M. Philippe Thomas in the centre, and a café. There was no ice, no meat; the hotelkeeper could only produce fried eggplant and beans and small, sour grapes. "This is the back of beyond," he explained unnecessarily.

The mines were situated at about 2 kilometres from the "town." There was no transport, so we walked in the glare of the sun. Even Slimane complained of the heat, and we congratulated each other on our mutual qualities of endurance. On one side of the railway track which led to the mines lay the European quarter, reserved for the company directors, supervisors, etc., with neat little villas surrounded by pleasant gardens and a canteen for the Europeans. On the other side of the track were innumerable mounds of earth under which the Arab workers ate and slept and procreated. The children ran about half-wild, in rags. There wasn't enough room for them all in the school. There were douches—paying douches—for the Arabs, but they cannot afford to use them. There was no canteen. I noticed a little office marked "U.G.T.T." where some of Ferhat Hached's recruits were fighting for a little justice. I stood on a hillock, and surveyed the bleak landscape: stones, mud walls, rags and refuse.

"Would you mind stepping down?" asked the U.G.T.T. man politely. "You are standing on the roof of a house, and the stones are falling on to the people's heads below."

"I think," ventured Slimane timidly, looking up at me, "that this is what they call 'sweated labour.'"

## THE *CHECHIAS* OF SFAX

THERE WAS NO TRANSPORT from Kasserine, we were told, but a lorry was due to pass there in the late afternoon, bound for Feriana. If we cared to hitch-hike, no doubt they would be willing to take us, they said. Feriana had the advantage of possessing an hotel. In Kasserine there was nothing. It was just a square of white, rather dilapidated buildings, with the usual police station (no Public Works this time), and a café where the beer was cool. All around us was just plain desert. A monotonous landscape. I remembered how the General at Fez had remarked, when I told him how anxious I was to see the desert: "It's all right for about a quarter of an hour. After that, it begins to pall." In the middle of August, with no shelter from the sun, I began to realize that his remark had been an understatement. Some of the

Destour people offered to take us back for lunch to their little farm about half a mile from Kasserine. We could go on horseback, they said.

The local Sheikh had started out by inviting us into his spacious office and asking us to partake of the mint tea of friendship when we arrived. That was before he had noticed us talking to the Destour people. When he saw me taking photographs of the Bedouins, he began to grow really suspicious. A *faux pas* like this, offering hospitality to a pro-Destour foreigner, could cost him his job if the French authorities were to find out about it. He decided to ignore us from then on, and looked through us as if we had been invisible. The mint tea, however, had already been prepared, but the Sheikh locked his office door with the aid of an enormous mediæval-looking key and stalked out. We were then handed the glasses of mint tea in a back room which was used as a post office. Obviously we had been classed as "undesirables."

The Tunisian farmer who had asked us back home to lunch was one of the rare people in the region who had not been dispossessed of his little patch of land, and who also had a little money—enough to have a well bored in his garden, so that his land was a pleasant oasis of fruit and vegetables, which he sent to market at Kairouan. The little white house was clean and neat inside. The eldest son had just got married, and we were ushered into the bridal room, resplendent in its new trappings: a magnificent Kairouan carpet covered the floor, there was a high four-poster bed covered with a spotlessly white counterpane and surmounted by a large sequin fish (a symbol of happiness and good fortune), a wardrobe, and hanging on hooks round the room were long, gauzy dresses or perhaps nightgowns—courtesy prevented me from inspecting them too closely. There were water-jars on the narrow window sill from which we drank avidly, but the water was lukewarm and sulphurous. Outside in the courtyard, the white-washed walls were also decorated with outlines of flowers and the good luck fish again. They looked strangely incongruous in this waterless atmosphere. The sanitary arrangements were contiguous with the kitchen and separated from it by a low wall. The women, with perspiration trickling down their faces and breasts, were busy cooking over the charcoal fire. They only spoke Arabic, in common with most of the country women, so that we could not exchange much conversation,

but they smiled and inspected my clothes with interest, and gave me a tubful of water with which to rinse my feet. All ablutions were performed out in the courtyard. Meat was scarce in the country, but they served us with about half a dozen fried eggs per person, together with delicious peppers, couscous and melon. After this large repast, we pulled down the blinds and stretched ourselves full length on the bridal carpet for a very necessary siesta. The master of the house provided me with a fly switch—a very useful object indeed.

In the middle of the afternoon, the master of the house came and roused us: it was time to go and look out for the lorry that would, we hoped, take us to Feriana. And, besides, the clouds were gathering, he said; it looked as if there would be a storm. A good sign, he added; it showed that we were auspicious and that our visit would bring them good fortune. Slimane and I sincerely hoped so, as they badly needed it. Crowds of tattered, emaciated figures were crouching round the village well, the hot wind had raised the sand, and half-buried camels stared placidly into the nothingness of a blurred horizon.

The French lorry driver and his mate gave us a lift into Feriana readily enough and seemed glad to have somebody to talk to; life in the *bled* (countryside) got very dreary, they said. They were longing to get back to France. At Feriana, we found that the hotel proprietress had left that morning to spend her summer holidays in Paris, leaving her two sons behind to look after the hotel. They were slightly embarrassed when Slimane and I turned up, and explained that they could only produce fried potatoes and sausage for dinner, that being the sum total of their culinary knowledge. They were not expecting any visitors at that time of the year.

Feriana was refreshingly green. It consisted of one main road, lined with pampas grass, a tiny square composed of remains of Roman pillars and a small fountain, a very important post office and, of course, a magnificent police station. There were farms dotted about the area, and the sound of running water and the green vegetation after the miles of sandy track through the steppes was like coming upon Paradise on earth. The postmaster was Tunisian, but he was having to resign from his post, as his Destour affiliations had only just come to the knowledge of the local police. We sat on

the edge of the fountain and talked until the cannon went off faintly in the distance.

Fortunately for us, the twice-a-week local bus to Sfax was passing through Feriana the next morning, and so once more we were on our way again, after a sleepless night, for the variety of vermin in Tunisia is quite extensive and knows no boundaries.

At Sfax, the capital of the south, with its lofty ramparts dominating the sea, we left our luggage at an hotel and had a much-needed bath before climbing up to the *casbah* to contact a M. Hedi, another "friend"—of the merchant class this time.

Business was slack—as usual—and we found M. Hedi fanning himself inside his shop in the *souks*, in front of a few bales of material. He was a large, stout man with a calm face—slow and precise in his movements, but none the less observant and keen-witted. He was not expecting us, but he manifested no surprise. He quietly made arrangements to leave his shop for the day in the care of some of his neighbours, and excused himself while he left instructions and signed a few invoices. Then he took us out through the *souks* and spent the rest of the day showing us Sfax and its surroundings: the miles of olive trees, the fishermen sailing in with their boat-loads of sponges, black and viscous until they had been washed and treated.

The *souks* were filled with an odd assortment of wares: European cloths and cheap gimcracks alternated with hand-made carpets and embroideries and leather goods. M. Hedi explained that the cheaper European goods were rapidly extinguishing the local crafts which had made Tunisia famous in the past. He showed us a few of the remaining arts: the manufacture of *chechias*, for instance, the little red skull-caps worn all over North Africa. The process of manufacture was performed by hand and was most involved. Everything except magic formulæ seemed to enter into the procedure. The *chechia* begins in the form of a very long hand-knitted white woollen cap, which gradually shrinks and turns red as it is submitted to the various processes of dyeing, pressing and dipping in the waters of a special stream in the outskirts of the town. Finally, it is carefully brushed with bullrushes.

The striped blankets and the carpets were still flourishing, for local consumption mostly, since export was proving difficult

at the moment and the duty was heavy. Silk used to be produced in Tunisia—in the island of Djerba, in particular—but this is all dying out, for their antiquated methods have not been renovated. Ten thousand families used to specialize in the making of the *chechias*, which were exported as far as Egypt, but here again high tariffs and Austrian and Czechoslovak competition had stopped business. The whole question of home industries, said M. Hedi, had not been reorganized along modern lines. Credits, professional training—all this has been neglected, and the crafts are gradually dying out. During the war they revived for a time, but immediately afterwards the removal of economic control on the one hand and freer exchanges with France on the other soon stifled the old *métiers* again. The luxurious objects made in the past were sold to the Beylical family and to the Tunisian aristocracy, but these outlets are now reduced to a mere trickle, like the clients themselves.

“What about industrialization in Tunisia?” I asked Hedi.

He smiled and shook his head. “Only about 5 per cent. of the active population—that is, about 30,000 people—are employed in industry,” he said. “These are divided for the most part between small transformation enterprises and different branches of home industries. All the big concerns, mining, building, etc., are in the hands of Europeans. The capital, too, is mostly European and the taxes imposed upon them are extremely light. Apart from all this, the Tunisian Budget serves to subsidize many of the industrial concerns. You can see therefore that industrialization can hardly be called a profitable realization for Tunisia and the Tunisians proper. Tunisia has remained a country of extractive industries. We have unlimited supplies of phosphates, iron, lead, zinc, manganese, copper and mercury, and lignite, but these are far from yielding maximum results. Secondary industries, such as textiles, building, food production are limited and do not satisfy local demand. Salt, cork and alfa are, however, produced in sufficient quantities to be able to support certain transformation industries on the spot.

“Tunisia is really only at the very beginning of her industrial era, and this is not only due to her lack of fuel, said M. Hedi. The country is used by France to supply her with raw materials. She is a ‘satellite’ to France’s economy. A vicious circle is therefore established. People tell us sometimes: ‘If you had

more technicians, engineers, skilled labour, then you could do something about industrialization yourselves.' Not at all. The few technicians we have who have studied in foreign colleges and institutes come back home and cannot find employment here. They are not encouraged to take up positions in French concerns. Until we are politically free, it is impossible for us to progress economically and participate as we have the right to, in the development of our own country. Recent Budgets have been increased, by means of loans, to float a large reconstruction programme. Our mineral wealth is to be exploited, we are told, thanks to important French investments. Apart from phosphates and minerals, which enable France to conclude commercial agreements with other countries, Tunisia sends most of her olive oil to France—nearly 50 million kilogrammes in 1945, of which vast quantities have been re-exported from France at higher prices towards hard currency countries. And the same goes for our alfa, our cork, fruit and vegetables. Our Customs system is all in favour of France, but, until we are politically independent, once again we come back to the same point: we cannot hope for commerce on a multilateral basis. The Tunisians' purchasing capacity is steadily diminishing. We see more and more land being sold, businesses going bankrupt. Our Budget caters for a disproportionate number of French civil servants, revenue on capital invested in Tunisian pensions for French personnel, their overseas allowances, loans, etc., and this results in a regular Budget deficit."

In spite of this gloomy overall picture, M. Hedi was a basically cheerful person, and he was ready to comply with any of our requests, however unusual they might be. Whatever we wanted to do or see during our visit, he would try to arrange. He even did his best to arrange for Slimane and me to don divers' suits and explore the crystal-clear depths of the Tunisian waters and their fauna, but, unfortunately, we were dissuaded from attempting this by one of the sponge-divers themselves, whom M. Hedi had solemnly convened in conference to his shop. Not that there were any trade union regulations in that part of the world to prevent us from indulging in this childish pleasure, reminiscent of the age at which we read Jules Verne's adventure stories, but simply because he warned us, quietly, that we were liable to become suddenly paralysed from the waist downwards. "It happens

sometimes even to experienced divers," he said. Regretfully, we abandoned the idea. We decided to console ourselves, however, by paying a visit to the garden-island of Djerba in the Gulf of Gabes. The only transport was a local bus of the variety with which we were already familiar, starting off at dawn for the oasis of Gabes, and after that a ferry-boat over to the island. Slimane was enraptured with the idea of taking a boat as he had never sailed in his life before. As he looked out across the Bay of Sfax, a happy, boyish smile chased the worry from his face. It was one of those rare moments when he really looked his age. I thought of those telegraph poles again; it still seemed incredible. Suddenly, Slimane became serious again as he remarked casually to M. Hedi: "The police are not so strict down here, are they? We haven't been followed so far." M. Hedi smiled, and then laughed—a short, bitter laugh. "You don't know the informers in this part of the world, my dear boy; that's all. Yes; of course you have been followed—from the moment you both arrived in town." And, seeing the look on our faces, he added more gently: "I didn't want to mention it. I didn't want to upset you. It has been such a beautiful day!" Slimane sighed and said nothing, but the old, preoccupied look had come back again. As for myself, I would never have known whether we had been followed or not, being totally lacking in perspicacity in such matters. I had already inwardly made up my mind that I would be a complete failure in any intelligence department.

M. Hedi took us back home for dinner, to a pleasant Arab house by the sea, surrounded by a fairly extensive piece of land. A horse was tethered to a fig tree, and three large setters rushed forward to greet him as we drove up. Water was brought for us to rinse our feet and face and hands before dinner. After the meal, I visited the ladies in their apartments. They were in European dress, so it was all the more astonishing that they should be confined to *purdah*. The ladies proudly informed me that they had lived in Tunis. This capital, like all others, obviously had the reputation of conferring polish and sophistication upon its citizens. I asked the ladies (who were, incidentally, M. Hedi's wife and daughters-in-law; I never met any polygamous Arab among the younger generation) to initiate me into the art of making their national dish *couscous*. Very obligingly, they brought out

a wide wooden tray, sprinkled dry semolina over it, then moistened it lightly before rolling the semolina into tiny compact balls with a deft horizontal movement of the hand. They wanted to know whether I also wished to be instructed into the mysteries of macaroni-making, but this, I informed them, was too much, for I preferred to buy the ready-made article in the shops. They were surprised at this, and perhaps a little shocked. Maybe they regarded this as an easy and lazy method, just as we are inclined to disapprove of the woman who opens a tin instead of preparing a properly cooked meal. We talked, too, about the people I had met in Cairo. They knew Dr. Thamer and Habib Bourguiba, and their eyes lit up when I mentioned their names. They were vivacious and intelligent, these ladies of Sfax, and, hospitable as all North Africans, they would not allow me to depart before having loaded me with cakes, sweets and perfume—the latter extracted from a veritable treasure chest of a wardrobe. This piece of furniture assumed ample Victorian proportions in every North African household I visited, but still managed to look very foreign among the exotic cushions, rugs and draperies with which it was invariably surrounded.

## THE ISLAND OF DJERBA

**E**VEN THE LATEST SUBTERFUGE I had resorted to in my campaign against “body-crawling insects,” to quote the label on the General’s tin, i.e. keeping the electric light switched on all night, had not prevented the enemy from launching stealthy, provocative and all too successful attacks. The heat prevented one from sleeping much before one or two in the morning, the insects rendered long spells of sleep impossible, and so, since transport in North Africa always starts just after dawn, I did not get very much sleep during our southern tour. Slimane, who was apparently pachydermous, suffered no vexations, whereas morning after morning I was converted into an irritable, lumpy mass of humanity.

We both replenished our stocks of socks and sandals in Sfax before leaving for Djerba, as we were badly in need of both, and we stayed at the hotel long enough to have our clothes washed and pressed. When we set out again, we were feeling practically normal.

As we passed along the seafront on the way to Gabes, we saw camels being given their daily bath and a thorough scrub in the sea by cheerful, half-naked urchins who waved their scrubbing brushes gaily as our bus spluttered and steamed from village to village, until we deserted all habitation for the familiar miles of sandy plain. We smelled the oasis of Gabes long before we actually came to it: an aromatic breeze told us that we were nearing vegetation and life. But the wonder of it as we grew near! The girth of the palms, the music of the irrigation canals at their feet, the cool of their benevolent shadows: no words can possibly describe the balm of an oasis to the sun- and sand-sore eyes. Children rushed forward from the shade of a fountain to offer us water melons and figs. They called them *bali* fruits, and Slimane explained that this was a word used in the pagan south for certain types of fruit at certain seasons of the year. They had been ripened by the sun-god, Baal, the ancient idol of heathen times, still preserved in this repository of Mediterranean civilizations. We had passed Roman ruins, too, and now we were *en route* for the island thought to be the home of the Lotus-eaters referred to in the *Odyssey*—the Gerbo of Leo Africanus. I only wished I'd time to linger here and re-read the classics which had suddenly sprung to life and reality in these the lands of which the ancient authors wrote. One developed a sense of immeasurable continuity in the history of mankind among the vestiges of so many civilizations—samples, as it were, of what man could accomplish and of what he could so easily destroy. That, of course, was the eternal, the tragic climax: destruction, decay, and the encroaching sands, as impersonal and inexorable as the sea, as empty as a tomb and as full of memories.

Djerba lay about a couple of miles off the coast in a girdle of palm trees. The sea was dotted with small craft whose quill-shaped sails, poised as if ready for flight, were busy transporting sponges to and from Sfax. As soon as one sets foot in Djerba, one realizes that it has a completely different way of life from the rest of Tunisia. It is an island and a people apart. The Djerbians have always been known for their business acumen. They belong to the Mozabite sect of Islam, which is preserved in a few regions of North Africa. Emigrating often to the mainland, with centres in Sfax, Tunis and Susa, the Djerbians always return home after having made money

abroad. It was a pleasant change to see signs of comparative prosperity after the appalling misery we had left on the mainland, even though the industries that Djerba is renowned for, her carpets and cloths and Guedalla potteries, are not working to capacity, and export is steadily dwindling. About 700 families work on the looms in tiny houses dotted round the countryside, using archaic methods but producing most beautiful colours and designs.

Crossing the island from south to north, the first thing one remarks is the peculiar style of architecture, reminiscent of the Turkish period. The houses look like mushrooms, for they are low with rounded roofs, usually set in a clump of palm trees, olives or vines, and isolated from each other by earthen walls topped by prickly cactus. The 284 mosques of this 224-square-mile island also have an individual style of their own; low, square minarets, surmounted by a conical stone which is perhaps a vestige of a phallic cult. There are about 32,000 people on the island, and there is a fairly important Jewish settlement among them, and a Jewish shrine which attracts thousands of pilgrims from far and wide every year.

We saw many wells, and the water being raised by patient camels walking round and round while their masters waited. But the water is in general too salt for drinking purposes, and the inhabitants usually collect rain-water on their roof-tops. It had not rained for months, however, and the earth was parched, but the entire island—with its network of miniature canals, mushroom houses so neatly partitioned off from one another, and the abundance of vegetation, fully justified its name of “Djerba, the garden-island,” and this in spite of the fact that Djerba has a most stirring history. It has been occupied countless times by successive invaders. Situated as it is, it was always an ideal lair for pirates: the Normans conquered it and then the Sicilians, and, in the middle of the fifteenth century, it became the Mediterranean base for the operations of Arudj-Dragnet, the pirate king, who reigned here supreme until he was blockaded by Andreas Doria of Sicily; and he only escaped by having his galleys hauled over the peninsula of Al Kantara at night. What an extraordinary sight that must have been!

The Spanish took Djerba in 1560. They too were defeated, and their garrison left exposed to the Turks, who massacred them all and built an enormous pyramid with their bones.

This pyramid was not destroyed until 1848, and a stone monument is now left to mark the dread spot. The Spanish fortress alongside it, with its Islamic addition of a small mosque on its upper terraces, still bears witness to the inextricable see-saw of Djerba's past. A few Bedouins were camping in the ruins and washing wool in the shallow sea-water, while a white camel stared, blankly and unconcernedly, at the fleet of sponge-carriers that were waiting by the pier for the wind to rise before they could put out to sea.

Here too we met Destour party friends and representatives of the U.G.T.T., and we admired the barbaric jewellery belonging to our host's wife—exposed in a glass case in the "parlour." I thought, upon seeing this exhibition for the first time, that our host was in the jewellery business and that this was a sample show-case, but Slimane hastened to inform me, before I committed any gaffe, that it was the custom here for the wife's collection of ornaments to be shown *in extenso* for all to see and admire and envy. The womenfolk were Bedouin, and resplendent in their striped silk *foutahs*, anklets, and head-ornaments, their heavy make-up and perfume, which suited their elaborate costumes. Their whole collection of *foutahs* were strung across the bedroom on a cord, *sari*-fashion; they showed me all I wanted to see and let me "touch" all the shiny objects which took my fancy in their rooms, but they demanded in return—for they too were just as curious about me—to know what I wore underneath my narrow European skirts, which seemed to amuse and intrigue them.

Time, however, was getting short, for sand-storms and siroccos had delayed us in the interior, and I had soon to leave for Algiers. In view of the extreme heat, we decided to return to Sfax on one of the sponge-boats, and from there to take the rapid auto-rail back to Tunis.

We made the necessary arrangements with an old Maltese sea-captain, who, with his long red stocking-cap, clay pipe and beard, looked extremely piratical. Then we sat down and waited for the wind to rise. While we waited, we watched gangs of shiny Sudanese sailors opposite the quay who were unloading cargoes from incoming boats. They worked with an undulating, rhythmic movement, accompanied by a chant which sounded like a litany: as indeed it was, for after repeating "In the name of Allah" for about six heaves, they then reverted to the names of local saints, whom they invoked one after the

other, returning to Allah Himself after every six names or so. We also watched another gang, working some distance away, silently; they were far from achieving the same results as the "music while you work" gang.

The wind obstinately refused to rise, and we sighed for the whirr of an engine, however incongruous it might have sounded in these pre-mechanical surroundings, but the Captain and his crew of three Negroes did not seem to be in any hurry. So long as they reached Sfax within three days, they said. Three days! And the normal crossing only took seven hours with a wind! At last, however, a faint breath of air puffed into the flabby sail, rousing it from its lethargy. "Let's set out and see what happens," said the Captain hopefully. What happened, once we got out of sight of the island, was that the capricious puff of wind dropped as suddenly as it had come, and for nineteen long hours we floated in lazy circles without making the slightest headway. There was only bread and cheese to eat on board (for the infidels), washed down with mint tea brewed by the Captain himself in his exiguous cabin, and there were no amenities of any description whatsoever.

"We must *do* something," I insisted. The Captain, realizing at last that we belonged to that unreasonable category of people to whom time is actually important, suggested that one of the three Negroes could row us to the opposite shore. A ridiculous little rowing boat was lowered for us and off we went. But the waters were so shallow that the boat soon reached the point where it could go no further without sticking in the mud. We were still a good half-mile from the land.

There was nothing for it but to step out into the sea and paddle strenuously to the shore on foot, baggage and all. A strange sight it must have been, and hard work it most certainly was. As we drew nearer, we caught sight of an old Ford car full of people on the jetty, and immediately proceeded to hail it vociferously. "Are you going in the direction of Sfax?" shouted Slimane. To our joy, the driver nodded and encouraged us forward, while the other occupants of the car craned their necks to get a better view of this strange apparition from the sea. Finally, still carrying our shoes and luggage aloft, we scrambled on to the dry shore, and fell into the old car, which started up with such uncontrollable energy that it actually shook the rusty doors completely off. They clattered on to the stones beneath, but, undismayed, the driver got out

without manifesting any surprise, drew a few yards of string from his pocket and proceeded to tie the doors up again, asking us, when he climbed back again, whether we would mind holding on to the ends of the string, "just in case." After this rather disquieting prelude, we set off and eventually reached Sfax without any further mishap. We scraped the mud off our feet as best as we could before walking up to the hotel, but our appearance was still rather primitive, in spite of all our efforts, and several people eyed us with curiosity as we sidled past, crab-fashion, up the stairs and into the first bathroom we spied.

On the way back to Tunis, we visited a prosperous little town on the coast, next-door to Nabeul, where the potters fashion "good luck" fish and porcelain camel salt-cellar for the dwindling tourist trade. The peculiarity of the town consists in its inhabitants' extraordinary traditional passion for ornate, carved stone door-frames. The local stone is tender and the people have specialized for years in delicate scroll-work, so that the little town resounds with the "chip, chip" of their chisels and even tiny boys were learning the trade young, and polishing surfaces for their elders to embellish. They looked up as we passed, their long eyelashes white with dust. To possess a carved door-frame is the greatest ambition of their lives, and, presumably, the most tangible evidence of their material prosperity, for this lengthy handwork is expensive. Orders come in from all over the country—or, rather, they used to when trade was better—and the whole town is a sculptured display of their local talent. Unfortunately, because the stone is so tender, this delicate workmanship will probably not withstand the test of time and perhaps the inhabitants will tire at last of their crumbling ambitions. But it is to be hoped, if ever they do, that they will replace them by others equally artistic.

