



**ALONE IN ARABIAN NIGHTS**



# ALONE IN ARABIAN NIGHTS

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## CHAPTER I

### TO THE HOLY SHRINES

**A**SK what is beauty, and you will receive indefinite and varying replies. It is so because you cannot describe beauty. So, too, it is with travel. You cannot describe the feeling of enjoyment which arises in the mind when you travel. Describe adequately, if you can, the sensation of the wondrous exhilaration upon beholding the melting of colours over the mountain tops on a new-born day; or the feeling into which the mind plunges on seeing an old and battered castle on the edge of a sleeping desert, emerging as it does through the mists of an enchanted past.

The motive of a real log-roller or the denizen of many a caravanserai is more difficult to give in matter-of-fact words than the explanation of any of the above feelings.

This, in essence, is the philosophy of a globe-trotter. Not that he travels in order to arrive at any particular destination; he simply moves on and onward. Such men, of course, have been styled as spies, madmen, or at least ne'er-do-wells. All three of these distinctions have been won by the author of this book, according to the degree of the mental limitations of his several judges.

Sitting under the cool shades of Chow Pati on

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the Bombay beach, I saw the tide rolling in, and if my mental dejection then was not greater than that of other down-and-out wayfarers I have seen since on the London Embankment, it was in part due to a feeling that Allah does not desert those who have faith in themselves. From the sea-shore I walked on, like one in a trance, my mind full of desire to journey to Arabia. It was towards Crawford Bazar that I went, for I would have a taste of real mangoes. They were the most innocent things of all in India. And that was a turning point.

As I lifted a basket of fruit to take away to my abode from the fruit-market, I felt a soft hand on my shoulder: "*As salam alaikum*—peace be upon you—fancy seeing you here!" called a voice.

Looking round, my eyes beheld a familiar face—a retair *fix* of a wealthy North Indian landlord stood before me. The man had not changed since my days at the "paradise of learning" in Aligarh that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan built, and which gave that enlightenment the young generation of the Middle East possess.

My friend's linen cap rested just as awry on his well-oiled, bobbed hair; his long shirt was just as immaculately sewn with lace, and the gold buttons fastened the collar in the most accepted fashion of the Moghal Court. The aroma of his scented betel-nut wafted towards me, blotting out the days of my long stay in Europe and the years when Prince Charming of Bhopal used to be the pupil of the eyes of his fellow-cricketers at Aligarh.

He was accompanying his master to the pilgrim-

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age of Holy Mecca. The grandee had a whole *qafala* or pilgrim band with him. Would I join? It was a god-sent invitation. Yes, I would go to the Cradle of Islam: and then an evil thought crossed my mind. Could I go in the *qafala* of a rich man, whose forbears were the best and closest friends of my people, and travel in third-class, whilst he travelled in the first-class cabin? The snobbery of Asia is the worst snobbery under the sun. I would think it over. For the time being, I preferred to let it lie dormant.

There were but two days to decide the question. The next day I walked to the palace of a rich Indian lady—some six miles up the Chow Pati hill—to get an inspiration on the vexed question. By the time I arrived on the terrace of the Begum, the glamour of an afternoon garden party had very considerably diminished, for she had known me when I played the rich man in Delhi society: and now, as I stepped on to her sun-bedazzled terrace, there was a noticeable surprise over my Indian disguise. She hardly expected to see a one time immaculately dressed former Secretary of a Foreign Legation step into her wondrous castle in Eastern dress of such a poor sort. Perhaps in the eyes of some, clothes make a man! Still, I did not think it necessary to apologise for being what I was.

Tea was passed to me by a very delicate young Prince, who spoke with an effeminate lisp. He wished to impress me by informing me that he was going to England soon. He did not forget to tell me that it would be his seventeenth visit.

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He always travelled first-class. I was informed, too, that he always stayed in Mayfair. May I add here that I met the Prince subsequently in London, when he kindly invited me to tea in his rooms somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tooting. I naturally did not remind him of our former conversation on the terrace from which you could see miles of angry sea howling to the Malabar hills.

There was, of course, a lady there, an Indian lady of great age and greater proportions. Neither of these two attributes were we permitted to note. It was enough that she was an Indian Knight's wife; and, of course, "how well her English pronunciation resembled that of the real English women," observed my delicate and effeminate Prince in a whisper.

To my left sat a Professor, a mere youth both in age and learning, if one were to compare him with such giants of intellect as the late Sir Thomas Fraser of Edinburgh. He would, however, not let me forget that he was a man of learning, so learned indeed that he had written a whole book; and so eager was he to benefit mankind by his scholarship that he published it at his own expense. The book was about the cure of dog bites, and I think that he was a lecturer on fine art or music, I really forget which. But I am not wrong in recollecting that he did try, even during those short minutes when I was having my fourth cup of tea, to establish some sort of connection between the subject of his lectures and the theme of his "well-known<sup>0</sup> book, as he put it. He, too, was

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reputed to speak with a distinguished English accent; "just like a Sahib/" was the term used, if I remember aright.

My emphasis on this mere aping of English dress and method of speech in an essentially Oriental gathering is to be particularly noted, because it goes to show how little the anti-Western feeling has changed the craze of that sort amongst the idle rich, even in a place not many miles away from Mr. Gandhi's movement. And in the midst of this glittering gathering sat I, a solitary figure in Eastern dress, and with an unshaven chin.

Came the day of decision. I rose from my bed still hesitant about my plans. That day, too, was the last day when I could have free lodging in the rest-house. Presently, by accident or by some providential design, I heard a great deal of shouting going on under my bedroom window. Looking out, all I could see was a medley of bazaar people, engaged in some fierce altercation. Nothing draws me like a magnet more readily than a free fight. Within a few minutes I joined the throng.

An Uzbek of Bokhara, who wore long felt boots and was a pilgrim on his way to Mecca, had bought a melon, and the melon was not ripe; at least, it was not as sweet as in his Golden Samarkand; and the fruit-seller refused to exchange it for another. The poor Central Asian pilgrim could not make himself understood in the language of Hindustan.

How your blood tingles upon hearing your native language in far-off lands! And when I translated in Persian and had the matter adjusted,

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the Son of Old Asia clasped me in his arms as if I were his long lost brother. Then he related to me the story which had hurried his steps Meccawards. His beloved wife had died. He could not live alone. The pain of that separation clutched him like a living creature. . . . And so dearly it was that he wooed her.

The man was almost hysterical with the thought of his loss by the time he finished his life-story—or, at least, the only story which mattered to him. Once his friend and companion had gone, he could not live alone, he wanted to die; and what better place to reside in waiting for death than Mecca, the Cradle of his Faith. Thus, too, he thought to fulfil his covenant to God, by performing a pilgrimage at least once in his life-time, as enjoined upon the faithful.

And that, indeed, is the true spirit of the East, where life's bitterness arises or diminishes with one's associations; and where such associations are deeply embedded in family connections or the true affection of a husband for his wife, and *vice versa*. In cruder form, too, you will find it in the once rife practice of *Suttee*, when widows throw themselves on the burning pyre of their deceased husbands.

The true love and romance of Asia still resides amongst her unsophisticated sons, amongst the plough-boys in the heart of a desert born, or amongst the camel-train leader winding his caravan in and out of the mighty passes of the Afghan highlands; it is one of those rare virtues which, like a rich stone, is best set plain. And it was in

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this spirit that I heard the story of the Uzbek that burnt in his heart.

That story also served to dispel the belief that woman in the East is a mere chattel. Actually, she is greatly respected and honoured, infinitely more so than in Europe. What peasant youth in the West will become a hermit, if he loses his spouse? I take the village community for preference, because no city in Europe is truly representative of the people. Someone will say that such a thing in the West would be considered madness.

When I rose from the Turkoman carpet which my Uzbek friend had spread for me in the *Mosafir Khana*, or the rest-house, I walked away towards the sea-shore almost as deeply touched as I was with the Central Asian story. It was past the time of afternoon prayer, and the Chow Pati beach was already crowding. Parsi women in *sarees* of wondrous hues and silken texture walked back and fro; their sickly-looking menfolk, with pinched cheeks, wearing pill-box shaped black velvet caps, led the children behind their ladies.

A hundred or more men and women clustered round a magician, who professed to swallow half-a-dozen razors at one gulp; the betel-nut seller smeared the paste on the leaves and handed them round to a couple of North Indian youths; the cool-drink seller was pouring out red and yellow and green sherbet from several bottles for those who could afford to pay a halfpenny for a quaff; and, of course, there was a political lecturer with a fair number of listeners and interrupters.

Every local beach train which passed by the

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shore at an interval of seven minutes, brought more Parsi women, more children, more cool-drink sellers, more betel-nut sellers, until before sundown the whole beach was a seething mass of humanity and gigantic seaside fair that, I was told, was the programme every day of the year.

Soon I was in a forlorn caravanserai in the depths of the city, where the inn-keeper told me that it would cost me more than a rupee and a half to secure a night's rest at his place. I did not wish to waste the sum, so to an adjoining mosque I betook myself. A small tin box—one of those atrocities which you often see at the rustic fairs—was my sole item of luggage.

It was, however, late in the night that the final resolution came to me regarding further travels. The previous day's meeting with the Nawab's agent, and the story of the Uzbek accentuated the craving of every Moslem's heart to go to Mecca.

Late though it was, I sallied forth to seek the Nawab's residence in some back of beyond place in the city. With that tin box perched on my turbaned head in the approved fashion of the wayfarer, I walked a mile, two miles, four, five, and then sat down to take a rest. The horse-carriage, the perilous-looking *Tanga*, the tramway, all were at a standstill. The city was in deep slumber as I walked through bazaar after bazaar, passed the clock-tower, the railway station, the cricket grounds; only occasionally the night patrol passed me; and yet I walked on to swell the number of the Nawab's retainers. The party was due to sail

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for Arabia precisely at n a.m. the following morning.

At last, in the half-light of the dawn, I read the name of the road where the Nawab's house was situated. At the cross-roads I made a somewhat protracted halt in order to adjust my turban, dust my shoes, pull up my socks, and to tidy myself generally before appearing even before the night watchmen of the grandee.

This done, I proceeded towards the house, the unsightly tin box under my arm. That the box which I had bought that night in a hurry had, apart from its rustic floral design of lurid red and yellow, a picture of a heathen goddess with multifarious hands and feet, is not quite beside the point, because fancy my possessing that kind of box—I, a faithful, bound to the monotheistic shrine of Islam! Thinking it over now, of course, it must have looked quite ridiculous when I stopped on the roadside at least twice, in order to rub off the figure of the goddess from my Islamic luggage, as I had a prayer carpet and a copy of the Koran in it.

The stillness of the morning was now broken; the long, drawn-out chant of *Allaho-Akbar*, *Allaho-Akbar* (God is Great, God is Great) rose from the throat of the Mullah, calling the faithful to the prayer of the dawn. Here, sure enough, was resting the worthy caravan of the Nawab.

Presently I joined the hurrying figures of the worshippers and stood at prayer just behind the worthy whose pilgrim band I was to join. The Nawab was not surprised to see me, for he had

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been informed of my intention to join his fellow-passengers by one of his men who had hailed me at the fruit-market. But as they had all taken their boat tickets to the Red Sea port of Jeddah, naturally, it was assumed that I, too, had provided myself with one much before that morning, for within a couple of hours all would be on board the steamer. Of course, I had done nothing of the kind, yet said nothing about it.

The next two hours were the busiest in my life so far, because I had to get a ticket, secure a passport, buy some medicine, a regulation sheet which had to be worn on the pilgrimage and some articles of clothing. The difficulty was that not only were the various offices and shops where I had these businesses to transact at very scattered points of the compass, but it was not at all probable that I would get accommodation on the boat—a pilgrim steamer notwithstanding, in which they pack the travellers like pilchards in a tin—at such short notice, nor could one get a passport by merely looking into the Government Office, for a certain degree of red tape was necessary.

It can therefore be imagined how I stumbled in my haste, like a hunted thing. When I could not reply at the Shipping Office as to the class in which I wanted to travel, the booking clerk tapped me on the shoulder and took me aside: "Take my tip . . ." and he halted. I took his tip, and ten rupees slipped from my hand into his. I was travelling first-class, but I found that the pilgrim boat first-class is worse than even tourist-third in most liners.

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As I emerged from the booking-office like the very whirlwind, I never looked as to who took away my tin box, because the prayer carpet under my arm was all that I needed. The volume of my Koran slung over my shoulder, I raced through an enveloping dust cloud to the Haji boat. Presently, a concourse of humanity emptied itself from an adjoining jetty train in front of me. They were all making for a tin shed, the blazing sun of the tropics beating upon their shaven heads. All we pilgrims were to be vaccinated under that tin shed.

In row upon row we sat waiting for the Haji doctor to arrive. Afghans, Persians, Javanese, Indians and Uzbeks, all staring at one another and endeavouring to follow diverse languages we had never heard before. At last vaccination was done, and no sooner was the medical certificate granted and our fellow pilgrims free to move, than one could see some of them hurrying along the passage with their left shirt sleeve folded. A moment later you noticed them behind the shed, washing the wound inflicted by the vaccinator; for, according to the rumour in far-off villages of ancient Asia, the lymph used is considered to be "an impurity of the cow," and rumours die hard.

Close by the quay platform lay the boat to Jeddah on the Red Sea, and when the final word of "depart" was given by the medical authorities, there was a rush for the gangway. Stalwart Pathans of the frontier, weak and ill-fed Bengalis, sleepy-eyed men of Bokhara, veiled women bearing children in their arms, made one great rush.

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They carried their valuables along with them in sacks, crudely-made boxes, or bulging baskets insecurely tied with ropes. The sacks, however, were in predominance as items of "portable luggage," always "wanted on voyage."

We, the faithful, were excited, more truly excited than children before a party, for a mystic veil hung over the whole atmosphere, because we were bound for a city the thought of which had grown with us since children; a city of holy dreams and devout yearning inbred in the blood of every Moslem as a part of a tradition centuries old.

And the noise and bustle wended with the sanctified air of the pilgrim boat. We rushed the gangway, people pushing into sacks, bundles and baskets pushing into people; a water receptacle now peeping out of a sack, now pushed up by the jostling crowd, and then slipping out of the hands of its owner into the sea; thus the narrow pathway led the faithful to the deck and away down to the ship's enormous cavernous depths.

Three shrill blasts, a thud of the engines, and slowly we moved away from the shore amid cries of *Allaho-Akbar, Allaho-Akbar* (God is Great, God is Great).

Existence on the pilgrim ship, to one used to the ordinary comforts of life, was, to say the least of it, harassing. Although much has recently been done by the Wahabi Government to provide livable conditions, the devotees were crowded together. The worst phase of the voyage began on the third day after we had left Karachi for Jeddah, because practically every pilgrim was in the throes of

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*mal-de-mer*; and one of them who, only the day before, had told me that he could not be sea-sick, was prostrated and prayed loudly for death to release him.

The shouting and harrying scenes had come to a standstill, for the sky was now grey, the wind swept the vessel, and the waves beat on the sides with more than ordinary force. Corpse-like men lay on the deck, on their charcoal sacks, on coiled ropes, everywhere, uttering not a word, hardly interested in existence and readily denying food or drink. They thought an evil spirit had come upon the boat.

But it takes more than a rough sea to hide life altogether, for as soon as the waves subsided the corpse-like ones rolled up their bedding, sat up, cooked their food, the Persians made tea, the Bengalis skinned fish, the Pathans were busy with their Palau rice of excellent flavour.

During the spell of sea-sickness the pilgrims had lost all clear idea of their purpose; but on recovering they soon remembered the solemn idea that induced them to journey to the city of their childhood and life-long prayers. The air on the boat was "thick with religion," prayer carpets were spread, recitations of the Koran were chanted, doctors of theology were busy reading to the devotees those chapters of the Moslem Holy Book which related to that part of the journey of the pilgrimage.

In the afternoon, religious discussions took place, even political, and both used to end where they began. Thus the life of the pious on a **pilgrim**

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ship was spent, till one day, soon after dawn, the captain appeared on the deck and pointed out to us in the distance a dark blue line—the Holy Land of Islam! The Arabian coast! The port of Jeddah!

I could hardly speak for excitement, for was I not going to see that "Great Unknown" to which I had stretched hands all my life? Little by little it became clearer, as we stood watching it in our *ahram*—our regulation pilgrim costume—till the white city of minarets and domes of Jeddah lay as cut in marble when the boat dropped anchor some two miles from the shore. From that point no ship could go nearer, as the reefs are very numerous, and many traversed that portion in tiny sailing boats, tossing like cockle shells on the crest of the waves.

The first sight of Jeddah gripped me. I gazed at it as a Moslem, with pleasure mingled with awe and reverence. Beyond that city, at a distance of fifty miles or so, lay Mecca, the goal of my hopes—the Holy of Holies of every Moslem.

Life's dream, I thought, had at last been realised. The pallor of my face and those tears which dimmed my eyes were indications of my emotions. The scene was strangely familiar, for had I not faced the Holy City five times every day in prayer? Absorbed in these thoughts, I remained in Jeddah for the night, and next day in a motor-car started towards Mecca.

Those of us who had more money than sense were bundled into a large motor-car, and were told that by this means we were to travel the fifty

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miles. We had not proceeded far, when a halt was called at the reputed tomb of Eve. Curious as to the grave of my great ancestress, I alighted to examine it. She must have been a lady of formidable proportions, for the original grave, I was told, was some eight feet long. But the grave had, by the time I arrived, mysteriously extended itself to altogether gigantic dimensions.

On payment of a fee I learned that during pre-Wahabi days one could receive an oracular message from the buried progenitress of suffering humanity. This was, of course, supplied by a confederate in an underground crypt, who, for a shilling or two, droned out a "prophecy." Fortunately, the evil practice is now stopped, since the advent of the Wahabis in Arabia.

As we trundled over the sandy tracts, we felt the grilling heat of the desert overpoweringly. I was dressed in the traditional *ahram*, which consists of two sheets, one for the upper part of the body, the other for the lower, knotted together, as pins or sewing are frowned on by Moslem law. In accordance with immemorial custom, too, my head was shaved and unprotected from the merciless sun. At last, after twenty-five miles of the hottest journey that I have ever undertaken, we halted at the half-way house of Bahra, where we were told was a well. Thanks to the Wahabi King, we found not only water, but even cool drinks—a god-sent thing in the scorching heat of the desert.

Hardly had we journeyed three miles beyond the well when the rear wheels of our car sunk deep

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in a sand heap. We alighted and strove to move the venerable and ancient vehicle, but to no purpose, and much to the contemptuous amusement of a passing Bedouin, who, from the back of his swift-trotting camel, jeered at us unmercifully.

"It serves you right for bringing that creation of Satan into the sacred land/<sup>1</sup> he yelled. "Why can't you travel on camel-back, like other folk? See, I can make my camel stop when I want and go when I wish him to. Take that iron contraption back to the devil who made it."

From the moment the pilgrim enters Mecca to the time of his departure, he is kept in a fever of excitement and pious frenzy. Ceremony after ceremony claims his constant and unfaltering attention. He is for hours wedged in swaying and seething crowds. One of the rites is the passing seven times between the space of Safa and Marwa, the alleged tombs of Hagar and Ishmael, a distance of perhaps three hundred yards, which is known as the Sai ceremony, and from which one may acquire much merit. The road is not narrow, but is constantly crowded with pilgrims. Add to this, prayer five times a day, and one has not much time to see the sights of Mecca. Not that there is really much to see in the non-religious sense of the term; and the atmosphere of the town is austere—and so, indeed, it should be, for the Sultan Ibn Saud, the present guardian of the Holy Shrines, has the true Islamic spirit at heart and has banned those sordes which pollute certain fringes of Asia.

Prior to the actual day of the pilgrimage and the assembly of the Grand Moslem Conference, I had

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time to make occasional excursions in and around the city of Mecca. If you walk right through it, the actual town cannot be more than two and a half miles long, and beyond Babul Omra quite delightful houses of modern construction, even with an adequate water supply, can be seen. But its heart is the Great Mosque, the Harem Sharief, in the centre of which stands the stone structure known as Kaba; the sacred Black Stone, which every pilgrim kisses, being built in one of its walls.

During my 40,000 miles or more of recent travelling, both in the East and the West, I have not so far come upon a building with which I could compare the Great Mosque at Mecca. In design and style the structure has no parallel. In the first instance, it is a great rectangular courtyard, about 250 yards long and a little less than this in width. Nineteen gateways give access to its interior; and as one enters it a remarkable spectacle strikes upon the eyes. All round are colonnades crowned with rather low ar6h-shaped domes. Several minarets rise from its walls.

From various points of the outer colonnades narrow pathways lead to the centre of the space, where stands the Kaba, entirely draped in a thick black tapestry. Near this is the well of Zam Zam, reputed to have yielded water to Hagar; then there are some pulpits from which prayers are conducted, because pilgrims in prayer, when actually inside the Great Mosque, surround the stone structure of the Kaba; and a great congregation of the Islamic world meets there five times a day.

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And now as to the spirit which grips one in Mecca. When I was visiting Mecca, I had already lived or had contact with the dazzling civilisation of the West for close upon ten years. I loved comfort. Whereas I could rough it on a journey, as most Orientals can, yet the lack of physical well-being distressed me; that is, the veneer of Europe lay thick on me. I was not the most devout of Moslems, nor indeed was I over-conscious of the power of religion. There was a good deal of "alloy in my heart," as the Sufi doctors of Islamic Law term it.

With this mental pose I entered Mecca, looking for iced water, electric fans, sumptuously decorated apartments, good motor-cars, and more. Instead, I found a temperature of over 133 degrees in the shade, no quick method of locomotion, strange food, very little ice, apartments but poorly furnished; in fact, I met with every discomfort which one could remedy outside Mecca.

Now a strange feeling came upon me. I found myself suddenly dropping into a sort of mental vacuum. Discomforts did not appear as discomforts. Believe me, that if I did not pray, and pray in the grilling heat of the Great Mosque, I felt most wretched. Everything else outside Mecca, outside that quadrangle with its Shrine of the Black Stone, was lost to me. I literally forgot everything. All day long, all night too, I did nothing, cared to do nothing else but pray, bending and kneeling towards that mysterious and august stone building, standing as it did, draped in black. I slept on the stone floor of the Mosque,

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and used to *get up* and wash myself for prayer at all odd hours of the night.

Nor was I alone in this practice; for every minute of the day and night people were reading the Koran, or bending low in prayer, or going round and round the Kaba Shrine of the Black Stone, dazed with some indefinable influence.

But it is to be regretfully noted that the atmosphere changed when one went a little further away from the Great Mosque. One incident stands clear in my mind. The late lamented Mohamed Ali and his brother, Moulana Shaukat Ali—the names of both of these, who were the giants of Indian politics, are well-known—were staying in Mecca at the time, awaiting the opening of the World Moslem Conference which the Wahabi King had invited.

My visit to their house to inquire after the health of the former—who was ill—and my meeting there may prove how true it is that even in Mecca people may behave in an unholy manner, and that the influence of the Holy City corresponds to the reverence in which one holds it.

As soon as I arrived at the apartment of the Moulanas I found them lolling about on cushions, and engaged in a fierce argument with the Palestinian delegates about the alleged atrocities of the Wahabi King. That they were the guests of that King in Mecca may not be beyond the point. Upon my taking my seat at the end of the room, a silence fell upon the company, a silence which menaced, for I knew that the Moulanas never favoured my line of policy; or, indeed, any political

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philosophy which differed from theirs in the least degree; so they looked to each other as venerable sanctuaries holding their posts like some lonely old gods of memory, brooding over vanished glories, when an insignificant man like me dared to challenge their opinion. At last the younger brother spoke like an ogre to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

"This man/' he pointed to me, "is one of our most brilliant men of Islam, but he likes the British, and," he regretfully continued, "whether he loves Islam or the British most, I do not know."

I could not control my temper, and in a spirited reply reminded him that he had misunderstood me all along, and that he was a little too concerned about losing his self-fashioned crown at the hands of younger Moslem writers, whilst at no time would I sell for anybody's friendship.

The other took the words out of the mouth of one, Sulaiman Nadir, and taunted me for taking a wife from a different clan than my own. It is strange, however, how both taunts came to roost; for, as the world knows, the younger respected Moulana, amidst tears, begged the British in London, during the Round Table Conference, to bury him in their own country—in the land for the life blood of whose people he thirsted barely a year or two before. The other Moulana was recently married to a young and virtuous English girl.

## MECCA AND BEYOND



## CHAPTER II

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**A**ND thus avoiding any further contact with the outside atmosphere of the Great Mosque, I prepared for the World Moslem Conference. The date of the Conference was altered no fewer than three times, and it was a great relief when at last we were informed that the Motamar Islami would begin on Sunday, June 6th, at two o'clock. It was held in the old Turkish artillery barracks or fort, on the top of a rocky eminence outside the western gate of the city. As we approached it I noticed the green Wahabi flag flying from the tower. Standing alone on the grey rocks, the white fort presented a charming picture, reminding one of an Arabian knight's castle. All round the building, on the rocky ground, earth had been spread and sown with barley and other cereals to produce a green effect, and a dozen or so men were spraying water on the young shoots.

At the entrance white-robed officials wearing white turbans received us and examined our credentials. We then passed up the wide staircase to the hall upstairs, where the Congress was to deliberate—a spacious oblong apartment, some ninety feet in length. There were latticed wooden

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shutters to the window openings painted green, this being the colour also of the curtains as well as the covers on the tables. The latter were arranged in the form of two giant horseshoes with a fair space between them.

The Turkish delegates failed to make an appearance till later, but the leading Moslem countries were represented. Russia had seven delegates; the Hejaz twelve; Java five; India twelve; Nejd five; Asir three; Palestine three; and Syria three: and, in addition to these, the Wahabi King had appointed two doctors of theology to represent the Sudan and three to represent Egypt. It should be noted that, in addition to Turkey, neither Persia, Iraq nor the Yemen was represented at the Conference till later. The Persians never came at all.

Precisely at two o'clock, when all had taken their seats, a muffled explosion afar shook the building. It was the firing of the salute from the fort, announcing that the King was on his way to open the Congress.

"The Sultan! The Sultan!" shouted the usher.

We rose to our feet and saw about a dozen negro guards wearing red tunics, white breeches and black knee boots, with the customary drawn swords, ascend the steps, followed by the King himself, accompanied by his son, the Emir Faisal. Behind them were his Ministers, military officials and another bodyguard.

The King went first to the ante-chamber just behind the President's chair, and then took his seat in the middle of the hall at the President's

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desk. His Chief Secretary, Hafiz Wahaba, stood on his right and read the King's Speech :

"I welcome you, my fellow-brothers of Islam, and I am thankful that you have accepted my invitation to join this Congress, the first of its kind in Islamic history, I hope and pray to Almighty God that year by year we shall assemble to discuss our various problems. In the past there has been no such thing as Islamic public opinion. Islam has lacked the spirit of reformation and uplift. The government of the Hejaz has been administered by Caliphs or Sultans, who paid little attention to the question of the betterment of this country. There were other Islamic rulers with good intentions, who, on account of their illiteracy and lack of knowledge, showed their incapacity to do good to Arabia. Wealthy men, who cared nothing for the future of this country, gave licence and liberty to the people here to such an extent that in this holy and sacred city un-Islamic practices became rife and disturbances began to show themselves all over the country. Some of the governors of this country have been severe, both to the pilgrims and to the inhabitants of this city.

"After the decline of Turkish rule in Arabia, when the government fell into the hands of Sherif Husein and his son Ali, the whole Islamic world became uneasy on account of their inability to govern this sacred land, and every Moslem became anxious concerning the future peace and prosperity of the country. Official

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"papers which have fallen into our hands justify  
"our statement that its late rulers had handed  
"over the independence of the country to the  
"foreigners, and that they were in their pay. We,  
"the people of Nejd, being the neighbours of the  
"Hejaz, were particularly affected by the cruelties  
"of Husein. He regarded us as infidels and pro-  
"hibited us from performing our religious pil-  
"grimage to Mecca. Not only did he do this, but  
"he was instrumental in fanning discontent among  
"my subjects of Nejd. When the limit to these  
"cruelties and depredations had been reached and  
"my Ministers and compatriots satisfied me that  
"it was my religious duty to protect Islam from  
"such evils, then, relying upon God and God's  
"support alone, I did not spare my life and  
"property and money to achieve that end. God  
"gave us victory and helped us to purge the sacred  
"land of its oppressors and enabled us, the people  
"of Nejd, to fulfil our promise towards the people  
"of Islam.

"I further fulfilled that promise by inaugurating  
"this All-World Moslem Congress, and in my  
"invitation to you I spoke of my personal views  
"regarding the future government of the Hejaz.  
"My first invitation received no response, except  
"from our brothers in India. Though disap-  
"pointed, I issued a second, which I am glad to  
"see has borne fruit. You can see with your own  
"eyes that not only are the various sacred places  
"and shrines in the Hejaz safe, but their sanctity  
"is being preserved and these dearly-beloved spots  
"are being duly protected. For the first time for

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"many generations there is peace in the land and  
"perfect security to the pilgrim. This state of  
"peace and tranquillity I mean to maintain accord-  
i n g to the strict injunctions of Islam. I invited  
"you to this assembly to discuss and explore  
"avenues for the moral and religious betterment  
"of the Hejaz which may be satisfactory to God  
"and man alike. This Government is being run on  
"the lines of the Koran and is free from the vices  
"which had crept into the general practices of the  
"people. I request you to discuss these points.  
"I desire you to make up the deficiency in the  
"morals of the people and to make this sacred  
"land the real fount and cradle of goodness and  
"civilisation, of sanitation and goodwill. Almost  
"everything in this country requires some better-  
"ment, and in the betterment of the people of  
"Hejaz every Moslem must help. My brothers,  
"you are a free people gathered together in this  
"assembly to give free expressions of your views.  
"Islam's weakness to-day is the wrangling be-  
tween various sects, which is contrary to the  
"dictates of the Holy Book. And I beg of you to  
"discover means of getting cohesion of ideas and  
"the lowering of those barriers that keep heart  
"from heart. I pray God that He may guide you  
"and me into a serious solution of these difficult  
"problems. May peace be with you."

The speech was heard in silence. The King rose, bowed to right and left, gave his greetings, went to his ante-chamber and passed down again, with his guards following him, while all stood,

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We were left in something of a dilemma as to the mode of procedure. Hafiz Wahaba proposed that, for the time being, the oldest delegate should occupy the presidential chair and conduct the business till a permanent president should be elected, and this honour fell upon Maulvi Abdul Wahid. He read a long passage from the Koran, after which Mohamed Ali, the delegate of the Caliphate Committee from India, rose and said it was a very regrettable incident that brothers in Islam—namely, the Turks and the Arabs—had parted in that holy city as a result of the revolt of the Arabs against the Turks during the War, largely engineered by the mischievous activities of Husein and his followers. Now that the reconstruction of Islamic interests was being effected through the agency of that assembly, he thought it only right and fitting that the head of the Turkish delegation should be made president, in order to cement the *rapprochement* between peoples of the Islamic world.

Evidently our temporary president, Maulvi Abdul Wahid, could not tolerate this, the more so as no Turkish delegate was present. Jumping to his feet, shaking with old age and emotion, he declared that the suggestion of Mohamed Ali was calculated to widen the cleavage and break the friendly attitude of Moslem peoples. And when he went on to hint that Mohamed Ali was actuated by personal desires, Ali's elder brother, as well as other Indian delegates, jumped up and protested vehemently against the charge. There was general consternation and an interchange of uncompli-

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mentary remarks. Had not someone judiciously hinted that this was a serious gathering of responsible men assembled to solve certain vexed problems, and not a vegetable market, matters might have descended to abuse and blows. The election resulted in the victory of Sherif Adnana, who had secured forty-four votes. Hafiz had one vote and the head of the non-existent Turkish delegation nine. There were some blanks. Generally speaking, many people were glad to welcome Sherif Adnana, because he was a man of sober ideas. He had been an exile for some years and had only recently returned to his home, and was liked by everybody.

Then came the election of two vice-presidents, when the Seyyid Suleiman Nudvi secured thirty-two votes and Raz-ed-Din thirty. The former is the chairman of the Caliphate Committee in India and the latter leader of the delegates from Bokhara.

When it was announced that the election of a secretary-general would take place, Mohamed Ali rose to a point of order. Hitherto the Congress had been conducted in Arabic, and to the surprise of everyone Mohamed Ali spoke in English. This was strange, for the Ali brothers have declared time and again in India that the English language was to be boycotted as well as the British Government. The sudden introduction, therefore, of the mother tongue of an "infidel" race at such a gathering and in such a place, by one who was an avowed enemy of the British was, to say the least, extraordinary.

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One of the Arab delegates quickly interrupted him, declaring that if he could not speak in Arabic, the real language of Islam, he had better express himself in Hindustani. But he continued in English, and wanted to know on what basis the delegates had been elected. Indian delegates, he declared, should be entitled to more votes than those of Nejd or Asir, because they represented an infinitely larger body of Moslems. When his remarks were translated, there was much talk and whispering among those on the President's right, where sat the representatives of Nejd, Asir, the Hejaz, and Syria. They did not care to realise that after all there was something in Mohamed Ali's contention. They had hoped he had been reformed and converted, and they failed to understand how he dared to make such a proposal in such an assembly. He wanted, they said, to differentiate between Moslem and Moslem. He was seeking self-advertisement and self-aggrandisement, which the restive independence of the Arab cannot brook.

The voting papers were then handed round, but once more Mohamed Ali rose and inquired of the President what had become of his proposal. There was no reply, and when he realised he was being ignored he made another suggestion, turning the tables completely round.

"We in India," he said, "are slaves; we are not independent, our necks are bleeding under the hobnails of the English. We cannot justifiably claim to have the equal status with the free people of Nejd or the Hejaz. I propose, therefore, that

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if we Moslems in India have one vote, then the people of independent countries should have four."

This, he thought, would please the Arabs. Fortunately they were more cute, and, like the preceding proposal, it passed without comment. Taufiq Sherif was elected secretary-general by an overwhelming majority.

Next day the real work began. The first item was that the assembly be called the "All-World Moslem Congress"; that it be held yearly in Mecca during the time of the pilgrimage. Here Mohamed Ali rose to propose an amendment.

"Supposing there is war in Arabia," he said, "and the delegates could not get to Mecca, where is the assembly to sit?"

After some discussion it was decided that if there was war or disturbances in Mecca then the Congress was to meet in some independent Islamic country where the Islamic law was practised; failing such a country, then in the best possible Islamic province.

Another proposal was to purchase the buildings surrounding the Haram, knock them down, and make a wide avenue right round the Holy Place. This led to very heated discussion. The majority of the delegates favoured it, but apparently not a few had vested interests in the properties concerned. However, it was referred to a committee with instructions that it should go thoroughly into the question, draw up plans, and advise the Government of the Hejaz on the subject.

