DESERT ENCOUNTER

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KNUD HOLMBOE IN THE DRESS HE WORE DURING THE JOURNEY

DESERT ENCOUNTER

AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY
THROUGH ITALIAN AFRICA

By

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INTRODUCTION

KNUD HOLMBOE was born on April 22, 1902, and his early years revealed traits of character which age and experience only served to intensify. He detested everything that was dull or banal. Though he was not rebelliously unconventional, often his desire to avoid dullness created an impression of unconventionality. He did not deliberately flaunt public opinion, but he was never afraid of doing what he thought was necessary and right even at the risk of social censure or ostracism. His conversion to Islam is a case in point, and his assumption of Arab dress, which, necessary as it was for the journey described in this book, nevertheless at once alienated him from those Europeans who only the day before had associated with him as an equal.

Independent rather than unconventional, in his early years as later he welcomed any enterprise that offered adventure, however hazardous, or that gave him an opportunity to escape from the monotony of urban civilization. The son of a Danish manufacturer in Horsens, he deliberately rejected the sombre security of an established business; journalism offered a way of escape, and as he had a natural aptitude for writing—at the age of nineteen he wrote a collection of poems, but with more discretion than is usual at that age refrained from publishing them—it was as a journalist of travel that he made his first essay in exploration.

The *Dagens Nyheder* of Copenhagen gave him his first commission and published his descriptions of a journey with a Lapp household migrating across Kølen into the most remote extremity of Norway.

Four years later, in 1924, he travelled to Morocco for the first time, and visited Prince Aage in the front line, where he wrote his little book *Between the Devil and the Deep Sea.*

It was at this point that his second characteristic developed to a remarkable extent. As a child he had a very pronounced sense of justice, which always led him to take sides with the weak and the oppressed, and the sufferings born of the Riff campaigns awoke in him such a burning sense of indignation that he felt the aggression to be a betrayal of European civilization no less than a destruction of all that he saw was fine in Moorish culture.

The disgrace of it, as he saw it, bit so deeply into him that he went into retirement for nearly a year, during which he meditated and planned out his future life in a French monastery. His resentment, the sense that Christianity had failed, drove him to Islam, the one faith in which, paradoxically enough, he could find contentment and peace. This attitude is reflected in much that he writes of his religion here, and not the least valuable part of his book are his excursions into Islamic philosophy and the account which he gives of his reception by his co-religionists and of the talks which supervened. Like others, he finds that the Moslem world of North Africa has ceased to look towards Turkey and looks now for the renaissance of its religion for a new prophet to arise from the Hejaz.

After his year of retreat he travelled in Asia Minor and Persia and spent some months in Basra, on the Persian Gulf, where he wrote articles of more than ordinary interest for the Scandinavian Press. There followed an interlude in the Balkans, after which he returned to Africa in 1930, when he undertook the journey of which this book is an account. The spring of the following year found him once again in Asia Minor, intent on making the

pilgrimage to Mecca through Arabia. This was his first and last failure, for he was murdered by Arab brigands a few miles south of Akaba on the 13th of October of that year.

It is not easy to assess Holmboe's achievements at their true value, since they were greater in prospect than in fulfilment. He was still laying the foundations of the future when he died at the age of twenty-nine, but it may be said that the foundations were well and truly laid. In him a burning enthusiasm was joined with stark sincerity and a becoming modesty. "My Arabic was not quite correct," he writes; and, again, he records his confession of ignorance when he asks with a naïvety that may seem surprising, "What are the Senoussis?" He travelled to learn, and he never pretended to a knowledge which he did not have. In him we have lost a potential T. E. Lawrence. He possessed the same dynamic qualities, without, however, Lawrence's erudition. He had a personality and resilience which carried him through the most critical occasions, a wit, humour, and understanding which endeared him to all men of good will. Spare of frame, he had an almost inexhaustible store of endurance and a courage which, without being reckless, thought little of personal danger. And what is perhaps the most remarkable thing of all is that together with this identity of personality and of enthusiasm, with the same sympathy for losing causes, we find a physical resemblance to Lawrence so startling as to be almost uncanny.

One last word. He has much to say against Italian methods in Africa. Recent events have proved his censure to be justified. Yet, bitterly as he felt for the oppressed, bitterly as he resented the injustice and atrocities which they have had to suffer, every statement is made judicially, dispassionately, and carries the hall-mark of truth. Holmboe's account of this journey can be checked at each stage,

and every test makes it the more convincing. And possibly one of the most gracious attributes of this remarkable man was his ability to recognize the good in, one might almost say, his enemies, despite his political and religious antipathies. He pays generous tribute, for instance, to Captain de Pauli, who, he records, was popular with the natives, and in whom he recognized a fine and sympathetic administrator. *O si sic omnes!* The fullness of his acknowledgment makes his indictment all the more powerful.

J. H. DRIBERG

CAMBRIDGE, 1936

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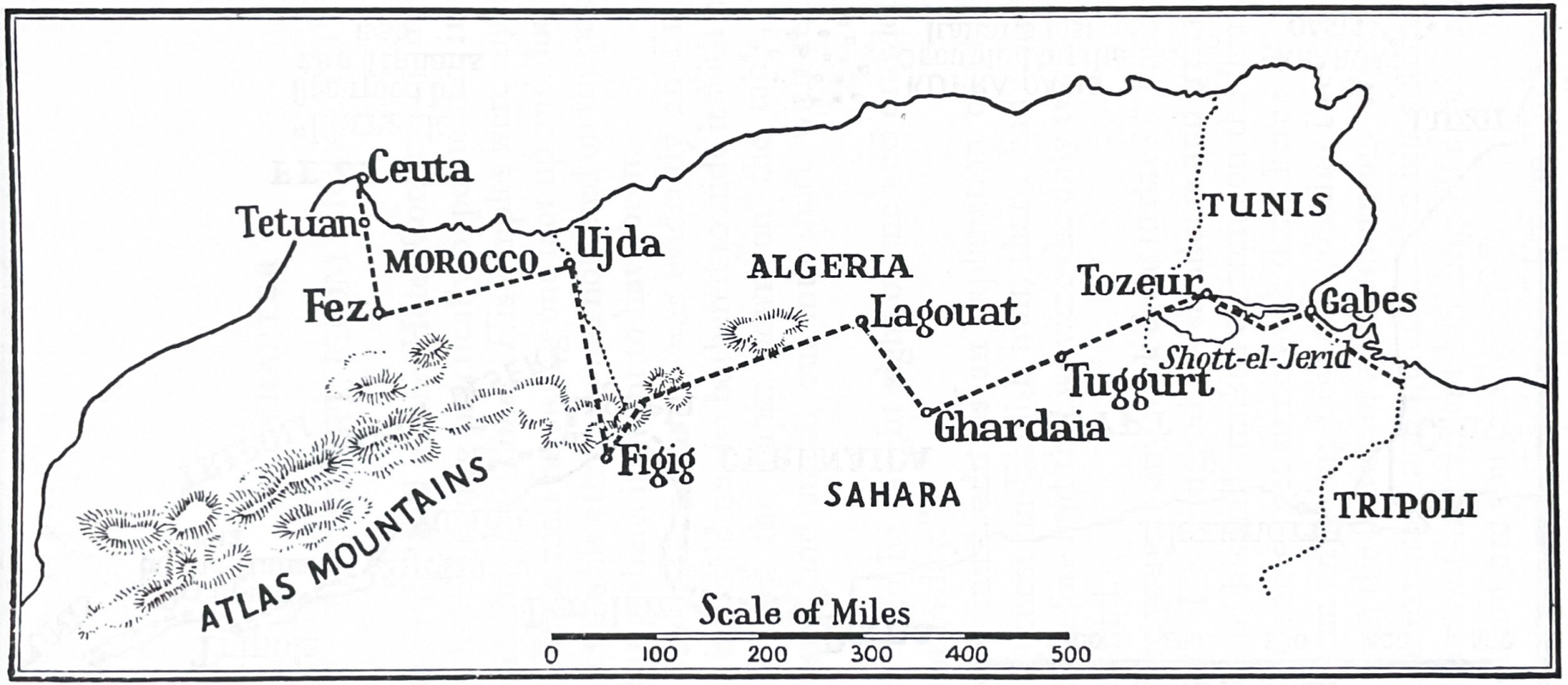
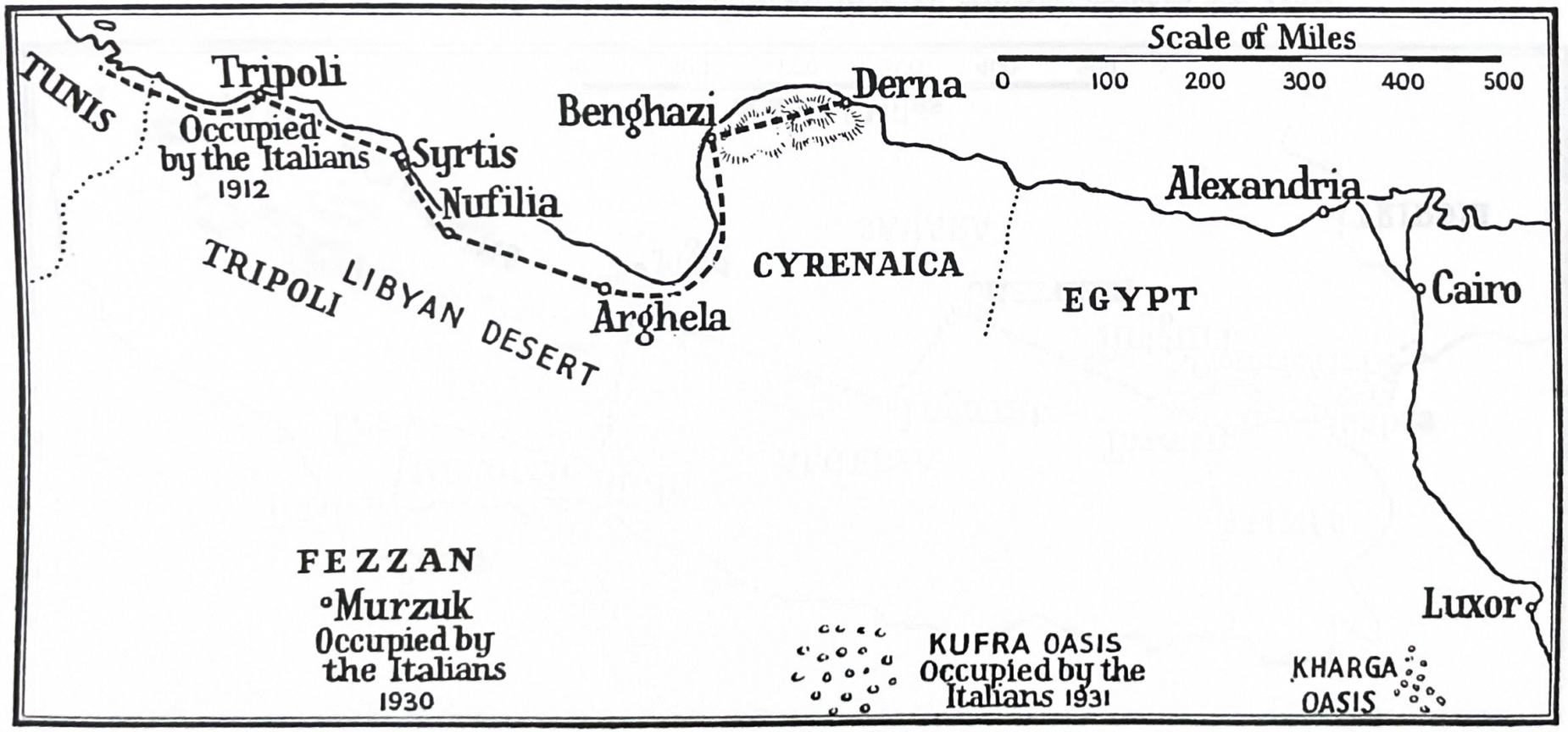
NOTE

The illustrations in this book are reproductions from photographs taken by the author under great difficulties with a small camera.



MAP OF THE FIRST PART OF THE JOURNEY, THROUGH MOROCCO, ALGERIA, AND TUNIS



MAP OF THE LAST PART OF THE JOURNEY, THROUGH THE ITALIAN COLONIES OF TRIPOLI AND CYRENAICA

Between Benghazi and Derna are the forts of Merj, Maraua, Cyrene, and Guba.

CHAPTER I

THE START FROM MOROCCO

It was in the hall of the Hotel Continental in Ceuta in 1930. He was sitting practically opposite me, in a wicker chair, reading *The Times*. His temples were slightly grey, and while he read he swung one foot up and down, which showed that his attention was not fixed on the paper in the way that perhaps it ought to have been.

He yawned, and as he was evidently an Englishman abroad he could not be bothered to hide it with his hand; then he put the paper down on the table, took off his glasses, and stared out into space with red-rimmed eyes.

Only then he caught sight of me and drawled: "It is very hot to-day."

Now I must add as an explanation of this psychologically most un-English trait, that I had talked to him the day before and that we were the only two guests at the Continental.

"Have you got any work done to-day?" I asked.

"Yes." He shrugged his shoulders and irritably threw the butt of his half-smoked cigarette on the floor. "What does it mean to get some work done here? If you mean have I seen anything, I can tell you that I've been driving round with the Governor all the morning. We saw the new pier, the experimental nurseries, the big chemical works, and the new Government building. It's quite nice, all of it. And how are you getting on?"

I shrugged *my* shoulders. "I'm no farther on to-day than yesterday. All the morning I've run from Herod to

Pilate to obtain permission to drive through Spain to Barcelona. But it's always the same. I must wait."

"Yes, I know." He sighed and shook his head. "What else can I write from here than about the marvellous Spanish colonization of Morocco. I have seen positively nothing but figures, statistics, and buildings of concrete—everything one can see just as well in Europe. Oh, yes, I've seen some dirty Arabs run about the streets here in Ceuta—and I'm to write a series of 'Oriental Pictures'!" Slightly irritated, he added: "But why do you insist on going by car to Barcelona?"

"That's been my idea the whole time," I answered. "From Barcelona I'll take a boat to Egypt or Syria. And from there I'll go by car into Arabia."

For some seconds he did not answer. He took his cigarette-case out of his pocket, offered me a cigarette, and lit one himself. Then he blew the smoke out in a big cloud.

"Look here!" He banged the table with his hand. "Why on earth don't you drive through Africa to Egypt?"

"That's impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"You can't get through the Libyan Desert. There's a war in Tripoli and Cyrenaica."

"Why not try? You speak Arabic and have joined Islam. Write us a book on North Africa seen through Arab eyes."

I hesitated a little. "But we discussed all that yesterday. You know that I've joined Islam in all sincerity. I feel that Arabia, Mecca and Medina, should come first."

He shook his head slowly. "No, it's North Africa that is interesting. I don't mean that it would be interesting to know how civilization is progressing. And what is the civilization doing here, anyway? Everybody sees that. But observe Islam as it is in North Africa, and write about it."

"Here Islam is decaying."

"Quite true. But it may take months before you get permission to drive through Spain. Primo di Rivera expects a revolution any day. Start at once; but start in Arab clothes and avoid Europeans."

"It will be very, very difficult," I said. "I shall be arrested; I shall never get through."

"But you would see Africa with the naked eye and not through glasses. Oh, if only I spoke Arabic!"

He stood up, carefully folded his copy of *The Times*, and put it in his pocket; then he went slowly up the stairs.

"Good-bye, and think over what I have been saying."

The porter bowed deeply as he passed.

I sauntered out into the street. It was nearly two o'clock and the sun shone warmly, even now in January. Outside the hotel door, resplendent with brass, sat four Arab shoe-cleaners. They were the only Arabs in sight; otherwise the street was a sea of soft felt hats, hurried business-men of all nations and colours, barelegged Spanish newspaper brats, shouting in their falsetto voices: "*El Sol, El Sol, El Sol de Madrid.*"

I went up the street towards my garage. Outside the *cafés* were young Spanish officers with shining boots and golden epaulettes. Perspiring waiters, with well-greased hair, ran to and fro serving drinks while the money clinked. A brass band blared out *Valencia.*

Europe! Europe!

When I arrived at the garage I paid, got into the car, and drove to the hotel. It was no use waiting any longer. Better follow the Englishman's advice and hope for the best, and perhaps, anyway, I was only following the voice which for days had been whispering to me.

To Tetuan, twenty-five miles.

I woke just before sunrise. The fog which had covered

Tetuan all night was lifting, and from every square minaret sounded the cry that called to prayer.

My room was the same as in any modern hotel from South Africa to the North Cape, most elegant, with hot and cold water, heavy curtains at the windows, soft rugs on the floors.

When the muezzins who summoned the faithful to prayer had become silent and I could again hear the clatter of boots and the rolling of wheels, another sound penetrated to me.

Somebody was singing in one of the Arab houses.

The song sounded sad; it started very soft and low, and then rose gradually, to sink slowly again. I listened. It was the death lament. Perhaps it was a father who sang over his dead child, or a young man who sang at the bier of his father. But the singing had gone on all night, from the time the sun set behind the black Riff mountains till now, when it had dispersed the clammy January fog.

This was going to be my last day as a European, my last day for a long time in an elegant, civilized hotel, and my first day with the people I so much wanted to know and whom one can only get to know by living among them.

I put on my Moroccan burnous (the Arab cloak), and in a few moments I was unrecognizable. The colour of my skin and my blue eyes were of no import, as the people of Northern Morocco are often tall and fair. They have avoided mixing with the Arabs who conquered the plains in the south, and are supposed to be direct descendants of the Vandals, who overran Spain and Morocco a short time before the Arab invasion, and who possibly were closely related to the Scandinavians.

The little porter was busy. As I wanted to leave as soon as possible, I went up to the counter and asked for my bill.

He looked at me a moment, surprised, before he recognized me.

"But, señor, why are you wearing Arab dress?"

"Because I am going to travel through the country."

"You are sure to meet many difficulties."

At that moment two Spanish officers arrived. I had spoken to them the day before and they had been very pleasant. Now they did not know me. I was occupying the place at the counter which they evidently wanted. With a movement of the hand they swept me aside. I understood that I was *déclassé*. I was now *un Moro* and could be treated anyhow.

Well-pressed long trousers and monotonous lounge suits have in certain parts of the world become a proof that you have the civilization which we Europeans think is culture. Suddenly I understood the little story about Abd el Krim, the Riff leader, who once had his ears boxed by a Spanish officer. He fled to the mountains, furious at the insult, and raised a rebellion, which almost swept the Spanish army into the sea, until France came to the aid of Spain and sent one of her best marshals of the World War to Morocco.

I went to the garage to fetch the car—a four-cylindered 1928 Chevrolet, open, and only differing from an ordinary car in that the petrol tank had been enlarged so that I could cover 375 miles without refilling.

When I returned to the hotel the porter told me that an Arab had called and wanted to see me. I was just going up to my room to pack my things when the porter stopped me: "Señor, señor, here he is." I turned round. A young Moroccan stood at the counter. He walked up to me.

"Ya Sidi, are you going to drive through Algeria to Tunis?"

"Yes, but how do you know?"

"I was told in town. May I come with you?"

"In what way do you want to come?"

"I have no money, but I can help you with the car. I want to go to Tunis."

"What is your name?"

"Abdeslam."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen, I believe, but I am not quite sure."

"But haven't you any relatives here?"

"No, my father was in the war with Abd el Krim—he was shot, and my mother has married somebody else. She lives in Xauen now."

Abdeslam looked rather bright, so I decided to take him with me, especially as it would not be amusing to drive alone the first part of the journey through mountains and desert to Tunis.

"Have you got a passport?" I asked him.

Abdeslam nodded and showed me his passport. It was in order and valid for the French protectorates and colonies, so at any rate there could be no question of getting him into Tripoli when I got so far.

We started at nine o'clock. We decided to cross the frontier between the Spanish and French protectorates at Fez and to proceed to the Algerian frontier at Ujda. The trip would really only start from there, as it was my plan to turn south, cross the Atlas Mountains, and reach the Figig oasis in the Northern Sahara.

Our baggage was cut down to bare necessities. We had no tent—I was going to buy one later—and only the most essential cooking gear. For the first few days there would be no opportunity to use camping equipment either, as the real Morocco (that is, the fertile valley lying between the Atlas Mountains in the south and the Riff Mountains in the north) is dotted with small and large towns.

At two o'clock we passed the frontier. Here we turned east towards Fez, the capital of old Morocco. The road

passed through mountains, and for most of the time we had to drive through heavy snow or hail.

Not until five o'clock did we reach Fez and park the car in the market square a short distance outside the town.

I was told that the same evening a religious festival called Esaui was to be celebrated in Fez. I did not know what Esaui meant. No European would be admitted to the house where the celebration took place; but now I found it easy.

The house was in one of Fez's narrow side streets, and the celebration took place in an open courtyard. In a corner of the courtyard an open fire flamed, which made the shadows of all those present assume fantastic shapes.

They had not yet started when I arrived. A number of men were stretching the skins of some large tambourines by heating them over the fire. The onlookers were assembled on the outskirts of the courtyard.

Ten to twelve men of all ages between fifteen and eighty now formed a circle. Each of them had a tambourine in his hands. Simultaneously they all started to beat the tambourines and walked round in a circle, singing:

Help me, O God,
to understand with my human mind
  Thy Divine greatness;
make me, O God,
a servant in Thy Divine universe.

Open my ear
to Thy voice
through every phase of my existence.

Make me, O God,
Thy slave in adoration,
Thine own slave
with no trace of desire
to be above any of Thy creatures.

But while they sang and beat the tambourines at the end of each line, they wandered round in a queer automatic

way. It looked as if they did not grasp the words or the meaning of what they were singing—as if they only heard the rhythm, the eternal throbbing.

When they had sung these verses several times a greybeard stepped a little in front of the others. All now sat down, and the old man began rhythmically to cry, "*La illaha il'Allah.*" The gathering repeated the same cry, first in slow rhythm, but after every hundredth time of repeating the phrase they changed the intonation, and the rhythm was quickened. Everybody stood up. At last they shouted in mad delight. Up and down jerked their heads at lightning speed, and their bodies moved convulsively. Suddenly the greybeard and a small boy stood in the middle of the circle.

A thousand times "*La illaha il'Allah*" was repeated; then they started again from the beginning, and the two dancers foamed at the mouth. At last the old man fell to the ground unconscious and had to be carried away.

Among the onlookers was a very old man. I noticed that time after time he sadly shook his head. I asked him the meaning of this dance.

"I don't understand these people at all," he said. "None of them keep Islam's commandments, and what has the dance here to do with Islam, anyway?"

"But why have they got to repeat '*La illaha il'Allah*' a thousand times?" I asked.

"They entirely misunderstand one of the great teachers, Ben Esau from Meknes. He taught that by continually repeating God's name you would imprint God's image on your heart. Now they imagine that they only have to cry 'There is only one God' a thousand times and they will have achieved Paradise. It is madness! Allah knows what will become of North Africa. The pure teaching of Islam has become a savage incantation."

He sighed.

"I believe it is better to say Allah's name once in your heart."

Before we started the next morning we went to the mosque. The great mosque in Fez has a small, unobtrusive entrance, but all who could were streaming in by this entrance before the sun rose. No Europeans are admitted to any of the mosques in Fez; the natives do not wish to have tourists there watching them at prayer. Nobody, however, tried to stop me from entering the great mosque. Just inside the entrance there was a small court with bowls and running water. Anyone wishing to say his prayers inside had to wash here before he entered the mosque proper.

The cleansing had to be thorough. Arms, neck, and feet had to be washed carefully. Only those who were bodily clean were allowed to say the prayers.

Then the cry sounded from the minaret, and its last refrain, "There is only one God," was repeated by the whole gathering. Then an *Imam* was chosen from among those present who could recite the Koran, and he read a passage from the holy book. No sermon followed, for just as all men are different so is the degree of their religious development, and everybody understands the Koran according to the degree of his development. There was no music either, for although music, as all art, is considered one of the means by which you may reach God, on the other hand it may lead you astray by blurring the clear conception of God which the Islamic prayer tries to give.

When the recital from the Koran had ended the *Imam* stepped forward and exclaimed simultaneously with the worshippers, lifting his hands to his ears, "*Allahu'l akhbar*" ("God is the Greatest"), and from this moment all attention had to be concentrated inwards, if the prayer was to have any value. Then *el Fathah*, the first *sura* of the Koran, was recited, which in translation runs as follows:

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!
The compassionate, the merciful!
King on the day of reckoning!
Thee only do we worship, and to Thee cry
for help.
Guide Thou us on the straight path.
The path of those to whom Thou hast been
gracious;
With whom Thou art not wroth,
And who go not astray.

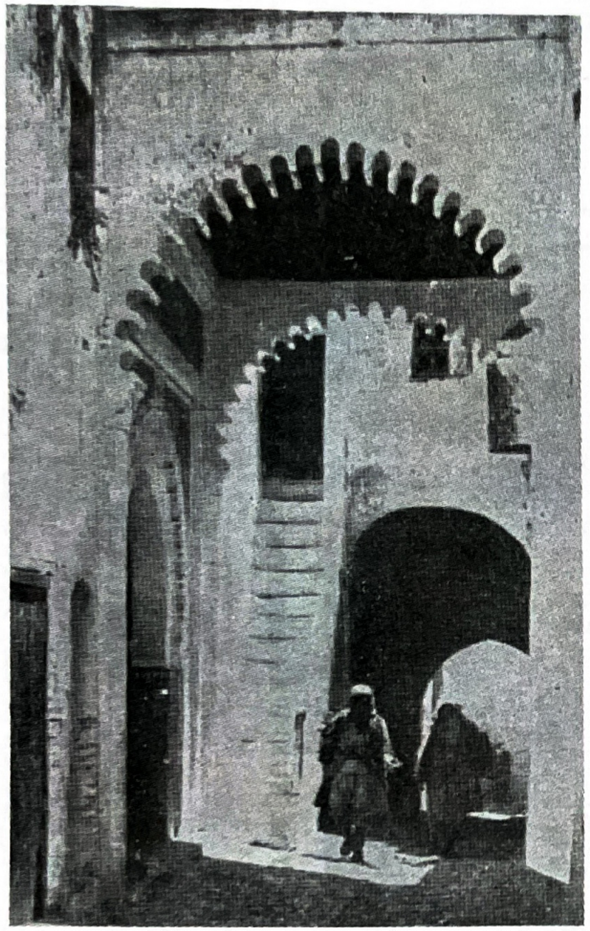
There followed another passage from the Koran, and then came the solemn moment when the foreheads touch the ground as a sign of the ephemeral nature of wisdom, and God is praised as the only One of all creatures who may be adored. When the prayer was over each of the worshippers shook hands with his neighbour and invoked peace for him and for the whole world.

An hour later we were on our way from Fez to Ujda. The road was straight, and so good that we arrived in Ujda by two o'clock. We turned south immediately and that evening reached the starting-point for our trip through the desert, a small oasis close to the northern slopes of the Atlas Mountains.

Here we could get petrol, and the next morning before sunrise we started for Figig, the oasis in the Sahara 125 miles away. When we started the moon was still in the sky; but after a few minutes one caught a glimpse of the first pink tint of dawn behind the mountain-tops. It was icy cold and there was hoar-frost on the sand.

The solitude was absolute, and was only emphasized by the shepherd who, just as the sun rose, said his prayers with his face turned towards Mecca. He did not even turn his head as the car went past.

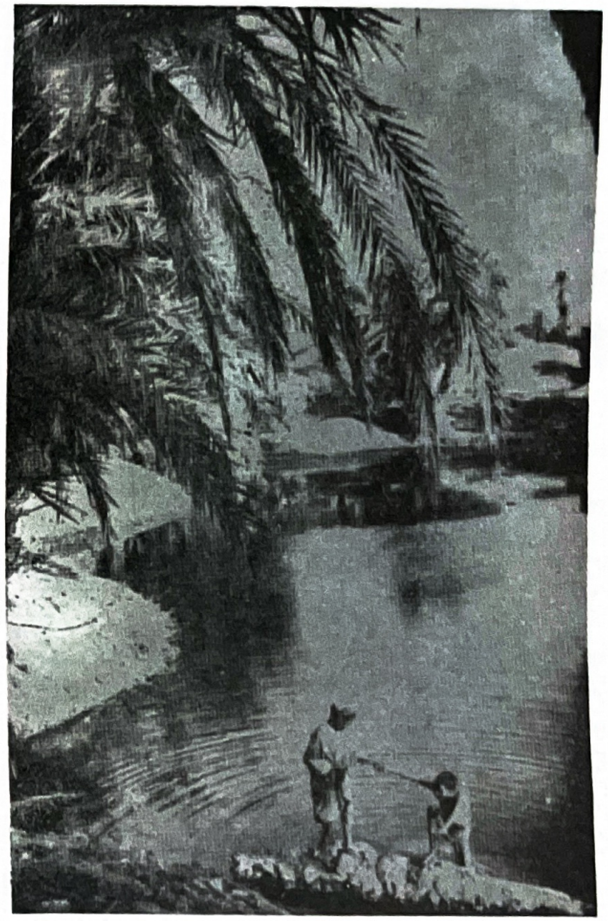
It was biting cold, and only when the sun was fairly high in the sky did the hoar-frost which covered the grey-green, stiff desert sand disappear. But the sky was clear; even in winter there is seldom any rain.



A STREET IN THE ARAB QUARTER IN TETUAN



THE BEDOUIN'S TWO WIVES SAT IN A TENT ON THE BACK OF A CAMEL



ARAB BOYS AT AN OASIS



HARD ROCK WORN AWAY BY THE SAND



AS THE SUN WAS SETTING WE MET A CARAVAN

Mile after mile we travelled without sighting a human being, in a silence unbroken save for the humming of the engine. The road became a mere rut, and in the mountains it was very bad. We had to cruise between deep holes and large stones. The *wadis* or river-beds were filled with water from the melting snow, and several times I thought it would be impossible to get the car through a roaring torrent. But all the river-beds turned out to be rather shallow. We took our shoes and stockings off and waded through before we drove the car across. Getting up full speed, we managed to cross, even though the motor was submerged and spluttered badly for some minutes afterwards.

A few miles farther on the real snow began, but under the sun's rays it became simply slush. We had brought no snow-chains, and several times we slid backward. Luckily all went well, and four hours after we left Kibili we were on the uplands which branch from the Atlas Mountains.

The rough track now led down a steep slope to the limitless sea of sand. We started driving by compass. The track had stopped, but, as we could see on the map, the Figig oasis was so many miles due south, and we were not likely to lose our way.

There came a stretch covered with sharp flints. We had five punctures and had to stop for a couple of hours for repairs.

The landscape constantly changed. Now came a stretch dotted with large boulders, and we had to drive in a zigzag course, advancing very slowly.

As the sun was setting we met a caravan. The camels appeared, walking with slow and majestic steps. We stopped and chatted with the Bedouins, who came from Figig and were going to the market in Kibili.

The leader was a tall, sunburnt man, strong and sinewy,

and had the calm, clear eyes which the life in the desert gives. His two wives had been put in a tent on a camel's back, and four or five barefooted children ran among the camels, which were loaded with all the goods he was taking to the market.

I invited the children to come for a ride and after much persuasion I succeeded in getting them up into the back of the car. The eldest, a boy, kept his hand on the lock and refused to allow me to shut the door. I drove in a small circle, but when I had driven fifty yards I found I had no passengers. They were all mortally scared at the speed and had jumped off.

The head man mounted his leader camel, and with his little rod hit it lightly on one side of the head. The caravan started. The children ran alongside shouting and babbling. Soon they had all disappeared.

The sun set. We began to fear that we had lost our bearings. Soon it was quite dark. We turned the headlights on, and they threw their rays far out across the yellow sands. Sometimes we saw a hyena crouching in the glare, but when we got nearer he jumped aside and only a pair of phosphorescent eyes stared at us as we rushed by.

Then we caught sight of a row of lights far out on the left. They could not be those of Figig, for according to the speedometer we still had about 60 miles to cover. We turned towards them and soon saw four huge fires blazing. As we got nearer we heard a deafening noise, and a pack of large yellow dogs rushed towards the car and tried to jump into it, but we beat them off with a stick. Our headlights showed behind the fires a row of tents—large black shadows which flickered in the flames.

Some men came towards us, carrying rifles, their fingers on the triggers. We stopped, and were immediately involved in hand-to-hand fights with the dogs, who after a few rounds stood back in a circle, snarling and growling

at our slightest movement. The sheik of the camp and two other men approached the car, and when he saw that we wore Arab dress he stretched out his hand and greeted us with "*Salaam aleikum!*" We answered with "*Wa aleikum salaam!*" When the others, who had stood silent and threatening in the background, heard this they chased the dogs away. We had been accepted as guests, and nobody dared hurt us now that we were inside the camp.

The sheik asked us where we came from and where we were going. We explained that we came from Fez and were going to Figig; but that we were not sure that this was the right way.

"Yes," he said, "by Allah, I believe that you are on the right way. But where do you come from since you do not speak the language as we do?" I explained that I came from a country called Danimarca, and that I was on my way to Arabia, to Hejaz.

He smiled.

"Praised be God, you are going to the sacred Mecca. Oh, you are lucky, stranger, who are going to see the sacred city and the places where the Prophet wandered. But I did not quite get the name of your country. Where is it? And are the people there good Moslems?"

I told him that the country was in the far North where the day in winter time only lasts a few hours. He shook his head incredulously.

"Perhaps," I said, "I am the only Moslem in the whole country."

"Have you come here then because you were persecuted?"

"No, in my country you may have any religion you like. You are not persecuted because you choose to change your religion."

"But why then have you joined Islam?"

"Because I believe that you can be happy if you live

according to the teaching of the prophet Mohammed and the prophet Isa."

"Praised be Allah," he answered, "who also spread the light of Truth in the far North. But you must not drive on, stranger. Descend from your car and be my guest."

I allowed myself to be persuaded and went into the largest tent in the camp. There was a large carpet in the middle and a number of sheepskins, on which we sat. The whole camp was wildly excited. At first all the children had gathered in wonder round the car, but were then ordered by the sheik to keep away from it, and so profound was their respect for the head of the camp that not even the strong curiosity they must have been feeling could make them disobey. Now they were all peering at us through the openings in the tent.

As we came in we were asked to sit down next to the sheik. We were introduced to his son, a young man of seventeen with a clever face, and we sat quietly down in a circle on the floor, with our legs drawn in under us tailor-wise. Nobody spoke. Everybody waited for somebody else to start.

As the silence became slightly embarrassing, I produced my cigarette-case and offered it round. They all shook their heads. Not one of them smoked. I looked a little scared at the sheik and said, "But is it prohibited, then?"

"No," he said, "but we think it is better not to smoke. Why should we ruin the health Allah has given us?"

"But," I objected, "one should not do away with all pleasures in life."

"I do not regard it as a pleasure," he said, "and I feel sure that if I smoked much I should get less enjoyment out of life as a whole. But what were you saying about the sun only shining two hours a day in your country at this time of the year?"

He evidently could not forget that.

One of the Bedouins smiled. "It must be very easy to keep Ramadan in the country you come from. It is written in the Koran that you should fast from sunrise till sunset."

"There is a country to the north of mine where the sun does not set at all for a whole month of the year, and farther north still, the night lasts six months and the day another six months," I told them.

My audience began to get restless. It was evident that only the politeness and consideration due to guests kept them from calling me a liar.

"And how would you keep Ramadan in such a country where there is winter and darkness and the sun never rises?" I ventured to ask.

A lively discussion ensued. Most of them held that you should not keep Ramadan at all when the sun did not rise. Besides, it would be so cold that it would be bad for you to fast.

I went further with my criticism.

"As you know, the sun year and the moon year do not coincide. It might happen that the month of Ramadan fell during the six months when the sun was always in the sky? What then?"

One of the young Bedouins remarked that then, of course, you would starve to death.

The sheik broke into the conversation.

"I can quite well believe that the stranger is telling the truth. Don't we ourselves notice that the day is longer in the summer than in the winter? But don't you see how that shows the wisdom of the Koran? It is prohibited by the Koran to fast if it causes you bodily harm. This wise prescription about Ramadan has been given simply in order to create healthy people. If we go towards the north, where the days get shorter and shorter, of course, you must fast less than where it is hot, and if Ramadan falls in a season when the days are longer than the nights you

arbitrarily choose a day which lasts twelve hours, as the days are in Mecca."

The conversation became general, but most of them agreed with the sheik. Some even thought that one should always count the days from six to six, as at Mecca.

Abdullah, the son of the sheik, brought in the tea, served in small glasses. It was very strong, and when we had drunk it the sheik said he had ordered a tent to be prepared for us.

In the tent a straw mat was spread out, and in a corner were put two bolsters of sheepskin. We fetched our rugs from the car, and after the prayer had been said in the sheik's tent we pulled our burnouses over our heads and fell asleep.

The next morning we were awakened by a strange noise, and saw that a camel had been thrown to the ground outside the sheik's tent. A rope had been tied round its nose so that it could not bite, and the legs also were fastened together. It was being treated for vermin.

They scraped it with irons till the blood appeared, and then the skin was rubbed with some strong medicament. The huge beast roared wildly with rage and tried in vain to bite and kick the men who held it.

An old negro, obviously some kind of slave, entered, bringing a large bowl of black coffee and some bread, which no doubt had been cooked in the embers from the fire that very morning. When we had finished our toilet we went to the sheik's tent. He was busy with the affairs of the camp. As he caught sight of us he broke off the consultations and asked us to sit down. We told him that we would like to proceed on our journey, but he insisted on our staying for dinner. Argument was of no avail; we had to wait till the afternoon before starting for Figig.

The time passed quickly until dinner time, and the old

negro, who evidently did all the heavier work in the sheik's tent, now came and asked us to come in for dinner.

The meal took place in the sheik's tent, and as honoured guests we shared it only with the chief of the camp. Not even his son was allowed to take part. With the meal we drank buttermilk made of camel's milk, and when we had finished the sheik asked me if I would lead the prayer, *el Dorr*.

I felt a little anxious about it, as my Arabic, of course, was not quite correct; but I realized that I could not refuse. It was an honour only conferred on very highly esteemed guests.

So I led the prayer for the first time.

When it was four o'clock we took leave of our hospitable hosts and started towards Figig. It proved to be a very difficult journey, for our tyres punctured time after time. Darkness had come and we had already made up our minds to sleep in the car when our headlamps suddenly caught a signpost in the middle of the sand. Half an hour later we entered the sleeping city.

The streets, between the queer houses built of red clay, were deserted. We drove about for several minutes without meeting a soul. Then we saw a man, who told us there was no hotel in Figig, the nearest being at Beni Ounif in Algeria, three miles away.

In utter darkness we passed the frontier between Morocco and Algiers. We stopped a fortnight in Beni Ounif in order to put the car in thorough repair for the long desert trip to Tuggurt. At the time money was rather scarce, and as the overhauling of the car cost a good sum, we had again to postpone buying a tent.

One morning we were ready to start. We limited our baggage to strict necessities. For provisions we bought dates and chickens, as the Bedouins do; and an empty petrol can which would hold four and a half gallons acted

as a drinking-water tank. The back of the car was entirely filled with spare tyres and cans of petrol and oil, and on the luggage carrier which we had fitted to the car we placed a drum containing twenty-five gallons of petrol. Thus, all counted, we should be able to do 600 miles without running short of petrol.

For a few miles the road was good. Then it practically disappeared, and we had to use our compass when there were not even faint ruts to show us where the road ought to have been. We headed north, towards an oasis 125 miles away.

The terrain grew more difficult. It lost its desert character. Large stones were strewn about on the flat plain, which here and there was covered with thick shrubs bearing long, pointed thorns. Queer as it may sound, we found sufficient water. The plain sloped gently upward and we had to cross many streams which evidently came from the melting snow on the mountain slopes in the north. The bed of these streams was always hard, and there was rarely more than a few feet of water, so it was fairly easy to get the car across. About three o'clock we again struck loose sand, our worst enemy. Large drifts appeared at intervals round us, and later became undulations which we could not avoid. On the lowest gear the car worked its way through the fine sand, into which the wheels sank several inches deep. Time after time we stuck. Abdeslam had to get out and push, in order to allow us to back out, and twice we stuck so thoroughly that the car would not move either way. The wheels skidded round in the loose sand without gripping, and we had to dig and put down rugs, branches, and dry grass until we got going again.

About four o'clock a wind sprang up. At first we hardly felt it, but the fine sand on the top of the drifts began to fly about like crisp snow. Suddenly the sky turned a flaming red in the west, whence the wind came. The sun



HUGE DRIFTS OF SAND, WHICH MOVE DURING GALES



A SANDSTORM



A CARAVAN TRAVELLING FROM ONE OASIS TO ANOTHER



CAVE-DWELLERS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE SAHARA

was low, and the sand piled up in front of it like a high mountain, so that we only saw just a pale red glow behind a black wall. Then the glow disappeared, and all was dark. The sand stretched towards the sky like a wall. A gale blew up in a few seconds. In a moment the sand was over us in a choking cloud. Round us the wind roared and howled. We heard the rustling sound made by the movement of the grains of sand. There was no question of driving on. We had to hide in the car under the rugs. The sand, however, penetrated in spite of everything; but we were able to prevent it from filling mouth and ears.

Just as suddenly as the sandstorm had started it stopped. The immense mountain of moving sand retreated from us, and soon we could see it in the distance lit by the setting sun.

The sunset was wonderful.

The whole horizon turned purple; all, even the sand we were driving through, was a flame-coloured sea of red. But immediately the sun had gone it turned cold, and a white clammy mist covered everything. In spite of our headlights we could hardly see a foot ahead, and much against our inclination we had to stop and find a place where we could sleep.

We awoke stiff with cold, and were ready to start just as the sun appeared through the fog like a large red ball, and drove northward, quite hidden in our rugs and coats, with our fingers frozen blue.

At ten o'clock next day we caught sight of some smoke on the horizon. Coming nearer we saw a number of figures crouching huddled round a fire at the foot of a high rock which was honeycombed with holes. We had come across some of the cave-dwellers from the mountains.

We stopped the car a short distance from the fire and went up to the cave-dwellers, who hardly noticed our approach. An old grey-bearded man, evidently the leader of

the little tribe, looked up, nodded curtly, and made a movement with his hand, indicating that we could sit down near the fire. I looked at these queer people. Evidently they were not Arabs, and their language was not Arabic either. It reminded me of the Berber languages which are spoken in the southern part of the Atlas. They were stockily built people, looking rather strong, but of a very dark complexion. On the other hand, it did not look as if they had negro blood in their veins, for their lips were not thick and none of them had the slightest trace of negroid features.

The old man, hunched in front of the fire, was silent for a long time; now and then he threw a branch on the fire, observing it carefully; nothing in the appearance of these queer people seemed to indicate that they were in any way surprised or curious about our arrival. Possibly the women, all of whom were worn and ugly, covered their faces a shade more than usual.

The old man grasped a kettle, which was nearly eaten away by rust, and from which the water dripped slowly through a hole in the bottom. With the aid of an iron bar he placed it over the fire, and then he turned to us, speaking in Arabic.

" Peace be with you, and Allah's protection. From where do you come, stranger, and where are you going? "

" We come from Figig and are going to Tuggurt."

The old man shook his head. He spoke to us, all the while watching that the kettle did not tip over.

" I know neither one nor the other. Are you going far? "

" Yes," I answered. " Tuggurt is nearly 600 miles from here."

The old man looked up from the fire.

" In all my life I have only been one day's march away from here. So I do not know much of the world."

For a little while there was silence. The water started,

faintly, to boil in the kettle. The old man said something to one of the women in his unintelligible language. She returned shortly afterwards with a glass of the kind that is sold by the thousand in the *souks* (markets) in Algiers every day. The old man looked at it proudly. The clothes he and the others wore were all manufactured by the women in this small community, as were all utensils, but nobody in this camp was able to make this cheap German factory glass.

He took it from the woman and started making tea in it.

"You will drink some tea?" he asked.

We accepted, and he passed us the glass filled with strong sweet tea. Some tousled, long-legged hens were running about not far from the fire. I whispered to Abdeslam that we had not many provisions left, and decided to ask the old man if we could buy one of the chickens. He replied that we could have a hen, but in no circumstances would he take any money. After a long discussion I persuaded him to come over to the car, where I made him choose from all the things we had brought with us. He picked a beautiful embroidered waistcoat from Morocco.

We had no opportunity of seeing the dwellings of these queer people; they are hewn out of the rock and have no doubt existed like that and been handed down from father to son for thousands of years. These caves are really, for living purposes, quite practicable. The smoke does not penetrate into them; they are always cool during the heat of the day, and warm in winter time.

We went on. Not far from the caves we caught sight of their common well. The well was only about thirty feet deep, and the old man told me that there was always plenty of water, as it rained in the mountains during the greater part of the year. This well was the very life-blood of the strange tribe. Thanks to it they had arranged an

intricate irrigation system, so that the water was continually led through some narrow channels, dug criss-cross through the cultivated land, which sloped gently.