Back in Tunis, Salah ben Youssef informed us that the latest piece of gossip at the Residency was that I was reputed to have brought important secret documents to the Destour from Abd el Krim. "Maybe," laughed Salah, "they think the Emir has sent orders for a general attack. Really, they must be feeling extremely nervous. And with all the arms and military they have in the country, too! Not forgetting, either, that all the colonists are armed and that it is forbidden to Tunisians to possess any arms!"

## CONFIDENCES

**MADAME BECHIRA M'RAD**, daughter of the learned Sheikh of that name who had been deposed by the Bey, received me in the presence of a Tunisian student, one of the few persons of the opposite sex who were allowed to see her unveiled. Even Slimane, known and respected as he was, had to wait outside in the garden during our conversation. Yet Madame Bechira M'Rad is an ardent feminist.

She makes speeches and holds meetings, encourages education and the emancipation of women. She spoke only Arabic, this dynamic woman of about thirty-five with auburn curls falling on to her shoulders, but her face and eyes, alive and mobile, radiated her personality to such a degree that language seemed almost superfluous. She looked straight at me as she spoke, while the student interpreted, and she appeared to guess my replies. The magnetic fluid of fraternity passed between us, and, as she laid her hand gently on my arm, it was as if a blood-bond had been sealed. I told her frankly that it was embarrassing for me, as a European, not to be able to meet Muslim women in the men's company. I found that their pattern of society was incomplete without the feminine contribution of charm and wit and elegance. I had been told that Europeans did not mix freely with the Muslims, but this divergent conception of society and social structure had, in my opinion, a great deal to do with it. Madame Bechira M'Rad nodded gravely in assent. "Yes, I quite understand," she said. "But we are doing all we can to remedy the position and emancipate women. We must also get the menfolk accustomed to the idea. They need training too." And she smiled. "We are obliged, however, to go slowly, and consolidate each step, as it were. There are still a few old-fashioned religious elements in our society who are opposed to a violent transition. This is not the time to provoke a clash within our society. Once we obtain our national independence, then we can assert ourselves more and discuss these questions more freely. But we are anxious to contact our sisters overseas, and hear more about their activities. There has been a barrier there, you know. We are ready to be friends and to work together, but we have often found a lack of interest and understanding on their part. But

patience. We shall soon catch up and maybe show you a few things." And she laughed gaily.

I had not dared to discuss the question of polygamy with the Sheikh's daughter, but in Madame Bourguiba's house, in the company of Habib's numerous cousins and nieces, I felt quite at home and was accepted as one of the family, so that one could be more blunt. One by one, the little presents brought all the way from Cairo were unfolded and gravely distributed. Clothes for the children, silks for the women. They fondled these things affectionately, and tears came into their eyes, for had *he* not touched them with his own fingers only a few days before? There was still something of his vibrations, his presence, about the gifts he had so tenderly selected for those who stayed behind and anxiously awaited his return. Even the old family servant shed tears unashamedly, for she, too, had been remembered. Then they installed me in the place of honour and gathered round to ask me questions about Habib Bourguiba the man, the husband, the uncle, who had always looked after them with the same paternal solicitude he displayed towards his people as a whole. It was Ramadan, and although one of the cousins was expecting a child, and therefore permitted to eat, she insisted on adhering rigidly to the fast. She it was, too, who had led a delegation of Muslim women to the quayside upon the arrival of M. Labonne as Resident-General in 1938. "They wanted to present the new Resident-General with flowers," they had said, showing a large bouquet. The French police were delighted, their own countrymen so taken aback that they did not know what to say, for they had confided their plan to nobody. But, with the flowers, went a speech—a flaming speech asking for Tunisia's independence, so that the women were all promptly arrested and sent to gaol. The patriotic cousin, who was then expecting her first child, said: "Even in prison we found that there was racial discrimination between the Europeans and the Arabs. There were beds for the former and only mats for us. One of the gaolers, seeing the condition I was in, volunteered to bring me a mattress to lie on, but I replied: 'No, do not trouble. My child will be a Nationalist. He will therefore have to lead a hard life. He might just as well start his apprenticeship now.'"

Her sister, a young and pretty girl in her early twenties, smiled when I questioned her about polygamy. "It is dying

out," she said, "among the younger generation. But my husband, who is older than I am, had a first wife when he married me. She didn't like me being about the house, though, and she soon left."

Divorce is easy among the Muslims, especially for the men; and this occasionally gives rise to hardship among the poorer classes. In a rug-making factory I visited, several of the women workers were surrounded by two or three children, and I was informed by the Arab woman superintendent that "they were divorced women and poor. As they did not know what to do with their children, they brought them to work with them." The little mites were already learning how to unravel the coloured wools and tie knots. The mothers looked up with sad, resigned smiles, but did not leave their looms for a second.

"What can I do?" sighed Chedlya as we both lay in bed gazing at the moon. We had been discussing her matrimonial affairs, for her parents had just betrothed her to an eligible young man whom she had already met on one or two occasions. This was a rare occurrence, for usually a Muslim fiancée only sees her "future" on the wedding day. "What can I do? I like him well enough, but I do not love him. Do you think it is true what they say—that love comes after marriage? Somehow, I do not feel it so in my heart. Ah, Nina, if you knew how unhappy some Muslim women are. Mother has already confided in you, and in many ways what she says is true. I do not want to marry a man I do not love. And supposing that one day I happen to meet a man whom I would have preferred? Then it will be too late. How fortunate you are to be free. You do not realize what it means!"

Driss confided in me because I had guessed his secret. Yes; he loved Chedlya, but it was impossible to contemplate marriage, he said. His family were very orthodox. They disapproved of modern ways: of married women wearing European clothes and no veils. If only he could take her away and abroad, away from the family, from the numerous relations with their gossip and advice and recommendations. There was no privacy at home, in one's life or in one's thoughts. Oh yes, he had already been married once. It had been arranged by his parents, of course, and, as usual, he saw his bride on their wedding day. His friends waited outside while he went to her apartment, trembling slightly. He was a small, insignificant

person. "And then I saw her," he said, "seated on a high chair, decked in her splendid wedding clothes—and she was beautiful. I looked at her, and I stopped, and a feeling of sadness came over me. Why have her parents done this thing, I asked myself. For they knew how small and ugly I am. It is not right. It is not just. And I was very sad, knowing that I could never make her happy. When I came out, my friends crowded round me: 'How is she? What does she look like?' they asked, and then, seeing my dejected appearance, they asked again: 'But what is wrong?' And then I told them: 'She is too beautiful for me.'"

*Part IV*

*ALGERIA*

*To Messali Hadj, and to Ahmed, who led me to him.*

INTRODUCTION TO ALGERIA

I MET ONE OF THE five newly-elected Algerian Deputies of the Parti Populaire Algérien in Tunis just before leaving. His official status enabled him to travel. We arranged to have a preliminary talk at the headquarters of the Destour in the rue Bab el Souika. The appointment had been fixed for eleven o'clock at night, so as to allow ample time to linger over the evening meal after the long day's fast. Slimane called for me at the hotel and escorted me through the busy streets quietly, with his queer lurching gait and seraphic face.

The Algerian Deputy was sitting waiting for us in the little office, holding a demure black attaché-case upright on his knees. Salah ben Youssef was keeping him company, and fanning himself rapidly with a fly switch as great beads of perspiration rolled off his ample forehead. He seemed relieved to see us: "Ah! So there you are! What a hot night. Oh dear, what a hot night! Why don't we go out? It is too hot to talk in here." The little man with the attaché-case rose and bowed. "M. X...," said Sallah. "He will be able to give you plenty of advance information about Algeria. He knows the question inside out, and he is an old friend of ours; he has been through it, too. Tortured, you know, by the Brigade de Sécurité Territoriale," he murmured in my ear.

I eyed the Algerian curiously, wondering whether he differed from his Tunisian and Moroccan co-religionists with whom I was already familiar, but there was nothing to distinguish him from his neighbours, except perhaps a certain awkwardness of bearing and the fact that he was wearing Western clothes. He was short, unprepossessing, half of his face was distorted by some form of paralysis—and his eyes burned like

two black coals. His European suit looked out of place among the flowing robes of the Tunisians, and his patent-leather shoes creaked audibly. But he could talk. He talked until two in the morning, until Salah's big, babyish face looked pale and creased, and Mungi Slim, who came and went noiselessly in the background, looked as drawn as a wraith or a tired djinn. The Deputy poured out facts and history and dates and unfamiliar names, from the conquest of Algeria in 1830, through the policy of assimilation, through the long, long years of struggle, and the words "famine" and "prison" and "oppression" came up again and again until they almost assumed a human shape, standing naked before us; the spectres of the past, the hardly-formed spectres of the present, standing in their shrouds, appealing, threatening, despairing. There were so many names—of men who had fought and struggled and died, whose names would never be known outside their own little country—and the tortured face in front of me moved in a curious half-grimace, speaking of wrongs, of people who could not speak their own language properly, because it had been denied them; of people who had lost their traditions and culture; of people who had lost their soul. "Yes," he said. "They have taken away our language, they have interfered with our religion, they have dispossessed us of our lands, but, above all, they have taken away our soul." A hush fell upon us as he pronounced these words fearfully, with all the intensity of his small, shrivelled body. Salah, the realist, looked uncomfortable, and Mungi as grave as a mandarin. It was a banal sentence, I suppose, a phrase that might seem rather devoid of meaning in Europe—a mere figure of speech. But the way the Algerian pronounced it made it sound as ominous as an excommunication.

"It is late, M. X..., and very hot. Shall we go out?" Salah sighed as two tireless members of the staff brought up a trayful of ices.

The Deputy did not seem to hear. "You must see our leader, Messali Hadj," he urged me. "Try and get to him when you are in Algeria. He is up in the mountains of Tlemcen, surrounded by police." The Deputy then proceeded to give me an outline of Messali's life-story. Born in 1898, of a modest family, Messali fought in the First World War and then lived for a number of years in Paris. He started by frequenting left-wing meetings and was noticed by the French Communist, Doriot.

Little by little, Messali reached the top and became leader of the Etoile Nord-Africaine (North African Star), an association founded in Paris by Hadj Ali el Kader (a member of the Communist Central Council) to defend the Algerian workmen's interests. There were, and still are, many workers from southern Algeria in Paris and its suburbs. This North African Star became less Marxist and more and more strictly nationalistic in outlook when Messali took it in hand. From the beginning, he claimed complete independence for Algeria and the evacuation of French troops. Messali expounded his ideas in a paper called *Ikdam (Courage)*, which was soon suspended. The same fate also befell two other papers which were published later, as well as the Party itself.

In 1934, Messali was sentenced, after having tried to reconstitute his banned Party. Before his arrest, however, he managed to escape to Switzerland, where he met Chekib Arslan, one of the principal authors of the Pan-Arab movement. In the meantime, the advent of the Popular Front in France in 1936 favoured Messali, and so he returned to the fray, thanks to an amnesty. Back in Algeria, Messali reproached the delegates of the Muslim Congress, who had submitted a list of complaints to M. Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, for their excessive moderation. He was all for an Algerian parliament, elected by universal suffrage. The North African Star was banned again on January 1st, 1937. After this, Messali gave up the pan-North African liberation ideal to found the Parti Populaire Algérien on March 11th, 1937. In August of that year he was again arrested for having attacked French sovereignty, and imprisoned for two years. Liberated in 1939, he immediately started another newspaper, *El Umma (The Nation)*. This paper, being violently anti-French, was fated to disappear, and Messali and twenty-four of his colleagues were again sent off to prison. On March 28th, 1941, Messali was sentenced to seven years' hard labour and twenty years' banishment, but, fortunately for him, the Allied landing intervened in the meantime, and he was liberated by General Giraud on April 26th, 1943. As a precautionary measure, however, he was despatched to Reibel. There, riots started in 1944 on the occasion of a visit from the Préfet. Messali was declared responsible for the trouble and deported to Brazzaville, where he remained until 1946. Liberated again, he started off on a fiery propaganda tour of Kabylie in southern

Algeria to rally his partisans, and again was sent to Tlemcen under police supervision. There is no doubt, however, that these years of imprisonment have bestowed an aura upon Messali which none of the other and lesser leaders possess. Neither Ferhat Abbas of the Manifest Party nor the President of the Oulemas can aspire to the popularity which he enjoys.

"You will see what I mean when you arrive in my country," said the Deputy. "The people are uncultured, illiterate; they have lost their personality. Messali was the first to really breathe it back into the masses, who had fallen into a lethargic state of listlessness and apathy—Messali, who has not feared years of prison and privations for the liberty of our country. Here in Tunisia," the Deputy went on, "they still have a form of local government and administration; they have managed to preserve their Muslim University of El Zeitouna and the beauty of Arabic literature and music. There is a Bey, a Nationalist Party which is unofficially consulted by the Residency. We have nothing of all that: our great families, our noble names have all been swept away ruthlessly. We are now an amorphous mass. We are considered to be a part of France. We constitute three of her departments, although the Mediterranean flows between us. Ten million Arabs and 1,000,000 Europeans, and we are strangers in our own country. Inevitably, we have developed an inferiority complex. Do you wonder at it?" The Deputy scribbled an address for me on a slip of paper. "This man," he said, "is a Party man. He will put you in touch with our friends and they will show you round. He lives in the Kasbah, in the main street, rue Marengo. You will easily find it. Your arrival will be announced anyway."

"Careful about that," warned Salah. "Better not say anything beforehand. You never know."

"It's perfectly safe," replied the Deputy. "I have a sure means of communication with Algiers which is untapped by the police."

Salah shrugged his shoulders incredulously. He proved to be right.

"What do you think of him?" asked Slimane as we went down the stairs. "*We* like him. He seems sincere. Of course, we do not know anybody else from Algeria—I mean any representatives of the other party, the Ferhat Abbas people. M. X... says the Parti Populaire Algérien represents

by far the majority of opinion in Algeria, but we cannot check his statements. As you know, it is impossible for us to travel there. It is only because he is a Deputy, since the recent 1945 law, that he is able to come to see us himself."

The Deputy caught us up and bade us good night with a little stiff bow before disappearing among the Ramadan revellers, and Salah started up the car to take me back to the hotel. The Deputy preferred to wander off alone, and he cut a pensive, lonely little figure against the classic folds of the surrounding Arab draperies. It was my last night in Tunis. Salah advanced slowly among the crowds; from time to time a fellow Destourian would recognize him and wave a friendly salute. Slimane smiled and looked his normal youthful self as he glanced round at the merchants, the vendors of coloured cakes and sweets, the bright lights, the jasmine-sellers. Mungi had placed several mysterious boxes at the back of the car, which turned out to be home-made cakes which his mother had made, a gold and amber brooch, and a lace handkerchief embroidered by his sister. The cakes, alas! I had no room for, despite my desire to introduce Ramadan delicacies to my English friends, so I left them with the hotel porter.

We said goodbye quietly. The chauffeur got out and shook hands and gave me a little bouquet of jasmine flowers, neatly arranged on false stems, posy fashion—the typical jasmine bouquet of Tunis. He smiled eagerly as he held them out, and though he spoke no French, there was no need for words. I remembered how he had driven us, fasting, through the heat of day, and thought of the many sacrifices he would still have to make: of the long nights and days of driving from town to town, from village to village, from meeting to meeting; and I shook hands warmly. "Your mission is over now," I said to Slimane, who was standing, almost at attention, beside Salah and Mungi.

He smiled, and lowered his eyes. I bade goodbye to them all in turn and murmured trite words of thanks. "Good luck," said Salah buoyantly. "And watch your step in Algeria!"

"Try and write us a personal letter occasionally," suggested Mungi. "Perhaps the censors will let them pass."

"One day," added Slimane with the youthful expression returning to his plump face, "one day, when we are free, I shall travel; I shall travel and come and see you in your country. Then *you* can be guide."

“And there won’t be any police following us,” I assured him.

“Impossible,” Slimane laughed, shaking his head, “I cannot believe it. I am so used to them. Life would hardly seem normal without them!”

Upstairs, a large black cockroach ran furtively across the bedroom and slipped into a crack in the wall. On the other side of the street, a group of Italians were accompanying Napolitan songs on a plaintive mandoline. A slightly foetid smell rose from the gutters and, although the windows were wide open, nothing stirred in the solidified air.

Next morning, at the airport, the Tunis Customs official was thorough. The large, whiskered old man sighed as he took out every object from my valise and declared: “Oh yes, Mademoiselle. I admit that I *am* very much like St. Thomas. That is my job.” The china fish from the village of Nabeul, the glittering sequin-embroidered bed-cover from the *souks* which Slimane had insisted on buying, the porcelain camel salt-cellar, the gaudy Bedouin necklace with its gold crescents and “hands of Fatima” were callously laid out for all and sundry to see. My papers were examined, the reports from the Bureau des Statistiques, the official photographs. Fortunately, my handbag, containing the two letters of introduction to Moorish Nationalists in Rabat and Tangier, was not asked for. “St. Thomas” sighed heavily as he started piling things back into my suitcases. “All right. You can go,” he told me regretfully.

From the little lightweight plane bound for Algiers, I could see great toffee-coloured mountains surging up in heavy creases, interrupted here and there by deep crevasses and ravines, at the bottom of which a faint glimmer of light indicated the presence of water. Dark green patches of trees were criss-crossed like icing on a cake by man-made paths and, clinging on to the steep sides of the mountains, hung minute native villages from which thin wisps of smoke were rising. When the mountains stopped, fatigued by their great upheaval, fertile plains, green and yellow, stretched for miles, broken very occasionally by a neat white group of dwellings. There were vast domains, larger than in northern Tunisia, evidently highly productive and fertile.

Suddenly, the scenery assumed perspective, rather at right angles, as we nosed downwards to the Algiers aerodrome.

We bumped lightly on to the ground, undid our belts, and stepped rather unsteadily out into the stifling air. The Customs officials seemed too overpowered by heat to embark on a close inspection of the passengers' luggage. Wiping their brows with one hand and chalking up the luggage with the other, they muttered and grumbled, while passengers fell over one another to reach the waiting Air-France cars as quickly as possible. The police officials, at one end of the room, inspected the usual forms one had to fill upon arrival: "Where do you come from? Where are you staying? Where are you going?" Hesitating over the "Where are you staying?" query, I put down "Hotel Astoria," a hotel which one of the Residency secretaries had recommended as being moderate in price and comfortable.

I had hardly been seated for more than two minutes in the Air-France car bound for the centre of the town, with my small valise and precious typewriter at my feet, when a swarthy, sturdy little Frenchwoman darted out of the aerodrome and rushed up to me: "Are you Miss Epton?" she enquired sharply.

I murmured a surprised affirmative.

"Then follow me. Bring all you have with you," she ordered.

So the journey was not to be so smooth after all! A porter dragged along my large suitcase, and I followed a few yards behind, rather dazed by this unexpected turn of events. The brisk little lady in front of me stopped suddenly, opened the door of an office on the right of the passage, and ushered me in with a quick, impatient gesture. As soon as the luggage had been deposited on the floor, she locked the door, pulled a curtain across a recess and ordered me to undress. She stood by me while each article of clothing was removed, inspected it, and then returned it to me without any comment. The moment I had completed dressing, she opened the door again, and called in three officers, who entered rather sheepishly, after asking her whether she had "discovered" anything. The woman shook her head, asked me for the keys of my suitcases, and, while the men were engaged in ransacking them, she roughly emptied the contents of my handbag on to the table.

"Is this treatment reserved for British passengers?" I enquired, seating myself in an old-fashioned horse-hair arm-chair that, by some strange chance, had found its roundabout way from a Victorian home to this outlandish spot.

A man who appeared to be the chief officer, since he acted as general supervisor and hardly troubled to touch any of the objects himself, sauntered over to the desk in the middle of the room and offered me a cigarette. "Oh no. Not at all," he smiled—with a malicious look towards his colleagues. "But as you know, of course, there has been a certain amount of trouble lately over sterling; and we must take precautions."

One of the officers had come across a box of undeveloped spoils. "Wasn't there some recommendation about photographs?" he whispered loudly to his companion.

The latter scratched his head thoughtfully for what seemed a very long time. "No. I don't think so."

I heaved a sigh of relief. During all this time, the woman, eager and birdlike in her movements, had switched over from examining the papers in my handbag to assisting the men. She worked a little apart from them, as if anxious to discover an item of interest before they did. Not content with their inspection, she actually took up every object they left, and re-examined it herself from all angles.

"Ah, what is this?" asked one of the inspectors, coming across an innocent box of face powder, carefully wrapped in an old Tunis newspaper.

"Face powder. But there may be gold sovereigns hidden in it?" I suggested.

"Maybe," smiled the inspector sardonically, trying to open the box and smothering himself in a fine dust of Suntan powder. He sneezed violently, and wrapped it up again in disgust.

Nobody smiled; and from the depths of my armchair I marvelled at their grim earnestness. Nobody, except the chief officer, had addressed a word to me. Time slipped slowly by. After an hour and a half, by which time everything I possessed had been thoroughly investigated (although the letters of introduction had still not been noticed), the team decided to give up. The woman threw an odd pair of stockings back into the suitcase with a gesture of defeat. The chief officer began to look apologetic. "I am sorry to have caused you such inconvenience, Mademoiselle," he volunteered.

"I am sorry to have wasted so much of your time," I answered curtly.

The youngest of the officers, a tall, flabby young man in tennis shoes and a loose-fitting tropical suit, escorted me to

the door. The woman turned her back on me and stared pensively out of the window on to the air-strip. I felt, uneasily, that she had not given up the search.

Outside the airport, and on all the walls leading to the town, the words "*A bas le Statut—la parole au peuple*" were scrawled evenly in large characters—French and Arabic. The new Algerian Statute being discussed in Paris by Parliament did not seem to meet with the Algerians' approval. A long, straggly row of factories and docks led to the famous bay, with the Kasbah, or native quarter, perched on the hill opposite—grey, grim, odorous and unromantic. Very different from the dazzling whiteness and lure of Tangier. European houses and buildings, of the French provincial type, shops, boulevards, cafés; no Oriental "cachet" at all, but a general impression of an overcrowded, over-built city. It was siesta time, and ragged urchins were curled up in the shadows of doorways—the same ragged urchins that one sees all over North Africa; but here they looked fiercer and wilder; there was not the gentle smile, the velvety eyes of the Moor or the Tunisian, but a defiant, hostile look, that became more and more apparent as one penetrated into the town. Having delivered me and my baggage at the Air-France bureau, the driver looked disinterested while a swarm of little boys rushed up and volunteered to find me a taxi—"for fifty francs," they stipulated firmly in advance. Air-France, I had been told, held the monopoly of the hotels in Algiers, so I went inside to enquire about a room. They were most efficient, and had already booked one for me at the Hotel Suisse: only the price was 350 francs per night, meals excluded. I calculated rapidly. "Rather expensive. I have to be careful of my few pounds. What about something less onerous?"

The suave young gentleman in the attractive Air-France uniform was quite definite: "You will not find anything cheaper in the whole of Algiers. Everything is full up," he replied.

I glanced at my watch. Time was getting on, and I had to go to the bank to change a traveller's cheque. Banks closed early in these latitudes. There was lunch to be taken too, and addresses to be looked up. I had no time to lose if I wanted to contact all these people in the few days I had to spend in Algiers. "Very well. I shall go to the Hotel Suisse for to-night anyway. To-morrow we shall see." The young man pursed his lips, wrote on a slip of paper, and asked

me to give it to the hotel proprietor. The room number was already marked on it: Room 541. Outside, the taxi-finding children were waiting to swoop down upon me. One of them ultimately found a taxi, and a violent discussion broke out between them on the splitting up of the 50 francs reward. Finally, we made off—with half a dozen of them hanging on behind the taxi. The Hotel Suisse, clean and cool, was situated up a side street off the Boulevard Michelet. One is always climbing in Algiers—steps and steep streets and more steps. The Hotel Suisse was no exception, and the houses opposite were so near that I could almost stretch from Room 541 and touch the shutters of the window opposite. There was running water, too, and no signs of bugs or cockroaches. Room 541 was a pleasant, tranquil haven after the morning's events, but I did not trouble to unpack, in view of my anticipated move on the following day.