One of the most far-reaching schemes, which was

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duly carried after three days' discussion, was the proposal to build a railway line between Jeddah and Mecca and link it with the Hejaz Railway at Medina, and also to construct a branch line to Yanbo, the port of Medina. It was also agreed to carry out certain very essential improvements at the port of Rabegh, on the Red Sea, south of Yanbo. A harbour was to be built and docking accommodation provided. An interesting feature of the railway proposal was that the money for the construction of the line was to be provided by general subscription throughout the various Islamic countries, and when the undertaking was completed and running, half of the revenue was to go to the Hejaz Government and the other half to the upkeep of the line. Why half the proceeds should go to the Government when the Arabs were not prepared to spend a penny on it can best be answered by the Wahabi King himself, added Mohamed Ali.

Other resolutions passed included the decision to establish hospitals and base camps where pilgrims making the Haj could obtain medical attention and comforts; whilst it was finally agreed that from next year every delegate must contribute £300 towards the running expenses of the Congress.

The good spirit of fellowship which existed at the Conference was, however, marred by its later phase when the Ali brothers sharply questioned the Wahabi practices. Much of the practices which were resorted to by the ignorant pilgrims, especially Indians, as is well known, run contrary

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to the true spirit of Islam; and these the Wahabis rightly prohibited, thus giving opportunity to the Ali brothers to raise a storm on that score. Not only did they want to have the repair and guardianship of the shrines in the hands of a body of which they would be a part, but also urged that all the fees collected from the pilgrims should be disbursed by the nominees of that Conference; which was clearly transgressing the laws of hospitality, and an interference in the sovereignty of the Wahabi Kingdom; which even a lesser man than the Sultan Ibn Saud could not tolerate.

The Conference broke up, after a stormy session, for the performance of actual pilgrimage; for the full pilgrimage does not consist only in visiting Mecca, because close to the Holy City at Arafat many religious ceremonies have to be performed. On the 8th of Zilhij the pilgrims, wearing the usual regulation costume of only one white sheet, leave Mecca. Taking the Taif road everyone journeys to the plains of Arafat; and usually a halt is called at the village of Mina after about three hours' journey from Mecca; but many continue to Arafat. Crossing another landmark of Muzdafa and the narrow rocky defiles, one sights the Hill of Mercy, at which sacrifices are offered to complete the Haj ceremony.

Smitten with heat and in the grip of high fever, I left the Cradle of Islam. Dawn was breaking; its grandeur grew lovelier and more definite as one streak of light blended with another on the ridges far away; and the two-seater car sped on to the

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shores of the Red Sea. The moving sand was like the marching of men, and though ill in body—for I had contracted enteric fever—I had an inner feeling of exhilaration at having performed a visit to a place the like of which exists nowhere else in the world—the cynosure of Islam, the grail of every Moslem's heart. I was advised to get out of the heat as quickly as I could; and so at Jeddah fortunately a small craft was setting her sails. With little difficulty I got standing-room on it, for the captain of the boat, not knowing me, was willing to take a chance on a lugger boat with a passenger up to the Port Sudan just across on the other side of the Red Sea.

Two Sudanese looked at me almost with reverence, as I stood bargaining to be taken across to the other side of the shore near the only hotel in Port Sudan. Every pilgrim back from the land of the Hejaz is an object of respect and envy of these simple and lovable people of the Sudan. But I was too dazed with fever to take notice of their congratulations for having been to the Cradle of Islam, so jumping into their somewhat unsteady paddle-boat bade them hasten. As to what coin I gave them for hire, I did not remember; for me it was enough that I was getting to some place where I could find a bed to lie on.

There is only one hotel in Port Sudan, just facing the quay, and it is modern. They wanted to charge me a pound a day, and wanted it in advance. I told them I had three in my possession. What a hope I had to reach Europe with only three pounds and the fag end of enteric fever still

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in the marrow of my bones. So I reeled to a room, and switching on the electric fan I flung myself on to the bed. I knew no more till fully twenty-four hours later, for whether it was sleep or I was comatose, I never cared to ascertain.

It was on the third day, when the management found that I could not pay in advance because I wished to retain the last pound, that I had to walk out of the hotel. There was not much to pack up—only a prayer carpet and a volume of the Koran. I possessed nothing more.

I often wonder whether it was some unknown spiritual factor, or merely my unkempt appearance which excited pity in the impoverished bazaar of Port Sudan, that someone hailed me in Hindustani. Upon conversation, I discovered that my young friend was a Boarah, originally from Bombay, who traded in rubber, betel-nuts, wrist watches, cloth, and in fact, any and everything which he could import from India in a small way. He thought I looked forlorn, and guessed that I must be needing help. I did. To his warehouse he took me. It was a barn of a place, divided into two sections, an office and a warehouse; the warehouse was open at the back like a caravan-serai; the office had no files, no pen or ink, no ledgers. All business was done by word of mouth, so he enlightened me. He did not believe in wasting his time in dusting the office, because as soon as you dust, another sandstorm will make it merely more dusty. For the rest of the day I sat under a thatched roof in his warehouse, drinking home-made soda water, which was quickly made

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by occasionally throwing handfuls of lime into the earthen pot beside me. Our dinner consisted of dried dates, rice and smoked and dried meat soaked in camel's fat. I helped myself liberally and liked it chiefly because for the last three days I had lived on rather short rations, as one pound a day at the hotel did not include food charges.

The next day a score or more Indians and non-Arab population, who were either employed or were trading at Port Sudan, were invited to meet me. Dried dates and curd were served, even the Hindu merchants eating with the rest. It was astonishing how well these Banya crowds of Indian Hindus spoke Arabic so fluently; but they pronounced their words in their own Hindustani accent. They were not going to give up all their national characteristics. Far into the night we sat talking and gossiping about many lands and many trades, whilst occasionally our host had to chase a jackal away from under the floor of the huts which are built on raised and propped-up wooden platforms.

Whether it was that the period of my fever was over, or the change in the air, or only that Fate had ordained that I should continue to live and suffer the existence amongst civilised people in the West, or maybe it was the bouts of home-made soda water that I took, sure enough the next day I was better; so much better, indeed, that I actually walked to the quay to see whether any lugger boat was going to Europe. And there was one. They were loading monkey-nuts in it. For a consideration I proposed to the man on point-

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duty that the captain might take me to a European port. I was taken before the captain.

"What do you want?" he growled at me. I explained.

"I can't. I would not," he said. "Quite a lot of scoundrels want to escape. I am not of those who will give them a lift and get into trouble for it!"

He blew hard his strawberry nose, and gulped another dose of the beverage denied to me as a Moslem. I descended the gangway, very much taken down from my pedestal.

"Besides," he yelled after me, "you can speak English. Why do you not buy and sell like these blighters who are fore and aft of you?"

Buy and sell! A thought leaped into my mind.

Sheikh Onru, the local bead and curio merchant, had many men working for him. Why should I not sell his wares at the ship sides? The Sheikh soon provided me with beads, and amulets of glass, trinkets of sorts, reputed hand-cut by best Sudanese workmen, but only imported from Birmingham. Lion's claws, hair from the mane of the king of the animals, all made in the workshop of the Sheikh, were to be sold to the European curio hunters who passed on English boats ever so often through Port Sudan.

When the next steamer arrived, I was already dangling strips of beads, rosaries of the holy witch, the claw that warded off evil. Young and old women yelled and shouted at me to come up. My rival tradesmen were more fleet-footed than I; **but** no, they wanted to examine the wares of no **other man** than that one who spoke English so

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well. Thus I made a good harvest. I was bringing psychology into trade. I saw a young wooing couple behaving like two half-wits as they reclined over the ship's railing and seemed to be giggling over nothing. Approaching them, I proffered the young lady a ring of elephant hair and dilated upon its wonder-working qualities of good luck for the newly wed. Only a few of that kind of ring were made by a Sudanese witch every year. Its price was more than one of equal weight in gold. In fact, I could have said more in its praises, according to the Sheikh's advice, but a little was sufficient and the magic ring was promptly bought.

The next customer was a missionary lady from South India. She knew the price of the junk which I carried, for it was her thirty-first voyage back to the East. But one thing she did not know—the psychology. The beads she did not want; for the other bric-&-brac also she had no use; but had I a cure for baldness? I had; and the solution was no other than common salt and ammonia, slightly coloured by madder.

A sergeant's wife with about nine kids hanging round her hailed me next, but judging from her encumbrances I did not break my neck to serve her; instead, I edged round to a prosperous-looking middle-aged man. He was too wise to patronise me, and remarked to his fellow in the next deck-chair that in Dundee they could buy all that assortment for ninepence. So you can! But had he seen a rare stamp which I had, a real Arab stamp, centuries old? He had not, and he bought it at a good price for his stamp album, which had

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incidentally fallen from his lap as I approached him, a fact of which I had made a mental note. By the time I had finished I counted fully nine pounds profit on my sales, which is not bad for an afternoon's business; and then, for the first time, I realised the meaning of studying one's market.

It was a great evening in the annals of the Sheikh's trading days when he counted the proceeds of my afternoon's sales. We went fifty-fifty. A month of such brisk trading and I should have enough to pay for my fare to Europe in a lugger boat; so I tarried at Port Sudan, making ready for the arrival of the next boat.

After a week's weary waiting the next boat did arrive, but there was a yellow flag floating from its mast\* They had smallpox on board. For the next three weeks no further boat came into Port Sudan, and my prospective employer found my keep rather expensive. So it was that one dark night I was sitting somewhat morosely in my dimly lighted shop, when a particular employee of a shipping agency came to see me. He gave me enough in Egyptian money to buy my boat ticket to Marseilles and a little over; but on one condition did he offer it.

"I am a Moslem," he said, "and not a rich man. I want to see that no Moslem is stranded, and will help everyone of my faith, provided you will not mention my name to anybody, and not return the sum to me, but rather make a chain of this good action. Help someone in the manner that I have helped you."

I was so moved with this true spirit of Islamic

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charity that I very nearly wept. Slipping the money into my hands, he was gone, perhaps never to meet me again.

The very next day I took a passage on a lugger boat. The sum at my disposal could not buy me anything better than deck accommodation. When I had paid even for that cheapest of all rates I had just two gold pieces left. These I tied in the corner of my handkerchief and wore it under my shirt, next to my skin.

The boat had hardly left the shore when the thought of food on the voyage distressed me. The purser could not allow the rations to be given to me for less than eight pounds, so being at my wit's end I had either to cook my own food with the Laskars and buy flour and butter and other items, which would cost at least three pounds up to Port Said, or to fall on the mercy of the Goanese head-waiter on the boat. I chose the latter course. He agreed to give me the scraps from the table for a pound to the end of the voyage. The other pound I tied even more securely round my neck, for I wanted to travel beyond the Egyptian coast. Three meals I was given by the waiter. True to the bargain, they were scraps from the table, half-pats of butter, a nibbled toast, a discoloured and over-sugared and discarded cup of tea. These were heaped before me at the scullery of the boat dining-room, and this I ate and thanked God for small mercies.

In between the scrums for meals I used to mix with my fellow-passengers on the deck. They were eight Hindus, all bound for South America

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to ply some small pedlar's trade; also a young Indian Moslem from Kenya with his tiny son, whom he was taking to school in England. Once a great rising light at the Cambridge University, this young man had incurred the wrath of the conservative Indian father by marrying an English woman. When the old gentleman cut him off with a shilling, he gallantly went as a planter in Kenya and was doing fairly well. Then there was another rather sober-looking young Punjabi, an enthusiastic convert to the Christian Scientists, who was on his way to Boston.

A long and narrow passage ran along the hold in the ship, and it was there that we "lived" during the night. All along the length of the space, iron bunks were fixed to the side of the ship. There were no port-holes, no means of breathing the fresh air, unless you opened the iron doors and flooded the interior with vapour-laden air. Everybody did his cooking there, the Hindus took their baths in the place, they spread their washing there to dry, and then we all slept there. If the Black Hole of Calcutta or a prison cell is worse than the accommodation which I am describing, then all I can say is thank your stars that you have not experience of the place I had. And then the greatest of all tragedies occurred.

One bright morning when I was admiring the scenery of the coast-line, the ship lurched a little, a spray of water rose high and, dashing itself against our lower deck, completely soaked us. It was easy to dry oneself by merely donning the pilgrim sheet. During this operation of changing

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I must have somehow loosened the handkerchief knot. As I stooped, the precious coin fell with a tinkle and rolled smoothly, quickly as a ray of light on its yellow glistening body, and down it leaped into the bowels of the sea; with it went my solitary hope of travelling beyond the Egyptian coast. I do not think that I have mourned the loss of any sum more than that pound; but there you are, I was put on my mettle again.

Within a few brief days later we were nearing the shores of Egypt. They would, of course, have me leave the boat at Port Said, and how in the name that is holy was I to get beyond, into other parts of Arabia? My last pound gone in the sea!

They were now lowering the gangway, passports were examined and the first-class passengers were leaving the boat. Within half an hour I would find myself in a strange city amongst a strange people.

Presently I saw a burly man, dressed in a very grubby overall and running about as if searching for someone amongst the passengers. He talked to several without much success, so it seemed; then he descended the iron steps to our lower deck. I was standing near the gangway.

"Ha!" he shouted out to me. "Do ye ken this toon?"

I, of course, pleaded ignorance of Egyptian conditions.

"Ye know enough though," he spoke in a proper sea bark, "fuse yer eyes and yer tongue. Take this and wire off to wife in ter-rms as ye see in this paper. Wire in French from the shore. Maybe she

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can get it at Greenock by sundown—and keep the change for yourself V

I did telegraph the message, asking the sex of the newly-born bairn and directing that the reply be sent by wireless to the Chief Engineer, who could not get away from the boat. The change left enough to get to Jerusalem, with exactly thirty-four shillings over.

Let me look at Port Said first.



THE CITY OF SHAM ROMANCE



## CHAPTER III

### THE CITY OF SHAM ROMANCE

**I**T is at Port Said that the average eastbound European gets his first whiff of the Orient. He expects to inhale the East in full flavour and at once on setting foot in it, and Port Said sees to it that he is not disappointed. He certainly gets what he wants, but it is about as close to reality as an Oriental scene in a Hollywood film.

In a word, Port Said, with all its tinsel glamour, is merely the European's idea of the East staged by acute Greeks and Jews. That is not to say that it cannot be exciting to those who know it. It can, for the simple reason that a large proportion of the rascality of both East and West collects there as in the joint of a badly-constructed sewer, and although the police have this element pretty well in hand, there is bound to be a fair leakage of crime and scoundrelly practice where so many hard-boiled folks are gathered like flies round the honey-pots of the incoming boats which almost daily drop their quota of travellers for a few hours.

In the "native" quarter so called, that for which the tourist and the "griffin" on his way to India invariably make, the panorama of what Wordsworth once called "the gorgeous East" displays itself in all the hues which the credulous Occidental believes to be inalienable to it. Bazaars where

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everything from cheap meerschaums made in Switzerland to scented necklaces turned out in Birmingham, Turkish daggers from Sheffield and Egyptian shawls from Turin are vended; dancing booths where faded Parisiennes garbed as *houris*, wriggle in dances supposed to be "Eastern," giving the impression that it takes at least half-a-century's hard work to break into the dancing job; cafes, where sleek Armenians and Jews hand out wicked-looking drinks which are just as harmless as sherbet; and halls of variety, where sights which would shock Mrs. Grundy to death are supposed to be seen, but which are really rather behind the standard 'of most London theatres in this respect.

The last time I struck Port Said was on my way back from India, a year or so ago. It was just the same old Babel as ever, a perfect picture of the doer and the done, the first going about his business with the stale expression of the everyday business man, the latter taking it all in with the *bonhomie* of the credulous Britisher who rather likes to be swindled. There are, of course, cases where he cuts up rough, but these are few, and I noticed that complaints usually came from men who could scarcely be mistaken for anything else than Londoners. The rest took it as incidental to the voyage.

But the occasion on which I saw most of Port Said was the time when I resolved to spend three days there on returning from a mission to Alexandria. The blackguardly colony of cosmopolitans rather intrigued me from the comic point of view, and I felt inclined to study its psychology

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at closer quarters. There could not but be, I felt, a wealth of the petty picturesque in this the first street in the world's East End.

So I disguised myself as a somewhat seedy-looking and down-at-heel Turk, with shabby fez and worn frock-coat, and began to compare notes with the local banditti. The first rascal I encountered—and a tiresome enough one at that—was the gentleman who arranged abductions. He was a down-and-out Irishman who had found himself stranded at Port Said some twenty years before, and who had taken to the place as affording a congenial spot for his natural bias to rascality.

You could scarcely have told him from an Egyptian of the middle class, so faithfully had the environment dealt with him. Indeed, his reddish hair and freckled face were characteristic of a certain type of North Egyptian, who is often of Turkish extraction. A drink or two induced in him a communicative mood, and as he seemed to take me for one of his own kidney, a view I encouraged, I soon had from him the details of his amusingly "picturesque" business.

In this he was assisted by several young women of marked histrionic ability. His *modus operandi* was as follows: One or other of the little beauties he employed made a dead set at the greenest young Englishman or Frenchman they could find, and in affecting broken English or French spun a pitiful story of a cruel father or an unhappy home. In about twenty per cent of cases the greenhorns swallowed the bait, and agreed to rescue the entrancing Eastern maiden from the dreadful

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conditions she lived in by affording her an opportunity of escape. In some instances the moon-struck idiots, regarding themselves as the heroes of an Eastern romance, even went so far as to propose elopement.

As a preliminary, the enchantress usually enticed her victim into the garden of the "Effendi's" house in the native quarter, assuring him that her stern parent was away from home. It was then that the "Effendi" swooped. That swoop of his was a masterpiece of parental wrath and outraged grief. It usually cost the "griffin/" who had no mind to cool his heels in an Egyptian caboose, anything from twenty to fifty pounds, and not in one single instance, my shady acquaintance assured me, had any application been made to the police. The shock of disillusionment and the terror of a lost appointment in India were usually powerful incentives to a peaceful solution. Only in one instance did the old rascal get more than he bargained for, and that was in the case of a brother Irishman who was proceeding to India to take up a post as a junior police-wallah. The punch behind his fellow-Hibernian's fist, he assured me, as he ruefully rubbed his jaw, would always remain as a reminder of the militant propensities of the race to which they both belonged. It was, however, the one liability he had to enter in a flourishing ledger.

The ancient Jewess who ran an "opium-den" was scarcely as communicative, but when I assured her that I was an inoffensive wayfarer she entered somewhat into the spirit of the thing, and

## THE CITY OF SHAM ROMANCE

came across with the details of her rather comical business. The "opium" she dispensed to the young fools who came to her dive in search of a novel sensation was, she told me, of a strength so absolutely innocuous as not to harm even the most fragile constitution, and a strong cup of coffee, administered after the "smoke," invariably cleared the heads of her customers sufficiently to permit of them catching their steamers in plenty of time. The experience usually cost them a sovereign or thereabouts, and native music and dancing were thrown in. Probably, they were no more the worse for it than if they had taken "one over the eight" somewhere in Piccadilly.

There were, of course, darker phases in this bazaar of minor villainy, which I do not intend to specify, sordid means of livelihood of the most horrible kinds, but, generally speaking, these were designed more for the excitement of the resident population than for the tourist or traveller. Among the more amusing means by which the nimble note is charmed from the case of the visitor are the gambling hells. So far as want of ventilation goes, in these places the mephitic suffix was fully justified.

Careful examination of the roulettes in these tawdry pleasure-houses enables me to say that they are usually within the entire control and manipulation of the banker, who, by a quick glance, can see precisely how much is placed upon the various numbers, and can by a certain number of revolutions of the wheel, so manage things that the index points to almost any figure he chooses with very nearly mathematical exactitude.

## ALONE IN ARABIAN NIGHTS

But the dancing-halls are, above all, the resorts to which the European passing through Port Said finds the kind of atmosphere he expects. In the entrance porticoes of these are usually to be seen one or more specimens of those ladies who seek by ventral wriggings to create the impression that they are engaged in an Oriental *pas seul*. The majority of these are Frenchwomen of *passe* appearance and "tough" reputation. They are usually good dancers enough of their kind, but the contortions in which they indulge have, as a rule, but little resemblance to Eastern dancing proper.

But the inner mysteries of these places are dedicated to modern dancing, and here the traveler can be seen disporting himself with the best imitation of an Eastern *houri* which the place can afford—young Jewesses, Armenians, Egyptians, plentifully beautified with paint, their eyebrows heavily daubed with Kohl, their nails, both on hands and toes, scarlet with henna—and they jingle like the old lady who rode to Banbury Cross with sequins and beads.

Queerly enough, too, it is in such places that one may often "pick up" an Egyptian antiquity—I don't mean anything in the female line, but a scarab or a piece of "Pharaoh's" sarcophagus (what an extensive coffin it must have been to be sure), or an amulet from the grave of Osiris. The Egyptology of the vendors is weak, but their strong point is arithmetic, when it comes to counting in English shillings.

Port Said! The centre of Oriental mystery!  
Oh, my English friends! And then some!

PALESTINE



## CHAPTER IV

### PALESTINE

I do not think that I will weary the reader with an account of my long trek up into Palestine. Unlike an ordinary traveller, my time was my own and I was out not so much to see sights and to place a pencilled tick against their names in a previously prepared itinerary, as really to see the country and to absorb its atmosphere.

That there had been great changes in Palestine since I had seen it in 1918, I was fully aware, but I have to confess that I was not prepared for the great transformation which gradually made itself evident to my eyes.

There is no country in the world which has undergone such radical changes since the conclusion of the War, and here I do not even exclude the Soviet Union of Russia.

The Oriental and biblical background is still there—will, in fact, never be obliterated, but whereas before the foreground had nothing but unproductive desert, a few grape-growing colonies and terraced slopes where, with infinite labour, fruit and vegetables were induced to grow, it is now occupied by towering edifices of brick and stone, vast generating stations and, wonder of wonders, even a soap factory.

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Soap in Palestine! What an anachronism!

When the Turks advanced on the Suez Canal and dragged with them those heavy pontoons now to be seen, holed and shot-ridden in the public gardens outside Cairo, they made painful progress. They placed palm branches on the sand, and upon the branches they laid mats.

That is more years ago than some of us care to remember; yet, the passage of time has been relatively brief—ridiculously so in a country such as Palestine, which remained unchanged for many centuries.

When the British armies decided to launch an advance upon the Turkish forces in Palestine, they looked at the yielding sands of the desert, gazed upon the palm and branch roads of the slowly retreating Turks, shook their heads sadly and called in the R.E's, as they always do on such occasions.

"We want roads," said the Gunners (the infantry have no say in such matters, and that is why infantry is always spelt with a small "i"), and the R.E's straight away conferred with the Sappers. Now, one of these Sappers had a wife who insisted upon keeping fowls, and it was the Sapper who had been made to make the hen-roost.

Thus it was the wifely determination and man's ingrate cowardice solved the transport problems of the British armies.

This Sapper had had to wrestle with many yards of chicken-run wire and he had discovered that it would bear his weight when placed upon the ground. He secured some, planted it on the

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desert sand, and invited the Gunners to proceed. The Gunners found that the wheels of their war-chariots remained above the level of the sand, and they fell upon the Sapper and blessed him in potations of Alexandrian beer.

The cables hummed and it was discovered that in Australia there were hundreds of miles of this matting. There they use it to keep the rabbits in check.

Seven hundred miles of wire-netting were pegged out across the desert of Palestine in the War years, and all who would make progress, from Lord Allenby downwards, had to traverse it.

There was, it is true, a misguided officer who introduced a tank. He brought his tank in sections to the battle front, assembled it, and then sent it forward. Slowly, ignominiously, yet humorously, it churned up the desert, gradually dug a neat hole into which it subsided and proceeded to go to sleep there for the rest of the War.

Travel was difficult in those days of a very few years ago, but now every spot of interest in Palestine is within a few hours' journey from Jerusalem. And the cars are good and the roads are better.

One reaches Jerusalem by rail from El Kantara on the Suez Canal and the journey is a very comfortable one.

When the R.E's first laid the track in the War years, as far as Ludd, the reverse was the case.

They had to hurry and speed meant more than **comfort**. Consequently, as soon as the rails were **delivered from** England, they were laid upon the

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desert, the track being allowed to follow all the contours of the landscape.

Travellers on the railway in those days had both alarming and amusing experiences. The carriages would rock from side to side and dip and oscillate like a dinghy in a rough sea. Drinking out of a cup or a glass was an impossibility because of the violent movements. Travellers quickly found that the only way to convey liquid safely to the mouth was to place the neck of a bottle firmly between the teeth and to suck hard.

The engines—what funny engines they were, too! Their funnels had grown stiff and tall with age, and try as they might, they could not altogether shake off the suburban respectability of the siding. They, too, often suffered from the pangs of thirst. Water for them was a very serious matter. Sometimes they drank too much and then they became red-hot. Then the stokers would draw the fires, the passengers would decant upon the desert and there all would lugubriously remain until another stiff-funnelled ancient wheezed perilously in sight.

Now all this is changed. The travel bureau round your nearest corner will sell you a sleeping-car ticket for the El Kantara-Jerusalem journey.

And how Jerusalem has changed in this very short time! Now its streets are lighted by electric light, it has an efficient water-supply and there is a modern drainage system. Its peoples are conversant with the use of the telephone and of wireless; they are carried to and fro in really modern motor-cars or motor-coaches and the old mule-

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drawn contrivance and the slow-plodding camel has been banned from its streets.

Yes, indeed, the change is astonishing. Soon there will be an olive tree on the Mount of Olives. There may, of course, be one there now, but a diligent search on my part failed to locate it.

Jerusalem now has imposing shops, efficient hotels and all the amenities of a modern metropolis.

Here, of course, we have the foreground. In the background, behind the city walls, the narrow streets have been denuded of their accumulations of filth. Otherwise they are the same as they were before the War—the same as they were in the time of Solomon and of Christ and of Muhammad, the Prophet.

Very little is known about the early days of Jerusalem, but it is obvious that dominating position which it occupies made an irresistible appeal to the worshippers of Baal. Around the Temple to Baal a township of sorts grew up, and then it had to be set out for defence. When Solomon was there in all his glory it had become a vast citadel. Walls surrounded it and it was a magnificent capital.

Jerusalem has been a war centre through the ages and although the greatest of all wars left it unscathed, those of the past were waged over it and in it, and the havoc which was wrought was immense.

Yet, notwithstanding these depredations of old, the city is packed with interest. Jerusalem the Golden is no place for a fleeting visit, for here we

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have a centre where many faiths meet, where Moslem jostles Jew and where the Christian Protestant walks shoulder by shoulder with the orthodox Greek.

Because of this conglomeration of faiths it is impossible to say which is the principal of the relics to be found within the city walls. There is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, to which the ex-Kaiser presented gems subsequently discovered to be imitation. This imposing structure is high above the Via Dolorosa, where inscriptions mark the stations of the Cross. Within the Church is the site of the Cross and a portion of what is declared to be the beam which Christ so laboriously carried; and, as the name implies, there is the most sacred of all Christian Shrines, the Holy Sepulchre. It was Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, who founded the Church. She travelled extensively and at Jerusalem she discovered the Tomb and near it the Cross buried beneath nearby rocks. The rocks bore indentations made by the tears of the Virgin.

Whilst there is no possible doubt regarding the Sepulchre, a considerable difference of opinion exists as to the site of the Crucifixion. The late General Gordon identified as Golgotha a knoll outside the Damascus Gate.

The Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been the centre of much strife between the Christian sects—the antagonism being due, of course, to the zeal of the worshippers. All desired a part in the custody of the Tomb of Christ. Copts, Latins and Orthodox Armenians share the

## PALESTINE

actual shrine, but there were more than twenty other denominations who felt that they, too, should have a part. Conflict was inevitable in such circumstances and during the days of the Turkish regime it was found necessary to post a guard of soldiers in close proximity to the Tomb to maintain some semblance of peace.

Sacred to all Moslems is the site of Solomon's Temple in the precincts of the Haram-es-Sherif and upon which the Kubbet-es-Sakhra, or Dome of the Rock now stands.

One enters the Haram-es-Sherif and comes upon a vast paved court with picturesque old buildings on two sides. Marble columns enclose the central terrace where stands the Dome of the Rock. The roof and the sides are of beautiful tiles, mellowed green with age, and the interior is adorned with ninth century mosaics and scrolls upon which are inscribed verses from the Koran.

A railing completely encircles the rock, which is deeply fissured with indentations, believed to be the finger prints of the Angel Gabriel.

Quite near—too near for the peace of Jerusalem on some occasions, is the wailing wall of the Jews. It is here, beneath Mount Zion, that Jews flock from all parts of the world. On the evening prior to the Sabbath they lower their faces against the great wall of the Haram-es-Sherif and wail and call upon God to restore to the Chosen Race the site of Solomon's Temple.

The Garden of Gethsemane lies beyond the Golden Gate of the Haram-es-Sherif. This gate has been walled up for more than 400 years. The

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Garden is on the upper slopes of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. From here paths wind up to the Mount of Olives from the eastern summit of which Christ ascended to Heaven. This hallowed spot is marked by a small mosque, transformed from a Christian Church built by Constantine in the fourth century.

The simplicity of this shrine, together with the impressive yet pleasing simplicity of the Harames-Sherif, is in striking contrast to the modern decoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and of the Chapel of the Nativity at Bethlehem some five miles from Jerusalem.

The simple manger under the Star of Bethlehem is now in Rome, and its place has been taken by an ornate marble structure within an ornamental grotto. The lighting is provided by fifteen silver lamps, each one of which is tended by a different Christian denomination.

The Altar of the Adoration of the Magi which marks the spot where the Wise Men knelt when they went to offer gifts to the infant Christ is still more ornate. All is in marked contrast to the beautiful simplicity of the fourth century Basilica of Constantine which adjoins.

However, to return for the moment to the City of Three Faiths—the City of Three Sabbaths—the City of Three Official languages.

Let us spend a little more time in examining the modern foreground—for it is indeed interesting.

Jerusalem is a city which provides for a modern administration a series of knotty problems. There is the complexity of the different creeds; that can

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be well understood. But it is difficult to cater for a people, one-third of whom observe their Sabbath on Friday, one-third on Saturday, and the other third on Sunday.

Then there is the matter of language. In the city, all the street signs and all the official notices are printed in three tongues—English, Hebrew and Arabic. And then pedestrians will stop you and ask the way to their destination.

One of the greatest problems which confronted the present administration when it took over the Government of Palestine was the question of an efficient water supply for Jerusalem.

Right through the ages Jerusalem had been content to rely upon the rainfall for its supply. This was caught during the rainy season and stored in underground cisterns until required. This was a good enough system while Jerusalem remained confined to its walls. I have to confess, however, that when I first saw the Pools of Solomon, which was the principal source of the old supply, I yearned for soda water. The pools were covered with a green slime and appeared to be the reverse to hygienic.

The extremely rapid growth of Modern Jerusalem made the provision of a proper water system absolutely imperative. Present-day Jerusalem consumes nearly 1,000,000 gallons per day.

To provide this, my despised Pools of Solomon underwent a course of sanitation, and a harness was placed on the Urtas springs close by, and on a series of rock springs at Ain Farah in the gorge leading to the Wadi Kelt near Jericho.

This called for the exercise of much engineering skill and necessitated the building of roads through much mountainous country. When the road to the Wadi Kelt was made, it required half a ton of dynamite to blast a way through one section of six hundred yards.

Now, not only has Jerusalem a modern water supply and an efficient drainage system, but her old walls have been repaired and the city within made thoroughly clean. It is now possible to ascend the walls at various points and to make a complete circle of the city along the old ramparts. The walls have a circumference of three miles, and they vary in height from thirty to forty feet.

Outside the walls is the modern city—and, in point of size, the greater city. There are splendid residential sections, good hotels, colleges, hospitals, commercial offices and parks and recreation grounds. And Jerusalem is still growing. Building operations are everywhere in progress and new streets are being added and fresh districts being opened up every month. To-day, more than two-thirds of Jerusalem's 100,000 population live outside the walls. Soon Bethlehem will be a suburb. Jerusalem is already half-way there. On the south it extends practically to Ain Karim, the birthplace of John the Baptist and on the north to the foot of Mount Scopus, where is situated the British War Cemetery.

And now a little more background—still not far from modern Jerusalem. Hebron, known to the Arabs as El Khalil—the City of Abraham, the Friend of God, is midway between Jerusalem and

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Beersheba. Here the Westernisation of the country stops short and one reverts to the Palestine of old.

The story of Hebron is wrapped up in those places found near-by—the Vale of Tears and the Tomb of Abraham. The Tomb has long been in Moslem keeping and a great mosque is built over it. At the door of the mosque one is shown the Cave where lie buried Abraham and Sarah, their sons and their wives. None has descended into the Cave for centuries.

As I have noted, Hebron is still the City of Abraham. It has no electric light, no drainage to speak of and no efficient water supply. Consequently the inhabitants have none of the restlessness which comes with the provision of Western comforts.

Groups of Arabs sit around in the shade of the trees and converse gravely. They have little more to do. When the time comes to till the soil or to gather the harvest, they bestir themselves, but not unduly.

There is a premium on masculine energy in Hebron.

And the men still take their time from Abraham, whose tomb they guard. They are still content to harness a diminutive donkey next to a camel and allow the twain to scratch the earth with a primitive wooden plough, the patent for which was taken out before Abraham espoused Sarah.

Only the women have the itch to work.

Perhaps the men see to it that the irritation is constant.

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Besides, the affairs of the City of Abraham have to be discussed. And that is man's work—fatiguing work, necessitating long periods of repose.

Further afield there is the site of Mizpeh, where Samuel judged Israel for twenty years.

It is now graced by a modern aerodrome, and aeroplanes from London use it as a terminus, carrying both passengers and mail.

Shades of Samuel!

This is where an aerodrome mechanic offered me, a Moslem, a bottle of beer.

I admit that I was thirsty, but the man, a Cockney, looked askance when I said that I would prefer a glass of water.

Yes, Palestine is now a country of many weird contrasts.

On the River Jordan the engineers have erected a vast power station to supply the country with cheap light and power. It stands on the banks of the stream some seven miles below the Sea of Galilee at a place called Jisr-el-Mirjameh. Here, virtually in the wilderness, the engineers have toiled for years. Not only have they erected a great concrete building which contains immense revolving turbines, but they have dug many miles of canals and thrown up a great barrage so as to ensure that there will always be a sufficiency of water. And the station has been so constructed that further great units of power-giving machinery can be added when the demand makes this necessary.

What a great revolution there is in Palestine!

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Yet one can always escape from these evidences of progress.

On the way to the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee one passes a succession of biblical sites where nothing has been changed. Near the village of Askar there is the Well of Jacob, where Christ met the woman of Samaria.

It cannot be long before the water of Jacob's Well is raised by an electric pump with power supplied from the River Jordan!

Then one passes the Tomb of Joseph. This is near Nablus, the capital of Samaria. Once this was a fine city, but to-day it houses no more than fifteen thousand inhabitants. But a few miles away is a track which leads up to the ruins of the old city of Samaria. The history of this ancient town is a story of one long series of battles dating from the time of Ahab. It was then one of the centres of the worship of Baal.