Over the well a huge wheel had been placed, to which a rope with a number of buckets had been attached. In the same way as on a modern mud-dredger the buckets were continually refilled from the well and the contents were emptied into a channel as the wheel turned. The wheel was worked by a dromedary which evidently was too old to do any other work. He had been blindfolded in order not to get dizzy. The last impression we had of the tribe was the sight of this old dromedary, which, with twitching lips, walked round and round all day long in order that the water might continually ripple over the arable land.

For a couple of hours we fought our way over difficult country and gradually rising ground. We stopped shortly after noon and made some soup from the hen. The meal was not exactly Lucullian. The hen itself was old and tough, and it was a hard job to get it down.

About five o'clock we arrived at crossroads. The camel tracks here led in all directions, and it was hard for us to make up our minds which way to go. A very bad path led to the left, while a much better track went straight on. We chose the best track, although no road whatever was shown on our map.

The sun set. The gradient increased all the time. Every minute the track grew worse till it was practically impossible to drive on it. It was full of yard-deep hollows, which we could only avoid with the greatest difficulty. Time and again we had to stop and manœuvre the car slowly across such spots, and at our greatest speed a man running might easily have kept pace with us. We began to feel the cold, although we were both wrapped in all our blank Obviously we were very high up, but we could not see

by the light of our headlamps, and therefore had no idea of the character of the landscape. About eight o'clock it began to snow. At the same time the wind rose, and soon a violent snowstorm raged about us, so that we could only see a few yards ahead. We closed the hood as far as possible, but it was not snowproof after the damage it had sustained during the violent sandstorm in the desert. The snow fell more and more thickly. At first it melted the moment it touched the ground, but by about ten o'clock we had evidently reached a very considerable altitude, for here it lay thickly. We had the impression that the track was very narrow and running alongside a cliff wall. Suddenly the track turned sharply. The light fell in a cone across an enormous precipice. We stopped the car and got out. On one side a wall of rock rose perpendicularly, on the other the abyss yawned. In the lowest gear we attempted to continue along the narrow mountain path, but a hundred yards farther on we again stopped. A bridge led across the abyss—but it was not an ordinary bridge. It was suspended by ropes from one side of the chasm to the other, and when I got out to investigate I found that it was paved with loose boards.

We both felt rather anxious. The snow kept falling in huge flakes, and from the bottom of the precipice we heard the jackals howling and the piercing shrieks of birds of prey. Neither of us dared to sit in the car while we crossed. We started it, and standing on the running-boards we managed in some miraculous manner to get it across. On the other side the track rose sharply, then zigzagged again. The snow fell thicker and thicker. Suddenly we were surprised to see a light. There was a long row of houses—we were in a street of a town.

I sounded the horn a couple of times, and the deserted street came to life. The most weird-looking figures clad in thick woollen burnouses poured out from the houses and

gathered round the car. They asked one another in Arabic, strongly seasoned with some Berber dialect, who we might be, and whither we had come. So far, however, nobody addressed a word to us.

It was obvious that most of the inhabitants had never seen a car before, since they gaped at it with open mouths. One of them advanced and touched it gingerly. I asked him if we could stay for the night, but as soon as they heard my pronunciation they shouted all at once:

"*Inte fransawi* [You are French]."

They became more threatening, and I heard remarks such as "You can be sure he has come for no good purpose" and "Send him out of the town again."

Luckily the sheik of the village now appeared and turned out to be an enlightened man of some culture, who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, had spent some time in Egypt, and in his youth had been to France. I explained to him where we came from, that we were both Moslem, and that we were going to Egypt. When he heard this and had seen the Arabic paper I had brought with me for safety's sake he became very affable and invited us to stay in his house. The sheik's house was the largest in the town, built of roughly hewn natural stone, and very spacious. A roaring fire was lit in the room we were going to sleep in, which a few moments later was filled to capacity by the inhabitants of the town. The sheik was an old man with a grey beard and a mild and kindly face. He sat down with the rest on the straw mat on the floor, and while his thirteen-year-old son was ordered to make some tea at the fire in the hearth we had a little chat, which was followed intently by all those present.

"Have you been in Algiers?" asked the sheik.

I nodded, and one of them remarked:

"By Allah, stranger, you may well believe that Shei' Abd el Aziz is a much travelled man. He is the only o1

of this town, except a merchant from Ghardaia, who has seen the French."

"I myself am going to Ghardaia," I put in. "When is he returning there?"

"Here he is," said the man who had just spoken, and pushed a short fat man out into the light from the fire.

"Listen, Hussein, the stranger is asking you when you intend to go back to Ghardaia."

"I had thought of going to-morrow," said the merchant, a little shy of the situation.

Everybody looked at him.

"That suits me all right," I remarked. "If you like I can give you a lift. I have got to pass through Ghardaia on my way to Tuggurt."

The merchant thanked me profusely, and we decided to leave early next morning. The tea was ready. The boy served it, and I offered cigarettes. The inhabitants present all liked smoking.

"Some Bedouins I met in the desert did not smoke," I told them.

The sheik nodded.

"Most of the Bedouins do not smoke, or take anything that in the slightest degree might affect their health, but we here in the town have taken to it. But if you get right out east, towards Barce,[1] you will find that the people in the towns do not smoke either. Over there they are Senoussis."

"What are Senoussis?"

"They are a sect founded by Sidi Ahmet Senoussi, very strict and pious. Their sole aim in life is to become as noble as is humanly possible, and in order to achieve this end they think that asceticism is absolutely necessary.

"Are there many of them?"

"Yes, there are many in Tripoli and Cyrenaica. If you,

[1] Another name for Meij in Cyrenaica.

as you say, are going through to Egypt, you will see for yourself. They are fighting hard against the Italians."

"How do you like the French?" I asked him.

"If we cannot be allowed to govern ourselves, then the French are not the worst. They do try to understand us and treat us like human beings. But all the same they are strangers." He sighed. "It is like that everywhere here in North Africa. The strangers say that we cannot govern ourselves, and in the towns we Arabs have never been so poor, so downtrodden, as we are now. Here it is still all right; no foreign influence has penetrated yet."

The old sheik lit a cigarette.

"But what about you? Why have you joined Islam?"

"Oh, there are so many reasons," I answered. "First of all, I saw how Islam preached that you must live according to your religion. Other religions only demand faith in fossilized dogmas. Secondly, I consider Islam to be the only religion which will be able to survive our modern times. It is clear and concise, tolerant towards everybody as long as they do not deny God, and it grips you because you soon find out that following it leads you onward."

Sheik Abd el Aziz smiled vaguely.

"As I told you before, I have seen much of the world, including the part from which you come. At first it impressed me. I thought the things you had created were so immense—but luckily I one day found out that in Europe you develop outwardly, and ascribe to that the greatest importance. Now I know that the eternal truths are always the same and cannot be shaken, and one of the eternal truths is Islam—God's Way."

"Then you don't approve of civilization?"

"No. I have seen how everybody thinks that European dress, motor-cars, wine, and engineering are the only things that matter. But what do we learn from all that?

Have all these things rendered one single person happier or better?"

"Probably rather to the contrary," I said seriously.

"That is why we fear that these things will penetrate here. We do not want them; we only wish to be allowed to keep our religion and the contentment which few needs and industry give. It is probably much more difficult to produce the necessities of life with our simple implements, but we do not want machinery. We do not require much, and our children live happily believing in almighty Allah."

He sighed.

"I am perhaps the only person in the town who understands these things; the others are impressed."

It was nearly midnight. The little Ali, who had been serving the tea, firmly refused to accept money. I offered him a cigarette. He solemnly shook his head.

"I am learning the Holy Koran at present, and am not allowed to smoke."

He suddenly caught sight of an Arab Koran which I had put on the floor among other books. He took it up, kissed it, opened it, and recited a *sura* in his beautiful voice. When he had finished and gone the cocks were already crowing. I fell asleep in the middle of this queerly peaceful world. The next morning Ali brought tea and cakes, a present from the sheik. I was too tired to get up and slept on till Abdeslam turned up at eight o'clock, accompanied by the merchant, whom I was very glad to have with us, for we had to go back several miles in order to pick up the right track. We started at ten o'clock, and of course the whole population was intensely interested. The sheik gave us a lamb to take with us, and all the inhabitants brought cakes and cigarettes. There was no question of allowing us to pay. They were all gifts, and we should have offended the people mortally if we had offered money.

About noon the road went rather steeply downhill and became much broader, and again we could see the desert in front of us. The snow which had fallen in the mountains overnight now mixed with the slush in the road, and we stuck innumerable times and often had great difficulty in getting the car free again. At two we were in the desert, and about seven o'clock we rolled into Ghardaia. At sunrise we took leave of the merchant.

Twenty-five miles from Ghardaia, when we were crossing some desert country, the engine suddenly began to knock. I thought the oil was wrong, but on investigating found that there was no water in the radiator. Although we had covered the car up during the frosty night in the mountains the radiator somehow had sprung a leak. We filled the radiator with twenty pints of our spare water and proceeded to a small oasis about 12 miles ahead. There were only three or four houses; but the inhabitants did all in their power to help us. We took off the radiator and tried to solder it. After great efforts we partly succeeded; all the same, a tiny split remained, through which the water dripped.

CHAPTER II

CAVE-DWELLERS AND A SORCERER

THE next morning we started with the radiator still leaking a little; but as it was not possible to get it mended till we got to Tuggurt we took 30 pints of water as extra supply.

About ten o'clock it came on to blow badly. The sand formed a large dust cloud, covering everything, and soon we could not see our hands before us, much less find the trail. We had to stop and creep in under the blankets. It was several hours before the storm had subsided and we could proceed. Just as we started the engine Abdeslam caught sight of a figure far ahead. It was a man quite alone who was struggling through the sand. As we approached we saw that he was very old, with a long, snow-white beard. He hardly even turned his head as we drew alongside, but when we spoke to him he stopped and greeted us.

He was a strange figure. His face was furrowed and wrinkled, and his clothes were in rags. His skin was hardened and dark brown. He looked like a beggar, wandering about alone in the desert, with his sack on his back; but he did not ask for anything.

"*Salaam aleikum*," he said, in a voice that shook with age. We answered his greeting and asked if he were going to Tuggurt and could we give him a lift? But he just shook his head.

"But why won't you drive with us?"

"Does it matter whether I arrive five days earlier or later?"

"But no doubt you have something to do in Tuggurt, and would like to arrive early."

"Here, where there are no human beings, I am alone with Allah; here I can hear my own heart beat. Your machine is strange to me."

He patted the bag he carried across his shoulders.

"Here I have my dates; and I have some bottles of water. That is all I need, and I shall not fall ill till Allah bends my body towards the ground."

"Anybody may fall ill."

"O stranger, you evidently do not know the story of the Persian doctor in Arabia. I will tell you. When Arabia after the appearance of the prophet Mohammed (peace and blessing be on his name) spread its culture over all the world it happened that a Persian doctor was so inspired by the new faith that he decided to go to Mecca and cure the sick there. He was a very famous doctor and nobody could understand why he would leave his own country, where he was so famous, and go to the stony Arabia.

"But he left and went both to Mecca and Medina. But, queer as it may sound, nobody consulted him: nobody asked him to practise his art as a doctor. One day in Medina, when the thoughts of this weighed heavily on his mind, he went to the chief man of the town and said to him: 'O Kaid, peace be with you! In Persia all the great ones of the land came to me and asked me to cure their sufferings. How is it that nobody seeks my advice here? Are my knowledge and art so poor that nobody has any use for them?'

"The Kaid smiled and said: 'O Hakim, peace be with you too! No, your art has not become poorer by coming to Arabia. But in this happy country nobody requires a doctor.'

"'Nobody requires a doctor?' repeated the doctor, astonished. 'But anybody may fall ill.'

"The Kaid continued: 'In Arabia we are accustomed to eat only what the body requires, considering our body to be the slave of our spirit. Think this over, O Hakim, and you will find the best remedy.'

"And the doctor gave up his practice and stayed in happy Arabia."

The old man smiled to himself when he had told the story, and then said:

"That will also explain my health to you, which I pray Allah alone to preserve. I live on dates and water and have never been ill."

"But I have never seen so much illness as in the towns here in the East," I objected.

The old philosopher shook his head.

"Very few people in North Africa live according to Islam's instructions; if they did we should not need any doctors. I am old now, and my fatigue may make my body collapse, but it might just as well happen here as in a town. And isn't Allah nearer to me here?"

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

His face shone.

"I am always content. Don't I learn something every day from everything that happens? If I am happy and must starve, I thank God that He teaches me to be patient and content with little, and if I am rich and have abundance I learn generosity. But through it all I see God's face shine upon me."

Abdeslam jumped out of the car, caught the old man's hands, and kissed them. Turning to me he said:

"Don't you see he is a holy *marabout*?"

I asked the old man his name.

"Sidi Mohammed," he answered, "but I am nameless. When I arrive in Tuggurt nobody will know me."

"But where are you going?"

"To Mecca, where I hope to die."

"Are you going to walk all the way?"

"No, only to Tunis, from where there are pilgrim ships." The old man nodded and said: "It is better to be a beggar than a king. O stranger, as you know, in one bed there may be room for ten beggars, while in a whole country there is hardly room for two kings."

He began to walk on. For some minutes we did not think of starting the engine, which had stopped. Abdeslam said, full of enthusiasm: "He was a very holy man. It will bring us luck to have met him."

At length the engine hummed again, and we struggled on through the sand.

About four o'clock serious trouble started in the radiator. The small hole in it had become larger, and soon we had no more water.

It was no use trying to repair it, but as the sun soon set and it began to get cooler we thought it might be possible to drive on without the radiator till the engine began hammering, and then stop to cool off.

It was a slow process. We drove on for five minutes, then the engine began to hammer; we stopped an hour till it was cool, then drove on for five minutes, then stopped again. We moved at a snail's pace, and there seemed to be no hope of reaching Tuggurt for several days.

All next day we did not drive at all, for when the sun was in the sky it was burning hot, and the engine got overheated practically immediately. We crept in under our blankets and tried to fight our thirst as best we could.

The situation began to be desperate. Round us as far as the eye could see there was only sand, yellow and red sand, which hurt one's eyes in the sunlight. And with the slightest breath of wind the sand would drift and fill ears and nose.

There was little hope of meeting a caravan. Weeks

might pass between caravans in these parts, and even after a week only our skeletons would be left!

The whole day we stayed there, and only after the sun had set after a scorchingly hot day did we go on, but by midnight we were only a few kilometres from the place where we had spent the day. We crept in under our blankets and fell asleep. A breeze got up and we heard the wind ring, when the fine grains of sand hit each other. It sounded as if the spirits of the desert were whispering and murmuring.

Suddenly Abdeslam jumped from under the blankets. He had fallen a victim to the terror of the desert which often grips the man from the towns in these implacable regions. He turned pale under the brown skin and shouted with staring eyes:

"I won't go on any farther. There are evil spirits round us."

"Why do you think so?" I said, and tried to calm him down.

"Can't you hear them whisper?" he said. He hid under the blankets and kept muttering the first verse of the Koran, which all Moslems know, and the verse which protects against evil spirits:

Surah Al-Nas

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,
I seek refuge in the Lord of men,
The King of men,
The God of men,
From the evil whisperings of the slinking Devil,
Who whispers into the hearts of men
From among the djinn and men.

The wind grew in strength. But in the middle of this eerie experience I thought that I heard the baying of dogs in the distance.

"Can you hear it?" I asked Abdeslam.

He listened too; but the sound had gone, and for half an hour we heard nothing.

Then it was there again. It sounded as if a pack of dogs were raging far away. We got out of the car and walked in the direction of the sound; but again it got fainter till it disappeared entirely.

Abdeslam was shaking with fear.

"It is not natural, this; it is the evil spirits," and again he mumbled the *sura* which protects against evil.

We were afraid to lose sight of the car, so we returned to it and sat down to sleep, but we had hardly closed our eyes when the dogs again started barking. I jumped up and took Abdeslam by the arm, and said: "There must be people somewhere about. Come on, we will go on till we find them."

When we had gone half a mile in the direction of the sound we saw a camel track. Abdeslam bent down and picked up a piece of camel dung. It was still fresh.

"There have been people here yesterday," he said.

We hurried along the trail.

The baying soon sounded uninterruptedly, and a little farther on a pack of large dogs of the kind the Bedouins use for protection came tearing towards us, and attacked us. We threw stones at them, and as they are rather cowardly they kept at a distance, barking more and more furiously as we advanced.

At length we discovered the human dwellings. In front of us there was a chalk face about fifteen feet high, in which, like swallows' nests in a clay slope, were a number of holes big enough for a man to pass through easily. Up the side of the cliff steep stairs led up to a larger entrance.

Were these cliff-dwellers going to prove friends or enemies? Would they kill us and take all we possessed, or would they treat us kindly and give us food and drink? We were hungry and thirsty. We had had nothing to drink but a few drops from the radiator for thirty-six hours. Our tongues were swollen, and the dates we had

brought were so dry that it was impossible to get them down without drinking at the same time. The dogs behaved quite hysterically now we were so near the people they were guarding. They rushed towards us barking, while they bared their white teeth and their bristles stood stiff like those of a hyena.

We did not feel very happy about going up to the main entrance. But we dared not go alone to the well to draw water. We had to ask permission first. Luckily the problem solved itself. A man with a turban, dressed in a burnous stretching to his knees, pointed his long, old-fashioned rifle at us and asked why we had come.

I explained that we were on our way to Tuggurt and that our car had broken down. But he became still more threatening and grunted that if I wanted help I could ask my own people. The Europeans had never helped him. I told him that his people were my people and that as a Moslem I asked for protection.

On hearing this he lowered his rifle and asked Abdeslam: "Does he speak the truth? Is he a Moslem?"

Abdeslam answered in the affirmative and added that I knew a number of *suras* by heart in Arabic, an accomplishment that is not very common among the Algerian population. The man on top of the stairs, who looked terrifying, with a huge unkempt beard, said to me in a calmer tone of voice:

"That's excellent! You can read the Koran to us tomorrow. In the name of Allah, come in!."

With a gesture of his hand he signed to us to follow him; we mounted the staircase and came into a tiny room hewn in the rock. The cave-dweller to whom we had spoken lit a small oil-lamp, and we saw a strange sight. In the corner of the first little room was a bier, covered by a large rug, under which we could see the outline of a human form. Abdeslam started murmuring the first

verses of the death *sura*, the only ones he knew. But we did not have time to wonder who was under the rug, for we were beckoned into the next room. Here was a fireplace in the middle, evidently made of gypsum, and the chimney, built from roughly hewn stones, opened out to the surface of the rock. Round the hearth, in which a fire blazed, lay three or four sleeping boys. They did not even wake up as we came in and the light of the lamp shone straight on them. Abdeslam did not feel very happy about the state of affairs, and I willingly admit that it was all rather uncanny. Abdeslam incessantly kept repeating: "Oh, I wish I had never left Tetuan!"

Our guide, asking us to sit down, went into an inner room. A few seconds later he appeared with a bowl of crystal-clear water and a large lump of dates. We drank and ate ravenously, and felt our courage return. The old man made us understand that we could lie down to sleep where we were.

I was awakened an hour before dawn by somebody shaking me. Half drunk with sleep I stood up.

"*Ya Sidi*," he whispered, "we must leave now and you must come in order to read the death *sura*. Praised be Allah that you have arrived here!"

The boys with whom we had slept were awake, and now sat staring at the queer strangers, who had eyes of a colour they had never seen before.

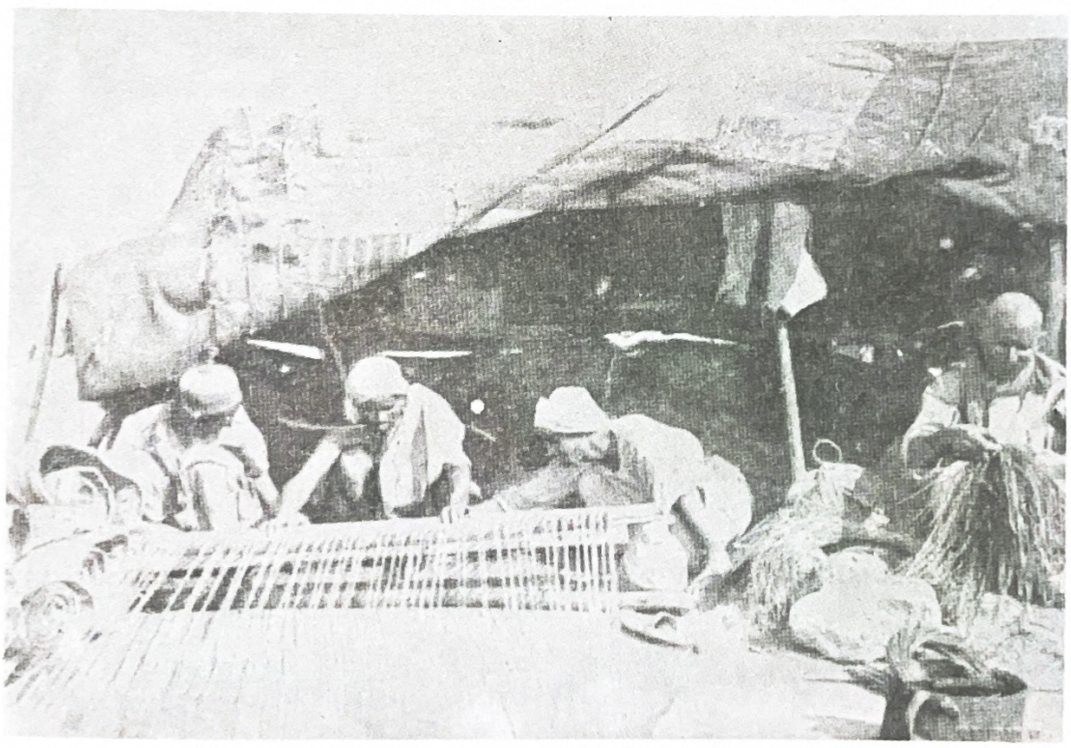
Abdeslam also got up, and we went outside and down the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs stood our host and another man. On their shoulders they carried the bier I had seen the day before.

"Good morning!" said my host. I answered, and without further conversation the procession started. In front were the two men with the dead body on their shoulders;



BEDOUIN WOMEN MAKING BUTTER



BEDOUINS MAKING MATS



PRAYERS IN A BEDOUIN CAMP



WOMEN FROM A BEDOUIN CAMP WASHING CLOTHES

behind came Abdeslam, the three boys and I. While we walked the Islamic article of faith was sung: "*La illaha il'Allah, Mohammeda rasul-'lah.*"

In about half an hour we arrived at a small mosque, evidently built over the tomb of a marabout. Round about in the yellow sand were graves, on which had been placed rifles, ploughs, and all kinds of implements which the dead had used during their lifetime.

The bier was put down outside the door of the mosque, in the sand, and we entered the small room, the floor of which was covered with dry grass.

The man with whom I had spoken last night and who was obviously the leader of the small community turned towards Mecca and said a prayer in a loud voice. When that was over and he had finished the two *rakat* with "*Salaam aleikum, wa rahmatulla,*" he came up to me and said:

"Ya Sheik, your boy said that you knew the Koran. I only know the prayer. Will you read the death *sura*?"

Luckily I knew the death *sura*. We went outside where the first tiny streak of daylight just began to tint the eastern sky, and the sickle of the moon grew fainter and fainter, and while all present covered their faces I read the death *sura*: "*Wa el Koran el Hakim.*"

Then the head man, with tears streaming down his cheeks, went up to the bier and tore the cover away. A very old man with a white beard was wrapped in the shroud.

Gently he took hold of the dead man's head while somebody else took the feet, and they put the corpse in the grave which had been dug a couple of yards deep in the loose sand.

"And to Allah do we return," murmured the head man as he gently shovelled the sand back.

Then he erected one stone at the head and one at the

feet, and with his head towards Mecca the dead man slept his last sleep.

The sun had risen. The insects wheeled in the clear morning air. We returned silently to the caves.

On the open ground outside the caves two big fires had been lit, over which large iron pans were steaming. The women were boiling sheep's and camels' milk.

In a corner about fifty sheep—strange lean animals with large fat tails—huddled together, and three kneeling camels were mumbling juicy cactus leaves without heeding the sharp thorns.

The three boys whose room we had shared during the night were busily engaged watering the animals. They drew the water from a shallow well, using a dromedary to pull up the heavy bucket. The water was poured out in a stone trough.

We sat down round the fire and asked the headman why they did not drink tea or coffee.

"Once we had some which I had bought at Tuggurt. But it was all used up. I have not been to Tuggurt for two years, and the boys have never seen a town."

"I have some tea in my car which I would like to give you. Let us go out to the car now and you can have it."

The headman shook his head.

"You have already rendered us a great service by reading the death service. If you had not been here we should have had to wait till somebody who knew the Koran happened to pass. You are our guest and we would like to give the best in our power, but you are not to give us anything in return."

"But tea is only a trifle."

"It is not a trifle for us," said the headman. "If we want it we have to fetch it from Tuggurt; just think what that means."

"But please do let me give you some, all the same," I pleaded.

At length he agreed. It was quite clear that he would like to have some tea, but he was most reluctant to do anything which in the slightest degree might infringe the rules of hospitality.

The women now brought the breakfast. Like the women in the Bedouin camp they were not veiled. They shook hands with both Abdeslam and myself and asked us how our remote ancestors were.

The meal was very simple. Bread was unknown. Instead we each had a basin of boiling milk and a handful of dried dates. For dessert we had some sweet green prickly pears.

When we had eaten the headman asked me: "Why won't your car go?"

I explained that I had no water and that the radiator was leaking, but that we could probably drive it to the caves if we took some water out to it. The boys had finished watering the sheep and camels, and he therefore ordered them to bring two jars of water, which he would not allow us to carry.

When we reached the car we saw sitting on the running-board the marabout we had met in the desert.

"Peace be with you!" he said to me, smiling. "You see, I get on as quickly as you do."

When the cave-dwellers saw his rags they put the jars down in the sand, hurried up to him, and covered his hands with kisses.

"Oh, thou holy man," they both cried, "praise be Allah who has sent you to us! We hope by Allah that you will honour our dwellings by visiting them."

The old man shook his head.

"I must go on alone," he said. "I am on my pilgrimage and it is best to be alone."

Both the men exclaimed:

"Oh thou, who soon wilt be Hadj, think of us when thou art at the holy Kaaba in Mecca."

The headman sighed.

"I am afraid it will not be granted me to see the holy city where the Prophet wandered."

We gave the marabout some of our dates and filled his flasks with water. When he had rested for about a quarter of an hour he went on, silent and alone.

Abdeslam, who had developed into a good mechanic, fixed the radiator in about half an hour, the two cave-dwellers got warily into the back of the car, and a few moments later we were at the caves.

We stayed several days with the cave-dwellers, wondering how to get the car mended. It was one of the young men who solved our problem by bringing a small bag of burnt gypsum, which he said they used for building.

It turned out to be excellent. When we had smeared all the underpart of the radiator with the plaster-like earth it leaked no longer.

We said good-bye to our hosts, who on no condition would accept any gifts in return for what they had done for us, and three hours later we were in Tuggurt, the last town of Algiers, the strange rendezvous in the desert where Arabs, Tuaregs, and Frenchmen meet.

The sun was setting behind the flat roofs. The whole sky was flaming red, and an old man in the market-place, just inside the walls, said with a happy smile:

"I think it is going to rain to-morrow."

I asked him if it was a long time since he had seen rain here.

"Yes," he said, "it is more than five years, and there are even children here who do not know what rain is."

We drove through the narrow streets to the hotel where we had decided to stay a couple of days. Our room had

one window with bars across it on a level with the street. We were tired and went to rest when we had eaten, but we were not to be left in peace for long. A noise like an engine far away increased in strength as if an enormous cradle were being rocked to and fro to the accompaniment of the blowing of bellows. The part of the street which we could see was suddenly lit up, and some men with big torches appeared. At that moment a queer procession came round the corner at the far end of the street.

In front came a negro, with four jackal-tails fastened to his shaggy fur cap. Round his neck he carried a serpent and a string from which hung all kinds of bones, bits of wings, metal objects, and animals' tails. He danced forward, now standing on one leg, now on the other, foaming at the mouth as he danced. His face was convulsed and he was beating a huge drum. Behind came six other men with tambourines which they struck in answer to the drum.

Behind came men playing wooden flutes and finally a great swarm of people, who soon filled the entire street. About the middle of the street the procession stopped. The strange medicine-man went up to a house, took out a bone, and knocked three times on the door with it. Both Abdeslam and myself went out into the street. Although we had already attracted some attention in our Moroccan dresses, nobody thought of harming us.

As there was not an immediate answer the medicine-man knocked again at the door. Still there was no answer, and only after the negro had knocked for the third time a man's voice sounded from within.

"*Min?*" ["Who's that?"]

"It is Sidi Abd el Kadr who is here. It is Sidi Abd el Kadr from the mountains who will cure your sick son."

"*Min?*" sounded the voice once more from within.

"Ya Sidi," answered the negro, "it is the holy Dervish

Abd el Kadr who lives in the caves in the shadow of the palms."

Once more came the question from within, "*Min?*"

"Ya Sidi, if you want a cure for your son then you will open the door. For it is Abd el Kadr who is outside—Abd el Kadr, who knows the flight of the eagle and has the quick wits of the hunting-dog and the strength of the lion within him."

The door opened slowly, and the crowd outside watched intently. An old man appeared, went up to the negro, and kissed his hand.

"Welcome, *ya Sidi*," he said.

"You know that I can cure your son," answered Abd el Kadr.

"Allah alone knows if my son can be cured, but do you think you can read what is written in the golden book?"

Abd el Kadr tossed his head so that the jackal-tails danced, then lifted the bone and beat his drum. At a sign from him two of his followers went into the house and returned with a bier, which was placed in the middle of the street. On the bier was a boy hardly sixteen years old, whose eyes were red and swollen; only with the greatest difficulty did he succeed in moving his eyelids.

Abd el Kadr took a torch and, holding it right in front of the boy's face, asked: "Can you see the light?"

"*La, ya Sidi*," answered the boy in a weak voice. The father burst into tears and went up to the bier, bent down, and kissed the boy on both cheeks.

"*Ya Ali*," he said, "don't worry. If Abd el Kadr can't give you back the light of your eyes, I will be your eyes as long as I live. Oh, my only son, what have I done to have deserved this punishment? But the name of Allah be praised!"

The negro, growing impatient, grasped the old man's shoulder and said:

" When you have called in Abd el Kadr, Abd el Kadr comes to help. But we are hungry and thirsty."

The old man sighed. Then he took out a leather bag which he carried on a string round his neck and counted out some silver coins, which he put in Abd el Kadr's hand.

Abd el Kadr sat down; the musicians started playing. The sorcerer began to draw on the ground with the bone, moving his head to and fro while he mumbled; the music played louder and louder. Suddenly he gave a sign and the music stopped. " I see nothing," he murmured. " We are still hungry and thirsty."

The old man sighed, took out the leather bag, and put half of its contents in Abd el Kadr's outstretched hand.

" Be merciful," he whimpered. " I am a poor man, a very poor man."

Again the music played, this time a little longer and more excitingly, but still Abd el Kadr's mask was unmoved. He shook his head so that the tails danced, and looked gloomy.

" *Ya Sidi,* take your money back, I can see nothing." But at the same time he squinted at the leather bag, which was still half full. " Take it all," moaned the old man, " take it all for the sake of my son," and he put the leather bag in Abd el Kadr's hand.

The music started again and the drums began to beat. Abd el Kadr moved his head forward and backward, faster and faster, till he foamed at the mouth and showed the whites of his eyes like an unconscious man.

Suddenly all was silent, and Abd el Kadr said in a solemn voice, " *Sja, sja.*"

He was given two squawking chickens. He caught one by the head, tore out the tongue, smeared his fingers with blood, and then daubed it on one eye of the sick boy. The same procedure followed with the other chicken.

The two chickens were let loose and ran about without

uttering a sound, but the blood streamed out of their mouths. Somebody caught them, and they were killed.

The ceremony was over; the torches, drums, flutes, and the mad negro all disappeared. The boy was carried into his father's house.

"Do you believe in such things," I asked Abdeslam.

He did not quite know what to answer.

"Why not? Abd el Kadr is a very holy man, who lives out in the mountains."

"But did you see how he took money from that poor old man and in what a barbaric way he tried to cure the eyes. Do you think that Abd el Kadr is like Sidi Ahmed Idriss from Fez or Sidi Mohammed whom we met in the desert?"

Abdeslam did not reply to my question, but merely said: "I won't come any farther. I wish I could go back to Tetuan."

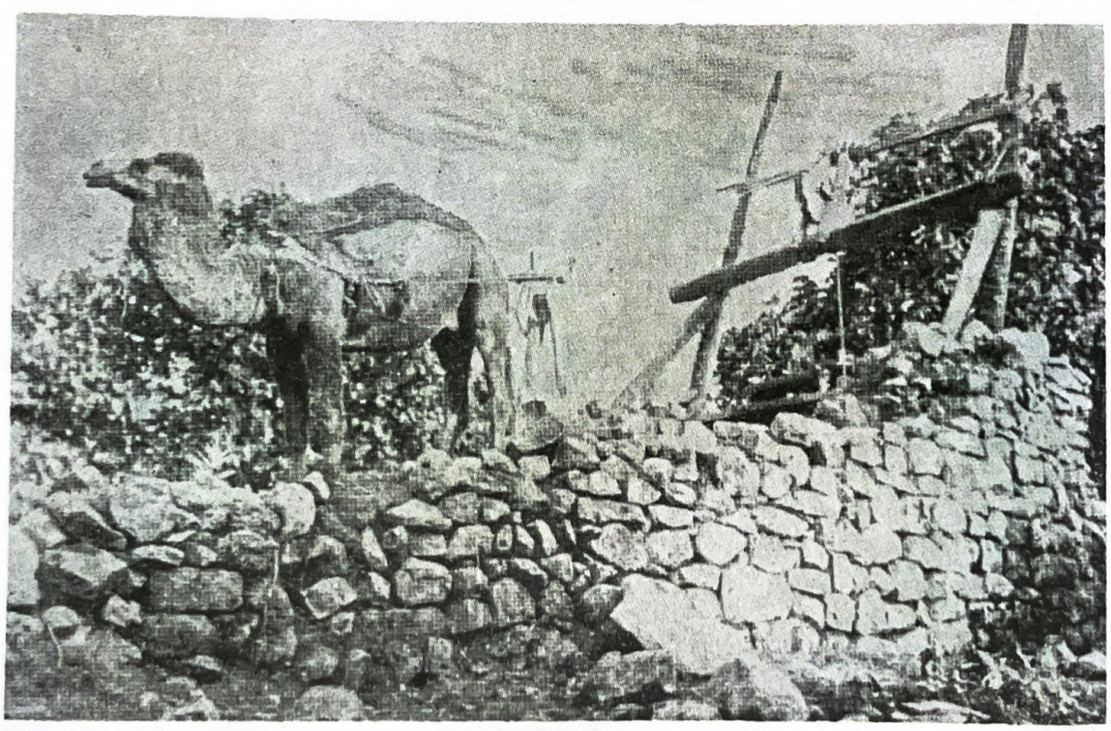
And while murmuring about the marvellous Tetuan where he lived as a beggar in rags he fell asleep.

The proprietress of the hotel where we were staying was a Jewess. She looked as if she always covered her face with a thick layer of oil, and three or four greasy tufts of hair dangled about her face. But she was a smart business woman. Besides the hotel she owned a small bar on the ground floor, and here she made the largest sales of wine and spirits in Tuggurt. She was a picturesque sight standing behind the bar, her red kerchief over her head; with one hand she poured out the *apéritifs*, while with the other she wiped her continually running nose. She spoke all the languages which could possibly be necessary in Tuggurt; she knew well to whom she ought to give credit and she had attracted her large *clientèle* by acting as a repository for grievances. She always agreed with the person she was talking to at the moment.



A SMALL CARAVAN

A woman is seated in the tent on the back of the dromedary. On the sand-dune is a marabout's tomb.



A DROMEDARY IS USED TO PULL UP THE HEAVY BUCKET



THE MARKET IN TUGGURT



THE PUPILS WERE HANDED LARGE SLATES WITH VERSES FROM THE KORAN

After a desperate fight with lice Abdeslam and I at length got to sleep. About eight the next morning somebody banged on the door.

"*Qui est lá?*" I asked sleepily, for the proprietress favoured the French.

"*Oh, monsieur,*" came her excited voice, "*parlez-vous anglais?*"

"Coming," I said, and opened the door. There was no need to dress as we both had slept in our burnouses in order to keep warm. "What's wrong?"

"A gentleman who arrived the day before yesterday is very ill."

"But I am not a doctor."

"No, but he only speaks English, and nobody can understand what he says. Would you mind interpreting?"

I could not very well refuse. We went up the creaking stairs and entered a room which was, if possible, still more Spartan than the one in which Abdeslam and I had slept. There was nothing but a big bed and a small white-painted night table standing rather rickety on three legs. The walls were whitewashed with no decorations except the holes which the lice favour when they have finished their bloody hunt.

In the large bed was a very young man.

In the most pronounced American accent I have ever heard he said, as I spoke to him in English:

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet a person who speaks American. I don't like the people here."

"The proprietress says you are ill."

"Yes, my stomach's out of order. I've not been well since I arrived in Africa."

"Where do you come from?"

"My name's Roscoe D. Tarbox. I'm from New York. In Algiers I suddenly thought of going to Tuggurt; now

I've got a ticket to Tunis. From there I think I shall go to Egypt—that is, if all goes well." He smiled. "My stomach's not quite right."

I had a good look at this quaint American. He did not appear to be more than about twenty years old. He had a clever, open face.

"What's wrong with your stomach?"

"It's awful. I feel as if I've no stomach left."

The proprietress, who stood looking over my shoulder, now asked impatiently, "What is it he wants?"

I asked Tarbox if he could eat anything, and he answered that he could not eat any of the food with which they had tried to tempt him, but he would like to have a sandwich with ham and mustard.

I translated to the proprietress, who brought up a slice of white bread on which had been put a thick rasher of ham. Tarbox was just going to pour the contents of the mustard pot over the ham when I stopped him.

"Are you quite mad?" I said. "It would be pure poison for you with that stomach of yours."

Tarbox sighed and looked at me.

"That's the only thing I want. I can't eat anything else."

"You're not going to, either."

I asked the proprietress to fetch a bottle of castor-oil, and Tarbox had to swallow four tablespoonfuls.

"After some hours," I told him, "you can eat all the chocolate you want, but nothing else. Then you will get well."

Tarbox did not look too pleased, but I consoled him. "Once in Casablanca I had the same complaint as you, and I was given castor-oil and chocolate."

Tarbox then went to sleep. I went to see him again in the evening after he had had some chocolate, and he was all right.

"How is it you are wearing Arab dress?" he asked.

I explained that I was *en route* for Egypt from Morocco and that it was my intention to get to know all the tribes on the way.

"Are you alone?"

"No, I have an Arab called Abdeslam with me, but I'm not sure that he's coming farther than Tuggurt."

"I'm going to Egypt too. Can't you take me in your car; in that way I should see all Africa."

"But it isn't exactly a pleasure trip," I objected. "We may get killed."

"Oh, that's all right. If you get through alive, I suppose I shall too."

"But you don't speak a word of Arabic and you are in European clothes."

I was not very enthusiastic about his proposition.

"I will change into Arab clothes. Perhaps it's as well that I can't speak to anybody—then at least I can't say the wrong thing! Do take me! Entirely on my own responsibility."

After some hesitation I gave in, and we decided to start two days later when the radiator had been repaired.

I was correct in my surmise. Abdeslam would come no farther. He considered that he had got so far away that he would never find his way to his dear Morocco, and when we gave him Tarbox's ticket to Tunis and a few hundred francs he was radiantly happy. He left that same evening.

It was something of a job to get the radiator repaired. It could not be soldered and there was nothing for it but to get rid of all the gypsum, fill it with concrete, and then wait until we could get a new radiator when we came to Tripoli. We thought that it might last until then.

At last all was ready, and Tarbox and I left Tuggurt in the morning, and headed east towards Tozeur, on the other side of the Tunisian frontier. The old Arab was

right, for the rain had been pouring down the whole night, turning the environs of Tuggurt into one huge morass.

The soil around Tuggurt consists mainly of red clay, which in dry weather forms a very fine dust which is blown about by the lightest wind. Now the clay had been turned by the rain into thick mud. Several times the car swung right round, and about noon it skidded right off the track into a ditch, in which were a few feet of water. We laboured all the afternoon to get it out again, but in vain.

Help appeared in the shape of an Arab who was driving two dromedaries towards Tuggurt.

"Will you help us to get out?" I shouted to him.

He hardly turned his head. "Why didn't you stay in Tuggurt with your car, when you can't get it through?"

"We'll pay you well if you'll help us out."

"I'll have nothing to do with you infidel Frenchmen who are overruning our country," he answered.

"But I'm not a Frenchman. I'm a Moslem like yourself."

He pulled the dromedaries up with a jerk.

"Are you speaking the truth? Say *El Fathak* so that I can tell if you are lying."

When he had listened to my recital of the sacred words he was satisfied, and we harnessed the dromedaries to the car. Two minutes later it was out of the ditch, and we could go on. The Arab would hardly accept any thanks for his trouble and with a dignified gait his two dromedaries splashed on towards Tuggurt.

A little later the road improved, the rain stopped, and we were able to increase the speed. Just about ten o'clock we caught sight of a cluster of dwellings, a small village with white houses. We asked if there was a hotel where we could spend the night, but were told there was none; we were advised to try the post-office.

We banged at the heavy door but got no answer, so we settled down to sleep in the car, hungry though we both were.

I was aroused by a man carrying a lamp with a candle in it.

"Who are you?" he asked, bending over us.

We told him and explained we were waiting for the postmaster.

"I am the postmaster," he said. "What do you want?"

We said we had been told that perhaps we could sleep in his house. He looked at us for a little while and then made up his mind.

"All right, if you will take pot luck," he replied and invited us in.

The room we entered had a straw mat on the floor, a painted table, and a wooden bench or seat in one corner.

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

We could not very well say no, and he called two boys, who tumbled into the room, drowsy with sleep.

"They are my brother's sons," our host explained. "They go to school here. I keep the school, you see, as well as being postmaster."

They stared stupidly at us, who had disturbed their sleep. The schoolmaster ordered them to crawl up on the roof to the dovecote and strangle a couple of pigeons. In a moment they brought the dead birds down. After our meal the gramophone was started and while the out-of-tune records were played our host hummed and beat time with his feet. At about midnight we were allowed to retire. We wrapped ourselves in the rugs out of the car, lay down on the straw mats on the floor, and fell asleep.

We did not wake until the next morning, when the schoolmaster came in and shook us about seven o'clock.

"You must get up now," he whispered. "In half an

hour school starts, and the post-van will be here in a moment."

"Then cars do come here," I exclaimed surprised.

"Yes, once every week we have connexion with Algiers. To-day the car arrives from Biskra."

We were soon drinking black coffee and eating bread with the schoolmaster and his nephews.

Then our difficulties began. We could not get the car started.

The whole school, between twenty to thirty boys, gathered round.

When the schoolmaster thought that there was nothing more to look at he fetched a large bell and rang for the boys to come in. The lessons began. The children sat on the floor holding large slates on which were written verses from the Koran. Then they all began to read aloud. The older boys read one *sura*, the younger quite a different one. You could not hear yourself speak for the noise, but the schoolmaster could evidently hear when the different children made a mistake, for every now and then he called up a small sinner. The boy had to stretch out his hand, which was struck with the ruler two or three times.

In the middle of the lesson the hooting of a car sounded in the distance. The schoolmaster rang his bell vigorously. "Now we will have the break," he said, and the children rushed out into the open. The school was now a post-office.

The car turned out to be a six-wheeled desert vehicle driven by a Frenchman. It did not stop long in the small village, which was the terminus, only delivering and collecting the post. The postmaster stamped the few letters with dignity, fully realizing his importance as a civil servant of the French Republic.

I went up to the driver.

"Would you mind letting your car pull mine round the

square once? I don't think I can get it started any other way."

The little chauffeur was agreeable. I put the engine in gear, and a moment later it was running smoothly enough. We could start.

After several hours of laborious driving we arrived in Tozeur, a European town in the south of Tunisia, where we spent the night.

We had now to face the most difficult stretch of desert we had so far encountered. Round Tozeur are mountains which would be quite impassable for motors. In the winter the only approach from the town is from the north and the west. To the south is the desert and to the east the great salt lake.

These salt lakes are common in the south of Tunisia. As a rule they are quite dry in the summer, but during the winter they are usually covered with water a few feet deep. The largest of them, which we had to cross, the Arabs called Shott el Jerid, and in the narrowest part the distance is about twenty miles from shore to shore.

For the first few miles out in the lake we were able to drive quickly over the solid salt. Suddenly an inch of water appeared, which grew deeper until it swirled round the car and reached the hubs of the wheels and then the running-boards.

Although we took care to drive slowly, some water splashed up over the engine and immediately caused a short circuit in the distributor. The car stopped, and we had to work half an hour to get it started again. The situation was not pleasant. We could not leave the car and wade through the salt lake until we reached the shore, because it was most likely that the sharp salt water would take the flesh off our feet. We already felt the action of the salt very much on our faces and arms, and the burning sun blazed down upon us from a cloudless sky.