Two hours later, I was sipping a synthetic lemonade on a café terrace in one of the main squares. I had bought two local papers at the kiosk opposite. One was called *L'Egalité*, the weekly organ of the Ferhat Abbas Party. I took note of their address—Place de la Vigerie—and decided to go and see these people before proceeding up to the Kasbah. Sitting alone on a café terrace in Algiers is not a very pleasant experience. First of all, there is a continuous stream of shoe-shiners: most insistent they are too, as they look down with a superior air at your shoes, appraising them, counting each fleck of dust. The Algiers shoe-shiners are an insolent lot—far more insolent than their neighbours in Tunis and Rabat, and without the merry twinkle in their eyes. Again I was struck by their ill-disguised contempt and hostility towards the European. Here there was an atmosphere of hatred, of suspicion, a feeling of insecurity, of tragedy lurking in the background—of something intangible, ready to pounce on you suddenly, without warning. Something furtive and underhand. I clapped for the waiter, who looked at me closely, with an impudent stare. Here, people turned round in the streets and stared openly, rudely; remarks were passed. The Algerians looked small and dirty and vulgar. They were nearly all clad in European clothes, and smoked filthy cigarettes, stuck in the corners of their mouths. They had no manners, they walked all over the street, they bumped against one frequently and intentionally. Where was the dignity of the

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Moors? The grace of the Tunisians? I remembered what the Algerian Deputy had said: "They are illiterate, uncultured. They have no soul."

Out of every six Algerians I asked for the location of the Place de la Vigerie, five would turn their heads away and refuse to answer. "How they hate us," I thought. I began to understand the plausibility of stories about sudden and mysterious knife-thrusts; the story of the French cabaret artist returning home late at night on her bicycle, stopped by a couple of Algerians, who chopped off her legs; stories of pirates and bandits and cut-throats. I shivered slightly as I turned up the narrow side streets by the cathedral. The Place de la Vigerie happened to be just behind it, but still I could not see the offices of the paper *L'Egalité*. At last, when I enquired specifically for *L'Egalité*, an Algerian volunteered to stop and point across the road at a small, tumbledown building, outside which two or three men in Arab clothes were having a lively discussion. I walked across the square, followed by several pairs of eyes; this time, they were slightly less hostile. Although the Ferhat Abbas Party is not 100 per cent. nationalist, as is the Parti Populaire Algérien, it *does* advocate greater freedom for the Algerians, it *does* want them to be treated as equals. So that, although my back was turned to the crowd as I crossed that square and entered their offices, I no longer felt the mental knife-thrust of before, and when I emerged about an hour later, several people actually smiled at me—for the first time since my arrival.

## THE MANIFEST PARTY AND THE ALGERIAN ELECTIONS

I WALKED THROUGH THE open door and asked a small boy with owlish eyes who was typing with one finger in the passage whether M. Ferhat Abbas, the leader of the Manifest Party, was in.

He glanced up at me and shook his head vigorously. "No. He is in Paris," and went on typing unconcernedly.

"Isn't there anybody else I could speak to? Who replaces him in his absence? I come from England."

The small boy stopped typing and looked at me with greater

curiosity than ever. "Wait a minute," he said, and suddenly darted upstairs. He was away for a couple of minutes, and then peered over the banisters and asked me to come up. M. Boumangel, the Assistant Editor of *L'Egalité* would see me. He was sitting in a small office that smelled strongly of cheap ink and cheap newsprint, and he rose to greet me with a rather surprised and reserved look. M. Boumangel was a lawyer, and a cautious man. He seemed rather dejected by the turn of events in the National Assembly in Paris, where they were discussing the new Statute, and it took some time to convince him of my sincerity. Whether he thought at first that I was some kind of a spy, I do not know, but he did not appear to be very interested in the English. Not even the evacuation of India had led him to believe that our policy had changed—"there was probably something behind it," he thought—but, talking at length upon the subject, I was surprised to find how badly informed he was of the facts of the situation. What little knowledge he had, had been culled from the French Press, and very little came through about India. He was suspicious. The Allies had not been very sympathetic towards the Algerians, he said. In 1943, when the Manifest Party submitted its declaration, or *manifeste* to the Allied occupation authorities, they had not evinced any active interest. It was strange, if Great Britain really intended keeping to the Atlantic Charter and giving freedom to her colonies, that she should not want her ally, France, to do the same with hers. It was said, of course, that North Africa was too important strategically for the European Powers to want France to give it up. There was much talk of secret clauses in the Anglo-French Treaty relating to North African bases. "We must go slowly," sighed M. Boumangel. "It's no use as things are. We must be realistic about it. It's no use asking for complete independence now. We would never get it; and the country isn't sufficiently prepared. Let us hope the Statute will improve matters. We must wait and see." His party was obviously opposed to the intransigent demands of the Parti Populaire Algérien, who want complete independence now—or, rather, it would be more accurate to say that the Manifesto do not consider that such a direct method of approach is practicable. "We will never achieve anything that way," he said. But, in spite of all, he seemed a little disappointed and disillusioned. It was uphill work, and sometimes

they wondered whether they were making any headway. The party's paper, *L'Egalité*, had been suspended for some time, but had now been going on for about a year. The situation at the moment, however, was a little difficult; some of the articles appeared to be too forthright to please the authorities, and it was believed in official circles that Abbas's Party was getting too dangerously near Messali Hadj's ideas to be healthy. The future was precarious. No wonder that M. Boumangel looked worried.

He was, in spite of everything, quite willing to co-operate loyally with France, if only there seemed to be an even remote possibility of their granting more liberty to Algeria and the Algerians. "You know," he said, "we were always on friendly terms with France before the conquest. We signed over fifty-nine different treaties with them. And even when we became a colony, at first the occupiers did not inspire too much distrust. We hoped that France would propagate those famous humanitarian principles contained in her *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme* of 1789. As Ferhat Abbas has often said, the great drama and contradiction of French colonization is not that they have deposed our princes, put lackeys in their place, and installed civil controllers and administrators. It is not even that they have expropriated thousands of poor peasants and created 'tin-can towns.' Every form of imperialism has done as much. The great tragedy is that this colonization has destroyed all the old values. The greatest tragedy of all, and the most dire contradiction, is that in this field which was ripe for her to cultivate, Western culture has hardly sown any seeds at all."

"But," I objected, "there seem to be plenty of men like yourself, who have had a good French university education. Most of the leaders seem to be in your position. Their political formation, their democratic ideals—where do all these come from? What has France done in the field of education? She must have done something."

"The first schools built in Algeria were intended first of all for the children of the European colonizers. Some men, however, protested and demanded that special schools should be built for the natives. Most of the colonials scoffed at the idea, and some of the authorities even went so far as to say that the average native lacked intelligence and was incapable of assimilating Western education. They also said that the parents

of the native children would most surely object. These are the fallacies that still continue to give some Europeans a superiority complex *vis-à-vis* the Arabs. However, one day, the experiment was started. Several Arab children were put in the same school as European children, and the results in both instances were identical. It had to be admitted that the Arab child could learn and assimilate just like his European comrades. Little by little, some schools were built. The first, inaugurated by Jules Ferry in 1865, was at Benni-Yenni, in Kabylie. In 1892, a ministerial decree was passed by which French tuition was started for natives. This seemed a daring enterprise to the settlers of the time, and they were all against the ultimate creation of a native élite which might embarrass their movements in the country. They openly opposed education of the natives on the grounds that ignorance constitutes one of the essential bases of domination. Those who denounced his opposition (like M. Jeanmaire, who was the Dean of Algiers University at the time) were subjected to violent attacks and were finally obliged to give way, defeated by the superior numbers and importance of their adversaries. This spirit of opposition in the educational field has persisted until to-day, since there are only about 1,000 primary schools in Algeria, and over 1,250,000 children of school age are left to trail in the streets. In 1944, Mr. Laugier, the Rector of Algiers, estimated the total of Algerian children who had benefited by primary education at about 100,000—this out of a total population of 10,000,000.

“It is obvious that in these circumstances the number of children who have passed their *certificat d'études* or who have gained a scholarship to enter secondary schools and obtain their *baccalauréat* is infinitesimal. I am afraid there are no official statistics available from which I can give you the exact number of Algerian doctors, lawyers, etc. A few years before the war, we had in all: forty-one doctors, twenty-two chemists, nine dentists, three engineers, seventy lawyers, ten professors (secondary school) and 500 teachers. The numbers have increased now, but they are still quite inadequate for our immense needs. What is this due to? Well, first of all, the primary schools, where one can first gauge a child's possible vocation, are far too few and reserved for a privileged minority. At a higher stage, whereas the smallest towns in France possess their secondary school establishments, only the principal

town in each department possesses one in Algeria. Only four towns boast *lycées* for boys: Algiers (Lycées Bugeaud, E. F. Gauthier-Mustapha-Ben-Aknoun), Oran (Lycée Lamoricière), Constantine (Lycée d'Aumale) and Bone.

"Recently, colleges have been built at Blida, Medea, Miliana, in the department of Algiers, at Sidi-bel-Abbés, Tlemcen, Mostaganem, Mascara, in Oranie-Setif, Guelma, Boufie, Philippeville in the department of Constantine. Arab families who would like to send their children to boarding school in the *chef-lieux* have to consider the matter very carefully indeed—owing to their impecunious situation. Most of them decide to keep their sons by them to help them earn a living. Parents who can afford to let their children study for seven years are few and far between."

Again I interjected: "Yes. But all this presupposes that before the advent of the French there were no schools at all—or very few—and no universities. Everything has started from scratch; and it is only human to expect that the settlers, on arriving here, had other things to think of than educating the natives. After all, they had hard times to go through, too, to get the economy of the country going. What about your own schools—I mean your own Arab Koranic schools?"

"Our own language, Arabic, has been discouraged," retorted M. Boumangel. "Our schools are discouraged—sometimes even closed—and it is forbidden to open new ones, the excuse being that Arab schools are hotbeds of nationalism and politically dangerous. Let me give you one or two concrete examples: On July 28th last the President of the Muslim Cultural Association of the little village of Telagh sent a petition to the Sous-préfet of Sidi-bel-Abbés, asking him to authorize M. Mirigua Brahim, a *ftih* (teacher) of his district, to open a Koranic school. After a delay of three months and a half, the Sous-préfet replied on November 12th that he could not give a favourable reply to the petition. No explanation was given. There is no Arab school at all in Telagh, so the President of the Cultural Association and eight municipal councillors decided to send a letter to the Sous-préfet to demand that the school should be opened. So far, nothing has been done. Another instance: A little *medersa* (or Muslim college) situated at Jemmapes, in the department of Constantine, had managed, in spite of many difficulties and obstacles, to give several thousand Arab children a basic knowledge of Arabic

and some religious teaching. For reasons which we all totally ignore, the local authorities have decided to close this school. The parents of the pupils have sent a telegram to the Governor-General, protesting against these anti-democratic, arbitrary measures adopted by the local authorities. These are just two instances, but I could quote many more. Do you wonder if we get a little tired of this constant battle for our most elementary rights?"

The main milestones of the colonization of Algeria are, briefly, as follows:

From 1830 to 1900, the French colony, under the ægis of a military régime, began to prosper. Gradually, the town buildings and best lands were expropriated and distributed among the Europeans. In 1851 there were already 4,774 concessions, representing a total of 19,000 hectares. Napoleon III, dissatisfied with the results of the plebiscite in Algeria, and frightened by the greed of too large a number of adventurers, instituted a régime of large concessions. In 1853, the *Compagnie Gènevoise* obtained 20,000 hectares. In 1862 and 1863, 160,000 hectares of forests, the best and easiest to exploit, were handed over to thirty owners. In 1865, the *Société Générale de l'Abra et de la Macta* obtained 25,000 hectares in the plain of the Sig, and the *Société Générale Algérienne* (which became the *Compagnie Algérienne* in 1877) received 100,000 hectares in the department of Constantine. From 1870 to 1877, the French Government established 198 villages, peopled by 30,000 French settlers; and the French population passed from 195,000 to 268,000 and continued to increase. The wholesale naturalization of Jewish natives following the Cremieux decree in 1877 added to their numbers.

As far back as 1844, Marshal Bugeaud wrote: "We have displayed our strength before the tribes of North Africa. Now the time has come to show them kindness and justice. This will enable us, firstly, to get them to bear our domination; later, to get them accustomed to it; and, finally, to identify them with us so that we form one and the same people, under the paternal government of the King of France."

We need not trouble to argue as to whether or not the Algerians would have accepted at that time to be identified with the Bretons or the Provençaux, and to what extent they would have wished to form one and the same people with the French. A vanquished country, particularly a

non-Christian country, has no choice in the matter. How has Marshal Bugeaud's brief been applied and what has been its fate?

In 1887, MM. Michelin and Gautier drafted a Bill, which was submitted to the French Chamber, by which French citizenship was to be extended to the Muslims of Algeria, and in 1890, M. Martineau drafted another Bill, asking for French citizenship to be granted to a specific category of Muslims.

In 1898, M. Jaurés took the question up again and asked for the emancipation of Muslim Algerians by means of French citizenship.

In 1900, the Arab tribes had already lost, by virtue of various decrees, 2,250,560 hectares of their best lands, and in one expropriation alone—in 1871—the Kabyles lost 2,639,000 hectares. French colonization, having embedded its roots in Algerian soil, became conscious of its strength. France's trusteeship and her right to follow what was happening in the country began to weigh heavily upon them. The policy of co-operation with the metropolis began to lose favour. The colony thought about independence. According to the historian, E. Gauthier, the anti-Semitic trouble in 1896 was merely the expression of the settlers' desire to free themselves from the metropolis. Indeed, the slogans, 'Death for the Jews,' soon subsided when financial autonomy was granted to Algeria, together with the institution of Algerian assemblies. These assemblies, representing in actual fact a strict oligarchy, were soon to become masters of the Budget. They voted all taxes and decided on all questions of expenditure. From 1900 onwards, this financial independence not only increased, but encroached upon the political sphere. The Algerian assemblies assumed the role of a local parliament. Moreover, the French settlers revived their threat of total independence whenever their interests were menaced by the metropolis, as they did recently when they thought that the new Statute for Algeria, voted in 1947, tended to prejudice their privileged position.

After the First World War in 1919, the ex-Servicemen returning home no longer consented to become serfs fit for sweated labour only. They joined with the educated élite in the fight for improved living conditions. The decree of February, 1919, allowed Algerian Muslims to elect representatives in the local assemblies. Their voice was feeble, since

their numbers were not allowed to exceed one-third of the total in each assembly. But their plans found an echo in the metropolis. Finally, in 1937, the French Popular Front Government produced the Blum-Violette plan, destined to increase Algerian Muslim participation in local affairs (about 30,000 would have been involved: ex-Service men, civil servants, *bacheliers* from secondary schools, etc.). None of these plans ever materialized, however. The mayors of Algeria had only to threaten to resign for Parliament, Government, and the whole of France, to give way. "We thought," said M. Boumangel, "that after the 1940 catastrophe the French settlers would perhaps be willing to reconsider the whole Algerian problem. But the defeat of the metropolis in 1940 did not bring about any change at all. On the contrary, most of the European colony interpreted the Vichy régime and Marshal Pétain's New Order as an expression of their own ideals and as a means of satisfying their own personal ambitions. German officers and members of the Armistice Commission were openly invited to French colonial homes. The Algerian Muslims were declared to be 'dangerous revolutionaries' and Communists. After the Allied landing in November, 1942, the French used the same kind of propaganda against us with the Allies. On this occasion, however, we were painted as 'Germanophil savages, thieves and degenerates.' This insidious propaganda was also used to convince the Allies that Algerian workmen should not be paid the same wages as Europeans."

Since then, however, the notion of a "French Union" has been embodied in the new French Constitution—a federation along the lines of a commonwealth of nations, with France in the centre. The Manifest Party of Algeria has always, and was at the time I spoke with M. Boumangel (that is, before the results of the debate on the Statute were known) in favour of some form of federation with France. The Party's proposals with regard to Algeria's new Constitution, which were submitted before the National Assembly in Paris, included the following clauses: (1) The French Republic recognizes the complete autonomy of Algeria. At the same time, it recognizes the Algerian Republic, the Algerian Government and the Algerian flag. (2) The Algerian Republic adheres to the French Union as an "associate state." Her external relations and national defence are common to those of the French Republic and the Union, etc.

The leader of the Manifest Party, M. Ferhat Abbas, has had a less physically agitated career than Messali Hadj (of the Parti Populaire Algérien, and he is a very different type of man. Born in 1899 at Ghalma, he comes from a traditionally "assimilationist" family. His father was a Caid and ended up as a Commander of the Legion of Honour. Ferhat Abbas studied chemistry at the Faculty of Algiers, but also started taking an early interest in politics. He talks and writes well, and is more of an "intellectual" than Messali Hadj. He wrote a book called *Le Jeune Algérien* while he was still a student. Later, under the influence of Ben Djelloul, who played an important role in Algerian affairs and who was President of the Fédération des Elus Musulmans de Constantine, he became first a General Councillor at Setif, then a Municipal Councillor and, finally, a Financial Delegate. In 1936 he wrote for the paper *L'Entente*, of which he subsequently became the Editor.

In 1938, Ferhat Abbas organized a party, L'Union Populaire Algérienne, which favoured France's assimilation policy. He fought in the Second World War, but returned after the Armistice embittered by the fact that the French military authorities had not raised him to officer's rank, although they had done so for all his French colleagues who possessed the same university degrees. Back home in Algeria, he tried to enter the Commission Financière de l'Algérie, but this was refused him by Governor-General Abrial. He submitted a reform plan to Governor Chatel in 1941, but nothing was ever done about it. All these setbacks were having an effect upon Ferhat Abbas; he was gradually becoming disillusioned. He realized, further, that the Algerian masses themselves were turning more and more hostile towards the French. His Party would have to be modified accordingly.

After the Allied landing, Abbas published his *Manifest of the Algerian People*, which appeared on February 10th, 1943. The French were hurt by the fact that he addressed himself to the Allies and they were also stung to the quick by the allusions made in the *Manifest* to the collaborationist tendencies displayed by the French during the occupation. When the Financial Delegations held their first meeting on September 23rd, 1943, the Muslim members refused to listen to the inaugural address by Governor-General Catroux. The General took this affront very seriously, and placed the President of

the Muslim Financial Delegation (Salah Abdelkader) and Ferhat Abbas under police supervision.

The French National Liberation Committee, meeting soon afterwards in Algiers, could not remain entirely unmoved by the general atmosphere of discontent. Their President, General de Gaulle, made a speech at Constantine in December, 1943, which, although it was still along the lines of the assimilationist policy, offered French citizenship and certain official positions to a few specific categories of Muslims, while allowing them to retain their personal status. This speech preceded a Reform Commission which produced the famous ordinance of March 7th, 1944. This plan was similar in substance to the unfortunate Blum-Violette scheme of 1936. It prescribed absolute equality of rights between Muslim and non-Muslim Algerians and increased Muslim representation in the local assemblies, extending their voting rights to two colleges. French citizenship was extended to about 60,000 Muslims, and economic and educational reforms were envisaged. All this, however, came too late. It did not go far enough for the Muslims, and Ferhat Abbas decided once and for all to reject the assimilation policy and found his Amis du Manifeste Party on March 15th, 1944.

In the following year, victory over the Germans in Europe heralded a day of violent riots in Algeria. At Setif in particular, Djidjelli on the outskirts of Guelma, Chevreul, Perigotville and on isolated farms in the country blood flowed freely on both sides on May 8th, 1945. The first incidents started during the victory celebrations. The independent Algerian flag was hoisted amid cries of "Liberate Messali Hadj!", "Long live free Algeria," "Down with colonialism," etc. Europeans were massacred, and the reprisals, as ever, were ferocious. The French used machine guns, shells, aeroplanes. How many were killed? Who was responsible for the riots? The whole affair is wrapped in the deepest mystery. The French tried to put the blame on the Parti Populaire Algérien, the Amis du Manifeste and the Oulemas. Some referred to "foreign intervention" and to Communist Party activity. (Incidentally, the Secretary of the Setif Communist Party branch tried to quell the rioters and had his two hands cut off by Kabyle tribesmen.) Ferhat Abbas and many others were detained. A commission of enquiry was sent out from Paris by the French Government. It was recalled—nobody knew exactly why—forty-eight hours after its arrival in Algeria. The consequences of May 8th,

1945, are incalculable. The effect has been to stir up violent hatred and resentment on both sides.

Released in 1946, Ferhat Abbas started to prepare an active electoral campaign. His party was still officially banned, so they presented individual candidates for the June, 1946, elections who obtained 71 per cent. of the votes in the Second College. Ferhat Abbas's suggested Algerian constitution, based on an Algerian Republic, was rejected by the second French Constituent Assembly, but the latter decided, at one of its last sessions, to ask the Government to submit the draft of a new Statute for Algeria.

The French National Assembly met on August 10th, 1947, to discuss the various drafts on the proposed new Statute. There was the Government plan established in agreement with the then Governor-General of Algeria, M. Chataigneau (since replaced by an Alsatian, M. Naegelen), for M. Chataigneau, like M. Erik Labonne in Morocco, had liberal tendencies), a Socialist plan, a Communist version, and the Algerian Federalists' plan. The Rapporteur of the Commission (Socialist M. Rabier) presented a text which the President of the Council, M. Ramadier, and the Minister of the Interior considered to be too much in favour of the Arabs. The plan had been under discussion for several months, and the Minister of the Interior, M. Edouard Depreux, had made a rapid preliminary tour of Algeria to investigate existing conditions. The representatives of the large French agricultural trusts in Algeria, such as MM. Quilici and Rencurel, constantly opposed any Statute which might have the ultimate effect of "submerging the French European minority in Algeria."

The French Communist and Socialist parties agreed, up to a point, to support measures granting further liberties to the Arabs, but towards the latter part of the debate in Paris, and after the Socialist Congress of Lyons, the two parties split upon issues of internal policy, and this in turn affected the vote on the Algerian Statute. There was also a split between the Government and the Commission of the Interior. Both had worked upon separate drafts, but the Commission of the Interior had endeavoured to reconcile as far as possible the conflicting interests at stake. Suddenly, however, on August 23rd, when the Rapporteur of the Commission asked the Assembly to pass from the general discussion on the Statute to the detailed discussion and votes on the individual clauses,

and to take into account the Commission's draft, the President of the Council intervened, claiming priority on behalf of the Government, and asking the Assembly to adopt, as a basis for the discussion, the *Government's* project. The Assembly voted upon this point and the Government won the day by 312 votes against 276. M. Jacques Duclos, Communist, alluded to the bargaining—already widely referred to in the Press—that had been going on behind the scenes between “certain commissions and sub-commissions, and the new French electoral laws, negotiations in which the Algerian Statute had been used as a pawn.” The Rapporteur of the Commission, who was obviously not in a position to defend the Government's project, since he had been working for over a month on the Commission's suggestions, resigned. He admitted that he was completely at a loss to understand what had happened.

In the meantime, General de Gaulle had published a declaration on the First Algerian College which tended to exclude the Muslims introduced to this college by the March 7th ordinance. The combined effect of the negotiations between parties and General de Gaulle's declaration produced a profound effect upon the Arab delegates. (There were fifteen of these: five Messali Hadj candidates only: their lists had been crossed out in Oran and Constantine as being “irregular”—for the party was still legally banned; two Communists and eight Independents headed by Benchennouf, who were in favour of assimilation.) After the discussion by the Assembly of Article No. 1 of the Statute, which refers to Algeria as a part of France, the Arab delegates felt that this was a crucial issue on which they could not agree and which conditioned the whole of the Statute. They decided, therefore, that it was impossible for them to continue to take part in the debate. The discussion on the Statute therefore continued without them, both in the National Assembly and in the Conseil de la République. The Statute was finally voted by 325 against eighty-six in the National Assembly, and by 186 votes against thirty-four in the Conseil de la République.

The new Algerian Statute thus voted provided for the election of a local Algerian Assembly, divided into two colleges of sixty representatives each, consisting mainly of Europeans in the First College (plus a few carefully selected Algerian Muslims, principally ex-Service men) and of Muslims exclusively in the Second College. This local Assembly, which is

convened, presided over and carefully steered through its deliberations by the all-powerful French Governor-General, has very definite, limited powers. All decisions are obtained by a majority vote, but can, upon decision of the Governor-General or one-quarter of the members of the Assembly, be taken upon a two-thirds majority vote. The minority is well safeguarded. The Statute also officially recognizes Arabic as "one of the languages of the French Union," the teaching of which is to be "organized." The French law of 1905 on the separation of Church and State is now extended to the Muslim cult, and the four main Muslim feasts declared to be legal holidays in Algeria. The application of these articles, however, is entrusted to the Algerian Assembly. Elections to the first Algerian Assembly took place in April, 1948—not in ideally democratic conditions, according both to the Algerian Muslim and to the French Press. Of the representatives elected in April, only nine belonged to Messali Hadj's Independence Party, eight to Ferhat Abbas's party, and forty-three were independent Muslims. It was farcical that in Messali's home town of Tlemcen his supporter was returned bottom of the list; Messali has protested to the Arab League, for many of his candidates were arrested during the elections and tens of thousands of voters were prevented from voting for Messali in the second ballot. Ferhat Abbas claimed that in many places 95 per cent. of the Muslim electorate did not poll for the second ballot owing to police and military intimidation. He and the Editor of his paper (now *La République Algérienne*) are being prosecuted for publishing a statement to the effect that Governor Naegelen personally sent a telegram to the authorities in Orleansville (an Abbas stronghold), telling them to prevent the return of a Manifest candidate at any cost.