Alexander the Great levelled old Samaria to the ground in 331 B.C., and it was rebuilt. Soon, however, it was in ruins again. Herod was well-acquainted with Samaria and it is from this date that the present ruins date. A number of magnificent marble columns standing amid carved stones were unearthed a few years ago by an expedition sent out by the University of Harvard.

Even modern Nablus had a narrow escape from destruction in 1918, when the victorious troops of Lord Allenby pursued the fleeing Turks.

Assisted by their German Allies, the Turks made many a brave stand and the British guns thundered perilously close to Nablus.

## ALONE IN ARABIAN NIGHTS

And then the Turkish horde finally broke and retreated by mountain paths in the direction of old Samaria. Aeroplanes followed them and harried them with machine-gun and bomb and then, when they eventually emerged from the hills, they discovered to their chagrin that Allenby's cavalry had meanwhile worked round the hills and had cut off their retreat.

There was one curious thing attaching to the capture of Nablus which bears telling.

It was noticed that the sepoy of an Indian regiment, bivouacked under trees, had provided themselves with camp beds—several scores of them. On inspection it was noticed that these camp beds were of English pattern. On a closer inspection it was found that they bore the names of British officers.

It did not take long to clear up the mystery.

The beds had belonged to the British officers captured in Kut-el-Amara in Mesopotamia.

The Turkish headquarters had appropriated them and transported the lot for their own use in Palestine. They retained them to the last, until indeed, they were shelled out of them by British guns at Nablus. Spoils of war are nobody's property but those who are strong enough to hold them.

The traveller reaches the Plain of Esdraelon soon after leaving Samaria, and it is here that one meets the real Zionist, usually a totally different person to the Jew seen in the streets of Jerusalem.

The Jews have purchased over a hundred and

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fifty square miles of the most fertile tracts in Palestine and their agricultural settlements dot the land from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. Some of the poorer settlements are on land which five or six years ago was regarded as virtually worthless. Upon these once swampy and mosquito-infested areas hard work has produced prosperous farms, modern cottages, synagogues and institutes.

It is this prosperity of the Jews which has induced so much of the trouble between the Zionists and the Arabs. When the Jews made offers for seemingly worthless land the Arabs gladly sold in the secret belief that the Zionists were mad to invest in such unproductive soil.

On the Plain of Esdraelon there are many Jewish rural settlements and I took the opportunity of visiting several of them.

At Afouleh there is the Jewish Women's Agricultural College, and the Lady Superintendent there was kind enough to entertain me and to display to me much that was of interest.

I was given an opportunity of conversing with some of the young women, all of whom seemed to be in robust health and quite happy, even though they were required to work very strenuously at tasks which were strange to them.

I asked two girls who eighteen months previously had been working in an office in a town in Poland, how they liked the hard life.

It transpired that they had spent the morning ploughing.

When the interpreter put my question to them

they laughed and held out two calloused yet well-manicured hands.

They assured me that they were far happier in Palestine and that that accounted for far more than the ardours of hard work.

Some of the girls were rather shy with me at first, but when I explained that I was not an Arab they lost much of this.

I only wished that I could have understood more of their incessant prattling. The interpreter put in some hard work, but she was too slow for some of these maidens.

They tried very hard by signs and by speaking slowly and distinctly to make me understand how their heart was in the new Palestine.

I did my best to look intelligent.

It is, however, not only upon the land that the Jews are making headway in Palestine.

Down on the coast above Jaffa they have reared a modern and up-to-date city. This is Tel-Aviv, the first purely Jewish city to rise since the days of the Romans. It has a population of some 36,000, every one of whom is a Jew.

Tel-Aviv has its hotels, its restaurants, its synagogues, its hospitals, its schools, and is in every way a thoroughly modern city. It is fast becoming a busy industrial centre, over seventy different enterprises having been founded in the last few years. The manufactures include shoes, hats, thread, stoves, corks, mirrors, electrical goods, leather goods, furniture and a host of others.

Not far from Tel-Aviv is the pre-war colony of

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Richon, where is grown the famous Palestine wine. I am not competent to judge, but I understand that the Medoc is a particularly good vintage.

However, we were on our way to the Jordan. We had left the battlefield of Samaria behind and were on the Esdraelon Plain. We pass on to the Pass of Megiddo, the scene of many another bloody battle from the time of the Pharaohs to Napoleon, and then gradually ascending hills of Galilee and approach Nazareth.

The interest of Nazareth centres more or less entirely around the story of the youthful Jesus and of Joseph and Mary. It has never been the scene of any great conflict—a fact which is perhaps explained by its secluded position in the lower hills.

In Nazareth is the Church of the Annunciation. Steps descend to the Chapel of the Annunciation, and a broken column marks the spot where the Angel spoke to Mary.

Here also are the dwelling and the kitchen of the Virgin. Over the workshop of Joseph a chapel has been erected, and over a large stone known as the Table of Christ there is another. Yet another chapel denotes the spot where Christ preached in the Synagogue, and the spot from which he was driven by the Nazarenes.

Mary's Fountain (Ain Miriam) is still used by the women of Nazareth much in the same way as it was used by Mary. They congregate there and gossip while waiting for their turn to fill their long, earthenware jars, which they carry gracefully away upon the shoulder.

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From Nazareth one goes through country rich in biblical association. As the road rises among the hills one can make out Kefr Kenna, built over land of Galilee, the Mount of Beatitudes and the place where Christ fed the five thousand. One steadily mounts higher and then suddenly one espies the Sea of Galilee with the small town of Tiberias nestling on the shore. Capernaum can be seen in the distance where the River Jordan carries its waters into the sea.

Tiberias is famed among two, at least, of the races of Palestine. It is rather an uninteresting place in itself, but the Jews believe that when the Messiah comes He will rise from the Sea of Galilee, gather together His scattered people at Tiberias and proceed with them in triumph to Safeo, which lies in the shadow of Mount Hermon.

The Arabs refer to the place as Sultan el Baraghit, which, being interpreted means "King of the Fleas." One can only assume that Mr. Keating is not an Arabic scholar, for it has to be confessed that the appellation is well-merited.

However, one must not be too critical of Tiberias. It would never win a beauty competition, but it at least looks out upon the blue, rippling waters of the Sea of Galilee.

And this great inland lake, so oft mentioned in the Bible—is now made to support the flying-boats of Imperial Airways when they drop down from the skies after their trip over the Mediterranean.

# DIPLOMACY AND THE DESERT BRIDES



## CHAPTER V

### DIPLOMACY AND THE DESERT BRIDES

**I**T must not be thought, however, that Tiberias has no other claim to fame. Even in the days of Herod it was famed for its hot springs, which are credited with great curative properties. Herod was a frequent visitor to Tiberias, and often sampled the waters. Now his place has been taken by fashionable crowds, for a spa, with every modern appointment, has been erected over the springs. To my eyes, however, the interior of the domed bath-house was somewhat uninviting.

As for the Jordan itself, which, after all, it was our purpose to visit, this flows through a wonderfully fertile valley, in which are to be found figs, cultivated and wild olives, palm, sycamore, oleander and, above all, henna.

We associate henna with hair, and we are inclined to imagine that its application to the human head for dyeing purposes is a modern innovation born of the twentieth-century feminine demand for beauty-parlours.

In the Pentateuch—the five Books of Moses—there is the story of the Butler and the Baker. It is possible to refer to some reliefs of the Middle Kingdom which depict these high officials performing their functions. Here we see a butler

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**pouring a** comforting drink into the cup of his **great lady** while she is undergoing the strain of **the** hairdressing toilet.

There is no reason to disbelieve the suggestion that this lady was having her hair treated with henna—the white, fragrant-flowered Kopher, or camphire mentioned by Solomon, in his Song of Songs.

We Orientals have a great regard for this flower, and we have at all times associated it with love and marriage. And we have found many uses for henna. Many of our women use it to dye their finger nails. The men even, though, do not despise it. They utilise its colouring properties in the decoration of their beards.

When in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee and of the Jordan, one should take the opportunity of visiting Haifa, if only because it affords such striking contrasts between the Palestine of the Biblical and post-war eras.

It seems extraordinary to make such a contrast—one between a period of many centuries and one of less than a score of years. Yet, up to the time the Turks left the country, Palestine was virtually the same land that it was in the time of Christ.

I, of course, had visited Haifa on my journey down from Syria, but that is quite by the way. No travel agency had arranged my itinerary, and I was free to go just where fancy and the opportunities of the moment urged me.

Haifa was once a quiet little retreat nestling in the shadow of Mount Carmel, upon whose summit **Elijah** met and confounded the prophets of Baal.

## DIPLOMACY AND THE DESERT BRIDES

A small chapel on an eminence stands out picturesquely. This landmark is still known to the Arabs as El Mahrahkah, or the place of Burning, where was erected Elijah's altar on which the miraculous fire descended from Heaven.

On the Mount too is the Monastery of the Carmelite Fathers. Here there is a basilica, which is built over the grotto of the prophet Elias. The flat roof of the monastery provides one of the most magnificent views to be seen anywhere in Palestine—that is, if one neglects to look in the direction of the Port below.

Haifa, because it is nearer to the fertile areas of the Esdraelon Plain and the valley of the Jordan than is the old port of Jaffa, the home of Jonah, is fast becoming the principal mercantile town of Palestine. It is speedily absorbing an industrial complex not to be found in the Holy Land outside the new city of Tel-Aviv. Colossal, up-to-date factories and workshops have been erected. Recently completed enterprises include a large flour mill capable of milling all the grain raised in Palestine and Transjordan. There is a modern oil and soap factory which is turning out 5,000 tons of these products each year; there is a cement works capable of manufacturing 70,000 tons of cement per annum. In addition, there are silk factories, glass works, box works and other industries—needless to say, mainly in the hands of the Jewish fraternity. There is, near the sea, an immense Jewish garden settlement to which has been given the appealing name of Bat-Galim, or Daughter of the Waves.

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Rapidly nearing completion is the new harbour which will be capable of accommodating the largest vessels afloat. No less than a million tons of rock is being requisitioned for the erection of breakwaters.

Now being forged is a great metal link, many hundreds of miles in length, which will connect Haifa with the oil wells of Iraq. But Haifa already has its disfigurements. The great ocean oil installation there has a total capacity of ten million gallons of liquid fuel. There are more than a dozen giant tanks. To be kind, we will merely say that they are a conspicuous landmark for many miles around.

Every possible device for delivering petroleum in a pure state is provided—settling tanks, filters, special pumping plants and what-not. All add their quota to the scenery and assist in emphasising the Biblical setting—by contrast!

There is also a factory for tinning benzine and kerosene. It can turn out no less than 6,000 tins in eight hours—and they are in great demand by the Jewish settlers and the Arabs.

The tins are rectangular and contain four gallons. The Palestinians cut away the lid and with wire or string attach a piece of wood across the middle of the opening. This makes a very convenient handle to a very cheap bucket.

These, in their dozens, are to be found at all the wells of Palestine. They are carried by the women just as gracefully as were the long-necked pots of yore; but they are incongruous and serve to emphasise a degree of poverty which tasteful,

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earthenware vessels only reflected as picturesque.

And out on the desert routes between oasis and oasis where lie the bones of camels picked fleshless by the vultures and the jackals—here, rejected as cumbersome because the means of transport has fallen by the way, are to be found these kerosene oil tins, and not only here, but resting against the walls of Sacred Mecca, in the streets of Constantinople, in Angora, in Baghdad, in Kabul, in Peshawar and, such is modernism, even in the newly-built government city of New Delhi in India. Here, against the white walls of palatial bungalows designed by the designer of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, are to be found these self-same kerosene tins, battered by use and blackened by fire. The high government official who inhabits the house, takes his daily bath in water heated in these tins.

In Simla, the hot-weather capital of India, where these highly-paid officials adjourn for the summer, the kerosene tin not only serves as a receptacle for the bath water, but cut, and flattened out, it is applied to the roof and there, much in the way that galvanised iron is used elsewhere, it performs the useful function of keeping out the rain.

We cannot blame some of the people of the desert, therefore, if they carry this principle a little further and build hideous, rickety-looking huts with these tins. These are a no greater blot upon the landscape than the factory in the shadow of peaceful Mount Carmel, which manufactures the tins at the rate of 6,000 an hour.

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### TO TRANSJORDAN

Ordinarily, to reach the Dead Sea, Transjordan, one starts from Jerusalem. It is by far the easiest way, and I do not recommend travelers to do as I did and that is, to travel from village to village, willy-nilly, until one sees the waters of the Dead Sea.

Yet the days I spent upon the journey were not uninteresting, if uneventful.

The guide-book way—if there is a guide-book—takes one through the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem and down the white road between the Mount of Olives, beloved of the ex-Kaiser, and the ancient walls of the Temple Area to the Valley of Gethsemane.

Coming direct from the modern Jerusalem, it is quickly possible to forget the hammering of the builders and to allow one's mind to become placid and receptive and to take in the old-world atmosphere.

The road rises to Bethany and here there are no petrol tanks, no kerosene tin factories and, if one is careful to keep wells out of this purview, no maltreated kerosene tins.

This most impressive biblical site will impress, if only because of the simplicity which it radiates. Bethany is modest. It is much the same as it was 2,000 years ago. There are no modern buildings, and there is nothing that is new—except perhaps an ancient bowler on the head of a more ancient Jew.

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Mary and Martha had their home in Bethany and the place is still shown. Looking upon the unaltering landscape and the complete lack of the disfiguring shadow of modern civilisation, one accepts the fact that one is looking upon the actual abode of these good women without the least suspicion of incredulity. It was here, too, in Bethany that lived Simon the Leper, and it was in his house that the woman washed the feet of Christ.

It is in a village such as this, as yet unspoiled either by religious feuds or by the march of progress, that one can see the biblical picture unfurled in something approaching living reality. Looking upon present-day Bethany from the close proximity of its simple modesty, the stories associated with its history stand out clearly, truly, and naturally in a relief which is astonishingly clear and vivid.

From Bethany the country undulates and becomes barren and then, a mere hour and a half from Jerusalem for the modern travellers, there is the Dead Sea, 1,300 feet below the level of the ocean.

The ancients it was who gave this lugubrious title to this dark expanse of water, and it was sufficiently well merited for it to be retained over the centuries.

Always has it been a barren and a dreary spot with but a sprinkling of incredibly poor humans eking out a precarious, fever-stricken existence around its shores.

But the moulding hand of the twentieth century

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is to be found at work even here. A health resort is rapidly coming into existence with piers and bathing establishments and modern hotels and restaurants.

I decided practically to test the old adage that it is impossible for a human to sink through the waters of the Dead Sea because of this high relative density.

I found the waters to be extremely buoyant, but it was, of course, possible to submerge, if one made an effort. I had had an excellent bathe and I thought, as I scrambled uncomfortably into my clothes, that I had made a discovery. The waters, besides being extremely buoyant serve, for the unwary, as a violent and potent emetic! However, others had been before me, and the discovery is to cause this allegedly Dead Sea itself to suffer the pangs of regurgitation.

An immensely wealthy financial syndicate is erecting extensive plant for the recovery of potash and other valuable minerals in which the district abounds.

Roughly ten miles from the northern end of the Dead Sea is that place to which so many generations of Westerns have been bidden to depart—Jericho.

Why it should have become the practice figuratively to consign to this place, and why it should have held a vogue in this respect only comparable with Timbuctoo and Hades, I cannot imagine, for it is by no means an unpleasant place.

Presumably it was selected because it was somewhat difficult of access and the return journey

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equally lengthy and fatiguing. The modern traveller however, if he so wishes, can be in Jericho within a very short time of leaving Jerusalem.

The twentieth-century Jericho is by no means remarkable, but the orange groves, and palm trees and the large variety of flowers in the gardens make it stand out invitingly from the barren surroundings.

The modern Jericho, as did the old, depends entirely upon the waters of the Elisha's Fountain, to make its land fertile. The spring still gushes forth to its beneficent work from the rocky hillside close to the site of the ancient City of Palms.

Of the old city little is to be seen except a few stones of great size which were recently revealed by excavation. It was, however, a place of no small importance in olden times, lying as it did upon the main caravan route. Its basic industry was centred around Elisha's Fountain and the provision of water.

It was at Jericho, I think, that I came closer to the real Palestine than at anywhere else.

I had the misfortune, when there, to be visited by an old acquaintance of mine—sand-fly fever—and this incapacitated me for several days.

I stayed in one of the many *khans* and, when recuperating, spent some quite amusing hours gossiping with the locals.

There was one benign and venerable figure who was happy when giving rein to his remarkable vein of penetrative, yet subtle humour. In much of what he said there lurked a substratum of truth, even though this was invariably em-

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broidered with an intriguing pattern of Eastern fancy.

It was this gentleman, whom I named the Oracle, who told me much of the difficulties of those who had laboured on Palestine's behalf since the closing stages of the War.

Particularly beset with difficulties had been the engineers who raised towns and made roads, for they came from the West with plane tables, chains and rulers and proceeded to draw straight lines over ground which had sacred associations for men of many religions.

In gauging the achievements of the engineers in Palestine we are wont to take a material view and to weigh only their accomplishments in terms of steel, concrete and kilo-watts. But the engineers of Palestine have had to be diplomats first and engineers second.

There was the engineer whose way was stopped by the possessions of an irascible old landowner who dwelt in the past, spat scornfully at the mere mention of mandates and regarded the League of Nations and Mr. Balfour as things which were unclean.

To him went a subordinate engineer and one who was well versed in the art of Eastern badi-nage. Unto the old man did the man of blue prints unloose the bridle of fancy.

"Away, over the caravan routes in Iraq," he said, "there is a very wise Emir. His possessions are great, but they are greater now than they were, even though they are less."

The aged one who had been restless by swaying

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to and fro and allowing his eyelids to fall in affectation of listlessness and inertia, paused in his movements and eyed the story-teller with evident suspicion.

He pondered heavily and then muttered:

"Greater, yet less! What nonsense is this? Surely this young man of travel and seeming learning has been accursed by Shaitan, for surely he is mad/"

Quite unperturbed, the young engineer proceeded in his discourse.

"Yes, verily," he said, "this wisest of all Emirs, even though he gave, knew, that in so doing, he was receiving tenfold."

"How is this?" demanded the irascible one.

"In many ways," responded the engineer, "for he gave land for a road and now all the land that adjoins has more than doubled in value."

"Fool! Are you suggesting that I shall provide land for the building of one of these roads which bring pestilential motor-cars and undesirable travellers and worry the sheep and scare the she camels—I, of those who have held on to our land for generation after generation and who are known throughout the countryside as those who are not to be beguiled by those who indulge in sharp practices?"

"Besides," he went on somewhat artlessly, "methinks you stated that this wise Emir was repaid tenfold. And now you tell me that his land merely doubled in value. You lack veracity in your tale-telling, you maker of roads."

"Indeed, I do not," enthused the engineer, "for

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indeed, I understated when I said that the Emir received tenfold. Not only has the value of his land increased, but, the people of the countryside, realising the blessings which his wisdom has brought upon them, were loud in their praises. So overjoyed were they that they made up a deputation which besought an audience of him. Respectfully they prayed that they be allowed to approach the authorities with a prayer that the road be named after him. The Emir agreed and now that road bears the name of this great man of unbounded wisdom. And that road is one which will last as did those laid down by the Romans. Therefore, the name of this illustrious man will endure for evermore. The generations which come after him will tell of his wisdom; they will chant his praises and they will revere his name, and, of his tomb, make a place of sacred pilgrimage. All this, mark you, O man of magnanimity and discernment, because he, in his wisdom, gave but a tiny portion of his land."

"What would be required," asked the old man after pondering awhile, "should the people of this countryside decide—ahem, to send a deputation to me and ask for land for a road?"

"But very little," answered the engineer. "The road could enter your lands at 'Sidi-Abas' and proceed in a straight line to your boundary. Such a straight line without deviations would take the smallest amount of land for, as you know, the shortest space between any two given points is that which is made by the straight line.

"There might, however," he proceeded, "be

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some objections to such a hne as it would undoubtedly, here and there, pass over certain houses the occupants of whom might object."

"Object!" mumbled the stout old gentleman, "Object! Who are they to object? A straight Hne it shall be and if there be any objections you send the objectors to me."

"You will, of course, be compensated for parting with land for the roadway and no doubt those whose dwellings will have to be demolished will look for compensation from you. In that event, perhaps an order from you promising compensation would be requisite."

"But if I am to give this land on which be built a magnificent road—so magnificent that the surrounding people will of their own accord demand that it be named after me—what further blessings should they want?"

"Compensation! The idea is fantastic, young man. But perhaps you did but jest. I note that you require an order from me *promising* compensation. It shall be given. It will matter not. The fulfilment of the order will rest with me. It will at least make the people rest in hope and make them the readier and the more quickly to organise that deputation which shall do honour to my name."

And so it was that the road was commenced. An army of workmen was recruited and the engineers departed from their straight Hne not so much as a hair's breadth. True, it was, that many a dwelHng had to be demoHshed, but the ousted occupants were provided with compensation or-

ders bearing the signature of the landowners and all was well.

The chief engineer anticipated no further trouble and was indeed contemplating the chances of a favourable answer to an application for leave when work on the road was suddenly stopped.

Those who went on ahead of the workmen, taking levels, estimating materials and generally preparing the way, found that their straight line brought them directly upon an ancient and tumble-down mosque. The chief engineer had noted it in passing, but had registered it in his brain merely as an insignificant, unimportant ruin. He had noted it thus because it occupied a site around which, should a detour have to be made, much difficult work and intricate engineering skill would be called for.

Those who did the actual work for him, however, stopped aghast when they saw where their plan was taking them, for this that lay in their path was nothing less than the tomb of a bygone Holy One. True, but few now went to the spot to venerate his bones, but to desecrate such a place by steam-rolling it out of existence would be to rouse the instantaneous hatred of the countryside and, who could say, perhaps a rebellion on a small scale which might even have unpleasant repercussions in Jerusalem itself where feeling between the races at the moment was none too serene.

Besides, those who normally obeyed the behests of the chief engineer and the subordinate engineer and the other engineers who did most of their

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work at a large table in a large office were good Moslems themselves.

That is why they stopped work, and stopped immediately.

The disquietening news was conveyed to the chief engineer who, groaningly, cast aside those pleasant thoughts of the flesh-pots of Egypt and consulted with the subordinate engineer.

Immersed in gloom both battled for hours with fresh plans and specifications and came to the reluctant conclusion that such was the contour of the land that a deviation from the straight line in the vicinity of the mosque would undo much of the work already accomplished and worse still, render necessary a revision of the estimates and an application to the Powers that Be for a considerable augmentation of funds.

The chief engineer definitely requited the idea of an application for leave, but rather turned his thoughts on to the probability or otherwise of retaining his job.

Such was the dreariness and barrenness of the situation when the subordinate engineer, a born diplomat, had a further brainwave.

He would, he said, interview the irascible landowner once again and endeavour to discover a way out of the seeming impasse.

To the house of the landowner he repaired. Now he was received as an honoured guest and after a repast wherein much full-flavoured rice, newly\* killed and consequently very tough mutton with much sour sheep milk vied for the principal place on the menu, he was able to express his satis-

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faction for the hospitality confirmed upon him.

In many parts of the East such appreciation of enjoyment is expressed by a gentlemanly exhibition of belching and the host anxiously gauges his success as an entertainer by the rise and fall in the crescendo of sound.

In this instance, aided by the sour sheep milk, the subordinate engineer was able to do more than justice to the meal and the aged host beamed with self-satisfied reaction.

It had been an anxious moment, for the subordinate engineer had thought that he was going to be sick, but he saved more than his reputation when he succeeded in transforming a western abdominal turbulence into an eastern geniality of manners.

In such ways, however, are great engineering feats accomplished.

Basking in the evident kindly disposition of his host the subordinate engineer commenced his task.

"O man of wisdom," he said, "as you will be styled when this great and wondrous road is completed, I have given many nights to the contemplation of your fertility of mind and the reverence which is in your heart for your forbears and all that has gone before.

"There is no man such as you in the whole of this vast countryside who has done more to uphold the traditions of his race and the fair name of his noble family."

The subordinate engineer paused for breath to

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observe the effect of his words, but except for a more than ordinarily potent belch the old man gave no sign.

"The road," the host was at length constrained to say, "how is it progressing?"

"Magnificently," responded the engineer with an enthusiastic smile. "It will be a great monument to your forethought for your country and your countrymen and, of course, to your amazing business acumen.

"As you indicated when, in your wisdom, you first conceived the idea of this road, it proceeds in a line that is absolutely straight. It points like an arrow to the fertility of the mind of him who will rightly confer upon it the great honour of his illustrious name. Future generations shall say: Here is that which was conceived by a noble man—a holy man—a man who dazed his own generation by the scintillation of his own brilliance."

"Noble words, young man," acquiesced the old man, with animation. "It is but right that the fruit of my mental labours should be so appreciated, and that it should be a straight road is right, too. The road, posterity will acclaim, is as straight as were my dealings with my fellow men."

"Yes," broke in the engineer, "and when they recount the difficulties that beset you they applaud your name the more."

"Difficulties, difficulties?" responded the landowner. "Indeed, the difficulties were great. I have had to part with much land."

"And there is the matter of your tomb, yet to be erected."

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"My tomb, young man? Do you think that I am about to die? Am I not to see the completion of the road?"

"The association of death with the tomb is insignificant," the younger man rejoined. "True the tomb is a receptacle of the human clay, but that is as nothing compared with the name which it commemorates—especially if that name be an illustrious one."

"But what has my tomb to do with the road?" the now wide-awake host asked suspiciously.

"Posterity will say that it was the shining pinnacle of your many wonderful achievements," artlessly suggested his companion.

"Along the road that is to be straight is a mosque where, forgotten by those who should do him honour, lie the remains of a by-gone saint."

"One would assume that, left as he is in such absolute abandon, the spirit of this holy man would be at peace, yet it is not so. Missing for many generations have been the prayers of the Faithful and the spirit of the holy man is restless."

"But," interposed the landowner, "who would trouble to go to that woe-begone place to utter their prayers? It has not been done within living memory."

"That is so," agreed the other, "but I think that you will agree with me when I suggest that the spirit of this saint should be composed."

"I am certain," he added after a significant pause, "that when you commence with your thoughts in the night watches that the germ of

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this shining achievement will be made plain to you."

"It may be that you will have a visitation and that it will be suggested to you that dignity could once more be restored to the name of this saint, if you erected a mosque in that shady portion of your garden and had his bones restored thither."

"It could be so arranged that, as the earthly benefactor of this holy man, you, on your demise could share his mausoleum and shed the lustre of your presence upon his memory."

"And there is no doubt," hastily resumed the engineer as he saw the other struggling for words, "that were you to transport the saint to a place of befitting dignity many pilgrims would pause on their journey and leave offerings for the poor."

The landowner, deep in thought, resumed his petulant swaying, so characteristic of the man.

The engineer, for his part, watched his host narrowly, feeling that his tale had been told, and well told, but that the result still lay in the laps of the gods.

Eventually the old man spoke.

"I have long cogitated," he said, "over the conditions of the mosque and of the unseemliness of the surroundings for the mortal clay of so great a saint."

"Without doubt it would be shedding lustre upon the memory of this holy man were I to erect, in that beautiful corner of the garden, a shrine of elegance to which the remains could be removed. Unquestionably, also, it would be well if I lie there

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when, in the years to come, I cease to take an interest in this earth/'

"I will hold communion in the night watches and maybe I shall have a visitation/'

"And the offerings to the—ahem—poor—they should be considerable."

"Now I think that blue Damascus tiles would be best for the dome; but, as I say, I must take counsel in the night watches."

The road is straight. It bears the illustrious name of the landowner whose land has been doubled in value; motors now run upon its surface and the inhabitants of the district find it easy to transport their produce to the markets of the towns. All is peaceful and relatively prosperous.

There is, however, an engineer who knows the truth. The road and all that it has entailed was not brought into existence by the skill of the draughtsmen and of those products of the Universities who directed their endeavours.

The votive offerings of pious pilgrims alone were responsible.

AN EYE FOR AN I.O.U.



## CHAPTER VI

### AN EYE FOR AN I.O.U.

**A**FTER I had recovered from my bout of fever, I made preparations to continue my journey eastward into the desert of Transjordan. It was on Allenby's Bridge—an imposing structure of iron and stone thrown as it is over the River Jordan—that I met an old friend, a British Colonel, whose car having broken down, joined us on our journey to the capital of the new State of Transjordan.

We followed the winding road up to the Es Salt. It was a veritable paradise of flowers during the time of our visit, for seldom have I beheld such a rich profusion of colour. There were wild roses, orchids, balsam, gladioli, and many other kinds of flowering plants which I was unable to identify. And they grew wild amongst the rocks, behind grey-blue giant boulders of stone. They grew in bunches, in stray patches everywhere. Es Salt is a sort of half-way house, a pleasant enough halting-place for travellers on their way to Amman, where the monarch of the youngest Arab State awaits to give true Oriental hospitality.

As both my British companion and I were in a **hurry** to proceed, we decided not to halt for the night at Es Salt, but to break our journey just **for** a brief refreshment.

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Several sheikhs of the village did all they could to provide such small items of rations as we wanted, bidding us stay the night with them; one even hinted that the road was none too safe those days, especially if our motor broke down and the nights were dark.

The Colonel was sipping his tea, and I tackled a roasted chicken, when, in the throng which had gathered to look at the two afflicted of Allah who travelled merely for the love of travelling, I espied a rather curiously fashioned Bedouin. He was staring hard at my British friend. And then the face was gone almost as quickly as I had picked up another piece of meat.

"Do you know anybody in this village?" I asked the Colonel, as the Syrian motor-driver, swerving the car past the gate of a caravanserai, made the vehicle gather speed.

"No, I do not know anyone in Es Salt," replied the Colonel almost reproachfully, "nor do I love this beastly, god-forsaken part of Arabia!" And he dropped his monocle.

Taking it to mean that that topic was finished, so far as he was concerned, I engaged him on his war-time experiences. But he was listless, and every now and then reminded the driver that we desired to reach Amman by sundown, and he should not sleep at the wheel. That there was some foreboding atmosphere in the air, I could not get from my mind. The sixth sense of the Oriental also seemed to tell the driver that something was going to happen.

Another short spin would bring us **out of the**

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rocky defiles, and **Amman should be well within** sight, I thought. But were we going to reach our destination by the evening, something kept on asking within me? Whether the same feeling affected the Colonel, I did not know; but we gradually plunged into silence whilst the car bumped over and on the stony road. Mountain rocks rose spur upon spur, barring the living world with every bend that we negotiated.

Then a shot rang out, another bullet spit past; and a third. There was a hissing noise; then we knew that the front tyre of the car had been punctured by the bullet of some concealed enemy.

The Syrian driver was perhaps the bravest of the three; he called out to whosoever the sniper was that we were the Amir's guests. Then he clambered up the rocks as the Colonel handed him his revolvers. Presently he was out of sight. A few minutes later we heard the exchange of shots, and then a long, long silence.

The Colonel and I decided to stay there, till a passing lorry could give us a lift. But who would pass at such a late hour. We must wait there till the dawn, at any rate. And then darkness fell like a curtain.

"Great Scott!" cried the Colonel, "if that was not a bullet again, what was it?"

"Well, it wasn't a peppermint drop," I replied, "and it's left a very clean hole in the canvas of the hood—a kind of hole a Jezail bullet leaves."

"I knew your district was bad," growled **the** Colonel, as he felt for his revolver, **which was**

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there now, "but I didn't think that it was so deuced bad as this."

Another shot followed, piercing its lead nose in through the mudguard. I blew out the lantern.

"I think I know who was behind that shot." I volunteered the information on the strength of a rumour that I had heard in the bazaars of Jerusalem. "It can be no other than Ahmed the Black, who, by the way, is not black at all, but an Englishman, and a Londoner at that. Society swell, I believe, who had to get out in a hurry for some devilment or other/'

"Yes, for somebody else's devilment," grated a voice at the side flap, while a tough face behind a Browning revolver peered in at us.

I could see by the light of the electric torch which I had the presence of mind to flash that it was none other than Ahmed, as the elder school of novelists would have said. The face was that of the curious Bedouin I had seen at Es Salt.

"Well, I'm dashed," said the Colonel, "if it isn't Seymour!" His red face had gone as white as chalk, and the monocle dropped from his staring blue eye.

"Stupid of you, Curtis, isn't it?" said the interloper, "running about these stark hills with only a single companion at your tail. It's four years now since that little game of bridge, when you and the rest made a black sheep of me and forced me out of the circle. But thinking over things, sizing them up so to speak, out in these wilds, I think that there was more in that little deal than met **the** eye. None of our hands were exactly clean.

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**Only** you could play the hypocrite better than I could. What about it?"

"I refuse to discuss the matter with—a hill-robber/' grated Curtis. "In any case, I do not know what the Hades you are referring to."

"That sounds lame, doesn't it?" jeered Ahmed. "Scarcely logical, and all that sort of thing. Let me remind you just here and now that at the moment you aren't the Honourable Algernon Curtis, District Commissioner, etc. etc., but merely a very scared greenhorn, and you've reason to be scared, old lad, for unless I make a very extensive mistake you're scheduled to have a skinful of lead within the next ten minutes by the clock."

"Now look here, Ahmed—for such is your name in Jerusalem bazaars," I said, taking a hand in the conversation, "I don't know the rights of this little personal tiff, but I really can't have you shooting up Commissioners in this little patch of Arabia."

"You're out of this," Ahmed snarled, "this is a private row between—gentlemen, shall we say? At least, there's a good margin of doubt as to which was the bigger blackguard of the two. Now, Algy, if you're ready, we'll just scatter into the night and see which can pot the other. Are you game?"

The Honourable Algernon (although that is not his real name) tried to bluster. "I simply don't recognise you," he bawled. "Do you think I am here to exchange shots with any dashed sneak-thief . . . ?"

**The** moon had now crept above the crags.

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"That'll be all of that." There was an ugly twist on Ahmed's face. "Humph yourself in those swagger Piccadilly boots of yours and get up and fight like a man. You remember . . . well, I won't mention the lady's name in a place like this," Ahmed's face grew blacker at the recollection, "but we both lost her over that little rumpus, didn't we? Well, I've good reason to believe she looks kindly upon me still, but I swore I wouldn't go back to her till I had the privilege of wiping my boots on your dirty hide, you double-crossing loafer. Have I got to kick you before you'll get up?"

The Honourable Algernon rose spluttering. "You swine," he grunted, "I'll have your life for this, dash me if I don't. Lend me your gun," he said to me, "I'm going to shoot a dog."

"Well, since you're both so keen," I remarked, "I'll just have to let you have your own way. There's my shooter, and if I have to regret to report the all-too-sudden demise of a handsome District Commissioner, or the wiping-out of a star brigand, don't let the dirty water land on my doorstep. Might I suggest, however, that it would be better that the rough-and-tumble was held over till daybreak?"