At length we managed to limp ahead on three cylinders, and four hours after we had left the other shore of the salt lake we drove up among the cliffs and the grey-green cacti. We fought our way along the faint track till at last, at sunset, we reached a well in the midst of a tiny village. While we washed the car and engine, which was full of salt, a young man remarked:

"Have you really driven through Shott el Jerid at this time of the year? You ought to be jolly glad that you got the car safely through. Two months ago when there wasn't nearly so much water a car got too far out on one side. It disappeared in the soft mud."

"But isn't all the bottom hard?"

"Not at all. It's only a narrow strip in the middle which is hard now in the winter."

I looked at Tarbox. Luck and not skill had achieved a miracle.

We drank tea with the villagers round the well till far into the night. Story followed story. The Tunisians, who were the most pure-bred Arabs I had seen so far, told about the time when Tunisia was independent, before the French arrived; about the war in 1912 in the Tripoli we were going to see; about the hope they had that one day all Islamic peoples who now were fighting between themselves would unite and chase away the foreign spongers.

"Listen!" a young man said to me in the course of the evening. "How about Mustapha Kemal? Don't you think he might be the salvation of Islam? You know, it is Mustapha Kemal who has chased the Greeks out of Asia and actually defeated the English."

"By Allah," sneered an old greybeard, "you talk foolishly. Don't you know that Mustapha Kemal is a very bad Moslem. He drinks wine, I am told, and he has prohibited the inhabitants from wearing the tarbush."

"That's right," I supplemented the old man, "the

Turks have spoilt Islam. The Arabic world has the Turks to thank for what it is like to-day. Where the Turks go even the grass can't grow, everything is allowed to decay."

The young man looked at the old one.

"*Ya* Mustapha, we must all stick together if we are going to attain anything."

"It is all coming," remarked Mustapha, "but it must come from Arabia."

"The best has always come from there," I said, "and it is quite possible that Ibn Saud will become the great man. I believe much more in him than Kemal Pasha."

Mustapha nodded.

"By Allah, Ibn Saud ought to be Kalif." He sighed. "Yes, but that will probably not be in my time."

And thus the conversation went on till the slender sickle of the half-moon began to fade away.

As we parted Mustapha said: "Now Ramadan will soon be over. Where will you be during the festivities?"

"In Tripoli, if Allah wills."

"Do you think you will get through? The Italians are not easy to deal with."

"Oh, that will be all right," I said hopefully.

Tarbox, of course, understood nothing of the conversation; but strangely enough this American of Americans felt very much at ease in his Arab dress among these quaint people whom he had never even heard mentioned in the 100 per cent. American college which he had attended in the United States.

The next morning, before the sun rose, we were on our way again. The road improved, and the desert character of the landscape vanished. Date-palms grew in large groups along the road. The wind came from the sea, and a perfume of flowers rose from the valley where Gabes lay hidden from us.

Shortly afterwards we drew into Gabes, a genuine French town with a very small Arab quarter. Here were straight streets of European design, large cinemas with soul-stirring posters of American films; here were demi-mondaines, who, with cigarettes between their painted lips, balanced themselves on stools in the bars; here were banks and humming factories. And down at the harbour the sailing-ships with triangular sails had almost been superseded by tiny steamers and smelly petrol-driven boats.

The Mediterranean twinkled blue in the sun. The first part of our trip was over.

Tarbox was a strange fellow!

I have told of the journey at such length that I have not had time to describe him. He was long, thin, and loosely knit. He was exceedingly enthusiastic about everything new. And because of his abysmal ignorance he never felt in the least afraid. Whatever happened, Tarbox could not be moved from his almost fantastic calmness. He only knew America, about which he also spoke early and late. He had been to college, but you did not get the impression that he had learned anything there, except that America was the only country on earth, and that to flirt with the modern American girl was, as he anxiously told me, dangerous.

As far as I could understand, it was such a love-affair which had driven him out into the world. One day, taking whatever money he could lay hold of, he embarked on a steamer from New York to the Spanish town of Cadiz. Here he had found out that Africa was quite interesting—one wonders how, for he spoke nothing but English—so he had gone to Africa. How he happened to land in a backwater like Tuggurt he hardly knew himself, but he had enough of the spirit of adventure to think himself

lucky to have joined this motor trip, which was one long procession of hardships and difficulties. He proved himself a real man. He had money enough to travel first-class to Tunis, but all the same he preferred to toil with an engine which was not very fond of going.

We humans are creatures of habit. In spite of this fact, I still cannot understand why I got cross with Tarbox soon after our arrival in Gabes.

We had had an excellent dinner at the hotel. Coffee was brought in; we each lit a cigar and I passed Tarbox the sugar.

He shook his head.

"I don't take sugar," he said quietly.

I accepted that, for quite a number of people do not take sugar with their coffee. But then he called the waiter.

"Please could I have some salt?"

I stared at him. What was he wanting salt for?

The waiter brought the salt and looked apparently quite unimpressed, but on a closer scrutiny I saw that he too was watching Tarbox with secret interest.

Tarbox took the salt and poured some into his coffee.

"What a very strange idea—to take salt with your coffee," I said.

"Well, I like it," Tarbox answered.

I felt with a shiver how the waiter and the fat French landlady were scrutinizing us; I imagined them already looking up our names and addresses for critical inspection in the visitors' book.

"Yes, but it's causing a sensation," I said.

Tarbox just shrugged his shoulders and put salt in his next cup of coffee.

This was the reason for our first and, I am happy to say, last quarrel and it shows how deeply rooted the human being is in habits and prejudices, even when mere trifles

are concerned. When an Arab eats with his fingers instead of using knife and fork it is barbaric; when a Spaniard eats octopus or a Frenchman snails it is disgusting—though most of us derive great pleasure from swallowing live oysters!

CHAPTER III

ROMAN EAGLES OVER TRIPOLI

A FINE, macadamized highroad with milestones stretches right to the Tripolitan frontier. We left Gabes in the morning after repairing the car, estimating that we could cover the ninety-five miles to the frontier by evening. I began to feel anxious about passing the Customs, for as we had driven through the desert we had evaded the officials on the frontier between Morocco and Algeria, and my papers had therefore not been stamped. Tarbox suggested, therefore, that we should try to cross into Italian territory by night. About seven, when it was dark, we arrived in the frontier town and drove quickly through the streets without being stopped. We assumed that the first Italian post would not be far, and we proceeded very slowly in the darkness along a terrible road which was no more than a series of deep holes and bottomless morasses. We thought ourselves well beyond the frontier when we saw a car stuck in the ditch with the driver standing beside it.

"Can I help you out?" I asked.

"No, thanks," he answered in French. "Help will arrive soon. They may be here any moment now. My steering-gear is out of order."

"How far is the nearest town in Tripoli?"

"Twenty miles ahead, but you'll first have to pass the French military post."

We felt rather alarmed. We had imagined that we were already in Tripoli, but we were still in French territory. We had to hurry.

About six miles farther on the road ceased. Three or

four ruts branched out in different directions. We hesitated as to which to take, but trusted to luck and chose the one in the middle. Five minutes later we suddenly caught sight of some lights to our left and a collection of miserable hovels; and in front of us in the glare of our headlamps we made out the contours of an ominous-looking building. We were proceeding slowly when a voice shouted from the darkness: *"Arrêtez!"*

We turned the car in the direction of the voice and saw an Arab soldier wearing a French *képi*, his bayonet levelled at us.

We stopped, and he came up to us.

"Où allez-vous?" — "Where are you going?"

I explained truthfully that we were on our way to Tripoli, but his only answer was to pull his whistle out of his pocket and blow it a couple of times.

Some Arab soldiers, led by a fat sergeant, came running from the fort, and we were ordered out of the car. The sergeant took our passports, and, after examining them thoroughly, said: "You may just as well admit it. The passports are false."

I told him that the passports were all right, and Tarbox started to protest as an American citizen, but the sergeant would listen to no explanations and stuck to his opinion. We were Italian spies dressed as Arabs.

He 'phoned to the frontier town we had just passed, and was instructed to bring us back.

In the town we were allowed to go to the hotel, but the door was guarded all night. Next morning we had to appear before the military authorities. They examined our passports minutely, found no faults with them, and permitted us to cross the frontier to Tripoli.

Then came our turn for the Customs.

Rather nervously we entered the Customs building. We had some vague idea that they might confiscate the car.

But all went much better than we expected. When I had explained to the chief officer that we had met no Customs officers in the desert he accepted the fact. He wrote several papers, turned up many records, stuck stamps on papers which he gave us, and finally fined us twelve francs.

We went straight back to the frontier. This time we had the necessary proof that we were allowed to pass. The fat sergeant put his glasses on his nose and read our permit. When he had finished he looked up: "You were lucky not to be allowed to pass last night."

"Why?"

"The Italians on the other side would never have let you through during the night. They shoot immediately if anything suspicious happens."

And with this little piece of cheering information we followed the narrow strip which led through "No Man's Land" to the Italian colony of Tripoli.

For a long time we passed through stiff, coarse grass and inch-deep sand. The track took us nearly down to the beach. A few birds of prey shrieked hoarsely; but we met no living soul.

When we had driven for about an hour we came to a fort on the left side of the road (which by now had much improved), and a moment later we saw a flagstaff with an Italian flag and a metal Roman eagle fixed to the top. A bar across the road stopped all further progress, and it seemed somewhat superfluous to have erected a board on which we read, printed in bold letters: "Stop."

A number of Arabs in Italian uniforms rushed down from the fort when they heard the humming of our engine, and as we came near to the toll-bar they shouted that we should turn left, towards the fort.

Here three Italian officers had just finished their meal. They were obviously in a rosy mood, produced by the good Chianti which no self-respecting Italian will do without.

But as we drew up at the entrance of the fort their faces immediately became serious.

"*Capite italiano?*" asked the commanding officer, a much decorated captain, who had walked up to the car.

I replied that I understood very little Italian, but that I spoke French.

He looked grave.

"Here we speak Italian," he remarked, but luckily one of the other officers spoke French and acted as interpreter.

"You come from Tunis and wish to go to Tripoli," he began. "Please may I see your papers?"

I handed him our passports and the permit for the car, which he examined with a critical air.

"Haven't you brought any permit to leave Tripoli?" he asked sternly.

"But I've never been to Tripoli before," I objected meekly.

"Why did you not say so at once?" He scratched his chin seriously, and turned over the pages of the passports. Then he pointed at me: "*Americano?*"

"No, *danese*," I answered.

"H'm! Where do you want to go?"

"To the city of Tripoli."

"And then?"

"To Egypt."

"In that car?" He smiled, and all the officers grinned. I must admit that the car did not look its best.

"You will in no circumstances be allowed to proceed beyond Tripoli."

"Can we go on at once?"

"No, you will have to wait."

We were left in the car in the middle of the courtyard. Nobody seemed to take any further notice of us, and our passports were in the office.

The hours passed.

We began to feel thirsty and asked for water; it was difficult to obtain. The sun set.

We began to resign ourselves to spending the night in the fort. The officer who spoke French appeared about seven o'clock, when we were very hungry.

"Thanks to me you will be allowed to drive on. I had innumerable difficulties and had to make all kinds of representations before I succeeded in getting the permit. Please follow."

We went through the gate, over which a marble plate was fixed in the wall, bearing the inscription: "In glorious fight the IX Battalion carried this post on April 17, 1916. The following officers were killed on the field of honour. . . ."

The little Italian officer took us to the Commandant's office, and for five minutes we sat there alone. Then he returned, followed by an Arab soldier carrying a long-barrelled rifle. With great dignity the officer said, "This man will accompany you to Suara and hand you over to the Commandant there. It is for him to decide if you will be allowed to go on or not."

He handed about ten cartridges to the soldier, who in a martial way that was anything but reassuring put two of them in the rifle and the rest in his belt.

Horrified, I asked: "We aren't under arrest?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"You are, till you have spoken to the Commandant in Suara. After that you are free."

"But why was the soldier given cartridges?"

"That is the law of this colony, and while you are here you must act according to it."

We drove by a fairly good road to Suara. The soldier occupied Tarbox's seat next to me in front, and Tarbox sat in the back. During the journey the soldier sang loudly in a mixture of Italian and Arabic. Now and then

he took out his pocket-flask of claret, and after proffering it to us he drank in deep draughts.

It was pitch-dark when we arrived in Suara, where the soldier ordered us to drive immediately to the Commandant's office.

We were shown into an empty office. After about ten minutes the Commandant of Suara arrived, followed by three or four young officers. None of them understood anything but Italian. When we had tried for some time to make ourselves mutually understood, an Arab was called in to act as interpreter. I found later that he was a teacher in the town.

"Where do you come from?" asked the Commandant.

"From Tunis."

"And where are you going?"

"To Tripoli."

"And from there?"

"To Benghazi."

"H'm! Yes, of course, you will never get permission to do that; there is no road between Tripoli and Benghazi. Nobody has ever been allowed to drive on that stretch. What nationality are you?"

"Tarbox is American, and I am from Denmark."

"Denmark? What is that? Are you an Arab?"

"No, it is in Northern Europe."

"Don't know it. But why do you speak Arabic and dress like an Arab?"

"To get to know the population of North Africa thoroughly; and then I have joined Islam."

"For political reasons?"

"No, solely because I think Islam is right."

"I see. Well, you will be allowed to go on to Tripoli city, but there you will have to register with the police at once; they will then decide what is to happen next."

The audience was over, and we had our passports

stamped. The soldier who had guarded us then left us—he had to walk the twelve miles back to the frontier—while the teacher who had been our interpreter invited us to his home.

He was called Ibrahim Abd el Krim, and he had a large house in the centre of Suara.

It was still chilly during the night, and a merry fire blazed in one corner of the large room into which we were shown. Along the walls were divans, and we were asked to sit down. A moment later a servant brought tea.

"I heard you say you were a Moslem," Ibrahim began.

I admitted it.

"Then I am specially glad to be able to receive you as my guest. Is your friend also a Moslem?"

"No. He knows nothing about Islam so far."

"Are there many Moslems in Europe?"

"Yes, both in England and Germany there are quite a number in recent years."

There was a knock on the door, and some Arabs came in. We were introduced. One of the visitors had an enormous scar across his face. They all shook hands with us and sat down by the fire.

"The stranger is a Moslem," said Ibrahim, pointing at me.

The guests observed me with interest. He who had the scar across his face said:

"Then it will be difficult for him to get through Tripoli."

"Not any longer, I should say," remarked Ibrahim.

"Perhaps not," said the other bitterly. "No, of course all Tripoli has submitted, and those who would not·don't talk."

"Why not?" I asked naïvely.

The man with the scar gripped his throat with both hands and pretended to squeeze hard.

"That is why," he said. "No, you will only see peace and quiet in Tripoli."

Ibrahim silenced him, and I led the conversation in a different direction.

"We have come by car and it is our intention to drive on to Cyrenaica and Benghazi."

The man with the scar looked up quickly. "To Cyrenaica," he repeated. "There is still war. You will never get through the mountains.

"For how long has the war lasted?"

"Nearly eighteen years."

He pointed to his scar.

"Yes, as we have already said, here it is over now. But I remember when Enver Pasha warred against the Italians. I was there myself."

Ibrahim got nervous, and put in:

"Where did you learn to speak Arabic?"

"In Morocco," I answered.

"Yes, I can hear that your dialect is Maghreb. Does Abd el Krim still fight there?"

"No, that finished a long time ago. Abd el Krim is now a prisoner on the little island of Réunion, off Madagascar."

The man with the scar sighed.

"Yes, that's what will happen everywhere"—he clenched his hands till the knuckles were white—"till we learn to unite."

At that moment the food was brought in, and Ibrahim, who again was getting nervous, invited us to partake of the many courses, which were placed in small bowls on a large brass dish.

We were very hungry and did justice to the food. Ibrahim alone ate with us; the others had tea and smoked in silence.

When we had eaten the discussion went on till far into

the night, and just before we retired the man with the scar came up to me and whispered:

"You say that you are a journalist. Then please ask them in Europe why they come to this country to force upon us a culture which we do not want. By what right? What would *they* say if we one day arrived in their country with machine-guns and said: 'We are the rulers here. We are the only legal authorities, and whoever is against us is a rebel'?" With clenched teeth he added: "Oh, we are treated like dogs—worse than dogs, practically as——"

The guests departed. Ibrahim said:

"You must not mind what Sidi Hussein said. He didn't mean all he said."

I looked at him a moment and simply said:

"I have not quite forgotten the laws of hospitality. You need not fear that I shall gossip."

He shook my hand, and we were told to sleep on the divans.

Ibrahim was reluctant to let us go next morning, but we could not stay. It was seventy-five miles to the capital city of Tripoli, and if we were to reach it that day we would have to hurry.

The road from Suara to Tripoli is the best I have ever seen, even in Europe. It was asphalted all the way and very wide. But, of course, there is not much traffic. We sped along at sixty miles an hour and did not meet a soul till we were quite near Tripoli.

The Colonial Exhibition was opened on the day we drove into Tripoli. This exhibition was to show the new Italy, the new Roman State, in its Might and Glory. From all official buildings flew the Italian tricolour; blackshirted young Fascists marched through the streets singing the Fascist march. Everywhere one saw the Fascist symbol, the bundle of rods, and below was inscribed the year of

the new Italy: *Anno Mussolini VIII*. The head of the dictator was painted in black on every wall, giving the appearance of a huge collection of deaths' heads, and underneath blazed posters with the inscription: "Those who are not for us are against us."

When you arrive in Tripoli by road you first see the new European-Italian part of the town, which is sharply divided from the Medina, the Arab quarter, and the Mellah, where the Jews live. This modern quarter has the appearance of a theatre town, built up hastily; but it must be admitted that it is splendid. The buildings flash with marble and brass; in the big hotels there are plate-glass windows, swing-doors, palms, and lifts more splendid than anywhere in Europe. The shops, too, are unusually smart and modern, and two shining rows lined the Italian main street. But everything smells so new and is so exaggeratedly splendid that one is inclined to doubt whether it can be real.

Round the city of Tripoli stretches the Libyan Desert, mile after mile of desolate yellow sand, with a few date-palm oases, between which Bedouins wander in search of the little they need to keep alive. One would not think that this barren desert, with its disintegrating rocks and scorched grass, would be able to give Tripoli its riches.

An exceedingly smart policeman with a white helmet (although it was still quite cold) and white kid gloves stopped us when we wanted to drive through the main street to the centre of the town.

"Signori, it is strictly prohibited to drive through the main street to-day. The procession will be here very shortly." So we turned down one of the side-streets where the imposing splendour grew less and less noticeable as we got farther away from the main street.

"Listen," said Tarbox, "I'm really rather tired. What

about going to a decent hotel, where one can get a bath and all that kind of thing."

I agreed with pleasure, and after having asked our way at least twenty times we arrived at the largest hotel in Tripoli, the Albergo Nazionale.

The porter who received us as we, dusty and tired, emerged from the car saluted us in the Fascist manner by lifting one arm. The lady with whom we had to discuss the price of the room greeted us in the same manner. The maid who took us to the rooms did the same, and people in the restaurants all greeted each other by lifting the arm. All Tripoli was intoxicated with Fascism, even though we were in the year VIII.

The hotel was crowded with journalists, mainly German and Italian, who had come for the opening of the exhibition, and when we had tidied ourselves a little and garaged the car we too went out to see it.

The main street was one gaily coloured sea of people, most town Arabs wearing their soft tarbushes with a blue woollen tassel; Bedouins from the country with solemn, sunburnt faces; dirty Jews from the Mellah with black kaftans and small skull-caps pushed to the back of their heads; veiled Arabian women; pregnant Jewish wives with a swarm of children round them, one trying to crawl on top of the next, to see better; Italian beggars with peaked caps, who in dignified recognition of their superiority over the coloured 'rabble' kept to themselves; and any number of Arab brats with red and white fezes.

The sun shone. The policemen, forming a long row, with white batons in their hand, tried to keep the crowd back. In the distance we heard the first strains of the Fascist march. The Italians shouted with enthusiasm, the Arabs were silent. A band passed in quick time, with four torn standards borne in front. They were the standards from Murzuk and Fezzan, the two oases far south of

Tripoli which the Italian troops, with bombs and machine-guns, had recently managed to wrest from a handful of Bedouins.

The hands of all the Italians shot up as the standards fluttered by: "*Evviva Italia. Evviva Mussolini.*" The eyes of the policemen passed alertly down the long row of people. The hands of the Arabs slowly rose to where the Jewish hands had been for a long time. Long live the glorious colours, the sign that the Romans had come back to the age-old colony of Libya!

But the Arabs stood silently with their hands lifted.

When the band had passed there was a short pause. I stood in the front row next to Tarbox, and my neighbour on the other side was an Italian soldier. He was tall and fair. In my bad Italian I asked him where the main celebrations were to take place.

"*Sind Sie ein Deutscher?*" he asked, and looked me up and down.

I said no, and he told me that the band was going to the Exhibition, on the outskirts of the town. Then he added:

"You see, I am from Bozen."

"From Bozen?" I repeated, slightly puzzled.

"Yes, yes—now it is called Bolzano. Oh, you know, the town in Tyrol."

Then I understood.

"And now you are in the Foreign Legion here?"

"No," he went on. "There's no Foreign Legion here—only a few Italian regiments, and I am in one of them."

A little later he asked: "Have you come to see the exhibition?"

"No," I answered, "it is quite by accident that we are here to-day; we are on our way to Benghazi."

"To Benghazi?" He looked rather dubious. "And when does your boat leave?"



NEGRO SORCERER WITH MASK AND DRUM



THE MINARET AT TRIPOLI



A VIEW OVER TRIPOLI



JEWS IN THE MELLAH (JEWISH QUARTER) OF TRIPOLI

"We are going by car."

"Have you got permission to drive through to Benghazi?"

"No, not yet. All offices are closed to-day. But that will be all right."

"I don't think so," he answered. "Quite recently a couple of Americans arrived here. But they had to ship their car to Alexandria. As far as I know, nobody has ever driven through to Benghazi. And furthermore I believe it's impossible."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The country is quite impracticable by car, and then the Bedouins in the Libyan desert are not easy to get on with. If they get hold of you you'll be tied to the car and burnt, or still worse may happen."

"Oh," I exclaimed, "it can't be as bad as all that. We are not at war with the Arabs, and I speak quite good Arabic."

He smiled scornfully.

"Ach, you do not know them. The Bedouins of the Libyan Desert are not like the Bedouins of the Sahara. These people here are more like beasts than humans. It is simply ghastly what they have done. I could tell you stories galore. They have tortured Italian officers who have fallen into their hands—and how will your speaking Arabic help you? Lots of Arab soldiers have been murdered in the most foul manner. And they both spoke Arabic and had the same religion as the Bedouins." He shook his head. "No, the Bedouins are a bloodthirsty rabble, who know no mercy. Nobody would ever make me go through the desert to Benghazi."

"Have you actually fought against the Bedouins?"

"I should say I have. Ach, what I could tell!"

At that moment the trumpets sounded again. Some

horsemen clad in medieval dress appeared at the far end of the street, and the Italians cheered. In the first carriage sat the grey-bearded Marshal Badoglio, Governor of Tripolitania. A band followed, again playing the Fascist march. Badoglio bowed, nodded, and smiled to each side.

Carriage followed carriage. At last came the Italian journalists in a special car. They were in gala attire with silk stockings and patent-leather shoes, and kept wiping their pale faces, evidently overpowered by the unwonted African heat.

When the procession had passed we went with the soldier to a *café* not far from the hotel where we were staying, and he started at once to tell about his adventures.

"You bet I know it all. I've been in it." He laughed reminiscently. "They fight like devils, these Bedouins, and are led by a strange man, called Sheik Amar Moktar —an old fellow, over seventy, always on horseback, tearing from place to place. When we think he's in one place and that we've got him—*poof*, he's gone!"

He emptied his coffee cup, swallowed a cake in one mouthful, and continued:

"I was there once when they very nearly got him. We had taken an oasis. As none of the men were there, we had driven the dromedaries away, hidden ourselves, and were waiting to attack the men when they came home. But in some mysterious way these bandits got wind that we were there."

"How?"

"How should I know?" The soldier shrugged his shoulders. "We had locked all the women up in the houses and put them under guard, but evidently one of them must have seen her chance to escape, for we were attacked by the Bedouins and a regular battle ensued."

Half contemptuously he added:

"But what was the good? Poor devils, we had the nest

stuffed with machine-guns and they only had rifles of an old model. We routed them, and they galloped away on their horses pursued by us in cars. How it happened I don't know. But one of our soldiers told us that Amar Moktar was among the flying Bedouins—which, of course, made the pursuit much more dramatic."

He paused a moment as if savouring the memory, then he went on.

"The desert round the oasis was quite flat, and the ground hard, just like one wide highroad, so, of course, we could drive much quicker than they could ride, and we gained strongly on them with our cars, shooting at them the whole time with machine-guns. Suddenly we caught sight of Amar Moktar. He was always mounted on a grey horse, and one of our men knew the horse, so we fired at him and he fell. But, unfortunately, we had not hit him, only the horse. One of the other Arabs gave him his horse, and they all escaped. But I heard later that Amar Moktar had had his arm smashed by a bullet."

He again shrugged his shoulders, and I asked:

"And what happened to the Arab who had given Amar Moktar his horse?"

"We took him prisoner."

"And where is he now?"

The soldier pointed to the ground. "In hell, I suppose. He was a rebel and was hanged."

I could not remain silent any longer.

"But these people aren't really rebels. They only defend their own country."

Indignantly he continued:

"You wouldn't say so if you knew the rascals. I'm from Bolzano, but I'm an Italian, and we got this country at the conclusion of peace with the Turks in 1912. The people will have to behave accordingly. And if they won't —well, we'll give them short-shrift."

I paid, but before the soldier left he added:

"Well, I suppose you'll see it all for yourself if you get permission to drive through; but I don't think you'll get the permission."

We spent the whole afternoon lounging about in the Arab quarter. In the Medina at Tripoli one is very much aware of getting nearer to the East. The customs are much more Oriental than in Morocco and Algiers. And in the *cafés* they have the Turkish habit of smoking hookahs, a custom unknown in the two countries under French influence. The dress is different, too. The burnous with a hood to draw over the head has given way to a shawl, which is wrapped round the body. The Moroccan trousers are also quite different from the trousers here. In Morocco they are short and of some gay colour; here they are long and always white. But the women's dress is the same here as farther west; a few ladies of rank wear the half-transparent Turkish veil, which only covers the lower half of the face, but by far the greatest proportion of the women wear a shawl with which they can cover the face entirely, peeping out through a slit.

In the street occupied by the tailors there was great activity. Ramadan might finish that very evening, and then everybody must have new clothes the next day. Nobody yet knew exactly when Ramadan would end; the strict fast lasted the whole month of Ramadan, till two reliable men had reported that they had seen the slender sickle of the new moon, which heralded the month of Shawal. It was towards evening. Dromedaries and donkeys with their heavy burdens moved through the narrow streets of the *souk*; everybody was waiting for the gunshot which would indicate the end of that day's fast. An old Arab who sat outside his door said, as the shot sounded and the white pigeons rose from the roof of the mosque:

"One can only hope that the fasting is over for this year."

It grew dark quickly, and large crowds of people gathered in the streets and on the roofs, all watching for the new moon, all equally anxious to be the first to see it.

"It ought to be to-night," said a young Arab who stood next to me, as he scanned the sky eagerly. Hour after hour passed, and it was beginning to look as if Ramadan would have to be continued over the next day when suddenly the cry went up: "*El Ahmar, el Ahmar!*" ["The moon, the moon!"] The festival began. The long month of fasting was over. All night they danced and ate to their hearts' content in the Medina.

Tarbox and I returned to the hotel and met journalists who had been invited by the Italian Government to see Tripoli and the exhibition. They were going the next morning to see some plantations outside Tripoli, in the south. Tired out after a gruelling day, we retired early, enjoying for the first time since we had left Tuggurt a real bed, with mattress and bed-clothes.

We rose early the next morning. There was much to do. First we had decided to buy a tent, so that we would not be dependent on hotels or have to sleep in the car or on the sand. After hunting through the town we finally succeeded in running to earth an old Jew who had a large stock of junk, among which we found a second-hand military tent which we thought would suit our purpose excellently. Having bargained with him for hours and beaten him down from 500 to 100 lire, we bought it, and decided to find a place where we could camp the same day.

It was noon before we finished our shopping. Then came the most important and most difficult job of all—to obtain permission to drive through to Benghazi.

First we went to the Danish Consul, an Italian wholesale hardware merchant called Vassuro. He was a keen

Fascist, and was both surprised and rather indignant when I happened to mention that in Denmark, where we had a Radical-Socialist Ministry, it was quite feasible to telephone to Ministers. Here it was absolutely different: here nearly every one was an Excellency, and Consul Vassuro himself liked, in the letters he wrote to the Government, to sign himself "His Royal Danish Majesty's Consul."

But Consul Vassuro did all he could. He came with me round to the Government House, and we spoke to the Governor's secretary, but the answer was disheartening.

"A great number of people, both Americans and Frenchmen, have been here to ask for such permission, and we have to tell them all that the Italian Government regrets that it is unable to grant it. The country is too dangerous."

That was not very encouraging, but the secretary promised to put our request forward, and the Consul and I returned to the Consulate.

"At which hotel are you staying?" he asked.

"Up till now at the Nazionale; but this afternoon we are moving out to a tent."

"To a what?" asked the Consul, surprised.

"A tent," I explained. "We have bought a tent, and are going to live in it."

It was almost impossible to make him understand that people really exist who would rather live in a tent than in a hotel; he shook his head sceptically.

The porter at the Albergo Nazionale was a Swiss, from one of the Italian cantons, and when he heard that we were applying for permission to drive through to Benghazi he too shook his head doubtfully.

"You may just as well abandon the idea," he declared. "There are so many who have made the request. You may be allowed to drive to Syrtis but no farther."

So everything looked rather black. We packed our

baggage at the Nazionale, loaded it all on the car, and started towards a small oasis about three miles from Tripoli. Here we spent our first night in the tent.

The next morning the drawbacks of having a tent began; Tarbox and I had to separate. Somebody had to stay by the tent, and, as I spoke French and enough Italian to make myself understood, of course it was Tarbox who had to sit all day by the tent and wait for me to come home.

That very same evening we decided to try to find an Arab boy to look after our things, so that we both could be away at the same time. And the next morning, the third day of our stay in Tripoli, I found Mohammed, the twelve-year-old boy who was to play such an important part in what followed.

Tripoli has a large market square, where all kinds of eatables are sold, and the poor Arab boys have made an excellent job for themselves by carrying goods for the buyers who come. They sit in large groups on the pavement outside the stalls, with their large baskets on their shoulders, waiting patiently until they are required. As a rule they do not find the time long; they play marbles, using small stones. The keenest of the players was Mohammed.

He wore one garment, a long, thin shirt which reached half-way down his legs and was incredibly dirty; and in addition he had a ragged old fez on his head. But his face was marvellous, his eyes were black and sparkling, and he was the first to accost me as I came to do my simple shopping in the market.

"*Signore, signore, portare, portare!*" he shouted, pushing away the others who were trying to get to me first.

"You needn't speak Italian to me," I said in Arabic. He looked at me in astonishment. I was not wearing Arab dress in Tripoli, and there are not many Italians who take

the trouble to learn Arabic. He yelled at the boys, " He speaks Arabic."

" Moreover, I'm a Moslem just as you are."

That was too much for Mohammed. He looked at me dubiously and then whispered to the other boys:

" He says he is a Moslem."

" Look here," I said to Mohammed, " you can help me carry the goods."

Of course he was more than willing, though he was slightly nervous when I asked him to get into the car. He had never been in a car before, but he did come with me right out to where Tarbox was waiting.

When he saw the tent he was full of enthusiasm. He told me that his father had been a great sheik somewhere in the interior, but he added with a sigh, " He was shot by the Italians when they took the oasis."

At the moment I had no occasion to go deeper into this interesting subject, but asked him if he would like to look after the tent when we were away. He agreed enthusiastically.

" Where do you live? " I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

" Oh, different places, *ya Sidi*; where Allah gives me shelter, but sometimes I stay with my uncle."

" And where is your uncle? "

" He is an Italian soldier here in Tripoli. He has married my mother, but I don't like him. He always speaks badly about my father, although he was his brother."

" And what will he say if you live here? "

" Nothing. Often I don't go home for days and days, because he beats me."

It was settled that Mohammed should look after the tent.

The next day the Consul told me that I had to call at the Government House, where they would discuss my



THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD MOHAMMED



A CARAVAN



AN ARAB BOY

permit. When I arrived I was shown in to the secretary. He asked me to sit down and sent for some coffee.

"Look here," he said while he nervously fingered his paper-knife on the table. "We would very much like to give you permission to drive through, but as I have already told you it is too dangerous. On the longest stretches there are no Italian posts whatever. You can very easily get into difficulties, and who then would be responsible to your Government? The Italian Government."

"But," I objected, "both Tarbox and I are willing to take all responsibility ourselves."

"That isn't enough," replied the secretary. "First and foremost, you must be able to speak Arabic."

"But I do."

For a moment the secretary was shaken out of his bureaucratic pose; then he went on, slightly nervously:

"But at any rate we don't feel that we can grant you the permission. My Chief has asked me to tell you so."

"Don't you think it would be possible for me to obtain an interview with Monsieur Le Conde, your Chief?"

The secretary was silent a moment, then took the telephone, spoke for a minute, and said, "His Excellency the Vice-Governor, Monsieur Le Conde, will see you for five minutes."

Monsieur Le Conde was a tall man. One of his arms had been amputated during the World War. He was very cultured and spoke five languages fluently, among them Arabic.

When I entered he looked at me a moment, and then said quietly, after having offered me a cigarette:

"I believe my secretary has explained to you the reasons why we cannot allow you and your friend to drive through Cyrenaica."

I answered that I had been told it was because I could not speak Arabic, but that I spoke Arabic fluently.

Then followed a difficult examination. The conversation, which had up to now been carried on in French, now changed to Arabic; at length the Vice-Governor declared himself satisfied.

"If you and the American will sign a declaration that the Italian Government has no responsibility whatever in case anything should happen to you, it is possible that I may obtain the permission for you. But," he added, "you will in that case have to wait a few days. There are two Governments, one in Tripoli and one in Cyrenaica. I will also have to obtain permission from Benghazi."

I thanked him profusely, and, radiant with success, I went back to Tarbox, who was waiting in the tent with Mohammed.

But we had to wait many days.

First we had to go to the police and sign a declaration as follows:

"We, the undersigned, Roscoe D. Tarbox and Knud Holmboe, hereby declare and agree that the Italian Government accepts no responsibility in case anything should happen to us on our journey by car from Tripoli to Benghazi. The Italian Government is not responsible for either loss of life or loss of property."

It was more or less like signing one's own death warrant.

CHAPTER IV

LOST IN THE LIBYAN DESERT

It was the late afternoon of March 10 when Tarbox and I returned to the tent, having signed the important document, and with the permission to drive through the unknown Libyan Desert entered on our passports. We intended to set off early the next morning, and I told Mohammed that we must leave him.

Tarbox was to look after the provisions, the tent, and its contents. We had bought plenty of food, including three live chickens. I made myself responsible for the car, but there was really not much to see to, as we had not money enough to buy many spare tyres or a new radiator. We hoped that the old cemented radiator, which had served us excellently from Tuggurt to Tripoli, would last out till we reached Benghazi.

"Have we a compass?" asked Tarbox.

I nodded. We had a small pocket-compass.

"A compass isn't so essential," I objected. "First we're going to follow the coast-line as far as possible, and anyhow the sun is by far the safest compass now, as in March it's always clear."

Tarbox thought this obvious, and we began to study on the map the six-hundred-mile course we were going to cover.

"How long do you think it will take us?" asked Tarbox.

"With a bit of luck we should be able to do it within five or six days," I answered. "From here to Misrata won't take long. From Misrata to Syrtis there is no road. Let us say that we do that on the second day—that is, the day

after to-morrow. Then comes the difficult bit, from Syrtis to Nufilia. We know nothing whatever about that. Next comes the stretch from Nufilia to Arghela, through entirely unknown country; and finally we have to go from Arghela to Benghazi. It's quite possible that it will take the greater part of a week," I concluded.

"Don't you think we'd better have a meal to celebrate? It's the last evening Mohammed is with us," Tarbox suggested.

We lit the primus, killed one of the chickens, and put it in the soup-pot. A little later all three of us were sitting round the blazing fire, each with a bowl full of soup. But Mohammed ate hardly anything at all.

The car was ready to start; we only had to pack the tent. He looked at it, and suddenly I saw that he was crying, his tears dripping slowly into his soup.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"I am so sorry that you are leaving," he sobbed.

"Would you like to come with us?"

"Yes." He was one radiant smile. "May I?"

I translated this to Tarbox, who was just as enthusiastic as I was at the idea of taking Mohammed with us.

"But," I said to Mohammed, "do you realize that this is a dangerous trip, and that we don't know if we shall get through alive?"

"That doesn't matter as long as I can come." Mohammed refused to consider dangers.

It was agreed that I should go next day to Mohammed's uncle, the soldier, and find out his views on the matter. The house, which was on the outskirts of Tripoli, consisted of five rooms, all opening on to a courtyard, and in each of which lived one family. In the room where Mohammed's uncle dwelt seven or eight people slept each night—the uncle; his wife, Mohammed's mother; a brother of the uncle; Mohammed's two brothers, one a couple of years

older and the other a couple of years younger than him; a sister, who was four years old; a baby, the result of the new marriage; and finally Mohammed himself.

When we arrived Mohammed's mother was chased out: we were not allowed to see her, and she had to hide somewhere in the courtyard.

The uncle turned out to be most disobliging when I asked if Mohammed could come with us. He said quite curtly, "No."

"But why not?" I asked.

"No. He is now just at the age when he should begin to earn money. Now I have fed him for long enough, and we cannot do without him here."

All the negotiations seemed to lead nowhere. The uncle would not listen to my representations, and it did not help even when the older brother suggested, "But why can't he go to his uncle in Benghazi? He could remain there."

At length Tarbox and I got into the car. Mohammed stood beside us to say good-bye, sobbing bitterly. The uncle came out too. I tried the last resource: I offered him a hundred lire. Nothing doing; he was much too fond of Mohammed to do without him. Two hundred lire—no use! At last, when I had got up to three hundred lire, he was softened by Mohammed's tears!

Mohammed was allowed to come. When we had started again, the mother could not keep away any longer. In spite of all decency she rushed out of the open door, crushed Mohammed against her, kissed him, and implored me to be good to him.

Now we were on our way to Misrata. It was a real road, and a good one, and before two o'clock we saw Misrata in the distance. The town is surrounded on all sides by a high wall, and there are only two gates into it, one from the north and one from the south.

We did not stay long in Misrata, but as we stopped in the market-place to get our papers stamped a young Arab came up and asked if he might come with us to Syrtis.

I refused, of course. We were not allowed to take any passengers; the permit was a personal one, only valid for ourselves, and I thought the matter settled. All three of us got out of the car for a moment to stretch our legs a little after the long drive, and the car was left unattended for perhaps a few minutes. Then we started again towards Syrtis, which we hoped to reach the same evening.

But it was not to be so easy. The engine began knocking just as we got outside the town, and about twelve miles the other side of Misrata we had to stop for the night. The sun was already setting, and a mist hung low over the flat landscape. Here and there we could see the fires of Bedouins through the mist. We took the tent and our blankets from the back of the car, and found to our astonishment the young Arab who had asked if he could come with us. He had profited by the halt in Misrata to hide in the car.

"You deserve to be made to walk back," I told him. He had evidently not expected us to stop before Syrtis. But he pleaded so hard that I forgave him. He was made to help put up the tent and prepare the camp.

When we had finished it was quite dark. We ate our supper, lit a fire, and were thinking of retiring for the night when a couple of figures came creeping up out of the fog and darkness. They were two Bedouins from the camp nearest to ours, bringing eggs and milk. The laws of hospitality demanded that I should ask them into our tent, and they stayed until midnight, telling us about themselves and the life they led.

"It is not easy for us to live," one of them said. "We are not allowed to carry rifles any longer, and we are not even permitted to decide where we are going to camp. We

are not allowed to live at all in the great fertile region on the other side of Nufilia."

"But why not?"

"We have surrendered. It was impossible to continue to fight against the Italians. We have grown poorer and poorer. They blocked up our wells with concrete so that the cattle could not drink, so in the end there was nothing for us to do but to give in. And what is the result? Now we are starving to death slowly, whereas before if death came it came quickly. We have to pay taxes to the Italian Government, and we are not allowed in any of the districts where the free Bedouins live, because the Italians are afraid that we shall join the rebels. It is all so hopeless."

The other one now put in: "I think the Italians want to destroy us utterly."

"That's impossible," I said. "I suppose they only want to put an end to the rebellion."

"What rebellion?" retorted the Bedouin who had spoken last, quickly. "There is no rebellion; there is only a desperate fight for existence on the soil which our fathers possessed long before us." He added, still in the same calm voice, "But it must be the will of Allah. We are getting more and more ignorant, more and more poor, more and more like the animals they call us."

The next morning we packed quickly and started towards Syrtis. We still had trouble with the car; it did not pull as it should do, and in the course of the morning we punctured a couple of times. But civilization had not quite vanished yet. When we were half-way between Misrata and Syrtis we passed through a little village with a general shop, where they had petrol in sealed tins. We needed it badly, having already begun to feel anxious lest our store of petrol would be insufficient to bring us to Syrtis, for the engine consumed much more than usual.

The country became quite flat: the road disappeared,

but the desert surface was excellent to drive on. It looked as if this was an old sea-bed, and it was easy to keep our direction, as we constantly caught sight of a blue strip of sea far out to the left.

Mohammed sat next to me.

"Tell me," I asked him, "how is it that you can both read and write? It is not usual for a boy of your age to do that."

"My father taught me," he answered.

"And where did your father come from?"

"From an oasis not far from where we are now." He sat very quiet for a moment, and then he added: "That's why I'm not afraid to go with you. If the Bedouins come they won't do us any harm if I tell them who my father was." His eyes shone. "My father was a great sheik; everybody knew him."

"But what did he die from?"

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Mohammed said, "He was shot by the Italians."

"But what had he done, then?"

"Nothing."

"But people don't get shot if they haven't done anything."

Mohammed frowned. "I don't quite remember—it's three years ago, but it happened when the Italians first came here. By Allah, we had a good time when my father was alive!"

"In what way?"

"Have you ever tasted camel-meat? Believe me, it tastes good, and we had that very often." Still more enthusiastically he added: "And every day we used to have *tamr* and camel milk. You should just taste that; there's nothing like it." He sighed. "Now I never get it."

"But you are quite all right here, aren't you?"

"Yes. I like you much better than my uncle, but then he



OUR CAMP OUTSIDE MISRATA



BEFORE WE LEFT SYRTIS



MOHAMMED AND THE AUTHOR AT BIR MERDUMA



AN OASIS

is a soldier. All the same, it was best when my father was alive."

"How was he shot?"

"I don't quite remember everything, but they had been fighting outside the town, and one day he and nine others from our oasis were brought into the town by the Italians. They were all in chains. *W'Allah*, it was awful! My mother howled and tore her hair, as women do. We all cried with hunger. I had two little brothers who died because for nine days we had nothing to eat. Then my father was shot."

"Did you see it?"

"Yes. All ten of them were put against a wall; my eldest brother and I went to say good-bye to him. Then the soldiers fired. My father was not dead; we thought that he would get away, but then an officer went up to him and shot him through the head."

The little boy looked so sincere that I was obliged to believe that he was speaking the truth. I have never caught him out in a lie.

We went on for ten minutes longer, the engine still knocking. We had covered perhaps twelve miles from Syrtis when suddenly I caught a smell of burning. The oil was on fire. We quickly stopped the engine, and found that the water had run out of the radiator. We feared that the concrete had loosened, but discovered that it was only a screw at the bottom of the radiator which had fallen out. We found a screw which fitted, and Mohammed and I went down to the sea, which was only a couple of miles away, to fetch some water for the radiator.

On the beach were the prints of many animals. Mohammed knew them all.

"Look, this is a hyena," he said. "There is a jackal, and, see, this is a leopard."

"Are there leopards here?" I asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes, we are sure to see some—there are lots of them here."

We fetched the water, poured it into the radiator, and proceeded towards Syrtis. A little distance outside the town, which had the appearance of a fortress, we dropped the stowaway. We were not risking any trouble for his sake; he would have to reach Syrtis by himself.

Already it was getting dark, and we very nearly drove into the barbed wire fence which surrounded Syrtis on all sides. But we avoided it, and passing through a gate—where a sentry paraded up and down—drove up a small hill and reached the square.

The Commandant of Syrtis was a fat colonel. With a long pipe in his mouth he was pacing up and down the square in animated conversation with a Franciscan priest, who evidently had the task of converting the Bedouins. When we drove in he came hurrying up as quickly as his fat legs would carry him.