The French newspaper *Combat* pointed out that the method used to enforce these results was comparable to those used on the other side of the Iron Curtain. According to *Combat*, votes were bought: Muslim votes cost 1,000 francs and European (in the suburb of Algiers, Bab-el-Oued) 5,000 francs. In an outspoken editorial, Marcel Fourrier of *Franc-Tireur* declared that the Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas parties were willing to give this trial of democracy a fair chance, but they have been cruelly deceived. The last shreds of confidence have disappeared, and the two Arab parties are more firmly welded together than they have ever been before.

## THE KASBAH BY NIGHT

LEAVING THE CROWDED Place de la Vigerie to find the Deputy's Parti Populaire friends, I walked up a narrow lane which led to steps; these, in turn, climbed into the rue Marengo, main street of the Kasbah. The smell of refuse and urine was overpowering. People were coming and going in all directions, donkeys alternated with hooting cars—for there was room in the rue Marengo for a small car and even for an ambulance. The inhabitants were nearly all in rags. Their long, lean faces and hands—their narrow black eyes—had a spectral quality about them which fascinated as much as it revolted. Children with running noses and matted hair sprawled in the gutter. Squashed tomatoes and pimentos shone like blood-stains in the dim light—for the Kasbah is always half in shadow. Narrow, climbing streets and steps, sticky and slimy with pools of thick liquid and mud, and bare feet and toes splashing unconcernedly through the mire. Dark houses with no windows; doors that had once seen better days, some with jagged remains of quite beautiful carving.

I edged forward slowly, afraid of losing my step and falling into some cesspool, until I came to the house I was looking for. A small child looked up at me as I pushed open the door and prepared to mount the stone steps. It was a fairly modern block of flats—one of the best in the neighbourhood. The child, who evidently belonged to the porter, asked me whom I wanted to see, and upon hearing the name, proceeded to guide me up the stairs. At the top, the door slipped open and a face peered at me through the chink. A few seconds later, the door opened wide, disclosing a woman in knee-length Arab trousers, with dark hair framing her small, anxious face. I gathered that she was the mistress of the house, although we could not converse very freely since she hardly knew any French, but she guessed who I was and gave me to understand that my visit was expected; but her husband had left for Paris that morning. Her small daughter, however, would take me down to some other friend, who would look after me. The woman had shown me into a little living-room, furnished in an evident endeavour to appear European. I suppose the ugly square sideboard, the stiff chairs and nondescript table *were* European.

From the open window, one could look out on to the port: grinding cranes, ships in the harbour, a strip of blue sea. Voices and a cacophony of noises rose from the town, together with a nauseous gutter smell that never seemed to subside. The woman bade me sit down while she brought a cup of coffee and a slice of cake. She sat opposite me, clutching a corner of her apron, knees wide apart, looked at me up and down, and asked where I hailed from. Another relative joined her—a fat, oily-looking girl of about twenty, who stood staring and bowing every few seconds in a welcoming gesture which was both servile and irritating. The small daughter now appeared shyly—a wizened child of about eight, wearing a tattered European frock of a colour which age and dirt made it impossible to describe. She too had heard about the foreign visitor who was due to arrive, and she sidled up to me with a friendly smile, and told me that M. Ahmed X. was waiting for me. Would I go with her? The child spoke quite good French. There was nothing I could say to the mother, so we just bowed and smiled repeatedly and I rose to go as soon as I had finished the coffee and cake. The mother came and opened the door for us and watched us disappear, closing the door slowly behind us in a surreptitious way, as if she spent her life looking through chinks, furtively. Distrust, suspicion—the atmosphere reeked of it at every turn.

The child took me by the arm and together we pushed our way through the crowds to a little baker's shop at the corner of the street. The baker shook hands warmly and turned to an insignificant-looking, slight young man with yellow teeth who was standing in his shirt-sleeves talking to some customers. This was Ahmed, who had been appointed to be my guide in Algiers. I immediately compared him with Slimane. He was a very different type. When I looked at him more closely, however, I noticed that his deep eyes and high forehead were not insignificant at all. Perhaps the general unkempt appearance of the young man had prejudiced me against him. Ahmed cared very little about his appearance, and it was difficult to believe, seeing him there in his shirt-sleeves with a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth, that he was the son of one of the oldest families in Algiers—wealthy people at that, who still owned fairly large properties. Ahmed was about twenty-five, and a *Licencie-ès-Lettres* of Algiers University. He had intended to become a Professor of Arabic, but politics

had now got hold of him, and he burned with an ardent and utterly devoted passion for Messali Hadj and the cause of Algerian independence. Ahmed was friendly, but reticent; he accepted me impersonally as "just another job." He had many things to do, he told me, but volunteered to call for me later at the hotel to show me round the Kasbah at night. From what I had already seen of it, I did not care to know more, but a refusal was out of the question. There did not seem to be any pleasant cafés here as in Morocco where people played and sang and drank mint tea—in fact, there was no mint tea at all. There were no flowers, as in Tunis, no jasmine in the air. Algiers was an empty shell, and even what appeared to be a large mosque in the central square turned out to be the Catholic Cathedral. Oh yes, Ahmed told me, it had been a mosque once; and an all-night struggle was put up by the faithful about a hundred years ago, but they were finally ousted, and the Christians took over. I was to hear a lot more about "Christian" interference in Muslim affairs later.

For an evening visit to the Kasbah, its rags and its misery, it would be wiser to leave my money and important papers behind, I reflected. After a slight hesitation over my two letters of introduction to Moorish nationalists from my friends in Cairo, I decided to remove them from my handbag and add them to the bulky parcel of documents, statistics and photographs which half-filled my suitcase. At 8.30 the telephone rang to announce that Ahmed was waiting downstairs. As I closed my bedroom door behind me, I noticed that the lock seemed peculiar and of an intricate design which I had not seen anywhere else. Ahmed was waiting by a taxi just outside the hotel door. I left my key for the little Algerian boy at the desk to hang on to its corresponding hook. The hotel lounge was quiet and empty, except for a fair, rather angular young man who was sitting stiffly on the edge of a wicker armchair. I noticed him casually, and would not have looked at him twice had it not been for the strange way in which he looked up and stared as I came down the stairs. He was holding firmly on to the sides of the armchair, as if ready to spring into action at a moment's notice, and as his blue eyes rested for a brief moment on mine an inexplicably exultant gleam suddenly lit them up and gave them an unnatural brilliance. I could not recall ever having been looked at in

that way before; an uncomfortable feeling came over me and I almost felt impelled to stop—but reason got the better of me; I shook off the momentary uneasiness, and went forward to greet Ahmed. “We can only take the taxi so far,” he explained unnecessarily, “and then we will have to walk.” His observant eyes glanced at my white shoes, and he added: “I am afraid it is rather dirty there too. You must expect that.” Inevitably, one compared these Algerian nationalists with their neighbours in Tunisia and Morocco. Ahmed seemed very Western, and very efficient. There was an element of nervous rapidity about his gestures and the way he darted his eyes backwards and forwards, as if he were following two or three parallel incidents at the same time. He smoked continuously, and his fingers were stained a deep yellow. He had replaced the coloured sports shirt he had been wearing when I first met him by a neat tropical suit. No doubt this was a concession, because he did not seem to be the kind of person who gave much thought to clothes. Ahmed was more tense than any of my preceding guides; his dark hollow eyes and sunken sallow cheeks, his wiry frame belied a great inner strength, an unshakable faith. As we rolled down the boulevards of the European quarter, past the disproportionately enormous post office of blatant, pseudo-Oriental style, where the single-decker tram-cars crossed with fretful sparks over the crowded square, a sudden mental weariness came over me. We were leaving the brightly-lit cafés, the strolling couples—boys in white shirt-sleeves, girls in short, full skirts—for the narrow, putrid alleyways of the Kasbah. I knew what to expect now. There would be squalor, the penetrating odour of disease, emaciated forms and the fumes of frying. I looked at Ahmed again. He was silent, smoking in quick, short puffs, staring thoughtfully ahead, his mind evidently intent on some scheme of his own. No doubt it was rather boring to have to conduct a journalist through the Kasbah. Obviously, he was not accustomed to these more mundane tasks. He must have had much more important things to do.

We left the taxi at the corner of a street, and plunged upwards, through a dark recess, up a narrow street, up never-ending steps, past dense crowds of shiny-faced, beady-eyed men and women and children. One remembered all the films on Algiers, on the Kasbah—the exciting scenes in *Pépé le Moko*. Where were those picturesque night-dens, those alluring,

transparently-veiled women and be-jewelled visitors? This was sheer disillusionment. The houses were old, yes, but their warped beams, their mutilated faces were but sad vestiges of past glory. Occasionally, up through a blind alley, one came across a once-beautiful façade, a piece of exquisite wood-carving, and one caught a glimpse of a tiny, perfect *patio* and slender colonnades, but these visions were brief.

In front of a Moorish bath were the remains of Djamaa Sidi Ramdane, an old mosque still pointing its white minaret towards the sky; but its whiteness was crumpled and flaky, as if it were incurably attacked by leprosy. Decay—decadence and decay—everywhere. Rue N'fissa with red and orange lamps in front of shady recesses, and in every doorway the rounded curves of a voluptuous hip, the white softness of much-caressed breasts, the provocative arch of over-painted lips. Children played on the doorsteps. A blind beggar prodded his way slowly with a jerky tap-tapping of his stick. Every now and then a curious and unexpected inscription appeared above the door of a house, *Maison honnête*, the only way in which the occupants can attempt to dissociate themselves from their less reputable neighbours.

Breathless, we reached the top, or nearly the top, of the Kasbah. As we paused to look at the human ant-hill below and the lights of the harbour, Ahmed laughed suddenly for the first time. A short, cynical laugh. "So that is the Kasbah," he said with an empty gesture of his thin, yellow hands. "Perhaps it was beautiful once. I don't know. There are still a few lovely old houses here and there—an old relic of the past, when thousands of visitors came from all over Algeria to see the Kasbah. Now all that is left is misery and dirt and prostitution." A hard glint came into his eyes as he spoke. "Many people had to leave the Kasbah, so that more 'red light' houses could open. Look at them all: rue N'fissa, rue des Sarrasins, rue Sidi-Ramdane, rue de la Casbah, impasse Bologhine, rue Bologhine—full of them, full of them!"

"But haven't the inhabitants of the Kasbah ever complained to the authorities if they feel the same way about it as you do?"

"Of course. But nothing is ever done. It is the same with everything else here. There are 100,000 inhabitants here; and a delegation of the District Committee went up to the Préfet only last week to complain once again, and to ask

him to remove all the 'red light' houses to a reserved quarter by the barracks, where there is an empty space. M. Perillier said he would deal with the matter promptly: '*C'est toujours la même histoire!* Think how bad it is for the children, and how humiliating for honest people to have such neighbours.' "

I suppose that many Westerners would have been surprised to hear young Ahmed talk in this strain. Average opinion on Arab ethics does not quite fit in with this almost Presbyterian austerity, but I found it dominant with all the youth of North Africa—with the orthodox, uncorrupted youth, that is—and, as a matter of fact, those were the only elements I came into contact with. Perhaps, in the more remote country areas, among the old Caid and Pasha, things may be different, but the modern youth which still keeps to its traditions is brought up according to a strict Victorian code.

We eventually found a stool in a local café and sat down to a lemonade of an unnaturally warm shade of pink. There did not appear to be any characteristic Algerian fruit drinks or dishes, apart from the semolina *couscous* which is found all over North Africa. Ahmed shook his head woefully as I tried to discover from him what remained of "Algerian" Algeria. There was next to nothing. Not even the Kasbah, the most Algerian thing left to them, had been left undefiled.

Ahmed was not very loquacious. He answered politely when I questioned him—with a certain restraint, as if he were afraid to let himself go. There was a bitterness about these Algerians which one does not find to the same extent in the neighbouring countries of Tunisia and Morocco. The people seemed to lack the individuality of the Moroccans and the ease of the Tunisians. There was a hard, passionate streak in them. One did not notice the venerable, prophetic expressions on the bearded faces, or see the same suave and beautiful lines. A general uncouthness, a stern, never-ceasing battle against poverty left its mark on the sharp features. It will probably take them a long time to forget the last hundred years.

Ahmed lapsed into silence again, and I tired of asking questions. One reached a point when there was little more to be asked. One just observed and took note. The passers-by did not overtly pay much attention to us. The noisy Algerians sipping coffee or lemonade at the tables round us were engrossed in their own laughter and conversation. There were

no other Europeans here. *They* were down below in the well-lit square, together with the more modern type of Algerian—of the sleek oily-haired variety one saw such a lot of in Paris, and who went under the names of *métèque* and *sidis*. The type who were always getting themselves involved with *crimes passionnels*. The real Algerians were here if they belonged to the immense proletariat, or quietly at home in their villas and little farms if they enjoyed a little more ease. Ahmed's father was a fairly large farmer, I gathered, since the family possessed a villa up the hill, in the residential area of Algiers, a farm in the country, and Ahmed had a little bachelor flat at the foot of the Kasbah. "There are always people in it," he said; "coming and going on some mission or the other connected with Party activities." There was somebody in it now who had been driving all through last night and to-day, and who was "sleeping it off." Ahmed's parents were not connected with politics.

Here, as in Tunisia, the family tacitly divided itself up into the wage-earners who could not afford to take any risks, but who took charge of the family's material welfare, and the few who lived for ultimate independence, whatever the cost: spending their lives in and out of prison, constantly dodging the police and not daring to assume the responsibility of founding a family of their own. They came and went, and nobody took much notice, or pretended not to—except the mothers, whose destiny here, as elsewhere, is to wait and watch and pray. I never met Ahmed's mother: it was wiser not to, although once when he was in an expansive mood he said he would have liked to show me over the farm. I knew however that his mother was anxious about him, for later, when we left Algiers, he sent her telegrams from different points on our route.

Strolling down again, we passed a local Arab theatre and walked in. It was an indoor theatre in a large, bare room with ordinary wooden chairs for seats, and a stage completely devoid of any settings. A small table and a few stools, an odd rug or two—these were the only "props." The audience, as usual, was composed almost entirely of men. The show was "variety" of a vastly inferior brand to the kind I had seen in Tunis. There were two female "stars" clad in gaudy, gauzy ankle-length dresses; their make-up was crude, but one of them had a good voice, and was much appreciated by the audience.

Then there was a family sketch, in which an Algerian soldier appeared. His antics were quite amusing, even though I could not follow the dialogue. The music was mostly European; nothing was specifically Algerian.

In the middle of it all, I wished myself back in Tunis. Here the paint was peeling off the walls and the boards were bare. It was symbolic of the whole country and its inhabitants, as compared with gay Tunis, or, better still, with picturesque and still lavish Morocco. We came away before the end of the show. Ahmed had hardly followed it: he had been thinking of something else, working on a new plan for some line of communication that had been interrupted by the police. His party, the P.P.A., is considered to be the most dangerous, and for that reason is closely watched. On the long way down, we passed the Association of the *Ulemas*—quite a handsome building in a ribbon narrow street. I wondered whether the President of the *Ulemas* would see me if we went in. The *Ulemas*, or “learned men,” according to Muslim tenets, have a peculiarly important standing in Algeria, where they represent, as did the monks of medieval times, the keepers of Muslim culture and traditions. These are the people who speak pure Arabic, the guardians of the Faith, who have studied at the ancient Quaraouine in Morocco or at El Zeitouna in Tunis—the fortunate few who have maintained, in the face of many difficulties, the lamp of learning, the link with the past, and with ancestors who were free men. The *Ulemas*, therefore, command respect. From time to time they get up and make speeches and advocate freedom for their own tongue, Arabic—and from time to time the French authorities, considering that they go too far, frown upon them—and even intern them. There are some who linger in prison still in spite of the protests of their friends. So the *Ulemas* have to be tactful, and are sometimes reproached, by those who would like them to take a more active part in the affairs of the country, with “sitting on the fence.”

The Association of the *Ulemas*—or doctors in Islamic theology and law—was founded in Algiers in 1931 by the venerable Sheikh Abdul Hamid ben Badis, who deplored the Europeanization and scepticism of the Algerian youth who frequented the French universities. He fought against the assimilation policy and in favour of a renewal of culture.

His first magazine, *El Bassair*, was suspended, but he had better luck with the second, *El Chih'ab*, which was published until the time of his death in 1940. In nine years, the *Ulemas* have been able to establish 250 Koranic schools, and they endeavour, with the limited means at their disposal, to influence the youthful members of Muslim society. When Ferhat Abbas, years ago, wrote his famous article, denying that he had been able to find "an Algerian nation," Ben Badis replied in his magazine: "We too have searched in history and in the present: the Algerian nation exists; and it is not France, it can never be France and it does not want to be France." The present successor of Ben Badis is Sheik Brahimi Bachir. The Association does not present any candidates to the elections, but it applies pressure on its members to vote for one or the other of the Algerian parties. At their 1946 Congress, the *Ulemas* listed their demands as follows: The recognition of Arabic as an official language; liberty of the Muslim cult; restitution of charitable bequests or *habous* lands; a reform of Muslim justice and election of the *cadis* by the people; re-opening of the *medersas* closed after the events of May, 1945; amnesty for all political prisoners.

We walked through a little courtyard to a delightful, mosaic-patterned room, adorned with colonnades. There were students everywhere, chatting gaily, and they hardly noticed us as we came in. As soon, however, as we hesitated at the foot of some steps, a bearded gentleman bustled up and enquired what our business was. As Ahmed explained briefly in Arabic, the old gentleman's placid brow folded into a couple of worried furrows, and he darted an enquiring, doubtful look in my direction. He was polite, however, in a negative way which left us no doubts as to what the answer would be. He came back a few seconds later, all smiles and apologies: The President regretted. He had a lecture. Many students were waiting to see him after. To-morrow he was leaving Algiers on a journey. There was nothing to do but to step back into the murky street. Evidently the President of the *Ulemas* wished to avoid an interview with a foreign journalist. It might have been compromising, and the political situation was delicate at the moment.

Ahmed left me at the hotel. He had further business to do that night, and I felt he was glad to get rid of me and attend to it. The debate on the Statute for Algeria was about

to begin in Paris. M. Mezerna, the Deputy, had left that very morning and the others would be on their way tomorrow.

Here in Algiers the atmosphere was tense and heavy. I took my key off the hook and walked slowly up to my room, as the lift was out of order. Upon opening my door, I noticed, before switching on the light, several dark objects on my bed. "Surely," I thought, "I have made a mistake. This cannot be my room, for I left all my belongings in my suitcase." Quickly turning on the light, I gasped at the sight that met my eyes, for the entire contents of my two suitcases had been ransacked and strewn all over the room. My portable typewriter, which had been left in a smaller suitcase, had been forced open and left in the middle of the bed. Various objects were lying on the floor or on the chairs, but the first thing that struck me was that all my carefully collected papers, notes and photographs, even articles cut out from Tunisian newspapers, had disappeared. Every scrap of paper I had possessed was missing. Only my complete set of *Egalité*, Ferhat Abbas' paper, was intact, although the brown paper wrapping round it had been torn across. I stepped over my crumpled garments and took up the telephone receiver. The hotel manager wasn't there. "Then find him—urgently," I ordered. Five minutes later he was at my door. I eyed him carefully as I told him what had happened. It was quite obvious from the surprised way in which he surveyed my room that he was unaware of what had happened. Two points in particular distressed him: first, his beautiful new lock, of which he was so proud, had not worked. It had proved as fallible as human folly. Secondly—and this hurt him deeply—the police had not notified him of their intention to raid my room. There was no doubt, of course, that it *had* been a police raid. Not a single item of my personal belongings was missing; only the papers (plus, incidentally, the bank-notes I had been so careful to leave behind).

"They have never done such a thing before," pouted the hotel manager, sitting disconsolately on the edge of my bed. "Never. Why didn't they tell me?"

"What a shameful procedure! Is this the way that journalists are treated in this country? It's no better than the Gestapo!" I shouted.

The hotel manager took no notice of my indignant outburst. "I can't understand it at all," he muttered to himself. "And

the lock—the new lock. They *can't* have got in if the door had been closed.”

I laughed sarcastically. “But they did.”

The manager rose with a wounded air, walked over to the door and fingered the lock dejectedly. “I cannot understand it. And they never had the courtesy to warn me.” There was almost a sob in his voice. “It affects my whole reputation,” he choked.

## THE COMMISSARIAT DE POLICE

THE COMMISSARIAT OF THE rue Denfert Rochereau, Algiers, is well known to the Arab population. The special police, known as the Brigade de Sécurité Territoriale, the much-feared B.S.T., is particularly effective in this district, it appears.

The Commissariat was situated a little below my hotel, in a shady sloping street that led lazily by easy stages down to the sea-front. A limp French flag hung outside it, and just inside the sombre interior a fat gendarme sat on the edge of a chair several sizes too small for him, breathing heavily over a pile of forms. The Commissariat was empty and quite bare, except for a few de Gaullist posters on the walls. The gendarme pushed his cap back and nibbled his black moustache importantly. He waited for me to open the conversation, and his expression remained unchanged until I announced, in loud and indignant tones, that “I had come to report a raid on my hotel room the night before,” that “I was a British journalist and that—”

The gendarme left his pile of forms, stopped nibbling his moustache, and swung round, darting a nervous glance at an office at the back of the room. “Ssh! Not so loud, Mademoiselle, please,” he entreated. Then, leaning forward with a frown and looking very uncomfortable, he asked: “Are you sure it was a raid?”

“Of course. Of course. All my papers have been stolen, and all my personal belongings are intact. I have come to make an official complaint. Where is the inspector?”

Two people walked in while I was talking, and the gendarme

lowered his voice to a whisper: "Ssh! Mademoiselle, please. The inspector is not here just now. Come back in half an hour. But in the meantime, do not mention the—the incident to anybody." He swung round again and proceeded to suck a frayed wooden penholder slowly and thoughtfully.

To kill time, I strolled up the boulevard and gazed at the shops full of expensive Parisian luxuries. Suddenly, by a strange coincidence, I came across one of the Customs officers who had examined my luggage at the airport. It was apparently his day off, judging by his leisurely gait and his general air of being unbuttoned and at ease. I walked up to him and he stopped, slightly embarrassed, as if uncertain what attitude to adopt. There was obviously a struggle going on in his mind. But he smiled, half-sheepishly. "Hullo," I said cheerfully, extending my hand. "What are you doing here this morning? You'll never guess what brings *me* here," I went on, without waiting for his answer: "You know, your little examination at the Customs evidently didn't satisfy the boss."

"What do you mean?" The young man looked slightly alarmed.

"Oh, just that while I was visiting the Kasbah yesterday evening, the police raided my hotel room and stole my papers. That's all."

"You are not serious. Is that really true?"

"Every single word, *cher ami*. I am waiting now to complain to the inspector. You understand, I cannot let a thing like that pass."

"It does not seem possible. Have you time to have a cup of coffee with me."

"*Bien volontiers.*"

We sat down at the nearest terrace. "Now tell me all about it."

Briefly, I told him the story, and the young man shook his head and looked down at his tennis shoes. "Really, they exaggerate," he admitted.

"*They* certainly do. The word is mild, Monsieur," I remarked acidly. "Moreover, I happen to be a journalist, and on this occasion I am representing papers from several countries: Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and India. In other words, Monsieur, this little story is going to go round the world like wildfire." I accompanied my words with a sweeping gesture. "You see, Monsieur, it is so significant. What have you got to

hide in Algeria that you should pursue people like this? There must be something you are afraid of—something you are not sure about. What is it I am not supposed to see? As a journalist, frankly, I am beginning to be intrigued. Yes, Monsieur, my curiosity is piqued. The procedure, however, is obviously to be denounced. Your police methods are really too similar to those of the Gestapo. I wonder whether all foreign journalists are treated like this?"

The young man winced. He even had the grace to blush. "I trust you will not be too severe in your articles, Mademoiselle."