But to this neither exalted gentleman would agree. It seemed to be a needle match with a very nasty memory behind it. Seizing their revolvers, they rushed into the moonlit pass, and next minute I saw the Honourable Algy's gun spit fire.

"Damn you, you fool!" I cried. "Remember you've only got six shots and there's probably

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seven or eight in his magazine. He'll have you on the last, you cuckoo."

There was a heavy groan from Ahmed. I knew that groan. There was the whole of fiction and the stage behind it, and a chuckle at the end of it, but Algy evidently took it for the real thing, and crowed like a bantam cock in triumph. The next minute he yelled like a scalded cat, as a bullet clicked him just in the place where ladies wear ear-rings.

"Ough!" he shrieked. "Shamming dead, are you," as Ahmed rolled along the ground. To hit a rolling man in that semi-darkness is, as anyone with the knowledge of a rough-and-tumble is aware, among the more difficult things of life.

"Blast you," howled the Piccadilly Pet, as a second bullet caught the toe of his boot. "Fight fair, can't you, you lousy brigand?"

"Get down on the sand, you lunatic," I shouted, "or you'll never see breakfast-time. Down, blast you!"

Algy obeyed with that wonderful sense of discipline inculcated in the best public schools, but he didn't improve matters by writhing about in his new recumbent position. From the blackness beyond came another vicious spurt of flame. Its message seemed to annoy the District Commissioner considerably.

"Here, I say," he yelled, "I'm not an Aunt Sally, you know." Ahmed was shooting off his corners. It was the refinement of vindictiveness.

I felt I must finish the deal.

"What a pother about a game of cards and a

lady/' I sniggered, and, as if I had pulled the strings, both figures rose and blazed at each other furiously. Their wrists must have shaken, for neither registered a hit, and throwing down their guns they rushed at each other like a couple of bull-terriers.

Algy was the heavier of the two, and almost at once he got in a nasty left, which floored the bandit. But immediately Ahmed was on his feet again, wiring into his antagonist. There wasn't much science displayed, but they made up for it in ferocity.

Suddenly a scream such as I don't want to hear again in a hurry rose out of the pass, and Algy came hobbling down, holding his hand to his right eye, or rather to where it had been.

"Here ends the first lesson," laughed Ahmed. "You'll have to wear a blue eyeglass now, my friend, and mount a phoney optic at that, I fear. Let's call it an eye for an I.O.U. shall us?"

"Go away," shrieked Algy, "you beastly maimer."

"That isn't what you called yourself when you maimed my character," jeered the bandit, "but somehow I don't think Polly will like you now, with one peeper and a hobble in your right great toe. You'll probably retire from the service and rusticate at Homburg or Aix for the rest of your yellow existence, you dirty little card-sharpping parasite."

I heard the galloping of hoofs and the galloping of Algy's language, as I dragged him back to the crippled car. What he had actually done to Ah-

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med in the past I could not worm out of him, but which, I wondered, would have the hardest row to hoe? The spoilt beauty-man or the brigand picking up a desperate living among the **Arab No-Man's Land**?

The worst of these English Society people, it seems to me, is that their feuds are just a little more desperate than any of those in which my own countrymen indulge. Probably they put the whole blame upon the influence of the wild hill-hand. But on that memorable evening I couldn't see much to choose in the way of pure savagery between that pair of Society lights and a couple of dacoits who "had it in for each other" over the theft of a goat.

Thank goodness, we hill-men don't play cards!

In the morning the driver returned safe and sound, having slept in an adjoining Bedouin encampment, and repaired the car on oath of secrecy not to mention a word of it to anyone at Amman or elsewhere, for the Colonel's honour was involved.

At last, the next day, we reached the Amir's capital. The Colonel wore a patch over his eye, and allowed no doctor to treat it for having "caught a chill in it." It was no business of mine to relate the escapade to anyone in Arabia, and I saw of him no more till the other day in Piccadilly.

Between Es Salt and the capital of Trans Jordan there are but few villages, for this range of country is given over almost entirely to the tent\* dwellers and their immense flocks of sheep. And

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the tent-dwellers of Transjordan despise him who lives behind bricks and mortar.

Even the Amir, installed upon his throne by the British and brought from Mecca for the purpose, finds it extremely irksome when away from his tents. He is a true nomad chieftain and typical of the people over whom he rules—a true lover of the desert, and of more or less constant movement.

The Amir, it is true, has had erected an imposing house on the outskirts of Amman, but those who call upon him there are fortunate if they find him at home. More often than not he has slipped unobtrusively away and is sojourning in his tent out in the desert.

The Arab, especially the Arab of the Transjordan, has little of the civic sense. He has none of that pride which the Englishman has in London and none of that which the American has for New York.

It would not greatly perturb him if the capital of his country was constituted in a shifting encampment. This partly explained why Amman is such a small and such an insignificant town. And one calls it a town because it is the capital. Actually, it is nothing more than a struggling village.

Until a few years ago even its main street was unpaved. Even now with the exception of the Amir's house, all that it can boast is one street of shops, one or two not very imposing mosques and a straggling array of one-storied houses.

Yet Amman is the ancient Rabbah Ammon and

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for thousands of years it has been a place of considerable importance on the caravan route from Southern Syria and Egypt and from the east to Arabia.

Under Alexander the Great it was a great Greek settlement, and, in the third century B.C., it was one of the cities of the Decapolis.

The remains of this ancient grandeur are still to be seen. On an adjacent hill there are parts of the wall of the citadel, there is a Roman temple and much of a great theatre. Several of the fifty columns which were part of this structure are still standing.

Some day perhaps Amman may be restored to its former glory, but a vast and fundamental change will have to be brought about in the mentality of the people if this is ever to come about. And one is tempted to ask, is it worth it?

So firmly implanted is the nomadic spirit in the Arab mind that nothing short of generations of stern discipline and confinement to fixed areas could eradicate it. Few administrations would care to bring about such regulations and I doubt very much if one exists which could bring them effectively into force. It would mean putting the people in virtual servitude and even the tent-dwellers of Transjordan have heard of the League of Nations!

From the valley of Amman great plains extend in the direction of Damascus. Once these lands were fertile and supported a great population. To-day nothing grows but grass and scrub over which the nomad grazes his sheep and camels.

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There is no question of the fact that these plains could be made fertile once again and that grain and cotton could be grown in abundance, but it would be at the cost of terrible feuds with the tent-dwellers, who regard a plough with almost as much abhorrence as they do bricks and mortar.

The Arab, over the centuries, has assumed very strong grazing rights and rights to the well-waters. These have been accepted as customary law. One section recognises the rights of another to certain areas and to the grazing and the water to be found therein. These rights are regarded as inviolable and for any power to interfere with them for the purpose of introducing a plough would be to court trouble of the most serious kind.

Yet this was not always so. Trans Jordan once had a magnificent system of irrigation and the ruins of many of the old aqueducts can still be seen. And the people of Transjordan were not always tent-dwellers. The ruins of many great cities are to be found dotted over the country, providing a mine of wealth for the historian and the excavator.

As one proceeds northwards one realises more and more how firm is the grip of the nomad upon this once wealthy and flourishing country. It is entirely given over to the camel and the sheep, beyond which the nomad Arab has no interest in this life.

Beyond the confines of Amman, one is better travelling on a camel; and this method I chose thenceforth as I journeyed into the unchartered

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regions of North-Eastern Transjordan. Here, again, is a No-Man's Land; for the Kings of Hejaz, Iraq, Transjordan, and even the Syrians have claims. But in the desert it is not easy to erect a frontier wall. And here it is that much of the romance of real Arabia dwells. Its encampments are pitched in the open and free air of the limitless sands, where alone you can feel the real freedom of life. Where there is a small village at the crossing point of trade-routes—for which I was making—there are caravanserais which even now bespeak of the ancient glory of Arabia—an Arabia whose religions have exchanged the solid strength for the feeble splendour of Persia or Rome of old. Such was the rest-house where I ultimately arrived.



## PERILS OF MAN-SMUGGLING



## CHAPTER VII

### PERILS OF MAN-SMUGGLING

**A**S I bent down to unstrap my camel load, someone tugged at my long flowing garb. Then the wet nose of the camel touched my bared arm, and I thought that the skirt of my loose shirt must have been caught under the bag which I had unloaded. Once again I felt a pull at my clothes.

"In the Name of Allah! In the Name of Mighty God——" and the voice of a prostrate form gurgling in a hoarse throat was drowned by the sound of the bubbling camels in the quadrangle of our desert rest-house.

With more than ordinary curiosity I reclined towards the one who had pulled my garments, and whose words of supplication were swallowed up by the general din of shouting drivers as they unloaded their beasts of burden.

I flashed my electric torch at the man. He lay face downwards, holding his side, apparently in great pain. His eyes—oh those eyes! I can't forget—had a haunted look. And his face—well, you have heard of the handsomeness of the desert Sheikh? He could beat many film counterparts of his, for aristocracy of the desert was writ large on his visage.

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Then he leaped like a wounded panther and snatched the torch from my hand.

"Thinkest thou that in the heart of the desert people will spare thy life if they see thee making light without a fire?"

A long memory came back to me, for have I not been shot at once in a Bedouin encampment as a magician for "making light out of nothing, like the one cast down from Allah's Palace."

The man now squatted down beside me. Our backs rested against my sitting camel. From his Kamarband he produced a paper, shading the light of the torch with the skirt of his long Abaya whilst I read the epistle.

"Peace be upon thee, my brother," I shook him by the hand, "what great honour has fallen upon me. It shall, indeed, be my pride to escort thee, the friend of the Murrad; for Murrad saved mine life's blood."—"S-sush"—he placed his hand on my lips.

I took the tip, for the camel may not understand the conversation, but Allah only can tell as to who hides behind the camel: and although my new friend knew that I, as Murrad's commercial agent, could smuggle him over to heaven, yet even then there were eighteen men in the rest-house who would literally drink his blood.

With what care we could bestow, the Sheikh's wounds were attended by me. His enemies had only half buried the point of their blades in his thigh, and he had slain three before he got to where I was unloading my mount.

It is true that as trading goes in Arabia, I was

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not a trader, but the roving commission given me by Murrad, the merchant prince of Damascus, had made it possible for me to travel into the most covetously guarded parts of inner Arabia where inter-clan fighting is so dangerous that they shoot first and ask after. But, indebted though I was to Murrad, I would have hesitated a little before agreeing to smuggle his friend had I known then what I know now about the dangers surrounding it.

That night I intended to rest before taking the long sandy stretch that lay before me from the banks of the River Jordan eastwards. But Murrad's letter and the plight of the young Sheikh compelled my departure.

A haze floated over the distant sand dunes, as the silvery moon, like a blazing scimitar, rose higher and higher above the horizon. The sleepy gate-keeper rubbed his eyes as my camel lumbered out.

"Thou goest at an evil hour/" he shouted, "for beyond the ridge, thy life will be in the palm of thy hand."

It was fortunate, however, that he did not plunge his spear in the sack that hung by the side of my camel, as for a reason I had accommodated the wounded Sheikh in it, and, stuffing hay in another sack, I had placed it at my back to look like someone sitting behind me.

For three hours my hurri did gallop. She was the best trotter in Murrad's stables, and the Sheikh felt fairly safe, because not till dawn could any man fire on us during those days of the month

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of fasting, when during the night all the faithful must remain peaceful to each other.

Then the face of the moon began to tarnish; the sand now showed curious strands of light in that half light of approaching dawn. A streak shot up all along the rim of the desert; and the Sheikh wriggled in his suspended cradle, but again lay still as I announced the approaching light of the day.

With a sense which comes to desert travellers of feeling things, both the Sheikh and I had a presentiment that we were being followed at a discreet distance. Only of the aeroplanes or armed cars searching for the fugitive Sheikh did we fear. But maybe the French will spare him, I thought; and by merely placing a price on his head will set the Bedouins of the desert and the deed will be done. If that be the case, then we were more than a match for the Bedouins. A smuggled machine provided by Murrad, and which equalled the balance of my camel's load will see to that.

Just as I was rounding the bend of Bin Khiza, I could have yelled with delight to see the tent-dwellers far below where the French territory ceased. But it was still a good three miles. Hard hoofs hit on the rock; presently an Arab climbed up the ridge on our right and then dipped down. We were spotted.

Almost immediately a bullet sang past me. There was no time to lose. The Sheikh fell behind a boulder, and in a trice I saw the sack which rode behind me rent to bits by bullets. I was now training my machine-gun. Knowing that they

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would not shoot down the camel, I let her run towards the friendly encampments.

Fanwise our attackers were spread. But our superior arms were evidently playing havoc with their ranks. Muffled faces jumped up and fell before the fire of the machine-gun. Presently their leader steeled himself up with a long-nosed gun, a shot from the Sheikh's rifle made him whirl in a frenzied circle as he dropped on his face.

Now they were closing upon us, now retreating, the machine-gun barked unceasingly. I appealed to even my game leg to do its best, as I scrambled down yard by yard towards the land of friendly Bin Khiza, for the nephew of the Sheikh of that tribe was blazing away for his life with me.

Another attack was launched against us; it, too, was repulsed. We were crawling to safety as we fired on. Forms of our enemies rose only to be mown down by the "devil's own weapon," as they call the machine-gun in Arabia.

Then a burring and whirring noise of the aeroplanes struck upon our ears. "What in the Name of Allah is this for!" I wondered. They swept down; clearly one could recognise them to be French desert patrol. Within a few minutes they had alighted; but we were already touching Bin Khiza line.

A dozen horsemen led by the Sheikh of the tribe himself rode towards us. He clasped me in his arms. News had reached him that Murrad was having the Sheikh's nephew escorted by me. He anticipated trouble, but not a pitched battle like the one that we had to undergo.

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"And let mine, eyes that have dimmed with waiting alight upon mine dearest nephew!" He pulled the cloak from my ward's face.

A murderous gleam stole into the old man's eyes. The one whom I had smuggled made a wry face.

"Aman—Aman—in the Name of Allah I seek peace," he said.

In His Name the man was given peace; then he spoke:

"Aye, it is true that thy nephew wanted to escape, and he confided in me. Him I had drugged and donned him with mine own uniform, stole his papers and in his guise I have reached safely here out of the hands of my regiment. As to me, mine name is Krutz," and the German renegade hung his head in shame.

I saw the Arab chieftain's thumb curl over the hammer of the carbine. Then he tarried.

"In the Name of Allah thou hast asked peace," he said, red mounting to his cheeks: "In His Name I give it; but go thee back to thy regiment before sundown, for let the infidel kill infidel; I shall not pollute mine blade by slaying dogs."

The deserter's eyes shot with blood.

"I shall not go back to the hell from which I have escaped," he shouted; and as the old Sheikh turned, there was a sharp report. Smoke floated from the mouth of the deserter. In his teeth was the end of the barrel of his rifle. So that, if your way should lie one day to the Wady of Bin Khiza, see a rudely erected tombstone with "Al Almani . • ," (the German , . .) on it. The only lesson

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which the incident has left with me is that of one thing you can be absolutely sure in a desert travel; it is that you can be sure of nothing, least of all your fellow travellers.

I lost my way more than once over the devious tracks of the desert when I trekked back to the south, and I discovered that the Arabs of Trans-Jordan have hardly any sense of direction beyond the district over which they graze their animals. Fortunately for me, twenty miles to the east of Deraa is Bosrah, a great conical peak which projects prominently from the hills in the background. This landmark proved unfailing in my final journeyings in Trans Jordan and it allowed me more than once to correct the failings of so-called Arab guides whom I sometimes recruited from an encampment.

Beyond Deraa one moves into the country of the Druses—a race about whom not a great deal is known and who have a bad reputation with the French for their warlike proclivities. Personally, however, I found the Druses to be quite pleasant people and not sparing in their hospitality.

The men, especially, are of magnificent physique and they are great horsemen. They have, however, one curious practice. They black their eyes, but I discovered that this was not because of any desire to adorn the manly face. The substance which is used for this treatment is held to keep away the flies—of which there are positive clouds in some areas—and to safeguard the eyes from the glare of the blazing sun.

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These men have certainly most magnificent eyesight, rivalling in this respect the tribesmen of the North-West Frontier of India. They can determine even slight movement over incredible distances and they are natural and splendid shots.

Life in the Druse mountains can be exciting for the imaccompanied wayfarer, for the tracks over the mountains are littered with boulders which have been precipitated down from above.

Journeying along these paths one every now and again hears an ominous rumble and one looks up at the hillside with no little apprehension. Quite often miniature landslides obliterate the tracks and bring down with them rocks and boulders which fly at uncanny angles, any one of which would be sufficient to crush a man or a mule.

I had several narrow escapes from this kind of unpleasant death, but these were the only occasions when I suffered perturbation. The Druses, as far as I was concerned, belied their reputation and I found them almost a shy rather than aggressive people.

All the time, however, one could sense a certain atmosphere. Here were people who would remain quiet and law abiding if they were left to their own devices. Quite obviously they were resentful of intrusion and suspicious of any interference from an outside power.

The Turks, during their regime, evidently realised this. In any case, their suzerainty was quite nominal.

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One thing that makes the Druses rather difficult people to make conform to modern ideas of administration is the nature of their religion. Its secrets are most zealously guarded and no man is initiated into the mystic rites until he has more than reached the age of discretion. And when a man is admitted into his church he has to vow the most terrible and binding vows never to disclose to any who is not a full initiate any of the secrets of his faith.

Consequently, the Druses never speak of their religion and little is known about it beyond the fact that it is a somewhat curious mixture of Christianity and Islam.

They have one outstanding belief and that is in regard to transmigration. They believe that at the time of death the soul passes into whatever is born on their land at that moment—no matter whether the new-born is a human or an animal. Should death take place at a moment when no living thing is born, then they believe that the soul passes away to China. It is in China that the Jebel Druse believe that there are many of their race.

These people do not worship in churches, mosques or temples, as do those who have other faiths. They are careful to perform their religious ceremonies in some chamber carefully hidden away from the eyes of the curious.

Most carefully guarded also is their Sacred Book upon which no one who has not been initiated with the full rites of the faith has ever been allowed to gaze.

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This retiring secrecy which attends the religious observances of the Druses also extends, in a measure, to their relations with those of other races. Much of the trouble of the past has undoubtedly been due to a disregard of this trait.

Farther on northward when working toward the Iraqian frontier and the Jebel Druses left behind, I had the misfortune one night to stay in a small house where a man became sick. Apparently he was taken seriously ill in the middle of the night, for my sleep was disturbed by the shuffling of many feet.

Those who have been taught to respect the sick chamber and to enter it only when bidden or by permission of the doctor would regard with amazement that which transpires in this part of the Near East when a man is unfortunate enough to become ill.

The noise in this house was such that sleep was impossible. When I rose to investigate the cause of the confusion I found the place filled with friends and curious neighbours who had been hastily summoned to render aid. This motley crowd was busily engaged in prescribing all manner of incredible remedies and charms. The man's bed, a hard pallet on the floor, was literally surrounded by those anxious to try their medical skill.

It was quite obvious that the patient was seriously ill, for already two freshly-killed chickens had been applied warm to his feet. Every few minutes the unfortunate was dosed with an evil-

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smelling concoction, declared, by the old lady who had apparently dispensed it, to be capable of restoring anyone but who was actually dead. It was in my heart to believe her, too. I should have had to have been on the verge of coma not to have arisen and hurriedly departed from the noxious smell.

Others who assisted plied the patient with charms made of earth and others were deliberating whether or not one should not be despatched for a lamb which could be sacrificed for the good of the sick man.

The wife of the man demurred and suggested that the company should at least await the morn before embarking on such desperate measures.

It was easy to understand her concern. Chickens, charms and potions cost money or the equivalent. Already she had mortgaged a goodly part of her household goods in acquiring sustenance for her man.

Whether or not it became necessary to slaughter a lamb I shall never know, because I thought it expedient to change my quarters. I could do Uttle more. I could not possibly have intruded into the circle around the sick man, even though I Was aware that the treatment he was receiving was probably hastening him to his death.

However, his friends and neighbours evidently worked with thoroughness, for I was told, early the next morning, that the man was dead.

Going to collect the belongings which I had left in the house the previous night I found that this was indeed so. The poor widow was bewailing

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her lot. I could only attempt to console her by contributing to the burial fund.

Already a long strip of muslin had been resurrected from some place, and from the smell of camphor which it gave off it was reasonable to assume that it had been used at more than one burial. The body of the man was wrapped in this shroud and it would be little more than this which he would require.

Later that day I saw the remains being carried away in a rough wooden box—for the dead have quickly to be interred in the East.

The box was carried from the house by the friends who had done so much to expedite the man's end, but they performed this service not from any sense of remorse, but because those who act as pall-bearers acquire great merit. As the cortege proceeds the first person of the same religion that is met is expected to relieve one of the carriers and thus the burden is shifted from shoulder to shoulder until the burial place is reached. The coffin or box, with the shawl which is placed over it, are not interred. These are hired for the occasion by the poorer people and returned to the hirer after the body has been placed in a deep grave with but the muslin shroud as a cover. A priest was hurriedly summoned to recite Inj eel in Arabic.

At yet another village I came across an occurrence which was more pleasing—nothing less in fact than a wedding. The ceremonies attaching to marriages differ from country to country, sometimes in vital respects; sometimes in lesser.

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Invariably, however, are they of interest to on-lookers, if not always for the principal participants.

Here the wedding is divided into two distinct ceremonies—the actual betrothal and the wedding ceremony proper. In Moslem law both ceremonies are legal and binding. Consequently, there is more attending the initial ceremony than the lighthearted bestowal of a ring which may, or may not, already have adorned the finger of some earlier fiancée.

The ceremony of betrothal is a very serious one, into the preliminaries of which the families of both contracting parties have entered with zest, for it is one requiring the exercise of much business acumen.

Quite often betrothals are arranged by marriage brokers, many of whom are old women. They receive a commission from the contracting parties for their services. Much the same practice is observed by many of the Jewish fraternity, even in London, and it has not been unknown for May-fair hostesses to receive a valuable "present" for arranging a match between some wealthy, social aspirant and a member of the peerage. The arrangement in every instance is mainly commercial.

The peoples of this part of the East, however, have one practice which may or may not commend itself to brides of other nations.

In the betrothal ceremony which I witnessed the bridegroom to be was the Sheikh of the village and the girl the daughter of a neighbouring chief.

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They were not wanting in worldly goods, especially as the bridegroom was also a merchant who had journeyed to England and had taken to himself a Feranghi wife. But of that presently.

The bride, her mother and other feminine friends were accommodated in one room while the bridegroom and his friends occupied one adjoining.

The contracting priest took up a position in the doorway between the two rooms and read from a list detailing the property of the bride.

It had not been prepared merely to impress the neighbours and the friends of the family, or from any sense of false pride. There was a real object in this part of the ceremony.

All the articles named by the priest were to give her a sense of security. In later years, should the man desire to divorce the bride he would be unable to send her away penniless. He would have to provide her with all the goods and chattels mentioned in the list.

This practice may seem curious to some Western minds; nevertheless, it has its counterpart in many Western marriage settlements.

In Germany especially, it is frequently the practice for the groom to cite in his marriage settlement the carriages, the motor-cars, the houses which one day *might* come into his possession. There is a close association between the two forms of contract.

I remained in this village long enough to witness the second part of the ceremony, as this occurred only a few days after the first.

The bride lived in a flat-roofed single storey

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house and, in common with half-a-dozen other such structures, it looked out upon a court. In Europe you would say that it was but one of a collection of cottages which shared a common backyard.

All the neighbours came to the assistance of the bride and freely loaned carpets which were laid over the stone slabs of the court. These loans they augmented with gifts of flowers with which the court was further decorated.

A huge tea-urn had been obtained and this was kept bubbling the whole day. It was greatly in demand also, its only rival being long pipes of sweet *sherbat* which were passed from hand to hand. The court, by the way, was given over entirely to the women.

The bride was attired in a new silk garment much like the *sari* of Hindustan and her neck was adorned with a string of glass beads amongst which were interspersed a few gold and silver coins.

This trousseau was the gift of the groom—another pleasing practice, some fathers-in-law will say.

The bride had not disdained cosmetics. Her cheeks were rouged, her eyes had been blackened and her garments had been plentifully besprinkled with scent.

The hostess of the occasion—quite an old woman—seemed to be serving in a professional capacity. Obviously she augmented her income by giving her services in this way. No mere amateur could have carried off the situation as did she.

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As the guests entered the courtyard they peered around for this woman and then advanced upon her, enunciating the words: "May this wedding be blessed."

And the hostess, with supreme gravity, would respond: "In the Name of God enter; your kindness in coming to assist us is indeed great."

In the adjoining house where the guests of the Sheikh were assembled, a somewhat similar scene was being enacted. Here, however, the masculine temperament made for a little more verve and vigour.

A wandering minstrel had been imported to amuse the guests and he sang songs in a shrill, minor key, the words of which were improvised to meet the needs of the occasion.

Masculine humour, at such events as weddings, is cruder and much more direct than the feminine, and judging from the roars of laughter which the minstrel produced from the guests and the obvious discomfiture of the groom on sundry occasions, the man was well worthy of his fee.

The minstrel's voice was shrill and piercing, and I could not but notice with amusement that, when he introduced some sally at the expense of the bridegroom, the feminine chatter from the near-by courtyard suddenly ceased, and the hidden audience there was patently listening to the words with appreciative gusto.

Once even, the fair ones so far forgot themselves as to echo the boisterous laughter of the men when the minstrel had been particularly audacious.

The religious part of the ceremony—a brief and

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formal affair—had taken place earlier in the day and the singing and the laughter and the drinking of tea, coffee and *sherbat* proceeded until a late hour. At dusk, candles and lamps were produced and the whole assembly was served with a repast consisting of coloured rice, mutton, pomegranates and sweets.

Later, the party displayed signs of breaking up. A medley of particularly efficient bandsmen appeared as if by magic, and the surrounding roofs of the near-by houses became crowded by those anxious to witness the final phase of the ceremony.

The male guests assembled around the groom as an escort and a procession was formed which made its way slowly to the home of the bride.

As the groom reached the threshold of his bride's abode a lamb was sacrificed, and then the bride was led to the doorway and given over to the bridegroom amidst the plaudits of the spectators and the raucous blowing of trumpets.

In all these proceedings, Sheikh Abdullah, the bridegroom's father, I felt, was taking but a half-hearted interest. His mind, it would seem, was flying back to some distant scenes, some former experiences. At first, I thought that a man past middle age could hardly be expected to raise enough enthusiasm about an affair which warms young hearts; but the reason was different. He recollected his former Ferangi wife, the mother of the boy whose wedding he was celebrating.

Till late that night I sat with him. Then he became reminiscent. During the Great War,

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when European countries were at each other's throat, he found a chance of selling the wares of his land at a hundred per cent profit. To make more money he went to England. He lived the part, and began his story in the present tense; and let him relate it in his own way.

ABDULLAH LEARNS TO LOVE



## CHAPTER VIII

### ABDULLAH LEARNS TO LOVE

"t | "\0 be sure the Inglis are mad, for here in  
I London whose circuit is many miles, I have  
seen soldiers marching and countermarching.  
Yet they be so few. Many men wear hats of  
felt even as in Kurdistan, called 'bowlers,' but  
they are pale of face and make much of the for-  
bidden wine and pork. Yet the women are of an  
admirable fairness. These women are more war-  
like than the men, even as in Arabia, and their  
eyes are the colour of turquoise set in cheeks of  
coral. With a harem of such, the men of the desert  
might conquer the world.

" In the space of a few days I was made at home  
both by the Inglis and men of my own country  
now in London. All speak of wounds and war, yet  
yesterday I was taken to a place on a hill called  
Hampstead, where many men and women met  
together to dance. Had he seen them, my father  
would have used his tulwar, for the men were pale  
of face and 'precious.' 'I knew nothing of pre-  
cious' until my guide—a woman with false teeth  
and smelling of strange flowers—explained that  
this meant 'too proud to fight.' By Allah!  
Within five minutes I might have strangled them  
all! Some men there were (whom at first I thought

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women) who had cheeks of cherry blossom. They swayed from the hips as I have seen the 'nautch' girls of Bombay, and I greatly regretted the loss of my Arab knife.

"All were drinking wine—amber, blood red. Glasses were on every table and I was sickened by the heat and smell of strange scent. Then at one side I saw an Inglis lily. Tall she was, unaccompanied by any man. Her eyes met mine and she smiled. Her shameless skirt showed legs clad in silver silk and I dared not look at her breasts cradled in a wisp of tinselled fabric. O Allah! That there should be such beauty and yet no man to possess it and keep it from sight of the common herd! Yet she smiled. Her eyes swept my heart-strings. Without a word I pushed between the dancers and so came upon her, seating myself on the divan at her side.

"I do not know you,' she said. 'But you look as though you might be worth it. Are you an Indian?'

"So I explained that I was of those who swept with the mighty Arab lancers up to India, possessing all the land, the riches, the women—all that pleased our kingly eye. She smiled, and her teeth were whiter than the snows of Sulaiman Range. She asked whether I danced, whereat I said I would rather fight or make love. Her eyes met mine, blue as the sea I had left, and as seductive.

"Let's sit outside/ she said. 'I cannot stick this crush. Mabel always has the most impossible people. Most of them are "Conchies" or "indispensable" men in Government offices, drawing umpteen quid a week/

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"The gardens of the Inglis are very beautiful, and here was one where seats were cunningly hidden between arbours of roses. We sat upon a seat and presently my Lily laid her hand in mine.

"'You're rather a dear/ she said.

"This I took for a sign of favour, and felt the blood leap in my veins. From her came the scent of violets at dawn as I have smelled them a thousand times under the morning star. Yet I felt at a loss. An Inglis would have known what to do. I knew what my pulses told me; to sweep her into my arms, to crush her slender form so that it melted into mine, to carry her away and possess her utterly and most beautifully. Nevertheless, I was in a strange country and afraid. Moreover, who can tell the heart of a woman ?

"'You don't even know my name/ said my Lily. 'You'd better get it straight in case any questions are asked. What with sitting out here and with an unknown Sheikh, I'm likely to lose what reputation I've got. Not, of course, that that would trouble me. Reputations are like the bloom of life, both so darned fragile that they are not worth keeping!'

"Still I did not know what to do, save that the girl slipped closer to me so that I could see the sweet hollow between her breasts. I tore my eyes away, for here lay madness. The blood was singing in my ears and there was a red mist in front of me which hitherto had come only when I saw my knife sink home in an enemy's throat.

"'I'm Nella Carson/ I heard her say. 'Rising twenty-three, sound in wind and limb and—er—a

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widow/ She leaned forward so that I could not see her face. 'Jim was killed out in Salonica fifteen months ago. Things happen like that, you know. For a time I thought the end of the world had come, but now—oh well, I've grown wiser. Bloody world, isn't it?'

"In that moment I craved to comfort her. Tears were slipping down her cheeks and I, who knew the lore of the rifle and the knife, felt powerless. Yet at last I turned to her, and, as it were a miracle, found her in my arms. I had known her perhaps half an hour. Yesterday I had never seen her, yet at that moment my heart was in my throat with the fragrance of her.

''Tell me,' I whispered, 'may I not comfort you?'

"Then I found her lips, petals of purest passion that clung to mine and swept me to Paradise. Allah be praised that women are women, whether in Kirmanshah or Hampstead. She lay cradled in my arms, her slender limbs against mine, and I could feel the throb of her heart as I bent to kiss the scented whiteness of her shoulder. How long we sat in that garden of the *houris* I do not know. It must have been long, for when we returned many of the 'precious' men had left, taking their women with them. Almost alone in the ballroom my Lily found our hostess, who smiled sweetly.

''Quite a conquest!' I heard her say. 'You really must be a trifle discreet, Nella dear. You never know what these foreigners will do!'

H" Whereat I would have killed the woman, had I not received a soft glance from blue eyes that

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wrenched my heart even as a cook wrenches the neck of a chicken.

"Will you see me back/ said my Lily, when we were under the stars again.

"A street stretched empty before us. Few lights showed, but of a sudden a taxicab slowed beside us. So it was we went home together. I did not know the hour, for time has naught to do with passion. In a rose and amber drawing-room she showed me photographs—her man, her father, her sisters. So I came to know somewhat of her life, for now it appeared she worked in London alone. A question burned in me, so that I could no longer stifle it.

"Have you children?' I said. 'Perhaps a son to follow in the steps of your husband? Surely he would be a great fighter.'

"My Lily lay back, the lamplight making her an elf, rose and silver clad. I saw her smile.

"Do remember you are in London/ she said, 'and also that I was the wife of an infantry subaltern. Children are a luxury we could never afford/

"I did not understand her, save that perhaps she was afflicted of Allah. Presently I rose to take my leave, whereupon she leaped to her feet.

"Come and see me again/ she whispered.

"It is not well to kiss the women of the Inglis. No man—save he be a fool or a hero—brings himself within their wiles. Maybe I am a little of both, for when I walked down that dark road in the starshine with my heart singing, I knew I was in love. What then would my father, the old Sheikh, say? A Ferangi woman, even though

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fair as the dawn? And the Mullahs? And the women of my father's harem? What place had she in the life of a warrior of the desert, where death lurks at every corner and women are the lawful spoil of the strongest?

"After a while and with many questionings I came to my house. Allah preserve me from living in such a wilderness of houses so that scarce a tree can be seen and there is only the stench of petrol! So I lay upon my bed that night, and for many nights afterwards. First I put the thought of that seductive one away from me. Then I gloried in her beauty. I could neither eat nor sleep. My strength departed from me. Then the spirit that lives in the wires rang a bell, and a servant came to tell me that a woman wished to speak with me. For me there was but one woman, and at her voice my heart leaped into my throat so that I could remember not one word of the Ferangi tongue, in which I was by now becoming more adept.

"'That you, Abdullah?' I heard. 'What's been biting you? Got anything on to-night? Good. Then come and call for me at seven o'clock. I've got seats for a show and afterwards—perhaps—'

"The silver voice ceased, while I could say nothing.

"'Did you hear? Can you manage it?'

"Then I spoke burning words into the telephone, so that I heard a soft, faint laugh and then a click.

"That night was the first of many. With my Nella I grew to know, to understand and afterwards to love a little this great London. From

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restaurant to restaurant we went. Now I would hire a car and we would slip down a wide road called the West towards the Thames, where were boats which I knew not how to manage. At first, I tried to hire a servant who should row, but Nella thought not. Indeed, she herself did propel a punt in most skilful fashion, whereat I grew shamed since of this thing I knew nothing. But of those nights when lights danced upon the black water I scarce dare speak. The whisper of leaves shrouding us from the common gaze, the dark ripples that swept past our fingers like those waves of passion which engulfed us. My Nella cared for nothing save that I loved her, and in her arms I found heaven.

"Darling—what are we going to do about it?"

"In those few words I faced the crisis of my life. Of Ferangi fashions I knew nothing, save that by the paying of money and the mumbling of a priest a wife can be bought. And such a wife! A thing of flame and silver, fragrant as the dawn, whose lips snatched me up to Heaven so that the blood thundered at my ears and I knew that only in her wonder could I find satiety and peace.