"Where have you come from, and where are you going?" he asked suspiciously. I showed him our passports, but he looked our Arab clothes up and down, and said: "Well, you can't go on just yet: no one has ever been allowed to drive farther than Syrtis. I must have further orders from Tripoli." He added, hesitatingly: "Where are you spending the night? There is no room here."

"Oh, that's all right," I said. "We have our own tent: we will camp outside in the field there."

He made no reply, and we found a place where we could pitch our tent. Syrtis was crammed with native Christian soldiers from the Italian colony of Eritrea. The Italians cannot make the Arabs, whom they describe as unreliable, fight against the Bedouins, and consequently they keep a very large contingent of imported black troops in the colonies of Tripoli and Cyrenaica.

Below Syrtis was a large Bedouin camp with fires blazing outside the tents. Tarbox went to sleep, but Mohammed and I strolled down to look at the camp. Never have I seen such poverty. The women had only torn rags wrapped round them, and the men looked just as bad. Starved children came running up, begging for coins.

"How long have you been here?" I asked one of the Bedouins.

"Three months," he replied, "and we don't know when we shall be allowed to move on. We can only live by moving about. Here there is no more grass for our sheep. Now we shall have to sell them in order to keep alive and to buy fodder for the others. I don't know what we are going to do."

"Do they want you to settle down in one place?"

"Allah alone knows. I believe they want us to die."

The fires shone brightly: the ragged women, their faces sharpened by hunger like birds of prey, stirred the embers. The children were not like real children; they were so horribly emaciated that you could plainly see their ribs, and their stomachs were distended.

The next morning we started for Nufilia. The colonel had telegraphed to Tripoli, and had received confirmation of our permit to drive through. He then reported our departure to the wireless station in Nufilia.

On the other side of Syrtis all trace of a road disappeared. We met a shepherd dressed in a sheepskin coat. He stared at us as at an apparition. For months he had lived here; for months he had not seen another man; and at any rate it was unlikely that he had ever seen a car before. As we came up to him he picked up some big stones from the ground and threatened us. We shouted that we had no evil intentions, and that we only wanted to buy some goats' milk. Mohammed gave him our bucket,

and he milked a couple of sheep, but he would not take any money. We could have as much milk as we pleased if we would only leave him and his sheep in peace. When we asked him where he and his flock belonged he pointed towards the east and replied, " Our camp lies many days' journey from here, but soon I am going back."

For a long time we could see him standing on the crest of a hill, gazing after us. The landscape was melancholy. Here and there were deep, narrow ravines which we had to avoid. The important thing was not to go too far to one side. All the time we had to keep the sea in sight, so that we could be sure we were driving in the right direction.

After a couple of hours we stopped to cook some food. Tarbox was about to chop the head off one of the chickens we had bought in Syrtis, but Mohammed would not let him touch it.

" You must do it," he said, pointing to me. " You know how it should be done." So I had to cut the chicken's throat. I tried to explain to Mohammed that the blood could flow just as well if its head were cut off, but he insisted that it was not the same, and that at any rate he would not eat it if the jugular vein were not severed.

The Libyan Desert here, not far from the sea, was a huge carpet of flowers, swaying in the breeze. The bees hummed from blossom to blossom, and the sun began to burn in real earnest. Far out on the horizon the air shimmered with heat, making us believe that the small bushes which we saw from time to time were great oases with tall palms.

About noon the water began to boil in the radiator, which we found to be leaking. It did not drip very much, and we hoped that if we hurried we would be able to reach Nufilia. We poured some of our drinking water into the radiator. But it was difficult to force the pace as the sand

grew softer and softer, and now and again we sank in so deeply that we had to toil a solid half-hour to extricate the car. And each time this happened we lost more precious water.

About three o'clock we reached an oasis. It was uninhabited, but we found two wells with excellent water, and a ruined house.

"What about pitching our tent here and trying to mend the radiator?" I suggested to Tarbox and Mohammed, and they both agreed with me that it would be the best plan.

The oasis was only fifty yards from the sea. It appeared to be very fertile, as there were more than twenty date-palms and many bushes and flowers. It was sharply delimited from the desert, which lay inland as far as one could see. To the south-east, the way which later on we should have to take to reach Nufilia, lay a huge dried-up lake, which must have held salt water quite recently, for not even the smallest blade of grass was growing there. In the oasis alone was there life. On the old ruin sat a hideous vulture. Every time we approached him, he stretched out his ugly naked neck and flew high up into the air and circled slowly round, pursued by ravens and jackdaws which had built their nests in a date-palm and screamed hoarsely and incessantly. But in the desert reigned the stillness of death. When you stood still you could hear the wind blowing through the desert grass and the sound of the waves breaking perpetually on the shore.

We soon pitched our tent and started work on the radiator. We found that the leakage was more serious and more difficult to repair than we had expected. Fortunately we had soldering gear with us, and all that afternoon we tried to solder the hole, but the metal would not hold. Towards evening a fog crept in from the sea, nestling close to the flat desert. It grew cold. Tarbox took the axe and

began to chop branches off some dead bushes, but Mohammed stopped him.

"It will never do to light a fire here—if the Bedouins come and see the fire and the car they will think we are Italians and shoot us before we can get out of the tent."

"Yes, that's true," I said. "I had quite forgotten the Bedouins."

The two chickens which were left ran cackling about the tent. We caught one, and it went into the soup-pot with the macaroni and some vegetables we had bought in Syrtis. We did the cooking inside the tent, and covered the side towards the desert with a blanket so that the light did not show through. Unfortunately we had no weapons. We had thought it wiser not to buy rifles so that our peaceful intentions might be evident to the Bedouins. We rolled ourselves into our blankets and fell asleep.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when I was awakened by a rustling in the tent. It was pitch dark: the sky was clouded, and at first I lay quite still, not daring to strike a light. Then I clutched Mohammed's arm; he too was awake.

"Can you hear something?" I whispered to him. We groped in the dark until we got hold of Tarbox's electric torch and the axe. I quickly opened the tent flap and stepped outside. A large jackal stood just outside, gnawing our last chicken, which we had tied to a stick stuck in the earth. The hen was already torn to pieces, but queerly enough we had not heard a sound of the actual killing. I threw the axe at the jackal. He snarled and moved a little farther away, his yellow eyes shining like phosphorescence. There was nothing for it but to let him stay. We fell asleep again, several hours passed, and then all three of us awoke.

An uncanny moaning seemed to approach the tent; and then faded away. Now it came from above us, now from

all around us. Mohammed, who as a rule was unmoved by anything, was now seriously afraid.

"Some one must have died here," he said with deep conviction. "Those are the djinns howling."

"Nonsense!" I said. "I'm certain it is either birds or bats." And I made as if to open the tent and go out, but Mohammed kept me back.

"Please don't go out," he begged. "Djinns are very strong. They can wring your neck as easily as you can wring the neck of a chicken."

Mohammed rolled himself up in his blankets and began to sing all the *suras* from the Koran that he knew.

"Now they can't do us any harm," he explained, and to the sound of the monotonous reciting we fell asleep again.

Next morning we screwed the radiator on again. We had mended it as well as possible, and prepared to drive on, provided with a small reserve supply of water. We felt pretty sure that we should find other wells nearer the sea, and so should not run short of water.

Just as we were going to start Mohammed called to Tarbox and me. He stood by the palm-trees.

"Come here and just look," he said. "It was quite true what I told you last night—those were djinns round the tent."

Mohammed had found four graves. The dead had evidently been buried not very far below ground, for their bones lay spread about, and it looked as if jackals had been turning over the earth. Here and there were pieces of cloth.

"They were Italians," cried Mohammed. "I can see that they were wearing uniforms."

The dead had evidently been buried in great haste. We quickly left the eerie oasis.

We soon crossed the next stretch of desert, which was an ancient sea-bed. It was like a highroad to drive on, and

we could travel as fast as we liked. Then came sand again, dunes with coarse speargrass growing on them. About noon we encountered a serious obstacle. Before us was a small lake, not more than three yards wide, but so long that it would be impossible to drive round it, as the sand inland got looser and nearer the sea became quicksands. Hence if the car sunk in we should never be able to get it out again. We waded out into the lake: the bottom was firm, and at its deepest part there was only three feet of water, but that was enough to submerge the engine. We therefore unloaded the luggage and carried it to the other side in order to make the car as light as possible. I backed away and went full speed ahead. The others pushed, and we got across quite nicely.

We passed the wreck of an aeroplane which seemed to have been burnt. A little later we saw on a hillock a marabout's tomb, the simplest I have ever come across. Boulders had been placed so that wild beasts could not get at the dead. It was built of sticks planted among the stones, and from the sticks fluttered some bits of material.

"That is one of the Bedouin sheiks who died here," explained Mohammed. "He was a great man. We, too, used to bury our sheiks in that way."

"What are the pieces of cloth for?"

"They were his clothes."

In some places the fragments of material had been tied together, and in the pockets thus formed you could feel that some money had been placed.

"For the use of passers-by," said Mohammed. "All Moslems have to give one-fortieth of their possessions to the poor. But as the free Bedouins have no poor, and never come in contact with other people, they sew their fortieth in the clothes of a marabout. Anyone who needs the money can take it."



IN FRONT OF US LAY A SMALL LAKE



WE PASSED THE REMNANTS OF AN AEROPLANE



A MARABOUT'S TOMB



WE MEET THE ESCORT FROM NUFILIA

We also tied our contribution into the ragged bits of cloth.

It was three o'clock. The heat haze shimmered along the horizon. We stopped to eat a meal: we had a plentiful supply of bread and marmalade, and we soon made some tea. When we had been sitting a short time we caught sight of a cloud of dust in the distance. For some minutes we thought it might be a herd of gazelles, but little by little we could distinguish figures in the dust-cloud. They were men on horseback, and they came towards us at full speed, with rifle-barrels glittering in the sun.

"*Badawi*," said Mohammed. I looked at Tarbox. Was this going to be the end of our expedition? We had heard so much about the ways in which the independent Bedouins kill, and how were we going to persuade them quickly that we were not Italians?

The horsemen drew nearer and nearer. They had caught sight of the car, and the one in front swung his rifle over his head and spurred his horse. We retired behind the car. If they were going to shoot we should be sheltered from bullets. A moment later five riders were level with us.

The leader was a negro. He wore a kind of uniform and covered us with his rifle as he walked up to us.

"From where have you got that car?" he asked in broken Arabic.

"It is my car," I answered.

"But where are the American and the Englishman who should be here? Have you killed them?"

We were completely bewildered.

"Well, where are they?" The voice became more threatening.

"But we are they."

"You!" He lifted his rifle. "Now speak the truth, where are you from?"

"But we are they," I repeated.

"Why, then, are you in Arab dress?" he asked.

I explained, and asked him where he came from.

"From Nufilia. If you really are the Englishman and the American, then I can tell you that a telegram came from Syrtis three days ago, saying that you had left. We were afraid that the Bedouins had attacked you, so we were sent to search for you. But now all is well."

They all dismounted, a fire was lit, and we made tea. The negro went on:

"You are lucky to have got safely through. It's swarming with Bedouins here. Where did you sleep last night?"

I told him about the oasis with the two wells. He whistled.

"Oh, there!" He looked at the others and showed his teeth in a grin. Five of our soldiers were killed there last month. The Bedouins usually come there to water their camels."

I also told him about the crashed aeroplane which we had seen, and he remarked:

"Yes, they shoot like fiends. I've heard about that. They shot it down with an ordinary rifle. It's a very funny story." He started laughing heartily. "The pilot was killed in the crash; the engine, of course, was smashed and useless. The Bedouins wanted to celebrate the occasion. They set fire to the petrol and danced happily round the blazing fire. *W'Allah*, and then it happened! The 'plane exploded: it was filled with bombs. The Bedouins were all killed."

"But we didn't see any bones round the 'plane."

"No, I suppose the other Bedouins have come back and dragged the corpses away."

Sending his companions ahead with his horse the negro joined us in the car and we started for Nufilia. When we had covered about twelve miles we saw a signboard in the

sand which pointed inland, and on it was written in clumsy lettering: "To Nufilia 30 Km."

Here was a very faint horse track which little by little became a regular road, and about eighteen miles from the sea we saw Nufilia. It was dark as we approached the fort, which lies in a valley between high hills and is surrounded by barbed wire fences. An enormous searchlight shone from the roof and showed us which way to go. Suddenly the barrier loomed right in front of us. The negro gave the pass-word, the gate was opened, and we drove into the open courtyard of the fort, and up to the main building, a small wooden shed used as an officers' mess.

The Commandant was a captain called de Pauli. He courteously came out to meet us and introduced us to the other officers present, five in all: the doctor, a fat, rosy fellow; two artillery lieutenants; the wireless operator; and a cavalry officer.

"You have had difficulties in getting through?" asked Captain de Pauli. "We have received a series of telegrams about you from Syrtis. We had begun to fear that you had been attacked."

"It was the radiator that caused the trouble."

"Is it all right now?"

"No, we could not get it soldered properly."

He called a mechanic and told him to see that the radiator was mended.

"And now I hope you will dine with us; the meal has been waiting quite a long time."

We ate our fill of macaroni and roast kid, and we were then given a room.

The next day we were busy repairing the car, but we did not succeed in getting away. The radiator was badly damaged, and it had to be properly mended if we were going to reach Benghazi.

I went to Captain de Pauli in his office.

"Please may I see a map of the section to Arghela?" I asked.

He pointed to a large map on the wall.

"We don't know much about the way from here to Arghela," he answered. "It's nearly two hundred miles, and even though a few mounted patrols have got through, it's more than five years since one of our large military cars did the trip. I'm afraid you won't be able to find your way alone."

"Why?"

"The country is quite trackless; there are huge stretches of dense scrub, which it will be very difficult for you to force your way through. You'd better let me send a soldier with you as far as Bir Umm el Rich."

"Where is that?"

"It's a well about forty miles from here. I can't give you an escort farther than that, as the frontier is at Bir Umm el Rich, but I'll telegraph to Arghela, which is in Cyrenaica, and get them to send a patrol to Bir Merduma, and they can show you the way farther on."

"What is Bir Merduma?"

"Two wells about twenty miles from Bir Umm el Rich. There's a valley between them and hills on both sides."

He telegraphed to Arghela that we would start the next morning; but we had to stop two days more in Nufilia, as it proved very difficult to get the radiator watertight. At length, on the morning of March 15, we were ready. We had bought a kid, which lay bleating in the back of the car, and we were taking a large packet of macaroni, six loaves, some dates, and a few pounds of potatoes. The soldier who was to act as guide sat next to me.

The surface was dreadful. We had to cross gullies several yards deep and push through dense scrub, breaking down the bushes as we advanced in bottom gear. In spite of having strapped our baggage securely, it worked loose

time after time, and Mohammed and Tarbox had to keep a sharp look-out so that we did not lose anything.

About noon we were only half-way to Bir Umm el Rich. Two wheels punctured, and when we got the inner tubes off we found that they were both full of sharp thorns from the scrub. We had only brought patches for vulcanizing—eighty in all, which ought to have been enough—but we had to mend forty holes before we could proceed. The heat was stifling, and the perspiration ran off us in rivulets. It was a wonder that the springs of the car could stand the bumps when we drove across the holes.

The country became a little flatter. Suddenly the soldier caught sight of a herd of at least ten gazelle on the horizon. He got his rifle ready. I drove at full speed; the car jumped madly over the terrible ground—but we did gain on the gazelle. The soldier fired, but missed; once more he tried, and this time was successful—one of the gazelles fell and we had soon cut its throat. During this exciting hunt we had to a certain extent lost our bearings. At length the soldier thought he had found the right direction, and we went on, following his instructions, zigzagging to right and left.

"We shall never be able to follow our own track back if it should be necessary," I said to Tarbox.

Tarbox shivered uneasily. "No, it's lucky we've a guide with us."

About six o'clock, when the mist came creeping in over the desert and the sun could only be seen as a blood-red ball, I had begun to doubt whether we should find Bir Umm el Rich that day. Suddenly the soldier shouted:

"Stop, I think it's here."

Not far away was a rounded hill, very much like all the other hills in the monotonous landscape. On the hill were the tracks of many horses.

The well was about fifty yards from the hill, a mere hole

in the sand a yard wide and quite impossible to distinguish at more than twenty yards' distance. I threw a stone into it, and it was several seconds before we heard the hollow splash when it hit the surface of the water. Luckily there *was* water, even if it was far down. We had a bucket and a rope. We pulled the first bucketful up and drank. The water tasted horrible—it was both salt and sulphurous, nearly undrinkable. Then we unloaded the car. When the tent was pitched I wanted to use our can holding eighteen quarts of fresh water, but I could not find it. Evidently it had dropped off while we were occupied with the hunt.

Darkness descended. We lit a fire, made tea with the radiator water, and boiled as much of the gazelle as we could eat. Then we wanted to sleep.

"It won't do if we all sleep," said the soldier. "There are many Bedouins. We must keep watch in turn."

All night we each took our watch outside the tent. The fog covered everything. It all looked so ghostlike, till the sun at last rose and the mist cleared away.

We loaded the car.

"Well, I'm not coming any farther," declared the soldier as we were about to start.

"But you can't walk right back to Nufilia," I said.

"I shall get there some time to-night," he answered.

"But how are we going to find our way alone?"

"That's very easy." He pointed to the south, where a large valley lay between two mountain ridges. "You have only to follow the valley until you get to Bir Merduma. There are two wells, very easy to recognize, and there is good water. You will find an escort waiting there for you."

He slung the remainder of his antelope over his shoulder, and with one of our loaves and a tin of apricots he started on his way back to Nufilia.

Bir Merduma turned out to be an open circular place

about a hundred yards wide, without a blade of grass. In the middle were two hillocks, which were the two wells. The nearest well was almost as deep as Bir Umm el Rich, but the water we pulled up was much clearer than the sulphurous liquid which the other well had contained, only it was full of little larvæ which we had to strain off. There was no sign of an escort. We first thought that we were too early, but then we discovered some fresh horse dung. It was obvious that the escort had grown impatient and had left just before we arrived.

The sun blazed fiercely. The kid bleated with thirst—we succeeded in making it drink a little of the water from the well. As we walked round the place we found on the right-hand side a veritable fortification and on a hill to the left were trenches.

"It looks as if they have been fighting for the well," I said to Tarbox. "You can still see the marks of the bullets which have hit the sand."

All was quiet, however; only a couple of vultures sailed high up under the blue sky. The stiff grass moved; constantly we had the feeling that eyes might be watching us from the hills and that a bullet might come whistling at any moment. We were all wearing Arab dress.

"Bedouins might come here for water," I said to Tarbox.

"In that case they'll be sure to think we are Italians when they see the car, and shoot us before we can speak to them," Tarbox remarked.

I beckoned to Mohammed, who was trying to stuff a few dry straws into the mouth of the kid.

"We had better try and get away from here. Come on, Mohammed, we will see if we can find a road."

We crossed over to the opposite side of Bir Merduma and tried vainly to follow the horse tracks in the loose sand. Suddenly Mohammed shouted to me.

"See! See!" He waved his hand eagerly. "A track of a car! That must lead to the fort we're going to."

Though none of us knew which way Arghela lay, and it was not marked on the map, it was more than likely that this motor track would lead there, especially as it went in the opposite direction to that by which we had come.

We ate our last tin of apricots, filled the radiator water-tin with water from Bir Merduma, which, in spite of being salt, was distinctly better than the mixed water which had been in the tin before, and then realized that both front tyres had punctured. The inner tubes were full of holes. When we had mended them we had only about twenty patches left.

We then followed the track. Often it was so faint that we had to get out of the car and search for a long time until we found it. We had to push our way through scrub and loose sand. We punctured several times and our supply of patches dwindled further. When the sun set we were only twenty miles from Bir Merduma, which should leave another hundred miles to cover before we reached Arghela—if we only knew where Arghela lay.

At sunset we were crossing an enormous plain; as far as the eye could see there was only stiff grass and sand. Far on the horizon we could just discern some high chalk cliffs, tinged red by the rays of the setting sun. We dared not drive on after dark as it would have been impossible to follow the track, so we camped. We had only two or three quarts of water left in the tin, and there was thus nothing for the kid, which was still alive.

When the sun had set a dry wind rose. We pitched our tent and soon fell asleep.

The next day, March 17, we covered about sixty miles, still following the faint track through inch-deep, loose sand. About three o'clock we reached the foot of a high ridge. I suggested that Tarbox and Mohammed should

mend one of the front tyres, which had punctured, while I climbed the ridge to try to form an idea of our whereabouts. Then they were to take the car along the narrow gorge between the hills, through which led the track we had been following.

When I had topped the first crest I saw a ridge in front still higher; on it were several stone constructions which looked like wells, but when I reached them I found they were ancient Bedouin tombs.

To the south, the way the track led, there was nothing but desert. The sand stretched yellow as far as the eye could reach, until far out on the horizon it melted into a blue haze. Obviously the track did not lead to Arghela, which could not possibly be situated in the middle of the Libyan Desert, where all the wells had been closed up with concrete. I descended on the other side of the hill, and shortly afterwards found the car track. It looked as if at some time there had been many camels here; there was camel dung everywhere, but no smoke could be seen, no palms, no traces of human beings. I found the car just as it was getting dark.

"Why didn't you drive on?" I asked Tarbox.

"I can't get the tube mended. It's full of holes, and we have no more patches," he answered.

"I think it would be better to turn back: this track doesn't lead to Arghela; it leads straight on into the desert. How much water have we left?" I asked nervously.

"One quart."

"Then there's nothing for it but to try to get back to Bir Merduma to-morrow. At least we shall have water there. To go on would simply mean death."

For the first time the possibility of death in the desert rose before us.

We made tea with the water we had, and lay down to sleep. The whole night all three of us were ill. We

thought we had contracted dysentery. In the morning Mohammed said:

"I know why our stomachs are bad. Do you know what Bir Merduma means?"

"No."

"It means," he said, "'the well with the laxative.'"

We tried to mend the inner tube. It proved impossible; we could not make any patch stick, and vulcanized rubber does not dissolve in petrol. We tore up our European overcoats and stuffed them inside the tyre, and after great difficulty succeeded in fixing it. This helped a little, and at noon we had done about thirty miles of our return journey, leaving forty-five still to be covered.

As bad luck would have it, we punctured in two more wheels.

The situation was getting desperate. We had no water; for twenty-four hours we had eaten nothing, as our stomachs were so upset by the tainted water that we could not swallow any food.

We had a hasty consultation, and decided to abandon the car, drink what water we could from the radiator, and take the remainder with us. Thus we would have a slight chance of reaching Bir Merduma alive.

We all three kept our Arab dress. Tarbox took a blanket and a little macaroni and sugar. I took the bucket, with what rope there was, and my own blanket. Mohammed took a blanket and the can with the few quarts we had drained from the radiator. We cut the throat of the kid and tried to drink the blood. But, in spite of our throats and tongues being quite dry with thirst, none of us could swallow the nauseating liquid. Then we left the kid behind, as we had neither time nor wish to eat it. Our stomachs were still very queer.

At one o'clock we left the car. A quarter of an hour later it had disappeared in the vast waste. Then we fought

our way through the deep sand for a couple of hours, walking one behind the other. It was too hot to talk. Every half-hour we handed the can round and each of us was allowed to take one mouthful of the rusty, oily, lukewarm water. Possibly our thirst made us drink too deeply, for at three o'clock the can was empty, and we threw it away.

A wind rose, and the fine sand penetrated into ears and nose. Each gust was like a red-hot blast. We walked for another half-hour in silence with our eyes riveted to the track. Tarbox groaned to me:

"I'm all in. Let's rest a little."

"No," I declared. "Remember there's no more water, and at night we can't follow the track. We must go on as long as it is daylight."

Mohammed was a few steps in advance.

"Come on," he shouted impatiently to us.

Tarbox staggered on.

At four o'clock we heard a humming sound on the horizon. We stopped and listened, not quite sure what it was. Suddenly two specks appeared in the sky to the east.

"Aeroplanes," I shouted. "We're saved!"

We spread our blankets on the ground: we took off our burnouses and waved them. The two aeroplanes came nearer and nearer. Three minutes after we had first heard their engines they were right over our heads. We shouted and cried, we waved, but they neither saw nor heard. They continued flying westward, about 1500 feet up, then turned north and disappeared as quickly as they came.

The silence was felt doubly after they had gone from sight. None of us dared speak; the disappointment was too great. Then Tarbox said:

"I'm sure they've been sent out to look for us. Bad

luck that we didn't stay by the sea—they couldn't have helped seeing us then!"

I too felt quite stunned. I only answered:

"It's some consolation that they know we're missing. They are sure to send soldiers to Bir Merduma."

This small event had cheered us up for a moment, but then the reaction set in. The vast desert, the dry winds, became unendurable. None of us could speak. We still plodded on in single file—first Mohammed, then I, lastly Tarbox.

About half-past four Mohammed turned round and suddenly shouted to me:

"Tarbox is dead!"

I turned quickly, but could see Tarbox nowhere. Then I caught sight of a white bundle lying on the ground. We hurried back to him. He had fallen face downward in the sand. He did not move. I turned him over. His face and lips were blue. He did not seem to be breathing, and I could not hear his heart beating.

"He's dead," said Mohammed impatiently. "Come on, let's go."

But Tarbox was not dead. When I had done my best with him for ten minutes he recovered, to the great astonishment of Mohammed. I brushed away the sand from his face and eyes, and tried to get him on his feet.

"Let me alone," he said. "I'm much better here."

"No, come along, we must get ahead: it means death for us all to stay here," I said.

The sand hissed incessantly around us, forming a fine red mist which rose above our heads.

"I want to sleep. Do leave me in peace!" said Tarbox feebly, and shut his eyes again.

Both Mohammed and I shook him; he must not be allowed to sleep.

What was to be done? Tarbox would not come: he was

still only half-conscious. As soon as I let go of him he collapsed again. He had sunstroke, and only water could help. I shook him again.

"You can go. Then why don't you?" he said irritably.

We gave him all our blankets, and I told him he had only to follow the track the next morning if he felt strong enough, otherwise he was just to stay where he was, and we should try to bring some water from Bir Merduma.

I found that he had thrown away all the packets he had been carrying, so now we had absolutely nothing to eat; but as our stomachs were still out of order we did not feel hungry.

Mohammed and I went on. Hour after hour we followed the faint car track which led back to Bir Merduma. The sun set: the moon, in her second quarter, rose. Although it was half dark, we would not give in. We must reach Bir Merduma, so that we could return with water. We were both in despair: perhaps Tarbox was already dead.

It turned cold, and the wind increased, drifting the sand like fine powdered snow so that the car track was at times entirely hidden. For long stretches we walked by instinct till we found it again.

About half-past eight we had completely lost the track. We hunted for it in every direction, but in vain. We went on, and gradually ascended the slope of a hill. From its crest the bleak, wild landscape extended as far as one could see. Yellow sand everywhere; in the valleys lay the mist, and up above the sea of mist chalk cliffs reared their naked sides.

We had to find Bir Merduma, a mere hole in the ground, hardly a yard wide, and we still had several miles to go.

"I suppose Tarbox is dead now," said Mohammed.

"Yes, he is better off than we are. We shall never find

Bir Merduma again. And there is no water anywhere else."

"We must trust in Allah!" Mohammed said hopefully.

"How far do you think it is to the sea?"

"At least three days—and we shan't find water to drink there either."

No, we could not get to the sea. We had not had many drops of water that day, and we could not last out three days under the scorching sun.

Mohammed had learnt part of the Koran from his father. And here, in the great waste, where hyenas and jackals were afraid to come, he sang a *sura*. Tarbox had our blankets. We were tired and sleepy, and lay down where we were, creeping close together to keep warm. The wind whispered around us, and the red sand soon covered us.

When we awoke the next morning the sky was cloudy. It looked like rain, and no human being could ever have wished for rain more than we did that morning. When Mohammed saw the clouds he said:

"Allah will help us: now we shan't die."

"But I don't like those clouds," I said. "How are we to keep our direction without the sun?"

"I believe that's north," said Mohammed, pointing.

We should be heading north. I thought his instinct would be truer than mine, so we took the direction in which he had pointed. We did not feel thirst nearly as much as on the previous evening now that there was no wind and no sun.

For two hours we went steadily on. Suddenly we caught sight of a figure in white far ahead, advancing towards us.

"I think it's a Bedouin," said Mohammed.

We were no longer afraid to meet a Bedouin. We were ragged and hungry, and would have faced all the Bedouins in the world without fear if only we could get water. The

figure approached. We waved; he waved back. We ran; the figure ran too, towards us. It was Tarbox! Unknowingly we had retraced our steps!

We clasped each other and wept for joy. Both Mohammed and I had reproached ourselves many times for leaving Tarbox, even though it was only to fetch water. Tarbox said he was quite all right. When he woke up that morning he felt refreshed and rested, and had started immediately for Merduma. He was still following the track which Mohammed and I had lost on the previous evening.

So once more the three of us walked on, this time with much more hope, for although no rain had fallen the sky was still cloudy, and we could again follow the track which must lead us to water. After about three hours we reckoned that we were only a few miles from Bir Merduma. Tarbox wanted to sleep for a couple of hours, but I opposed this, as we were so near water. He stubbornly insisted, so again Mohammed and I went on alone.

About noon we reached Bir Merduma, though we only saw it when we were practically there. Our joy knew no bounds. We lowered the bucket into the deep well and greedily drank of the salty, larvæ-filled water. But it was *water*—what did it matter that we had nothing to eat? We could starve for many days more—but water, water! The apricot tin still lay in the sand, its label faded in the sun. We sat dozing in the sand, waiting for Tarbox.

But Tarbox did not arrive. Becoming uneasy, we filled the bucket with water and set out to look for him. We found him barely a hundred yards away, fast asleep. We threw the contents of the bucket over him, and I don't think a man was ever more surprised than he at this sudden downpour in the desert!

When all three of us had slaked our thirst we faced the problem of what to do next.

"I suppose some one will come and find us," Tarbox said.

I did not feel so sure of this.

"We don't know for certain if those aeroplanes were looking for us. It may be a month before anyone arrives here, and by then we shall have starved to death."

"We can wait here a few days, and if nobody comes by then we can go on towards Nufilia," Tarbox suggested.

I could not agree to this.

"We have absolutely nothing to eat, and can't get anything. We must use our strength while we have it."

"Well, I'm staying here at any rate. Here's water!" Tarbox declared.

"What do you think?" I asked Mohammed.

"I think we ought to go on. We shall die of hunger here. If you will go I will come with you."

The result was that Mohammed and I decided to go on to Bir Umm el Rich. Tarbox was to stay behind, and if anyone arrived he was to send them on after us. If we met anyone, we should return.

We found an old bottle which the soldiers had evidently thrown away. We filled it with Merduma water, drank as much as we could hold, and set off. As before, we followed the track of the car. It was very faint, and evidently there had been a sandstorm. We counted on reaching Bir Umm el Rich by the evening.

We had brought the bucket, some rope, and two blankets, leaving part of the rope with Tarbox, who, as he had made a bucket from an old tin can he had found near the well, would not lack water. About an hour before sundown we lost the car track, but found horse tracks instead.

"How long can a horse last without water?" I asked Mohammed.

"Two days at the most."

"Then these tracks must soon lead us to a well. Let us follow them."

Our small bottle of water was empty before night. The clouds had cleared away in the afternoon, and the sun burnt even more fiercely than on the previous day. At nine o'clock, by moonlight, we found an old blockhouse. It looked as if there had been soldiers there at one time, but we could discover no trace of a well. Mohammed found some mushrooms, which we ate. About midnight the moon went behind a cloud, and we could not see the trail. There was nothing to do but to lie down. We crept behind a bush and fell asleep.

The next morning the sun rose in full splendour, and already at eight o'clock beat fiercely down on our heads. Our thirst began again, and with it came a deep depression.

"Why did you say we should follow that trail? It would have been much better to keep to the car track—then we should have been in Bir Umm el Rich. Now we don't even know if we shall ever find a well," said Mohammed in despair.

"It was your doing as much as mine. You told me the horse tracks would lead to a well," I said irritably.

"Perhaps the well was at the blockhouse, only we couldn't find it in the dark."

I looked at the empty bottle. "The American was right: we should have remained at Bir Merduma."

"We can't walk all those miles to Nufilia," declared Mohammed, "and, in any case, we shall never be able to find Nufilia at all—it lies in a valley. Shall we turn back?"

I too had begun to feel the terror of the desert, and we turned back, following the track by which we had come.

By noon the heat was stifling, and our thirst unendurable. It was a wild landscape through which we were

travelling. Round us was scrub, tall, dry grass, and small hillocks, each one exactly like the next. We saw a hill with some kind of stone erection on the top. It looked like Bir Umm el Rich.

"I think it *is* Bir Umm el Rich," I said to Mohammed. "I'll go up and see."

The hill did not seem very far away—under half a mile, but the heat haze made it impossible to judge distances correctly. Mohammed was too tired to go on, so he sat down and I went on alone.

The hill proved to be at least a mile away, but the mere possibility that there might be water made me hurry. When I reached the top I found that the stone erection was an old tomb.

Thirst tormented me as it had never done before. There were some large yellow snails on the parched grass stalks; I tried to eat them, but they were dead and dried-up, for the winter rains were over long ago.

I found my way back to Mohammed, and again we went on, hour after hour, until in the afternoon we could go no farther. We chewed dry grass and the flowers of some thistles, but they gave us no moisture; our tongues were swollen and black, and our palates so dry that it was difficult to speak. We flung ourselves down and lay there for an hour or more. Our feet were so sore that we could not drag ourselves along.

Suddenly in front of us stood Tarbox! We had not noticed that we were only a hundred yards from Bir Merduma.

"I thought at first that you were Bedouins," he said, "so I dared not come up to you. You know I can't speak Arabic."

Tarbox had settled down in very practical manner. In a sandhill not far from the well he had dug out a cave. He had found some rusty cans which he had filled with

cleansed water, and we drank—drank as much as we could hold.

That day we did not talk of going on. We were much too happy to have that awful water. In the evening Tarbox crept into his cave: we huddled under some bushes, lit a fire, and fell asleep.

By the next morning our courage had re-awakened. Both Mohammed and I wanted to start out again. And this time we were not going to come back. Tarbox still refused to come. "It is too risky," he said. Once more we set out into the desert alone. We followed the track as far as the last time, but now we turned north, in the direction where we thought the sea should lie. The soldier had told us that it was only about three miles to the coast. True, Nufilia was not on the coast, but somehow or other we were sure to be able to find the right point to turn inland.

As on the previous occasion, we had one bottle of water with us. It was very hot, but this time we were more sparing with the water, and in spite of all temptations we only used it to moisten our lips.

About noon we came to a dry river bed, a *wadi*, where a kind of tall green reed was growing, but we found no water. We could see, however, that there had been water here not so very long ago. We pulled out whole armfuls of reeds, and chewed the soft stalks. That eased our thirst a little, but we soon realized that the soldier had underestimated the distance to the sea. About two o'clock we were still following the *wadi*, when we came across the track of a dromedary. We followed it, and a quarter of an hour later saw a white house in the distance. It was obviously not a marabout's tomb; it was a real house where people lived.

Our bottle was still half full of water.

"What does it matter now?" I said to Mohammed.

"There is a house, and where there is a house there is water. Now we can drink all our water with an easy conscience."

We lifted the bottle to our mouths and in a second had drained all the precious water, which before we had only dared to drink drop by drop. I pulled five hundred lire out of my pocket.

"We have plenty of money," I said proudly, and gave Mohammed a hundred lire. "When we get to the house you may buy what you like."

"Yes—we will have eggs and chicken. For where there is a house there will be some hens. Perhaps we can even get hold of a lamb. Roast lamb—that tastes good!" said Mohammed enthusiastically.

In our eagerness we ran towards the white building. It looked well kept; its door was shut, but as sheep dung lay around it would not be uninhabited. We banged at the door. There was no answer. We banged again. Still silence reigned. Then we pushed the door open, and stepped inside.

Foul air met us. A couple of large spiders scuttled away as the door opened, and a gecko fled up into the roof, from where it looked at us out of its queer eyes. It was half dark in the room, and, dazzled as we were from the strong sunlight, we could at first see nothing. Then we became aware of a figure lying on the stone couch at the far end of the room. It was an old man with a long grey beard. We drew nearer, and saw that he was dead. He had been dead so long that he had become almost mummified. One hand hung down towards the floor, where stood an empty stone jar. On the table lay a Koran, open at the *Ya Sin*, the death *sura*. Dust lay inches deep everywhere. In a corner stood a wooden box, with bits of bones, pieces of insects, bats' wings, and old feathers.

We shut the door and went out into the sunshine.

"But there must be a well belonging to the house," said Mohammed despairingly. His voice quivered with disappointment.

We did find the well. It lay twenty yards from the house. It was full of sand.

In despair we walked on. At a short distance from the house we found a village, entirely in ruins. We did not see one whole house standing. Here, also, all the wells were blocked up. A little farther on we came across a graveyard, all the stones being placed in the direction of Mecca. On some graves there were no stones, only rifles or ploughs in their stead. The stillness of death reigned everywhere. A jackal peeped out from behind one of the graves, looked at me as if surprised, and slunk away.

"I wonder where he gets water to drink," I remarked to Mohammed. Mohammed wept.

"And now we've drunk all the water we had," he wailed, "and we can never find our way back to Bir Merduma."

"No," I said, "we shall have to go on until we reach the sea. Perhaps we shall be able to get water there."

"Why do you think that? It would be salt."

I picked up a rifle which lay on one of the graves. Possibly with the help of its barrel and our bucket we could make a distilling apparatus. I did not know how it was to be done, but we had to try everything.

We went on towards the sea. The *wadi* grew wider and more fertile.

"It looks as if plenty would grow here," I said. "Why do you think all the houses have been pulled down?"

"Probably the Italians," said Mohammed.

"Do you think they have destroyed the wells too?"

"They did that in the village where my father was shot, so why not here?"

"But what happened to the people?"

"They were allowed to go to Benghazi, where they could live as they wished if they were not shot."

"And the women?"

"Allah alone knows! My mother married the soldier. I have not seen the others. Allah alone is just."

The grass grew taller and taller. Evidently we were approaching the spot where the *wadi* entered the sea. Suddenly something yellow sprang past us a little way ahead. Mohammed shivered.

"What was that?" I asked.

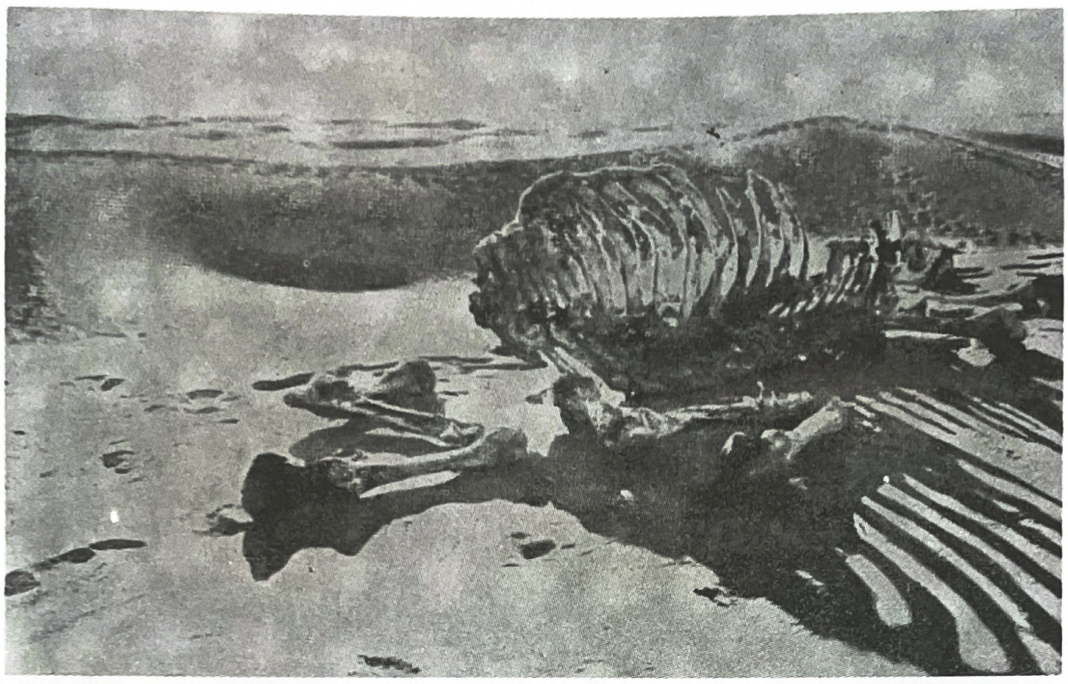
"A leopard. Come, let's hurry! It's dangerous."

Just before sunset we came to the sea. It lay shimmering blue in the sunshine. We felt that we were saved. There was still no trace of man, nor of any well, but the yellow scorched desert lay behind us. Here was water enough, but undrinkable. The long white beach reddened in the sunset. The sea broke lazily in long, flat waves on the level beach. We took off our clothes and bathed; that eased the thirst a little. Then we began gathering wood for a fire. Much dry driftwood was scattered over the beach, and in a moment we had collected enough for an enormous fire. But we could not make a distilling apparatus. We tried in vain to soak the blankets with steam from the water we boiled in the bucket, but they did not get damp enough to enable us to get more than a few drops of fresh water. We found a few snails which we ate. That was all for that evening. Tired, but thankful to be by the sea, we fell asleep.

The next morning our wandering along the shore began. Our feet were sore after the many days' march. We walked barefoot in the water to heal them. Suddenly Mohammed shouted, "I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"How to get water. In Tripoli we used to dig holes a



A VICTIM OF THE DESERT



I SAT ALONE ON THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN



MUSTAPHA, WHO WAS NEVER AFRAID



THE ITALIAN OFFICER WHO DROVE
THE RELIEF CAR

little away from the edge of the water when we played on the beach. We could drink the water which came up into them."

I felt rather sceptical. We dug many holes, but the result was always the same. The water was salt.

Then we tried other things. We caught some crabs which we ate alive. There was not much in them to quench our thirst. We tore to pieces all the small snails we could find and swallowed them, and we hoped to find octopus and other creatures. But our thirst became worse and worse, and probably also we unintentionally swallowed a good deal of salt water. About noon it was unendurable.

One good idea occurred to us: we waded right out into the sea with all our clothes on, and then continued walking along the shore in our damp garments. This helped us a little. About five o'clock we found five wells quite near the coast. In four of them the water was so salt that we could not drink it, in the fifth it was dirty and slimy but brackish. We drank as much as we could swallow and filled our water-bottles.

That evening we lit a fire again and slept on the beach.

"When do you think we ought to be turning inland?" asked Mohammed the next morning.

"I know no more than you," I answered. "Nufilia is twelve miles from the coast. Our safest plan will be to keep along the shore till we are well past Nufilia, and then strike inland and carry on until we hit our old motor track."

"How far is it to Syrtis?" asked Mohammed meditatively. "Syrtis is right on the sea—it should be easy enough to find."

"Yes, but we could not possibly walk so far. Remember we have eaten nothing for seven days. We can't do another 250 miles. That would take us at least twenty days more, and we can't last so long without food. Are you hungry?"

Mohammed shook his head. "No, but I can feel that

I'm beginning to get tired. I don't think I could stick it if we rested in the daytime. We must keep on."

He smiled. "I wonder how the American is?" he said. "At all events he has water."

"Yes, he is in Paradise—fancy, all the water he can drink!"

I imagined Tarbox in the desolate Merduma!

All day we wandered along the coast. About four o'clock we caught sight of a post standing on a sand-dune. When we reached it we found it was a signpost. On the board was an arrow, with the words "To Nufilia" and beneath them "Second Squadron Savari."

"But that's the squadron which the officer at Nufilia commands," I cried joyously.

Mohammed did not answer. We were both crazy with joy. Suddenly he called out to me; he had found a well, a well with wonderful fresh water. We began at once to turn inland.

"To-night we shall eat macaroni," I said. "It's only twelve miles to Nufilia. We can get there by eight o'clock."

Before us lay a range of hills. We climbed the first hill: there was one still higher behind it, which we also climbed. Eight o'clock came.

"We should be there by now," I said. But there was still no trace of Nufilia. Far away we saw one peak higher than the plateau on which we stood.

"Let us go over there," I suggested. "From there we are certain to see the lights of Nufilia."

Mohammed did not answer. He had sat down, and for the first time I saw him give in. His head lay on his knees.

"I'm finished," he sobbed. "I can't go any farther."

I comforted him as best I could.

"Now we are so near our goal, Mohammed, it's no use giving in. When we arrive at that peak we are sure to see that Nufilia is quite near."

Mohammed dragged himself along behind me. I hurried on, anxious to see Nufilia when I arrived at the top. I felt quite certain about it—hadn't we seen the signpost on the shore?

I got there somehow. There was nothing to be seen. As far as the eye could reach it was dark. The wind blew cold, but not even the glow of a Bedouin fire showed in the darkness.

I waited a little. Mohammed did not come. I grew uneasy.

"Mohammed," I shouted, but there was no answer. I felt as if I were going mad.

Mohammed had disappeared. I shouted and yelled, but still there was only silence.

What goes on in the mind of a man at such a moment cannot be described. Here I sat on a hilltop in Tripoli, absolutely alone, without water, without food, without hope.