"Too severe? Too severe? After such an experience? Put yourself in my place, Monsieur, please. I am more than shocked. I was brought up in your country, in France. I always imagined that you really believed in equality and liberty. I would not have believed it possible to be treated like this. If your police have doubts about me, why don't they call me up and question me? But this underhand way of waiting until I am out to break into my room and search my belongings—ah no, that is too much!"

Nervously, the young man lit a cigarette, fumbled, and asked whether I would lunch with him the following day. Rather reluctantly, I agreed, not quite sure as to whether he was trying to be gallant and make up for his more uncouth countrymen, or whether he had been instructed to keep an eye on my movements. One was apt to become distrustful.

Back at the rue Denfert Rochereau, the plump gendarme rose with alacrity as soon as he saw me and almost ran into a little office at the back—the one he had glanced at so nervously before—to announce my arrival. Then, puffing and blowing with the unusual exertion, he asked me to go in and see Monsieur l'Inspecteur. Monsieur l'Inspecteur was standing up at his desk as I went in. He was an unexpectedly young man, slight and of medium height, with fair, straight hair, a pallid complexion and cold, very piercing pale blue eyes. His eyes never left my face for a moment, and although they did not smile, his thin lips were curled in an amused, rather sardonic grimace. He offered me a cigarette, watched me sit down, and waited for me to speak. Briefly, I went over the whole story again. Monsieur l'Inspecteur sat down with a rather bored expression on his face. He never even asked me for my identity papers. My story did not appear to make the

slightest impression on him. At one moment, I hardly thought he was listening at all. Suddenly, pulling himself together, however, he reached lazily for a pen and made a few cryptic signs on a piece of paper. "Tell me then exactly, Mademoiselle," he drawled, "all that you did from the moment you landed at Algiers Airport." He then leant back, pen in hand, and looked at me with a scarcely concealed smile. My *emploi du temps* must have been so well known to him! I proceeded, however, and he listened in the same semi-detached manner until I reached the point in my story where I "left my bank-notes, which I had just changed, among my papers at the hotel, since I was going to visit the Kasbah, and I thought it would be wiser to leave my money at home." For the first time, Monsieur l'Inspecteur broke into a laugh which, although it could not exactly be called hearty, was at least very obviously sincere. "I see," he observed sarcastically, "that Mademoiselle knows the country well, since, before going to the Kasbah, she leaves her money at home."

"On the contrary, Monsieur," I smiled back significantly, "I did not know the country well enough, or I would have realized that it was wiser to take my money with me to the Kasbah and *not* leave it in hotel rooms which are raided in one's absence." There was an awkward pause, and the inspector's eyes narrowed slightly. "I am a journalist, Monsieur," I proceeded.

"Yes," he replied unguardedly, much to my surprise. "Yes, I know. Didn't you write an article on Morocco in the — issue of — magazine?" The facts were quite correct, and as I looked up at him in astonishment at this admission of knowledge on his part, our eyes met in a hostile stare. Finally, Monsieur l'Inspecteur lowered his eyes and the mask-like expression came over his face again. Then he rose stiffly. "I hope, Mademoiselle, that you will recover your lost papers," he said, extending his hand.

"I hope, Monsieur, that *you* will recover them. And when you do," I added, "would you be so good as to have them sent down to the British Consulate, for I am not staying here long, as you probably know."

The Inspector frowned and bit his lip. "So you have complained to the British Consulate too?"

"Most certainly I have. And they are most amazed at the whole affair," I lied smoothly as I stalked out.

## INTERLUDE: THE KASBAH BY DAY

AISSA HAD PROMISED to show me the Kasbah in the daytime, and to take me inside the houses to see how the people lived. "Come with me on one of our rounds," she said. "Then you will meet my patients." Aissa and her friend Mamia lived in the Kasbah, and they were the first two Arab midwives to exercise their profession in Algiers. I met Aissa one night at a small private meeting arranged by Ahmed in a villa outside the town. Meeting Algerian Nationalists requires some manœuvring. Since any large, official meeting is prohibited, a party of about a dozen members of Algeria's Parti Populaire was carefully organized, with all due precautions, so that I could meet and speak with representative Nationalist Algerians. There were a couple of businessmen, a lawyer, as usual, a doctor, and two or three teachers. They were all dressed in European clothes and appeared, on the whole, to be sincere, average human beings. One of them, being more voluble, acted as spokesman for the party. The others had little to say except to approve his statements. We were meeting in Aissa's mother's villa, and Aissa herself presided over the large silver coffee pot and the platefuls of sweetmeats. She, too, was in Western clothes—a neat, slight girl of little over twenty with beautiful, lustrous brown eyes and wavy hair. Her complexion was golden brown, although I had remarked that most of the Algerians along the coast are fair-skinned.

Ahmed sat in the background and followed the conversation with his eyes. From time to time, he would look at me enquiringly, wondering what impression his colleagues were making. Yes; they were quite average, sincere human beings. Some had been to prison; some had been tortured for their ideas, though they did not speak much about that. Like their friends in Tunisia, they seemed to take this kind of experience almost as a matter of course—part of any patriot's apprenticeship. But it made them different from anybody else. For people who have suffered and been tortured for their ideas are a class apart. The independence of their country, freedom from domination, was the objective towards which everything else in their lives had been subjected. Politics, the day-to-day

struggle and evasion of the police, there was room for little else. Some of them looked slightly weary; they wore the expression of men who have been kept waiting for an appointment. They are weary, but they still wait. If they still appeared to be ridden by that subtle poison, an inferiority complex, it was not so much because they consider Europeans to be superior, but because they are still afraid of being scorned. Obviously, they have been looked down upon; the pathetic traces of years of slights and petty insults were there, branded almost unconsciously into their very souls. And that was the greatest barrier of all—the barrier that would take such a long, long time to eradicate. Ahmed looked at me in the same way that Slimane, in Tunisia, would look at me when I was talking to people there. Then later he would ask: “Well, what do you think of them—of us? What are your impressions? Do you like us? Do you think there is something worth while in us?” The women—those with a minimum of education—were different, and less self-conscious.

I marvelled at Aissa, who was the daughter of an Algerian gendarme, and who had managed to become so outstandingly modern and yet remain feminine and simple. She showed me round her flat in the Kasbah with legitimate pride, although, as she said shyly: “We have only just started, and there are still so many things lacking, which we cannot afford yet.” The rooms were rather bare, it is true, but the clinic was well fitted up and spotlessly clean. Mamia brought in some orangeade and cakes and we sat on a divan in the front room and the girls discussed some of their recent cases.

I asked them whether they met with opposition from the more superstitious elements of the womenfolk in town. On the whole, they thought, they were being well accepted and kept very busy. There was room for far more midwives in the Kasbah, for infantile mortality was appallingly high. There were few hospitals and maternity homes in Algiers—far from enough; so the girls only sent their difficult cases there, whenever a bed was available. “You know,” said Aissa, “you will be surprised, when we take you inside some of the houses in the Kasbah, to see how clean and well kept they are, in spite of outward appearance and all the dirt in the streets.” True enough, I hardly thought it possible, but Aissa was quite right. We walked up a filthy side alley and through an arched doorway into a typical Arab house with a tiny central courtyard

surrounded by colonnades and wooden stairs leading to the stories above. Once upon a time, the house had belonged to one family, in the days when Algiers was prosperous. Now it was let out to innumerable people, and whole families were cooped up, ten and twelve in one room. There was no running water in the house, and the women were hurrying backwards and forwards with buckets, which they filled at a communal well outside.

The house we were visiting must have been very beautiful once; the sculptured colonnades, the carved archways, now fast falling into disrepair, the heavy wooden doors, and the women, with their wide knee-length trousers gathered round them as they tripped over the uneven flagstones in their turned-up *babouches*, formed a pretty picture in the summer sun. Upstairs, Aissa pushed aside a raffia curtain that separated her patient's room from the rest of the other inhabitants in that crowded house. The patient was quite a young woman. She was lying on a rug on the floor, her head on an embroidered cushion, and her face was drawn and pale. She smiled slightly as we walked in, and stretched out a thin hand to me. Beside her was a jar of water. The room was narrow and dark, for there were no windows; the door was the only source of light and air. In one corner was the usual high bed, covered with a white counterpane. Above it, the traditional "good luck" china fish. There was a chair beside the bed, a small chest in the centre of the room, and a large sideboard in the far corner, with an old-fashioned trunk that no doubt contained most of their belongings. The woman's husband had gone to work. She had few friends in Algiers, it seemed, for she had only just arrived from the country, and it was all new to her. She was expecting a baby, but there were complications. Perspiration fell in continuous trickles from her forehead and temples. She wiped it off patiently with a lace handkerchief, and looked up at Aissa to ask her what she thought she should do. "Yes," she replied in answer to Aissa's questions, "I have had pain—very bad pain—nearly all through the night." Aissa and Mamia whispered to each other, and decided to send for an ambulance if they could get her in to the nearest maternity home. They told her, and the woman nodded. She obviously had confidence in their decisions.

"It isn't always so easy to convince them," said Aissa.

“Very often they are against going to hospital. It is a strange idea for them, and they feel they will be separated from their families and friends, with foreigners who do not understand them, and who seldom speak their language. It is uphill work, but little by little, especially if there are more Arab midwives and social workers, we will convert them to modern ways. It is easier for us to do the job than for strangers, as you will understand.”

I looked at the woman's tortured face, and admired the efforts she was making to smile at us. Aissa nodded. “These women are very strong-minded. They are brought up the hard way, and they usually go through life that way. It isn't all roses for them. This one is fortunate. She lives with her husband, and the in-laws are far away. In-laws are more feared here than anywhere else, I think, for they wield a tremendous influence over young people's lives. In the country districts, especially, and in the south, where the Kabyle tribes live. If you want to know just how bad a mother-in-law can be,” she laughed, “I would advise you to go there. The Kabyle woman is admirable in many ways. She is a perfectly devoted mother. I suppose you have noticed, anyway, that most Arab mothers are very devoted; they spoil their sons, especially. It is about the only thing they have in the world to love and cherish. Even their children, however, are soon taken away from them. And infantile mortality is so high that you often find mothers with only two or three children left out of ten or twelve childbirths. The way they live often accounts for that. They all sleep together under the tent or little mud-house at night. The mother has often been working heavily in the fields under the hot sun during the day. She therefore sleeps heavily too, and a sudden movement during the night is enough for the baby to die of suffocation. Or else she returns from the fields at midday, the baby is hungry and she puts him to her breast straight away. The hot milk gives the mite dysentery, which he dies of a few days later. All this, of course, in addition to the ravages caused by tuberculosis and malaria, which decimate this undernourished population.”

“What have you got in Algeria in the way of sanatoria and clinics?” I asked her.

“There are about 800 to 900 beds in the whole of Algeria,” she told me. “Professor Levi-Valensi, the T.B. specialist, says

there should be at least 4,000. But, apart from the actual lack of hospitals, there are two other things to be considered too. If the patient is the head of a family, then the whole problem of social security is involved; and so far, family allowances, insurance, the many things you take for granted in Europe, are not applied here. The people still believe that tuberculosis is incurable, and we are continually fighting against prejudices and deeply-rooted old-fashioned ideas. General prophylactic measures, as Professor Levi-Valensi has often said, will only be productive if they are allied to a social security programme: the improvement of the standard of living, better nourishment for the population as a whole, and abolition of the hovels in which most of them live now. that will take time," she said sadly, looking down at the thin face on the rug below.

Mamia had gone down to see about an ambulance, and we went on to the next patient, a few streets away. But in this case, the expectant woman was surrounded by relations and the object of much attention. This was to be her fifth child. She did not look more than about twenty.

"What effect does it have on them? Do they get hardened to losing so many of their children?" I asked. "I suppose that women are more or less used to suffering everywhere, perhaps here more than anywhere else."

"Yes; I would say that they slowly adapt themselves to deaths and burials until an apparent hardness, a superficial callousness, sets in. But it is only superficial. The slightest reference to their misfortunes will bring tears to their eyes. Joy and sadness are closely allied all through their lives. This is especially true of the country people—the Kabyle women I was telling you about before. Their daughters are taken from them young to be married, and then they are under the tyranny of their mother-in-law, for it is only as she grows older that a woman can take a little revenge, as it were, on her sad life, and find an outlet in domineering the daughter-in-law. But not only the mother-in-law is feared; the husband, too, in these remote districts. Divorce is easy. A woman can be repudiated for the slightest reason, and then she returns home. If she is lucky enough not to have left any children, she may marry again without too much difficulty. It isn't so easy when she has children. The husband has the right, however, to keep the children if he wants to. Sometimes he lets the

repudiated wife keep them until they are weaned, and then takes them back. You can well imagine how much sadness this can cause! There are many songs about this state of affairs in the Kabyle tongue—about mothers-in-law in particular.” I asked Aissa to sing me one, and she hummed this one, which she afterwards translated:

“Mohand, my son, your wife is quite inefficient. She does not know how to wash the linen.”

“Leave her alone, Mother. It is her linen, not yours.”

“She does not know how to dance.”

“Then she will not get tired.”

“She does not know how to make-up properly.”

“She pleases me as she is.”

“She does not know how to make noodles or fritters.”

“I shall buy them ready-made on market day.”

And so the list of complaints goes on until, finally, Mohand, tired of it all, gives way to his mother and repudiates his wife. “And things often happen just like that,” added Aissa.

“Well, what are you doing about it? What do you intend doing to make your womenfolk follow your own example?” I asked her. “And how, by the way, did *you* manage to get out of the rut?”

Aissa smiled. “I was fortunate enough to have sensible parents,” she said, “and they have always encouraged me in every way. So did Mamia’s. But they are not all like that. Oh, there are lots of reasons, of course. But it is a slow process. I honestly do not believe that any of our men want their women to go on being so much behind the times. As they are, they are inclined to be a hindrance to those who want their country to advance. I suppose you have remarked already upon the fact that most of our Nationalist leaders—the most modern elements among our men—have married French and European women. But some of the men prefer to marry Europeans rather than incur the displeasure of an Arab woman’s parents and relatives if they think he is trying to ‘over-modernize’ her. You see, European women are known to be emancipated, and it is an accepted fact, but it is more difficult for *us* to be accepted by our own people. Education is, of course, the basis of the problem. Many Arab girls get a primary education, but those of us who get to the secondary schools and the universities are regarded somewhat as curiosities. Then, of course, the usual question: the material problem.

People are poor, and what little extra money there is will go towards educating the son of the family. There are not enough scholarships, and the few good schools available are far from home. Arab parents do not like the idea of their girls being left to their own devices. We would have to have a special students' centre built for them. Many people have already suggested this, and especially our woman doctor, Aldjia Noureddine, who is always talking about women's emancipation. We are interested, also, in what our neighbouring countries are doing about their women; and it has encouraged us to hear about the Sultan of Morocco and his daughter, Princess Lalla Aisha, who advises the Moorish women to discard their veils. When somebody of that importance, and of that spiritual importance, moreover, gives a lead in the right direction, it is easier for us to follow up. Most of the women themselves are keen. You should see how they are attending the evening classes which were opened recently by the Democratic Muslim Youth movement. And they deserve a chance, too. They are capable of tremendous self-sacrifice. I remember, during the war, how the wives of Arab soldiers at the front would offer themselves as blood donors. Then they sent the sugar that was given to blood donors to recuperate to their husbands fighting in France and Italy and Tunisia."

We ambled along the streets and watched the children playing in the gutters. Most of them, however, seemed to be running on some errand or the other. They seemed happy enough, not knowing any better, although some of them, the more emaciated ones, were too listless to take much of an interest in life, and they just sat, huddled in small groups, inside a doorway, peering out and whimpering softly.

"So many children everywhere!" I exclaimed.

"There are over a million in the streets of Algeria," Aissa remarked. "There aren't enough schools for them. Child delinquency, as you may suppose, is fairly high too: about 4,000 children a year for Algiers alone."

"And what happens to them?"

"Well, I have never been able to go inside any of these children's gaols, although I would very much like to. I know quite a lot about them, though, from the prison doctor, a friend of mine. Maison Carrée is the largest, in a corner of the immense fortress of the penitentiary group. You can see

its white-washed towers from the Belfort district and from the park. Then there is the Barberousse Prison, whose walls are blacker and more sinister. But the children don't stay long there. They only remain at Maison Carrée and Barberousse before going before the tribunal. Afterwards, they go to Birkadem, the well-known *maison de correction*."

"And what does the prison doctor say? How are they looked after?"

"He says that at Maison Carrée and Barberousse the children are heaped up together in large, bare rooms, where they eat and sleep on the floor. They live like all the adult bandits there. They are dirty, and their food consists of the dreadful soup which is served in all French prisons. There is not enough light or air. He says that over 90 per cent. are infected by tuberculosis and that nearly all of them are syphilitic."

"But surely the T.B. children are not kept in prison?"

"Well, the prison régime prevents a lot of things from being done. The serious cases can be ordered to hospital by the doctor. But that is quite inadequate. They would need sanatorium treatment. How can they have this when they are in a prison?"

"Is nothing done to re-educate them along the lines of modern occupational therapy?"

"The doctor is very anxious that there should be. No; so far there is nothing. The children are just left to their own devices; the only thing they are taught is how to make mats of alfa. Children live among themselves, exchange ideas and vices. There is no selection whatsoever. There are plans, of course—there have been so many plans for Algeria—but nothing concrete ever seems to happen."

"And all this misery"—I waved my hands in the direction of a group of beggars and shoe-shiners standing idly at the corner of the street—"is this the glamorous Kasbah of international fame?"

"Quite typical," said Aissa tersely.

"But are there no benevolent societies at least—to relieve the worst of it? No schemes to employ the people?"

"Most of them *are* employed," said Aissa, "but at very low wages. Quite inadequate to keep a family on. As for charity—yes, there are two kinds of societies: one for the Europeans and one for the Arabs. As a matter of fact, the very first

Arab welfare societies were instituted under the reign of Napoleon III, in 1857. The European welfare societies were inaugurated ten years later, but they both have different organizations and sources of revenue. The European welfare committees are presided over by a commission, composed of the mayor of the commune and six members, of which two are municipal councillors and four are private people chosen by the Préfet. Their main revenue comes from a special tax on entertainment, called *droit des pauvres*, which varies between 9 and 40 per cent. according to the nature and quality of the show. As they are now, the Arab welfare bureaux are administered by a commission headed either by the mayor of the commune or the administrator of a mixed commune. They include ten Arab members. The first five are elected by the municipal councils or by the local *djemaas*, the others are designated by the Préfet. Their revenue comes from various sources, the most important being the revenue from the *habous* properties, wills, and subsidies granted by the Government. You can see from this that the two kinds of welfare societies dispose of very unequal means. To compare them, let me give you an example—the one I know best, here in Algiers. The headquarters of the European welfare society is situated in the rue du Divan, and it manages to succour the 4,000 people it has on its lists pretty adequately. The special tax I was telling you about, the *droit des pauvres*, brings in about 15,000,000 francs a year. Then, again, they receive important private sums in the course of the year. This all enables them to distribute food in several districts of the town, and to give the people on their lists small monthly sums of money. Furthermore, they have been able to organize a whole team of social workers and health visitors, who give the young mothers pre-natal care. They have also been able to found an orphanage for war orphans of every origin: there is room for about 285 of them, I believe. By way of contrast, the Arab welfare society has far more people to help, and far less money to do it with. The annual subsidy amounts to about 200,000 francs only; the gifts it receives, owing to the greater poverty of the Algerians as compared with the Europeans, are also much smaller. The two buildings it disposes of, one in the rue Colbert, worth about 18,000,000 francs, is let out at an annual rental of 100,000 francs. Since January 1st, the European welfare society decided to allocate

30 per cent. of its revenues to the Arab society. But they are still quite incapable of assisting the thousands of people on their lists. It's about all they can do to help 3,000 chosen among the very poorest—and what can they do for these? They give them the tiny sum of 150 francs a month per person, and 15 francs for every child! About thirty children can be sheltered at night in a cellar arranged for the purpose. Sometimes, on the occasion of a religious festival, there is a distribution of food or clothes. Very generously, I must add, the European welfare society offered to share its resources with the Arab society, and this would have been of great benefit, but, unfortunately, religious obstacles were put in the way from both sides. It was a great pity. Of course, it really is a problem of such magnitude that it can only be properly tackled from a general administrative point of view. The drive should come from the Government.”

We had got back to the clinic, and Mamia was at the foot of the stairs, waiting to announce that she had arranged for the ambulance and a bed at the maternity home. “Fortunately, they are well off and can pay for it,” she said. “We can’t do this for all our patients!” I left them to their work, and pursued my way back to the hotel. So this was the Kasbah by day. It was surprising there should not be more banditry, more crimes. The people, who had seen me in the company of their fellow countrymen and women, were now friendly disposed. I did not notice any insolence now, as I had done on the first day. It did not take much to win them over: a little friendship, a little understanding, a little *camaraderie*. The English resident at the hotel looked at me in astonishment when I happened to mention my visits to the Kasbah, by day and by night: “Oh, but you shouldn’t go there,” he declared. “You never know what might happen. It isn’t safe at all. Anybody might just stab you in the back. Really, you are looking for trouble.”

“Not for trouble, but for the source of trouble. That’s what I am looking for. And probably that’s where the answer is: in the Kasbah and all it stands for.”

## A DRIVE IN THE NIGHT

AHMED LOOKED THOUGHTFUL when I told him about my experience with the police. It did not impress him unduly, of course, for this kind of incident is common in Algeria, although it does not often occur to foreigners. He reflected for a few seconds before making a suggestion. "Look here," he confided. "I am leaving to-night for Tlemcen by car, with a couple of friends. You know whom we are going to see there?"

I nodded. That was where Messali Hadj was residing at the moment, under strict police supervision.

"Well, we shall leave the Kasbah about two in the morning—we have to be careful and take precautions, to avoid the police. As it is, it will be a risky business. Tlemcen and the roads leading to it are barricaded by police, as well as the town itself. Well, we know how to get to Messali's house and we would like you to meet him. Are you willing to risk it? After all, nothing much can happen to you. You seem to be in enough trouble already. And the practical point about the suggestion is this: Tlemcen is on the way to Morocco. You can get a train from there to Rabat, passing by Oujda. Since you have had your money stolen, why not cancel your air passage to Rabat, get your money back, and then you will be in pocket again?"

The idea was excellent. There did not seem to be any flaws in it. As Ahmed had pointed out, there was really not much more the police *could* do, except prevent us from seeing Messali; and, supposing that happened, I would in any case be going in the right direction—towards Morocco. I assented, and went to Air-France to get my money refunded.

Ahmed had said that there were precautions to be taken. This included my leaving the hotel where I was staying fairly early in the afternoon. Ahmed sent a friend down to collect my luggage and take it up to his little bachelor flat in the Kasbah, from where we were to depart late that night. I was just preparing to leave the hotel when another police inspector called to see me. For a moment I thought that, by some gift of second-sight, the police had guessed our intentions, but I was becoming unnecessarily nervous. This inspector had evidently been sent round by my friend, the Customs officer.

There are so many different branches of police in Algeria that they are occasionally inclined to duplicate each other's work. The proof that this inspector came through the Customs lay in the fact that he had been looking for me at the Hotel Astoria, the name of the hotel I had put down on my original police form at the airport upon my arrival. A few minutes before, incidentally, I had had an apologetic telephone message from the Customs officer himself. He could not "make" the luncheon appointment. He sounded uncomfortable and *géné*. Perhaps he couldn't face another meeting. Perhaps he was too honest. Who knows? I was beginning to feel rather sorry for him. The police inspector sat on the bed and questioned me. He was in plain clothes, and looked a harmless, bourgeois type of individual. He had none of the steely quality of his colleague at the Commissariat of the rue Denfert Rochereau. I repeated the now rather stale story of the loss of my papers, and he took a few careful notes in a little book. He was very anxious, however, to make me believe that some "natives" were at the bottom of the affair. "Perhaps," he said innocently, "perhaps it was somebody from the Ferhat Abbas Party who stole the papers. They are not in good odour just now and it is possible——"

"In that event, Monsieur," I replied coldly, "the Ferhat Abbas Party would have stolen back from me some of their own documents, which they gave me that very afternoon. The suggestion is quite absurd."

The inspector looked at me rather uncomfortably and said nothing. However, he said he "would do his best to retrieve the papers."