"*What are we going to do about it?*"

"The Ferangi know naught of the language of love. Maybe that is why their women speak of a sixth sense, for I have known many red-faced officers and others to whom words come with difficulty, save only when they are angered. Yet now with her lips under mine I knew the answer.

"Tell me, light of my eyes!" I whispered. 'Rose of my heart, do with me what you will so

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that you come to me soon. Let nothing stand between us, neither money nor custom. How shall we do this thing?'

"My Lily sighed, resting her bright head against my shoulder.

"'It's not so easy, old thing,' she said. 'I have got a father, also aunts. And what they will say when they hear I am marrying a scion of the great Sheikhs I daren't think. Why *will* people always judge things from the angle of fifty years back, instead of in the light of the present? "*We never did things like that in our day!*" I can hear Aunt Agatha saying. As if she ever did anything more than squeeze a curate's hand and imagine she was on the slippery hill to Hell!'

"Of such talk I could make little, but it served to fire my blood. If her father was indeed unwilling that his daughter should mate with a man of high Arab blood, my way was plain. I should seek him out, yet deal tenderly with him. There would be no need of a knife. No need, even, of a strangle hold. I should talk with him as men of the desert have talked for a thousand years, and doubtless he would see sense.

"'How much money have you got?' said my Lily after a pause. 'Please don't misunderstand me. I don't care a damn whether you are a millionaire or a workman. But I only want to know your immediate resources. Could you manage a special licence, or shall we say banns? That'll take three weeks, you know. And you are apt to be a bit impatient, aren't you?'

"So I was initiated into the mysteries of mar-

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riage as practised by the Ferangi. For my Lily I forswore my traditions, my very life. Think ill of me if you will, that as a strict Moslem of the Arabian lands I should mate with the Infidel. I make no plea, save that I was in love and so driven could do naught save bow before a greater force. For three Sundays I attended a great place of worship where many men and sweet-smelling women came to pray. Such music I have never heard, and pray I may not hear again, for it seemed ill to ears accustomed to the music of mountain and stream, of wind whispering in upland forest. Yet I said naught, seeking to pleasure my loved one.

" Hand in hand we sat and listened to an Inglis of mournful aspect. Of what he said I heard little, save that he spoke of the wrath to come. Yet he knew little of wrath, an undersized man whom I could have crushed with a single blow. The God of the Ferangi may be powerful, but his Mullahs are pale and thin-bellied. Truly a poor lot! Yet it was with this very man that my Lily and I gained a passport to Paradise. Witnesses there were, from the house in which I lived.

" The sun shone, but no more brightly than the eyes of my beloved, and within twenty minutes she was mine. In a dark room on one side of the church I gave money to the priest and his underlings. Then my name and that of my Lily was inscribed in a great book, whereupon all wished us joy, and even the driver of the taxicab loosed his features. The whole world smiled upon us, and so we came to a hotel where my Lily had taken rooms.

" There are some who say that London is a place

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of grime and penniless people. Yet here we found only much kindness, great happiness, and an eagerness to help us on our way. Truly, certain of the Ferangi are kind of heart, belieing|their outward looks. Thus it was that, within six weeks, I entered into Paradise. When I had come to London I had had no thought of this, yet now for the first time in my life I had a woman who lay against my heart, a thing of warmth and tenderness which demanded and gave love in overflowing measure.

" Yet often in the night I thought of the men of the desert, of my father and the Chief Mullah. What they would say of this I dared not think. "

In matrimonial bliss Abdullah forgot the War; he stayed on and on in England; the import business he extended to Damascus; a year passed and more, till the nursing home gave him the sad news of his wife's sudden death at childbirth. Ali he named the motherless boy; and Ali, the son of the English bride, grew to manhood in the purest desert traditions, to wed the only daughter of his father's rival Arab Chieftain. And Ali talked in terms of Arabia, in the spirit of that which is best in Islam, carrying the mantle of his father not unworthily.

When the young man came in to say good night and kissed his father's hand as a token of thanks for getting him a wife, a happy light ran in the eyes of the old Sheikh. In jest, I asked Ali whether he would like to visit England,

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"No/" said the bridegroom emphatically. "No, I shall not go where they eat pig and drink wine!"

What a commentary on Hampstead nights of revelry!

While on the subject of marriages I might just as well refer to another wedding which I presently saw among the Kurds. Here also, the marriage is arranged among the parents, the father of the groom invariably making a substantial present to the father of the bride.

This present usually takes the form of cattle or household produce, as the Kurds have little use for money as such. Much, of course, depends upon the comeliness and the status of the bride, but before parting with his daughter in marriage a father can expect to receive four or five sheep and perhaps one or two goats thrown in to give weight to the bargain.

Even after the wedding contract has been cemented by these gifts, the bride's father has, by custom, to stage a display wherein he can demonstrate his unwillingness lightly to part with the daughter of his house.

In this and in the evolutions of the groom something of the old-world romance and chivalry is pleasantly present.

When the time of the wedding ceremony comes round, the groom's father gathers unto himself as formidable an array as is possible. He collects his warriors and his friends, and the groom is attired in a striking garment of many colours.

A procession is formed and with much brandishing of swords and firearms an advance is made

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on the bride's home. As they approach garish "musical" instruments are played and much ammunition is fired from the ancient guns.

This is the signal to the bride's father, who must now sally forth with his own band of warriors and friends and engage the advancing "foe" in mimic combat.

To an ordinary and uninitiated onlooker the battle appears to be a sanguinary one, and it is in one's mind to be somewhat sorry for the groom. After all, one reflects, the bargain has been made and the presents handed over, yet his father's forces are repulsed again and again.

This, however, is all part of the ceremony.

Eventually the defenders give way and the groom is allowed to rush to the bride's home and bear her off in triumph, amidst the banging of cymbals, the roar of musketry and the triumphant cries of his "army."

The bride's father has still a part to fill.

He must detach himself from his vanquished warriors and rush headlong after his daughter and beseech her to return. If she were to acquiesce, I imagine that the real battle would ensue, but she invariably refuses. Then the two forces combine, and the whole repair to the bride's home for the wedding feast, and the night is spent in singing and dancing.

At the stroke of midnight the groom with horses appears, and conveys the bride away to her new home.

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## CHAPTER IX

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**Y**OU must assume, while you have been reading these domestic sidelights, that I have been steadily plodding my way toward the Iraqiian frontier. The country through which I passed at this stage of my journey was the reverse to interesting, much of the desert ground being covered with lava and the whole prospect being monotonous and uninviting.

Water often became a matter of serious moment, but fortunately I am a seasoned vagabond and I know how to take care of myself and my pack animals.

Before departing on my adventure I had had fashioned a stiff canvas bag with mouthpiece and a variety of straps attached.

This I rescued from my assortment of luggage and filled with water and suspended it from the martingale support of one of the mules and from the saddle girth. The water-filled canvas bag thus passed between the animal's forelegs and, as a burden, caused him no inconvenience.

I regret to say, however, that the water itself seriously disturbed both the mule and me on some of those long marches between wells, for as the animal ambled along, the contents of the bag

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swished from side to side with a most seductive and aggravating sound which made one think (and possibly the mule too) of the story of Tantulus.

What made matters worse was the fact that the canvas bag was slightly porous, and the movement and the percolation made the water most delightfully cool.

I retain quite fond memories of that mule, even though he came to a sad end.

On one rather dreadful march when our water supply was all but exhausted, I had to take pity on the unfortunate beast and spare him a few drops of the fluid beyond and above the meagre ration he had had two hours previously.

I carefully decanted a little water into one hand and then, with the other, I caught hold of his lolling tongue. Carefully I poured the water on to this receptive organ and wetted it thoroughly with a gentle massage.

Thereafter that animal lost much of his "mullish" complex. He seemed to sense that I had parted with something more valuable than gold and he would amble after me like a dog.

Poor fellow, sure-footed though he was, he slipped and fell one day among some boulders and broke a leg.

Mentally drawing two lines from ears to eyes I had to shoot him where they crossed.

Within a short time, and before I had progressed a hundred yards from the scene, the carrion of the air were disputing with a couple of jackals for all that remained of him.

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I make no special claim for the advantages of my canvas water bag, for the idea is quite well known among Easterns. Except in the large towns, and sometimes not always there, there are no drinking water plants. More often than not water has to be taken from rivers and pools in a very muddy state and it has to be rendered drinkable.

This is done by a simple, yet ingenious process. A filter is used constructed from clay in the shape of an Italian wine bottle.

The potter, when working the soft clay, introduces a little salt into that which he is moulding. The jar is then burnt in the ordinary way, but when water is poured in, the salt dissolves, leaving minute holes through which the water percolates.

The most nauseating-looking water can be rendered clear by means of this filter which can be purchased for less than one halfpenny.

Whether or not we of the East have become immune to microbes, I do not know, but we seldom feel ill effects from drinking such water. Although rendered cool and clear by this simple process, microbes must still be there.

Europeans, who find themselves in like circumstances, are recommended to take the further precaution of boiling the water.

Boiled water is insipid and unsatisfying because the air has been largely ejected. Nevertheless, it is better than cholera or typhoid.

It is in this arid region that one comes across now and again some curious ancient fortified walled camps. They are constructed in the shape of

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pointed stars and they have long-walled entrance roads.

It was here, during one of the periods when I was woefully short of water and when I was by no means certain of my direction, that I saw a heavy aircraft on its way to Baghdad.

This machine of the moderns seemed incongruous in such surroundings, but I was glad to see it. Although it crossed my path at a tangent a considerable distance away, it gave me a much-needed sense of comfort and assured me that my general direction was good.

It must not, however, be imagined that all is dolorous and dispiriting on treks through country such as this. I can imagine nothing that would be better for the harassed dweller of the city racked by "nerves" to the point of exhaustion and mental instability. I have seen many such men in the City of London ordered away from their business worries to the hectic gaieties of the south of France, when what they really needed was peace and solitude.

The life that I led at that period held a charm peculiarly its own. It was primitive, it is true, and it demanded perfect bodily health. As for "nerves/" their reaction is speedily blunted in such surroundings, by the wonderful tonic properties of the air and by healthy fatigue.

When one journeys by steamer and train the short space of time passing between places of "interest" is but a boring interlude. It is a time of irksome inanition during which one's routine is suspended.

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But there, out in the vast distances, one's real existence was upon the move and the brief stay in each stopping place, a period of preparation for the next lap in the journey and for much needed rest.

The routine of such a life would be a little irksome at first for most city-bred Europeans, but it is easily learned.

Each twenty-four hours is divided into four natural, but unequal parts.

There is the period of hurry and activity in the early morning, followed by a longer one of comparative tranquillity on the march. Then follows the bustle attendant upon arrival and then the period of beautiful, dreamless sleep.

And what sleep! Especially if it be under the stars, out in the desert.

Here the desert can be both a friend and a foe.

The traveller has to remember that it quickly loses the heat that it absorbs during the day and that even during the summer nights it can become uncomfortably cold.

But, some will say, how nice to nestle into the soft, comforting sand! All have heard of the shifting sands of the desert, but one needs to be on them really to realise how they can shift between a recumbent and sleeping human.

They can form little hillocks as hard as rock and cause to the human frame very serious discomfort.

One rises and feels oneself gingerly, meanwhile looking round for the assailant who has assaulted one with a big stick.

But the shifting sands can be easily subdued.

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If one scratches out a hole into which one places one's hip, rolling and tossing in one's sleep is made impossible and the sands do not "ruck up" in retaliation.

The sands like to sleep when nightfall comes and their shifting is only to escape the restlessness of the turbulent.

Sometimes when sleeping on the desert one has visitors. Maybe some mosquitoes will come closely to inspect the intrusion.

They dart, and hum, and hover and seek the more closely to give of their attentions.

The best thing to do in such circumstances is to pull one's rug up over one's face. If this renders the feet and ankles bare the only thing to do is to pull it down again and stretch forth in the darkness for one's socks.

If these appendages have failed one on the journey and are less than they were when they left the hands of the maker, then the only course left open to one, if one insists on being worried by such insects, is to pack one's traps and proceed to the shops of Baghdad or Damascus or Cairo where they sell the traveller prettily labelled bottles filled with liquid which is guaranteed to stun the most robust of mosquitoes at the first sniff. Personally I have found that mosquitoes thrive most excellently on such concoctions.

Quite often one has other visitors. More than once I have been awakened when sleeping on the desert and have found at a distance of eight to ten feet, a semi-circle of brightly glowing orbs about one foot from the ground.

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At first this strikes one as being uncanny, but one soon learns to realise that it is only a pack of jackals who have paid a friendly call.

A violent "Sh-sh-sh" is sufficient to disperse these cowardly creatures.

Once I was foolish.

I threw a boot at the semi-circle of eyes.

The jackals vanished and, in the morning, so had my boot.

The jackals—they had eaten it!

Notwithstanding pleasantries such as these on my line of march I admit that I was not altogether displeased when I eventually saw in the distance the waters of a great lake. I was sufficiently sure of my direction to recognise this as Lake Habbaniyah and not the Bitumen Lakes which lie some twenty miles to the westward.

This lake is in itself remarkable in that when full of water it covers an area of one hundred and forty square miles. And Nature has constructed it in a special pattern so that one of these days it will form the basis of a huge irrigation scheme which will make Iraq one of the foremost granaries of the world. Immense sums of money would be required for such an irrigation project, but they would only be relative, for the area to be irrigated would also be immense.

The eyes of the engineers must glisten as they scan the waters of this inland sea, so invitingly pressing for their attentions. As its level is lower than that of the River Euphrates, when in flood it is possible to pour into it the surplus waters of the river and thus form a vast, natural storage.

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Then, in the late summer, when the waters of the river decline and sink to a lower level than those stored in the lake, what would be more simple than to release the stored surplus and allow it to flow back into the river and from there to canals and the crops withering for the want of this priceless fluid?

The flying machines, on their way to and from Baghdad, purr gently and easily over this lake. I had to make a circuit of its shores. Eventually I stumbled upon the main motor road from Damascus and presently came unto Ramadi on the banks of the Euphrates. Here I was upon the entrance to modern Babylonia.

My safe arrival by such a route as I had travelled occasioned some little surprise because it had been generally noised abroad that robbers were active and that some had actually been on the look-out for me, not so much to rob me of my poor possessions, but to hold me to ransom for the money which they supposed I had deposited in some Western bank.

If my bank manager should read these lines he will probably be as astonished as I was. The secret-service agents of the nomads had been sadly led astray regarding my ability to pay.

Later on, some unfortunate, bedraggled travelers did stumble in to Ramadi and they told a hair-raising story which was so blatantly far-fetched that even the gullible film producers of Hollywood would have rejected it.

The poor people, nevertheless, had been **thoroughly** frightened, as **well as robbed, so that they**

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could be excused if their imagination ran riot on gruesome details.

Quite seriously they told of devilish tortures, forgetful of the fact that their bodies were still whole.

Fright and a vivid imagination, however, will do much.

I have actually seen a man, informed by the Hakim or wandering doctor that he is going to die, curl up on his mat and pass from this world. Organically, it was subsequently proved, there was nothing the matter with the man.

Apparently the hold-up had been staged with dignity. A crowd of rough-looking men had suddenly appeared and surrounded the party.

There was no wild galloping or the firing of guns. Instead the robber leader had quietly stepped forward and seized the bridle of the animal carrying the foremost traveller—an obese merchant named Suleiman who had spent the last three days and most of the nights on his little-used feet and was now an object for commiseration.

"Verily," wailed Suleiman to me, "did I protest to this Sheitan that I and my companions were but poor wayfarers with but nothing with which to propitiate such rich and mighty men of the desert.

"This robber, this pirate, this despoiler of the innocent, would not believe me though I swore by the beard of the Prophet.

"He said not a word, but looked at me with **those** soul-searing eyes of his, gave the bridle a **shake** and **I, Suleiman a trader, respected and one**

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of substance, was tumbled to the dust whilst the ruffians roared at my discomfiture."

"And then——" I prompted.

"And then," sobbed Suleiman, "he raised a great foot and placed it firmly upon me.

"Poor, are you oh fat one/ he said,' we will see what gives to you your comfortable girth/

"In the meantime the train animals were being unloaded and my merchandise laid out for inspection. Fortunately I had disposed of much en route, but that which was there I could still ill-afford to lose.

"And those who were with me were lined up with their backs to the proceedings and a huge man with a great sword stood behind them telling all that he would remove the nose of the first one that turned his head. They stood there, trembling like cowards," added Suleiman, "paying no heed to my cries of distress or to the overwhelming extent of my anguish.

"Implanting a foot more deeply into my entrails the robber chieftain beckoned one of his underlings. This man took his place and not only held me down as did his master, but leaned nonchalantly upon me as he serenely watched the process of plundering.

"Soon all the animals had been stripped and all minutely inspected, and then back came the chieftain. He was in no good humour.

"We have appraised your rubbish/ he said belligerently, 'and it comes to a total worthy perhaps of one little finger. Certainly it is not enough to save the protuberance which so coyly enfolds

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the foot of Husein, here, nor is it enough to save your head, or your arms, or your feet, or your legs. You must pay/ he thundered.

"To the best of my poor ability I enlarged on my dire poverty and of the penurious state of those who were with me, but this villain merely laughed in his beard.

"Let the portly one arise/ he said to the heavy-footed Husein, 'and we will inquire into his poverty/

"My cries of indignation went unheeded and despite my valiant struggles, I was shamefully assaulted and bereft of all my clothing. Naked I stood in the desert and it was then that that mean-spirited Ahmad there had the temerity to turn his head and wallow in my degradation."

"But," I observed, "Ahmad is still in possession of his nose."

"Verily," lugubriously agreed Suleiman, "but the guard with the sword was also delighting in my discomfiture, and he failed to notice the waywardness of Ahmad."

"Perhaps," I interjected, "you were not sufficiently insistent in declaring your penurious state."

"Insistent!" howled the indignant Suleiman, "Repeatedly did I declare by all that I hold holy that I was as the beggar of the bazaar. Yet, this foul wastrel would take no heed.

"For shame, fat belly/ he said. 'Do you see in my eyes the innocence of the dove?'

"Verily, I did not. Rather did I espy the glowing rapacity of the vulture.

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"Come/ said this robber, \* I have heard such tales many times before. You must pay for your life and for the lives of those who are with you.'

"Yet again I explained that my possessions had already been filched, but this man refused to listen to reason. Impatiently he turned.

"Take one of those men/ he commanded, 'and we will let the obese Suleiman know what we have in store for him/

"Two uncouth creatures advanced at his bidding and, drawing their scimitars, they seized upon the yelping and cringing Ahmad. Verily had vengeance come upon him for glorying in my degradation, but the cries which he made as he was assaulted with those great swords turned my bowels to water.

"I was not allowed to see the nature of his maltreatment, yet as Ahmad's cries became fainter I could but surmise that his end was near.

"When all became silent and the robber's henchmen came with their blood-reddened swords, the bandit turned to me with an evil smile and said: 'Come, fat one. Now it is your turn/

"Again was I roughly assaulted and my executioners stood before me waiting to perform their master's bidding.

"We will make you pay/ emphasised this terrible man, 'even if it is only with your life. But the payments shall be like those to the money-lender—protracted, irksome, painful.

"First/ he said, 'we will remove your nose, then we will slice away your lip and then——'

"But I had had enough. No mortal could have

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held out longer than I did, but, in the end, I had to pay. I promised the man a letter to a business friend of mine on which payment would be made. I thought that if I could but escape from his clutches and could send word to this friend to dishonour the note I could eventually seek the protection of the police.

"But that robber ruffian was too wily.

"After we had haggled and agreed upon a price he smilingly took the letter which I had indicated and informed me that were there any secret signs inscribed therein asking for assistance or suggesting any evasion I would surely die.

"I had been sitting naked all this while, but as an act of great condescension he gave me back my garments. Then he sent a messenger away on a swift-trotting camel and informed me that I was still a prisoner. Most of the evening he devoted to telling me of the manner of the death which would be mine if his messenger, and the money, failed to materialise on the morrow.

"Fortunately for me, all went well. My business friend met my bill without suspicion and the messenger appeared in good time with my ransom/ "

"And then/ " I suggested, "you were given your freedom and you made all haste to the nearest outpost and informed the authorities/ "

Suleiman raised his hands despairingly.

"I was given my freedom," he agreed, "and that was all.

"None of your tricks, fat one/ said the bandit in parting. 'I do not wish to be hunted over the

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desert by a Feringhee aeroplane and sent to perdition by a rain of machine-gun bullets.

"You are much too fat for rich living/ he added. 'Therefore, I will repay the inconvenience that I have caused you. I will keep your animals, though they be but sorry specimens, and you can walk/'

"And did you walk?" I asked sympathetically.

"Indeed I did," sighed Suleiman. "For three days we staggered on our way here and I am near to death."

Poor Suleiman!

He was indeed unfortunate, but I doubt whether he ever really missed the amount he was forced to pay as ransom. Despite his many protests he was known to be a rich man.

And three days' hardship in the desert!

I had not the honour of Suleiman's acquaintance before his great tragedy, but I can attest the fact that even after this dismal occurrence and the trials and tribulations which followed he was still grotesquely obese.

Gradually, yet surely, desert raiders such as harried Suleiman are being stamped out and each succeeding day makes it more difficult for them to carry on their trade.

The Iraq police force is doing wonderfully efficient work in this and other respects, but there is no question of the fact that it is still incumbent upon travellers to take all precautions.

The strength of the police force is 8,500 men, on foot and mounted, but the land frontiers total some 2,500 miles and in addition there are some

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7,000 miles of motor roads, railways and navigable waterways. With such a vast area to patrol the difficulties of maintaining an adequate passport and police system can be easily imagined.

In the desert tracts the police have armed cars equipped with wireless which frequently cooperate with the Air Arm in isolating and otherwise dealing with those with a tendency to rob and loot. In the more turbulent areas the police posts keep in touch with the heliograph and high-powered Morse lamps.

The marauders of the desert long ago discovered how easy it is to sever a telephone or telegraph wire.

Besides, this self-same wire, when cut up into convenient lengths can be rammed into old muzzle-loaders. When expelled by a charge of black gunpowder it makes most effective ammunition!

Many lady travellers in Iraq complain of the Government regulations which have been made to govern their movements, but these regulations have been made with the one idea of ensuring their safety as far as possible.

European and American ladies are granted visas only on the strict understanding that they undertake to keep in close touch with the local authorities and to agree to any restriction on their movements which these authorities care to make. Before a lady can proceed, either accompanied or unaccompanied by a male escort, to the holy cities of Kerbela or Najaf she has to obtain written permission from the Ministry of the Interior. And in the Northern Liwas of Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaimani, all journeys by a

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lady, whether accompanied or not, have to be made between sunrise and sunset—and then only when the express permission of the authorities has been obtained. As a further precaution for feminine travel in these districts, lady travellers are expressly forbidden to wander from a few carefully defined, main roads.

Worse still, in these days of feminine emancipation and equality, in many districts ladies (European and American) are not allowed to travel at all without a police escort—and, the authorities are careful to point out, escorts can only be provided at the traveller's expense.

The result of these restrictions—and my knowledge of these regions causes me to add that they are eminently sensible and very necessary restrictions—is that many ladies find it extremely difficult, if not frequently impossible, to visit some of the antiquities and archaeological remains in which Iraq is so rich.

From Mosul, for instance, one sets out for Nineveh and Nimrud.

A glance at the map will show that Mosul is built on the west bank of the Tigris, more or less opposite the site of ancient Nineveh.

Mosul, with its population of some eighty thousand, comprising Christians, Arabs, Kurds and Turks, I have always found to be an insufferable place because of the heat—and I am well accustomed to extremes in the temperature. I found, however, that in the hot season, even the regular inhabitants sought refuge in cellars during the day and spent their nights on the flat roofs. Those

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who went abroad during the hottest period of the day only did so in case of absolute necessity.

The radiation of heat from the walls of the houses has to be felt to be believed. It wells out in waves and this is not made the more pleasant when it is realised that not all of the inhabitants have assimilated modern ideas regarding the disposal of garbage and sewerage.

Nevertheless the visitor will find the bazaars of Mosul quite interesting, although they cannot be compared with those of Constantinople, Damascus or Tabriz. Still, a great deal of trade is done here, for it is the one real outlet for the commercial activities of lower Turkestan and Baghdad.

One of these days the Tigris will be made easily navigable for the river steamers as far as Mosul. These craft do accomplish the journey at periods of very high water, but to make river transport really practicable definite schedules will have to be established.

Now the usual means of river communication is by rafts. These are constructed with inflated goat skins—hundreds of them—which are lashed together with willow branches.

These rafts, which are usually accommodated with a cabin of sorts made of poles and gaudily coloured cloths, provide an easy and comfortable means of travel between Mosul and Tekrit and beyond—that is, if one cares to forsake the motor road which more or less follows the course of the Tigris for the whole distance.

One crosses the Tigris at Mosul by a floating bridge and immediately comes to Koyunjik, the

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mounds that mark the site of the palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh.

From here, and gazing northward to the foothills some forty-five miles away, one can determine the position of Alqosh, even though one is unable to see it. Alqosh was once the home of the prophet Nahum and little doubt is now entertained that this is the place where the prophecies of Nahum were written.

Unless the traveller is very keen I should advise him (or her) to take this much for granted, for although a motor road connects Nineveh with Alqosh the latter place is little more than an insignificant village.

In the days of Nahum, however, it must have been a place of some social importance and have occupied a position very similar to some of the hill stations of India.

As the heat of the Indian plains drives those who can afford it (and quite a few who certainly cannot) to Simla, Mussoorie, Dalhousie, etc., so it has to be presumed that in the time of Nahum the richer residents of Nineveh fled to the foothills to escape the heat. Near-by Alqosh would have provided a convenient place of temporary residence.

Probably also, Alqosh was the place where the old adage of "Idle hands" originated. I am not endeavouring to malign the hill stations of India, but were a modern Nahum to visit some of the gayer of them during the height of the season, I am afraid he would be just as unpleasant and as morbid as his ancient prototype. The authorities

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must have sensed something of this during the Great War, for there was at least one Indian hill station to which British officers on leave from the vicinity of ancient Nineveh were forbidden to go!

In Alqosh there is a small building where one is shown a scroll said to have been Nahum's. This is very difficult to believe, for there are signs that the building has been erected on a still more ancient site.

Near-by Alqosh is a large community of Yezidees. These people are devil-worshippers and they gave much trouble when the Turks held nominal sway in this area. That these people really worship devils I readily believe. No one else would regard with such amazing equanimity the enormous fleas which abound in their homes and which, with mosquitoes and flies, are frequently to be seen in dozens on the eye-brows and eye-lids of children.

Boys and girls of nine or ten make no apparent effort to rid their faces of these disgusting insects.

Quite unconcernedly they will allow these pests to browse away on their profiles while they ask the traveller a question or stay around in the hope of largesse.

It was near the home of the community that there occurred one of the greatest tragedies of my tour.

I had, for obvious reasons, found it vitally necessary to take frequent bathes in a fast moving mountain stream.

One day I was performing my ablutions when I

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trod upon a small rock which was being swirled along the river bed by the force of the current.

This disturbed a balance already made somewhat perilous by the presence of soap in my eyes, and I capsized.

Unfortunately, when floundering in the rapidly moving torrent I dropped my one tablet of soap—and it was germicidal soap at that.

I searched the river bed as well as I could, but I did not recover it. Two especially unhappy days passed before I was able to make good my loss—two days and one ghastly long night—which I shall never forget; for sand or river silt makes a very poor substitute for soap.

# BLACK MAGIC IN THE DESERT



## CHAPTER X

### BLACK MAGIC IN THE DESERT

**B**EING interested in all forms of the occult, I took an opportunity of finding out the truths about the Black Art, which was greatly practised in this area of Iraq.

Magic and the study of the hidden sciences is known to be as ancient among the Arabs as in any part of the East; indeed, it is not too much to say that they are the true successors of the magicians of old Egypt. Their name for Alchemy (Al Kemia) means simply "The Egyptian Science" and, with the old Egyptians, they formerly believed that gold was a sovereign cure for all human diseases.

On this occasion when I travelled through Arabia, I took a great deal of trouble to discover whether any of the ancient arcane studies and occult ideas still remained among the people. I had previously read and discussed many volumes upon the occult lore of the Arabs of old, the works of Geber, Alchindi, Rhasis and others, and I was anxious to know whether their principles of alchemy, astrology and magic were still practised in the country.

I found that they were, but that their practitioners took a deal of unearthing. I am, of course,

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not alluding to mere fakirs or snake-charmers, but to veritable students of the arcane sciences. I was soon to discover that not much was to be gleaned in Arabia proper, or in the Hejaz, where the strictness of Moslem principle forbids any savour of the occult. It was, indeed, in such odd corners in which I found myself and in Syria north and south that I encountered that which I sought.

After much careful questioning, I was directed to the ancient city once the seat of a college of Chaldeans and Magi, and the alleged centre of the Orphic Mysteries. It was here I met my first alchemist, who received me in his house clad in flowing robes. After some skirmishing he admitted that he was a practitioner of the art of Geber, and that he sought three things: the philosophers' stone, at whose touch all metal should become gold, the elixir of life and the universal solvent, which would dissolve all substances. Indeed, he confided to me that he had discovered the latter. I asked him in what he kept it, if it dissolved all things, and he replied "in wax," this being the one exception.

The next day I was granted the unusual privilege of inspecting the alchemist's laboratory, and duly presented myself at the appointed time. My highest expectations were fulfilled; everything was exactly what an alchemist's laboratory should be. Yes, there was the sage surrounded by his retorts, alembics, crucibles, furnace, and bellows, and, best of all, supported by familiars of gnome-like appearance, squatting on the ground, one blowing the fire (a task to be performed daily for six hours

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continuously), one pounding substances in a mortar, and another seemingly engaged in doing odd jobs. Involuntarily, my eyes sought the pentacle inscribed with the mystic word 'Abracadabra,' but here I was disappointed, for the black arts had no place in this laboratory. One of the familiars had been on a voyage of discovery to London, where he bought a few alchemical materials; another had explored Spain and Morocco, without finding any alchemists, and the third had indeed found alchemists in Algeria, though they had steadily guarded their secrets.

After satisfying my curiosity in a general way, I asked the sage to explain the principles of his researches and to tell me on what his theories were based. I was delighted to find that his ideas were precisely those of the medieval alchemists, namely, that all metals are debased forms of the original gold, which is the only pure, non-composite metal; all nature strives to return to its original purity, and all metals would return to gold if they could; nature is simple and not complex, and works upon one principle, namely, that of sexual reproduction. It was not easy, as will readily be believed, to follow the mystical explanations of the alchemist. Air was referred to by him as the 'vulture/ fire as the 'scorpion/ water as the 'serpent/ and earth as 'calacant;' and only after considerable cross-questioning and confusion of mind was I able to disentangle his arguments.

Some little distance from here, among the foothills of Kurdistan, I again unearthed a student of Black Magic. He certainly looked the part, and

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talked largely about magical operations, but, as I never saw him actually perform any, I cannot say whether he was merely a deluded disciple of the great art, or a very ordinary fraud. This, however, I can say, that he assuredly knew more concerning magic and its procedure than any man I ever met. He showed me how to form a magical circle, guarded from the intrusion of jinn and evil spirits by the time-honoured symbols, lights and perfumes, but when I asked him to evoke the powers of the elements he bluntly refused, on the grounds that such an experiment required a great deal of preparation lasting over some days, and that it was dangerous to attempt it without that.

I left his little house in the hills feeling rather disappointed, and observing a number of people, chiefly girls and women, hanging about the doorway, I concluded that he made his living by selling charms and philtres to them. I afterwards learned that this was so, but I must admit that he had a great reputation locally as a wizard, and I felt very strongly while conversing with him that he could have carried out successfully the dark experiments of which he spoke.

At Mosal itself there is a fair sprinkling of magicians and astrologers, as befits the fame of the place, and more than one occult brotherhood, but I experienced extraordinary difficulty in getting in touch with the members of one of the lesser known fraternities. I succeeded in doing so at last, on the plea that I had journeyed many hundreds of leagues from India to join it, and indeed I would have become a member had I not failed

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badly in the tests of arcane knowledge which its members set me.

I thought that I had read and studied the occult long enough to pass a fairly stiff preliminary examination in it, but I was not prepared for the standard set by the committee of this arcane society at Mosal. Of course, I say so humorously, for it was a debased standard. I saw and heard enough to conclude, however, that their philosophy was founded on that of the Alexandrian schools. Had their questions been based on pure Sufism or even on pure Neo-Platonic principles I could have replied to them readily enough, but I could make little or nothing of the ideas connected with the debased system they affected.

These worthies, mostly elderly and very old men, had evidently in the course of years altered the process of arcane belief as understood in Arab Alexandria, into something so weird and wonderful that it was with difficulty I could refrain from laughing outright at some of the questions with which they plied me. I found out afterwards, when we were drinking a friendly cup of coffee, that their library consisted to a great extent of popular French works on the occult, such as one may pick up in Paris for a few francs. So much for the magic of mysterious Mosal!

But I should do the romantic old place a serious wrong if I did not admit that I actually discovered more than one real practitioner of the occult within its bounds. I found at least three astrologers of repute in the city who might have stepped out of the seventh century. One of these shook his head

sadly over the uses to which his science was put in England and the West. He was quite a good astronomer, too, and could descant learnedly upon starry lore much as Galileo might have done, and he had never heard of Professor Jacks or Einstein.

"Is there, or is there not, an astral influence on things or people?" he asked me bluntly. "Who can deny it? Who dreams of doubting the influence of the sun on plants and on the health of man, or that of the moon on the tides? Even the humblest admit these things. The sun has an influence on the nervous system, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. So much your science believes in. What is the Universe but a group of magnetic gloves which attract and repel each other? The creatures inhabiting them share in this magnetism and experience weal or woe from its operations. The several planets of the solar system exercise a magnetic influence upon each other, as scientists assure us. They must then also do so on the living beings inhabiting them. It cannot be otherwise."

I had never heard the principles of astrology posed in this clear and forcible manner, and I must say I was impressed. It was quite a good argument from the point of view of physics. This globe influences us, by gravitation and by its emanations; so do the sun and moon. Why then not the stars, as my venerable friend so shrewdly argued?

## BOXING WITH A HORSE-THIEF



## CHAPTER XI

### BOXING WITH A HORSE-THIEF

COMING down Kerkuk way in Northern Iraq it was that I fell foul of the greatest of all horse-thieves in Arabia. I had managed to spot the horse which, in the eyes of judges at the fair, was beyond doubt the best animal in the whole show. The man standing next to me at the time of bidding I knew wanted that horse at all cost. There was one other who wished to possess it more than he. That was myself. And I got *it* at a fair price.

When the man said that he would get not only my horse but more from me, as he jumped in his saddle and rode away Kurdistan way, I took it for little more than a vacant threat. How was I to know then that he was the brigand chief, through whose territory I must pass if I were to reach Baghdad. At the horse-fair, however, I made light of the incident.