And Mohammed had disappeared.

Mohammed was quite an ordinary boy, whom well-dressed Europeans would call a dirty little beggar, and now I was longing for him with all my heart. I should go mad if I did not find him. What became of all that man termed 'intellect' and 'culture' in this great waste? It disappeared completely, and what was left was only man calling to Almighty God, aching to feel another human heart beating next to his own, so that together they could defy the eternal emptiness.

In those five minutes on the hilltop I learnt more wisdom than a whole lifetime spent in listening to the wisest philosophers of Europe could teach. Life and death were one.

The moon shone dimly. I went back to look for the boy. He was dressed in white, and when I had searched for five minutes I found him lying on the ground, fast asleep.

Evidently he had sat down to rest for a moment, and, tired as he was, had collapsed. That night we both slept on the hilltop.

The night was filled with dreams. Night became reality and day the unreal. It was as though the mind could not accept all this darkness, and created its own paradise in the night. As the body grew weaker and weaker the soul became set free, and dreams possessed a strange clarity.

But when we woke up the next morning we were both utterly dispirited. Without any doubt this was the end. We had evidently gone too far, and now how could we find Nufilia, which lay hidden in a valley?

We had to retrace our steps to the sea, where there was water, and we went back, scarcely exchanging a word. We reached the sea when the sun was at its highest. We began to walk along the beach, but after a couple of hours the coast changed in character, so that we could no longer walk along by the water. There were huge rocks which it was impossible to pass, and we had to turn inland for a few miles. Here grew a dense thicket of tall bushes, with spiky thorns and leathery leaves. It seemed as if the hyenas and jackals understood that we were exhausted, and that it would soon be over with us, for we saw a number of them. They moved about us stealthily, nearer than ever before. About five o'clock Mohammed spoke, for the first time that day.

"Shan't we find some place where we can dig a cave?" he suggested.

"Why?"

"Then we can lie down. Very soon I cannot go any farther, and what is the use, anyhow? We are walking just haphazardly. We shall never find Nufilia."

"But why should we dig a cave?"

"So that we can die in peace. We could block the

entrance with a stone while we still have some strength left. The hyenas and jackals will attack us if we fall."

He wept. "I'm not afraid of dying. By Allah, my father taught me to be a good Moslem! But I'm afraid of the animals."

I tried to rouse the courage in him as best I could—I had not much myself. And it might happen . . .

In the evening we found a hedgehog among the bushes. We lit a fire, killed the hedgehog by hammering it with a stone, and then threw it just as it was in the fire. A few minutes afterwards it was only a black lump. We peeled its black crust off and divided the flesh. All that could possibly be eaten was eaten.

All next day we dragged ourselves along a few miles inland. In the morning we found a well with good water, but still no human being, still no track. About four o'clock we saw a fort high up on a slope facing the sea. A flagpole rose above it, but no flag flew from it.

It was uninhabited.

Twenty or thirty graves showed us that there had been fighting here not so very long ago, and empty tins and bottles were scattered everywhere. Not far from the graves the jackals and hyenas had built their dens, but in the soil wild corn was growing. Mohammed gathered a few sheaves of this, lit a fire, and we roasted some handfuls of corn.

As the sun set the hyenas became more daring and came up to the fort. We set fire to a blockhouse, and slept in the shelter of the fire, which blazed all night. Hyenas and jackals kept away, but till sunrise they were howling their uncanny concert over the sea.

The next morning was the tenth day we had had no food, and when we woke up I said to Mohammed:

"If you agree, I will make a suggestion."

"What is it?"

"You see a lot of empty bottles lying there. Let us fill four of them with water, then let us go inland to try to find a track, until all four bottles are empty. If we have found nothing by then, we may as well give up. And at least it will be better in one way, as there will not be any hyenas there."

Mohammed nodded. We filled the bottles with water, and started to walk inland.

At ten o'clock we found a trail. We followed it, but two hours later it divided into three. We did not know which of the three to choose, but we trusted to fate and took the left one. Half an hour later we came into a valley, and suddenly—I thought it was a hallucination—I saw a radio mast not far away. I stopped and looked anxiously at Mohammed.

"Can you see that mast there?"

He could see it. The mast was there.

It was Nufilia.

A large caravan had arrived in Nufilia. The Bedouins stared at us open-mouthed as we went through the camp to reach the gates of the fort. I suppose we did look queer. We were both barefooted, as the hard leather of the shoes had worn our feet to pieces. Our burnouses were ragged and torn. We were copper-brown, and my beard had grown long. The last mile had been the hardest of all.

The sentry stared at us in horror. He did recognize us, but, as he explained later, he thought that we were dead long ago. I asked him if Captain de Pauli was there.

He did not answer, but led the way to the officers' mess. Soldiers came running from all directions to see us as we passed. The officers were eating when the soldier entered to announce our arrival. We heard the tinkling of glass, and cutlery rattling against the plates. Then came a sudden bumping of chairs and tramping of feet; all the

officers came hurrying out with their napkins in their hands.

We were saved, but we hardly realized it yet. We did not feel tired. All around us seemed to be shrouded in mist, as if this actual reality was only the dream which we probably both had dreamt so often. The officers looked at us as if we had risen from the dead. Then Captain de Pauli arrived. He came towards me, he loomed immense, the Italian tricolour over the officers' mess began to revolve, the building started to rock and sway, the many eyes became thousands of eyes.

"Tarbox is at Bir Merduma. He is starving to death," I managed to say. Then all was darkness.

I woke up as somebody sprinkled my head with cold water. It was the chubby-faced doctor. I sat on a chair, Mohammed sat next to me, and in front of us was a dish of steaming macaroni.

"Please, can I have a little of it?" I asked. The doctor shook his head.

"Your stomach could not possibly stand it. Wait a moment—something is coming for you."

An officer brought a bottle of brandy and some raw eggs. He poured out two glasses, but Mohammed would not drink.

"You know it is forbidden," he said reproachfully.

"Nonsense!" I answered. "It is necessary that you take it, and then it is not forbidden. Now drink it." We drank the brandy and the raw eggs. It filled such a small gap, and we felt a ravenous desire for the macaroni which we had been dreaming of for days. But there was no question of our being allowed to touch it.

Captain de Pauli sat at the head of the table opposite me.

"Can I get a couple of horses to-morrow morning to go out after Tarbox?" I asked.

He smiled and shook his head.

"That's all right! Tarbox is safe—he's in Arghela now, and perhaps he'll arrive here to-morrow morning, or even to-night. Don't worry about him."

The doctor then asked: "How many days is it since you have eaten?"

"To-day is the tenth day."

He looked dubiously at me.

"Ten days! Impossible! And you have walked all the way?"

I nodded.

"First we walked to Bir Merduma after we had left the car in the desert; then we lost our way in the desert, but got back to Merduma; then we left Merduma again; lost our way, walked along the coast, and finally found Nufilia."

He looked at Mohammed, who was only skin and bone.

"And this little rascal has stood it all? I shouldn't have thought it possible. And you have had nothing whatever to eat?"

"Yes, grass, a hedgehog, and some snails."

The others laughed. One of them said:

"Hedgehog does not taste bad—I've tried it a couple of times."

I looked at the speaker.

"Isn't it you who commands the Second Squadron Savari?"

"Yes," he answered.

"I saw a sign down at the beach on which was written 'To Nufilia, Second Squadron Savari.' It pointed inland, but we found no Nufilia."

"I know," he said. "That sign is very old; it marks the frontier between Tripoli and Cyrenaica. It ought to have pointed along the shore; I suppose it must have turned round."

Captain de Pauli interrupted the conversation.

"Now you had better go to sleep. I am sure you need it."

Mohammed and I were given a room, but we could not sleep. We were too tired, and only now the real hunger set in. I sneaked down to the canteen and bought two tins of apricots. We had one each, and the consequences to our stomachs were not agreeable.

Towards evening we felt better. Mohammed went down to the Arab soldiers, among whom he became the hero of the day. I had a shave and went to see Captain Pauli in his office.

He asked me to sit down and pointed to a huge stack of telegrams.

"All these have arrived because of your disappearance. As you see, we have had enough to do. We have searched for you for more than a week. We had given up all hope of finding you and thought that you were dead."

"It was a near thing," I said smilingly. "But what about Tarbox?"

"A cavalry patrol was sent out from here four days ago, and at the same time they sent out a dromedary caravan from Arghela. They reached Bir Merduma practically at the same time. They found Tarbox. He was more dead than alive, and the caravan took him back to Arghela."

"And now is he coming here?"

"Yes. The Commandant from Arghela, de Ronco, is sending two cars over. They have already left Arghela, so we can expect them soon. The idea was that they were to look for you, but now they can drive out and get your car. Why couldn't it get through to Bir Merduma?"

"It was the rubber that let us down. Can I buy some new inner tubes here?"

"You can have a look round to see if there are any of

the right size. But wouldn't you like to hear how our cavalry patrol found Tarbox?"

"Yes, very much."

De Pauli rang, and a young Arab soldier entered.

"Fetch Ibrahim."

Ibrahim was the negro soldier who had found us when we were on our way to Nufilia. He saluted smartly as he entered.

"Tell us how you found the American at Bir Merduma," said the captain.

Ibrahim hesitated. "May I speak Arabic?"

"Yes, of course," answered the captain. And the negro began:

"Well, we arrived in Bir Merduma, and saw a pair of boots sticking out of the sand. By Allah, we got scared, we thought it was somebody who was dead; but when one of the soldiers pulled at the boots the American came out of the cave he had dug in the sand. *W'Allah*, how he looked! Like a *mahbul* [madman]. His whole face was covered with sand, and he stared at us as if we were djinns. I asked him, as I had been ordered, where were the car and the other two men, and he answered that he did not know —they had gone. And he pointed out to the desert. 'But why did you hide?' He did not understand me, but said something in a language I had never heard before. I pointed down into his cave; then he understood. '*Badawi.*' He evidently thought that we were Bedouins. I gave him something to eat, but it was impossible to get any explanation out of him; then an hour later the caravan from Arghela arrived. It was *habasch*, Eritrean troops, and as we had to search for the two missing men we let him go to Arghela with them."

"But the letter the American gave you? Have you got it still?" asked the captain.

"*Aiwa*," answered the negro, and went to fetch it.

A moment later he came back with a piece of paper and a sock.

It was one of my socks, which I had thrown away about twelve miles from Bir Merduma, because it was worn out. He handed me the letter; it was written in English and addressed to "Nufilia."

"My friend and Arab boy disappeared in the desert five days ago," it read. "If possible send help as fast as possible."

"Where did you get that sock?" I asked, astonished, when I had read the letter.

"*Naam, ya Sidi.* We found the sock when we left to search for you and the boy. So we brought it back to prove that you had been where we found the sock. But all tracks ceased there."

After my talk to de Pauli I sauntered down to look at the Bedouin caravan which had just arrived, and which was to be sent to Syrtis the next day. It was outside the barbed-wire fence.

The sheik of the camp invited me to tea in the tent, and I told him who I was and that I had come to see how the Arab tribes in North Africa lived. We spoke Arabic, and when he heard that I was a Moslem the reticence he had first shown disappeared entirely.

"I wish Allah would help us," he sighed. "Life is not easy for us. If only they were all like the Italians in Nufilia; they at least treat us like human beings, but very few are like the *capitano* here. If foreigners have got to be in our country at all, he is one of the best. We can talk to him and he does not kick us, as so many others do."

"Where are you going?" I asked him.

"To Syrtis. And from there we are going where we shall be ordered to go. We could make no further resistance; we were starving to death."

"But where do you come from?"

"From the interior of the country. Until about a month ago we were independent, but then they blocked up the wells with concrete, so that we could get no water for our dromedaries. So we had to go towards the coast and submit."

"Oh, you are going to Syrtis?" I replied—and before me rose an image of the camp I had seen outside Syrtis, where the Bedouins were perishing in poverty and dirt.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Cyrenaica."

He nodded meditatively, then repeated:

"To Cyrenaica." He smiled. "There you will see much more than here. Here in Tripoli things are just bearable, but in Cyrenaica it is a real fiend who is the Governor. He is called General Graziani. The Bedouins are shot or hung like dogs."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, why? It is war to the knife on both sides. But, by Allah, it would not have been half so bad if they would let us live our life in peace." He sighed. "But really I need not tell you all this—you will see for yourself."

I gave him my hand, and he stood up.

"*Salaam aleikum*, and thanks because you came to see us! May Allah protect you!"

I left the camp depressed with a horrible foreboding. I received the impression that Captain de Pauli and his officers were well liked by the Arab soldiers, whom they also praised highly. Captain de Pauli was not only a soldier; he was also a human being, and he did his best to understand the people and their way of thinking. As I returned to the fort I met the captain and raised the question.

"Where are those Bedouins going?" I asked.

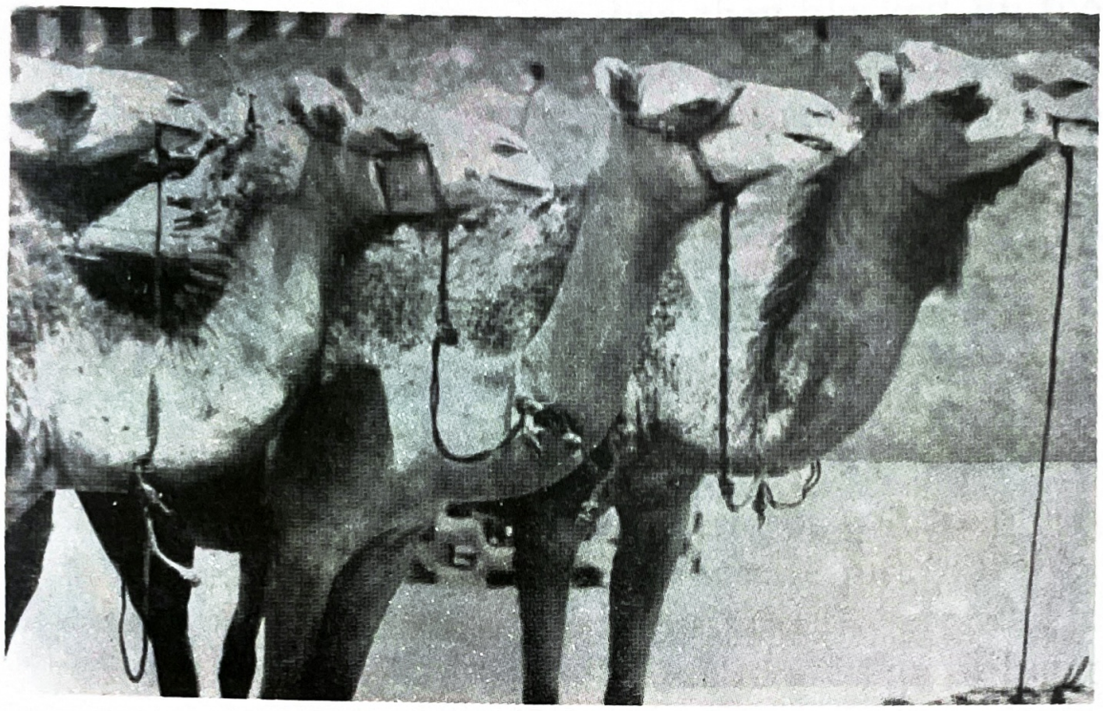
"To Syrtis."



WE FIND OUR CAR AGAIN IN THE LIBYAN DESERT



THE ITALIANS USE PRACTICALLY ONLY ERITREAN TROOPS
TO FIGHT AGAINST THE ARABS IN CYRENAICA



CAMELS IN A CARAVAN



ANOTHER ARAB VICTIM

"Is it true that there is a war in Cyrenaica?"

He looked at me for a moment; then he said, "Yes, but that has nothing to do with Tripoli. It is fairly peaceful here. Tripoli and Cyrenaica are two separate colonies, and I don't quite know what is happening over there. There has been peace for several years, but now the trouble has broken out again."

"Why?"

He answered evasively.

"It isn't every one who understands the natives very well."

And that is all I heard about it.

When we had had supper the sirens on the roof of the fort suddenly sounded. Captain de Pauli went up there, and a moment later a soldier was sent down to fetch me as well. As I came up Captain de Pauli was staring in the direction of Bir Merduma. He pointed into the darkness.

"Can you see anything out there?" he asked.

I strained my eyes, and a moment later I could see a faint light coming towards us.

"That's your friend arriving," said the captain.

The light came nearer, and proved to be the lamps of three cars struggling through the sand. The searchlight was turned on to show them the way, and it soon stretched its yellow light, like a huge flame, across the desert. The cars took about half an hour to arrive, but at length they drove through the gates of the fort. They were manned by Eritrean troops. In the front seat of the first car sat Tarbox, next to him a small Italian officer.

The cars stopped outside the officers' mess, and Tarbox and the Italian officer jumped out. Tarbox was still in Arab dress. He looked distressingly thin. For a moment he did not see me; then his whole face shone.

"Where's Mohammed?" he asked, and as he saw Mohammed behind me he heaved a sigh of relief.

"I felt quite sure that you were dead, when day after day passed without any news of you. But now, thank heaven, we are here, all three of us."

The little officer came forward and shook my hand. Tarbox introduced us.

"I must tell you that I admire Mr Tarbox. He arrived yesterday morning, and insisted on leaving immediately to search for you. But now that is fortunately not necessary."

I told him of our wanderings in the desert, and Tarbox said:

"It wasn't exactly fun for me either. I spent every day sitting on top of a hill looking out at the desert, and no one turned up till the day before yesterday, when the patrol arrrived. I had to ride to Arghela on a camel."

I could not help smiling: Tarbox had never before ridden on camel-back.

"What did you think of it?"

He shook his head. "Awful, I tell you. I was more dead than alive when we arrived in Arghela. I was seasick the whole time. Sitting on a camel feels like being on a ship in rough weather. And there were only Eritreans in the caravan. Of course we couldn't say one word to each other."

He sighed with relief. "But anyway, now it's all over."

We all went indoors.

"Would you mind if we started early to-morrow morning?" asked the little officer.

"Why, no. Let us get away as soon as possible," I replied.

"What was the trip across like?" put in the captain.

"The road was dreadful."

"It's over five years since the last car came here from Arghela," said the captain.

"Yes, and now we shall have to see if we can find that

car of yours, but I expect the Bedouins will have burnt it." The little officer was sceptical. We went to bed.

As far as I was concerned it was not a very peaceful night. In the desert the nights had been the best part—there I dreamt the most marvellous dreams. Yet now that I had both water and food the night became a real hell, a perfectly crazy nightmare. I lay in an excellent bed, and had placed a tumblerful of lovely clear water next to it, but each time I fell asleep I dreamt that I was still wandering in the unending desert, where the sun blazed and the sand glistened yellow. My palate contracted with thirst: my tongue swelled up. I felt all the horrors much worse than I had done in reality. Then I would wake; see the water by my side; drink as much as I possibly could; fall asleep again—and dream once more. These dreams pursued me for a long time after this, on every single night.

When reveille sounded in the morning the three cars, crammed with Eritrean troops and armed with machine-guns, started. We passed the same road which we had taken before our ten unhappy days. In the car with me was an immensely fat sergeant. He was very squint-eyed, and had a martial beard; but it was difficult to determine his race. Probably there was some Arab blood in him, for he spoke excellent Arabic to the Eritrean soldiers who were in the same car, but who did not understand much of what he said.

"Oh, I assure you," he said, as he refreshed himself from a bottle of Chianti, "there is nothing which frightens me less than those dirty Bedouins."

"Have you met some of them, Mustapha?" asked a young Eritrean.

"Have I met some?" Mustapha drew himself up, and made a wide gesture with his arm. "Lots, lots. But the Bedouins know Mustapha. They know what his sure eye means."

"Where have you fought them?"

"Are you quite deaf, then? By Allah, one would think so. Where have I fought? Haven't I told you hundreds of times? But you evidently have only eyes and ears for the harlots in Arghela."

The others laughed, and Mustapha went on happily: "I have fought against the Senoussi during the War when the English were on our side. I can tell you, that was some war. This one is a mere nothing compared with what happened then. Once, out in the desert, I had gone ahead all alone, when I saw (and, by Allah, I swear this is true) a troop of Bedouins in the distance. They were already flourishing their rifles, and anyone else would have been terrified. But who kept calm? Mustapha! I lifted my rifle to my shoulder, and at that distance hit the leader so squarely that he fell off his horse. I took aim again while the bullets——"

"Bedouins! Bedouins!" came a shout from the front car. Mustapha forgot the rest of the tale. He was as pale as a corpse, and his fat body shook. When the officer had scanned the horizon with his field-glasses, the Bedouins proved to be a herd of gazelle. Mustapha told no more stories that day!

The sun was setting when we arrived in Merduma. The wells were deserted as when we had left, and near one of them lay Tarbox's bucket and rope.

The camp was pitched; a machine-gun was set up on the hill, and we all fell asleep, tired after the terrible shaking over the desert. Next morning we were to look for the car in the desert.

The morning was misty. A big camp-fire blazed. We started as quickly as possible in search of the car. We followed the track which we had pursued the day before, and as we went I asked the little officer where that track led to.

"It is eight years old," he told me, "and it leads to an oasis in the Libyan Desert which is now uninhabited."

"How far is it from Merduma?"

"About three hundred miles."

It was fortunate indeed for us that we had turned back. We should not have had petrol enough even for half that distance.

We had now got so far that we began to keep a look-out for the car.

"If the Bedouins have found it they will have burnt it," said the little officer.

Tarbox saw it first as a black speck in the distance. It had not been burnt; it was just as we had left it, only the sand had drifted over it.

It was only ten o'clock when we reached the car, and in just under an hour we had mended the tyres. Mohammed and I got into our own car, and we started again towards Bir Merduma. About one o'clock we arrived there, and turned at once in the direction of Arghela.

At ten that evening we reached Arghela, a fort just like Nufilia, under the command of Colonel de Ronco. The little officer who had led the expedition was received as a hero. The stretch between Nufilia and Arghela was considered the most dangerous in the Libyan Desert. We had wandered about it for eleven days, and had not met a single Bedouin—it was utterly incomprehensible.

In Arghela the difference between Tripoli and Cyrenaica made itself felt at once. Here there was not a single Arab soldier; they were all natives from the Italian colony of Eritrea.

"Why don't you use Arab troops?" I asked Colonel de Ronco during the evening.

"You can't trust them. They fraternize with the enemy."

"But are the Eritreans any better?"

"They are more reliable. They hate the Arabs, who are Mohammedans, for they themselves are Christians. The Arabs here in Cyrenaica are exceedingly poor soldiers, while we can trust our brave troops from Eritrea implicitly."

"Then the Arabs round here don't want to be soldiers?"

"No. It's not the same as in Tripoli. There is an unquenchable hatred between the Eritreans and the Bedouins. For instance, some years ago some of the Eritrean troops here from Arghela caught three Bedouins. They burnt them."

"Burnt them?"

"Yes, they built a bonfire, and put the Bedouins on top alive, and then set fire to it."

"But weren't they punished?"

"No. They are our best and bravest soldiers. The Bedouins only got their deserts. How many of the Eritreans have not been killed in the most bestial ways? In this kind of warfare one can't afford to be soft."

That was my first impression of Cyrenaica.

Tarbox was considerably the worse for his stay at Bir Merduma. His digestion was completely out of order, and nothing seemed to be able to induce it to function normally again. It was obvious that he could not stand our irregular way of living; and we decided therefore that he should leave us when we arrived at Benghazi.

We stayed only one day in Arghela, took in petrol and provisions, and started for the fort of Ajedabia, which was some two hundred miles from Arghela. The country between Arghela and Ajedabia was very similar in character to that which we had just passed through—with this difference, however, that now it would be hard to lose one's way, for a wheel track ran between the two forts.

Very early in the morning of March 29 we had everything ready for the start. Most of the officers of the fort were asleep, and only Colonel de Ronco had got up to say good-bye.

Just as the car started a breathless Arab came running up to us. "Please, may I come with you?" he asked.

I looked at the car. We had a heavy load, the tent and the rest of our gear, together with the petrol cans, taking up quite a lot of room. It was difficult enough for Mohammed to screw himself into the back of the car.

"Look for yourself—there is not much room here."

"But I could sit in the front seat, next to Mr Tarbox," Mohammed offered. Little by little he had begun to forgive Tarbox for his aversion to more desert travel.

"But it's certain that we shan't get on very fast. Our tyres are nearly worn out," I objected, and this objection was a valid one. We had had to throw away our only spare tyre as useless, for the inner tube burst each time we tried to pump it up. It had been impossible for us to get a new one in Arghela, and the tyre on the left front wheel was as bad as any barely serviceable tyre could be. We had had to tie leather straps round it to cover up the holes.

"But I can help you if anything should go wrong," said the Arab. He was allowed to come, and we started towards Ajedabia, which with luck we hoped to reach that evening.

The country was quite flat, almost wholly covered with dense scrub, except for dried-up salt lakes, where we drove on the crystallized salt. When we had driven on for a couple of hours and had covered the best part of sixty miles the Arab asked if we had plenty of water. I told him we had more than five gallons.

"It's impossible to get any water in these parts. The wells have been blocked up."

"Why?"

"No Bedouins are allowed in this district. If we should meet any we can be quite sure that they are at war with the Italians."

"As we came through from Nufilia to Arghela we saw a village which was entirely destroyed. Where would the people belonging to it be?"

"Allah alone knows!" said the Arab. "Perhaps in Syrtis; perhaps they are dead, if they have not surrendered."

Mohammed told him about the dead man we had found in the house near the coast. The Arab listened with interest.

"It must have been a marabout. He has not wished to leave the tombs of the dead, and as the well had been blocked up he must have died from thirst."

"But you yourself?" I asked. "Why are you going to Ajedabia?"

"I keep a general store both in Arghela and in Ajedabia, but there are still four days before the car service between the two forts leaves. That is why I took the chance and left with you. Are you English?"

I told him where we came from.

It was dinner-time. I stopped the car and got out to have a look at the front wheel. Its appearance was not very reassuring, and it was obvious that it might burst at any moment. The Arab merchant went apart to say the midday prayer, and I followed him. When we had finished he looked at me in astonishment.

"I did not know you were a Moslem," he said. "You look like one of the Christians."

"Well, you can hear for yourself that I am," I said smilingly, "and particularly after the ten days we spent in the desert. Each day I thought would be our last. I am as convinced of the truth of Islam as you are."

"Have you ever been a Christian?"

"Yes, but in my country Christianity is in decay. A large proportion of the people have no faith left at all."

"They deny Allah?"

"Yes. They don't believe there is a God at all."

"But how did you find your way to Islam?"

"I only got to know Islam when I had learnt Arabic, and once I was interested I studied further until I became convinced."

"But why did you become convinced?"

"Because Islam is clarity itself. By following its rules you get nearer to God than through any other religion."

The Arab nodded. "What you say is true. I myself am a Senoussi. Do you know our sect?"

"No."

"Here in Cyrenaica you will get to know more about us. The sect was founded by Sidi Ahmet Senoussi, who was a pupil of Sidi Ahmet Idriss."

"Sidi Ahmet Idriss from Meknes?"

"Exactly. And we follow the words of the prophet Jesus. Once he was asked, 'Where did you learn your wisdom?' Jesus smiled and answered, 'No one but Allah has taught me wisdom, but I have seen the follies of fools. That is why I avoid them, and with the help of Allah I have learnt to purge myself from what I abhor in others.' That is the teaching of the Senoussi. You must get nearer and nearer to Allah, not through beautiful poems or art, but by letting poetry and art work on you so that your soul becomes pure. The pure soul shall see Allah."

"That is what the Sufis say."

"Sidi Ahmet Senoussi was also a Sufi."

"Has his teaching many followers here?"

"Yes, practically every one here in Cyrenaica considers Senoussi as their teacher, but there are very few who really follow him." He sighed. "It is difficult to follow him here.

The Italians persecute the Senoussi in every way—but all that you will find out for yourself."

We had lunch and drove on. About two o'clock our front tyre burst, and it was beyond repair. The outer cover was utterly ruined, so we should have to get to Ajedabia as best we could. We stuffed grass into the tyre, and in that way were able to go on slowly. But about sunset we were still sixty miles from Ajedabia, so we stopped and pitched our tent. There was no danger that we should suffer any privations, for this time we had been prudent enough to bring plenty of provisions and water. We killed a couple of chickens, and put them in the soup-pot. Just as the sun was setting Mohammed caught sight of three men mounted on camels coming towards us. They did not look friendly; in the light of the setting sun we could not see them very clearly, but by their long rifles they were almost certainly Bedouins. According to the custom of the desert they had tied their kerchiefs round the lower part of their faces. When they got nearer they got off their camels, and for a moment seemed irresolute, talking together.

The merchant, who had been cooking the soup in the pot, now came out. When he saw the horsemen he said: "They are certainly Bedouins. Better let me go and talk to them."

He advanced towards the Bedouins, unarmed and with outstretched hands. The Bedouins allowed him to come nearer, and a lively discussion now followed between them.

"Lucky for us that we have the Arab here," said Tarbox, "otherwise we might have had serious trouble."

When the merchant and the strangers had talked together for some time he came back and asked me to come back with him to the Bedouins. Their leader was a tall, black-bearded and black-eyed man. He looked me up and down critically, then pointed to the merchant.

"He says you are a Moslem: is that true?"

"By Allah."

"Good; and the other one?"

"He is probably a Christian."

"But he is not an Italian?"

"No."

"Will you be responsible for him, that he will not say he has met us?"

"Certainly I will."

The merchant turned to me.

"You understand that it is necessary to keep quiet about this meeting when we get to Ajedabia? Otherwise the Italians will hunt the Bedouins with their aeroplanes."

I nodded; then I turned to the leader.

"I hope by Allah that you will eat with us. Our food is just ready."

The front legs of the camels were tied together, and the three Bedouins came up to our tent. They left their rifles on the backs of their camels. I took Mohammed aside and told him to wait on us at table, and he nodded happily:

"I can do it properly. I know all their ways."

The camp-fire was lit, and we all sat round it. I had now plenty of opportunity to watch my guests. The leader was pure Arab, only about thirty years of age. He was slenderly built, but tall, and his face and eyes had the calm expression which life in the desert gives. The two others looked as if they had some negro blood in their veins.

"Where do you come from?" asked the chief.

I told him about the motor drive right across Africa and about my start from Morocco. Rumours of Abd el Krim's heroic fight for independence must have penetrated even down here, for he nodded meditatively.

"Marrakech," he said. "That is where Abd el Krim is fighting. How are things going with him?"

I told him of the defeat of Abd el Krim, and about his captivity on Réunion.

"Allah alone is just," he said. "It is the same everywhere. Islam has nearly ceased to exist."

"It is not as bad as that," I observed. "Perhaps Islam will win by reason of this period of distress. Everywhere it is gaining ground continuously, in India, in China, in Europe."

"It is very bad here." He sighed. "We are getting fewer and fewer. Our villages are bombed and destroyed. Our women are taken away. We can do nothing against the devilish machines of the Italians."

He was silent a moment. I offered him a cigarette, which he declined with a movement of his hand, then he went on:

"You are going to Ajedabia; there you will see two of our men. They were taken prisoner the other day when we had a fight with the Italians, and now they will probably be hanged. Allah alone is just."

"Where do you come from?" I asked him.

"From Kufra."

"Where is that?"

He looked at me in astonishment.

"Don't you know Kufra? It is the biggest oasis in the Libyan Desert. Fortunately it is still free, but we are all under arms in order to defend ourselves against the Italians, who are expected down there at any moment. We were a small detachment which has just been visiting those oases that are still free. Some have turned back, others have been killed, and the two I spoke of a little while ago will be hanged in Ajedabia one of these days. We ourselves are turning back as quickly as possible."

Mohammed came out to the fire with a washing-bowl. As the leader saw him he said in surprise:

"But he is a Bedouin! Where does he come from?"

I explained Mohammed's history to him as Mohammed had told it me. Now the leader questioned Mohammed:

"Who is your father?"

"Hamid ben Abd el Asis."

"Hamid ben Abd el Asis from El Muruk?"

Mohammed nodded.

"Your father was a good Moslem. Try to grow like him, and Allah be with you!"

Mohammed smiled proudly.

"And where are you going now?"

"To Benghazi. I have an uncle there. I am going to stay with him."

The chickens were cooked, and we dined. After having had some tea we lay down to sleep. Nothing would induce the three Bedouins to sleep in the tent: they wrapped themselves in their blankets and lay down on the sand.

The next morning shortly before sunrise the leader of the Bedouins led the prayer. And half an hour later they took their leave of us, mounted their camels, and had soon disappeared.

As fast as the front tyre would allow we limped along, and without further incident reached Ajedabia towards evening.

There was no question of our using our tent in Ajedabia: the merchant invited us to live in his house, and we stayed there a couple of days.

Ajedabia is a very small town, entirely dominated by the fort, which is fenced in with barbed wire. The day after our arrival the whole town was in a state of excitement: there was to be an execution. The two Bedouins of whom the leader had spoken had been sentenced to death and were going to be hanged.

The execution took place the next morning in the market-place. The gallows had been erected in the middle

of the square as a terrible warning to the Arab population; and the execution took place in public. Shortly before sunrise a detachment of Eritrean troops took up position in a square round the grim gallows, which stood out black in the dim light of dawn. They were in smart uniforms with tall red fezes and large silver crosses hanging round their necks. They stood round the gallows with fixed bayonets; but there was nobody to keep off, for the Arabs remained indoors behind closed shutters.

The two Bedouins were led in. They looked thin and miserable in the morning light; they were chained together, but their bearing was proud, and nothing in their faces showed terror of death. They were brought under the gallows and an officer advanced, opened a scroll of paper, and read:

"By reason of your having transgressed against the lawful Government by taking part in a rebellion, and having been made prisoners in action and bearing arms, you are condemned to be hanged by your neck until you are dead."

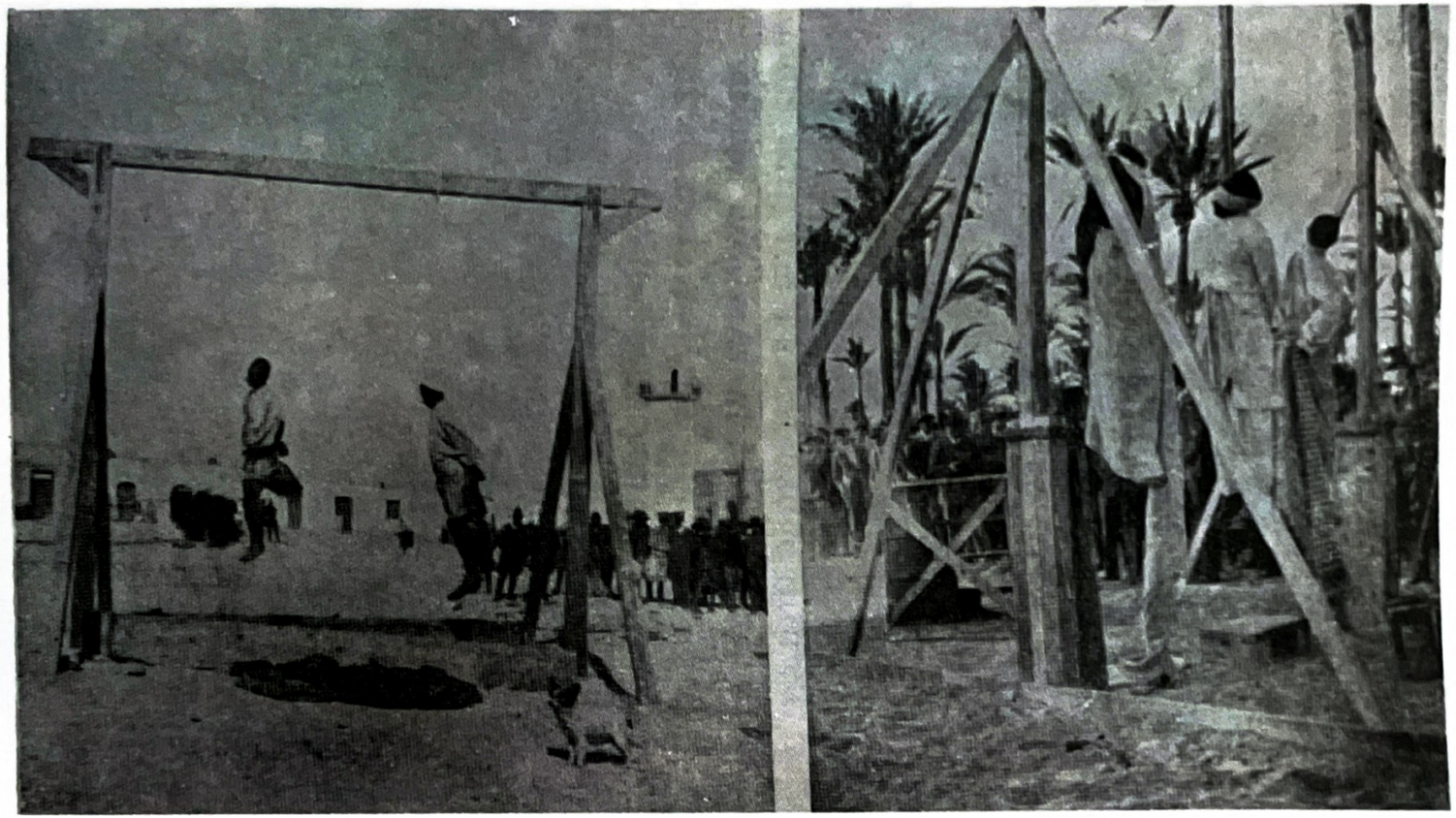
When the sentence had been read aloud the drums were beaten. The two condemned men shook hands calmly and mounted the scaffold; and then, without making any resistance, crawled up the ladder which had been placed there. The rope was put round their necks; the ladder was pushed away; a few convulsive movements, and all was over.

An Italian soldier who had been an interested onlooker remarked as he threw away his cigarette:

"They are quite spiritless, the dogs! It did not even upset them that they were going to be hanged."

And the troops marched off with a fanfare.

Next morning we got the car going and set off once more. I had purchased a new tyre, the road was excellent, and six hours after we had left Ajedabia we drove into



"... TO BE HANGED BY YOUR NECK UNTIL YOU ARE DEAD"

THE DAILY EXECUTION IN BENGHAZI



CHILDREN FROM BENGHAZI WHOSE PARENTS HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE WAR



BEDOUINS FIGHTING ERITREANS

Benghazi, the capital of Cyrenaica. The trip through the Libyan Desert was over.

Benghazi and Tripoli are very much alike. In both places you find the large square, which has been turned into a wonder of modernism by the Italians. In both places the Arab quarter, or Medina, is strictly separated from the European quarter; in both places you will find the silhouette of Mussolini's head on every wall; and in both places are European hotels, the equal of which, for comfort and luxury, you will scarcely find in Europe itself.

It cannot be denied that civilization has been created in Benghazi. Every afternoon at four o'clock the orchestra blares forth in the palm garden of the Albergo Italia, and at the tables of pavement restaurants sit smartly dressed Italians with the Fascist badge in their buttonholes and the striped trousers which civilization demands. But, in contrast to Tripoli, most of the people in the restaurants are officers. Wherever you turn the eye meets officers, with long shining boots and as many decorations as their breasts will hold. Spurs and sharp-edged swords flash in the sunlight; busy Eritrean batmen rush in and out among the tables with letters and telegrams, their black cheeks shining, their eyes dazzled by all the splendour, the like of which they never saw in distant Eritrea.

It was just four o'clock when Tarbox, Mohammed, and I drove up to the Albergo Italia. The car looked a wreck. It could hardly crawl on any farther and needed a complete overhaul; the doors would not shut properly, since the whole chassis had been strained, and the radiator was practically closed with concrete, so that it was a veritable miracle that it managed to keep the engine even moderately cool, the water boiling almost as soon as the engine was started.

And we ourselves did not look exactly smart. We were still wearing our Arab dresses, to the great amazement of

the Italians, who pay great attention to appearances; our hair was full of sand, dust, and oil; and our faces were red with the brownish-red desert sand through which we had just come.

The officers got out their monocles and looked at us with interest. We had a certain amount of difficulty in obtaining rooms in the Albergo, but succeeded in the end: we had to have a short breathing-space after those terrible days in the desert, before we started again through the mountains of Cyrenaica.

I write that *we* were to start; that is not quite correct. Tarbox had given in, and wanted to return to Europe as soon as possible in order to get his digestion put right again; and as we entered Benghazi it had actually been agreed that I was to drive on alone, Mohammed not being quite sure whether he wanted to stay with his uncle in Benghazi or continue to Egypt with me.

When we had had a bath, shaved, and changed, and were sitting at the pavement restaurant enjoying the sensation of being clean after having discarded three weeks of sand, Signor Bombardi arrived.

Signor Bombardi was a Venetian, and he belonged to those Italians who by nature could not follow the lead of militarist Fascism. Not that he was anti-Fascist: he very wisely never uttered an opinion on politics. But his heart was as soft as a child's. When Arabs were to be hanged—and that happened nearly every day in Benghazi—and all patriotic Italians went out with cameras to secure lasting records of the execution of traitors, then Bombardi shut himself up. He could not understand it. He was unique among Italians of Benghazi. He had the ridiculous and, for Romans, quite improper idea that Arabs were human beings, endowed with a capacity for feeling; therefore he would not watch them being hanged.

As I was discussing the subject with him one day, he

said: "I am from Venice. During the War the Austrians very nearly took the town. Just imagine if they had, and then had hanged all of us who were against them."

Signor Bombardi was a tall, stout man. He came up to our table and gave me his card. "Enrico Bombardi. Representative of Chevrolet, Benghazi."

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

I told him that we had driven through the Libyan Desert, and immediately he was full of enthusiasm.

"But that is marvellous publicity for Chevrolet! Please will you allow me to repair the car for you? I will do it as cheaply as possible. Can my chauffeur take it to the garage?"

I gave permission, and his chauffeur took the car, round which a wondering crowd had gradually gathered, to the garage, while I had to tell Bombardi about the tour.

"But that is *formidable*," said Bombardi, who spoke a mixture of French and Italian. "It has never been done before. I will introduce you to the editor of *Cyrenaica*, the newspaper here in Benghazi. He will be glad to write something about it."

By chance the editor happened to arrive at that moment, and we had once more to recount the story of the adventurous trip.

Evening came. The reaction after the desert journey now set in. We were all dead tired; Mohammed went to his uncle's house, Tarbox and I to bed.

The next morning our names were on all lips. *Cyrenaica* mentioned the desert trip in bold letters, and the twelve-year-old Mohammed especially had become famous. He came to me at the hotel in the morning, pulling at a large cigar.

"I am not coming any farther," he said.

"Why not?"

"No, I have got an excellent job at two hundred lire a month; and I can live with my uncle. I would rather do that."

There was nothing I could do about it, so I said good-bye to Mohammed.

I never saw him again.

An hour later the manager, Signor Malvicini, came up to my room and informed me that a gentleman wanted to see me. I went downstairs. In the hall stood a small, swarthy fellow, who said in Italian:

"You are the gentleman who arrived here last night?"

"Yes."

"You must come with me immediately to the chief of police."

I went with him to the police-station, a small gloomy building, and was told to wait in the anteroom. Here were gathered all kinds of people. Veiled women with their children were waiting; they had brought food, so it was obvious that they expected to wait a long time. Jewish merchants sat half-asleep on the benches. When I had been there half an hour I became impatient and asked how much longer I should have to wait. I was informed that it would be a long time yet before my turn came; and that the chief of police was in the Government Building, but he was expected back soon.

Twelve o'clock. One o'clock. I asked if I could go back to lunch. No, certainly not, I should have brought my own food. The little detective who had brought me to the station evidently thought me a very dangerous criminal, because I did not speak Italian as one ought to do.

About two o'clock the chief of police arrived—a small, unimportant-looking man with a long row of decorations on his chest—followed by his assistant, a black-haired Sicilian, who was to translate what I said in French to the

chief of police, who only spoke Italian. Later it became clear that the interpreter did not understand any French either, and the interrogation was therefore very difficult.

"Where do you come from?" the assistant asked severely.

"From Tripoli."

"But you had no permission to drive through."

This was said in such a mixture of French and Italian that I did not understand and asked the assistant to repeat it.

He banged the table, and his black eyes flashed.

"It is your fault, coming here without speaking Italian. I said that you had no permit."

I pulled my passport out of my pocket and showed him the permit. He read it through and showed it to the chief of police.

The chief carefully put his glasses on his nose and read.

"H'm!" he said, shrugged his shoulders, and put the passport on the table.

"Why did you not immediately report at the police-station when you arrived in Benghazi?"

"I did not know that I had to report here."

"I forbid you to drive on."

"I have no intention of driving on without a permit."

"Well, we are keeping an eye on you now. For what reason do you speak Arabic?"

"Because I am interested in Arab culture."

"Culture!" He grimaced. "The Arabs have no culture. Look at what *we* have built up! look at Benghazi! There can be no interest whatever for you in going into the country."

"I would like to have a permit to drive into Egypt."

"You will find that rather hard to obtain."

"Then there are disturbances?"

The Sicilian smiled gently.