Ahmed came to fetch me in a car about half an hour later. A few minutes prior to his arrival, I had gone downstairs to post a letter, and found the police inspector in earnest conversation with the hotel proprietor. They both looked a little guilty when they saw me appear, but I only sighed as I passed them, and a sudden wave of homesickness came over me. How remote we were from solid British security! Ahmed asked me if I wouldn't mind staying in his flat for a little while—until dusk. Then he would fetch me for dinner and take me back again. We had at all costs to avoid meeting the police—if we could. He very much doubted it, because it was obvious that I was being followed. He looked at me suddenly and smiled: the first time he had looked really human. "Don't worry,"

he said. "You will be all right. I think all this is upsetting you a little, is it not? You are not accustomed to this kind of existence? I am apt to forget that it is rather unusual. You see, it is just a matter of course with us."

"But it all seems so unnecessary, so utterly futile; like some rather exaggerated Hollywood film."

Ahmed smiled again. "I quite agree. I wish that it could be otherwise. We all do. We would prefer to work in the open. But our Party is considered illegal and has to work underground. It makes life quite complicated, I can assure you. Not even my people know where I am, what I am doing; and the same applies to my colleagues. Yes; we lead a strange life; it can hardly be called our own. But there is no other solution. We must just make the best of it. Perhaps one day things will change. Now, just you settle down here. There are plenty of books. You said you liked Eastern philosophy? You will find a copy of the *Baghavad-Gita* here, and the *Vedas*. They will calm your spirits, I think."

Ahmed's bachelor flat consisted of one immense room: kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and study all in one. It was situated in a house which one entered by one street and came out of by another, a flight higher. That was typical of Kasbah architecture, and very useful for anybody who wanted to make a quick exit. There were other exits too, I believe, so that one had quite a choice. The little street at the side of the house consisted of a series of steps, and as I waited in the twilight, trying to concentrate, as Ahmed had suggested, on the *Baghavad-Gita*, my reading was constantly interrupted by the subdued sound of footsteps outside. I eventually closed the book, lay back on the little divan and just spent the time listening. The footsteps echoed and re-echoed up and down the Kasbah. I wondered whether they were going to stop suddenly and come inside. I wondered, as the time dragged slowly by, whether Ahmed would come back. Supposing he had been found out, stopped, arrested by the police? Supposing he never came back? What would happen then? The large room seemed so bare and silent. I thought of all the people who had passed through it, as I was passing through it to-night—a stopping-place, a stepping-stone on the way to somewhere. I wondered if the police would ever raid it, as they had raided my hotel room. I wondered whether their fingers would ever touch the *Baghavad-Gita*; and I let it fall

from my hands. This waiting was intolerable. More footsteps—decided ones, this time, up and up. Where would they put the car? Down below? Or in the street above? And supposing the police were watching, ready to stop us as we came out? I shook myself. Obviously, my nerves were getting the better of me. Somehow, I had faith in Ahmed. I realized it now for the first time. I knew that he would manage, that whatever happened he would get back to let me know. His faith was so great that nothing would or could happen to him. Perhaps that was a stupid thought, but it was a comfortable thought in the circumstances. There had been so many others who had had faith, and who had not got away.<sup>1</sup> Aissa, and others, had told me—and Aissa's father was a gendarme—about the people who had been tortured and killed, and even an English Resident, who had been four years in Algeria, had seen the massacre of Setif in 1945, when over 30,000 people were killed. These things were not mere fiction. They happened somewhere, not far from here, every day. Something inside me went cold as I pondered over these things, as if a light had gone out deep, deep inside, and the world seemed very dark, and cruel. Yes, there was something inexpressibly cruel about Algeria. How rarely the people smiled! Those looks, the day I arrived; the hostility, and then this constant jungle-chase here in the Kasbah, and outside in the remote country villages. When would it all end? Suddenly there was a faint tap at the door, and Ahmed slipped in. His presence reassured me instantly, and I jumped up on the alert.

“Are you ready?” he said. “I have just got to pack a few things in a suitcase and then we'll go. I've brought a box of cakes. Mother made them to-day.” How incongruous it sounded: Mother's cakes, this drive in the night, Messali Hadj! I yawned. “You'll get some sleep in the car,” Ahmed said. “We'll sit in front and leave you the back, so that you can stretch—that is, after about an hour, because we'll have an extra passenger until we get to the village of X. You'll be quite comfortable after that. Our chauffeur is rather tired,” he went on. “He's been travelling all last night and this morning, and just got a few hours' sleep this afternoon. However, he's keen to go on, and he's the only available one we have; all the others are out on jobs.” It was the same as in

<sup>1</sup> Only a few weeks after this, Ahmed was imprisoned in Médéa Gaol for several months.

Tunisia: these devoted Party chauffeurs, who seem to drive on day after day and night after night. "Ready?" Ahmed had collected a clean shirt and various odds and ends, and was standing by the door. I nodded and followed him out into the dark passage. Ahmed struck a match and we climbed rather unsteadily up the marble steps. There was dead silence all around.

"Where is the car?" I whispered.

"Just outside. Jump in immediately as we get out to the street," Ahmed whispered back. He opened the front door, or one of the front doors, and I saw the silhouette of the car just round the bend of the street. We advanced quickly and climbed in. There were two other people—the chauffeur and a man in the back. We got in without saying a word of greeting and we had hardly closed the doors behind us before the car started and made off at a tremendous speed through the narrow streets. How the chauffeur got out of the maze is a mystery. This was not the car which was to take us all the way, however. After a rapid drive of about two miles, up and up towards the outskirts of the town, we stopped rather abruptly on the hillside, and changed cars. A breath of fresh air at last. The pine trees were scented, and the crickets were chirping merrily. Down below, thousands of gay lights flickered under the moon. The port of Algiers looked very beautiful indeed from up above, the Kasbah seemed to be a thousand miles away, and the long wait in the dark room a fleeting nightmare. Life was good again—good, and wonderfully exciting. We all began to feel less tense. Formal introductions were made before we set off again. The occupant of the back seat was an agricultural engineer—also a Party member—and it was not long before we were chatting about the *fellahin* and the agricultural organization of Algeria. We were rapidly getting into the country: hardly a house to be seen. We had passed the magnificent suburbs of Algiers, the palatial villas and large gardens full of cypress trees, and now hills, pink and mauve in the moonlight, made their appearance against the skyline. It was a warm, scented night, and the car sped on smoothly. We had 600 kilometres to go and would not reach Tlemcen before the next afternoon.

"It will be better," said Ahmed, "to reach the town in the middle of the day, because at night the police are on the look-out; they are less suspicious in the daytime."

We were beginning to pass small clusters of villages; uncertain lights blinked here and there; the *fellahin* were making their evening meal—or, rather, their last meal before sunrise.

The young Algerian agricultural engineer was interested in co-operative farming. "It is the only solution to this dreadful problem out here, this appalling misery," he said. "As things are now, the land is divided up: on the one hand, into enormous territories mainly occupied by vineyards, which belong to the agricultural trusts and European settlers, and then the poorer lands, divided into thousands of tiny plots which cannot produce enough for the *fellah* and his family. We have more town workers now in Algeria than we ever had, because the little craftsmen have been obliged to give up their crafts, owing to the advent of mass-produced articles from abroad—principally France. Now they have become dockers and unskilled workers. You have had the same development in Europe, of course, but with a difference. You have had, at the same time, a parallel growth in trade unions and social security measures which are almost non-existent here—at least, they have been until now. It is only just recently that Arabs have been allowed into the unions. The C.G.T. and, lately, the Comité de Co-ordination des Syndicats Confédérés d'Alger have insisted that certain categories of workers get a monthly minimum wage of 5,300 francs for a forty-eight hour week. But so far the laws are such that the greater part of Algerian workers—and by that I mean the agricultural workers—are deprived of any improvement in their conditions. Their wages are abnormally low, and they have neither family allowances nor insurance of any kind.

Before the war, at least, the labourer managed to eke out his living by cultivating a little field and keeping a cow or two, or a sheep. But now conditions have changed: the crisis, restrictions of all kinds, the higher cost of living—all these have reduced him to a pitiable state. And don't forget that these are the people who have helped to build up the country. About one-third of the land held by the *fellahin* can never be cultivated, because they haven't enough cattle or equipment, or seed; and what is cultivated at all produces about one-half of what it should. We need a co-operative system for the distribution of seed and fertilizers. We don't need any civil servants for that job. There are plenty of technicians and economists in our

agricultural services, I can assure you, who could get on with the work. There is another important point: many *fellahin* go on trying to grow wheat in soil which is totally unsuited, and others grow vines where the soil is just as unsuited. There is need of a complete overhaul of the land and a general change-over. As for the *fellahin's* technical education, well, I really don't know if it is quite as necessary as some people say—I know of so many cases—once the *fellah* has all that is necessary and the necessary equipment, well, he works just as well as the next fellow. What we would like to see, though, is an extension of farm-schools for the sons of European and Arab farmers, where boys between the ages of fourteen and seventeen can be brought up to the most modern agricultural methods. In other words, we don't want to see the agriculture of the country split up as it is now into European agriculture on the one side and Arab agriculture on the other. Something will have to be done about it, because our production is stagnant and our population continually increasing. Let me give you a few figures: let us take wheat, for example. Well, in 1930 we had 1,330,223 hectares of hard wheat, and in 1940 this had gone down to 1,161,939 hectares. In 1933 Algeria had sown 383,268 hectares of *blé tendre*, and in 1940 455,818 hectares. This slight increase just about compensated the decrease in hard wheat. But whereas in 1930 the total population amounted to 5,964,899 people, we now have over 8,000,000. Therefore we have an extra 2,000,000 people to feed. On the other hand, industrialization has never progressed in Algeria, owing to the opposition of French trusts in France. We only have extraction industries here. We must contemplate one of two solutions for the economy of Algeria in the future: either complete and total economic liberty, which is not the case now, since we are tied to the metropolis, or else we must have a total fusion of Algeria and the metropolis. We are always told that Algeria is composed of three French departments, but this is forgotten as soon as we pass on to the economic plane. A new organization has been started here recently, the Secteurs d'Amélioration Rurale, or S.A.R., but their functions appear to be rather confused. On the one hand, the new system advocates the grouping of *fellahin* in agricultural units in one sector, and, on the other hand, some of the official literature says that "there is no question at the present time, and in view of the *fellahin's* habits and customs, of grouping

individual properties in order to exploit them collectively.”

The hills had been replaced by mountains and ravines, and occasionally we stopped by a roadside fountain to quench our thirst. The hours slipped by, until we came to a village where bright fires lit in front of the little mud houses attracted groups of people busy roasting and frying delicacies peculiar to the time of Ramadan. We dropped our agricultural friend, and he disappeared into the night. And then on again, along winding roads, until I remembered no more. I was roused by a tap on the shoulder at 6 a.m. the next morning, and opened my eyes to look into the pink-and-white face of a surly-looking gendarme. This woke me up very rapidly indeed, and I fumbled for my papers. He had hesitated, it appeared, about waking me up, but had finally decided, in the interests of duty, to question me. My friends, who were carrying faked papers, were all right, and they looked at me with an encouraging smile as I passed the gendarme my passport. He scratched his head as he looked at it. “*Mais je n’y comprends rien!*” (“But I don’t understand a word of it”), he muttered, handing it back to me. “Haven’t you got any papers written in French?” I told him that that was hardly likely, since I was English. The gendarme insisted petulantly. “But you must,” he declared. “How do you expect me to understand English?” I told him, as politely as I could, that those same papers in English had never been questioned by anybody before, and, finally, with a growl and a suspicious glance, he mumbled something inaudible and let us pass. A few miles further on, we were again stopped by the police. This time, however, it was only a policeman who wanted a lift as far as the next village. We breathed a sigh of relief.

Our chauffeur was so tired by this time that he could hardly keep his eyes open, and we were afraid, Ahmed and I, that he might land us all any moment in one of the deep ravines that lay on either side of the road, so we finally insisted that he should stop and snatch an hour’s sleep. We waited for this until we reached a village and the shade of a clump of trees. When we stopped, crowds of children swarmed round our car to look at us, from a distance, like frightened, wild animals. They muttered under their breath, when they saw me: “Ssh! Do not talk to her. We mustn’t. She is French!” For the children to say such a thing, in these remote villages, revealed how deep was the hostility between European and

Arab. I coaxed them nearer, holding out a box crammed full of sugared cakes, and smiled encouragingly. Step by step, they advanced towards me, one with a doubtful finger poked against a fleeting dimple. The boldest suddenly seized a cake and devoured it hungrily. I asked her, in gesture language, to climb into the car. With an excited chuckle, she came and stood beside me. An old man from the village drew nearer and looked anxiously at us. He questioned Ahmed and was relieved to hear his reply in Arabic. "What does she want? Why are you taking photographs?" he asked as Ahmed opened the camera. The children, now full of confidence, clustered round laughing while Ahmed photographed them. I remarked how tender the little "P.P.A. agitator" was with the children: the kindly way in which he patted them and grouped them together for the picture, the paternal manner in which he spoke, and to which they responded immediately, looking up at him with their large, trusting eyes. And I wondered at the contrast in both, like the light and shade of summer clouds passing in front of the sun: the violence and the tenderness, the love and the hate, so quick to rouse, so quick to abate.

Tlemcen at last—at the top of a mountain. The scenery was superb, and as we started motoring round in spirals, through the pine forests, we caught a glimpse of a frail minaret in the distance. A bridge, a rushing cascade below, a few men on donkeys—there was a more picturesque and Eastern *cachet* about this place than any other we had passed on the long way. Algiers and its shadows seemed far away; and now the great thing was to get safely into Tlemcen and see Messali Hadj.

"I think the best scheme," suggested Ahmed, "is for us to leave you at some little hotel in the town, until we fix things up with Messali. If we leave you in some unobtrusive place, try and go up to your room without filling the hotel form, or else the police will be after you within an hour. Then *we* shall contact Messali—we know how—and call for you later. We shall get in touch with a mutual friend, and he will take you to his house for dinner. Then we shall arrange for Messali to join you later." It sounded rather complicated, but workable. Messali Hadj, Ahmed told me, could not move from any point in the town to another without being accompanied by his escort of Tlemcen and Algiers police.

Everything went according to plan. We drove into the

middle of the town, which seemed to be a garrison, for there were masses of soldiers and policemen about, found a small hotel with closed shutters in the midday sun; and I went up to my room, after the hotel people had reluctantly dragged up a couple of buckets of water for me to wash with, since there was no running water during the day. Ahmed and the chauffeur left me; and there I slept until the familiar tap at the door woke me in the comparative cool of the evening. Ahmed was standing at the door with the local tailor, who was a great friend of the Messali Hadj family, it appeared, and with whose family I was to dine that night. Ahmed left us rather abruptly and disappeared, and we proceeded through the narrow streets of the town to a charming Arab house, where dinner was laid out in a courtyard—a tiny pocket handkerchief of a courtyard, with a large eucalyptus tree in the centre spreading its perfumed branches over the flat, wide terraces. It was there that I met Messali Hadj later in the evening.

## MESSALI HADJ

THE TAILOR'S FAMILY consisted of his wife and an ageing mother-in-law, who spent most of the time dealing with the operations which preceded, accompanied and followed dinner, and two children: a mischievous little girl of three, with straight, dark hair and sparkling eyes, who had already been taught the "Nationalist salute" (rather like the Boy Scouts' salute), and a lanky, rather neglected girl of about eight, who was relegated to the background, pathetically endeavouring to attract attention by imitating the smaller child. This elder girl went to a Franco-Muslim school, however, and could speak and read a little French, so that I could converse with her. The other womenfolk could only speak Arabic, so that the tailor was kept busy interpreting. We sat round the table, waiting for the cannon shot to announce the breaking of the fast, with our plates of soup under our noses. At last, the welcome sound, and a sigh of undisguised relief passed round the table like a breeze. The family drank a glass of water each avidly before commencing the meal, which was frugal, and consisted of a vegetable *couscous*. They apologized several times for the lack of meat. The butcher had

not had any meat for days, they said. I explained our rationing system in Great Britain, dwelling on the equal distribution of available foodstuffs among the population, and they were impressed that such a system could not only be devised, but that it was also actually put into effect. The tailor was an excellent host and saw to it that my glass was never empty of lukewarm water. There was no ice, and the water-jars did not keep the water very cool, although the temperature at Tlemcen, up in the mountains, was far lower than in the scorched plains we had just come from. After dinner, we sat on a divan in the little courtyard and I watched the women wash the dishes—also in a corner of the courtyard. It seemed to me that a vast amount of water was wasted in the process, considering how precious that element was, and no drying-up cloths were used. The women put on clogs for the washing-up, rinsed the plates profusely under the tap, piled them all up and then carried them into the kitchen. Since men were expected to arrive at any minute, they quickly put out a few rows of glasses and a jar of fresh mint. Then the mother-in-law retired behind the curtain of her bedroom and the tailor's wife donned her *djellaba* and veil and went up on to the terraced roof. I noticed that, by some obscure means of communication, some of her neighbours had joined her, and soon a rapid buzz of feminine laughter and conversation floated down from all sides. The children stayed with us, and the tailor switched on the wireless: the Arabic news bulletins from our B.B.C. in London, which are listened to all over North Africa, and, after the news, to Egypt for its music. The little girls followed the haunting rhythms, swaying gently backwards and forwards.

The tailor sat on the divan and showed me an old photograph album with the pictures of Messali's young days, for he was born in Tlemcen. It was here that he met a European dentist who taught him about the West and the modern world outside. It was here in Tlemcen, ancient seat of Islamic learning and centre of a once-famous university, where the fourteenth-century historian, Ibn Khaldoun, taught the new philosophy of history, that serious young Messali decided to spend his life trying to recapture the grandeur of the past and to build a solid bridge which would link it to the modern present.

Suddenly a strange noise rose from the far end of the town—

a plaintive, tremulous whine that grew in volume and intensity, passing from throat to throat until it reached the outer wall of the house we were sitting in. The women on the terrace above us rose and joined in the chorus of ululations. The children stopped, raised their heads and clapped. "Messali is on his way," said the tailor simply, closing the photograph album. Above the women's cheers—they were lining the streets, as they always do when the leader goes out—we now heard a cacophony of klaxons, the crunch of motor-bikes and the grinding of brakes. It sounded as though a small motorized column had stopped outside the house. "Do not be alarmed," smiled the tailor. "They make a lot of noise because there are so many police. It is always the same whenever Messali moves from one place to another, or pays a visit to any of his friends in town. The police have orders to follow him wherever he goes." There was a murmur of voices outside, followed by a hollow knock on the door, and the tailor left me to open to Messali Hadj, Ahmed and a group of friends.

Messali Hadj, leader of the Parti Populaire Algérien, strode into the courtyard with the dignity of a prophet. (The Nativity play setting of North African surroundings constantly brought Biblical analogies to mind.) Messali is a tall, broad man with a majestic bearing, and his regal stature is greatly accentuated by a long black beard. A faint aroma of ambergris permeated his snow-white Arab clothes. He came forward with a friendly smile in his deep, kind eyes and shook hands firmly. "If only I had known you were coming to see me," he said, "I would have liked to have received you properly."

I told him that in view of my recent experiences with the Algiers police, we had preferred to act discreetly.

Messali smiled at the mention of the word "police," and his eyes twinkled. "Yes. You see how they protect me?" he laughed. "As a matter of fact, I am rather sorry for them. It must be a very monotonous task indeed, and uncomfortable, too, for they are obliged to live in the *medina* near my house, and it is very dusty over there. They must find that time hangs heavily on their hands. Some of them have lately brought their wives here from Algiers."

Messali spoke perfect French (incidentally, his wife is French) in a rich, pleasant voice. His face became extraordinarily mobile and sensitive as he started to talk about his country and the aims of his party. There is a cheerful

strength about his whole personality, coupled with an affectionate paternalism which is not, I think, merely due to his physical appearance. There was no reticence in his attitude, no bitterness in his speech. An immense pity for the people, in the form of active compassion, seems to dominate his life and actions, but he talked little about himself personally. I liked him, too, for the sudden human gestures with which he punctuated the conversation; for the way in which he smiled at Ahmed and patted him lightly on the knee as he said: "My dear Ahmed, I keep on telling you, you smoke too much; and your teeth are an absolute disgrace to the Party. Why can't you brush them, my dear boy?"

Messali, like so many other North Africans I had met, was surprised to hear how ignorant we are of North African affairs. He, too, has a high opinion of the British sense of justice, and our intervention in Syria, it was hoped, would lead us to take an interest in other Arab affairs. The same questions that had been put so often were asked again, here in this little courtyard under the eucalyptus tree, with a faint scent of ambergris in the air: "Surely, your Government must *know*. Cannot they apply some pressure? We do not desire bloodshed. We do not want to have to fight. We would much prefer to negotiate. But we are up against a blank wall of bias and misunderstanding. Our people are growing more and more impatient. They have already made sacrifices; they are ready to make more; but next time it must be in the form of a concerted effort with our neighbours. We don't want the massacres of Setif to happen all over again. The French are talking about a federation within the French Union; we, too, aim at federation—our own North African federation. We must unite, for we have so much in common: our culture, our language, our religion, our desire for freedom and independence from foreign domination. What would happen to the French? That question is always put to us, as if we intended to exterminate them or pack them off home—two equally impossible solutions. Well, the French and other Europeans—for you must not forget that we have many other elements in Algeria beside the French: Italians, Spaniards, Maltese, etc.—would be treated as all other minorities are generally treated in other countries. They would have exactly the same rights and safeguards. Naturally, a considerable amount of adjustment would be necessary, but it certainly *could* be done."

There were more knocks on the door. Some students were arriving to talk to Messali: Tlemcen boys on vacation from Paris. Little by little, the courtyard was full to overflowing; the glasses of mint tea began to circulate, golden-brown and thick with sugar, brewed by the students themselves. Messali spoke with them individually, and then he addressed them collectively in French. They were words of encouragement, words of hope. Messali stood up and looked at them, sitting in tightly formed rows in front of him in European clothes, with their European veneer, and underneath it all, as he knew so well, the discontented, sensitive tinge of an inferiority complex. Perhaps Messali had been through it himself once. He certainly does not suffer from it now. Yes; probably he had, or else he could not have spoken to them with so much understanding and feeling. He could not have probed their hearts so deeply and made them look into their souls as he did that night. He wanted to give them faith in themselves as Algerians. He wanted to instil some of his own ardour and convictions in the possibilities that lay ahead of them in their own country. He wanted to make them believe that they were really part of a nation. He spoke to them about the encouraging events that were taking place, about India's freedom and the United Nations. The students discussed and debated with him afterwards, as they would with a professor. Some had prepared set speeches; others had even written poems—not very good poems, but the sentiments they expressed were sincere, and they were delivered with conviction.

Up on the roof-tops, the womenfolk listened and applauded every now and then. Some of them, Ahmed told me, had gone up to Messali in the street and spoken to him, and thanked him for all the work he was doing. Such boldness was a sign of the times and the increasing interest that the women were taking in their country's affairs. They were on the march, one felt. The eyes behind the veils were bright with the light of earnestness and purpose.

Ahmed and I joined Messali for an informal glass of mint tea as soon as he could free himself from the students. He would have liked to invite us to his house to meet his wife, but this, owing to the presence of the gentlemen who were waiting outside, was impracticable. Messali would also have liked to show us the beauties of Tlemcen, and especially the old Andalusian mosques and the *medersa* where Ibn Khaldoun

used to lecture. Although he could not accompany us himself, he said, he would delegate his brother-in-law, who would act as guide on the following day. Messali also suggested a swim in the pools at the foot of the cascade which we had passed in the car. He was a lovable person, full of humour and kindness towards humanity. Even after a short time only, one felt a warm ease in his presence, irradiating, perhaps, from his own unlimited capacity for genuine friendship.

I asked him whether he was thinking of escaping to Cairo, as the other Nationalist leaders had done. "Algeria," I said, "is not as well represented there as are the Tunisians and the Moroccans."

Messali smiled a little ruefully, and glanced at Ahmed. "There was a rumour," he said, "that an Egyptian Prince was on his way by private plane to pick me up and take me to Cairo. They say he landed at Algiers, but from there he was escorted back to the Tripolitan frontier, accompanied by two fighter planes. Something went wrong, evidently; and it would be rather difficult to kidnap me from here." He laughed.

When he had gone, taking the ambergris scent away with him, and causing a general stir in the motorized unit outside, accompanied by a repetition of the ululations which had preceded his arrival, we waited for another half-hour before returning to the hotel, to be sure that all the police had left. Ahmed ventured out first, just in case, and I followed a few minutes later, accompanied by the faithful tailor.

## RECREATION

"**T**O-DAY," DECLARED AHMED as we reassembled in the courtyard of the hotel on the following morning, "to-day will be a day of recreation. We owe this to Tlemcen, for it is one of the few towns in Algeria which has retained a shadow of Algerian soul."