Well, nearly ten days rolled along before the fun started in the wild reaches of the hills. One fine morning I missed the horse. The fast little jet-black Arab had been abstracted from the stable some time between dusk and dawn, and no one could account for the manner of his going. But I, having some experience of bandits, thought

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I recognised the method, and within an hour of the discovery of my loss, I was hot on the track.

I could trace the beast's spoor for nearly a mile down a muddy donga, where it was lost in the grass. But from the last hoof-marks I saw that it had been travelling almost due south. It behoved me to be careful, for I feared that he might bag his pursuers and their horses by waiting for them in the very trail they followed when chasing him.

So I tried a new trick. I slipped my rifle out of its holster and blazed twice at the seemingly empty desert.

The effect was almost magical. The top of a bare head, thatched with wild black hair, popped up from behind a bush not sixty yards away. There was the rat-tat of a rifle, and the new swagger astrakhan cap of which I was so proud flew from my head, drilled clean through by a bullet.

It's queer how a thing like that can make a man more angry than the loss of a fortune!

"Blast you!" I yelled furiously. "I'll have your life-blood for that. Haven't you any manners left?"

"My mistake, dear one," yelled he in return, for it was he, sure enough. "I meant it for your bean, but the wind's not quite favourable from this angle. Sorry."

"You will be sorry, Inshallah, if I can get within five yards of you," I howled. "What about downing rifles and giving the weapons of the country a chance? Can you handle the Arab knife?"

"Try me. Are you on? Yes, well, here goes." And throwing down our rifles, we started to crawl towards each other, armed only with the broad

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curved daggers the Arab knows how to wield to such purpose.

"You're hot stuff or equivalent of it in Arabic, I'll give you that," jibed the brigand, as we came within a few feet of each other. "Where do you bury your dead?"

"Plenty of room for you, old jackal," I chaffed him. It's not a nice job to have to try to stick one of the sons of the desert in the gizzard, but when that desert friend behaves to you like a demon, and comes all the way from Kerkuk to the lower sands to steal a horse and more—well, there's little else left.

He jumped high as I rushed in, and played a trick I hadn't seen yet—a slashing downward blow to the base of the neck, just the thing to cut the spinal cord clean in two—a sort of brigand's "rabbit-punch," if you know what I mean.

But it didn't quite come off, and with a lurch upward from the knee, I suggested the operation for appendicitis.

The blood was running down my neck, and it wasn't a refreshing rain. The worst of the hill knife is that when it strikes at all, it's bound to leave a bad notch at the best. It was really only a nasty slice, but it felt as though he had got home between the vertebrae.

Then the brigand pretended to stumble. I was just about to strike downward behind his left shoulder—a difficult break for the blade, which is built for frontal fighting—when his head collided forcibly with my chin. Now this isn't in the rules, and I yelped my protest as I fell.

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"No Mosal stuff here," growled he, as he bore me down and raised his knife with a flourish. "This is where you get it in the neck, you rotten double beast."

"Liar!" I choked. "You know that's not true. You strike a bad patch in the horse-fair and feel you've got to blame somebody, and look about for a victim."

I don't mind being blamed for anything I've really done, but . . . since there weren't any rules, I struck upward with my knee and caught him well amidships before he could bring the blade down. Then I buried the blade deep in his breast—or thought I did.

I rose and made to survey the corpse. How was I to know that the brigand wore a coat of mail beneath his rather disreputable clothing—one of those "undies" which Birmingham turns out of the finest steel, which looks almost like silk, but has the protective capacity for a human that armour-plating has for a battleship.

And as I rose, the "corpse" rose also, and emitting a wild war-whoop, slashed savagely at my throat. So surprised was I that only the biggest backward jump I ever managed saved me from annihilation.

Then we closed, and I guessed how it was.

"You rotter!" I cried. "You challenge me to a knife-fight and wear a steel singlet. D'you call that fair fighting?"

"Sorry," he said. "Half a mo' and I'll equalise things. I only donned this as an insurance against backbiting from the hillmen."

## BOXING WITH A HORSE-THIEF

Throwing off his rather dirty upper garment, he tore the steel mesh over his shoulders and faced me once again.

Then I did something which appealed to him. I chucked down my knife, and, remembering the boxing I had been taught at a British University, I made a shape and struck out at his jaw.

Down on the turf went his blade, and he squared up to me. We sparred for a bit, but there was no referee to separate us and we closed. Here he was scarcely a match for me, for there are no wrestlers like those of the Afghan hill country.

Crash on the springy yellow turf he went, and with the noise of a hammer striking a nail, his head cracked on one of the treacherous patches of whinstone which crops up all over the desert country. He lay there, seemingly dead as a stone, blood streaming from his forehead.

I bound up the brigand's head as well as I could, and looked about for his horse. But neither could I espy his well-known chestnut or my stolen black Arab. So I caught my own horse, and managed to lift him into the saddle with some difficulty. Then I jumped up behind and steered southwards.

But I had forgotten the wound in my neck. Getting into the saddle had opened it again, and I could feel the blood pouring down my back. The galloping of my animal made matters worse. I began to feel faint, and grabbed at the beast's mane. In doing so, I disturbed the Arab's balance, and down we both came to the ground.

When I came to once more it was night and I

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felt too weak and stiff even to move. On my shoulder lay a head. The head groaned.

"Can't you kill a chap outright without so much clumsiness?" the brigand asked.

"Same to you/' I moaned. "You can't use an Arab blade for pea-nuts. That slash you gave me across the back of the neck was as amateurish a stroke as ever was."

"Well, we're both in the soup," he whispered weakly, "and there's no hospital nearer than twenty miles. What do you know about that?"

"I'm afraid we're booked for heaven, unless they come to look for us," I replied, "and there's not much chance of that, but let's end friends, Sultan, or whatever you wish to be called, and forget the horse."

When I explained that the horse which I had bought was to be given to a shrine, for which both he and I had great reverence, the brigand was more mortified than ever.

"May the holy shrine forgive me," groaned the brigand. "Well, wayfarer, I apologise. All this blood-letting and playing the brigand for nothing!"

Just then we heard voices, and raised a feeble shouting. They got us somehow, and in a week I was my own man again. It took Sultan nearly a month to recover, and in that time we became bigger friends than ever; for both of us alleged that we had been set upon by brigands.

I have heard from Sultan; he is now a peaceful citizen as an agricultural colonist on the foothills of Kerkuk.

RE-AWAKENING OF ARABIA



## CHAPTER XII

### RE-AWAKENING OF ARABIA

**W**HEN I reached Baghdad again, I found the air thick with international politics; for it was more than a rumour that a Grand Arab Conference was to be held there soon.

As the subject is of profound interest, some observations on it are not out of place.

Before a year had elapsed since the Arab Conference held at Jerusalem, the King of Iraq resolved to convene another on a similar model during the early part of next autumn at his capital. Where the Grand Mufti failed, he might succeed, for, in the opinion of many observers, the Palestinian Conference was too localised in character. It over-emphasised, it is said, the Jewish-Moslem question, harped a little too much on the problems of pious foundations, the establishing of schools, inter-relationship of culture, and on such rather slight endeavours as the compilation of Anglo-Arabic dictionaries. Hence the Conference of the 7th December, 1931, at Jerusalem lacked a wider Moslem or Arab appeal. Then there was a quarrel amongst them to boot.

The Conference at Baghdad, however will be of a different sort. It will seek to explore broader principles of co-operation amongst the Arabic-

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speaking peoples, which will be in the spirit of consolidating essentially Arab position, and for establishing good neighbourliness with the Western Powers. Its effects will be world-wide; but we must consider its historical background, for in any review of affairs of Arabia due regard must be paid to the fact that, although allied in language, religion and traditions, the several States there to-day do not present a homogeneous political structure. What are the facts?

In the evolution of their past history the Arabs have certainly been divided, but it is a moot point whether any severe cleavage rent them to hopeless irreconcilability. The Arab revolt against the Turks would have come even without English help, for every son of the desert considers himself charged with a national mission. With these patent facts before us, we should dismiss the idea that what occurred in Arabia during and after the Great War was any real index to the mind of those people. The War merely created an opportunity. It was a period of great excitement, of giving vent to old grudges in which the foreigners did not hesitate to join. The thought of a great federation of Arabia was never out of their mind, and the recent reconciliation of the House of Husein and the Wahabis is symptomatic of the original ideals.

Perhaps the earliest indication of the Arab National Movement is to be found at Beirut in 1860, when a newspaper called *Nafar Suraya*, *The Syrian Trumpet*, began to publish articles exhorting all Arabs to unite for a national federation; and when El Jenan, *The Shield*, flashed in

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headlines its motto, "Love of Our Country is an Article of Faith," it caused the Turkish administration much concern. It was Syria, too, that ultimately helped the younger Turkish party in order to regain the Arab point of view for a national unity. But the first definite proclamation of the Arab committee was made in 1905, in which its members evinced a desire to unite all Arabia and to break away from Turkey. They proposed a liberal constitutional monarchy under an Arab king, making the holy places of Islam in Mecca and Medina an independent State, and its king as the Khalifa of the Faithful. In the autumn of 1914 again, the leaders of Arab nationalism arranged a Congress of princes and tribes at Kawait, and Tarlib Bay of Basra, who worked for the idea, and was markedly successful in approaching the Amirs and Chiefs of Nejd, Jabel Shammer, Kawait, Mohammarah and the representatives of the great Muntaiфик tribes of Southern Iraq.

In the meantime, the European powers were not idle in regard to the Arabian conditions. The Germans had been pouring men and material into the desert, their active propaganda was being furthered in Yeman and Iraq, and in order to checkmate it a secret Anglo-French agreement was signed on 16th May, 1916 in which the French recognised that in the Arabian Peninsula England possessed "special political interest;" and thenceforth Great Britain went deeper and deeper into the Arabian mire by financing King Husein and Sultan Ibn Saud. Some £6,000,000 were paid to **the former** and the latter was subsidised to the ex-

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tent of £5,000 a month, almost down to 1924. Curious situations arose from time to time, for the battle of Turabah between Husein and Ibn Saud was fought in May, 1919, when both parties were receiving subsidies from England, one from the Foreign Office and the other from the India Office.

The only apology for these blunders which has been given is that the Allies wished to remove all Turkish control from Arabia. That, of course, was done by the Turks themselves as soon as they came under the wise leadership of Ghazi Mustafa Kamal, for the very first article of the Turkish National Pact of 28th January, 1920, was to acknowledge the independence of Arabia; and ever since there has been no difference of opinion between the two.

To those who have followed the Arabian tangle it might be a matter of interest to know that whereas the progress of King Husein's power and his challenge to the growing prestige of the Wahabis resulted in fierce fighting all over the Arabian peninsula, yet in the main, whether Hashimites or people of Nejd, both had always the idea of Pan-Arabism at the back of all their struggles. When Feisal was received by the Council of Ten at Versailles in February, 1919, as representative of Hejaz he put forward claims for an Arab federation. The Sultan of Nejd almost to the day was haranguing his Wahabi followers on the same subject of Arab nationhood.

**But** King Husein went a step further by proclaiming himself as **the** Khalifa when the Angora

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Assembly banished Prince Abdul Majid in 1924; and it seemed that the consolidation of an Arab federation under the Hashimite banner was complete when both Palestine and Syria accepted him as the Leader of the Faithful. He reckoned, however, without the Wahabi warriors of Nejd, and the mandatory interest which England and France had already substantiated in the Near East.

On the fall of King Husein, the whole of Arabia lay at the feet of the Wahabis; the entry of Sultan Ibn Saud's troops into Mecca had, in its outward expression, increased the chances of the Wahabis for the hegemony of Arabia, or at least of such portions of the peninsula as Ibn Saud could justifiably annex; yet the more important result of his success was that thenceforth upon him fell the mantle of a hero who could bring about a grand federation of the men of his race, and Husein's sons ruling over Iraq and Trans Jordan were considered to have lost all claim to that task.

The Wahabi king, long before his entry into Mecca, where latterly he invited an All-World Moslem Conference, had felt the call of his mission of Arab leadership, so it seems; for the revival of the Ikhwan movement, which is the result of his genius, cannot be said to have only a localised interest as far as Nejd is concerned. Amongst the nomads of the desert he had been infusing a Wahabi spirit with a zeal and skill which prepared his followers for justifiable expansion. It was no easy task for him to curb the raiding instincts of the Badu; and to bring about a national cohesion Arabia had to contend with the difficulties of con-

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flicting interests between the nomads and the settled population of the oases. By giving fresh life to the old Wahabi tenets, he organised the Ikhwans, "the Brothers," and founded the first of their sixty colonies at Artawiyah. With state aid the Ikwans colonies of the fighting tribesmen grew apace to discharge the dual function of agricultural soldiers. This system of keeping an inexpensive army, it might be said, was not unknown to the Romans. In Arabia, however, it produced a binding factor amongst the settled and the nomads, as at the same time the movement served to destroy the tribal disunity which had been the cause of so many raids and counter-raids in the past.

Not only on account of the progress that the Wahabis have made in Arabia and the territories which they have acquired, but also owing to the hypnotic force of character of Ibn Saud, the cause of Arab federation should be well served. He banished the causes of tribal unrest by planting agricultural colonies all over the desert where nothing grew before, he removed many of those practices of religion which, although never forming a part of the faith, had yet always served to install priestly thralldom, and the directness of his character singles him out from the rest as the all-important man of Arabia under whose banner the federation of his race can be made a reality.

But in dealing with the subject of the unity of that peninsula, the natural question arises as to what form such a federation should take, **who** should preside over its destinies, **and what might**

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be the probabilities of its attitude in regard to Europe and the rest of Asia. If linguistic affinities are to form the basis of this discussion, then one would have to include Northern Africa, the Sudan and even Java within its orbit. As regards the religion of Islam the same obtains, but clearly the review has to be narrowed down to the geographical limitations of Arabia from Yeman in the south to the Turkish frontier in the north, and from Beirut in the west, eastwards to Basra. In this area, in race, language, religion, and to a marked degree in the relation of their history, there is a general basis of uniformity. But here, too, varying degrees of progress are to be met with; a desert Arab who lives under his black tent and moves from day to day has a somewhat different point of view, for instance, from that of one who sits sipping cup after cup of coffee in the wayside booth at Damascus.

As with individuals, so with states, one notices that there are differences. Yeman is being governed very much after the old Turkish model; strict discipline reigns supreme under a benign autocracy in Nejd and Hejaz; Iraq has now so gallantly won her independence, though not entirely without the British help, and has joined the League of Nations; the real status of Trans Jordan under Amir Abdullah awaits explanation; Palestine and Syria are definitely under the mandate system. In such a heterogeneous system of political apportioning, an Arab federation at first sight appears ridiculous. But it is so only to those who have had no first-hand experience of the Arab, for if there is any

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people under the sun who never forgets its racial and religious associations it is unquestionably the men of Arabia. The nomad problem has been solved already by the Sultan of Mecca, and his qualifications as a wise ruler and a statesman of vision cannot be doubted. The hope is that he will retain what he has already got and exercise a good influence over his neighbours. He is essentially a man of peace, so long as none infringes upon his legitimate interests. Under him both Nejd and Hejaz are already growing powerful.

Iraq has made unprecedented progress under King Feisal, so much so that from being a mere Turkish province it may soon have the status of an independent kingdom. Transjordan is not lagging behind, and therefore it is not mere imagination to hope that these three neighbouring states could work out a joint programme of an Arab renaissance under their own respective kings, and, within a very short time, a solution of the Palestinian difficulties.

Some observers have, however, stated that, if a working arrangement between the three desert kingdoms of Hejaz, Iraq and Transjordan could be made, the federation could not be complete without Palestine and Syria, where a different constitutional mentality is developing which is more or less opposed to autocracy, however benign. So far as Syria is concerned, perhaps that objection is tenable, not so much on account of the political outlook as because of the fact that an important element of minorities might resent an amalgamation with the rest of Arabia; especially

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as the so-called Syrian nationalists some little while ago had actually made a claim upon Palestine. The Jewish minorities in Palestine, of course, are far too insignificant to loom large in this discussion, for ever since the unhappy Balfour Declaration was made it has never ceased to irritate the entire Moslem world—and which the Moslems are determined to have reversed. The remarkable degree of intelligence that marks the present people of Palestine, of which the distinguished head is the Grand Mufti, is not averse to Arab national feeling; indeed, the latest disturbances there make it all the more possible for the people of that region to come within the Arab federation as equal partners.

But there are many students of Middle Eastern Affairs who are genuinely solicitous regarding their own share in the coming Arab re-awakening. In a word, the English on one hand and the Communists on the other, to put it mildly, are hoping that each might win the hand of this "bride." The two camps are poles apart, and, therefore, it may be asked whether a consolidated Arabia will become "conservative-English" in sentiment, or will leap to the side of Red Russia. Because, after all, that is the point which should most concern the future politicians of the West; and is, indeed, the only fact which they will watch with anxiety in regard to this Baghdad Conference.

A brief discussion about the "mind" of Arabia, placed as it is between two such opposing political doctrines and outlook, will repay study.

The Englishman, whose association with Arabia

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has been lengthy and intimate, has observed a subtle compliment to himself in that Moslem thought so closely coincides with his own. The Russian, and especially the Communist, has been encouraged to make many advances to Islam because he sees so much in Moslem make-up that approximates to his.

In point of fact the conservative Englishman and the Bolshevik Russian have both been wrong—the one in assuming that association with Islam had altered the channel of its thought, and the other in imagining that Islam could ever subscribe to Bolshevism.

Actually, modern, wide-awake Arabia has a medley of characteristics which have been developed and made more pronounced by war and post-war events. The Englishman, and especially the conservative Englishman, takes pride in his country's tradition—and very rightly so. He is apt to look into the past and glory in the achievements of his countrymen. His home is his castle—at least, he pretends that it is; and he has one axiom very deeply ingrained, and that is: "What I have, I hold." The Arab is steeped in tradition, and venerates the past. He literally sings the praises of the great ones who have gone before, and his home to him is a sacred institution. And he will perhaps go to greater lengths than the Englishman in safeguarding his possessions. He has, indeed, a highly developed respect for the individual right to property. On the other hand—and this is the trait which so delights the Communist—the Moslem regards all of the Faith as brothers, irre-

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spective of colour or rank, a difference which Christian missionaries might note, when a Black Bishop could preach only to a Black congregation, and Blacks cannot worship in the White man's Church in Africa. With a fellow follower of the Prophet the Moslem will share his bread and treat as an equal. Yet, most decidedly, this is not Communism.

All that can be said is that the Moslem Arab is still a Moslem, and, being so, he is capable of living in amity with those of widely-spanned beliefs. With most he has points of contact, but where so many go wrong is to mistake one facet of his nature as being indicative of the whole. Thus I believe that this racial movement which the world will see unfolded shortly, will be for the general good of mankind. The proud and noble Arabs are gaining strength to throw their weight for the peace of the world. And in that all men of goodwill wish them success, and not the least the British Empire wherein dwell by far the largest number of the Prophet's followers. Nor must we forget that it was largely through the instrumentality of the British Government that, less than two years ago, the rival Arab Kings of Hejaz and Iraq, meeting on board a British warship in the Persian Gulf, cemented a treaty of friendship.

In regard to this later phase of Anglo-Arabian dealings, however, an unhappy note is being sounded, in which it is rumoured that England wishes to lay a railway line right across Northern Arabia, beginning from Akaba, through Jauf and Tabuk, eastwards to Koweit on the Persian Gulf,

which naturally creates misunderstandings in the Wahabi mind; and this point, in addition to the ownership of Akaba, might possibly be raised at the forthcoming Iraq Conference.

In conclusion, England should look for an ally in this great gathering of notable Arabs, for, in the words of Professor Gibb: "If ever the opposition of the great societies of the East and the West is to be replaced by co-operation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition. In its hands lies very largely the solution of the problem with which Europe is faced in its relations with the East. If they unite, the hope of a peaceful issue is immeasurably enhanced—but if Europe, by rejecting the co-operation of Islam, throws it into the arms of its rivals, the issue can only be disastrous for both/'

To this wise counsel of a great Western scholar, I, as a son of Islam, may be allowed to add that the rivals are already holding out greater inducement to Islam. Believe me that this is the case. Let us beware that this time of test, both for Islam and Europe, does not become a time for the trial of strengths.

# **PASSION PLAY OF BAGHDAD**



## CHAPTER XIII

### PASSION PLAY OF BAGHDAD

**A**ND now what of the Fairy City of the Caliphs itself, and the kaleidoscopic changes which have embraced her since she was built? The City of Romance built by Caliph Mansur in 762 A.D. astride the River Tigris is there; its alleys are still winding and dark, its mysterious domes and minarets still rise above the rather alluring houses, the stork sits nursing its young on the edge of an overhanging bit of masonry, just as it was during the days of Nusharwan and his Viziers. When I say this I am speaking about the atmosphere, not of the buildings of Mansur's time, of which almost nothing remains. The town has died and risen again and again in history, shifting its mighty buildings, even slums from place to place, so much so that even the site on which Mansur laid its foundation stone is disputed; for some believe it to have been where the modern railway station is now situated, others hold it to be nearer the great Shrine of Kadamain.

But though its old glory is gone, there is still enchantment in the word Baghdad. The hidden courtyard, the narrow archways, intercepted here and there by blue tiled mosque domes, make Baghdad even to-day a thing of mystery,

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Walking along the only straight road called the New Street, you pass open-air coffee shops, where hundreds of Bedouins, Kurdish labourers, even town Arabs, sit sipping tea or coffee.

You cross the Tigris and are in the real old Baghdad. Camels and donkeys are carrying their loads of bricks, firewood or oil canisters. A few of those curious round boats peculiar to Baghdad, called *gufas*, are approaching their moorings. Anon, from a thousand throats the call of the evening prayer fills the air. The coffee booths are doing brisk trade, enormous chunks of bread are being washed down by large gulps of camel's milk. Presently, the bank of the river awakes, little fires burst into existence, for the nomads, too, are preparing their first meal of the day; and so the day ends in new Baghdad.

But one of the greatest modern landmarks of Islamic history is undoubtedly Kadiman, barely five miles from Baghdad. It is the most striking city in present day Iraq, and that entirely due to the fact that in 802 A. D. Musa El Kadhim, the 7th Imam, or the saint was buried there. Thirty years later Mohamed El-Taki, the 9th Imam, was also buried at the same place, thus giving a double sanctity to the shrine in the eyes of the faithful.

And here one sees the greatest Passion Play of Islam at Ashurah—or the Tenth Day of Moharrarn of Islamic Calendar. I took an opportunity of witnessing the mournful celebration, which, to my mind, is the most spectacular scene that my eyes have ever beheld. To appreciate **it to the full we must have a background of history.**

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When the Prophet Mohamed—who preached his religion of Islam from Mecca—died in 632 A. D. there were four claimants to his ministry; Abu Bakr, Omar, Usman and Ali. These were called his Companions, both in view of the fact that the first and the last named were his relatives, and the others had distinguished themselves in many respects for the cause of early Islam. To the vice-gerency of the Prophet, however, they were elected in the above-mentioned order, the Abu Bakr being the first Khilifa, or the Leader of the Faithful.

The days of the last two of the Khilifas, namely, Usman and Ali, were stormy in the annals of Islamic history, and due regard must be paid to that period, because the origin of the Battle of Martyrs at Kerbela in Mesopotamia, out of which has grown the Passion Play of the Moharrarn, is to be found in it.

The cohesion of Islamic hierarchy was retained by Abu Bakr, and his successor Omar is chiefly credited with the expansion of Islamic influence, so that the inherent Arab spirit of inter-tribal war was kept in check. On the death of the second Khilifa Omar in 643 A. D., however, when the third companion Usman superseded Ali, the tribal jealousies began to show themselves. The supporters of Ali resented this election on two grounds; firstly, they thought that as Ali was the husband of the only daughter of the Prophet Mohamed, who was devoted to his two grandsons, Hasan and Husein, Ali had the prior claim to the leadership of Islam; also they disapproved

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the appointment of one, Moawiyah, to the governorship of Syria.

This disaffection continued to smoulder for over ten years, till 655 A.D. when Usman, the third Khilifa fell at the hand of an assassin, and Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, was proclaimed the Khilifa. It was perhaps a tactical mistake on his part that soon after assuming the leadership of the faithful he issued orders for the recall of Moawiyah from the governorship of Syria. But Moawiyah had then gathered a great following, and, refusing to obey the order of the Khilifa of Mecca, installed himself as a Khilifa in Damascus. After varying moves and counter-moves on the part of each of these men, when Ali, too, fell at the hand of an assassin in 660 A.D., Moawiyah was proclaimed as the Khilifa in Northern Arabia, whilst Mecca elected Hasan, the eldest of the two sons of Ali. Both Hasan and Moawiyah disappear from the scene by 679 A.D., leaving the contest of the Khilifat to Husein, the younger brother of Hasan and Yazid the son of Moawiyah. The former still held Mecca, and the latter, regarding himself as the rightful monarch, challenged Husein to surrender.

The two armies faced each other on the banks of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, where Husein was slain and his followers met with the worst possible savagery of war that has ever been recorded in the history of man. It is the portraying of this tragedy which the mourning at Moharrarn has kept alive in the minds of the Moslems of the world for over twelve centuries. The several as-

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pects of the battle are acted with such intensity and passion that the appeal of the drama is almost religious, especially amongst the Shia sections of the Mohamedans. Although it is celebrated with more or less universal vigour throughout the Near and the Middle Eastern people, in Persia the mourning ceremony finds its highest expression. The reason of the Persian attachment to the Moharrarn Passion Play is sometimes explained by the fact that Husein, the hero and martyr of the battle, was wedded to Shahr-banu, a daughter of Yazdigid, the last Persian King of Sassanian dynasty.

The actual period of mourning begins with the first day of the month of Moharrarn of the Moslem lunar calendar; the climax of this tragedy, that is, the date on which Husein was slain, being the tenth of that month, is the day of Ashrah when the Passion Play is performed. During these ten days mourning is strictly observed; no marriages are celebrated then, no new thing is bought, no foundation of a home is laid. Women will wear no coloured garments, nor use cosmetics; laughter in the street, loud talking and many usual social functions are not permitted.

Gradually, as the days near the tenth of the month, the degree of "mournfulness" increases. Every night meetings are held in the mosques, in the halls of wealthy citizens, even in public caravanserais, where Rozah Khan, or a sect of priests who recite different versions of the Battle of Martyrs, sing melodiously but pathetically of the day on which the Prophet's grandson was killed at

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**Kofa.** To the Shiahs the attendance at these gatherings ranks on a par with prayer meetings.

Usually at the close of afternoon prayer, but often at night, hundreds are trekking to the well-lit mosque. Rich men come clad in their big fur coats, the poor wrapped in coarse homespun; they come slish-slashing, walking, tumbling, wading through snow of winding streets. Women move in droves, holding on to their babies or the voluminous cloaks around them. They come almost sobbing, for they have heard the sad tale of Mohamed's family being done to death so cruelly; and yet they are willing and earnest listeners as they sit row upon row before the altar. Women are already sobbing; an over-faithful is visibly affected, as tears are running down his beard.

At last the Reciter of Poems mounts the altar.

"It is a strange story," he says amidst intense silence. "Aye! It is a sad and lamentable commentary upon valour and devolution that warriors of such blue blood as Husein were slain!"

The whole gathering burst out in a chorus of loud weeping and wailing. "Aye! Aye!" they shriek in their tears. "It was cruel, that fate that befell the bone and blood of the Prophet himself," and they cry on.

"It is time," again says the priest reciter, raising his voice above the general din, "it is time to listen and to shed tears of blood about the tragedy of Husein."

He sings, he recites, he is depicting the way in which the slayer of Husein drew his sword; now

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he sits, showing how the Martyr tried to extract the arrow from the throat of his infant son; now again the reciter throws his handkerchief over his turban, and acts, the part of Zobeida, the sister of the Martyr; and then unveiling himself, signifies the agony of the lady when she finds that the thirst of infants was being satisfied by the tears of women, as the enemy will not give them water.

The mastery of imagination with which these scenes are depicted, aided by allegory and appeal to passion that can be found only in the Persian language, are all being resorted to by the reciter. Not a single person in the whole gathering is in his composed state of mind. Some have fainted through beating upon their breasts, others have utterly exhausted themselves; there are red rings round their tear-dimmed eyes, and yet at every additional recitation they continue to wail loud and long, men's hoarse weeping and coughing blending with the shrill wailing of women. At each pause the whole house rocks with intense emotion, and when they are thus oblivious of everything, the priest has left his altar, for it is past the midnight hour when they all trek back home to snatch what little sleep they can, only to rise to another day of mourning. And thus these side-shows, so to speak, of the great Passion Play go on from day to day till the night of the tenth of Moharrarn, when in the morning of that day the Play is acted in its full pageantry, thus bringing to a close one of the finest examples of Eastern Passion Dramas.

The tenth and the last day of mourning dawns

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upon the Shiah and Sunnis alike in Asia with the gloom of the occasion, for the great procession takes place this day. Practically every person, male and female, takes part in it. Every shop in the town is closed, thousands have already betaken themselves to sit at the wayside where the procession is to pass, the more devout and able-bodied men, having stripped themselves to the waist, stand before the portable wooden structure representing the bier of the Martyr in their district of the town.

At about nine in the morning the Tazais, or the above-mentioned wooden biers, are seen making the round of the city. From their different localities they are converging to the principal square of the town, from whence they are to proceed towards the last resting place of the biers. All along the route additional men are swelling the number of those who are carrying the several Tazais to the central meeting-place; till the aggregate might well go over 30,000 men.

Every hundred yards or more is a station for the procession, poems of lamentation are recited, men beat upon their breasts, women who watch from the balconies take up the wailing and are left crying as the Tazai moves on. Here and there, especially in India, youths may engage in fencing and sword-dances, representing the soldiers of the Martyr; and at wayside booths *sherbat* or water is distributed free to the people, an act which carries much religious merit in the play, as the followers of the Martyr were denied water by their foes at the battle of Kerbela.

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A little before noon the Tazais from different localities enter into the main square of the town. The crowd has increased enormously. Anon, thud thudding of small drums is heard, various stations where Tazais are to be deposited are cleared, a passage is made for the chief procession. First come some half-a-dozen boys clad in black, thumping upon small drums; they are followed by men bearing banners depicting the arms of the Martyr; and now a band of big men stripped to the waist, with spiked chains, thorns and heavy horseshoes hanging round their necks, their heads shaven, are beating upon their bared chests with chains. Blood is often seen to gush out with each blow as they raise their hands in unison and call in loud chorus: "Hasan, Husein; Hasan, Husein," the names of the two martyred brothers.

This is followed by a number of camels and mules purporting the pack animals of the Martyr's camp. A hundred horses bedecked in fine shawl pieces, and others led by their riders pass next in the procession. After that come thirty-five camel riders who are supposed to represent the female, infant and aged members of Husein's family; then representations of seventy-two bodies of those slain at the battle; seven heads on lances escorted by horsemen. The heads on lances are represented by large lemons stuck on lances. The horse of the Chief Martyr is led at this end of the procession, and last of all comes Hazrat Abbas, the standard bearer, with eighty water-carriers.

The passion of the mourners is at its highest at this juncture. Men form into small groups; at a

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given signal, a sea of arms shoot up in the air and descend upon their bared chests with a thud that can be heard like distant sea waves. Again and again the arms rise, and with increasing force and frequency the breasts are beaten and women wail.

"Husein chai-shud! (What happened to Husein?)" one asks.

"Husein shaheed shud! (Husein received martyrdom!)"<sup>M</sup> reply a thousand voices in unison, and then the arms rise high in the air, now descending on their shaven heads, then on their breasts; and so it goes on till dusk.

As a result of excitement and exposure fatal casualties are not infrequently reported after this Passion Play. For weeks together hospitals are found to be full with those suffering from pneumonia and self-inflicted wounds, but as the drama has acquired a religious colour, the ill-effects of the performance are cheerfully borne; indeed, are often courted. It is, therefore, obvious that without the exhibition of such extraordinary spectacle the only Passion Play of Islam could not have been kept at white heat for over a thousand years as it remains to this day. You cannot fully enjoy this description without comparing it with other Passion Plays of the East, for thus only can I give you a peep into the difference of the minds of Arabs and other Easterners.

This Moslem drama, as we have seen, has assumed almost a religious status, and its counterpart is to be found in the Hindu epic of Ramayan, the story having been laid many centuries before the Christian era. One of the greatest of Passion

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Plays of Hindu India is Ram Lilla, or the recounting of the exploits and hardships of Prince Rama as described in Ramayan. True to the Eastern turn of mind, to exalt a national hero into divinity, or at least to the status of a local saintship, which the poetical genius of the author of Ramayan and Firdousi of Persia have done for Rama, Rustam and Sohrab, many lesser singers of India have created other characters for Passion Plays; thus, for instance, we have *Actions of Chatty anna* about the seventeenth century; *Life of Sankaracharya*, ninth century; down almost to such recent dates as the eighteenth century depicting the life work and trials of Sirajaddowlah, but none have captured the imagination of the people more firmly than the episodes of the hero of Ramayan, as shown in Ram Lilla.

In understanding this Hindu play, the difference between it and the Passion Drama of Moharrarn must be borne in mind. In the main, both are of one class, inasmuch as they strive to appeal to the most profound feelings, that is, they are intensely human—the same effort at glorifying the young hero, struggling as he is with overwhelming odds, the same depicting of battle scenes, the same lesson of "truth triumphant." But of the two, as a play Ram Lilla is the more complete. It finishes the story; for whereas in the lamentation ceremony of Moharrarn your grief is so intensified that it almost surges above rationality, so that after you have heard of the gruesomeness of the battle of Kerbela and are hysterical with emotion, you think that if you had the army of Yazid before you

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you would fling yourself upon it in battle, not so the Ram Lilla, for the story tells you how the beloved Crown Prince Rama is banished to the jungle for fourteen years with his wife Sita; how the younger brother of his refuses to rule, but places Rama's shoes on the throne and "sitting under their shadow, he rules in the name of Rama till he returns," after his vow of fourteen years of exile is fulfilled; how during this period of exile, Sita is kidnapped by the "Bad King" of Ceylon, and how Rama aided by Hanaman, the Monkey General, invades Ceylon, slays Rawan, the Bad King, rescues Sita and lives happily ever after, so to speak.

All these scenes more or less grotesquely, are acted on the open air stage in Indian cities. You would see youths representing Rama, his wife Sita also; dressed in the early garb of the Hindus they parade the streets, heading a procession and followed by drum beaters and players of brass bands. Later, they are shown to take leave of their subjects as they are disappearing in a mango grove, as if on exile. The battle scene is depicted by hordes of men striking upon each other's bantoms and war dances take place, marking the conquest of Ceylon. Some men use masks of monkey faces, thus forming the legions of the Monkey General who helped Rama against Rawan. The Princess Sita is then tested for her chastity by "walking through a blaze of fire," and she having proved the integrity of her honour whilst in Rawan's captivity; boys sing her praises, conches are blown mightily, food is distributed to the per-

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formers; and finally the entire concourse of humanity follow Rama to an adjoining clearing in the jungle, where an enormous effigy of Rawan is erected, and Rama sets light to it. Whilst it burns, the people sing, boys dance, and players stand in the glow of the crackling fire of burning Rawan till its ashes can be taken home as potions for curing all sorts of diseases, from an eye-sore to malarial fever.