"No, all is quiet; but there are no roads. We dare not take the responsibility."

"I will ask the Government for permission."

The assistant smiled again.

"But the papers are made out here. So now you know that you are not allowed to drive on."

All this was translated to the chief of police, who nodded approvingly, and I left, clearly realizing that it would be much more difficult to get through Cyrenaica than through Tripoli.

On returning to the hotel I asked Signor Malvicini if he thought there would be any chance of obtaining an interview with the Governor. He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is quite possible that you can get it, but General Graziani is very difficult to speak to. He is every inch a soldier, and his manners are very gruff."

"How long has General Graziani been here?"

"Only a month. They complained in Rome that the last Governor did not obtain sufficiently good results; too many things were allowed to pass. Then General Graziani was made Governor. It was he who led the campaign against Fezzan and Murzuk. He is very hard, soldier first and last."

That did not sound very encouraging. I ate my lunch and went outside to have my shoes cleaned. Benghazi has four shoe-cleaners. They have formed a combine and woe to the new shoe-cleaner who should try to turn an honest penny! He would be knocked out immediately. Hence these four elderly shoe-cleaners are all able to lead a comparatively luxurious existence; they can ask any price they like, and all four wear silk burnouses while they work. One of these gentlemen finally let himself be persuaded to clean my shoes.

After a short time he asked:

"Are you going on by car?"

"I hope so," I answered. "I am going to Egypt."

"Don't go on."

"But why on earth not?"

"The whole country is in rebellion. El Mahafdia shoot all who pass on the roads, even Arabs."

"Who is El Mahafdia?"

He looked round cautiously.

"They are the rebels who are under Sheik Amar Moktar. There are many thousands of them. They rule the mountains completely."

"Have you seen them?"

He shook his head.

"No, Allah preserve me, or I should not be here alive."

"Are they near to Benghazi?"

"Yes, quite near, in the mountains near Merg, or Barce as the Italians call it, sixty miles from here. And lately they have become quite savage."

"Why?"

"Every one who gets caught by the Italians is hanged or shot without quarter. Why, even if an Arab is suspected of being in touch with them in some way or other he is executed. But you are bound to hear more about it before long."

It was four o'clock. The sun shone warmly from the blue sky which Benghazi nearly always enjoys. When I had my shoes cleaned I saw Tarbox for the first time that day. He was slightly depressed.

"I'm so terribly bored," he confessed. "Do you think one can get any English books here? There isn't a soul here who speaks English except yourself, and you are away all day."

We found a small bookshop not far from the Albergo Italia. We asked the proprietor, an intelligent Jew, if he had any English books. Strangely enough he had some

cheap Tauchnitz editions, and while Tarbox looked through them he said to me:

"I read the article about you in the paper. It must have been a hard trip."

This I could only confirm.

"They also wrote that you had embraced Islam."

I felt slightly annoyed.

"I've been questioned about that a thousand times."

"Yes, yes, but that was not the reason." The little Jew looked quite hurt. "I myself am rather interested in Islam. I have an Arab friend who is a teacher here. He is a very great philosopher; he knows the whole Islamic philosophy from A to Z. I would like you to meet him."

"I would like to. Does he come here often?"

"Yes. I'm practically certain he will be here to-morrow. It is Friday and he goes to the mosque. He always comes here in the morning."

"Tell him that I would like to meet him, if he comes to-morrow. I will be here at ten o'clock."

Tarbox had found the books he wanted and we returned to the hotel. The whole evening Tarbox was busy reading, so I decided to have a look round the Arab quarter.

Benghazi's Medina is nearly as large as that of Tripoli—one square, whitewashed house after another, and in every street small Arab *cafés* where for a halfpenny you can get coffee and hookah. The market was closing. The tradespeople had fastened their booths with shutters; the camels from the country stood with their loads on their backs ready to leave; only the *cafés* were open, and the monotonous Arab gramophone music sounded from them all.

The *café* I went into belonged to an old Arab named Abdullah. The house was already full: the guests played draughts, drank coffee, smoked hookahs, and listened to the music, which Abdullah himself controlled.

When I entered all eyes turned towards me.

"Moslem," I heard them whisper.

It was not surprising that my entry into an Arab *café* caused a sensation, for I was in European dress, and the Italians would have considered such a visit as beneath their dignity. I ordered coffee and a hookah, and after a short time a man came over to my table.

"Then it is you who have crossed the desert by car?" he asked, followed by the undivided interest of the whole *café*. He spoke in Arabic, and I answered in the same language, but suddenly he changed into English. "My name is El Greco and I am British," he explained.

"English?" I said, astonished.

"Yes, I am from Malta."

I nodded. A moment later he asked again:

"You intend to drive through to Egypt?"

I nodded once more.

"Perhaps I could give you valuable information. I have been here for twenty years."

"Before the Italians came?"

"Yes, three years earlier. The Italians occupied Benghazi in 1912, at the same time as they occupied Tripoli. I remember when the Turks were here."

"Is it as bad in the mountains as they say?"

"It is very bad. The war has never been so relentless as it is now."

"Then there really is a war?"

He smiled mockingly.

"Yes, I assure you that there is a war. With the exception of one year's peace it has lasted nearly eighteen years. It is the mountain people who are fighting for their independence. But they haven't much of a chance."

"Why was there one year's peace?"

"Because then there was a very sensible Governor here. He gave the Arabs sovereignty in their own country, but demanded certain concessions for the Italians. The

sensible Governor was removed. The country had to be conquered. They tried to entice Ahmar Moktar into Benghazi, where he would have been arrested, but it did not come off. Ahmar Moktar was too clever. He stuck to his mountains; they can't capture him there."

"But why should they want to capture him when there was peace?"

"The peace was only a blind for further conquest. Cyrenaica is too fertile to be left in the hands of the Arabs, the Italians think. And they thought that if they had Ahmar Moktar behind bars it would be easier to break the mountain people."

"And now?"

"Oh, now they fight more fiercely than ever. Especially after General Graziani arrived here—he gives no quarter. All prisoners are hanged or shot, and if the civilian population shows even the slightest sign of sympathy with the rebels, as they are called, they too are punished. It's terrible!"

"And Europe knows nothing about it?"

"How should they know? All telegrams from here are censored, and the Government takes care that nobody sees anything."

"But why are things so bad here? In Tripoli it seemed to be quite all right."

"The dead do not talk. The Bedouins who fought in the desert in Tripoli are dead or have fled long ago, and the people in the towns are much more materialistic than the countryfolk, who will defend their ideals with their last drop of blood. I don't know your country, but just imagine that it was occupied by an entirely foreign race who treated the inhabitants as animals and shot anybody who resisted. Wouldn't you react against them?"

"Of course."

"Well, such is the case here. The people are fighting

desperately for their country, but without much hope; what can they do against poison gas and machine-guns? And that's what is called the advance of civilization. Oh, it's a disgrace to watch!"

El Greco drank his coffee, then he went on:

"It is possible that they will allow you to drive on through the mountains. But you will be watched—that's certain. When I go there I'm surrounded by spies on every side. But I'm a British subject, so they can't do anything to me. In Merj, by the way, you will meet a very nice Italian officer, the commandant of the mountain district. He is just; he makes no difference between Arab and Italian, but treats them all as human beings. Even the people in the mountains like him and do not wish to do him any harm; but, of course, he is only one against many."

"But why don't the Italians pursue a more humane policy?"

"They have gone quite mad since they took to Fascism. Actually they are very decent people, but now they imagine they are the salt of the earth. They dislike everything that is not Italian. They feel they are the heirs of Rome. Every raw lad of an officer already talks of the war which soon will be waged against France—as if there had not been war enough in Europe already."

"But Fascism has put many things in order in Italy?"

"Possibly in Italy itself. I know very little about it. But here at least it is awful. Many executions are taking place daily. And people are executed for such ridiculous trifles."

El Greco sighed.

"And all could go so well here. The native population are excellent people, unexacting and hardworking, but I assure you they have been baited, so it is no wonder things are as they are to-day."

Nobody had understood what we were talking about. I tried to talk to some of the Benghazi people present, but they all affirmed that things had never been better. Nobody dared talk of conditions as they actually were in Cyrenaica.

It was late when I got back to the hotel.

The next morning I met the teacher Ahmet Ali at the bookshop, quite a young man with a pale face. He was not modernized as a few of Benghazi's young Arabs were; he wore the old-fashioned burnous. He greeted me kindly and expressed his pleasure that I was a Moslem. The Jewish bookseller had a number of Arab books—Ahmet Ali took one of them and asked:

"Do you know anything about Sufism?"

"Not very much," I answered.

"Then you ought to get to know about it, as nothing else will enable you to understand what is happening here and the course of development Islam has taken. Here is a book by the Egyptian Omar Ibn-al-Farid, who lived six hundred years ago; it contains some of the most marvellous poetry which Islam possesses."

Ahmet opened the book and read aloud:

Oh Allah,
In the hour of trial Thou beautified it
And Thou gavest it free sway over me
And it became an adornment.

For when man ardently seeks Thy beauty
His soul will joyously go to its death from the midst of richest life.

The love of Thee is not found by the spirit
That has found rest.
The joy of surrender to Thee is not won by the soul which loves an easy life.

I have no way of departing from my Way in love
And if ever I shall turn aside from it,
I shall abandon my religion.[1]

Ahmet Ali put down the book.

"That book expresses Sufism very well. Sufism is the highest form of Islam. It endeavours to make the soul absorb itself completely into the Deity, to become one with it."

"How?"

"If a man loses himself completely in his own subconsciousness and at the same time stops being a slave to all material phenomena, and if he will steadily keep his thoughts focused on Almighty Allah, then one day it will happen that he will taste a drop from the cup of God's love. From that moment onward he will never again be able to forget God. All bodily enjoyments, all things that originate in the material world, will be small to him and unimportant. He will have reached the first stage of a Sufi's development. If he were a Christian he would find the one and mighty God in the Trinity, if he were an idolator he would apprehend God dimly in the stone he worshipped."

Ahmet Ali again took the book and read:

Surely splendour is thrown on the praying niche in the mosque by the Koran,
But just as surely no church was dishonoured by the Gospel.

And by the books which Moses brought to his people
The Rabbis each night speak to God.

If a pious man prostrates himself before the stone in a heathen temple,
Then—for him who understands—there is little cause for fanaticism.

[1] The last verse is taken from Nicholson's translation of Ibn-al-Farid.

For perhaps he apprehends in verity the Almighty Allah
Behind the stone he worships.

From Allah the warnings have reached those for whom they were destined,
And by the grace of Allah mercy is granted in all religions.

Here I interrupted:

"But the Sufis do maintain that Islam is the right religion?"

Ahmet Ali smiled.

"Islam is in all religions, and by following the rules of Islam you will most easily apprehend the might of Allah. Islam, you know, means 'God's Way.' In all other religions there are dogmas; in Islam there is one thing alone: you must believe in the one and undivisible God, and you must believe in the Koran, which is the guide to reach God."

"I myself have felt how valuable it was to follow the precepts of Islam," I said. "Since I have begun to follow them I have felt a joy and happiness in life which I did not feel before. I can see afresh that Nature is beautiful, I can once more hear the beauty in music; and before I accepted Islam, when I had no religion, I could not."

"That is just the difference between Christianity and Islam," answered Ahmet Ali. "Of course, within Christianity there are many people who are much better and who follow God's Path much more closely than many Moslems; but Christianity stresses Faith and Salvation, ideas which we hardly know, and it forgets action, the only thing in the world which opens your eyes to God."

He made a short pause.

"Al Ghasali, a Persian Sufi, relates that the prophet Jesus one day passed some people who were sitting on

the edge of a ditch. They looked thin and miserable, and Jesus asked them: 'What is the matter with you?' They answered him: 'Fear of Hell has made us like this.' And Jesus said: 'You have deserved that Allah should deliver you from this fear.' A little later he again passed some people who looked still more thin and miserable, and he asked them the same question. They answered: 'The longing for Paradise has made us like this.' Jesus said: 'You have deserved that Allah should fulfil your longings.' A little later he passed some people who were still more emaciated, but their faces shone like the sun. Then Jesus asked them also, and they answered: 'The Spirit of God; we have seen God, and that has made us forget everything else.' And Jesus said: 'You are the ones who on the Day of Judgment will be near God's Presence; you are the ones in whom the Almighty has found delight.' This little legend explains just the difference between the man who follows his religion from fear of his conscience or from longing for Paradise. But still higher stands the Sufi; for he is actuated solely by his love of God, as expressed in beauty, in music, in the highest ethics, in all divine art. The Sufi has seen all this, which is only a very feeble reflection of God, and because of this he forgets everything else."

Ahmet Ali looked at his watch.

"It's nearly half-past eleven—time to go to the mosque. But I told you all this in order that you might understand Cyrenaica. Every single man who is fighting in the mountains is inspired by this thought. Every one of them, however ragged and simple he may look, is following Islam and the principles of Sufism. That is why they are fighting as they are."

"Who has taught them Sufism?"

"Sidi Ahmet Senoussi. Now come to the mosque and I will tell you more about him."

The mosque was at a fair distance, at the entrance of the *souk*, and on our way Ahmet Ali said:

"Sidi Ahmet Senoussi was born in Mostagenem about two hundred years ago. Already in his early youth he became deeply religious and was specially shocked by the degeneration which Islam had suffered in North Africa, and which we unfortunately still see in many places, even to-day. He saw how marabouts were worshipped as saints, although the Prophet has emphatically forbidden all worship of human beings; he saw how the Islamic prayers, which should be recited five times a day, had become a mere gabble, with no meaning, and how people thought that, the gabbling over, they had done their duty. When he was middle-aged he went to Mecca, and met Sidi Ahmet Idriss, one of Morocco's greatest Sufis. Sidi Ahmet Idriss influenced Senoussi very deeply, and Senoussi set out on the pilgrimage which was to be so important for the development of Islam in North Africa.

"He taught that a prayer should not be recited unless it is acted upon, that you should live according to what the Prophet preached, and then you will achieve a state of happiness which can be likened to Paradise on earth. By living according to religion the image of God in your heart grows. He gained followers everywhere, and most especially among the mountain tribes from Cyrenaica and in the oasis of Kufra."

"Yes, I have heard about Kufra."

"It is in the southern part of Cyrenaica—an oasis in the middle of the desert. Senoussi became king here and in Cyrenaica, and his family has ever since ruled over both Cyrenaica and Kufra. Now the Italians have driven the Senoussis away—who really ought to rule over Cyrenaica. Sidi Idriss lives in exile in Alexandria."

We had reached the mosque. The call to prayer had just been made as we entered, and the mosque was full of

people. When the prayer was over each went his own way. I returned to the hotel, where Signor Malvicini received me.

"A money order has arrived for you," he said.

I looked at the order. It was from Denmark and was for 1000 lire; I went straight to the post-office to cash it.

A clerk, who was undoubtedly a Sicilian, like the police assistant, stood behind the counter. I handed him the money order. He turned and twisted it again and again.

"I must see your passport."

I gave him my passport, and he turned over the leaves. He looked at my picture, he saw my name and all that was necessary, but when he came to the formulæ for position, etc., which in Danish passports are written in Danish, French, German, and English, he shook his head.

"I can't pay you the money," he declared categorically.

"But why not?" I asked in amazement.

"Your passport is not according to the regulations."

"What do you mean?"

"There is nothing written in Italian, and this is an official Italian post-office. You must get the passport translated to Italian so that I can read it—you will get no money till then."

The Fascist civil servant withdrew his head, but that was too much for me.

"Will you be good enough to pay that money immediately—it is my money, and my passport is issued according to the international regulations," I said furiously.

The bureaucratic official shook his head.

"Be careful what you say! This is Italy, let me inform you."

"I realize that perfectly, thanks, and I protest against the way you are treating me."

"If you don't keep quiet I'll go to the police," said the clerk.

"Excellent, then we will go together." And we both went to the tiny police-station.

When the detective saw us arrive a quiver of delight ran through him. He had borne me a serious grudge since I had spoken French to him, and I felt sure that nothing would give him more pleasure than to be allowed to lock me up. I sent my card in to the assistant, who informed us a moment later that we could come in.

The clerk explained the matter with much gesticulation —how this foreigner's papers were not in order, and how he had arrived with an identity card which was not valid, as there was not a word of Italian on it. He was convinced that I was a dangerous criminal who was trying to abstract 1000 lire of the public money.

The Sicilian assistant's black eyes rested on me searchingly.

"Can I see your passport, please?"

He turned over the leaves, then said to the post clerk:

"Yes, of course I cannot guarantee that he has not written it himself."

The clerk smiled triumphantly; the detective stuck his head round the door, ready to interfere.

Beside myself with anger, I took up my visiting card, which was lying on the table, and tore it to pieces.

"What are you doing?" the assistant roared.

"You are not to have my card. You have insinuated that I have written the passport myself."

The assistant was white with rage.

"You are arrested," he hissed, and pressed a button on the table violently. The detective entered.

"Guard him!" snapped the assistant.

The detective dragged me out, and I was placed in a side-room. I was not allowed to sit down and when I attempted to light a cigarette I was prevented. I was a prisoner.

Two hours later the chief of police arrived. I was called in, the assistant followed and explained the matter, waving his arms about. The chief of police pulled at his cigar, knocked the ash off, shook his head, and said:

"Well, this is a very serious business."

"But it was insinuated that I had written the passport myself."

The chief of police lifted his hand.

"Quietly! All papers here must be written in Italian." He made an artificial pause. "But perhaps you could not know this; that is the only excuse I can find for your behaviour. If you had been an Italian you would have been put in prison for having insulted a civil servant, but as you are a foreigner I will let it pass. I trust that you are duly grateful."

I wisely held my tongue. He called the detective.

"Go with this *signore* to the post-office and tell them from me that it is all right to pay out the money."

And this surprising remark ended the matter. The detective scowled as we went to the post-office, and I actually felt as if it was by a special favour that I was allowed to touch my own money.

Signor Malvicini shook his head when he heard the story.

"Yes, it isn't the first time," he said. "But now that you've got them against you, you'd better be careful."

Tarbox kept to himself during all these difficulties; he had quite enough to do looking after the mild attack of dysentery he had contracted. We had agreed that he was to stay on in Benghazi till he felt better, and then we would make the final decision.

On Saturday morning the Fascist paper *Cyrenaica* appeared with a black border and the front page entirely filled by a picture of a fat priest. Since Fascism and the

Pope have made peace the civil and spiritual powers have become firm friends. This finds expression in every sphere: any self-respecting Fascist must be a Roman Catholic. One young Italian, who was gripped by the spirit of Islam, was deported post-haste to Italy. Religious freedom has ceased to exist, as was specially evident from this Saturday issue of the *Cyrenaica*. The Bishop of Benghazi had died in the night, and his obituary filled column after column. The headlines of the issue read: "The population of Cyrenaica in mourning."

I went for my usual morning walk. All *cafés* were closed, and on all doors large black-and-white posters were stuck, bearing a cross and the inscription: "*Dolore Cittadini.*" I met Abdullah, who owned the *café* which I had visited a few days earlier, and asked him what it meant. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Police orders. Everything's to be shut up, and we are to stick the posters on our doors."

Benghazi was a Catholic and a mourning town.

CHAPTER V

KUFRA, THE SECRET OF THE SAHARA

WHEN I returned to the Albergo Italia it was time for lunch. I sat down at my table, where Tarbox had already started. Signor Malvicini came up to me and pointed to a couple of Italian officers at another table.

"The little stout officer over there is Captain Aldro Fornari; you ought to meet him. He would be able to tell you many interesting things—he has been a prisoner in Kufra, where no Europeans have ever been."

"I don't think I've seen him here in Benghazi before," I said.

"No, he is stationed in Merj."

"I've heard there is an excellent commandant there."

"Yes, Diodiece; everybody likes him."

Malvicini disappeared, and I had an opportunity to observe Fornari. He was small and cleanshaven, with a round face like a full moon. He talked and laughed incessantly, as if he were the most carefree person in the world; and while talking he put the long macaroni into his mouth with incredible dexterity. When he had finished eating I went up to him and introduced myself, and asked him if he would tell me about his experiences in Kufra. He was more than willing, and we settled down on the terrace with a cup of coffee.

"Signor Malvicini told me that you had been made prisoner by the Arabs in Kufra."

"Yes." He laughed and showed all his white teeth. "That is luckily over now, and I hope that I shall never go through another four months like those. It was my

Arabic that saved me. But I can assure you that it was no joke to live on half-sour camel's milk and dates for four months. You'll understand that I like to do myself well now."

"Where is Kufra?"

Fornari asked for a piece of paper, took a pencil, and drew a sketch.

"Kufra is situated about six hundred miles south of Benghazi and three hundred west of El Kharga in Egypt. The Italian General Staff has known for a long time that this oasis was the seat of all the disturbances in Cyrenaica. I, like my superior officer, Commandant Diodiece, have always advocated that we should try to conciliate the Arabs, and if we could in some way have contrived to come to an understanding with the Emir of Kufra, Mohammed Senoussi, a very great deal would have been achieved."

Here I interrupted Fornari.

"But who is Mohammed Senoussi? I was told that it is Sidi Idriss Senoussi, who lives in Alexandria, who directs the whole campaign."

"Quite," answered Fornari, "but Mohammed Senoussi stood as kind of proxy for Sidi Idriss in Kufra. There are two branches of the family—the white one, to which Sidi Idriss belongs, and the black one, which is descended from one of the Senoussi's connexion with a negress, and to which Mohammed Senoussi belongs. Mohammed Senoussi has always been more favourably inclined towards the Italians than Sidi Idriss, who demands full autonomy for the Arabs, and so of course we addressed ourselves to Mohammed."

"Did Sidi Idriss know anything about it?"

"Not to start with, and it was only when he learned it that the difficulties began. I had been chosen to lead an expedition to Kufra, but the undertaking did not seem

an easy one to carry out. A hundred and twenty miles from the oasis an enormous stretch of desert begins, consisting of very loose sand which now and then forms enormous dunes. This belt of loose sand is absolutely impassable for motors and in fact even dromedaries can have difficulty in getting through. The caravan road to Kufra is more covered with bleached bones than any other.

"There had never been a European man in Kufra,[1] but queerly enough there had been a woman, Rosita Forbes. Of course she did not see much of the town, as she only spent one night there; the population feared that she was a forerunner of European plots against them and threatened to kill her if she did not leave. So she had to return quickly to Egypt.

"My opportunity to get in touch with Mohammed Senoussi came about in quite an unexpected manner. One of the Emir's sons had fallen seriously ill, and it was clear that only immediate medical assistance could save him. The Emir therefore unofficially asked to have a doctor sent to Kufra, and then we could discuss a treaty at the same time. The Government in Cyrenaica—it was shortly before General Graziani's arrival—decided not to let this opportunity slip, and a well-equipped expedition was sent off, including a doctor, a wireless operator, and myself, who spoke Arabic, as political officer.

"At the end of December 1928 we set out from Benghazi on dromedaries, travelling alone as far as the last Italian outpost in the south—about a hundred and twenty-five miles from Benghazi—where we awaited a caravan which the Emir was sending from Kufra. After

[1] Fornari was in error. The first European to visit Kufra was the German explorer, Rohlfs, in 1879. In 1916 a French prisoner of war was taken there and was later released. In 1921, the same year as Rosita Forbes' visit, a French officer reached Kufra from the South.—TRANSLATOR.

some days the caravan arrived, and with it Mohammed Senoussi in person, accompanied by his two sons, one of whom was the boy who was ill. The boy was given immediate treatment.

"Then we left, still on dromedaries, and with all our baggage. We could of course make only very short marches, as the ground was unfavourable even for the camels, and it became much worse as we reached the huge sand-dunes. Here it was often so bad that the camels refused to go on, and only whipping till the blood came made them fight their way on through the soft sand."

Fornari took a few puffs of his cigarette, his eyes looked far away, as if he saw the immense desert again before him, then he went on:

"What a queer animal the dromedary is! It has the surest instinct of any creature I've noticed, and its Arab rider hardly need keep watch: the dromedary will do it for him. When one of the dreaded sandstorms is due it knows many hours in advance. It grows uneasy and begins to sniff nervously in a particular way, its large nostrils dilated. This beast has extraordinarly keen eyesight too. When it catches sight of something on the horizon —and that happens long before the human eye can discern anything—it twitches its mouth in the most comical manner and raises its ears; then one knows there is something wrong."

"How long can the dromedary go without water?"

"At least a week, I believe. But I had better go on with the story. We had many terrible sandstorms *en route*, but we advanced steadily, and after journeying for three weeks we came to the most difficult part of the desert, the great sand barrier which stretches like a wall between the northern part of the desert and Kufra. Here the incident took place which was to ruin all our hopes.

"We had fought our way wearily through the vast hills of sand for a couple of days. Water was very scarce, and the camels too had to drink. One afternoon the dromedaries began to get uneasy. They suspected, or perhaps saw, something on the horizon which we could not yet distinguish. We waited expectantly, but were not really afraid, for the Emir and his sons were with us. Half an hour later a large band of camel riders appeared on the horizon. In front rode a leader carrying a flag. We counted about a hundred men, and as it was evident that they came from the south the Emir thought they would be troops sent from Kufra to welcome us.

"But it was scarcely a welcome they had come to give us. As they drew nearer they formed a semicircle, levelled their rifles, and invited us to surrender!

"Their intentions were clear enough. There could be no question of resistance, and a quarter of an hour later the Emir and his sons were prisoners in their tents with guards outside, while we lay on the sand trussed and bound.

"We soon discovered that a revolution had broken out in Kufra. The people had violently resented Mohammed Senoussi's treating with the Italians while the true head of the family, Sidi Idriss, knew nothing about it; and when it became known that Italian officers were on their way to Kufra it was decided to depose Sidi Mohammed and proclaim a republic for the time being.

"Perhaps it might all have been avoided if the Emir himself had not come to meet us. But the very fact that he had been absent for several months had fanned the agitation against him—and the result was the attack on our caravan.

"Some hours after we had been made prisoner we were questioned. The Emir was still in his tent; we did not see him again till we arrived in Kufra. The examination

was very short. We were asked if it was our aim to promote Italian military occupation in Kufra, and when we denied this they wanted to know how much money we had brought. I replied, as I was the only one who spoke Arabic, that we had no more than what they had already taken from us. But nobody would believe it. They continued to cross-examine us: they were all convinced that we had hidden a large sum of money somewhere; we could only deny it. At length sentence was pronounced—death by shooting, to be carried out at dawn.

"We were taken out into the desert, some distance from the tents, and were told to dig our graves in the sand. Then we were placed in a row; a detachment of soldiers, taking up their position, aimed their rifles at us. The leader lifted his arm. We were waiting for the volley when he began talking to us.

"'Now tell us where the money is,' he said.

"I answered that we had none. If we had, we should have told him as we valued our lives higher than a miserable sum of money. The execution was then postponed; we were to be questioned again when we got to Kufra.

"A ghastly wandering across the one hundred and twenty-five miles of sand followed. We were not allowed to ride, but had to run alongside the dromedaries, and if we didn't run quickly enough we were made to feel it!

"When the doctor complained the leader said:

"'Don't you think that you've deserved a much worse fate than this? My brother was hung by your troops.'

"On this trip we had only dates to eat, because the Bedouins had brought no other provisions. They were not appetizing, stuck together in large lumps as they were, but we soon got so hungry that they went down all right. One day ran into the next, and a fortnight after we had been captured we sighted Kufra.

"The oasis looked like an island in the huge sea of



THE MOSQUE IN KUFRA WHERE AHMET SENOUSSI IS BURIED



FORNARI (RIGHT) WITH ANOTHER ITALIAN OFFICER WHO WAS A PRISONER AT KUFRA



ITALIAN PRISONERS IN KUFRA BUILD THEIR OWN HUTS



MOUNTED BEDOUINS, EASY TARGETS FOR THE MACHINE-GUNS

sand; and it is practically cut off from the outer world as an island in the ocean. To the south-west are the Tibesti mountains, which as far as I know are inhabited, but no European has ever been there; to the east it is a month's journey to Egypt; to the south the nearest country is the French Sudan, which also takes an interminable time to reach.

"Our reception in Kufra was far from amusing. The Bedouins had been disagreeable enough, but the way the women and children treated us was worse. They had never seen a European: they looked on us as a kind of noxious animal, and our Western dress provoked much mirth. They spat, and threw stones and earth at us, and several times we were afraid that they would literally tear the eyes out of our heads. But we survived this purgatory and were placed in a solid stone house, from which it was useless even to think of escaping.

"The next day we were questioned again. This took place in a large house, and all the heads of families were present. We were kept in the background, while the ex-Emir was on trial.

"It was the Kaid [judge] of Kufra who interrogated us, and he declared straight away that the whole population of Kufra agreed that the Emir had intended to sell the country to the Christian Italians, and that he had thereby violated one of the most sacred laws of Islam.

"The Emir denied this: he had only wanted a doctor in Kufra.

"'No,' said the Kaid, 'we do not believe it. You intended to sell the oasis as so many other countries in North Africa have been sold to the Franks; and therefore you can no longer be our Emir. We will do you no harm, because of your grandfather Sidi Ahmed Senoussi (peace be upon his name!), but you must leave Kufra before the end of the week.'

"And that was settled. The ex-Emir submitted to the decision and prepared for his departure.

"Our examination was quite short, and during the first week we were told every night that we were to be shot at dawn the next day. All preparations were made, but every morning for some unknown reason the execution was postponed to the following day.

"All through the day we were exhibited everywhere, more or less like animals at a fair. Anybody was allowed to walk right up to us and feel our clothes and touch our skin to discover if we actually were human beings. Even the women looked at us unveiled—as Christians we were not counted as real men from whom one ought to hide one's face.

"After the agony of the first week we got a little more peace. The Emir left for the Sudan, and, I'm told, he was later arrested by the French, against whom at one time he had been fighting.

"Our fate was much discussed in the oasis. A very large party was in favour of killing us, for how many Arabs had not been killed by the Italians? Others proposed that we should be sold as slaves in Kufra, where a large slave-market is held each Thursday. Whoever bought us could then resell us to the Sudan, where slavery flourishes to this day. Of course we wished that the latter group would prevail; once in the Sudan we should be safe. Finally, there were some who tried to persuade us to join Islam, for then all persecution would automatically cease and we could stay on in Kufra as free men.

"In reality we were nothing but slaves. We were made to do the heaviest work. We had plenty to eat, but, like everybody else, only dates and camel's milk. Occasionally we got a little mutton, but never bread, which is not known in Kufra at all.

"One day these deliberations came almost to a sudden

end as far as we were concerned. They had quarrelled till late in the evening, and we had already gone to sleep when we were called by an Arab. He asked us to get up, dress, and come with him. Of course, there was nothing for it but to obey, and we followed him.

"We were led out into the desert, mounted on some camels, and with an escort of fifty or sixty men, all armed, we travelled towards the south.

"It was soon clear to us that we had been stolen. The party who wished us sold as slaves and who could not agree with the others had cut the matter short. They had decided on the drastic solution of simply taking us away and selling us in the Sudan. They counted on getting a decent price for white men who were *hakim* [doctors] into the bargain. But the adventure did not last many hours. In Kufra the flight was soon discovered, and they set out after our kidnappers in great force. At sunrise a serious fight developed, during which a dozen fell on each side. Then the two sides made peace, and we were carried back to Kufra in triumph.

"Now I made my suggestion for a solution.

"'Listen,' I said to the leaders. 'Instead of executing us or selling us as slaves, wouldn't it be much simpler if we ransomed ourselves?'

"The suggestion was discussed from all angles, and in the end it was agreed that we could ransom ourselves for the sum of two million lire.

"It would have been quite impossible to procure two million lire, and we preferred that the Government should not be involved in the matter of our disappearance. I pretended to be very indignant.

"'Have you any idea how much two million lire is?' I asked.

"Of course nobody knew. Several guesses were made, but no result was reached. Again we discussed the matter

thoroughly, but then we unexpectedly met with a new difficulty. How was the money to be obtained?

"The Bedouins said that I should write, and they then would fetch the money from Egypt; but of course we were not very enthusiastic about that plan.

"'It is quite impossible,' I said, 'to get the money that way. One of us will have to go to Benghazi to fetch it, and the others will remain here as hostages.'

"But they would not hear of that at all. We discussed the question for a long time, but it seemed impossible to agree."

Fornari's voice had become hoarse, and he ordered something to drink. Then he said:

"You can't imagine the joy of getting real pure water; the water in Kufra was not good."

"Thanks, I know that!" I replied. "I've tried being in the desert for about ten days without food and water."

Then Fornari continued his exciting story.

"Day after day passed. We were still prisoners. We had been allowed to build our own huts from straw, and we were treated a little better. But little by little our clothes fell to pieces on us and we fought valiantly against all kinds of vermin. Then occurred the incident which was to lead to our salvation.

"It was decided to make a great attack on the Italians in Cyrenaica. Extensive manœuvres were held daily, and as they had over a thousand soldiers, all well armed, it was thought that they might even take Benghazi itself.

"I advised against this attack on Benghazi and told them that the Italian machine-guns would simply mow the thousand men down, but nobody would believe me.

"'You are an Italian and speak for the Italians,' they told me, and added: 'The Arabs are brave; one Arab can easily account for five Italians,' and on this basis the campaign was planned.

"At the beginning of this year the thousand men set out to attack the Italians. When they had left our chance came. I gathered together all the sheiks who had been left in the camp and suggested that they should let us go for two hundred thousand lire. They were agreeable, but the difficulty was still how to get the money.

"I got one of the sheiks on my side, and he succeeded, after a good deal of hard talking, in winning others over. It was decided that I should go to Egypt and thence to Benghazi. When the money had been deposited in Egypt the other prisoners would be released.

"I equipped a caravan on credit. I bought the necessary camels on credit, and hired some Bedouins on the promise to pay them at the end of the journey—and here I must say that the Arabs trusted me completely.

"Then we set out for Egypt. It was a terrible trip. It took us more than a month, and our drinking-water gave out. Again I had reason to marvel at the Bedouins. When we had only a very little water left they said to me:

"'You drink it. We are accustomed to life in the desert, to starve, and to suffer from thirst, but you will die if you do not get water.'

"But at length we reached Egypt, and my joy knew no bounds. For the first time I felt free from the fear of death which had haunted me daily for several months.

"After that, everything was arranged quickly enough. I arrived in Cairo, where I met Lord Lloyd, the British High Commissioner in Egypt. He told me I might consider myself very lucky indeed—I was the first European who had escaped alive from Kufra."

"What about slavery in Kufra?"

"The slaves are treated quite well on the whole. In the majority of cases they are negroes who have not joined Islam. They have been bought in the Sudan, and

do all the heavy work. But if an Arab has a child by a slave girl, both the mother and the child are free."

"How is the buying and selling done?"

"Every Thursday, Yom el Rhamiz, there is a large slave-market: a good slave may cost anything up to a thousand lire. But I was going to tell you the end of my story—for it very nearly ended badly all the same. From Cairo I went to Benghazi, and succeeded in getting together the necessary money. Then with the money I had to go back to the oasis of Kharga where it was to be paid over when the other prisoners arrived. I waited in Kharga for two full months before they arrived—and a dreadful tale they told! Some time after I had left the men who had gone on the expedition against Cyrenaica returned—that is to say, out of the thousand who started out only four hundred came back. The rest had been mown down by machine-guns. These men demanded that we should be killed immediately as revenge for their lost comrades. But luckily the desire for money conquered the blood lust, and thus all was well. Yet Kufra is a strange oasis. Everything which is used by the people is made by themselves, and they have practically no trade with the outer world. During my long stay there I did not see a single article in use which was European."

Fornari concluded with a sigh. "Strange as it may seem, I was quite fond of those people!"

"What do you think of conditions in Cyrenaica?"

"I can't very well give an opinion on the matter. I think we ought to try to come to some understanding with the Arabs. Only by friendly co-operation between European civilization and Oriental culture can any good results be obtained."

"Do many people here think as you do?"

"No, they are soon counted. So many people who come over here look on the Arabs as animals and treat

them accordingly. But what can you expect from people who don't speak a word of Arabic, and who live under the strange delusion that civilization is culture? Well, I must go now," he added. "If you come to Merj, please look me up."

I found later that Captain Fornari had this in common with his chief, Commandant Diodiece, that he was well liked by the Arabs.

CHAPTER VI

GENERAL GRAZIANI INTERVENES

THE next day was a Sunday, and Benghazi was radiant with festivity. The Italian tricolour flew from all the public buildings, and the streets were filled with Eritrean troops in brand-new parade uniforms. This was the Sunday on which the Fascist boys of sixteen to eighteen years of age were adjudged old enough to receive their rifles. All the boys, and practically all the Italian men in Benghazi except Bombardi and a few others, were in black shirts. At ten o'clock they marched up in front of the Government building in the great Square, practically opposite the Albergo Italia. Half an hour earlier they had received their rifles, and were lined up waiting for the Governor.

A band played the Fascist march. All the boys cheered as General Graziani appeared on the balcony. He was a tall, thin man with clear-cut features, indicating the typical soldier.

He did not speak particularly well—he barked, somewhat as if he were on the parade-ground.

"Boys," he shouted, "to-day you have received your rifles, the rifles you are going to use in defence of the Italy which we all love and for the furtherance of her might and honour if this is needed.

"Remember, in whatever you are doing, that you are Italians, Romans, and remember that your forbears were once in this country. You are Romans fighting against barbarians. Be kind to them, but always be their superiors. Remember that you are Romans!"

General Graziani raised his hand and looked towards the Italian tricolour.

"The Italian colours are again flying in this country, never again to be taken down. *Evviva Italia!*"

The boys shouted "*Evviva!*" in their clear voices. The music began again, and the boys sang the Fascist march and tramped out. A battalion of Eritrean troops took up its position outside the Government building, and General Graziani addressed them, but this time through an interpreter, who translated his speech in their language.

"My brave troops from Eritrea, you who have followed me through the campaigns in Tripoli against Murzuk and Fezzan, you who with me are fighting in order that the Italian eagle shall spread its wings anew over the old Roman Libya, accept the thanks of your General for what you have done. New battles lie before you, but I know that you will be victorious together with us Italians, who profess the same religion as you. Let us cry '*Evviva*' for Italy and her colony of Eritrea."

The General raised his hand. The Italian officers who stood among the black troops led the cheers, which sounded like the cries of hoarse crows.

Then the Eritrean troops began to sing and dance in the streets. They formed themselves into groups of ten or so, took each other by the arms and danced round and round, singing in the queer throaty sounds which are their native tongue. The Arabs watched the whole scene in silence, but the greater part of the population stayed at home while the military spectacle lasted.

When Tarbox and I had eaten we sat down on the terrace in front of the hotel. We had only been there a moment when Bombardi appeared. He came straight up to us.

"The car is ready now," he said. "You can leave any day you like, when you've got your permit."

"What have you done to the radiator?"

"We've changed the concrete for a better sort, and I'm sure it will last until you get to Egypt."

"What was wrong?"

"Quite a lot. It had to be repaired from top to bottom. If you like you can test it now."

We drove to one of the gates and were immediately challenged. An Eritrean soldier signalled me to stop and came up to the car.

"You are not allowed to drive beyond the gates."

"But why not?"

"I have orders not to let you pass."

Bombardi tried to argue. "But all other cars are allowed to pass?"

The soldier stuck to his point.

"This particular car is not allowed to pass. It is an order from the Chief of the *carabinieri.*"

I sent a kind thought to my friend the assistant of police for this, and we returned to the garage.

I had scarcely drawn up at the garage when I noticed that a jet of water was spurting from the radiator. This time it was more serious than the last, because the hole was above the place where the radiator had been transformed into a block of concrete.

I drew Bombardi's attention to the matter, and he shook his head.

"I think you'll have to have a new radiator," he declared.

There was nothing else to be done, so I bought a new radiator from him and arranged for it to be fixed by the next morning.

When we got back to the hotel I said to Tarbox:

"If I'm allowed to start to-morrow, won't you come?"

He shook his head.

"Candidly, I would rather not. If we had stayed on

here for another month, so that I could have regained my strength completely, I would have liked to come. As it is, I daren't."

"But what will you do?"

"Well, now that you can drive on I suppose it won't take you more than a fortnight to reach Egypt? When you arrive you can telegraph to me, and I'll take the steamer to Alexandria. But for the time being I feel I'd better stay here."

And so it had to be left like that.

I had been granted an audience with General Graziani on the Monday morning. It took place with great solemnity. I was received by the General's adjutant, Colonel Mafaldia, who wore white gloves and a ribbon across his breast. He informed me that I was to wait a moment and then the General would receive me.

When I entered General Graziani's private office I found him sitting behind an enormous writing-desk. He did not get up, but motioned me to a chair in front.

General Graziani had a clean-shaven, rosy face; his hair was silver-grey, and his eyes nearly black. He spoke with a certain crispness, in excellent French.

"So it is you who have driven through from Morocco?"

"Yes."

"You cannot be allowed to drive any farther."

"But I am so near Egypt now. If I could get there I should be the first man in the world to have driven through Africa from west to east."

"H'm! Well, is that the only aim of your travels?"

"No, I am also interested in the Arabs' culture and way of thinking."

"And what do you think of our achievements here?"

"From the point of view of civilization they are excellent, but that is not what I am going to write about."

"What then?"

"All the Italian part of it I can see in Europe just as well or even better. It is the things which I cannot see in Europe that interest me."

"If you will take the responsibility on yourself it is possible that you may get the permit. Call on my adjutant later."

The General stood up, bowed stiffly, and began at the same time to dictate letters to his secretary, who had slipped in quietly while we were exchanging the last words.

The car was ready. I fetched it, packed my things into it, and left it outside the hotel ready to start. It had hardly been there an hour before the Chief of the *carabinieri* asked to speak to me.

"Why is the car standing there?"

"Because I am driving on."

"But you have no permit."

"No, but I think I shall get it."

"Are you going to leave without a permit?"

"Of course not."

"Well, you wouldn't get very far if you did!"

He stationed a policeman to see that I did not leave, and I heard later that he had telegraphed to all posts that I was to be arrested if I attempted to pass. Evidently they did not believe that I would not try to start without a permit.

At three o'clock I went to see Colonel Mafaldia. He informed me that after much hesitation I had been granted the permit. The Italian Government, of course, would not be held responsible if I were killed. I had to sign a declaration very similar to the one I had signed in Tripoli. With a sour smile the Chief of Police in person wrote the permit in my passport.

When I returned to the hotel, radiant with joy, a very young Arab was waiting for me.

"I am called Hamid," he said. "Please can I drive with you to Egypt?"

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen—and I can drive a car."

I was not very enthusiastic about this last qualification—I preferred to drive the car myself. But, on the other hand, it was not pleasant to be alone, so I assented.

Hamid made himself comfortable in the car, where he intended to spend the night, and I prepared to leave Benghazi the next morning at four o'clock.

It was dark when I awoke the next morning. I dressed hurriedly. All the luggage was packed, so I had not much to do. Then I went to Tarbox's door and knocked. We took leave of each other, and I went down to the car. Hamid slept curled up on the back seat. I woke him up, and we got the engine going, and drove towards the gate that led to the road to the north—towards Merj, eighty miles away.

The gate was blocked with barbed wire fencing. We hooted, and at length the Abyssinian sergeant with whom I had already become acquainted appeared.

"I've already told you that I have the strictest orders not to allow you to pass, and certainly not this morning."

"But why not?"

"Three rebels are being shot at a little fort about seven miles along this road."

"But I have permission to pass." I showed him the permit in my passport.

He kept turning the passport over without being able to read it, and in the end handed it back to me.

"I know nothing about that. I have orders that you are not allowed to pass."

Finally he agreed to 'phone to the Chief of the *carabinieri*. He returned, very cross, a few minutes later.

"I don't understand," he grumbled. "Now you are allowed to pass."

He opened the barbed wire; the road was free.

For the first fifty miles the road to Merj goes through a huge plain, which is quite flat, without even the smallest hill. Then the mountains begin, and stretch uninterruptedly to Derna, three hundred miles past Merj. This is where the war was waged with such violence that it bordered on fury, and many of the convoys had encounters with the mountain people.

After driving for about ten minutes we saw a fort on the left side of the road.

"This is where the executions are to take place," I said to Hamid. "Shall we stop?"

Hamid shook his head.

"I won't watch them," he declared emphatically, and remained in the car when I got out.

The execution was to take place at dawn, and they were now busy making preparations, for it was beginning to grow light in the east. A detachment of Eritrean troops, about ten in number, were marched up in front of the wall that faced the road. The miserable Arabs who were to be shot were nowhere to be seen.

A large lorry came rumbling from Benghazi. In spite of the increasing daylight it had both headlights full on. The back of the lorry was covered with a tarpaulin. Nearly opposite to where my car was parked it turned into the fort and stopped a few yards from the Eritrean soldiers.

I stood about forty yards away from the soldiers. A trumpet sounded. A sleepy-looking officer in tall riding-boots, a revolver in his belt, came out through the gate and took up his position next to the black soldiers. They presented arms when they saw him, but a moment later they again stood at ease.

The prisoners were led out—three tall, powerful Arabs, chained together. They stared a moment at the soldiers, as if bewildered, halted for a few seconds, then walked on, their irons clanking.