"Good," said our chauffeur. "Do you mind then if I spend the morning sleeping?" He was indeed entitled to this after several days and nights of driving!

Ahmed and I waited for Messali Hadj's brother-in-law to come and take us round the city; he appeared soon after,

walking leisurely, the bearer of greetings from Messali, together with his profound regrets that unavoidable circumstances should prevent him from acting as our host.

After visiting the local museum and the mosque where the devout were performing their ablutions, we sauntered out of the town along a shady plantain-bordered avenue, towards the tomb of Sidi bou Medine, patron saint of Tlemcen, situated in the Hispano-Moorish village of that name, nearly as great, in its day, as Kairouan in Tunisia.

We were nearly 10,000 feet above sea-level, and there was a continual whisper of running water from the deep cascades in the ravine pouring out from their natural reservoirs in the dolomitic limestone crags towering above us. Where there was water, there followed a chain of orchards and rich vegetable gardens opening into a wide fan of abundance down in the plains. Here, on the heights, were terebinths, wild olives, oaks and thuyas, in whose shadows lurked the lynx and the hyena, the jackal and the wild boar. A little above us spread the ruined terraces of Dar es Soltane, remains of a once sumptuous palace, with its ten weed-filled chambers crumbling round three *patios*. Brushing broad wild fig leaves apart, we pushed our way through the overgrown path to these hollow chambers. A bat flew out as we peered into the scented gloom of what may once have been a favourite's boudoir. Only a few fragments of ornate plaster work, half-eaten by lichens, coiled steadfastly to the few surviving pillars and, as we approached the terrace, we nearly fell down thorn-covered steps leading to a complex network of underground bath-chambers. Ahmed touched the old stones lovingly. "The only Government post that I should ever like to fill when we are free," he said, "would be the post of *Ministre des Beaux-Arts*. How I should love to spend the rest of my life preserving things of beauty!"

We sat on the terrace, undisturbed, at peace. Below us, a white dome among the trees attracted our attention. "That," said Messali's brother-in-law, "is the Koubba of El Tayyar, the flying saint, who died here in the year 1300. He was an adept in the science—or art—of levitation, and could transport himself wherever he pleased at a moment's notice. So write the old historians!" He told us that Tlemcen had always been renowned for its cult of saints and practice of magic. He told us how Tlemcen had been built three times in three different places on the mountain-side, and that maybe it was the spot

where Moses met Al Khadir. In the time of the Almoravids, Tlemcen had been a centre of theological and legal studies, in which celebrated masters flourished. Moors arrived in great numbers from Spain in the fifteenth century. Once upon a time, the town used to have extensive commercial relations with the Sahara. But the turbulent and unreliable Hilali tribes prevented the capital from enjoying long periods of peace. The Turks, then the Christians of Spain, disputed Tlemcen at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Salah Kai'ir, Pasha of Algiers, took final possession of the town for the Turks in 1555. "God has sounded Tlemcen's last hour. Has He not devoted everything to an irrevocable end?" lamented the popular poetry of this period. The result of Turkish domination has remained, ethnically, in the Kulughlis who are descendants of Turkish marriages with Arab women.

It was only after we had been penetrated with the intense atmosphere of Tlemcen, and that we had inhaled something of its past from the ancient stones of the Dar es Soltane, that we were allowed by Messali's brother-in-law to visit the *koubba* of the Saint himself, the great mystic Abu Madyan al Andalus, buried beside the great mosque since the year 1197. There was a *medersa*, a mosque with its green-tiled minaret, and opposite, behind a wrought-iron lantern, a small door-frame of coloured mosaics, leading down into a dark cavity reminiscent of the Catacombs. On the left stood the famous wishing well with its moulded plasterwork and border of onyx; to the right, under a heavy, embroidered curtain, was the chapel of the saint. There, beneath many-coloured lanterns hanging from the ceiling, lit by enormous candles, flanked by ostrich's eggs and silken flags, lay the carved wood shrine of the mystic. Beside him, another reliquary belonging to his favourite disciple, Sidi Abd es Selam el Tounsi, also received homage from the Faithful. An austere-looking guardian watched impassively as we fingered the heavy gold and silver draperies, and a veiled woman came in, knelt by the shrine, and devotedly kissed the trappings which covered it. The atmosphere was heavy with incense, candle-fumes, and the echo of soundless supplications accumulated in these vaults through many centuries.

The mosque opposite was famed for its colossal cedarwood door and its perforated bronze panels, executed by an Andalusian artist. It was thrown into the sea, says a legend,

as the price of a ransom, and miraculously transported to Tlemcen. In the courtyard of the adjoining *medersa*, an aged guide showed us where Ibn Khaldoun had taught history. He also showed us a flat slab of stone in a corner of the building, under a solitary fig tree, where his own father had been buried many years ago. Such is Tlemcen, once a centre of saints and scholars. On the road back, we saw the ruined tomb of an astronomer, but nobody remembered his name; only that he had been a lover of the stars.

We said goodbye to Messali's brother-in-law before reaching our hotel, and sent our greetings to the leader. Inside the hotel, waiting impatiently for my return, was a local police officer. Ahmed, with his false papers, had not been suspected, but I had soon been spotted as a stranger to the town. The police officer questioned me closely, and I replied evasively. Anyway, I told him, I was on my way to Morocco, where I intended to stay at the Residency. This rather put him off his guard. He looked embarrassed, hesitated and finally disappeared after having taken down copious notes.

The news travelled fast. Later that evening, when I arrived at Oujda, the frontier station between Algeria and Morocco, a complete stranger came up to me with an envelope in his hand. "Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but I believe you are going to the Residency at X. Would you be so kind as to hand this envelope to M. So-and-so?" I took the envelope mechanically, and murmured some banal words of assent.

## MOROCCO REVISITED

**T**H**ERE** H**AD** B**EEN** A number of changes in Morocco since my last visit. The chief event was that Resident-General Eirik Labonne had gone, and had been replaced by General Alphonse Juin.

Opposition to M. Labonne's reforms was violent from the moment he announced them before the Government Council. His policy, declared the die-hard colonists, "was contrary to the interests of France," and they immediately went on strike by refusing to assist at the Council sessions. The Second College followed suit; only the Third College, composed of civil servants and employees, decided to co-operate with the

Residency. The colonists were not interested in the prospects of increased prosperity for Morocco. They were alarmed at the proposed changes in the political and social order. They were uneasy at M. Labonne's sympathetic feelings towards the Moroccans, affronted that he should even talk to several well-known Moroccan leaders. Further, he was suspected of having too many leanings towards Socialist doctrines. The rich colonists were up in arms. Life is very pleasant for them in Morocco. These people have not suffered from any privations during the war; they enjoy immense privileges, labour is cheap and they pay no tax on revenue. Why change such an ideal set of circumstances? They feared—rightly, perhaps—that M. Labonne's three main projects: elected assemblies in which room was to be made for Moroccans, trade unions to which Moroccans would be admitted, and an extension of educational facilities, would be the death-knell of French influence in Morocco. The natives, they argued, do not know enough about civic or professional rights. Their lives are dominated by religious prejudices. Any trade union would merely become a hotbed of nationalism, as it has done in Tunisia, where the U.G.T.T. has completely dissociated itself from the C.G.T. Apart from the colonists, the army of French civil servants in Morocco were equally opposed to his views; being accustomed to unbridled authority and unlimited powers, they naturally resist any plan whose ultimate effect tends to reduce direct administration. As for the military, in the haughty, autocratic isolation of the immense regions under their command, they united in a solid bloc against the unfortunate Resident-General. They even went as far as to send a high-ranking officer from their General H.Q. in Rabat to Paris to ventilate their grievances.

The day was finally won by the opposition after the Tangier incident, which resulted in M. Labonne's immediate recall to Paris. The Sultan's speech at Tangier on April 10th, 1947, had far-reaching effects, and the last ripple has not spent itself yet.

His Majesty, Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef III, Sultan of Morocco and Prince of the Believers, has turned out to be a very different man from what the French had hoped for when they singled him out from his two elder brothers upon the death of his father, Moulay Youssef, in 1927. Now that he has acquired influence over his people and has developed a

firm personality, the French point out, rather bitterly, that after all they, the French, have put him where he is, and he owes his position entirely to them. There is, of course, some foundation for this statement. When the neurotic Sultan Moulay Hafid abdicated in 1912, Lyautey hastened to replace him by a less difficult personality. It was not considered diplomatic to recall his brother, Abd el Aziz, or wise to choose from Moulay Hafid's sons. In the end, the Caliph of Fez, Moulay Youssef, was elected. He was ideal for the purpose, since he had no influence whatsoever, and was of a gentle, rather timorous nature. This appointment caused a little trouble at first, for the tribes hesitated to acknowledge an unknown Sultan who had neither prestige nor influence. In the south, a pretender called El Hiba proclaimed himself Sultan and occupied Marrakesh, but Colonel Mangin soon got rid of him, and peace was restored. Lyautey did his best to surround the new Sultan with all the pomp and circumstance designed to increase his prestige, and he was paraded up and down the country under the Imperial Parasol. The new Sultan, moreover, was a religious man, and this gradually won him over to the people. By the end of the First World War, France's position was well assured in Morocco—so well assured, in fact, that there was some talk in Paris of their governing the country directly. It was thought that Great Britain and Italy would not object, but Lyautey, observing that the Protectorate was guaranteed by international treaties, refused to give his consent.

The great trial of force came later, when in 1925 the Emir Abd el Krim made the boldest bid for independence that Morocco has ever known. The war in the Rif, the long drawn-out, unequal struggle in the hostile mountains, ended in disaster for the Moroccans, as we have seen, but it added a name to her history which she will never forget, and which was to fire the imagination of all the young Nationalists who were to come after Abd el Krim. The echo of his exploits must have equally fired young Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, who was fifteen years old at the time his father died in 1927. He was a quiet, studious youth. Again, the French thought that he would give them no trouble. He would no doubt be taken up with his studies, and, as he appeared to have the same religious bent as his father, they believed that he would follow in the same undisturbed footsteps. But the French

authorities did not realize that the serious, observant young man, who is as old as the French Protectorate in his country, was born in different times from those of his predecessors, that he had a will of his own, a religious fervour which makes him take a grave view of his Alaouite descent and role of religious as well as temporal leader, and that, in spite of his somewhat monastic, narrow, Arabic upbringing and unfrequent visits to France (the only foreign country he has ever had access to), he has, nevertheless, followed international affairs closely, and meditated at length upon the causes of the Sherifian Empire's downfall. Now, at the age of thirty-six, he is a dignified and good-looking young sovereign whose carefully measured speeches and cautious perseverance are directed unswervingly towards an openly-declared objective: the independence of Morocco. Those who know him intimately are unanimous in admiring his quick, subtle mind, his perspicacity, the wisdom of his sayings, which remind one, they say, of the classic Arab sages of old.

It was only in 1947, however, that the Sultan sided openly with the Nationalists. Until then, the French had had doubts about his views. I remember a General saying to me one day: "I don't think that His Majesty agrees with the Nationalists' opinions." They had hoped, perhaps, that the Sultan would feel his prestige diminished by their influence; on the other hand, they could not quite see how the Nationalists' programme, which includes plans for the redistribution of property and vast social reforms, would fit in with the splendour of the Sultan's court and the jealousy of the oligarchy which surrounds him. This is certainly a point which is difficult to assess, but, logical or not, as the future alone will prove, the Nationalists all declare their sincere loyalty to the Sultan, and His Majesty is definitely with them.

He started unobtrusively by taking a particular interest in education, encouraging it by every means at his disposal, and even establishing a Royal College at his own expense (with French as well as Arab professors). Then he started to encourage women's emancipation, and his daughter, Princess Lalla Aisha, who usually wears European clothes and no veil, has emerged from *purdah* and leads an active campaign by speeches and meetings, based on these two points: more education and a more modern way of life for Moroccan women. The Royal Prince, too, Moulay Hassan, leads a Boy Scout

movement and indulges in a little speech-making of his own. All this activity has begun to seriously preoccupy the Residency.

Under the wartime Vichy régime of General Nogues, the Sultan was allowed a freer hand than ever before. In 1940, His Majesty proclaimed his loyalty to the Allied cause. Unlike Moncef Bey, who was less definite, it has been quite impossible to accuse the Sultan of "collaboration." Then the Americans arrived in Morocco. For the first time in the course of their history, the Moroccans had a foreign Power other than France installed in their country, with a display of military, naval and air strength which did not fail to impress them considerably. The Moroccans have always had a healthy respect for warriors.

The people, too, were touched and gratified by the generosity of the American soldiers, and their kindness towards the children. Comparisons were inevitably made, and they were definitely unfavourable to the French.

The Nationalists took heart again. Contacts were made with the Anglo-American authorities, invoking the Atlantic Charter and asking for the abolition of the Protectorate. In December, 1943, after the Lebanese affair, there was some serious trouble; and again in 1944, after which severe repressive measures were taken. When M. Labonne was sent out to replace M. Puaux, who did not seem capable of dealing with the situation, his first brush was with the colonists, who wanted to send their deputies to the National Assembly in Paris. This was in direct opposition to the terms of the Treaty of Algeciras, which guarantees the sovereignty of the Sherifian Empire and its Sultan. The Sultan was therefore quite justified in protesting against such a violation of the Treaty, and the plan was stopped.

For a long time the Sultan had been planning to visit Tangier, a city which had not been visited by a Moroccan sovereign since 1889 and which, because of its strategic position, has always been a bone of contention between France and Great Britain. There was some talk between London and Washington, after the Second World War, of establishing a purely Anglo-American control of Tangier, but, in view of Russia's sudden interest in the affair (she even dug up the Algeciras Treaty, signed by Russia in Tsarist times), it was decided to return to the *status quo*, i.e. the executive power

in Tangier is held by the Mendoub, the Sultan's delegate. Legislative functions are exercised by an international assembly of twenty-six members: four French, four Spanish, three British, three American, one Belgian, one Dutch, one Portuguese, three Jews and six Muslims. A visit to Tangier, the Sultan explained to M. Labonne, was necessary. It was time that the integrity of the Sherifian Empire was confirmed. His passage through the Spanish zone (to reach Tangier one has to cross the Spanish zone of Morocco) would have a salutary effect, for his cousin, the Caliph of Tetuan, had recently assumed an independent attitude which it would be as well to keep in check. All this, the French thought, sounded quite feasible, and the visit might even be useful, since it would serve to affirm French influence in the zone. Of course, precautions had to be taken. In view of the Sultan's Nationalist sympathies, his speech was carefully censored in advance—in fact, it was carefully *prepared* in advance, and a flattering reference to France's role in the development of Morocco was inserted in a last paragraph.

Before the Sultan could proceed to Tangier, however, permission had to be obtained from Spain, the United States and Great Britain. Madrid was definitely irritated at the prospect. The Spanish Moroccan Nationalist, Abd el Khalek Torres, had been preparing for trouble. News had also trickled through that the Caliph of Tetuan, well-known for his anti-Makhzen views, had suddenly changed horses in mid-stream and was even contemplating going to Tangier himself to pay homage to the Sultan. All this was bound to have a bad effect upon Spanish public opinion. Could the Sultan not go by sea? The Sultan, however, was adamant upon this point. Finally, the Spanish authorities agreed to let him cross their zone. M. Labonne, ever unfortunate, was not permitted to accompany his royal protégé through the Spanish lines. As, however, the Spanish question was due to come up before the United Nations, the United States and Great Britain suggested that the visit should be postponed.

At last, in April, 1947, all the various obstacles having been surmounted, the Sultan set forth, accompanied by an imposing retinue and by his son and daughter. The journey took the form of a triumphal march through the French zone, and at Azila in the Spanish zone a magnificent reception was organized by the Caliph of Tetuan, who had decided—as

the Spanish had predicted—to come forward and ally himself officially with the Sultan.

Finally, on April 10th, in the Mendoub's Palace, the Sultan made his famous speech.

I think that a few words should be said here about a regrettable incident which took place on the day before the Sultan was due to depart, referred to since as the "Casablanca affair." Later, the French said that the Nationalists seized the opportunity to link two unrelated incidents together and to declare that the Casablanca affair had been purposely engineered by the French military authorities. The fact is that a massacre which started by an Arab woman being molested by a Senegalese soldier outside the Casablanca barracks took a toll of several hundred, if not thousand, Moroccans killed and wounded, in the middle of the day, before the military authorities so much as lifted a finger to intervene and order the men back to their barracks. The circumstances were suspicious, and His Majesty, upon hearing the details that night at the Palace, in one of his rare fits of temper, struck out the famous last paragraph of his speech—the flattering reference to France.

The news agencies and French radio, who had had advance copies of the speech, broadcast it *in extenso* the following day, so that the public only discovered much later that the visit to Tangier had not gone quite according to plan! The speech, such as it was, stressed the following points: "The legitimate rights of the Moroccan people cannot be lost and will never be lost. We are watching over the integrity of the State. We are striving to ensure a brilliant and glorious future for Morocco. You must therefore not despair, but on the contrary redouble your efforts. We must be active if we want to recover our past glory and acquire a new one." Referring to his people, he said: "The Moroccan people are at last waking up, becoming aware of their rights and following the path best calculated to enable them to regain their place in the world, but there is still a great gap between what has already been done and what remains for them to do."

On the second day of his visit to Tangier, the Sultan received gifts from the population of the Spanish zone. These included a beautifully illuminated Koran and a solid gold sword. They were presented to him by none other than Abd el Khalek Torres, leader of the Moroccan Reform Party in the Spanish

zone. The Sultan then went to the Great Mosque, where he delivered a sermon in the place of the Imam and ended by praying for all Mohammedan sovereigns—a privilege which used to belong to the Commander of Believers, the Caliph of Istanbul, alone. Nobody, since the decease of the last King of Turkey, Mehmet VI, had until that day dared to assume this prerogative.

Before leaving Tangier, an imperial communiqué was issued to the Press, which ran as follows: "Tangier has shown by the warmth of its welcome that it is a Moroccan town which is attached to its sovereign, thus proving that Morocco is an entity symbolized by the Throne. May this journey hasten the settlement of the Tangier question! On the other hand, Morocco is anxious to entertain cordial relations in the future with all the countries who have defended its liberty and who continue to support her case. Morocco ardently desires to acquire her full rights. It is a fact that Morocco is an Arab country, bound by solid ties to the Arab countries of the East, and it wishes these ties to become stronger still, especially since the Arab League has assumed an important role in international politics. We are convinced that cultural relations will help to strengthen these ties. That is the reason why we are endeavouring to enlighten the Moroccans by establishing institutes for their higher education with a similar curriculum to those of the faculties of Cairo, Syria, Lebanon and Irak.

"Ever since our advent to the throne, we have endeavoured to grant our subjects the democratic rights to which they aspire. We firmly hope to achieve the objective which we are pursuing."

The Sultan had unequivocally defined his position. France, injured and irritated by the humiliating omission to her presence in Morocco, immediately replaced M. Labonne by a military man, General Alphonse Juin. It was even rumoured that the Sultan was about to be deposed. General Juin went as far as to prepare a *fetwa* (religious judgment) signed by some of the pro-French *Ulemas*, in which it was stated that His Majesty was driving the country to disaster by opening modern schools and emancipating Moroccan women! But since France could not take such a grave step without consulting the United States and Great Britain, still according to the terms of the 1906 Treaty, M. Bidault had

to approach the State Department, who, remembering the Sultan's loyalty during the war, declared themselves opposed to such a drastic action. The United States have since officially confirmed their friendly attitude towards the Sultan. President Truman sent a cable of congratulations to the Sultan on November 18th, 1947, upon the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his accession to the throne. This event was again marked by a speech by the Sultan, who reaffirmed his ardent desire to work for the welfare of his people, who aspire to "genuine democracy on the same basis as the other nations of the new world." In the event of "possible incidents," the colonists were all armed before the anniversary, as M. Marie explained to the Conseil des Ministres in Paris, who expressed their agreement with the methods used by General Juin.

So M. Labonne returned to the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, where he still holds office in the Ministère de la France d'Outremer; in a purely advisory capacity.

Since April 10th, 1947, the Moroccan Nationalists and the Moroccan masses are united as never before, and more hopeful than they have ever been. Now they know for certain that their Sultan is with them, while, at the other end of the North African seaboard, Abd el Krim presides over the Committee for the Liberation of North Africa. The French declare that there is a split between the two ends of the pincers, that there is a rivalry between the various North African leaders in Cairo and between the Sultan of Morocco and the Emir Abd el Krim. This, however, appears to be mere wishful thinking. The only possible divergence of opinion between the North African political parties represented in Cairo might be on questions of procedure and timing. There has never been any cleavage on basic issues connected with the ultimate objectives of all these parties. It is hardly conceivable, either, that the young Sultan of Morocco should take umbrage at the Emir's activities, since the latter are in his own interest. Alone, he cannot accomplish much. It is hardly likely, on the other hand, that the aged Emir aspires at his time of life to the Sultanate of Morocco; his sons could hardly claim the throne, either. It is far more likely that he wishes to retire peacefully and freely, with all the honour and respect due to him, in his own Berber country in the Riff, once his aims are realized. In the meantime, General Juin has descended with an iron hand

upon Morocco and especially upon the rebellious Palace, where the Sultan, still flushed by his triumphal march upon Tangier, went on strike upon his return, refused to sign any of the *dahirs* presented for his signature, and promptly hoisted the Sherifian flag, alone and defiant, upon his Imperial rooftops. "No more appearances in public for the Sultan or his family," decided General Juin, "since every time they appear in public it is used as a pretext for an anti-French demonstration." The Sultan, after being severely admonished and, from all reports, in danger of losing his throne, put up with this stern régime for a short while. He was even obliged to sign *dahirs* again, under duress (General Juin had the Palace surrounded by machine-guns. "An excellent example," approved M. Jules Moch when the fact was disclosed before the Conseil des Ministres in Paris), and to agree to General Juin's reforms, for he too has initiated reforms which, although they allow for a more active Moroccan participation in Government affairs, are inclined to limit the Sultan's powers. Until now the Makhzen and the French administration have been quite separate: on the one hand, the Moorish *vizirs*, who deal with Arabic education, legal matters and the *habous* lands, and, on the other hand, the (French) Neo-Sherifian Services. From now on (1) five delegates to the Grand Vizir, having the same rank as an Under-Secretary of State, are appointed to each of the principal Sherifian directions, i.e. Finance, Agriculture and Commerce, Public Works, Industrial Production, Mines and G.P.O., Social Affairs, Public Health. They act as information and liaison agents between the Makhzen and the Neo-Sherifian Services. (2) A new post of juridical counsellor is created in the Makhzen, who is to study with the juridical counsellor of the Protectorate, the legislative texts to be presented to His Majesty the Sultan for his agreement. (3) A council of *vizirs* sits under the presidency of the Sultan whenever the sovereign considers it desirable. (4) The members of the Moroccan Makhzen and the heads of the Neo-Sherifian Services meet once a month in a Council of Vizirs and Directors, under the presidency of the Grand Vizir (the famous centenarian, El Mokri, a great friend of the French), for the study in common of questions of general interest. This aims at co-ordinating the two elements of the Sherifian administration as closely as possible. M. Bidault explained on July 6th, 1947, that the reform has a threefold

purpose: first, to allow Moroccans to participate in important decisions relating to Morocco; next, to create an élite of notables, who will ultimately be able to hold more important functions; and, thirdly, to create a permanent liaison between French and Moroccan civil servants. The country is to be divided into regions, as planned by ex-Resident Labonne, with the appointment of Franco-Moroccan councils invested with financial powers. The Sultan feels that his sovereignty, especially as it is affected by the new post of President of the Ministerial Council, which devolves upon El Mokri, is being impaired. The Nationalists, and Abd el Krim in Cairo all denounced this infringement of the Sultan's rights. Further, General Juin has definitely imposed restrictions upon the Sultan's movements and appearances in public. In view of all this, the Sultan decided to complain about General Juin's attitude to the President of the French Republic, M. Vincent Auriol. On December 3rd, 1947, he wrote the President an eighteen-page letter in Arabic. This reached the President in Paris on December 13th. In this long diatribe, His Majesty complained bitterly about the General's behaviour, which violates the 1912 Treaty of Fez, and which, he wrote, "is calculated to restrict his sovereignty and humiliate him personally, as well as the members of his family." As regards the latter statement, I personally recalled the "Temara incident," widely reported in the French Press, which aimed at discrediting the young Prince Moulay Hassan. The French told me this story in Fez when I revisited the ancient city on my way back to Rabat. "A pleasant young fellow indeed, this Prince," they said sarcastically. "So helpful and democratic. Just shows how they would treat people if we were to leave the country! The other day, there was an air crash off the beach at Temara, where many people from Rabat, including the Prince and his friends, often go to bathe. Well, the Prince was there as usual with his car, and he saw the accident. The pilot and his companions were badly wounded and there was no ambulance available. The Prince was approached and asked if he would lend his car to transport them to hospital. Do you know what he said? 'Most certainly not. I absolutely refuse to do such a thing.' Later, in Rabat, I met the Prince himself, a jovial, kindly young man of eighteen, and I asked him to tell me exactly what had happened. He explained quite simply that on his way to Temara

in his little car (a small Standard, which I saw; his father will not allow him at his age to have anything more luxurious), he had passed an ambulance. This ambulance was apparently transporting the pilot's wounded companion to Rabat. As for the pilot himself, he was already dead, it transpired. As soon as the Prince drew his car alongside the row of American Buicks belonging to the French visitors who were desporting themselves on the beach, a French gendarme came up to him and, taking no notice of the regal star on the car, addressed the Prince familiarly as follows: "*Dis-donc, Ahmed. Donnes nous donc ta voiture pour transporter des blessés à l'hôpital*" ("Say there—Ahmed (employing the familiar *tu* addressed to inferiors or intimate friends). Give us your car to take some wounded people to hospital"). The Prince pointed out politely that his small car was hardly adequate for such a purpose, and suggested that one of the larger and more comfortable Buicks could be requisitioned. The story was subsequently distorted as I originally heard it, widely circulated and made the most of for propaganda purposes. From what I personally saw of the Prince, I should think he would be the last person to refuse assistance in case of need, for he appeared to be extremely good-hearted and unassuming. There is not the slightest trace of arrogance or autocracy about him.