In the extensive land area stretching from Eastern Bengal to China, one notices dramatic performances which are acted within the precincts of local deities, who, according to the belief, must have been living personalities, and by their beneficence to the people or by some outstanding exploits in war, were exalted to the range of saints or even gods. But it is generally contended that in the countries of East Asia, barring China and Japan, much of the drama falls in the category of spirit worship. It is, however, in China that we meet with examples of true Passion Plays.

Even during the time of Confucius B.C. 500 ritualistic dramas were performed, at which wands and battle axes were brandished by actors, which clearly shows that in origin the Passion Plays of the Chinese must be war plays, or at least arise out of the general human propensity to exalt and to honour the heroes of war. That such dramas cannot have a lasting hold upon the people without a goodly mixture of religious thought is evinced by the fact that in the Chinese plays, as in those of the Moslems and the Hindus, the pious association of the "holiness of these war adventures" was intro-

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duced, so that no one in Persia considers the Moharrarn as merely the Battle of Kerbela, any more than the invasion of Rama is regarded only to rescue his wife Sita; as, indeed, is not the case with the career of Kuan Ti, the God of War, who, during the period of the Chinese romantic chivalry of 220 A.D., took such a noble part in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms; so that it will be seen that the heroes of all these three plays, although human, were placed along with the other saints of the several religions.

In such a drama as the God of War, the performers are, as a rule, drawn from the professional class at Peking, the company often consisting of sixty men. No women are allowed to take part, their parts being played by men. Unlike the Indians and the Japanese they use no masks, but artificial hair is often used to show the growth of beard. Quite in keeping with their national love of thoroughness, an actor has sometimes to memorise from one hundred to two hundred parts, in addition to undergoing a vigorous acrobatic training and acquiring a very thorough knowledge of the historical background of the play.

An open air stage is generally used for such a Passion Play. A large thatched pavilion is erected in an open field, plants are placed on the terrace-wise prepared ground for seating accommodation of the spectators. The stage should face a shrine, so that the gods themselves may have a view of the performance.

From early morning crowds commence to gather at the stadium of the theatre; precisely at noon the

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play begins, and goes on till sunset. There is no raising of the curtain, as the stage is merely a raised platform with no scenic effect behind it. Presently a character has appeared, and all are hushed to silence. He tells the people whom he is representing. Then the orchestra begins to play, attendants stand in readiness with chairs, tables or even screens to bring up at the stage when the actor wants them to make his piece the more realistic. Another comes to play his part, and another; they sing, they dance, they show their skill at fencing, and it is not unusual to see water or tea handed up to an actor during the performance. As there is no dropping of the curtain at the close of an act, all the characters stand and then walk quickly round the stage in single file. A clash of cymbals brings the play to an end, and the story of the God of War thus continues to live in the hearts of the Chinese, as do the exploits of Husein in Persia, and of Rama or Krishna in Hindustan, for these Passion Plays of Asia have a deep-rooted association with the living religions of the East.



# PINK ROSE OF THE HILLS



## CHAPTER XIV

### PINK ROSE OF THE HILLS

**A**FTER Baghdad I bent my steps westward in order to reach Damascus, from where I intended to journey back to the interior of Syria to see its many charming scenes. But I had not progressed far, when at Hit I beheld a fascinating Arab ceremony—the Idd or Bairam festival, not unlike the manner in which they celebrate it in the great square facing the citadel of Aleppo.

Thousands of Bedouins trek to the city for the sword-dance contest, when experts from each tribe jump out in the arena and contest their skill in swordmanship. They whirl themselves about, uttering war whoops, slashing the empty air with their Damascus blades. The real skill is contained in defending oneself by the sword, as no shields are used.

When this is over, small groups of men dance round and round a camel, holding their arms aloft, whilst others keep time with clapping their hands. The same kind of dance is seen during an Arab procession which goes to Nabi Musa to celebrate the birth of Moses in Jerusalem. But the crowd becomes very great towards the late afternoon **when** a short dance is given for the edification of **women,**

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Veiled women sit concealed behind latticed balconies of the houses that surround the square in front of the citadel. A small procession of boys ranging from eight to twelve in ages approaching the gathering takes its stand in the centre of the ring. Big drums are beaten mightily, a chant is taken up by the crowd as a veiled performer, riding a camel, is seen emerging from the cloistered bazaars. Slowly the camel, on which heavy and expensive rugs are thrown, wends its way through the crowd. The rider, though really a man, is dressed in women's clothes, the dress is the dress of the bride.

When the camel has attained the centre of the space, the boys form a ring round it; the music swells to very high notes, every throat is working overtime. Then the performer balances herself on her knees, her face still veiled; and throws her arms up, then twists and bends her form to the tune of the music. Then she stands up on the back of the camel and dances with more dignity. This is considered to be the "spirit of youth" expressed by the newly-wed. Presently a slower chant is heard, the performer unveils herself and repeats the previous dance, sitting on her knees on the back of the camel. The unveiling expresses her wedded life; and finally a much slower music is struck, symbolising the oncoming of a woman's old age, with which the performance terminates. In the real sense of the word, these may be called the folk-dances of the northern races of Arabia.

At the caravanserai at Hit, I met by chance a

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man whose troubles were the same as mine; for neither of us could afford to linger too long in the desert, but had no prospect of travelling on anything faster than a camel.

Hassan Khan was not an Arab. His one desire was to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, as his days were growing short in number. Together with his wife he had travelled thus far all the way from the snow peaks of Gilgit. A great Khan or a Chieftain, too, was he of his mighty clan that he thought could challenge the power of all the Mehtars of Chitral. But, now he had renounced the world and all it meant, and having already bent his head at such shrines as Meshad, Nejad and Kerbela, he was bound for Al Quds in Jerusalem and thence to Holy Mecca, where he wished to end his days.

Though old in age and a pilgrim, Hassan Khan still retained the old fire of a Chieftain in his eyes. He chose that Iraqi road to reach Al Quds at Jerusalem on purpose, so as to do the shrines in order, the holiest at the last; and he will not tarry in a desert hut a day longer and miss his chance of the season of the pilgrimage at the temple of the Black Stone at Mecca.

So camel caravan was no good to him. He must get a motor-car. Even a second-hand Ford may do; and it was that motor-car that he bought at the price of a new one; for money mattered naught to Hassan. In this car, he also gave me a lift to Damascus, and on the weary miles of travel westward thus, he told me his story.

Hassan Khan was a warrior. There were those

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who called him a brigand, but then one was bound to hear such jealousies when the outstanding deeds of bravery like those of the handsome Hassan Khan were mentioned. All the valley of the Khyber rang with his praise. His name was in the mouth of everyone and none cared to disagree with him, for as they said when discussing him—which they only did in quiet tones when there was no sign of a boulder—he fought like Shaitan himself. "Hassan Khan will take thee," was all that was required to be said to the most disobedient child, to have it show the requisite amount of fear.

Now like all warriors, Hassan Khan had a weakness. That weakness was Halima, the only daughter of a neighbouring Chieftain.

The last time the warrior had been on a little private business trip which had taken him to the Chieftain's fort, he had seen a vision of loveliness, a perfect *houri* in a setting of pink roses. This for sure was the lovely Halima, of whom his little sister Ayesha had spoken. Strictly speaking, Hassan Khan, warrior or no, should not have looked, or if by mistake his eyes had alighted, the look should not have been repeated. The etiquette of the clans forbade it to the extent of killing the offender; so great was the disgrace that it became an insult, and in Frontier law, an insult can only be wiped out by death. They are sticklers where their honour is concerned, these Highlanders. Hassan Khan was a man of honour, as becomes a warrior, and he looked away, torn as was his heart by the sight, but just as he did so, a rose,

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pink and enchanting, fell at his feet. Now what would any warrior do under the circumstances? Precisely what Hassan Khan did, pick it up.

This was the very shaft of love itself, he thought, as he raised the scented perfection to his lips, while his eyes, forgetful of blood feuds, sought the wall of the garden behind which the most perfect rose in the world bloomed. Only the bare walls met his gaze. Had it been a dream? No, it could not have been; the rose remained. The blood rushed to the warrior's head, his senses swam, the sight of so much beauty had conquered him as no strong arm could have done.

What had he done? Had anyone seen him? Anyone even now unsheathing his tulwar to fight to the death. Hassan Khan was no coward. He had looked too many times in the grisly face of death and—laughed. Hastily he tucked the rose in his tunic. What right had a man of the sword with roses? And yet! Yes, assuredly Hassan Khan, the warrior, whom some called brigand, and all feared, had his weak moments.

Quickly he turned away and went to the room in which he would be sure to find the old Chieftain, and perhaps his sons, his friends.

"Salaam-alaikum, (Peace be upon you)," Hassan Khan greeted them.

"Wa alaikum us salaam, (Peace also be with you)," chorused the men.

"The very man we want, my sons. Here as though the message, as yet only in these heads of ours, had reached him by magic!"

"I am honoured to be even thought of by you,

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Khan Sahib. Whatever you require of me will be given freely/'

Hassan Khan had never felt that he required bravery before. What had happened to him? He shook as a bunia. Never had he felt fear, not even that time when his horse had been cut down under him and he had had to fight four armed men single-handed. But then he had never experienced these new emotions, emotions that make cowards of the bravest.

He waited for the bombshell to burst about his head. What was this he had done? How could he raise his hand in war against his dearest friends? What would his father say? Terrible thought! Surely his father would kill him without a moment's thought. A fine end for a warrior!

The old Chieftain had fallen into a reverie, the sons looked sideways at each other, only the noise of the hubble-bubble broke the silence. At length the visitor, not feeling able to bear it longer, raised his eyes from the ground to the face of the Chieftain. What he saw there was not encouraging. The hubble-bubble was neglected. Sullen anger spread over the rugged features. Hate had screwed the eyes until they had almost disappeared. Truly a terrible countenance!

Terrible even to a man who had expected it. To one who deserved it, and knew he deserved it? The young man trembled anew, for the silence was worse to him than the heat of battle and the clashing of tulwars.

"Hassan Khan," the voice held in check but little, broke the silence at last, like thunder it was,

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thunder in the dead of night. The old eyes flashed like the lightning over the Khyber hills. "Thy father is mine best friend. Thy mother was mine sister. Side by side have we stood in many a battle thou canst yet hear tell of in the Peshawar Bazaar. For forty years have we been as brothers. Only to-day has mine house been insulted, and old man as I am, this fair right hand of mine shall defend mine honour while I yet breathe."

Again silence fell.

The hand of Hassan Khan, who had never known fear, shook as it strayed to that part of his tunic under which lay the scented emblem of his thoughtless action. It strengthened him.

The old Chieftain raised his head defiantly to gaze upon Hassan Khan as he said: "My youngest sister's son has this day been slain by Akbar Ali, with whom they have a blood feud. That nephew of mine was as mine own son, and now he is dead. Wai . . . e! Wai . . . e!"

The open-mouthed look of amazement which overspread the face of the visitor was totally out of proportion to the effect the news had upon him. He had never even liked the nephew, his cousin, who was now in death, stretching out a hand to help him—almost the hand of friendship.

Hassan Khan had not yet recovered from his astonishment. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, his ears burned. He could only continue his incredulous stare.

"Thou, the son of my best friend, may well be beyond speech—but fear not, for we shall wipe

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out the family of this viper, with the help of Allah, on whose Name be praises. Go to thy father, give him my salaams. Tell him the story, the rest I leave to him. If I know my best friend as well as I think, there will be support to hearten me in this raid of raids!"

"The message shall be delivered to my father with the utmost speed."

"This enemy of ours is a man of great strength, armed with the guns of the Ferangi soldiers. Strong are they as the young of the lion, and as bold," went on the Chieftain.

"Strong and bold are we, too, O Khan Sahib," said the visitor, "and none can afford to know not of our bravery."

The old Chieftain looked admiringly at Hassan Khan's six-feet-three of strong muscle and litness, the agility of a tiger, and looking he took heart.

"This raid shall see the end of my foe and by the hoof of the Evil One, anything thou carest to ask for shall be thine, Hassan Khan, when we are victorious! Be ready to-morrow night. Now go, tell thy father; Khuda Hafiz (God be with you)."

In a fever of excitement, the warrior jumped into the saddle and clattered out on to the road. It was a good twenty miles home, but no horseman ever had more cheering words ringing in his ears than the promise the Khan had given. "Anything thou carest to ask for shall be thine." The very thudding of the horses' hoofs was a song of love! **Once he startled a Hindu bunia by gallop-**

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ing almost into him. Bunia gee held up his hands ready with his life, but Hassan Khan only laughed loudly and galloped recklessly on, leaving the Hindu thanking whichever god he could think of first under the stress of the moment. There had been a time when the hillman would have enjoyed a little amusement at the expense of the moneylender, but this was no ordinary day—this was the greatest day in his life, and Hassan Khan galloped on, singing the lilting Persian song about the love of the Bul-bul for the rose. It was a new rôle for the warrior to fill, that of a Bul-bul!

Within two hours he reached home. Steam rose from his sweating and foam-splashed horse. This non-stop race was no new thing for the Arab, who cared no more for grazing, whizzing bullets than did his master.

A few minutes and the story was told to his father.

"Of a truth I will stand by mine old friend, even although these enemy sons of a pig shall be armed with Ferangi rifles, yet will I trust to Allah, and the old turn of my wrist; when do we attack?"

"Khan Sahib awaits your reply."

"Even now shall I send it and to-morrow while yet the insult tastes bitterest in our mouths, dusk shall witness our preparedness. Send a servant with this reply now."

Hassan Khan thought jealously of the rifles. What chance had his old father even with his far-famed wrist play against those sons of Shaitan, armed with guns stolen from the Ferangi soldiers.

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Ah! there was an idea! There was music to the soul! Perhaps even a little music of the tulwar on this, the greatest day in his life. A raid on the Ferangi camp! What others had done, of a truth he, Hassan Khan, would do.

He thought quickly. No meditation for the warrior! Prayer and Meditation for the Maulvies! The high road and the knife for the warrior. The high road it would be and the knife only if necessity called. Hassan Khan liked the call of necessity.

It was a long road, and bold, quick work would have to be done before the rifles could be filched from the Ferangi camp. Even nerves of steel would be sorely tried. The warrior was not a stranger to these tactics. There was that little affair with the soldiers at Kohat, another at Landi Kotal. Fine and full of adventure had those skirmishes been! Moreover, what were the Ferangi soldiers doing there if they were not intended to fight, and what was more exciting than a small engagement on the impulse, so to speak? Truly these delicate affairs made life the glad thing it was!

Nothing must be left to chance. Had the two brown eyes made a coward of the warrior, whom some called brigand, and who had never thought of chance before? For whom the knife had ever been sufficient unto the day? Never had he realised how dear life was. He must not die yet with so much to live for! He touched the rose again. That would be his mascot. With this he would brave a nation of Ferangies and conquer!

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That rose alone, not even the hand of Fatima, which his mother had hung round his neck when he was a boy, would come before it.

Hassan Khan thought out his campaign as he set out for the heights above the British camp. Through the rough hills he went and through these by the mercy of Allah he would retrace his steps with the rifles, lest anyone met him on the road. The road was not the place for anyone trying to hide anything.

Ah, there was the place, just behind that boulder! Creeping on all fours, the hillman got behind the great stone. Warily, with the ease of the practised reconnoitrer, he peered round the rocky side and took in the plan of the Ferangi camp. The sun glanced again and again on the rifle the sentry carried on his march backwards and forwards. Fifty paces he took, then turned, made a few fancy steps in turning and then paced fifty back. Not much of a life for a man, even a Ferangi man, thought Hassan Khan, this pacing backwards and forwards; nothing like the open hills and perhaps the possession of the one who had thrown the rose, one who already thought favourably of him. A haze even as pink as the rose itself floated round the warrior as he lay waiting till nightfall.

What thoughts passed through his mind during those hours! What thought did not! How many times did he attack the Ferangi camp in different ways, finally marching to the annihilation of the foe!

At long last the time had come. Hassan Khan

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had been cramped for so long, he felt stiff all over. He crept slowly lest any dislodged stone betrayed him. Down, down he went laboriously, without a sound. The jagged edges of the stones tore his hands. The cutting of the tough barbed wire blistered them, already pierced and bleeding. He stopped every now and again to listen. Strange, how perfect is the hearing of the hillman. Nothing! Crawling through the cut barbed wire which tore his clothes, face and limbs, he was finally behind the fort wall. Still the monotonous sound of the sentry, who was probably visualising what he would do when, his service over, he returned home. Once over that wall, there will be some pretty work, thought Hassan Khan. The sentry started on his walk back. The warrior was over! Like a panther he crept in the shadow of the wall—to his amazement he saw not a dozen feet away a stack of rifles near the block house. There was no time to be lost. It would be a pity to stab a man in the back, but only stunned he might recover and the rifles would be lost; the rifles that would make another chapter of history in the Khyber! He must kill. It was the work of a few seconds, the sentry fell without a sound, even his rifle mercifully made no noise. Huh! there was no fight in these eaters of pig's flesh! A few more seconds and the rifles and cartridge belts were over the shoulders of the warrior—who did not notice the weight in the excitement of the capture. Here, within his grasp, were the weapons to exterminate every foe on two legs! The weapons to unlock the door to his Paradise!—for,

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within the next twenty-four hours, the enemies of the house of his beloved would be dead, dead as the Ferangi sentry.

Back he laboured through the barbed wire entanglement. Suddenly he turned; what was the noise? The dead sentry had been found? Commands! Rifles spat bullets all round, but Hassan Khan was out of reach of the blind shots. He hurried up the difficult hill in the darkness, difficult even to a man who had spent hours memorising the way. On he went sure-footed as a hill goat, well out of reach of any pursuers who would never be foolish enough to follow up those heights even although they knew where he was.

That was better! He would rest now, and hide the guns in his posteen. The cartridge belts he would carry under his coat. It was an easy matter now to get home and tell the good news. The Ferangies would make a fuss over the dead sentry. They called themselves soldiers and then made trouble if one was killed. Were there no Ferangies who cared to die the death of a warrior? Pah! and Hassan Khan forcefully cleared his throat.

"We shall even make them go down in the dust before us," said his father joyfully fingering the mausers lovingly. "What a raid this promises to be!" laughed the old man wickedly and gleefully **in his throat as though** already in the thick of **it**.

That night, just as the old Chieftain and his **friends had collected for the raid, an outpost**

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scout arrived breathlessly to say that the enemy was converging on the fort from the south side. Rushing to the tower, the Chieftain took up his position. The others manned the loopholes. Thus they had the advantage of the unsuspecting raiders, who were allowed to crawl near the walls in order to be shot at close range, but the house of Akbar Ali had not been established through its adherents running away. Several fell with their faces to the foe. The others rushed the walls, zig-zagging and firing as they ran. Some jumped the wall, attacking the defenders like enraged tigers. They were brave men who could defeat Akbar Ali and he knew it. The fighting became too near for rifles. No word was spoken, grappling, stabbing, flashing knives, death dealing smashes, guttural gasps, every second was tense. The father of Hassan Khan forgot his age, he was the warrior of old, face to face with the enemy, here was the position he had always loved. Hassan Khan remembered the rose and laughed. The followers fought for the honour of their clan and gloated over possible plunder, while inside the harem a young girl prayed.

The left arm of Hassan Khan was useless, but the right still continued the good work. Here attacking him was the raiding Chieftain himself—Hassan Khan jumped on him and the two fell and rolled on the ground. When one arm is useless, double work has to be done by the other, that is all. More than double was being done now by the right hand of Hassan Khan. The Chieftain was now unarmed\*

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"Hast made thy peace with Allah, scoundrel of the black heart! Murderer of my brother! Take a last good look at Hassan Khan; on this my lucky day it is fitting thou shouldst see me last!" The Chief lay on his back, pierced through the heart.

"Praise be to Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate/" said the warrior with fervour.

Hassan Khan, blinded with blood from a gash over his right eye, staggered against the wall. Only four men stood. His father was not one of them. The famous twist of the hand had failed the old raider. At last, making his way painfully to the tower, Hassan Khan's shoulders were grasped by the old Chieftain. His grief at the loss of his old friend was great.

"Wai . . . e! Wai . . . e! That I should gaze on the face of thee in death, O my brother!" he wailed.

Hassan Khan felt weak from loss of blood. He grieved not for his father who had died as he wished. Died with the shout of victory in his throat! Not for him slow death beneath the quilt he had always said. It was the Will of Allah.

The wounds were bandaged and the men gathered to talk over the fight.

"What wilt thou claim, O son of a great father?" asked the Chieftain of Hassan Khan.

"To-morrow, Aga Sahib, I shall present myself and tell thee."

"It is good; then I shall await thee, for on mine honour thou didst fight even as thy father did at thine age."

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Hassan Khan was now Chieftain in his father's place. Chief of as brave a band of men as one could find in the length and breadth of the Frontier! He would be more acceptable to the Chieftain as the husband of Brown Eyes. The rose had faded as is the way of even the pinkest rose, but the faded leaves represented all that was beautiful to the eyes and imagination of the warrior. Look at the luck it had brought him in the Ferangies' camp! Luck again in the raid! With his own knife he had killed the enemy Chieftain. What more did a fighting man ask?

Only now the bride to claim! He would settle down and be at peace. Fighting and raiding were not easy for married men, at least, not so easy. Hassan Khan did not want to commit himself; after all, he was a warrior first and a warrior Chieftain at that! Still, he would cultivate fruit trees, apricots and mulberries, and yes! a rose garden wherein the delight of his heart could roam. Together they would live at peace with their neighbours—and—love!

It was not the next day, nor for many days, that Hassan Khan set off for the Chieftain's fort. His arm had given him a good deal of pain and he was obliged to give it rest to heal.

At length one day, dressed in his gayest clothes, he visited the Chieftain and asked permission to speak to him alone.

' ' I have come for what thou didst promise me, Khan Sahib," said Hassan Khan, with his eyes on the ground.

"Speak, my son, it is thine."

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"I want to marry thy daughter Halima!"

Fury convulsed the face of the old man.

"Anything thou canst have, save my only daughter. Have my land, my crops, horses . . ."

"No, Khan Sahib, I claim thy daughter. Thou art a man of honour and made no stipulations. Thy daughter or nothing/'

"Knowest thou, young man, that I have had many feuds over the same question? Thou knowest well," the old man shook with passion, "the beginning of the feud which cost thy honoured father his life was started thus wise."

"I care not, and I swear now, in thy presence, none other shall wed her, but I shall kill with these mine hands."

As Hassan Khan stood before him erect, with blazing eyes, the old Chieftain calmed down, for he felt instinctively here was a fitting mate even for his daughter. Instead of saying so, he wanted to prove still further the worth of this would-be son-in-law.

"There are many would wed this mine daughter, and I propose to hold open sports, shooting, sword-dancing, tent-pegging, etc., and the winner of all the events can claim my daughter as the prize."

"It is well, Khan Sahib, she is mine, for no right arm can match this one of mine own."

"A week from to-day then, gather all ye gallants in the courtyard and prove thy mettle. Until then, Khuda Hafiz, adieu."

Out walked the old Chief and after him followed Hassan Khan. The wall of the rose garden was

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deserted and his heart was sad. He was not expected to see a lovely face, also sad, gazing after him through the narrow confines of a latticed window. Nevertheless, he feared only as all lovers fear for his beloved. He was also not expected to know that the Chieftain was fully aware that none could defeat Hassan Khan, and that he wanted to have an opportunity of showing the prowess of his future son-in-law.

Hassan Khan went home. What a long time must be before it was a week to the day! The warrior experienced more doubts and fears in that week than many a man does in a life-time. Suppose! he kept asking himself, only to be answered by "if?" He would surely die of anguish before the time, he who had lain in wait weeks for an enemy and thought naught of it! And when the enemy did appear he was not alone, and yet Hassan Khan alone was left after the engagement. These were the things that proved whether a man was a warrior or a cheese! Yet here he was reduced to fear and trembling when he thought of a girl! Gazing on a few withered rose-leaves and seeing two appealing brown eyes through a bower of pink roses! Verily that which had come over him was of a peculiar sensation. Not even felt the night he raided the Ferangi camp! His horse stood unheeded in the stable. His hates were forgotten.

Thus the week passed and Hassan Khan awoke one morning, *the* morning! Such a morning as to make the warrior notice a bird singing to his mate in the garden. A strange thing for a man

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of the sword to heed, especially when that man was Hassan Khan!

The warrior was early in the saddle and the first to arrive. A good omen! Presently, the courtyard was filled and the events began. The first was shooting from bare-backed galloping horses. All men were equally good shots, all after Hassan Khan. The wrestling was watched with utmost attention. These young Adonises of the Frontier were all muscle and determination, but all, again, came after Hassan Khan. Sword-dancing but proved to be as his hobby. All gathered closely round in a ring to watch the supple youth who leaped so swiftly and accurately round and over the blades. It was a sight to gladden the hearts of even an enemy. The applause resounded through the courtyard. Now refreshments were to be given out and an hour's rest for the entrants.

Hassan Khan went to collect his coat which he had flung over the farther wall of the courtyard. Drawing it on, he noticed a figure standing in the shadow of a doorway. The woman wore a Burka and so her face was hidden. Hassan Khan had to pass her on the way to the refreshments. With eyes on the ground, he came opposite to the doorway.

"I would speak with thee," said the voice of a woman from the folds of the Burka. Taking a sweeping look, she crossed quickly to the other side to where the man stood. "My mistress sends me and bids me give thee this." She held out a rose, a pink rose.

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"Who is thy mistress?"

"I dare not tell thee. Thou knowest if I am found talking to thee I shall suffer death."

"Go, woman, tarry not in such danger. Give my salaams to thy mistress and tell her . . ." but just then a footstep sounded. The woman slunk away and Hassan Khan heard his name called. He had been missed and the refreshments were quickly disappearing. Again he tucked the rose into his tunic and joined the company.

Hassan Khan trod on air. Who could the sender of the pink rose be but the Chieftain's daughter? The warrior sat down with the rest, adjusted his turban and raised his eyes to where the latticed veranda proclaimed the women's apartments. Only for a second did he allow his eyes to dwell on that spot; then he sat silent in the chattering throng.

"Hassan Khan," teased one of his friends, "such tame work as this is not for thee, for thou hast lost thy speech. It takes a raid to make thee talk."

"Perhaps thou art right, Abdul Jan," replied the silent one, while the joke became general and everybody laughed.

"See," called another, "our brother even blushes."

"Fool," cried the enraged Hassan Khan, "let us fight, so that we prove who is the better man."

Hassan Khan was tearing off his coat just as he remembered the pink rose. The company would like nothing better than to see a rose fall from the coat of the great warrior! He could

## PINK ROSE OF THE HILLS

imagine how the walls would echo their laughter. To be mocked at on this day of all days!

"What is this, Abdul Jan?" inquired the Chieftain. "Art so jealous of the winner thou must run the chance of such a beating as thou hast never had? Hassan Khan dared not begin to strike thee. Run and see where the servant has gone who was to bring the *sherbat*!"

Thus was the shame of Hassan Khan averted.

At the end of the day he was the winner, and after the guests had gone home, the pact was sealed between the old Chieftain and the young one, and such a marriage as theirs was had never been seen before nor since in the whole Frontier.

"And did the Chieftain give up raiding, Khan Sahib?" I inquired.

For a moment he did not speak, then turning to his wife who sat beside him he said: "Did I, my pink Rose?"

She laughed so happily and contentedly, this old and once beautiful woman, that I knew he had grown the fruit trees and the rose garden—more especially the latter—and I thought as I looked at this fine old Chieftain that none who knew and feared him in the days when he was the far-famed warrior some called brigand would have recognised him. The rose had proved mightier than the tulwar.



GOLDEN DAWNS OF SYRIA



CHAPTER XV  
GOLDEN DAWNS OF SYRIA

DAMASCUS

**M**EN were loitering in groups around the Government Offices—the schoolboys were playing truant with an obvious zest—the women were clustered in the distance talking shrilly among themselves.

The *sherbat* vendors were plying a wonderful trade.

Damascus—one of the pearls of the Orient—and the citizens were enjoying themselves.

I, as a visitor, imagined that it was a public holiday, but it was soon evident that this was an occasion when even the atmosphere of mass amusement was transcended.

Syria is not a united country in race, religion or customs and its inhabitants, many of them mutually antagonistic, only have one point of cohesion, and that is the demonstration.

Agitations give an opportunity for enjoyment which cannot be compared with anything attaching to the many public holidays. Agitation means temporary turmoil under the cover of which much can be accomplished. The college students, scenting a rag, take sides indiscriminately. After all, they have to enjoy themselves while they are

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young. The women, with the guile of their sex, welcome the excitement. When the attentions of their menfolk are diverted there is much that can be done which is dear to the feminine mind. The men, well any occasion which tends to distract from the grind of daily toil is more than welcome and it does them good to exercise their vocal organs.

"Down with the mandate/" yell the students, and the police discreetly efface themselves. Wistfully they gaze upon the demonstrations from the distance. After all, it would be amusing to join in the fun, but they had to be careful. The assembly was more or less orderly, and a little honest shouting did no one any harm. Besides, it is embarrassing to be called upon to arrest one's cousin or one's brother-in-law. It is inconvenient at home where the women-folk fail to understand the workings of government, and the neighbours are inclined to be supercilious.

It was upon a scene much like this that I gazed as I made my way into Damascus.

Soon the demonstrators were joined by others. Hurriedly, the shops were closed, and the shopkeepers hastened to join in the revels. The crowd outside the Government Offices was now of a great size.

"What is the demonstration about?" I asked one man who was howling like a jackal.

He looked at me blankly, shrugged his shoulders and howled the louder.

Turning to another demonstrator I once again sought enlightenment.

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"Oh/' he said in response to my query, "a nabi has been arrested and it is a religious matter."

"It was not a nabi/' interjected the jackal, pausing momentarily in his howling. "It is said that a request by the Alouite priests has wrongly been turned down by the High Commissioner."

"Nothing of the sort," vehemently protested his neighbour. "This demonstration is to force upon the authorities our sense of displeasure regarding the new tax scale."

"Down with the tyrants," bawled the students and venom and point was added to their demonstration as they thought of the professors waiting in the colleges ready, on the return of the young men, further to torment the youth of the nation with unnecessary equations in a variety of unknowns.

And all in a temperature of 105 ° in the shade.

After a while there was a seething commotion amongst those nearest the entrance to the offices and soon it went through the crowd that there was no point to the demonstration. It had all been a mistake. No nabi had been arrested, the priests had not taken umbrage and all that had happened was that a long-wanted robber had been brought in from the hills.

Regretfully the crowd began to disperse.

Dejectedly the students thought of the problems which still remained to be worked out; the men returned slowly and disconsolately to their labours; shops were re-opened and the women decorously hung their eye-lids.

In the Government Offices the typewriters clicked

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and here, as well as without, Damascus returned to its sleepy, restful, Oriental lullaby.

Unfortunately, no picture of present-day Damascus would be complete without an early reference to the turbulent spirit of the Syrian. This is now part of the national character. Perhaps it is unfair and, in a sense untrue, so to refer to this trait. It would be more exact to say that it has always been there, but it is only since 1918 that an outlet has been found for it.

My province does not include the sphere of international politics, and it was my intention, when I commenced to pen these pages, vigorously and steadfastly to steer clear of the subject. Yet, at this stage it obtrudes. It is because it must—even if my incursion is but a brief and a cursory one. Syria of to-day, whilst retaining much that is hallowed by ancient history, is nevertheless bound up in such modern works as the League of Nations and mandates, and the like.

It has been the custom largely to blame the French for the present unrest of the Syrian and the word "maladministration" is one that has been worked to death. Yet these critics have not been entirely fair and this has been especially so when comparisons have been made with Palestine.

The trouble, such as it is, can be traced back to the days immediately after the cessation of War. In November, 1918, Great Britain joined with France in the issue of a manifesto which fired the blood of the Druses and the Syrian Arabs. The people of Syria were told that:

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"The end that France and Great Britain have in pursuing, in the East, the War unloosed by German ambition, is the complete and definite freeing of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks, and the establishment of national Governments and Administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations.

"In order to give effect to these intentions, France and Great Britain have agreed to encourage and assist the establishment of indigenous Governments and Administrations in Syria and Mesopotamia, now freed by the Allies, and in the territories whose liberation they seek, and to recognise them as soon as they are effectively established."

The peoples of Syria, looking to the progress which has been made in Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere, are impatient; but they forget that both they and the French have their own especial difficulties.

It is not for me to say that it was unfortunate for the Syrians that France should have been selected as the mandatory Power. One can only refer to the established fact that France is traditionally unpopular both with the Arab and with the Druse—an unpopularity which had its genesis in 1860 when a French expedition went to Damascus following a massacre of Christians. The Syrians have been apt to look upon the French as conquerors and the problems of the French administration have, thereby, been made all the more complex.

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The man who has been the target of most of the blame is General Sarrail. His name is held in execration by the Syrians and especially by the Druses upon whom fell the weight of his vengeance after the series of unhappy outbreaks. But the Syrian is apt to forget that his struggle for early emancipation is made the more difficult by its very violence. The French see a people composed of many races and creeds enmeshed in the coils of internecine antagonism and they themselves are at a great disadvantage.

They have and very rightly, adopted the principle of abstaining from any action which would cause offence to the religious susceptibilities of the many different sects—a principle which all European Governments have accepted, just as formerly Napoleon and Augustus had done. Yet how troublesome can be this principle! Half the disputes which arise throughout the land of Syria have a religious significance and the official who would abide by this principle to the letter must indeed have an agile mind.

Said one official to me during the course of my wanderings: "You are an Oriental and perhaps you can explain this to me. A man came to my office, supplicating, it does not matter for what. He approached me with the greatest deference and poured praises upon my head. He recited from the occult song of the Sufis and addressing me said:

'The sun will drink you up,  
You will become that rosy cloud

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Which will dissolve in rain upon  
the land of Men  
And of bright roses  
Which you will fertilise.  
Then when winter  
Turns you into snow  
The Spring sunshine will drink you  
up . . .!"

I could hardly forbear to smile for the idea of this bucolic, large-framed Frenchman becoming a cloud to scatter sweetness upon the land was a ludicrous one, even allowing for the allegory of the poetical mind and the supplicant, but he proceeded:

"Yes, here I was to be the fertiliser of roses and all because this man wanted me to do his enemy an ill turn. When I refused, as, of course, I had to do, he made his way out of my office, salaaming and calling down the blessings of Allah upon me against the time when I should change my mind.