I approached, and was now so near that I could both clearly hear and see all that happened. The chauffeur who had driven the lorry was an Arab; he too came nearer. Suddenly one of the prisoners gave a start.

"Ahmet, is that you?"

The driver did not answer, but looked nervously round, as if he were afraid that his knowing the prisoner might have serious consequences for him; then he shrugged his shoulders, went up to the prisoner, and shook hands with him.

"Good morning, Uncle!" he said cheerfully. "By Allah, I had not expected to find you here."

"Neither I you, Ahmet," smiled the uncle. "How are you?"

"Excellent, and you?"

An officer appeared with a scroll of paper in his hand, from which he began to read aloud. The uncle went on talking to Ahmet, inquiring how the family was.

The officer broke off and told him to be quiet.

"By merciful Allah, why mayn't I talk? It will soon be over, anyway, and I know what you are reading aloud."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and went on reading.

When it was finished the Arab who stood next to the uncle asked for a cigarette, which was given him, but the uncle turned to him reproachfully:

"Please do not smoke just now, when we are preparing to die."

The other bent his head and agreed.

The chauffeur Ahmet was pushed aside. A sharp word of command sounded, the rifles were levelled, and ten shots cracked. The three Arabs swayed a moment, then

sank to the ground without a sound. A few seconds later the bodies were loaded on the lorry, which then, with Ahmet as driver, rumbled its way back to Benghazi.

The sun had risen, and the hoar-frost glistened everywhere. In a strange, uneasy state of mind I turned to the car; I had received a grim foretaste of the Cyrenaica I was about to cross.

Hamid sat in the back of the car, asleep. I woke him up.

"Why did you wish to look at that?" he reproached me.

"I really don't know."

"It is forbidden us to watch. They hadn't done anything wrong," Hamid said. I did not answer, but started the car.

All went well till we were about forty-five miles from Benghazi. We were travelling at fifty miles an hour when the steering-gear suddenly gave way. The car swerved first to one side of the road, then to the other side, down into the ditch, up again, and into a field, until at length I succeeded in stopping it.

It appeared that the rod which connects the two front wheels with the steering mechanism had slipped. The bearing was worn through; it would be impossible to repair it there and then. A new rod was necessary. My feelings for Signor Bombardi, who had guaranteed that all was in order, were anything but kind! There was no alternative to my returning to Benghazi as quickly as possible. But how? To drive the car was out of the question; it would be risking our lives.

Luck would have it that at that moment a military car passed. I was granted a lift to Benghazi; Hamid stayed behind, promising not to touch anything and to see that nothing was stolen.

Back in Benghazi, I met Signor Bombardi at once and explained the situation. There was no end to what he would do to help me.

"Take my lorry," he said, "and drive with my chauffeur out to your car, and in about half an hour he will be able to change the steering-rod out there."

So the chauffeur and I got into the lorry and sped along in order to get to the damaged car as quickly as possible. I felt quite cheerful. It was still quite early in the morning, and with luck we should be ready about noon; I could be in Merj the same evening, and thus no time at all would have been wasted.

After about forty miles we began to look for the car. The road at this point made some sharp turns, and I expected at any moment to see the car.

"I told Hamid to look after it," I explained.

The driver only nodded. Benghazi is not a large town, and all Arabs know each other.

Still there was no sign of the car.

"I feel sure this was the place," I said, slightly uneasy.

Eight miles farther on we stopped. It was hopeless to proceed. The car had gone. The chauffeur scratched his head.

"Are you quite sure it was forty-five miles from Benghazi?" he asked.

"Quite sure," I asserted emphatically. "The speedometer showed just forty-five miles."

"Well, in that case the car must have been stolen."

I shook my head.

"First of all, it could not go, and secondly, I told Hamid to mind it."

"Well, he can't have returned to Benghazi," said the driver, "or we should have met him."

We began to examine the road, but could find no track that might belong to my car.

"Let us go back and find the place where the car stopped; from there it will be easier to see in what direction it has gone."

This we did, and found with comparative ease the spot where we had gone into the ditch; and from there all the tracks led back to Benghazi—not one went ahead.

"By Allah, this looks queer!" said the chauffeur. "It has gone back to Benghazi."

Swearing inwardly, both of us turned to Signor Bombardi's car and once more headed for Benghazi.

Between the place where we were and Benghazi there are five military posts. At the first post I went up to the Arab soldier who was on guard.

"I suppose you haven't seen a car with a heavy load of luggage pass here?"

"*Naam, ya Sidi,*" answered the soldier. "It is an hour since it passed, and it was driven like the devil."

"How many were in it?"

"Only one, *ya Sidi.*"

I looked doubtfully at Bombardi's chauffeur.

"It must have been Hamid," I said, "but how has he got past us and how has he been able to drive the car when one front wheel goes one way and the other the other? This begins to be a mystery."

Again we got the lorry going. And at every post we passed we received the same answer—that a car had dashed past an hour ago. There was no doubt it was my car.

When we reached the garage the car was there, and Hamid stood beside it, looking the picture of innocence.

"Why did you drive the car back?" I asked furiously.

"Somebody came and told me that I was not allowed to park in the road."

"That isn't true. I told you to leave it there. How have you returned to Benghazi without meeting us?"

"I got back two minutes after you had left."

"And how did you dare to drive with the steering-gear out of order?"

"I tied it together with a bit of string."

Hamid got the sack! I preferred to drive on alone rather than find the car missing every now and then. Hamid stayed in Benghazi.

About three o'clock I started again for Merj, and this time I arrived without any difficulties at the fort of Bakur, which is situated at the foot of the mountains about twenty-five miles from Merj.

It was then about six o'clock, and in spite of the gathering darkness I intended to drive straight on to Merj; but the Commandant of Bakur, a captain, who had demanded to see my papers, forbade me to do so.

"You will risk your life by driving from here to Merj during the night," he said.

"But why?"

"The rebels can see the glare of your lamps a long distance off, and I assure you that the mountains are crawling with them. You will have to stay here at Bakur to-night, and to-morrow at eleven you can go on."

"But why can't I start early to-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow at eleven three lorries arrive, bound for Merj with provisions; they have an armed escort, and if you go along with them nothing can happen to you."

"I am not afraid of the Arabs."

"You do not know them. I assure you I don't exaggerate when I tell you that they are simply devils. If you meet them you will be shot at once."

"Can I pitch my tent here, please?"

The captain looked surprised for a moment.

"That's hardly possible. Now and then the rebels attack the fort during the night. At any rate, you can't put it up outside the fort walls."

It was then agreed that I should pitch my tent in the courtyard of the fort. The captain ordered a couple of Eritrean soldiers to do sentry duty round the tent all

night, and to the sound of their monotonous tramping to and fro I fell asleep.

The next morning at eleven the lorries and escort arrived. There were three large lorries loaded to capacity with sacks. The escort consisted of an armed Ford car, which was well able to do sixty miles an hour; it led the caravan, and a scarred Eritrean soldier kept guard by the machine-gun, which was strapped to the back seat.

The drive to Merj was one of complete quiet, and we did not meet a soul. But we advanced very slowly. While the road from Benghazi to Bakur had been excellent, it was now practically nothing but a rut from here to Merj. The track ran through a wild and desolate mountain landscape; on both sides were enormous pine-woods as far as one could see, and high up against the blue sky huge eagles circled. The road zigzagged the whole time steeply up and down. Wild life was plentiful. Here and there a giant *leguan*, a lizard which measures about a yard and a half from its snout to the tip of its tail, darted across the road, and in among the tree-trunks we saw jackals, which gazed inquisitively at the car as it buzzed past.

At one o'clock we reached Merj.

The first person I met was Captain Fornari. He had returned the day before, and was as surprised as I was.

"Yesterday," he said, "I received a telegram that if you came to Merj you were to be stopped at once, and to-day about an hour ago I was informed that you could go on."

"Can I drive on immediately?"

"That you must discuss with my chief, Commandant Diodiece. I will introduce you to him when you have garaged the car. Where are you going to stay?"

"In my tent."

"That won't be allowed. It's much too dangerous. Better go to the hotel. After all, it's only for one night."

So I drove to the hotel.

At three o'clock I went to the Government offices.

Merj is the headquarters of the Italian administration in the mountain district, which was under the command of Commandant Diodiece. His peaceful views and his understanding way of meeting the Arab population was to some degree hampered by the dictatorship which reigned in Cyrenaica under General Graziani. Naturally he never expressed any opinion on this, being much too cautious; but I received the definite impression, through talks with large numbers of Arabs, that he was as well liked as several other Italians, with General Graziani heading the list, were hated.

"Graziani tries to choke us in blood; Diodiece could make peace by a handshake," said the Arabs.

And it is certainly true that the Italians tried to subjugate the million people of Cyrenaica by brute force. During the Terror of the French Revolution an average of three people were executed daily in France, which roughly gives twelve hundred a year. During the time I was in Cyrenaica thirty executions took place daily, which means that about twelve thousand Arabs were executed yearly, not counting those killed in the war or the imported Eritrean troops on the Italian side. The land swam in blood.

Commandant Diodiece was very tall, and, like Cyrenaica's Governor, General Graziani, he had silver-white hair. His eyes were brown and his features very irregular. When he spoke it was always very slowly and very deliberately, as if he had to search for his words. The first impression one had of him was that of a cold and reserved disposition, but on closer acquaintance this impression changed completely. One felt that Commandant Diodiece was a very warm-hearted man, with a strongly marked sense of justice; and that he did his utmost to reconcile a brutal military system with his conscience, although this

must have been very difficult. He himself never spoke about it. He referred to the Arabs always with the greatest sympathy; and I never heard him employ expressions like "Dogs," "Animals," etc., which were generally used about the legitimate inhabitants.

Although the Italian colonization of Cyrenaica is such that any European who obtains a glimpse of it must feel ashamed to belong to the white race—for here it is waging a modern war barbarically and ruthlessly—Commandant Diodiece was a rare and redeeming feature, for he possessed that culture which so many think can be replaced by civilization.

When Diodiece's adjutant, Captain Fornari, who also functioned as a kind of interpreter in Merj because of the knowledge of Arabic he had acquired during his captivity among the Bedouins in Kufra, took me into the Commandant's office, Diodiece stood up and shook my hand.

"I'm very sorry that I cannot let you go on early to-morrow morning. The risk is too great. You will have to wait until the day after to-morrow at sunrise. A military detachment will then depart for Cyrene."

"Then I shall not be allowed to travel alone?"

"No. There are orders from Benghazi that you must join the detachment from here to Derna, *via* Cyrene. A colonel is leaving for Derna the day after to-morrow. The detachment from here will accompany him to Cyrene, and from there a new detachment will be formed for Derna."

"Is this a very dangerous district, then?"

"It is not so bad from here to Cyrene. That's a distance of about 125 miles, but between Cyrene and Derna it is worse. Practically all transport is attacked."

"And from Derna to the Egyptian frontier?"

"That is not so bad. You will have to go to Tobruch first, and from there it is only a few miles to Sollum in

Egypt; but you had better discuss all that with the commandant in Derna."

"What is to be seen here in Merj?"

"Nothing much in the town itself. This building, in which you are now, dates from the time when the Turks were here. You can still see the Turkish guns outside, but otherwise the town is entirely modern. If you care to see it, to-morrow we can visit a great concentration camp for Bedouins here outside the town. But we can perhaps arrange that to-night if you would care to dine with me at six. If you come here Captain Fornari will show you where I live."

I promised to come, and took leave of him. Downstairs in the porch a box was fixed on the wall, in which were several proclamations by the Government in Cyrenaica. Here is one of them:

TO THE INHABITANTS OF MERJ

On the 28th of April the merchant Kamed Ben Mohammed Sharhadi was sentenced to death by shooting. By a special act of grace his death sentence has been commuted to hard labour for life. This does not imply that in future a more lenient view will be taken of his crime, which was that of supplying the rebel mountain people with provisions. On the contrary, all crimes of this kind will be punished by death.

COMMANDO CYRENAICA

BENGHAZI
May 1, 1930

At six o'clock I went again to the Commandant's offices, and there found Captain Fornari; we set out at once for Diodiece's house, which was not far away.

During dinner, at which only the host, Captain Fornari, and myself were present, the Commandant did not talk much. But after dinner he took me into his library. He had a marvellous collection of books, especially of books on the Orient; and among others I caught sight of one by a French journalist about his visit to Abd el Krim

during the fighting in the Riff, and as I took it out and turned over the leaves Diodiece asked me:

"What exactly do you think of Abd el Krim?"

"I of course admire him and I like him," I answered. "He is without doubt a strategic genius. With a handful of men he attacked a Spanish fortress, took what guns and rifles there were, and then began the war. He then stood up against the allied French and Spanish forces for four years—I call that a brilliant achievement."

"Yes, it is astonishing," answered Diodiece. "No wonder we have difficulties in managing the rebels in the mountains round here. Is the country worse here than in the Riff mountains?"

"No. It's about the same; perhaps the Cyrenaica mountains are more thickly wooded than the Riff mountains."

"Is there peace in Morocco now?"

"The French are at war with the people of Tafilelat. There are a quarter of a million men under arms on the Arab side. But Morocco itself is quiet."

"Yes," sighed Diodiece. "I have always admired the French colonial system: they understand how to win over the natives."

"Yes, but not always to the advantage of the population."

"Why not?"

"The European race introduces Western civilization in the Orient, and tramples down the culture which already exists. And while civilization and its factories advance the cancerous sores of civilization follow. The native artisan, who no doubt is an artist in his own sphere and who is content with very little, learns to become a materialist. Just like the greater part of the population of Europe, he becomes discontented, degenerate, drinks spirits, and neglects his religion, which hitherto made of him a very valuable *human* being."

Diodece smiled.

"Perhaps there is something in what you say, but I think it is wiser to drop the subject. You know we can never agree."

The next morning at nine Diodiece drove me in his car to the Bedouin camp, which was about two miles from Merj. Round Merj is a great plain, which, at a short distance from the town, merges into the mountain landscape which continues right to Derna. In this plain, right under the mountain wall, lay the Bedouin camp.

The camp was immense. It contained at least fifteen hundred tents and had a population of six to eight thousand people. It was fenced in with barbed wire, and there were guards with machine-guns at every entrance. As we drove up among the tents children came running towards us. They were in rags and hungry, half-starved, but evidently they were accustomed to getting money from the Commandant on his visits, for they stretched out their hands and shouted in Italian: "*Un soldo, signore, un soldo!*"

Diodiece stopped the car, put his hands in his pocket, which he had evidently filled beforehand with coppers, and distributed them liberally to the shouting children.

The Bedouins gathered round us. They looked incredibly ragged. On their feet were hides tied with string; their burnouses were a patchwork of all kinds of multicoloured pieces. Many of them seemed ill and wretched, limping along with crooked backs, or with arms and legs that were terribly deformed.

Diodiece, who spoke Arabic, asked them how they were, and one of them stepped forward from the crowd that kept timidly back.

"Things are very bad, *ya Sidi*. What are we to do as long as this war goes on? *El Badawi* come down from the

mountains and take our sheep and horses, and there is hardly any more grass for the herds. If only we could be allowed out in the plains between the mountains."

Diodiece consoled him.

"You will see; this war will soon be at an end."

"Yes, Allah look upon us in mercy, for otherwise we must starve to death."

Diodiece did not answer. On the way back he said:

"They are really to be pitied. We are distributing tinned food among them, but how far does that go? They are attacked by the Bedouins from the mountains, who reproach them for having submitted; and they cannot defend themselves, as they have to give up their arms when they submit. It is to be most sincerely hoped that these dreadful conditions will soon come to an end."

CHAPTER VII

CAPTURED BY BEDOUINS

The following morning at sunrise the detachment was ready to start. I had already on the previous evening said good-bye to Diodiece, and now placed my car in the file behind the open Fiat in which sat the colonel who was going to Derna. The detachment was very large. Besides two armoured cars, each with three machine-guns, it consisted of three lorries filled with Eritrean soldiers. The man in charge was an Italian sergeant, who, as we were about to start, shouted to me:

"Now you must keep your place in the column, and not try to drive quickly if they should shoot at us."

I promised him, feeling slightly depressed at the thought of what might happen.

On the eastern horizon were heavy clouds. The sun had not yet risen behind them, so it was still half dark when we started towards the mountains, across the plain where the Bedouin camp was. As we reached the mountains the clouds slowly lifted, and the whole sky in the east was a sea of fire. The wind blew down from the mountains and wafted to us a marvellous scent from all kinds of flowers. Enormous vultures soared high over our heads, emitting hoarse cries. No other sounds were to be heard except the humming of the engines and the incessant chatter of the Eritrean soldiers.

The gradient became very steep, and as the road was very bad, being only roughly hewn out of the rock and full of boulders, the cars had difficulty in advancing even in low gear. Several times, especially at the turnings, I

feared the car would stop, although I fully opened the throttle. When we had gone uphill for about half an hour we reached an enormous mountain ridge, with deep, thickly wooded valleys on either side. The sun was still so low in the sky that the valleys were in shadow, while the sides of the mountains glowed; and from the bottom of the valleys rose a white mist.

All day we fought our way onward, and except for the military patrols sent out from the small fort along the road to see that there were none of the enemy about, we did not meet a soul. The Bedouins might not have existed. At five o'clock after innumerable punctures and repairs we reached a vast chain of mountain ranges. To the right was the so-called Death Ravine, where innumerable fights had taken place, and where many bones, gnawed white by hyenas and jackals, still remained.

On the top of the ridge was a fort; from below it looked like a square box, but as we came nearer up the slope, we saw that it was heavily armed with mountain guns and machine-guns, with the Italian tricolour flying from a roughly hewn mast planted in the middle of the barbed wire entanglements.

This was Fort Maraua. Outside it stretched tents as far as one could see. Here also those Bedouins who submitted came and gave themselves up. On the horizon, far away in the midst of the forests, one could distinguish slender blue columns of smoke, thin lines against the background of the blue sky. That was the smoke from the camp-fires of the free Bedouins, whom the Italians called 'rebels.'

We were received by Lieutenant-Colonel Piatti, a blond giant, who looked for all the world like a Scandinavian. When I asked him for permission to pitch my tent he laughed, so that all the red scars and gashes in his face were distorted.

"No, that's quite out of the question. You are in Maraua, and you must sleep within the walls."

The result was that I was given a room in the barracks, a camp-bed, and a blanket to make myself comfortable.

The sun set, and fires were lit in the Bedouin camp outside the barbed wire. The men and boys, who looked cleaner and better dressed than the Bedouins I had seen in Merj, were busy herding the sheep and goats, while the women milked the dromedaries, and the water-kettles hummed over the blazing fires.

I made the round of the camp before I retired; everywhere was life and activity. The young men had arranged dancing and ball games. I asked one of the Bedouins:

"Where is Ahmar Moktar?"

The Bedouin showed his white teeth in a smile.

"Ahmar Moktar," he said, making a sweeping gesture towards the mountains with his arms, "is everywhere in the mountains and the valleys."

It was dark. The fires threw long shadows of men and animals. The bells of the leaders of the flocks tinkled faintly. I returned to the fort. The sentry saluted, then again turned the muzzle of the machine-gun towards the camp. For everywhere in the mountains hovers the spirit of the one-armed leader, Ahmar Moktar. . . .

The next morning there was only just time to swallow a cup of black coffee before we had to start. But this time the journey would not take so long. It was downhill to Cyrene, and we calculated that we should reach this town by noon, if all went well, and if we did not have a fight. I had a chance to talk briefly to the colonel on whose behalf the convoy had been formed.

He was a tall, cultured man from Northern Italy. He spoke excellent French, nearly as well as a Frenchman; but he nourished a terrible hatred towards his Latin sister-nation. Every time I happened to mention France

in the course of our conversation his voice became a snarl. When I asked him why there were so many troops from Eritrea in Cyrenaica, he said:

"Because they are the only troops we can depend on. The Arabs are lazy and unreliable, and run away at the slightest provocation, while the Eritreans on the contrary are absolutely loyal to us Italians. I myself have spent considerable time in Eritrea, and there we never had any trouble or rebellion. The people there have fully understood what advantage they can reap through the introduction of Italian civilization. Here we have to kill almost the whole population before they understand that we are the stronger."

We did not discuss the subject any further, although there was quite a lot one might have said.

We went constantly downhill, but on a ghastly road full of branches, large stones, and holes. The body of the car creaked incessantly and I felt convinced it would break down.

And so it happened. About six miles from Cyrene the spring of the left front wheel snapped. I had to go on as best I could. It was difficult, but I just managed it and made my way into Cyrene in the strangest-looking car I have ever driven in.

Cyrene lies about twelve miles from the Mediterranean and is situated on two hills, between which vast excavations of the original Roman town have been made. One can distinctly see rows of columns round the Forum, and several temples. In the midst of the temples I pitched my tent.

The car looked awful: the spring had broken in such a way that it could not be repaired, so I took it right off. But it appeared to be impossible to obtain another. Perhaps if I had waited a fortnight I might have got one through from Benghazi, but we were to start for Derna

the next morning, and it was most unlikely that there would be another convoy to Derna for another month, while to stay in a small town like Cyrene was no fun.

At length I obtained, by a mixture of good words and good money, an old lorry spring. Admittedly it was much too big for a Chevrolet, and much stiffer than the spring on the other side, but it was at any rate better than nothing, and I managed to fix it with some thick wire. When I had finished the job it was dark, so I did not see much of Cyrene. I fastened up my tent and fell asleep.

I must have overslept that morning, for the tent was pulled from over my head, and two Eritrean soldiers stood over it with a lamp.

"You must hurry up; they are already leaving," said one of them, and kindly began to throw all my things into the car.

It was still pitch dark, and I was informed that it was only four o'clock.

"But," explained one of the Eritreans, "we must leave at once. We have 125 miles to go, and we have to be there before dark. It is the most dangerous part of the whole journey."

I soon packed, and hurried to the place where the car detachment escort was mustered. The colonel was cross and did not even say good-morning. He got into his car and gave the order for departure.

For a couple of hours we drove through a flat plain, and then it began to be mountainous again. Now we drove through deep ravines where a dense thicket spread up the slopes on both sides; now we crawled along a mountain ridge, where we could be seen for miles.

At about seven o'clock I began to have difficulties with the spring I had repaired. At first I did not attach much

importance to it; I had to keep pace with the others. But all at once I completely lost control of the wheel; the car dashed from one side to the other. There was nothing for it but to stop.

The other cars passed me. First came the armoured car, then the car with the Eritrean soldiers, and at the end a lorry with a number of sacks and three or four Eritrean soldiers with a machine-gun.

When the driver of this car noticed that I had stopped, he too stopped his engine and came up to me. But while he was still some distance away he signalled to me and shouted nervously:

"You must hurry up. You can't stay here alone. This is the most dangerous spot."

I had already realized that there was no possibility of my going on for at least an hour; I had to do something to the steering-gear first, as I explained to him. For a moment he did not answer; we heard the sound of the armoured car quickly diminishing ahead. The driver said anxiously:

"Then I shall have to drive on. When you have finished you had better drive back to Cyrene. This place is full of Bedouins, and God help you if they get hold of you!"

While we were talking the Abyssinian soldiers had been looking around uneasily, ready at the machine-gun. Now they began impatiently to stamp on the bottom of the car. The driver bade me good-bye and hurried back to his car, which a moment later had disappeared in the distance.

I was quite alone. Everything seemed very peaceful. On one side was a slope thickly covered with *maquis*, on the other side a high plateau, sloping gently towards the lowlands. Bees were humming round me as they flew from flower to flower.

At any rate now there was no hurry. I lay down beside the car and began to chew a straw. A few seconds later I was awakened from my doze by a distant tinkling. I sat up, but could not discover anything, yet the sound continued. I caught sight of a herd of sheep some distance away. It took me nearly a quarter of an hour to reach the herd, which was watched by two small boys with sunburnt, serious faces. When they saw me the youngest wanted to run away, but the eldest, a boy of fourteen, took him by the arm:

"But, Nazmi, for shame! Haven't we been told to take care of the sheep?"

He took his stick in his hand and advanced threateningly on me. I stopped him.

"I am not going to take any of your sheep," I said, "but please could I buy a little milk?"

"You are an Italian," said the boy. "If you want milk you must go to your own people."

I explained that I was not an Italian, but that I came from quite a different country. He still looked rather suspicious.

"But aren't you working for the Italians?"

"No," I said, "I come from Marrakech."

"From Marrakech" he repeated, and frowned. "I don't know it. Where is it?"

"Far out to the west," I explained.

"*W'Allah*, I know. You come from Trables."

"No," I said. "Marrakech is much farther away."

He gave up trying to get any further explanation, and hurried to milk one of the sheep into a wooden bowl. He handed me the bowl with the rich milk and I drank greedily. When I had finished I wanted to pay him and gave him a couple of lire. He turned the coin in his hand and handed it back to me.

"I don't know this one," he said.

Unfortunately I had not any of the ancient silver coins which are current among the Bedouins, and I therefore asked him and his brother to walk back to the car with me, so that we could see if I had anything they could use.

They were quite willing to do this now that they were no longer frightened of me, but when I offered them a slab of chocolate they looked at it uneasily. They had never tasted chocolate, and spat it out. Finally I succeeded in persuading them to take an old burnous I had brought from Morocco.

As well as they could they helped me to repair the car. It proved to be a difficult job. I had to jack up the whole front part and when that was done it was a question of fixing the spring safely. I tied it with a rope and trusted that it would last until I reached Derna.

"Where do you live?" I asked the boys.

"Our tribe has a camp out in the mountains, not so far away, only a day's march from here."

"But aren't you afraid of the Italians?"

"Yes, we are, but they won't see us; they always follow the road on which your car stands, and we keep far away from that. And besides they are so quick with their cars that they are away practically before anyone can see them."

"And if they discover you, what will they do to you?"

"Perhaps nothing—we are still so small. But we had a brother who was a little older, and they shot him because he had a rifle to defend the sheep against the jackals."

I said good-bye to the two boys and continued on my way to Derna. It was a marvellous morning, and I have rarely seen anything so beautiful as this mountainous country. Colour was everywhere, from the sky, which



LANDSCAPE IN CYRENAICA



A GAME OF DRAUGHTS



A MOHAMMEDAN GRAVEYARD



AN ARAB SHOT BECAUSE HE WAS FOUND IN A "PROHIBITED AREA"

formed a deep blue arch over my head, to the thousand shades of green in the woods around. The ground was thickly strewn with all kinds of flowers, and black and brownish-red butterflies fluttered among the gaily coloured blooms. Here the rocks, even where they were bare, were not grey, but displayed a wealth of colour. I kept following the narrow track, now across the high plateau, now through pinewoods or among the cleft rocks.

About noon the track began to wind between two mountain ranges which became higher and higher and seemed to draw nearer to each other. On both grew thick scrub, and here and there were tree-clad ravines.

The engine hummed drowsily. It was very hot, and I think I was very nearly dropping off into a doze when suddenly there was a crack.

At first I did not realize that it was a shot; I thought there was something wrong with the engine, but there was another crack, and a bullet ploughed through the tent-cloth which lay in the back of the car. As I looked up the mountain slopes I saw a tiny blue cloud hovering over the trees on the left side. I immediately grasped the situation. Bedouins lying up there had fired at me. I stopped the car immediately, and trembling with fear lest the next bullet should be better aimed, I waited for the Arabs to appear.

Only a few seconds later two men armed with long rifles came out of the woods. They advanced towards me, their rifles levelled ready to fire if I should move. I sat quite still in the car.

Four more Arabs now appeared, all armed to the teeth, with cartridge belts crosswise on their chests. When they were quite near the car one of them cried, "So you thought you could get through. By Allah, that will be an expensive joke for you—a traitor like you driving one of the Italians' cars!"

I did not quite understand what he meant, but when all the Arabs had got up to the car a tall black-bearded Arab, who was evidently the leader, asked me where I had hid my arms. I told him truthfully that I had no arms, but they all started to rummage in the car, while a young Arab kept watch beside it.

When they had finished searching for weapons they tied my hands behind my back, made me get out of the car, and ordered me to sit down. They talked together in an undertone. I did not understand much of what they were saying, as the conversation was carried on in a dialect which was rather different from the Arabic spoken in Tripoli or Benghazi, but little by little it dawned upon me that they were discussing what kind of death would be most suitable for me.

When they had consulted together for some time the black-bearded leader turned to me, and, kicking me, said:

"What is your tribe, dog?"

I explained that I was not an African at all, but came from a country in the far north, called Denmark.

"But why are you driving one of the Italians' cars?"

"I am not driving one of the Italians' cars. It is my own car, and I come from Marrakech."

"Why do you wear a *tarbush* when you are not a Moslem?"

"I wear a *tarbush* just because I am a Moslem; and I am on my way to Egypt, from where I am going to Mecca."

The leader had a further consultation with the other five, then he said:

"I think you are lying. You have put on Arab clothes and say that you are a Moslem just in order that we shall not hurt you. You are really one of the Franks, who come here to destroy us in the mountains."

I assured him that I was speaking the truth, but he would not believe me.

"You are going to die now," he said, "for how many of our brethren have not been killed by you?"

One of the Arabs produced his flint in order to set fire to the car—and for the second time during this tour I felt convinced that all was over—when the leader seemed to have an idea.

"If you are a Moslem you must know the Koran. Recite what you know."

I recited some *suras*, and when I had finished the leader said, addressing the others:

"He could not have learnt that in one day."

I began to feel hopeful and said:

"I have come here specially to get to know your way of living. In Europe nobody knows anything about it."

"What is Europe?"

"Europe is where the English, the French, and many other nations live."

"And the Italians too?" He called them *Rumi*.

"Yes, the Italians also, but I belong to quite a different tribe from the Italians."

"If all that you say is true we will consider what is to be done. We will take you to our camp, and there it will be decided what is to be done next."

"You can easily find proof that I am speaking the truth. I have the Koran in my luggage."

"You have the Koran?" all the Arabs cried in surprise. "By Allah, it was lucky we did not burn your car, with the Koran in it! That would have been a shocking thing. Allah would never have forgiven it."

They untied my hands, and began to look at me with more kindly eyes, although their suspicions had not quite been dispelled. The leader said I had better bring some blankets, as I possibly would have to sleep on the ground

during the night. I took the blankets and some provisions, the car was driven away from the road into a crevice covered with branches and hidden there, and we began our march up-country.

In spite of all these exciting happenings it was only about two o'clock in the afternoon. For about an hour we marched through thick undergrowth and trackless country, then arrived at a little brook tumbling down among the rocks. The leader stopped.

"It is *el Asr* now," he said, looking towards the sun. "Will you pray with us?" he asked me. I nodded, and we all washed in the little brook. Then we ranged ourselves in a row behind the leader, our faces turned towards Mecca, and he said the prayer *el Asr*. When the prayer was over the leader asked me if I would read to them from my Koran, as none of them could read. I did so, and with silent, serious faces they listened.

We marched on till darkness set in; then they lit a fire in a small open space which we had chosen as our camping-ground for the night.

As the fire blazed we all seven sat round it, and I asked the leader: "Aren't you afraid that the Italians might see you?"

"No," he answered contemptuously. "They dare not come outside their cities unless they have many soldiers and quick-shooting rifles with them, and in the dark they dare not attack us at all."

One of the others said: "You have spoken to the Italians. What do they say about us?"

I told them that the Italians accused the people from the mountains of the most atrocious cruelties, and of torturing their prisoners.

The leader looked at me a moment; then he took a thick branch and threw it on the fire so that the sparks rose in the air.

"Now we know that you are a good Moslem and that you will not stab us in the back I will tell you something, and I assure you by Almighty and Merciful Allah that what I am telling you is the truth. I have not always lived in the mountains, but I was hunted up here, because there was nothing else for me to do, and because my oasis was struck by a terrible disaster. To the south of these mountains stretches the desert, the huge, yellow desert, where evil *djinns* live, and where the wells have been blocked up. Right down to Kufra there is desert, I have been told, and perhaps even farther south than that, to the countries we do not know, but where the black peoples live. Not far from these mountains was the oasis where my father had lived, and his father before him, and all my family, as many new moons back as there are camels in all Sahara. I was happy: I had a son—Allah alone knows where he is now; and I had a daughter who was the light of my eyes. I assure you that the noblest horse arching its proud neck had less grace of movement than she. Her skin was soft as a peach, and her eyes black as night. I loved her even as I loved my son, and you must know that only the love for Allah is greater than the love of a father for his son."

I nodded without speaking. The other Arabs had doubtless heard this story many times, but they all sat quietly listening. The only sound was that of dry wood crackling in the fire. The chief's eyes were full of tears: I could see them sparkling in the glow of the fire-light.

"Allah preserve me from behaving like a woman, but what happened has made my heart like a stone towards all the infidels who are invading our country, and it has made my mind soft like a child's when I think of it. Allah alone is just.

"We lived happily in our oasis. I was rich: I had more

than a hundred camels, and every one in the oasis listened to my words. True, there was war in Cyrenaica; every now and then our young men went away to the help of the mountain people, but we did not know more than that until one day . . .

"A score of our men, led by myself, had attended a great festival in a neighbouring oasis. It lasted three days, and we returned to our oasis. It seemed quiet enough, but the first person I met was my wife. She came running to me, horror in her eyes, her hair streaming down her back, her clothes torn off her body.

"'Oh, do not come home, do not come home!' she wailed. 'Allah forgive me for having to tell you what has happened.'

"She sobbed and wailed and I could not get another word out of her. I got off my camel, and then my brother appeared. He came up to me, kissed my cheeks, and said:

"'Brother, you know as well as I do that Allah alone metes out justice to man. Mohammed is dead.'

"'Dead!' I said. 'But he was not ill!'

"'No,' he replied. 'Our brother was shot. The Italians have been here. They shot every fifth man because we defended ourselves.'

"I was so shaken that I was speechless, but my brother continued:

"'You must place your trust in Allah, whatever happens. Aysha is gone.'

"Aysha was my daughter, and I could not control myself any longer. 'Tell me,' I cried, 'is she dead?'

"He shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'An Italian sergeant with some Eritrean troops arrived. They drove the camels away, and when they left with the animals they took Aysha with them too.'

"'Oh, my brother, could you not have spared my house

that shame and my heart that sorrow? You knew how I loved her, but you might rather have killed her than that disgrace should fall upon my name.'

"'I knew nothing until it was too late. Eritrean soldiers kept guard everywhere,' he replied.

"For a long time I did not answer him, then I said:

"'You must take care of my wife and son.' Ahmet, who was only nine years old, stood beside his mother. 'I am going to look for Aysha.'

"And I left the oasis on my only remaining camel. I did not know that I was never to see it again. I searched for many months in many towns, and at last I found her. She had been put in a public brothel in Derna, a house where every one could commit lechery for payment." The chief clenched his hand round his rifle.

"She knew me, and I asked her to come with me, but she shook her head and wept.

"'Oh, Father,' she said, 'I believe that I am ill, and if I have got that illness I shall never be well again.'

"'Aysha, I have forgiven you as Allah will pardon us all. How did you get here?'"

"'The Italian carried me away when they took the camels, and afterwards I was brought here to this house.'

"She sobbed. Only Allah the Merciful knows what I suffered at that moment.

"'Kill me, Father,' she asked, 'I shall never escape from this place, and death will be a favour when it comes from your hands.'

"So I killed her: kissed her forehead and fled, fled to the mountains. And I tell you, every Italian I meet shall die. That is just. If I had thought you were Italian my first bullet would have found its mark. But I saw your tarbush and decided to wait."

Every one was silent. I could not answer him. I was too deeply moved. Then he continued:

"And again, I swear by Allah the Almighty and Merciful that there is not one single person here who could not tell a story similar to the one I have told. That is why we do not surrender: that is why we shoot till our rifle-barrels are burnt away. We do not fear death from their machine-guns, we do not fear starvation, nor that we have to go in rags. We shall fight to the last man. We all love God, but we hate the white devils, who cause us more harm than anyone can imagine. Hamid, why are you here?"

"My brother was hanged," answered Hamid.

"And you, Abdallah?"

"They took my property away from me, and said that it did not belong to me because I had no papers for it, although it had belonged to my father."

"And you, Mohammed?"

"My father and my brother were shot."

"And you, Ali?"

"Because they would confine me in a town."

"And finally, you, Abdeslam?"

"Because they sentenced me to twenty-five years at the salt mines and I would not surrender. I ran away."

Again the Chief turned to me. "Now you have heard all. And once more I call upon Allah as witness that it is true. Would it not have been right for us to have shot you if you had been in the pay of the Italians?"

"Yes, but I was not," I protested. "You can see by my clothes that I am not from Cyrenaica. The garments I am wearing come from Morocco."

"I saw that a long time ago," replied the chief, "and that was why I let you recite the Koran. If we had allowed you to drive on, where would you have gone then?"

"To Derna."

"And from there you want to go to Egypt?"

"Yes, as quickly as possible."

He talked with the others in a whisper, and then he said:

"We trust you because we believe that you really are a Moslem, and that it is not something you have told us out of fear. It is still another three days' march to our camp. If you prefer to return to your car to-morrow morning you may do so, but on one condition. You shall promise us, by Allah, that if you reach Alexandria you will call on Sidi Idriss Senoussi, the lawful Emir of Cyrenaica, and tell him that we are fighting to the last man. Will you promise this?"

"By Allah, I promise."

He indicated that we were to say the last prayer for the night, and when it was finished he said:

"Then by to-morrow you will return to your car with Ahmet and Abdeslam."

The night was pitch-dark. The fire blazed more and more feebly. I offered the chief one of my blankets, but he declined. The six Arabs, hardy of necessity, lay down on the bare ground. I wrapped myself in my blankets and fell asleep. And out in the darkness the hyenas cried like little children.

I awoke the next morning some time before the others. The sky was still black, and the stars twinkled faintly. In the east one could just discern a faint light. Five Arabs were still asleep, but the sixth was busy getting the fire going. He put some more branches on it, but did not notice that I was awake, as he was sitting with his back to me, his rifle by his side. I glanced at the others, who were fast asleep. They looked ragged, but even now, while sleeping, there was a strangely peaceful and decisive look on all their faces. I began to understand why these men were able to die without a quiver of the eyelids. As far as I had observed during the one day I had spent with them,

they followed their religion scrupulously. Whatever fate might befall them, it would never occur to them to blame God for what happened. While they were standing at the gallows they would thank God for the life they had lived, and they would calmly endure any sufferings. The men who slept before me were probably poor and ignorant, they could not read, and could hardly spell their own names, but they were the truest noblemen I have ever met.

The sky was now a blazing red; it was time to say the morning prayer, *el Subr*, and the Arab who had tended the fire, and had evidently kept watch for the last couple of hours, now came up and shook us awake.

"It is *el Subr* now," he said.

We all went to a little stream near by, and performed the prescribed ablutions, after which the chief once more led the short morning prayer. When that was done, and we had had some of the dates I had brought from the car, I took leave of the four of them, thanked them for allowing me to return, and with Ahmet and Abdeslam I got ready to go back the same way we had come. Before I left I said to the chief:

"In a way I should have liked to return with you to the camp—perhaps I should have met Ahmar Moktar there?"

The chief smiled.

"You would not have seen him: he is far away now, right in the heart of the mountains."

"Does Ahmar Moktar command?"

"Yes, but only as deputy for Sidi Idriss Senoussi."

"How many are you in all?"

"I do not even know that myself," answered the chief. "I suppose we are a couple of thousand, spread over the whole country." He nodded meditatively a couple of times. "But very many have been killed. We were ten

when we left, and now we are only six. Four of us were killed when we fought a car detachment with machine-guns, the one which passed just before you did."

He smiled at me and gave me his hand.

"*Salaam aleikum!* You ought to consider yourself very fortunate in being allowed to go. You are the first who has been permitted to do so."

"After what I have heard, it would have been quite understandable if you had shot me."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Allah alone knows your heart and your mind. I believe that what you have told us is true, but how do you think one of us would have been treated if he had been captured by the Italians?"

I was silent.

Once more they shook my hand, and then Ahmet, Abdeslam, and I started on our way back to the car. We reached it shortly before noon. We dined together, and I took leave of the two sunburnt Bedouins. For a long time I could see them standing by the roadside, staring after me; then they disappeared into the *maquis*. Once more I was quite alone.

The country was almost impassable, and the road continued to wind in and out among rocks and thickets. The whole time I was afraid that some one would start shooting again. It was quite likely that I should meet other Arab irregulars, and it was by no means certain that the next time would pass off as happily as the last one. But all went well, and about three o'clock I arrived at a fort. I drove along a very steep path, and stopped the car outside the barbed-wire fence. The captain appeared. "Where do you come from?" he demanded excitedly.

"I do not understand Italian."

He became still more excited. "Foreign," he said, and nodded a couple of times signficantly. Then he called

an Italian soldier who spoke German, and with him as interpreter the conversation was carried on.

"The captain asked where do you come from."

"From Cyrene."

"Who has given you permission to drive alone?"

"I have the permission to drive on my passport."

He took the passport and looked carefully through it. With the help of the interpreter he said:

"It does not give you permission to drive alone."

"I was with a detachment, but my car broke down, and they did not wait for me but drove on," I answered.

"H'm. That sounds queer! Where did it happen?"

"About thirty miles from Cyrene."

"And you have driven from there alone? Through the most dangerous district?" The captain became more and more excited. "Did you meet any Bedouins?"

"Yes."

"And they did not do you any harm?"

"Not the smallest."

"Tell me, signor, have you any special object in coming to Cyrenaica?"

"Yes, I am going through to Egypt."

"I do not mean that," the captain sneered. "Are you making a special point of getting in touch with the Arabs?"

"Nothing beyond being very interested in the Arab peoples everywhere."

"Do you speak Arabic?"

"Yes."

"Oh! It becomes more and more peculiar." He thought for a moment.

"Yesterday," he continued, "four men of the escort were killed. It seems strange that the rebels should have allowed you to pass unless there were some special reasons. Please may I see what papers you have on you?"

He searched my pockets; then he shouted to a soldier, "Francesco, just have a look to see what there is in the car." The soldier looked, but found nothing Arabic besides the Koran, which he handed to the captain. He turned the pages over, then asked me, "Is this yours?"

"Yes."

"Why do you carry it with you?"

"Because I have embraced Islam."

"I do not know your country—are the people Moslems there?"

"No. In my country a man can have what religion he chooses."

"If they are all Christians in your country, then why aren't you one too?"

"Because I believe Islam to be the true Christianity."

"Well, you will have to wait here. I am going to telephone to Derna. Francesco, watch him in the meantime."

Francesco stood by my car, stiff as a ramrod, his rifle in his hand. After a quarter of an hour the captain returned. "I have spoken to Derna. To-morrow morning you will be allowed to drive on, but I shall send a couple of *carabinieri* with you, who are to hand you over to the Commissioner. Where are you going to sleep to-night?"

"In my tent."

"Oh, well, I suppose that will be all right."

I pitched the tent in the field inside the barbed-wire fence, and all the afternoon it was a great source of enjoyment for the Eritrean soldiers to lift the tent-cloth every now and then and peer into the tent. In the evening I was left in peace, although four Eritrean soldiers were detailed to guard me.

About nine the next morning, when I had long since finished loading up the car, the captain came out, followed by two *carabinieri,* both heavily armed. The captain ordered them to get into my car. One of them sat

down in the front seat next to me, and the other in the back seat. We then left for Derna, the two *carabinieri* having been given the strictest instructions to hand me over to the Commissioner. I confess that I was not a little nervous. The road from Guba—that was the name of the fort where I had been so disagreeably held up—to Derna was swarming with Bedouins, and if we were to meet any here they were certain not to be willing to give quarter, now that I had two *carabinieri* with me in the car.

The *carabinieri* were not precisely happy either. As we went along they kept looking around uneasily; then the one who sat next to me asked:

"They tell me you have seen El Mahafdia?"

"Yes, I have."

"They kill every one. Why didn't they kill you?"

"Because I am a Moslem."

"So the captain said. But we too are Moslems, and if they meet us they will certainly kill us."

"Yes, that may be, but I come from Morocco and am not fighting with the Italians. They understood that I was not an enemy."

The *carabinieri* were silent—a guilty silence.

We were still driving between mountains. It was forty-five miles from Guba to Derna, and when we had done about twenty-five the mountains began to slope steeply downward towards the plain in which Derna lies. The *carabinieri* clutched their rifles more tightly, and the one next to me said anxiously, "It is very dangerous here. Full of Bedouins." The road was now zigzagging on a steep incline. On one side was a yawning abyss, on the other were bush-covered slopes. The *carabiniere* moved uneasily in his seat, then said, "How do you stop the car?"

"Why?"

"Well, if they shoot from the hills they will first take aim at you, and if you are hit we shall go into the abyss."

I shrugged my shoulders. "If I am hit you cannot possibly stop the car from where you are sitting."

He paled and looked about him in terror, while we rushed downhill with great speed, round one sharp bend after another. We were almost at the foot of the steep mountain-side, when, just after we had rounded a bend, I saw that the road was blocked some fifteen yards further on. A barricade of huge boulders had been built up right across it. The barricade was about a yard high, and I should have smashed up the car, and probably ourselves as well, if I had hit it. It was a difficult choice: there was no time to stop. With a quick glance I saw that on my left was a slope of about twenty yards deep, very steep and leading down to the level plain. I turned the car over the edge of the road, and queerly enough it covered the twenty yards downhill without turning over. Then, at the foot, it hit a large rock, and both front tyres punctured.