But to return to the Sultan's letter to President Auriol. The Sultan asked whether General Juin's attitude was a purely personal one or whether he was acting upon a brief from the French Government. President Auriol's reply was handed to the Sultan by General Juin before the latter left for "consultations" in Paris on January 15th, 1948. Apparently—for to date the detailed correspondence has not been published, upon the request of the French Government—President Auriol in his reply confirmed and repeated the view that whenever His Majesty, or a member of the Royal Household, appears in public it is made a pretext for anti-French demonstrations.

The anti-Sultan propaganda initiated by the French, with the help of a few pro-French *Ulemas*, such as the famous El Kitani, whom I had seen in Fez upon my last visit, is growing in intensity. The latest development, I found out upon reaching Rabat, was the mysterious appearance all over the country of a flood of insulting circulars, in mimeographed Arabic handwriting, directed against the Sultan.

His Majesty had an enquiry made and the author of the circulars was finally run to earth—in the French Residency! He was a Muslim called Farfrah. The handwriting was checked by a legal French expert. His Majesty thereupon ordered the Pasha of Rabat to arrest Farfrah and bring him to the Palace, where he made a statement in front of four *cadis* (judges). He then repeated his story in the Pasha's Court before a high-ranking French official, and declared under oath that he had been acting upon instructions from the Residency.

Such was the tense atmosphere in Morocco as I passed through it again on the last stage of this North African journey.

## JOURNEY'S END

IT WAS DARK WHEN the night train pulled out of Rabat to amble through the nine hours it would take to reach Tangier—only 280 kilometres away. The black-leather seats were thick with dust, hard and narrow, but fortunately there was only one other fellow passenger, a fair young colonist and his small daughter, so that it was possible to stretch out in comparative comfort. There were no sleepers on the train. Soon after leaving Rabat, the inevitable procession started: the ticket collector, Customs officials, currency officials, passport inspectors—a whole army of self-important little employees in shabby uniforms, with more or less courteous manners, part of the staff of 24,000 that accounts for 60 per cent. of the Moroccan Budget. The hours jogged by fretfully, and soon the jagged skyline of the Riff came into sight, with its wide masses of deep black shadows—a sinister, uneasy skyline. Down in the plains, a few flames leapt from the wayside tents. Occasionally, we halted with a long-drawn sigh from the engine for a few panting seconds, while anxious, barefooted children rushed up and down outside selling water and grapes, which fat perspiring men in shirt-sleeves pushed themselves through the windows to buy, after lengthy bargaining.

Soon we would be in the Spanish zone of Morocco. Now we were drawing up lazily at Souk el Arba, the last post in the French zone—a minute railway station in a clump of

plantain trees. There was nobody in sight as we stopped, but we heard doors opening and shutting in the distance, coming nearer and nearer, until our own compartment was flung open and an electric torch flashed over my face. I sat up, still half-asleep. Two men in civilian clothes were standing at the door, eyeing me curiously. "Are you Miss Epton, journalist?" one of them enquired. I nodded, bewildered. "Please show me your passport. Yes. Thank you. Now will you please come with us? Bring your luggage too." Although they spoke peremptorily, their eyes were more intrigued than hostile.

The young man opposite, who had been sleeping, now sat up and rubbed his eyes. "What's all this? What is the matter?" His sleep-befuddled brain suddenly grasped, by a process of delayed action, what the police had just said. "Ah!" he exclaimed, staring at me with interest. "So you are a journalist too, eh? Shake hands. So am I."

"You are, are you?" said the police. "Well, you had better come with us too." "*Ça alors!*" my colleague exclaimed. "Make us get down, at this time of night? *Mais vous êtes complètement fous, mes amis!*"

The police winced and looked uncomfortable. They were evidently inclined to agree with the journalist. They turned towards me for some explanation. "Are you expecting somebody, Mademoiselle?" they asked me. "We have received a telephone call from Rabat. They asked us to stop the train until they, the police, got here. One of them has a declaration to make to you. Don't you know who it may be?"

"A declaration, indeed!" The journalist raised his hands. "At such a time! *Ah, làlà*. What have you been doing, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, indeed," echoed the police. "What can it be about? Don't you know? We need scarcely tell you that this is a most unusual procedure, to say the least. As a matter of fact, this has never, to our knowledge, occurred before."

"Trust a woman to change one's normal routine," grumbled the journalist, who had just been divorced. "Ah well, since we must go—*allons-y*. But it is a colossal bore, and probably quite unnecessary, *je les connais, ces gars-là*." The journalist, muttering to himself all the time, proceeded to lower all the luggage from the rack, and we descended, slowly and painfully, numb with the fatigue of an uncomfortable night journey, on to the tracks. The station itself was about 200 yards away. At that

time of the night, and loaded with our luggage, it felt like 2 kilometres. The police preceded us, with their hands in their pockets, while we struggled on behind.

Two Customs officials were waiting at the station when we arrived, but they did not attempt to open our cases, since they had apparently not received specific instructions to do so. They decided, however, to make me fill up an extra currency form while I was waiting. The journalist brought out a welcome thermos flask of tepid coffee, which he gallantly offered me. We sat on the Customs examination table and talked and yawned alternately for a whole hour before "they" arrived from Rabat. The idea of the police following the train by car all the way from Rabat seemed quite preposterous, but not inconceivable. I could imagine little Slimane standing beside me, or Ahmed. The thought of people like them, and there were so many of them, gave me courage. What could they do to me, anyway? I had that most treasured of all possessions, a British passport. I fingered it, and patted it as it lay in my coat pocket. Never before had it meant quite so much to me. That gold crest on a navy blue background; those little formal printed sentences on the inside cover. Yes; it was a passport to freedom, to a way of life and of justice which is unique. Never had it seemed so real, and yet so remote! "We, Ernest Bevin, Member of His Britannic Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, a Member of Parliament . . . request and require, in the name of His Majesty, all those whom it may concern, to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford her every assistance and protection of which she may stand in need." "Without let or hindrance"—and I was very much "in need"!

"You can come now. This way please." One of the two surprised-looking police officials escorted me through several tiny offices to a larger and more untidy room at the back, which smelled strongly of newly-printed forms. Seated at a table in the centre of the room was a solemn, grey-haired man of about fifty in a black suit. He raised a pair of dark, enquiring eyes as I entered the room and silently beckoned me to be seated in front of him. For a few seconds, we eyed each other with undisguised interest. In the background I vaguely discerned two other men, who remained as silent witnesses throughout the whole scene. For a moment, the

ridiculous, unreal film-setting of the situation struck me as being a hoax—somebody's idea of a practical joke. It was impossible, surely, in the name of all the democratic principles of the *Droits de l'Homme*! But the stern face in front of me brought me back to reality with a jolt. Unfortunately, it was not a practical joke, and the man with the stern face was beginning to talk, slowly, carefully choosing his words and watching me like a hawk as he rubbed his hands together—pale hands, I noticed at the time; they did not look as if they often saw the light of day. His face was grey, but maybe that was due to the late hour of the night. The man in black looked like a very typical bourgeois *fonctionnaire*. Surely, this was Paris, or the provinces, but not Morocco! His thin lips were cruel, and his dark, observant eyes—it was difficult to make up one's mind about his eyes: there were strange shadows in them and sudden glimmers. To begin with, the voice was low and even. Later, it became more rapid and rasping. "I have been wanting to speak to you for several days, Mademoiselle. There is something I have to tell you." The inspector toyed with a pencil in the tray in front of him. "I believe, Mademoiselle—it is true, is it not?—that you complained about some papers that were lost, in Algiers."

I nodded assent.

"Well, these papers have been found."

"Have you got them?" I enquired with interest.

"N-no. I suppose the British Consulate has them. I don't know. I have been talking to the Algiers police on the telephone and they merely informed me that a native returned the papers."

I smiled sarcastically and marvelled that this middle-aged man should so under-estimate one's intelligence. So they had not parted with the papers, but they had warned the police in Morocco about those famous letters of introduction! "Fortunately," the police inspector went on, "by a strange coincidence, there was an agent in Rabat Station to-night who recognized you from your last visit. Otherwise I would not have known that you were leaving."

I sighed deeply; why did he have to make such lame excuses?

"About these papers, Mademoiselle," the voice continued, smooth and oily. "I do not know whether they are complete. What did they consist of?"

I told him exactly what he wanted to know, to save time. "I cannot remember each one of them individually, but there were two letters of introduction—for Moorish people—one for a certain M. Alawi in Rabat, and the other for M. Guennoun in Tangier."

"Yes." The inspector's face lit up. "Yes. About those letters, Mademoiselle: how did you come to possess them? What exactly are you doing in North Africa? Does the British Government know about your visit?"

I was dumbfounded at the proportions my North African voyage was assuming in their eyes, as well as by the naïveté of his approach. The idea of the British Government being involved was, however, so ludicrous that I actually laughed. This startled the inspector, who was quite humourless, and he frowned angrily. "It is quite simple, Monsieur," I replied. "I happen to possess a medical certificate to the effect that I should spend a few months in a warm climate, and, secondly, I have a few journalistic assignments to cover the North African situation."

The inspector interrupted quickly: "But, Mademoiselle, we cannot help being shocked by the fact that you have been continually frequenting nationalist, anti-French, revolutionary milieux during your journey. You have not come to see *us*, the French people—and after all, we *are* at home here, are we not?"

"That, Monsieur, is a point of view," I answered guardedly. "But, as a matter of fact, I *have* called upon the French. In Tunisia, for instance, I saw the Prime Minister through the good offices of the French Residency."

The inspector nodded with studied politeness and again interrupted: "In Cairo, you saw Abd el Krim——"

"And the whole gang," I added flippantly.

The inspector frowned. "Didn't you take any documents from Abd el Krim to the Destour Party?"

I laughed out loud again at this suggestion. "That rumour was spreading in Tunis when I was there, and I did not take it seriously, but, obviously, some people did. No, Monsieur. I am a journalist, not a spy."

"But the Destour Party people looked after you during your stay in Tunisia?"

"Indeed they did; and very well," I assured him. "They showed me all over the country."

“And in Algeria, you saw Messali Hadj?”

I nodded.

“And you didn’t see the French? That was really most uncivil of you, Mademoiselle.”

“I should have liked to see M. Chataigneau, the Governor-General, but he was in Paris at the time. M. Chataigneau was really the only French personality I would have been interested in.”

“And here in Morocco?”

“I stayed at the Residency in Fez for two days,” I reminded him.

“Yes, yes,” he replied testily. “But in Rabat there is General Juin. You did not go to see him!”

“And why should I trouble the General? I have the text of all his speeches in my luggage. I do not think that General Juin would have told me anything more than he has already told other journalists. Besides, this is not my first journey to Morocco. Last year I saw M. Eirik Labonne. I did not think it necessary to call at the Residency again after such a short time.”

“But all journalists do,” insisted the inspector. “And you should have done so too. I am surprised that you should not have realized this. Yes; I know you were received at the Residency last year. I even read the articles you wrote subsequently. They were very good.”

I looked at him in some astonishment.

There was an aggrieved look in the inspector’s eye, which did not, however, impress me as being quite genuine. “When I tell them to-morrow at the Residency that you have left the country, I know that they will be offended.”

“I must say that I am flattered,” I remarked ironically, “that so much attention should be paid to my presence at the Residency.”

“Mademoiselle, I repeat, it is uncivil.”

“But,” I continued, “*if* you had me followed while I was in Rabat, Monsieur, you must have noticed that I stayed with friends there and that I spent most of the time on the beach. In other words, I was taking a holiday.”

“But you were seen with Nationalists in the town,” the inspector added quickly. “Yes. I happen to have friends among the Nationalists. Is that forbidden?” I too felt myself frowning, and sensed that the temperature of the conversation was rising.

“I cannot take a decision without consulting my chief,” admitted the inspector. “But I must say that, in my estimation, you have gone beyond the limits of journalism, Mademoiselle, and we are entitled to complain to the British Government.” (The unfortunate Government again!) “Maybe,” he added with a sly sneer, “maybe that will harm you in your career.”

I sighed wearily. “Very well, Monsieur. Say what you like, do what you like. All I know is that my conscience is clear. Is that all?”

The inspector nodded curtly, and I rose to leave. He accompanied me outside, where he ordered my luggage to be examined by the Customs officials. Both my suitcases were lined with Nationalist newspapers, the Algerian *L’Egalité*—the Moroccan *Opinion du Peuple*, in addition to other documents and statistics which I had been able to collect since the Algiers raid. The inspector looked at them all carefully and muttered something inaudible under his breath. He could not do anything about them, however, for had he not, on his own admission, come all the way from Rabat to inform me that my stolen papers had been found again—and by a native? The Customs people looked sheepish, extremely sleepy and bad-tempered. They even frowned at the inspector, obviously blaming him inwardly for this untoward disturbance in the middle of the night. Finally, we bade each other good night, exchanging glances as sharp as swords.

The journalist helped me back with my luggage on to the waiting train. He was, of course, very anxious to know what had happened. When I told him briefly, he lapsed into an awkward silence. Obviously, I was a dangerous person to know and, after all, I was British. Everybody knew that Great Britain had covetous designs upon North Africa. Had not she taken France’s colonies from her in the past? Always up to stratagems, these British. Look what they had done to the French in Syria! Yes, obviously, it was dangerous.

Dawn was breaking at last. Life suddenly stirred into the air and a bird broke into a spasmodic song. I shook myself, and shivered. A strange loneliness hung over the world—a loneliness mingled with hostility. It lingered on, unseen, intangible. The Riff, in a chain of remote citadels, was swathed in cloud. The arid plains were pink in the sunrise—the colour of flesh, as if to protect them from their poor, stark nudity. In the distance, a white horseman, like a figure out of the

Apocalypse, advanced towards the train. In spite of his antique grandeur, he looked as helpless as Don Quixote advancing upon the windmills.

Was this image symbolic of the North Africans' struggle against the usurpers of their soil? Looking back upon my wanderings and meetings with the Nationalists of the three countries, I decided that it wasn't. The romantic figure on horseback is only a part of North Africa—the picturesque part stressed by highly coloured geographical magazines. The real battle for supremacy is being earnestly waged by the resolute Party men organized into compact cells in every town, practically in every village. Their numbers, and their political maturity, increase as time goes on. It has been a long and thwarted awakening from a pastoral past. "Slowly—still more slowly; you must, for your own good, remain within the French Union," warns the guardian State anxiously; but her wards are weary of paper promises and faked elections.

We have seen how the so-called "reforms" in the three North African countries have been shrewdly eked out with so many limitations, so many strings, so many safeguards for the European minority, that another century could easily elapse without bringing North Africa any nearer to freedom. Independence, however, has never been envisaged by the guardian State, who only alludes, with purposeful vagueness, to the "progressive development" and "natural evolution" of her wards, in a future tense; independence is not mentioned as an ultimate objective after a given transition period of apprenticeship. In the meantime, the paper plans are as hollow as brass or a tinkling cymbal, for they are not inspired by a sincere change of heart. What is the good of resounding speeches referring to Franco-Arab *entente* when these are emptied of all meaning by local statements, such as: "We [the French] will remain here until the end of the world!" Or again: "We are at home here, are we not?" That is the language of the military and the police, both of whom are being reinforced rather than reduced in North Africa.

"We are sending out to North Africa tanks and machine guns to defend ourselves with," cried one of the French Deputies at the National Assembly, "when we should be sending tractors and lorries instead. How can we expect to convince the Arabs of our goodwill?" The answer is: "There

is no goodwill—but distrust and a state of friction which is daily approaching to danger point.”

One hears the same batteries of arguments and answers bandied about monotonously all over North Africa:

*The French:* But you have not got enough qualified statesmen to take over the reins of government, were we to leave!

*Arabs:* You do not allow us to fill responsible positions, so how can you expect us to become experienced statesmen?

*French:* You are not adequately equipped with technicians, engineers, chemists, agricultural experts to fill your requirements and develop the country. It would soon be ruined if we left.

*Arabs:* If we have not got enough technicians, whose fault is it but yours? See what difficulties you put in the way of education!

*French:* If we were to leave, some other less altruistic Power would come along and take our place. [Addendum for foreigners outside North Africa: “The Soviets would take over immediately.”]

*Arabs:* We realize we cannot stand on our own feet economically, since our economy has been developed as a complement to your own, but we are willing and anxious to enter into agreements with you and to hire technical assistance from you in order to develop our resources and become more industrialized.

*French:* The moment we leave, you will waste your time in internecine strife; corruption and nepotism will be rife, as it was when we arrived.

*Arabs:* People who live in glass-houses should not throw stones [or the Arabic equivalent]. We believe that there is sufficient unity within us to overcome these obstacles, which are bound to exist to some degree in every country.

*French:* Beware of Egypt. She pretends to support your claims, but she is really aiming at establishing an Arab empire.

*Arabs:* Bunkum [or the Arabic equivalent].

Egypt, however, *is* taking an interest, as already indicated, and no doubt she will be the mouthpiece for the North African independence cause before the United Nations. Senator Abul Fath (proprietor of the Egyptian daily, *Al Misri*) championed their cause, with particular reference to the censorship of the Nationalist Press, at the United Nations conference on Freedom of Information, held at Geneva in April, 1948.

Egypt, too, continues to try and despatch relief supplies to the famine areas of Tunisia. These are but natural gestures of solidarity on the part of a friendly Arab state, to whom North Africans turn as a centre of cultural inspiration—inhibited as they are in their own respective countries. The short-sighted policy of the occupying authorities has tried to stop this exchange of ideas between peoples possessing a common heritage: Egyptian magazines and papers are not allowed to reach North Africa. Would-be students at El Azhar University, Cairo, have been, and still are, prevented from leaving their country. This only tends to make the spirited youth of North Africa bitter and resentful towards Europeans, and more frustrated at home. Then the Europeans shake their heads and mutter: "The Nationalists are only found among the discontented elements of the population!" (I use the word "European," although, to be precise, I should substitute the word "French." I do so, however, to mark an attitude which is by no means peculiar to the French, since we and others share similar defects in some of our own colonial spheres. I always endeavoured to stress, when talking to the French authorities, that my pro-Nationalist tendencies did not spring from any preconceived anti-French feeling; they would have been exactly the same had the authorities been British or American.)

Apart from the cultural affinity between Egypt and North Africa, there does not seem to be much in common between the sturdy, vital North Africans and the more easy-going people from the fertile plains of the Nile. There are differences, too, between the North Africans themselves, although it would not be wise or accurate to divide and label each one of them into self-contained units. The colonizers have tried hard to accomplish this segregation, and to isolate Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco from one another, raising barriers, preventing communication between them.

Algeria, the first North African conquest, seemed to be an ideal wedge driven in between Tunisia on the one hand and Morocco on the other. Crushed, divided, annexed to the metropolis across the sea, deprived as far as humanly possible of its cultural birthright, it must have appeared logical to assume that Algeria had been completely, and for all time, severed from her neighbours as well as from her original self. It was not realized, however, that the North

Africans are uncrushable and that leaders would arise to inspire and rouse the people. So it is that Algeria has her fiery Messali Hadj and her less fiery but patiently persevering Ferhat Abbas. The pattern is more or less the same in each of the North African countries: each possesses two main Nationalist parties: the one all out for immediate and total independence; the other hoping still to avert a violent break and to deal with a liberal "third force" willing to accept the Arabs as equals and to co-operate with them, instead of automatically seizing the lion's share in Government and profits. In view, however, of continuing obduracy on the part of the colonizers, who find it humiliating (and less profitable) to climb down from their pedestals and important positions on the Boards, even the more moderate Nationalist parties are beginning to lose patience and to adopt a less flexible attitude. No violent differences of opinion separate the Nationalist parties. The main differences—personal, first, and of tempo, second—are rapidly being eliminated. No thick dividing line separates Ouazzani's Democratic Independence Party from Si Allal el Fassi's Istiqlal in Morocco; Ferhat Abbas' Manifest Party from Messali Hadj's Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques in Algeria, or Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destour Party from the clique of the Old Destour in Tunisia. Further, the reigning dynasties of Tunisia and Morocco support the Nationalists; in Algeria, of course, the question does not arise, *faute de survivants*.

The cliché of an Arab idly sitting over his hubble-bubble, sighing fatalistically "*Mektoub*" (It is written), is as obsolete, as far as the North Africans are concerned, as the cliché of the bearded Frenchman and his frog-eating habits; members of all Nationalist parties are extremely active and working as hard as we used to in the pioneering days when there was something to build and to work for. Lastly, the three countries are determined to pull together—uniting, first, to achieve their independence, and later to bring about the economic federation suggested by the geography of North Africa as a whole. It would be unrealistic to declare at this stage that the North Africans could accomplish both these feats alone. Partners are required, and they know it. Will the French wake up at the eleventh hour and give them a chance?

## FAITES VOS JEUX, MESSIEURS!

IT IS THEREFORE hardly possible to talk about "North Africa for the North Africans" in the present set of circumstances. The issue is much too involved, the interests wide and various and the stakes too high.

While France and Great Britain have started joint discussions on the development of their African possessions, to bolster up their depleted economy at home and elsewhere, there is little hope of the North African Nationalists banking on support from Great Britain. The most we can do, presumably, is to express pious hopes that France will soft-pedal her imperialistic policy in her colonies.

The United States, on the other hand, are taking more than a platonic interest in the strategic possibilities of North Africa in the event of a conflict with Eastern Europe. They want bases; whether or not these claims will ultimately dovetail with the Marshall Aid plan—now becoming more and more military in purpose—remains to be seen. In the meantime, their economic interests in Casablanca, Morocco, have aroused official comments from the French. In a recent speech before the General Council of Morocco, General Juin referred to American economic developments in Morocco, which, he added, they are free to pursue according to the "open-door policy" laid down by the 1906 Algeciras Treaty, but it is handicapping French economy, and therefore, he said darkly, "will have to be adjusted." How much adjustment, if any, the Americans are prepared to make is again a matter of doubtful conjecture.

If the question of North Africa's independence is brought up before the United Nations by one of the Arab States, and all the pros and cons of "strong" *versus* "liberal" measures put in the balance, perhaps the Americans may decide that it will be to their ultimate interest to espouse the North African cause and obtain co-operation from the "natives" instead of allowing the present unhappy state of affairs to continue to fester until the boil bursts at an inconvenient moment in international manœuvres.

As for Spain and Spanish Morocco, in the present state of mustering of forces between the European countries, recent developments seem to indicate that it is far from unlikely

that the Western Powers may decide on winning her over: taking the "realistic" view that Spain is anti-Communist, that she is strategically important and that she has an army of over 700,000 strong. Obviously, this is not the time to start taking a sentimental interest in the Spanish Moroccans. Unless, however, we wish to add yet another centre to the already calamitous list of trouble-spots in the world, it would be advisable to make sure that North Africa, already united within herself, does not unite against us at an early opportunity.



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