"A few minutes after the man's departure I also had to leave. On the doorstep I was surprised to see that my visitor still lingered. He was busily engaged in spitting upon this inoffensive stone. Meanwhile he was calling me 'Shaitan/' 'Afrit' and any other term of denunciation which came into his head."

It is this fundamental difference in outlook between the French and the Syrians which is retarding the development of the people.

As one approaches Damascus from the heights above Salahiyeh one looks down upon groves of cypress trees and olive trees. Between them

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there are other groves of lemon and fruit trees, all giving to the sunlit landscape their own shade of kaleidoscopic colour. This strikingly magnificent panorama extends for miles. From within the colours of the blossoms one discerns the roofs and domes of palaces and mosques. The scene to the weary traveller is serene and uplifting. One realises that one is gazing upon a scene on which has been enacted great historical events. It was here, amid the groves of trees in a street which was once called "Straight" that Saul of Tarsus lodged in the House of Judas. It was here, in the first flush of the triumph of Islam that the Arabs held sway, extending their rule to the Atlantic on the one hand, to the banks of the River Oxus in Central Asia on the other. Once Damascus was the capital of the Arabs' vast dominions. Even now it is fascinating and reflects much of its past glories; much of its past power and riches.

An addition to the Arabian Nights' atmosphere is made by the many sparkling streams which flow from the hills through the fruit gardens; by the fact that the majority of the buildings are white and dazzling in the rays of the sun; by the fact that the East is the East and notwithstanding the League of Nations and mandates, is really unchanging.

Quite apart from the mosques and palaces which are in themselves sufficient to give Damascus an Oriental air of opulence and theological austerity, there are the miles of wonderful bazaars to which have been attracted throughout the centuries the most precious of the wares of Asia. Here are to

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be found antiquities of all kinds—rare swords and scimitars with glorious blades of Damascus steel, magnificent gems, costly silks, magnificent carpets—all displayed at stalls by grey-bearded Arab vendors. And the bargaining! This is an art in itself, requiring patience and an insight into Oriental psychology. Because this is so frequently lacking, European tourists frequently pay fantastic prices for the wares of Damascus or go away disappointed.

No self-respecting vendor in a Damascus bazaar would dream of asking less than three times the price he would be prepared to accept. Haggling is all part of his creed. It is part of the fun; an essential salve to his conscience. He has to pretend to himself that he does not really desire to dispose of his wares and that in finally selling he is doing so more in regard to the feelings of the purchaser than of his own.

There is something just a tiny bit *infra dig* in trade in the mind of the true Moslem and in descending to deal with his customer there are finer, inner points of conscience that have to be placated.

It takes a whole morning, with perhaps a final session in the afternoon to purchase a valuable carpet with true decorum.

One must sit in the shade of the stall, drink *sherbat* or Turkish coffee and smoke cigarettes. Now and again one makes a passing reference to carpets, but one never really *talks* about them. Because there are carpets around one it is in keeping that one should, out of mere politeness,

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make an occasional point on colours and stitches, but this is to keep the conversation together and not because one is constrained to buy.

The American and the Englishman descend upon the bazaars of Damascus, march resolutely up to a carpet vendor and ask to see his stock.

With a hurt expression the merchant proceeds to display his wares, but that cord of sympathy between vendor and purchaser has already been snapped.

Neither the American nor the Englishman will consent to loll languorously upon cushions seductively placed in the shade. They parade steadfastly up and down with the exhausting, nervous, mechanical efficiency of their race and the next words they utter are:

"How much?"

Where is the symmetry and poetry of language; that which is essentially part of the poem in silk and wool which the Westerner wishes to buy?

"So much," says the Arab, diffidently, knowing full well that he would accept a quarter of the price.

"Too much," says the Englishman and the American artfully, for they know something of the ways of the East. "We will give you half."

If the vendor has no sons whose marriage is at hand, or if he has succeeded in pulling some of his carpet wool over the eyes of the tax collector, he will probably draw on his dignity and proceed to explain how to accept such a price would entail the ruination of himself and his family.

Before he has half finished, the Englishman and

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the American have proceeded to the next-door stall.

Should he really be in urgent need of money he will demur, yet accept the offer of half, finding solace in the reflection that all Westerners are fools, anyway.

As an Oriental, I will give a tip to Western visitors to the bazaars of Damascus. If possible, always time your advent for Friday morning. The Arab vendor believes that if he makes an early sale on Friday his luck will be good for the ensuing week. He will not want his first potential customer to leave without a purchase. He will size you up, mentally count the contents of your wallet, but he will not pitch his price too high. He will not, of course, rob himself, but if you display signs of going elsewhere, he will not rob you.

No one should visit Damascus without seeing the bazaars of the silversmiths, the coppersmiths and the other metal workers. These bazaars are features of the life of other great Oriental cities, but the workers of Damascus have an inherited skill and artistry which makes their products famous the world over. In these bazaars are to be found filigree ornaments of the most delicate workmanship—work which is finer than that executed by the craftsmen of Constantinople or Delhi. Then there will be found a profusion of amber and turquoise amulets. These serve to adorn the hair of the children and also of the Arab horse, for they are said to possess the property of warding off evil spirits and the effects

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of the evil eye. Amusing too, in its way, is the old Clothes Bazaar—but only when one wants a reaction from the sublime to the ridiculous.

All Christians, very naturally, ask to be directed to "The Street which is called Straight." Doubtless during the time of Judas and Saul it was worthy of its name. Then it was typically straight and Roman in character, its sides being adorned with pillars. Now its outline is irregular, shops and other buildings having been built with a true Eastern disregard for the Western cult of symmetry as exemplified by the dignity of simplicity and the ruler.

It is among the mosques of Damascus that the Christian of the Western world discovers how closely the Moslem faith is allied to his own. Many Westerners express their astonishment that this should be so, mainly because, I suppose, Western history books only have regard for the wars between the Cross and the Crescent. Many Westerners visit the mosques of Damascus and leave with a sense of unreality and bewilderment.

The greatest mosque of aU—El Umawi—is in itself a magnificent structure. It vies in splendour with the Harem el Aksar at Jerusalem and it is almost as highly venerated by the Moslem though less in rank than the mosques of Mecca and Medina. Unfortunately, El Umawi is encumbered by small dwellings and no true conception of its beauty and its greatness can be obtained without considerable trouble.

The site of El Umawi was hallowed long before **the days of the Prophet.** A Greek temple once

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stood on the spot and later, when Constantine was converted to Christianity, a church in the form of a basilica was erected there. This church now forms the centre of the mosque—this being, of course, only one of those examples where Christian churches were transformed into Moslem places of worship. Lest it be thought that, as a follower of the Prophet, I say this in any boastful spirit, I add that there are almost as many instances where Moslem mosques have been transformed into Christian churches. There is one notable instance in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab in India, where a great Moslem mosque was long used as the parish church by the European community. Later, when a cathedral was built, the mosque was transformed yet again, but this time into a government library!

One of the tombs of El Umawi is said to contain the head of John the Baptist. This shrine is held in great veneration by Moslems all over the world. Until the Young Turks secured control of Constantinople it was the custom for each successive Ottoman Sultan to send to the shrine a sacred covering on the occasion of his coronation.

The graceful minarets of this mosque will catch the eye of the visitor. Westerners, especially, should ask to be pointed out to them one in particular. It is conspicuous because it has a crescent on its long, tapering summit.

The name applied to this minaret is the Medinet Isa—in other words, the Minaret of Christ. Some believe that Jesus will descend upon this minaret on the day of Judgment.

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Not so many yards away is the tomb of the great Saladin, the amazingly successful Saracen Ghazi of seven centuries ago. The tomb is found in a pleasant garden. The mausoleum contains the sarcophagus of this famous conqueror. Originally the sarcophagus was encased in painted woodwork which at least harmonised with its surroundings. Now, unfortunately, as do so many other places in the Near East, it bears the inartistic handiwork of the ex-Kaiser. During his sensational tour of Palestine and Syria when so much vandalism was allowed in order to pander to the extraordinary vanity of the denizen of Doom, he caused the wooden covering of the sarcophagus to be removed. In its place were erected marble slabs in the German national colours!

Above the sarcophagus is a priceless antique chandelier. On this are panels upon which "S.S.," Sultan Saladin's initials, were inscribed. The ex-Kaiser had the lettering obliterated on every alternate panel and the monogram "W.W." substituted. Perhaps he will go down in history as "Wilful Wilhelm." He deserves to do so.

The old walls of the city are well worth a visit, if only because of their impressiveness. The walls are built of large blocks of stone faintly reminiscent of the pyramids of Ghiza. They are so heavy that they hold together without the aid of cement or mortar.

The Babkisan gateway has been closed for several hundred years, but alongside of it is the ruins of St. Paul's tower. It was from here that the Apostle was lowered in a basket.

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The palaces of the wealthy Arabs are rather difficult to inspect at close quarters, but if one is sufficiently fortunate to obtain an entry the visitor will be amazed by the luxury to be found in these homes of the rich. The exteriors invariably produce an atmosphere of forbidding gloom, but once beyond the giant gates one goes into a fairyland of fountains, courts and gardens, beautiful trees, aromatic shrubs and a wonderful variety of flowers. The courts are covered with mosaic paving and the verandas are screened by magnificently chiselled marble of dazzling whiteness.

Until a few years ago visitors could at least inspect the Palace of Azm. True, it had been converted into a museum, but it retained much of that charm which it possessed when it was a private residence. Now it is but a heap of stone, forlorn in the midst of other ruins. When the French found it necessary to bombard Damascus, the Palace of Azm seemed to exercise a fascination upon the Mandatory gunners. In any event, they gave it their complete attention until, with many surrounding buildings of note, it was razed to the ground.

## THE CITY OF ZENOBIA

One could spend many moons amid the fascination and the intrigues of Damascus, but a traveller is a traveller and he has to get on.

From Damascus I had intended to make my way through the hills of Lebanon to Beirut and from thence to the incredibly ancient city of Baalbek. It is some sixty miles from Damascus to

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Beirut. There is a train which does the journey in six hours, but one cannot really see a country from a railway line, so I decided to go by road. The road I found to be a remarkably good one.

I had been quite prepared to make the journey by camel, but in the course of my wanderings in the Damascus bazaars I came across a cheery rogue named Husein who was the proud possessor of a Ford lorry. Husein had to take his juggernaut to Beirut and for a slight consideration he offered to take me with him.

Husein was a remarkable talker and, I suspect, a great thief. We spent two nights on the road to Beirut while Husein waited and bargained regarding the transport of merchandise and each evening we dined on chicken. I am reasonably certain that Husein did not pay for these delicacies. I have humbly to add that my suspicions in this respect in no way detracted from the flavour of my repasts.

Husein, as I have said, was a great talker and, moreover, he could make himself heard above the roar and rattle of his ancient engine which, obviously enough, was a relic of the War. However, in a sense, it seemed to fit in with its historical surroundings.

I have to record, nevertheless, a somewhat painful incident when a long train of some two hundred camels which we overtook some eighteen kilos out of Damascus regarded his equipage with evident disgust.

We had hooted and ground our way past two-thirds of the snorting, snarling procession amidst

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the by no means polite remarks of the half-a-dozen Arab attendants, when the leaders took fright and, with wild lunges on their ungainly legs, they went scampering pell-mell for Beirut.

The hundred odd animals which we had passed took up the challenge to ancient modernity and speedily went by us in dense clouds of dust.

In a cloud of his own, entirely of profanity, Husein induced his Ford to cease from labour until the lumbering, unwieldy menagerie had out-distanced us by some hundred yards. Then, with his eye agleam with mischief, he started up again. Such were the discordant, indecent noises he produced from this product of Detroit that he scared those camels over a distance of many miles—all the way, indeed, to the caravanserai where we were to stop the night.

What the camel men said to Husein and me when they had finally calmed their affrighted charges is not for inclusion here. I recall, however, that their leader, a venerable Arab, paled with anger, did not cease in his anathematising until he had scandalised us and our relatives for many generations past.

And for once Husein was phlegmatic.

"Camels," he muttered. "I never did like the brutes. We had to eat them during the War!"

Husein was a very amusing personage with a queer philosophy of his own. In his way he was a busy man and that perhaps explained his contempt for politics and anything beyond the orbit of his own particular niche in life.

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He did not mourn the passing of the Turks, but the only use he had for the French lay in the fact that they built roads upon which one could run an ancient and dilapidated Ford.

As for legislative councils and all those extraordinarily cumbersome pieces of legislative machinery which go with a Western political complex, he had a supreme contempt for them.

He was an opportunist in his small way. He frankly lamented the cessation of the War because then, as he naively put it, one could ask any price for eggs and other farm produce and be certain of receiving it. His lorry marked the culmination of a successful period of War "profiteering."

I really am quite unable to apportion my indebtedness between Husein and Mr. Henry Ford. Husein displayed an astonishing dexterity in the manipulation of string-tied controls and a fatalistic confidence in the ground-work of Mr. Ford as he thundered down those hilly roads. He assured me that he travelled quickly down one incline so that the momentum would assist him in mounting the next. Never once, however, did he put his foot on the brake-pedal. It would have been a waste of energy. His brake drums had burnt out long ago.

During the intervals when I was not hanging grimly on to that decrepit lorry and wondering where Husein's supreme optimism would eventually land us I was able to observe the hills covered with olive trees and the great variety of flowering shrubs. Through these it was possible to discern glimpses of the mountains of Lebanon. And the

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hills were in varying shades of green—placid and restful for the traveller and in striking contrast to those with which one meets in Palestine.

It was with a certain measure of relief that I placed my feet upon the streets of the port of Beirut and bade farewell to Husein. At heart, I am certain, he is a nomad. A few years ago he would have despised a means of mechanical locomotion and would have been content with a Bedouin's tent.

And the rascal had been through my knapsack before we parted. My only consolation was that he found but little.

Beirut—once a great Levantine port—is now a disappointing seaport town from which most of the ancient glory has faded. Yes, "faded" is an excellent term. One feels that here there is much that should interest the antiquarian and one discovers that it is merely an excellent place from which to commence a tour—and as quickly as possible.

Perhaps, however, Husein's lorry had upset my liver. Beirut has some excellent educational institutions, not the least being the American University which is open to students of all nationalities and all religions. This University is doing a great work, quite apart from its purely educational sphere in that it brings the different communities together and makes for a better understanding between the races. The normal number of students is roughly 1,000, half of whom are Christians, the rest mainly Moslems and the balance Druses, Jews, Bahais and others.

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However, my principal purpose in visiting Beirut was to leave expeditiously for Baalbek. Now the railway from Beirut to Baalbek links up with the line from Damascus to Aleppo at the junction of Rayak. The railway crosses the hills at a range of 3,000 feet, but I am afraid that I did not go by rail. My journey was made in very lowly fashion. I made Baalbek by road and my transport was an ass, every bit as hard and as knobbly as Husein's Ford. Our road took us to a height of 3,500 feet and long before we could see the modern Baalbek there were the ancient ruins clearly visible—the great walls of the Acropolis—the marble columns—the vast courts and temples—the relics of a past and forgotten age.

In other places which have been deserted one is conscious of a certain air of romantic mystery. One senses this when visiting the many past cities of Delhi or when wandering around the perfectly preserved palaces of Fatehpur Sikri. But in Baalbek there is something else which assails one—a dim impression that one is probing beyond the ordinary confines of human intelligence; that one is on a spot where the human brain refuses adequately to re-act to the true measure of the passing of time. There is something tremendously tangible about the pyramids. One can gaze upon the Sphinx and the passage of the years becomes relative, but in Baalbek, one's impressions are only fleeting. Nevertheless, they are impressively vivid.

Baalbek is unquestionably one of the very, very old sites of the East. Around it legend has woven

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many fancies. Tradition has handed down many a fantastic story.

Cain is said to be its founder.

Nimrod it was who built a great tower rising to the skies.

It was here that Solomon raised his temple to Baal.

Baalbek, on the road which led from the East to Tyre, was very much on the map in the early biblical days.

There are, however, no traces of Nimrod's tower and none of Solomon's temple to Baal—at least none are at present visible though it may be that the excavators of the future will unearth some interesting finds.

On these very ancient archaeological fields successive civilisations have eradicated evidences of those which went before. Thus we find that at Baalbek Baal was afterwards associated with Helios, the Sun God, during the Greek occupation. Baalbek was then called Heliopolis.

When, in the first century, A.D., the Romans held sway over this site they added to the rapidly declining worship of Baal that of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury. Consequently, the ruins we see to-day are of Greek and Roman origin.

On a raised platform, facing the entrance to the Acropolis, and commanding the surrounding country, is all that remains of the Temple of the Sun and Jupiter. Although only the outer columns remain standing it is possible to visualise from these much of the ancient glory and grandeur of this ancient centre of worship.

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With its facade and doorway still clearly decorated with garlands of wheat, flowers and grapes as offerings to Bacchus, is the Temple to the god of that name. This, too, is in the shadow of the Acropolis. Of the original forty-six monolithic columns nearly twenty remain upright and they contrive to uphold the immense, richly carved marble blocks which form the entablature and supports of the roof.

The Temple of Bacchus is quite well preserved and it is one of the most striking and the most beautiful in the country. It combines in its bold architectural outline a remarkable delicacy of sculpture.

Vying in grandeur with the ruins of Baalbek are those of the amazing desert city of Zenobia—a site which still commemorates the name of one of the most remarkable women in history. Zenobia flourished in the third century and she carved for herself a mighty empire extending from Persia to Egypt. This great Queen was of mixed Arab, Greek and Egyptian descent and she seems to have exercised a mystic influence over her peoples. Always could she inspire them to great deeds and to conquest from conquest. However, ambition and jealousy proved to be her greatest enemies in the end, for she was foolish enough to pit her strength against the Roman Emperor Aurelian. Many fierce battles were waged in the vicinity of Horns and Hama, in which the redoubtable Zenobia was always to be found at the head of her troops. Her mystic powers proved of small avail against the mighty Roman war machine and

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she was eventually made captive and led away to Rome.

The historian, Gibbon, tells us that she ended her days as a comfortable Roman matron, but Gibbon was sometimes inclined to be sentimental. Other writers, and particularly Zosimus, maintain that Zenobia was truculent to the last. She scorned the advances of her Roman conquerors, refused food, and speedily died.

Zenobia, however, is quite a far cry from Beirut. One goes by way of Homs and Hama, and for those that prefer that means of travel the train will take them a goodly distance on their way. The final stage *can* be done by car, if one can secure one.

I preferred to spend some days among the Bedouins who congregate in this area. I had been fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of a rich sheep-owner who contemplated a tour of the encampments and attaching myself to his camel cavalcade spent several care-free days enjoying the hospitality of the Bedouin. The nomad tent-dwellers camp around the Arab town of Homs as they did thousands of years ago. Homs is mentioned by Pliny as the birthplace of one of the high priests of Baal who became a Roman Emperor, but little of former greatness remains. Lofty minarets still stand and the mosque of Sidi Khaled still possesses some priceless old carpets; but there is little else.

Frequently in our journeys between Homs and Palmyra (as Zenobia's city is now named) we crossed the old Roman road. Parts of the

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original paving are still to be seen and, here and there, one comes across an old Roman milestone still doing duty.

It is in this area that the desert opens out toward Baghdad and a deep-rooted weed covers the sandy waste in many parts. This weed, a sickly green in the spring, but a withered, unappetising thing in the heat of the summer, is that which has attracted the Bedouin shepherds through the centuries.

An ordinary observer would state that no animal could exist on such fodder, but the Bedouin sheep are as wily and nomadic as those who tend them. They have an astonishing strain of stamina in them and they can find food and nourishment where less hardy specimens would die. When all else fails them these sheep nibble away the sand from the roots of this weed and upon these roots they succeed in living until the winter months when rain comes to revitalise the desert.

Most of the tent-dwellers are exceedingly poor. He receives no money for his shepherding, but only a certain number of lambs, provided that the sheep are returned to the owner in good condition. Yet the Bedouin is a cheerful mortal.

It is always advisable, by the way, to approach these habitations with extreme caution. This is not because, as the scenario writers would have it, of the danger of being fired upon by the Bedouin, but because of the attentions of extremely savage dogs of which every tent seems to have an uncomfortably large complement. These dogs will rush

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forth like a pack of wolves and go leaping and snarling around intruders, and there are no trees in the desert! They only consent to be quietened by someone they know.

The Bedouin tents would hardly suit the fastidious tastes of those young damsels who affect to be struck by the glamour and romance of Sheikh-dom. They are spacious affairs, but in them the Bedouin accommodates everything that is his—his pots and his pans, his receptacles for storing butter and cheese, his clothing, his rugs, his chickens, his dogs, his innumerable children and his women.

The Arab women are never idle. When they are not attending to their children or inducing the poultry to behave with a due sense of decorum before visitors, they sit in the background making butter. These women pour the sheep's milk into a large skin suspended from the roof of the tent. This skin they rock to and fro, singing meanwhile mournful Arab songs with a dirgelike rhythm. They continue the churning, both of butter and of dirges, for hours on end.

It was in this way that butter was made thousands of years ago, and the Bedouin's habits are unchanging.

What would be more simple than to attach small skins to the very animals that provide the milk? As they graze and grub at the weeds of the desert they would provide sufficient movement to the milk to turn it into butter.

Such a simple innovation, however, would be too revolutionary for the nomadic mind.

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Palmyra, the city of Zenobia, is now but an oasis in the desert. There are groves of palm and fruit trees and tiny rivulets wind among them, giving to the oasis a green hue in refreshing contrast to the muddy yellow of the sands of the surrounding desert. In the hey-day of Zenobia there were aqueducts of massive stone built over high arches to conduct the water from springs in the hills some five or six miles away, but these have mainly disappeared. Near one of the outer walls one yet remains to remind us of the greatness of the Arab Queen.

Palmyra was once known as Tadmor and it was then the great granary of Solomon. On the great trade route from the Euphrates to Egypt, it was a meeting place between the East and the West.

Doubtless it was its waters that first caused people to pause and settle on this spot, for there is to this day a hot sulphur spring called Ephca which is celebrated for its curative powers. The waters issue from a subterranean grotto. If one can withstand the pungent smell (and taste) it is possible to swim into this grotto for several hundred yards.

Palmyra is a city which has undergone many vicissitudes. Mark Antony captured it and despoiled it and Hadrian ruled there in the second century. Above all, however, stands the name of Zenobia.

In Palmyra there is a great Temple of the Sun which is, unfortunately, now encumbered with many Arab dwellings. The ruin covers an area of

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several thousand square yards, yet even as it is it is most impressive. It is easy to judge also of its magnificence in the days of its early glories. Columns seventy feet high, in rows, adorned the outer court. There were several hundreds of these and many of them still remain erect. From the outer court, steps led up to the middle temple. The entrancingly carved ceiling of this is still there as an evidence of the love of craftsmanship of the ancients.

From the avenues of marble columns which lead through the Triumphal Arch one sees the Necropolis more than a mile away on the lower slopes of the hills. Some of the tombs in the Necropolis, built of red sandstone, are more than one hundred feet high. Their many storys tower into the air and there are some with receptacles to hold from four to five hundred bodies. None of these now contains any visible human remains. I made a laborious climb up the stone steps of one of these tombs and from the summit had a wonderful view of Palmyra and the surrounding desert. Inscriptions on some of the tombs date from the first century.

I would have liked to have stayed longer in Palmyra but the Arab sheep-owner from Beirut was anxious to be on the move once more.

We watered our camels at one of the rivulets and then commenced a steady, monotonous journey to Homs where I bade farewell to this very excellent friend.

Perhaps I should here digress and make a remark or two about the Syrian trotting camel.

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The best animals have quite lengthy coats which are carefully groomed. Soft and silky to the touch, the hair is of a light yellow colour.

Extraordinary stories are told about the length of time that camels can exist without water. Some who subscribe to the fantastic readily believe that one drink will suffice a camel for three weeks. In point of fact, to keep a Syrian trotting camel in proper condition, it should be watered at regular intervals of three days. Out in the desert, of course, this is not always possible and sometimes the camels have to pass a waterless period of six or seven days. When this occurs, however, they speedily become jaded. They continually regurgitate that rather revolting bag which, with a shuddering gurgle, they can protrude from their mouths, and display other signs of distress.

And the actual watering of a camel is an art in itself.

Led to a trough or a stream it will superciliously and disdainfully contemplate the water for some minutes. Then it will consent to lower its head and to drink for a moment or two. Then its head will rise again and it will stare stupidly around, perhaps for ten minutes at a time. One unaccustomed to the way of camels would conclude that the animal had drunk its fill, but it is not so.

Fortunately, time is of no great moment in the desert, for just when a city man would be losing patience, the camel drops his head again and has another short drink.

This process goes on for an hour or more. •

The Bedouins have sufficient sense never to

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hurry or hurry their animals at the watering places for they can never be certain when they will reach the next oasis. An indifferently watered camel is likely to flounder on a long desert trek and to leave its rider marooned.

Those long sprawling legs of the camel are ideal for negotiating the desert sands, but frequently the caravans have to take to the hills where they slide and slither down rocky inclines and pick a tortuous way through boulder-strewn ravines.

A loaded camel on a rocky hillside is a pitiable object. As he places his great, pad-like feet on stones that slide beneath them he squeals with evident terror.

And he has reason to be apprehensive. When a camel goes down in such conditions his legs invariably "star" about him, ripping open his under portion and making immediate meat for the vultures and the jackals.

These Syrian trotting camels have a surprising turn of speed—and they can gallop with zest and at an alarming rate—alarming, that is, if one is perched precariously above.

In many parts of the East the camel is ridden astride, and with stirrups. In Syria and Palestine one perches oneself on a tiny seat in the region of the hump and then crosses one's feet, left foot over the right, on the animal's shoulders. The long, curved neck looms up and reaches into the distance from between one's heels. Away on the horizon is the camel's nose and through the nostrils passes a string. The other end of this one holds in one's hand and one has to remember to

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keep it loose. If, in tribulations of trotting or galloping one happens to pull the string taut the camel loses speed, stops, follows the drag on its nostrils, curls that elastic neck, stares one unpleasantly in the face, snarls, grinds its green, foamy, saliva-laden teeth—and regurgitates.

To make a Syrian camel gallop one kicks him on the left shoulder with the heel of one's boot. To stop him one negotiates the string and hopes for the best.

# THE MYSTERIES OF EUROPE



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MYSTERIES OF EUROPE

**T**HE day when I returned to Damascus again from my wanderings, and reached Beirut, from where I shook the dust of Asia from my feet, I was so tired of playing the rolling-stone, as to vow never to start on a journey again.

But that feeling soon wore off. I was ready to start on the round of the world again—with or without my pack. Hardened travellers are incorrigible. The French steamer was taking me to Marseilles. Mist floated over the Syrian hills like departing visions that had haunted it by night; and I tried to read the palm of my hand to see what lay before me on reaching Europe.

After Marseilles, Paris was reached without any noticeable hazards—that is the worst of the ordered existence of the West; only in Chicago, if reports be true, they have some interest in the humdrum of life—and it was in Paris, the threshold of London that I fell in a thinking mood and compared the French capital with the Metropolis of the British Empire. I asked myself as a stranger on Western ground, as to why it is that Paris is so essentially feminine in its atmosphere, while London is so obviously a man's city? In the

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East we have no such curious urban distinctions. There the great majority of towns take on the stamp of national character much more than they seem to do in Europe, and such a thing as a civic environment, redolent of either sex, and more particularly catering for one or the other, is unheard of.

The femininity of Paris is rather more obvious than the masculinity of London, but under the skin the latter is certainly more male than any other city I have ever resided in. Its clubs, its restaurants, its places of resort all seem to me to have been especially dictated by manly taste and sentiment, and very much for masculine behoof and ideas of comfort. In London, woman certainly plays second fiddle. Man here is regnant, and a rather elderly or young-elderly type of man at that, for you English are just as much beneath the rule of men between forty and sixty as is any Eastern community, whatever you may say to the contrary. In any case, London is certainly not a young man's town. There is, of course, the "Albany" type of bachelor who counts for a great deal, but ultimately he must give way in respect of the kind of London he wants to the man of the avuncular type, who has a longer purse, a louder voice, and a more compelling personality.

I will not go so far as to say that woman is a cipher in London, for assuredly she is not. She has a very definite place here, and possibly a great deal more power than she suspects, social and personal. But she is not a queen, compelling

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and all-compelling and all-conquering, as she decidedly is in Paris. Her taste is subordinated to masculine notions. And that is why, I think, London is fundamentally so sombre. It has few feminine touches. Hotels, theatres, clubs, all have an air as if devoted almost solely to male comfort, and a somewhat ponderous comfort at that.

There is little colour, simply because the Englishman hates to be thought effeminate; there is scant daintiness.

"Take 'em away, I don't eat flowers," said an English friend of mine to the waiter at a smart restaurant, waving away the delightful jonquils, fresh from a French forcing-house. The remark, brusque and only semi-jocular, seemed to me to typify your stark, insular, rather hard London, with all its male propensity for the merely necessary. The sort of man one meets in your clubs would, I think, rather admire a rifle than a Persian prayer-rug, and prefer a hunting print to an El Greco.

The most fashionable women's shops in London seem to me to be hidden away in dingy corners. How different from the magasins of Paris! This in itself seems significant. In Paris, of course, mere man is ancillary to "the sex." He has his own places of resort, but in the aggregate the salon or the boudoir are the social rallying-places of Paris. Such sex segregation as obtains in London would be impossible and undesirable in Paris. The Frenchman lives and basks in the radiance of womankind, whom he regards as the

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light of existence. He is really miserable apart from some woman or another, and avidly seeks female society, either individual or collective. The Londoner looks upon "at homes" and drawing-room entertainments generally as a bore, and is never so much at his ease as when growling over a hand at bridge with his cronies. He has not the art of enjoying or appreciating female society, nor does he estimate it at its true worth. On the other hand, many Frenchmen seem only half alive if no woman is present.

I have never been quite able to make up my mind whether or not the quite egregious admiration women receive in Paris is good for them or otherwise, but I rather suspect that much of it is on the surface only and that the Frenchman in his heart of hearts scarcely honours or admires women so truly as does the Englishman. The Parisian courtesy to the female of the species is more of a cult, I am almost convinced, than a veridical native chivalry. In its exaggeration there seems to me something slightly mocking, and its medieval grotesquerie scarcely seems in consonance with the free understanding between the sexes which modern Europe, and especially modern England, has developed for itself.

However, that may be, Paris has always given me the impression of a harem let loose, and a rather naughty and temperamental harem at that. For none can aver that the Frenchwoman does not take the fullest advantage of the superficial courtship lavished upon her. Although the great mass of Parisiennes carry their divinity with surprising

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aplomb, there are, I think, more ill-mannered and arrogant women in Paris alone than in the whole of England, and even the best behaved among them wear the satisfied smirk of conscious goddesshood.

But much the same may be said about the Englishman. He is very much monarch of all he surveys, and plays the part of bull moose even more blatantly than the pater potestas of an Arab tribe. For him is the earth and the fullness thereof. He is politely tolerant of his womenfolk and that is all. Still, I think that is preferable to the half-grovelling, half-cynical attitude expressed by his Gallic neighbour for the opposite sex.

I have heard wise men say that as was the old religion of a people, so is their present attitude towards sex matters, that is, if they were formerly a goddess-worshipping folk, the cult of women still lingers among them, while, if they once adored a male deity, masculine traditions are bound to prevail. Who was the god of London, I wonder? The great Gog-Magog, I should think, complete with beard and club, who, I believe, was anciently adored on the rising ground somewhere between St. Paul's and the Monument, and whose celebrated frown has been bequeathed to the rulers among his children of Cockaigne.

Paris, I read, was anciently known as Lutetia, and so may have been the peculiar shrine of a goddess of that name. Whoever she was, she was answerable for a good deal.

But perhaps the somewhat marked deference of

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the London lady to her men is of the same substance and quality as the Parisian's attitude towards his belle amie, a mock deference, spiced with sharp and living cynicism. And there is nothing more devastating than mock deference. Think of a Swiss waiter! He is terrible as an army with banners, as you say. Well, I have sometimes seen in the glances of London ladies such a veiled sarcasm as I have noticed in his, when in conversation with their rather oppressive gentlemen friends.

Poor Parisian! Where would he be, I wonder, if someone left him, or made him a present of an Eastern seraglio? The Englishman, on the other hand, would probably try to "administer" a zenana, and would certainly find it a proposition more exasperating than a young lady's boarding-school.

Yes, that is just why Paris is gay and London's gaiety is somewhat forced, because the former wears the insouciant air of original femininity, which was ever a thing rather irresponsible, while the latter is filled with the stern and rather wistful spirit of man—and just because of that, London really bears a much closer resemblance to a city of the East.

The morning I arrived in London the weather of the metropolis was in its time-honoured wet mood. Sheltering under trees, keeping my prayer carpet as dry as conditions permitted, I walked to one of those parts of the town where lodgings could be had cheaply. I rang the bell of one house which showed an apartment ticket in the window. The

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lady informed me that the room was just let a few minutes ago. I tried another door. The old landlady there very nearly fell back in amazement when a man dressed in a long white shirt, and white trousers, wearing a tarboosh, and a bearded chin appeared before her. She stuttered something in reply which I took to mean refusal. The third was bolder: she told me that she did not take in foreigners, but the people living in the house opposite, with green shuttered windows, might. So that one I entered—"but we do not take in Indians," she replied, and by way of a little pastime, I said that I was not an Indian, but an Eskimo. She tumbled to the joke, but was having none of it. "We do not take in Eskimos either/" was her definite decision as she closed the door.

One more door I will try, and this time a very determined matron opened the door. Yes, she will give me a room. She was a desperate woman; she blurted out, ferociously: and would I produce my money weekly in advance.

"Thirty shillings?" I asked in amazement.

"Yes, thirty bob, and no less, and that now, young man!" She was emphatic. I could not escape even had I wanted to for she had locked the door: so thirty shillings I counted on her palm, leaving three miserable ones in my pocket. Then I was shown my room in a dark corner of the basement. I was chilled to the bone marrow, for it is a little too much to expect a man to graft himself to the "civilised" weather, after the grilling heat of the desert.

The week that followed was a miracle of all my

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experiences: lectures by galore, receptions, tea parties. I was lionised everywhere as a wonderful traveller, the one man of the hour. The landlady changed my room to the first floor, and then gave me her own sitting-room for a bedroom. All because I had prayed to be given the opportunity to serve Afghanistan, and thus mankind: and that prayer was answered. Still from that day to this miracles arise in almost every day of my life, despite the fact that my super-intellectuality pretty nearly starved me in the East. The jealousy of men stigmatised me as a British Spy and as an Afghan Secret Agent, never caring to understand that freaks of nature like me do and can live honestly, content with the thought that they have made peace with God and care not a jot for the miserable human beings. That, I believe, is the only worth while lesson to get from a long travel; otherwise, merely doing the world trip to see but the superficial form of life is waste of time. One must see deeper, probe more profoundly, and sacrifice much, if one is to be of any good to humanity. If I have learned this, my suffering has not been in vain.