The terrified soldiers jumped out, their faces a greenish-yellow. "Let us go on at once," they both cried. "The rebels have put the stones across the road; they may begin to shoot at any moment."

I tried to start the car. The engine was all right, but it was impossible to drive on two flat front tyres. I explained to the *carabinieri* that we should have to repair them first. We started the job, which took half an hour. The *carabinieri* were panting from the exertion of pumping, but we saw nothing of El Mahafdia. They had disappeared as dew before the sun.

At last all was in order. I drove the car on to the road, which fifty yards farther on led across the plain, and we covered the last five miles to Derna without incident.

As far as climate goes, Derna is a Paradise on earth. It is situated by the shimmering blue Mediterranean, and has the most marvellous temperature in all Africa. In the

summer the temperature is rarely more than 86°F., for the wind blows in from the sea, and in winter it never falls below 59°F. It rains on a very few days during the year, yet in spite of this there is never a drought, such as you see in the desert where the rainfall is rare. The soil is not yellow and sad-looking. It is not an oasis with a few single palms half buried in the sand; all Derna is a sea of flowers, and all the world's most wonderful fruits grow here.

Derna has the clearest, sweetest, and purest water in North Africa. It comes down from the mountains, and flows over the ground in the town itself and its environs, so that it has been necessary to dig ditches and channels through which the water may flow. Yet the soil is not boggy, for the water flows perpetually into the sea. The ground in Derna is covered with a thick carpet of grass where gaily coloured flowers grow. In the gardens the fan-shaped banana-trees bear their yellow burdens the whole year round, and even if the bananas are not as big as the famous fruit from Jamaica their flavour is much better, like a mixture of pineapple and strawberry. Apricots and peaches grow as big as goose-eggs, and the blue and green grapes which twine on frames across all the streets, and which in autumn are bursting with the pressure of the juice, are large and heavy as pigeons' eggs. And just as the town itself is bright and kindly, lying there under the eternally blue sky, so are its people too. The young Arabs go through the streets adorned with fresh flowers woven into chains of bright colours which they hang round each other's necks; and just as they love the beauty of the world around them, so this beauty is stamped on their minds. I have never met people who practised in their daily life so closely what the prophet Jesus taught; the stern and hard form of Islam which the mountain people doubtless in their relentless struggle against their Italian oppressors must needs uphold has here given place to something

gentle, almost feminine. There are few places in North Africa where Islam is followed more scrupulously than here, where the teaching of the Senoussi has its main strongholds, but also I know no place where, as here, man has placed all that is kind and lovely first and foremost and where superstition is abhorred like the plague.

Derna was surrounded on all sides by a high wall. During the past few years it had been transformed into a veritable fortress, and the wall was so high that only a very agile Bedouin could scale it. At each compass corner was a gate, where stood the black representative of European civilization, with a loaded machine-gun, to watch that no one got in or out without permission. I drove the car with the two *carabinieri*, who had by now quite regained their courage, through the gate opening towards Cyrene, and they ordered me to proceed straight to the Commissioner's office.

We drove through Derna's Arab streets, which are clean and well kept, across the little square with its two *cafés*, and on beyond the Arab quarter out to the European quarter, consisting of three houses and a hotel, and at length we arrived at the Commissioner's office, over which the Italian tricolour was flying, with the Fascist emblem displayed above the gate.

It was a huge white building, from which Derna was governed by a small handful of Italians who have come straight to the colony from their homeland. They were all soldiers, and had unlimited authority. The Arabs had no representation whatever, although it should perhaps be mentioned that there was actually one young and intelligent Arab at Headquarters, called Ali Jerbi, who acts as interpreter.

We stopped outside the gates, one of the *carabinieri* remained in the car, and the other accompanied me to the office. I was immediately shown in to the Commissioner.

The Commissioner was a man of less than average height. He wore a faultless uniform, with a pair of gold epaulettes, and his chest was covered with little bits of gay coloured ribbon, indicating what decorations he had. Besides this he wore a monocle, and had a small, well-groomed black moustache.

He signed to the soldier who had followed me into his office to go out again, and asked me to sit down in an easy chair in front of the writing-desk. He produced his elegant monogrammed cigarette-case from his pocket and offered me a cigarette. He spoke broken French, but we could just manage to make ourselves understood to each other.

"Well, signor," he began, and started to draw figures with his pencil on the blotting-pad in front of him. "I hear that you have come through without an escort?"

"I have," I answered, "because my car broke down, and the detachment I was with went on without me."

"I see," he said politely, "but it is also said that you have seen the rebels?"

"So I have."

"What is the motive of this motor trip you are making?" He was still drawing carefully executed circles with his pencil.

"First and foremost it is to write articles about what I have seen, and next my idea was to cross Africa from west to east."

"You speak Arabic and wear Arab clothes. Why?"

"First because I am interested in the Arab people, and next because I have embraced Islam."

"Is that why the Bedouins did not harm you?"

"I suppose so. But also because I am entirely neutral. It is the cultural life of the Arabs which interests me, and not political questions. I also explained to the Bedouins that I had no animosity towards them whatever, so they did not do me any harm."

The Commissioner put his pencil to his lips reflectively, and smiled in a slightly mocking manner.

"I come from Tobruch, and I tell you quite frankly that I do not understand you. What is there in the Arabs to interest you? This—this race of cowards, lazy and indolent—where do you find the 'culture' you say you are here to study?"

"In their philosophy, their moderation, their beautiful manner of life, their love of family and helpfulness to each other, and their absolute faith in God in all circumstances."

"Bah!" said the Commissioner contemptuously. "Philosophy and moderation—what is there in all that? Get to know them better and you will find that the Arabs are a lot of uncivilized wretches who put as many obstacles as possible in our way, now that we are trying to build up the country. We want to create order here. Now, take Derna, for example—you won't find a more fertile district anywhere, yet the natives live quite unconcernedly, and laze around, day after day, neglecting the land which under rational cultivation would yield twenty times as much as it does now. We want to industrialize Derna; we have already built one large factory, but the people are discontented, wrongheaded, and lazy, and they will not work there even though we offer them high pay. They much prefer to lounge about the town, earning only just what is necessary to maintain their miserable lives. There is no 'go' in them—no energy."

"But they were happy, and would go on being happy if they were allowed to live in the way they always did."

"I don't quite understand what you mean," said the Commissioner irritably. "Do you call it happiness never quite to be able to eat one's fill? Not to want to progress or develop, but to throw themselves on their knees five times a day in the mosque invoking their Allah? If that

is what you mean then we had better not discuss the question at all."

"Yes, that is exactly what I do mean, and I will tell you why. The Oriental differs widely from the European, especially in the way in which the latter has developed during the last generation. The Oriental does seek development and progress, but he seeks it in very different spheres from the European. The Oriental holds that spirit and the development of the spirit is the most important thing. And how does he arrive at the most perfect development of his spirit? By following his religion and its ethical demands, by continually trying to make himself better, more able to grasp beauty in all its ethical and æsthetic forms; by trying to approach that ethical and artistic perfection which is God.

"I have spoken to those people," I continued, "and I know that even though not all of them are like this, there are many who though ragged and poor yet spiritually tower high above the average European."

The Commissioner got up and paced the floor, to and fro.

"And you want to try and tell me that you believe this? It is lunacy! Then you would reject completely all technical progress, all the great inventions which have been made?"

"Yes," I said. "I must do so after the turn things have taken in Europe. All this technical development and machinery has now become the one aim of the white race, which means that both figuratively speaking and in reality they live for the body, and the body alone. I believe that this whole development will, sooner or later, create chaos in Europe, or, worse still, materialism, the complete mechanization of man, with a denial of the value of both culture and religion. Jesus was right when He said, 'Lay up for yourself treasure in Heaven.' These words are

preached in every country in Europe, but they are only followed in the Orient—but then Jesus was an Oriental."

The Commissioner shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not think we should pursue the subject any farther. You say that you write. Of course, we Italians do not mind in the least degree *what* you write. We are not afraid to look truth in the face. The right of the strongest has always been in operation on this earth: in Nature itself it is the strongest, the one most fitted to perform something great, who wins the victory. And so it is here. We have made this country our country. To the offer to create an ordered state they have replied by shooting down our pioneers, by attacking us in our work when we least expected it, by perpetuating the foulest cruelties on our officers and men when they were taken prisoners. For many years we have been lenient, but now that is over. Italy must have a place in the sun. We have a surplus population which is increasing enormously year by year. If the Arabs offer resistance—well, so much the better. Then there will be room for Italian peasants, and I feel convinced that Sicilians in particular would settle down here all right, because the climatic conditions are so much the same. These are the bald facts, which no one can deny. Has such a gang of dirty creatures the right to live when they are depriving a young active nation of all the essential conditions of life?"

I did not answer him—only shrugged my shoulders. The Commissioner sat down, and again began to draw nervously with his pencil.

"It does not matter whether we agree or not, but you cannot go on for the present."

"But why not?"

"The district between Derna and Tobruch is unsafe—it is full of Bedouins, and at the moment there is no escort."

"But I have the permission on my passport."

"I know that, but I command here, and I dare not assume the responsibility for your life." He smiled with assumed amiability.

"Where are you going to live?"

"I do not know Derna."

"Well, there is only one possible hotel, the Roma."

"Can't I be allowed to live in my tent?"

"Most certainly not. You are not permitted to live outside the walls, and within them there is no room. You will have to go to the Hotel Roma."

I took leave of the Commissioner, and walked towards the gate considering what to do. I had only five hundred lire on me, which would have been enough to enable me to reach the Egyptian frontier, and it would take the best part of a month to get money from Denmark to Derna, but I had to do what the Commissioner had said, and I decided to book a room at the Hotel Roma.

The car was standing alone in front of the gates. The *carabinieri* had vanished. I was free. Yet, all the same, I had an odd feeling of being in prison. All Derna seemed one large prison, with machine-guns at every gate.

I soon found the Hotel Roma, quite near the Arab quarter, installed in an old Arab house. The proprietor was an elderly Italian, who was evidently not accustomed to receiving many guests, for he made great preparations because of my visit. In the hall hung a photograph of Mussolini in a black shirt; and underneath it were pictures of the Pope and King Victor Emmanuel, with the inscription "Church and State clasp hands." The photograph had obviously been taken on the occasion of Mussolini's acknowledgment of the Vatican State.

At half-past two I went into the town in order to go to the mosque. The path which led from the hotel to the square, where all the *cafés* were, ran between two high

walls, behind which were gardens with banana-trees, palms, and all kinds of fruit-trees. The mosque was not far away from the square. It was very large, but not the only one in Derna. In the town itself there were four smaller ones, and a short distance outside the town was a small and very beautiful mosque, built in honour of Sidi Ahmed Senoussi, of whose teaching nearly all the population of Derna are followers. When I had been in the mosque a short time a man came up and greeted me.

"I am Ibrahim Serafi," he said. "Welcome to Derna! Where do you come from?"

I told him that I was a Moslem from Europe, but that I had just come from Morocco.

"From Morocco!" he said, pleased. "Then you have also been in Andalusia?"

"Many times," I answered. "In Malaga, Granada, Cadiz, and Cordova."

"It is amusing that you should have found your way to Derna, then," said Ibrahim, "for most of the families here are from Andalusia. For instance, the ex-Mayor, Abd el Aziz, and many others; they fled to Cyrenaica when the Spaniards took Andalusia from the Moors. How long are you going to stay here?"

"I do not know. I am travelling by car. But I cannot go on till the Commissioner gives me permission."

"Why is that?"

"He says there is too much fighting round here."

"And I believe it's true. The Italians have begun to use poison gas. They have destroyed the population in a whole village. That is why Ahmar Moktar's men give no quarter."

"Still, they did not do me any harm."

His voice became a whisper. "Have you seen El Mahafdia? Not many escape from them with their lives."

I told him of my experiences in the mountains.

"I have noticed that you say your prayers as we do, so I know that you are a Moslem, and I need not be afraid to tell you things. I tell you, by Allah, it is very bad here in Derna as well."

"In what way?"

"Nearly every day some of the inhabitants are either shot or hanged, and for mere trifles. The other day they shot a merchant from the town here, Abd el Wahat."

"What had he done?"

"Next to nothing. He had a brother who is up in the mountains, and it happened one night that the brother came to see him. He had scaled the wall—Allah alone knows how—and the merchant gave his brother all the food that he could spare. Then the brother again crept away. But next morning he was found dead outside the wall. The guard had evidently seen him and fired. But he had not looked to see if he had hit him or not, for only when daylight came did they find the corpse, with all the provisions beside it. The Italians held an inquiry, and at last they discovered that the food had come from the merchant. He was arrested, sentenced to death, and shot."

"Then do they sentence people to death for everything?"

"Yes, practically speaking. It has never been so bad as it is now. Even those Arabs from Derna who have surrendered to the Italians are now clenching their fists. But what is the use of it all?" Ibrahim added sadly. "I suppose they intend to exterminate us all."

We walked through the streets as we talked, and as we were just near the Square we went into one of the *cafés* and ordered cups of coffee. We had hardly been there two minutes before Ibrahim exclaimed: "Look, over there on the other side of the street is sitting Abd el Aziz, the ex-mayor. He is a lovable man."

We went across to Abd el Aziz, who was a man about



IN THE MOUNTAINS ON THE WAY TO DERNA



FREE ARABS FROM CYRENAICA



AN OLD ARAB ARTISAN



THE EX-MAYOR OF DERNA

seventy years old, with silver-white hair and beard. Sidi Abd el Aziz asked us to sit down, and ordered another round of coffee. When Ibrahim had told him who I was, and that I was on my way to Egypt, I was invited to tea the next day at his house.

The sun was setting, and I hurried back to the hotel, where I was due to dine at six o'clock. I was not alone during the meal. At a table near mine sat an Italian, who, as I soon found out, was an engineer, managing some factory not far from the hotel. He sat with a pale young Italian, a customs official. Besides these there were two or three officers present. In the middle of the meal they suddenly got up and stood to attention, giving the Fascist salute. The colonel, Derna's Commandant, entered.

He dined every night at the Roma. He was a short, grey-bearded man, very nervous, his fingers shaking when he ate, and continually making pills with his bread, but he had a kindly smile for every one.

He greeted me, as the only stranger there, and looked at me in slight curiosity: it was very rare that a non-Italian came to Derna.

We had scarcely finished eating, and had only just been served with coffee, when a soldier came in. He went up to the colonel and handed him a slip of paper which looked like a telegram. The colonel opened it quickly, turned slightly red, bit his under-lip, and got up without finishing his coffee. A moment later I heard his car start.

"Now he has to go out again," the engineer said to the customs official. "They are rather cheeky just lately."

The customs official was digging at his teeth with a toothpick. "Oh, never mind. He'll get the better of them."

A quarter of an hour later, as I went out of the hotel entrance, I saw three armoured cars with their headlights on tearing past. They headed eastward towards Tobruch.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPRISONMENT AND DEPORTATION

Four days passed. I had arrived in Derna on the 14th, and it was now the 19th. I went again to the Commissioner, and asked if I could leave. I could not see him in person—I was informed that he was very busy—but his secretary, a very superior young fellow, told me in an impudent tone that conditions were still such that I could not start. I should have to wait another three days, and then they would send a message to the hotel.

During the last three days I had got to know all the Arab population of Derna, and I had made friends with them all, especially the ex-mayor, Abd el Aziz, to whom no one ever applied in vain. Every day I saw him sitting in his chair on the pavement, his lap full of loaves which he distributed, his face beaming with pleasure. Furthermore, I made friends with Ibrahim, who had revealed himself as an extraordinarily clever and knowledgeable man. He told me the whole day long about the time when he was a young man and took part in the fighting against the Italians on the side of the Turks. He told me about Enver Pasha, and about Kemal Pasha, whom he did not like. They had both been in Cyrenaica during the war of 1912, and Ibrahim proudly displayed the wound he had received when he was fighting in the mountains.

So the days slipped by. Three days passed, but I received no word from the Commissioner, and when on the 25th I went again to ask how things stood concerning my departure I was told that I must have patience and wait. There was still no escort.

On May 28 something important took place. There was a Bedouin camp just outside the walls. All the Bedouins there had surrendered to the Italians, and were consequently not permitted to carry arms. An Arab *carabiniere* in the Italian service had found out that four of the Bedouins in this camp had given bread and tobacco to the Arabs who fought in the mountains. These four were immediately arrested and flung into prison.

All day this new arrest was the one topic of conversation in Derna. It was related how the Bedouins out there were starving to death, because, on the one hand, the Arabs warred on them because they had surrendered; and the Italians, on the other hand, prevented them from defending their camels and sheep by refusing them permission to carry arms. The eldest of the men arrested was a man of sixty years, tall and powerfully built; he had a wife and nine children. The second was forty years old; he had three small children. The third was deaf and dumb, while the fourth, a brother of the first man, was unmarried.

The case was very quickly brought before the military tribunal. The Italians under General Graziani instituted a special military tribunal to settle such cases. The judge was rushed by aeroplane from town to town, and on May 29 at five in the afternoon he came flying to Derna to hear this case.

The examination was public, and I took a seat in the court. It was conducted in Italian, Ali Jerbi from the Commissioner's office acting as interpreter. All four Bedouins appeared at the same time before the court, which consisted of the judge and some officers.

The judge read out the names. The four Bedouins looked round them bewildered by this fine room, with so many grandly dressed people present. The eldest of the prisoners was called Ahmet ben Abelkader. He was examined first.

The judge said: "You have given bread and tobacco to the Bedouins in the mountains—do you admit that?"

Ahmet kept silence.

The judge roared at him, "Do you admit it?" One of the *carabinieri* gave him a poke in the back.

"Yes," said Ahmet.

"Right. Enough. Next!"

The judge put the same question to him and received the same reply. This case too was finished in a moment.

The third man did not answer the judge's question. As the *carabiniere* gave him a few pokes and he still did not answer, Ahmet, the eldest, told them that he was deaf and dumb. He was instantly dismissed. The youngest Bedouin was called Idriss, and it was not so easy to finish with him as with the others. He was only nineteen years old and had a very intelligent face.

When the judge asked him if he pleaded guilty, he answered, "No."

"What?" said the judge in consternation. "How can you say no? We have all the proofs here, and the others have confessed. You and the other men have been traitors, and have helped the enemy."

"No," came again, loud and clear.

"Explain yourself."

"If we had not given them bread and tobacco they would have taken our sheep, and we had nothing to defend ourselves with. Then how could we prevent it? We gave them bread and tobacco so that they should not take our sheep."

"You could have called the *carabinieri* from Derna when they were out there."

"According to the Koran, it is forbidden to give Moslems up to Christians."

"I cannot see that there are any extenuating circumstances in what you are saying," the judge remarked

irritably. "You have admitted that you have provided the enemy with food."

"Yes, but——"

Sentence was passed there and then. The judge read the sentence aloud. The three were to be shot from behind as traitors to Italy, but the deaf and dumb man was acquitted.

Ali Jerbi translated the sentence into Arabic. The three Bedouins stared round them in bewilderment, without meeting a single compassionate glance. All the spectators were Italians, who were merely looking forward to seeing the execution. Idriss's brother, who had been present in the court-room when the sentence was read aloud, went crazy; he wanted to make his way to his brother to embrace him once more, but the *carabinieri* pushed him back. Howling like some wild animal, he rushed through the court-room and down the stairs. In the street he fainted, and had to be carried away.

Ahmet said to Ali Jerbi: "Ask the judge if he cannot give us a milder sentence. I have nine children at home."

The judge shrugged his shoulders. "The military court knows only 'Acquitted' or 'Death.'"

The purring of a motor was heard from below. A *carabiniere* went up to the three prisoners and chained them. Then he made them understand that they were to go down the stairs. They moved quite mechanically as if they were stunned; the full meaning of their sentence had not dawned on them yet. A crowd had gathered in the streets; they were all Arabs, who stood there silent and sad as the prisoners passed. A lorry had stopped in the middle of the street: the prisoners were pushed into it, and it drove quickly away, not towards the prison but out towards the beach. I saw Ibrahim and asked him, "Why do they not drive to the prison?"

He shook his head. "They will be shot immediately, down on the beach."

I listened. The purring of the engine had stopped. The crowd was quiet as death. Five minutes passed in complete silence. Then a volley was heard. Another few seconds' silence; then a single shot.

"What was that?" I asked Ibrahim.

"We are accustomed to hearing it," he said sadly. "They do not always die immediately when they are shot through the back, and then the officer shoots through the head any who are not quite dead."

The sun had set. The sea was calm, flaming red in the sunset right out to the horizon.

The next day a pall of depression hung over Derna. Every Arab in the usually smiling and beautiful town went about sadly. I met Ibrahim, who clenched his fists and said, "Oh, how I wish I were twenty years old—then I should not be found here, a cowardly old weakling! I would go out into the mountains, no matter what hardships I had to suffer."

"Then what happened yesterday was no isolated instance?" I asked.

"Alas, no. It gets worse and worse. They suspect all of us. We never know what day we shall be thrown into prison. Ahmet was shot yesterday—now who will look after his nine children? And so it goes on the whole time. A month ago they shot a woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes. We know the whole story now, but the *carabiniere* whom it concerns swears that it is untrue. In the outskirts of a Bedouin camp a woman lived, alone with her six-months-old child in her tent. She was quite young, and she was pursued by a *carabiniere* from the town here. She would not have anything to do with him, but she had no one to protect her, as her husband had died a short time before. I knew her quite well, I had spoken to her several

times, and she had told many people in the town about the way the *carabiniere* pestered her. One night two Arabs came to her tent, which, as I told you, was far away from the other tents. They told her that they came from the mountains, and asked her for something to eat. She said she could not give them anything, as there was capital punishment for doing this, but they threatened to kill her if she did not give them something. So then she let them take some sugar and a little bread, and they left without harming her. But the next day the *carabiniere*, who was an Arab deserter serving the Italians, and who for that reason could get no one to have any dealings with him, arrived, and told her that he knew she had been giving sugar and bread to the rebels. She cried and denied it."

Ibrahim here interposed sadly that it was dreadful to have to tell such a story about a Moslem: it was true this *carabiniere* was an Arab, but he had made himself exactly like the Italians: he drank and caroused, and perhaps that might account for his behaviour.

"Then," he continued, "the *carabiniere* said to her: 'If you will sleep with me to-night I won't do you any harm.' She still denied having done anything wrong. He insisted, but she would have nothing to do with him. Then he arrested her. Perhaps to begin with he only pretended, but the story got about and she had to appear before the court. The *carabiniere* produced the sugar and bread, and when he was asked where he had got it he explained that one moonlight night as he was doing his round he had seen a rebel escape from the camp; he had shot at him, and probably hit him, for the rebel had thrown away the bag and the loaf. It was proved that the bag belonged to the woman, and that was the end of the matter."

"What happened to her?"

"She met with the same fate as many others—she was hanged."

"But the child?"

Ibrahim shrugged his shoulders. "The Italians looked after it. I don't know where it is now."

"But how is it that you know the whole story?"

"The woman had told it to some one in the camp who came to say good-bye to her. She had told them how the *carabiniere* who had arrested her had tried to force her to belong to him, and that on thinking the matter over she was now certain that the men who had visited her that night were not rebels at all, but the *carabiniere* himself together with another, both disguised as rebels in order to get her into his power."

"Do you believe that was true?"

"I do. She was only about twenty years old and very trustworthy. But at any rate it is quite true that she was hanged, for it happened here about a month ago just outside the town."

Every afternoon the square with its many *cafés* was the rendezvous of all Derna. Actually, there was only one *café*, a coffee-house which was owned by one Mohammed, called el Hajd because he was born in Mecca; but as he had a large *clientèle* he had placed chairs along all the walls, and here the guests could sip their modest cup of coffee and enjoy the *hookah*, which is the only narcotic enjoyed by the orthodox Moslems. Derna has, however, other *cafés*. A few months ago a real Italian bar with radio music and *apéritifs* had been installed, but as a rule no Arabs visited it.

Now and then it happens that the soldiers amuse themselves by tempting an Arab boy to drink spirits, with the result that he staggers howling through the streets all the evening. But that happens rarely, and the square in the Arab quarter is peace itself each afternoon. Here the sheiks from the neighbourhood

meet the inhabitants of the town; here trade and commerce are carried on, and here they gather every afternoon for social intercourse.

Several days had passed since I had been to the Commissioner's office. We were now at the beginning of June, and the situation had begun to be desperate. I had had to use all the money I had intended to keep for petrol; and I had no idea how I should now be able to get away, especially as the matter of the permit seemed to drag on, and there was no telling how long it would take to get money from Denmark.

The Commissioner refused to receive me any more, and in the hotel itself the situation began to be critical. The engineer and the customs official, who were both ardent Fascists, were deeply shocked that I took my coffee in the Arab *cafés*, and they received me every day with more and more caustic remarks such as, " Oh, here he is, Ahmar Moktar's friend."

It was on Thursday afternoon, June 4, that things began to move. When I came down to the square I met my old friend Ibrahim. He looked very distressed.

" I cannot understand what has come over the Italians," he said. " Now they have arrested three sheiks in Tobruch, and we are expecting every day that these arrests will spread to Derna."

" But why are they doing this? "

" The three who have been arrested all belong to the Senoussi family; they have done nothing whatever, but they are suspected of having supported Ahmar Moktar. They are some of the most prominent citizens in Cyrenaica. It is very difficult for the rest of us to be loyal when the Italians behave like this."

A moment later the ex-mayor, Abd el Aziz (who had long since been replaced by an Italian), arrived. He looked very sad, and told us that the sheiks who had been arrested

were all well-known people in Benghazi, and that they were honoured and esteemed by every one.

"Allah look on us all in mercy!" he said, and sat down with Ibrahim and myself. With him were two Arabs to whom he introduced me. One, Mohammed el Mergi, was mayor of a small town not far from Derna in the direction of Tobruch; the second was a very rich merchant from Derna. The sheik asked when I thought I should be able to leave Derna.

"I have no idea. I don't understand anything. I have my permit to drive through to the Egyptian frontier, but they won't let me leave here. I have tried several times to go, but each time I have been stopped at the gates."

The merchant from Derna shook his head.

"Yes, it certainly does seem queer, but no one really understands what is going on here at the moment. No one feels safe."

"Of course," I said, "it isn't nearly as bad for me as for you who have got to live here. But where shall I get money from if I have to stay on? My one desire is to drive on, but in the Commissioner's office they shrug their shoulders and tell me I must wait."

"Yes, indeed," said the merchant, "it's very different from when Diodiece was here."

"Diodiece!" I said, astonished. "Do you mean the one who is the new commandant in Merj?"

"Yes. In his day all went well. The Italians were actually winning over the population, but now it is desperate; we all feel hunted. We dare not speak for fear of spies; we never feel that our lives are safe from one day to the next. Everything is uncertain."

Sidi Abd el Aziz agreed. "Yes. I have always tried to meet the Italians half way as far as possible, but I don't understand what is happening now. Executions take place every day. Yesterday two of my friends here were hanged.

It was said that they had been in touch with Ahmar Moktar's people."

Silence fell for a moment. No doubt we all followed in our thoughts the brave Ahmar Moktar, who fought in the mountains against the brutal foreign rule with his handful of men—but no one dared to say anything about this.

"Alas!" sighed Abd el Aziz. "It must be the will of God. We shall have to bear it. We are the weaker, and I don't even believe that fighting in the mountains is any use—now they are using poison gas up there they are certain to destroy them all. Poor people, fighting half naked and starved!"

"Something is happening now," I said. "Every day a number of cars leave the town, all heavily armoured."

"Probably it is the new general, Graziani, who is determined to quell the rising," said the merchant. "But if they go on like this we shall all perish."

Ibrahim joined in the conversation. "But perhaps that's their intention."

"Oh, I don't think they could do that," said the merchant.

"And why not?" I asked. "No one in Europe will ever get to know anything about it, and where national expansion and glory are concerned the Fascists have no scruples. In Europe one is only told that the peaceful Italians in Cyrenaica have been attacked by the bloodthirsty Arabs. Only I, who have seen it, know who are the barbarians."

A heavy shadow brooded over Derna, usually so smiling and happy. In the streets hardly anyone dared to talk: the merchants sat silent and distressed in their booths. Eritrean soldiers and cars reeking of petrol filled the narrow vine-clad streets. In many houses *cafés* had been installed for the Eritreans, in order that they might obtain the spirits which Islam has prohibited.

The merchant stood up, and shook hands with us all. Addressing me, he said, "If you care to come with me and see my house you will be very welcome."

I replied that I would like to; the others were invited as well, but only Ibrahim accepted. The merchant's house was very beautiful, and everything there was carried out according to the old Islamic customs. His two small sons and his little daughter came in, first kissed the hand of their father, and then greeted us. While we were having tea our host told me that he was on friendly terms with Diodiece, who was very distressed at the turn things had taken. Until quite recently they had corresponded, but that, too, had now stopped—even Diodiece was afraid. Tyranny had come to Cyrenaica and had taken its place in the seats of the mighty.

The next day I attended the Friday prayers at the mosque, which as usual was filled to capacity. When the recital of a *sura* of the Koran had ended the Imam suddenly faced the congregation.

"I have to make an announcement," he said. "Orders have been received from the Italian Government that all mention of the Senoussi must cease. No one will be allowed to practise the religious observances of this sect."

Not a sound was heard from the congregation, who were practically all ardent followers of the teaching of Senoussi, but when prayers were over a vehement discussion ensued. I met Ibrahim.

"What does this mean?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "I don't know. I suppose they want to break the power of the Senoussi in Cyrenaica, but I don't think they will succeed."

"Have many here joined Senoussi?"

"Almost every one. The doctrine of Senoussi is simply a purified form of Islam, you see, which teaches that the

perfect ethical life is only attained by thorough personal development."

"How?"

"By following very strictly the precepts of Islam; by making the body the servant of the soul; by constant concentration on good deeds and fasting, thus growing nearer that perfection which is Allah."

"But what have the Italians against that?"

"I don't understand much about it—and it's probably better not to talk, for there will certainly be severe punishment for following it now. But the reason may be that they want to get at Sidi Idriss Senoussi, the lawful Emir of Cyrenaica, whom they have driven out. I can explain it in no other way."

Every day I went to the Commissioner's office, and every day I received the same answer: "You will probably be able to start to-morrow."

I protested without avail. I telegraphed to Diodiece in Merj; the telegrams did not get through. And the days went on. I began to sell my equipment—my tent, blankets, typewriter, and camera—in order to hold out now that I was so near my goal, Egypt.

On June 17 excitement ran high in unhappy Derna. Four of its most respected citizens had been arrested. No reason was given, but it was said that the men were suspected of having communicated with the rebels. The prisoners were an old man of eighty, two merchants of middle age, and a young teacher of eighteen. Besides these four a young boy of thirteen, a near relation of Sidi Idriss, was thrown into prison. Terror was on every face. All night the town had been full of soldiers, as disturbances were expected. The people, however, though excited, kept calm. But during the midday prayer in the mosque which had been built by the Senoussi family soldiers suddenly arrived. They forced their way in, drove

the worshippers out, and placed the Government seal on the door. The mosque was closed. At three o'clock a message arrived at the hotel: I could leave the next morning at seven o'clock. I got the car ready, sold some more of my belongings, paid my hotel bill, and was then left with only a few lire, but I estimated that I had enough to last me to the Egyptian frontier; in Sollum it would be easier to get money from Denmark. I went into the town to say good-bye to my friends, and at five o'clock a *carabiniere* came up to me. I was to go with him immediately.

At the barracks I was brought before an Italian lieutenant.

"Have you everything ready to start to-morrow morning?"

"All is in order," I answered.

"The car all right?"

"Yes."

"*Bene!*—then you are arrested."

"What?"

"Arrested."

"For what reason?"

"I do not know."

"But you can't arrest me without a reason?"

"Orders from the Government. Can I have your passport?"

I gave him my passport. He brought some handcuffs and snapped them on my wrists. I was a prisoner.

The lieutenant finished writing out some papers and stood up.

"First of all we will go to your car."

We drove to the hotel in a military car. I was chained to the steering-wheel of my own car, and had to drive it to the military car park, where it was garaged. The lieutenant summoned another car, and we drove to the prison.

Derna's prison is a large, gloomy-looking building in

the centre of the town. It is managed by an old Italian sergeant, but otherwise the entire staff is Arab. I was taken there at seven o'clock; I was deprived of my luggage, searched, my name entered in the book, and then I was placed in a cell. The equipment of this cell was the most Spartan you could imagine. In one corner was a bucket holding the water supply, which was brought once a day—you had the choice of washing in it or drinking it. In the middle of the stone floor was a horse cloth, on which one had to sleep somehow. The walls were whitewashed—or, rather, they had been at one time—and a couple of geckos rushed up and down hunting the many insects that lived in the cracks. The door was of solid oak, with a square hole through which the guard could peer. Events had taken place so rapidly that I had not had time to realize what had actually happened. Now I had time enough. A quarter of an hour after the door had been shut on me the lights were turned off, and to the humming of hundreds of mosquitoes I tried to sleep, pursued by the one thought, "Why have they arrested me? What have I done?"

The next morning at seven a terribly pockmarked Arab entered, smiling broadly.

"Well, have you slept well?" he asked.

I looked at him rather sulkily. "But I don't know why I am here."

He kicked idly at the floor. "Bah! Don't worry about that! Next door to you are four sheiks from Derna and a boy—they don't know what they've done either."

"Are they here?" I asked with interest. "I've heard about them."

He put his finger to his lips. "Hush, not so loud! He hasn't gone out yet."

"Who hasn't?"

"The Italian. But he'll soon go for his morning walk.

Then you can come out for a little while and talk as much as you like."

"Is this a political prison?"

"No, not entirely—for which Allah be thanked, otherwise I should not be here."

"How long have you been here?"

"Four years."

"Four years!" I repeated, horrified. "But what have you done, then?"

"Four years is nothing," he grunted, "when you're in for life. I happened to hit a man too hard over the head." He sighed. "He died from it!" He stood for a moment, and looked very thoughtful, then suddenly sprang to life again.

"Well, I must get to work. You had better go out, as I must wash your floor."

Outside was a long corridor with a high trellis facing a courtyard. While the other prisoner was washing out my cell with an old sack I watched the Arabs rinsing clothes in a bowl with running water.

"You can go in again now," said my fellow-prisoner. "I know you are not an Italian, otherwise I wouldn't have washed it so nicely. Well, go in now, and I'll bring your food."

A moment later he returned with a large, round coarse brown loaf.

"Here you are," he said. "But go carefully with it—you won't get any more till to-morrow."

He shut the door, and I sat down in my solitude to gnaw my loaf. I had plenty of time to think things over, for the solitude lasted till the middle of the morning. I watched the geckos eagerly hunting up and down the walls. It was impossible to see out of the window, for the grating was right up under the ceiling. In the cell was neither chair nor bench. If I wanted to sit down I had to



AN ERITREAN SOLDIER IN CYRENAICA



CAPTIVE ARABS



THROUGH THE DESERT



AHMAR MOKTAR AT THE CONCLUSION OF PEACE WITH THE ITALIANS

put myself tailorwise, and I soon got tired of that. Sometimes I went over to the hole in the door, and peeped out; I could see only a part of the passage, but now and then I got a glimpse of my fellow-prisoners, all Arabs, who passed along the trellised passage. At ten o'clock a *carabiniere* came and took me to the office. The old Italian sergeant was sitting at his writing-desk.

"I have received orders that you are to go to Benghazi this afternoon."

"But I should like to know why I have been put in prison?"

"I don't know anything about it. I only get my orders. You ought to know."

"I'm not aware that I've done anything," I answered.

"Then why did you spend all your time in the Arab quarter, and why did you go to the mosque?"

"I cannot see that that is a crime."

"You must remember that there is a war here."

He wrote my name once more on a warrant, and asked me about my luggage, for he supposed I would have to take something with me to Benghazi. I answered that it would be quite enough to take the luggage I had brought with me to the prison. I could get the rest when I came back to fetch the car.

Then the sergeant went for his usual morning walk into the town. I was taken back to my cell, but I had been there for hardly ten minutes when one of the Arab *carabinieri* opened the door and announced that I could go out and stay out till midday.

At the end of the passage were stairs leading down to the enclosed courtyard, which was filled with prisoners. All those who had not been sentenced to death could during these few hours leave their cells and walk about freely. Every one, even the Arab *carabinieri*, showed great deference to the four citizens of Derna who had been

arrested a few days earlier; several times I saw a uniformed *carabiniere* walk up and kiss the hand of the octogenarian.

I knew one of the *carabinieri* from Derna—a tall, stout, and good-natured fellow, who was almost in tears as he watched the four prisoners washing their clothes.

"What have they done?" I asked him.

"The Italian rule is bad," he said. "Their only crime is to belong to the house of Senoussi. That's quite enough!"

"Will they be sentenced to death for that?"

"No, probably not. They are sure to be kept well locked up in the prison in Benghazi."

"Are they going to Benghazi?" I asked with interest. "So am I, this very afternoon."

"Then you are going together," said the *carabiniere*. "I have no orders as yet, but I believe that the boat leaves this afternoon; it comes from Tobruch with prisoners."

"Tell me," I said. "How can you continue in Italian service when you disapprove of the way they behave?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Don't you think it is better to have Moslems to look after the prisoners than Eritreans? When no Italian officers are about we can see that the prisoners have an easier time."

"How many prisoners are there here?"

"Only sixteen. Twelve are political, and four have been sentenced for ordinary crimes. Some political prisoners are going to Benghazi—you and six Bedouins from the mountains."

Then I knew that I was a political prisoner.

The murderer who had "happened to kill a man" was making tea in a corner of the courtyard. He brought me a glass.

"Drink that," he said with a smile. "It is good—I got it from my family in the town."

I drank the sweet tea with pleasure, especially as there

seemed to be no prospect of getting anything to eat except the coarse grey bread.

"Have you anything to smoke?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

He produced a packet containing five cigarettes, and handed me one.

"They send me ten a week from the town, so I have cigarettes at any rate," he said. "I know why you are here," he continued, winking at me. "One of the *carabinieri* has told us. You have seen Ahmar Moktar."

I shook my head. "Is that what they say? I assure you I've never seen him."

"But you have seen El Mahafdia?"

"Yes, that's right."

"You wait and see. They are going to accuse you of being a spy!"

Suddenly I heard a voice singing verses from the Koran.

"Who is that?" I said.

"Come with me and you can see for yourself." He led me to the end of the courtyard, to the cell from which the song came. I looked in. On the floor were seated six Arabs. They were in rags, and their feet were bare, but they were unusually handsome and vigorous, appearing to be in the prime of life. One of them was singing.

"They are from El Mahafdia," said the pockmarked Arab. I could not tire of looking at them. Their faces shone with a sublime calm, as if they hardly knew they were in prison, and their eyes were set in a fixed gaze, as if they hung on every word that was formed on the lips of the singer.

"They are condemned to death," said the pockmarked Arab, "and they will probably be shot to-morrow—in the back like the others, because they are rebels."

"But they are not rebels," I said, and watched them with deep interest. Not a flicker on their faces revealed

that they were prisoners on the brink of death. I felt a deep admiration for these men from the mountains who would not give in, who would not submit, but who preferred death to slavery.

The fat *carabiniere* came up to us. "According to what I hear, you know El Mahafdia—would you like to go and talk to them?"

"I would, but will it be all right?"

"Never mind that. The sergeant has gone to have his morning *apéritif*. No one will come till you are ready to leave."

He opened the door of the cell and I went in. I was in Arab dress, but I think the condemned men were nevertheless surprised when they saw me. They did not know quite where to place me: they had probably never seen a costume from Morocco before. The singer finished his song.

The *carabiniere* went up to them. "Here is a new prisoner. He has been put in prison because he has seen El Mahafdia. He is a good friend of the Arabs."

"I am indeed," I said warmly, "and become a greater friend the more I see of them."

"He is a Moslem," added the *carabiniere*.

"Then may Allah help you to be free soon!" they exclaimed.

Tears rose to my eyes. These men did not give a thought to their own fate; they wished me well. And it was of people such as these that I had heard Italian officers say that they died like dumb cattle. It became more and more clear to me that the Italians understood nothing of the soul of this people, of whom they had appointed themselves the rulers.

The fat *carabiniere* shook his head sadly. "No, the rest of us aren't worth much compared with these," he whispered to me.

The man who had been singing the Koran asked me to sit down.

"Are you allowed to have a Koran with you?" I asked.

He smiled. "No, but I know it all by heart, so no one can take it from me."

"When were you captured?"

"Ten days ago, on the road to Tobruch. We were the only men left out of fifty who were fighting. The others were mown down by the machine-guns, and I suppose we shall soon be finished."

"Is it true that the Italians are using poison gas?"

"Yes. Now they are bombing our villages and smoking us out. At least death by a bullet is better than the fog the bombs spread. When you have breathed that your lungs become just a great wound."

The fat *carabiniere* had gone out, but a moment later he came back and told me that the Senoussi would like to see me. I said good-bye to the brave men who were preparing to die, and they continued listening to the heart of the Koran which was being sung, the death *sura*, called *Ya Sin*.

The Senoussi, who were together in one large cell, all stood up and shook hands with me. The octogenarian sheik, who had silver-white hair and beard, said: "We have heard so much of you from Derna—will you eat with us?"

I answered that I would like to—I was not too fond of the grey bread, and he told me that they were allowed to have their own food. We all sat down.

"Alas," he sighed, "we had not expected to meet here."

"No, and why are you here?"

"Allah alone knows! One afternoon between el Dorr and el Asr three Italians arrived to arrest us, but we still do not know why, nor where we are going."

"We are going to Benghazi this afternoon," I enlightened them.

"Oh, well, Allah is just! We are too weak to fight against such odds," sighed the old man. The young teacher said, "No, what use has it been our trying to meet the Italians half way? They want to pick a quarrel with us—they intend to drive us all out into the mountains."

A boy brought in food from the town, and he had a large bunch of bananas and much other fruit for me.

"But who has sent me that?" I asked, surprised.

"I am not allowed to tell," he said, "but every one in Derna sends their greetings to you all, and prays Allah to preserve you."

"Listen, Hamid," said the old man, "I believe we shall be taken away this afternoon. Ask them all to keep quiet while we are taken through the streets."

Hamid listened with tears in his eyes. He kissed the hand of the white-haired old man, tried to say something, but could not get it out, and went away crying. We had just begun eating from the large dish, in which were boiled meat, carrots, and rice, when the *carabiniere* entered.

"You had better go back to your cell now," he said. "The chief of the *carabinieri* is coming."

I returned to my cell and the door was locked. But five minutes later it was opened again, and I was told to come down. My bag was standing on the floor, as well as the small case containing my papers. I was taken before the chief of the *carabinieri.*

"You are going to Benghazi now," he said. He asked for my luggage, which was then sealed—making it impossible for me to get at any clothes during the journey except the Arab dress I was wearing. I was then placed between two Eritreans with fixed bayonets.

All the Senoussi were likewise led out. They had to line up next to me, and then the fat *carabiniere* brought handcuffs and chains. He whispered, barely audibly, that he was sorry.

"But it isn't your fault," I told him, and the handcuffs again snapped round my wrists.

The next to be handcuffed was the old man. His whole body shook as they placed the irons round his wrist. He had never before suffered such humiliation, he told us later. We were all chained together. Then our luggage was thrust into our hands. It was very difficult to hold on to it with chained hands, and it became quite impossible when two loaves were placed on top of it all. That was each man's ration for the two days' journey.

The prison gate was opened, and we went out into the street in a long file. Outside stood six Arab boys, who ran up and took our luggage from us. We went down to the harbour by a side-street, as the Italians dared not take us through the Arab quarter; but through the whole walk we met only a very few people, and the Arabs we saw came quite openly up to us, kissed the old man's chained hands, and wished us all a "*Salaam aleikum!*"

At last we reached the harbour. It was noon, and the sun burnt fiercely. The steamer was not at the quay, so we had to be taken out to it in a rowing-boat. The boys who had carried our luggage wept the whole time from the prison to the boat. They now handed over our baggage, and one of them, a little boot-cleaner, came up to me and said, "Have you any money?" I nodded. He produced a creased ten-lire note. "Otherwise I would have given you this so that you could get something to eat in the prison." I nodded gratefully to him. We got into the boat, still all chained together, but when we reached the steamer our chains were removed, and we had to swarm up a very narrow rope-ladder. The old man could not climb quickly enough, and one of the Eritrean soldiers thrust him in the buttock with the butt-end of his rifle.

The steamer was evidently used for the transport of prisoners. It was very filthy—a glaring contrast to the

super-elegant passenger-ships which Fascist Italy displays for the world's admiration. On the deck stood a score of Eritrean soldiers with fixed bayonets, their faces gashed in parallel lines to show their bravery. A brutal-looking Italian sergeant took charge of us. We were placed in a row and counted. I came first, then the old man, whose lips moved constantly in prayer, next the sheik whom I knew, then the merchant from Derna, a middle-aged man with a black beard and mild blue eyes, and finally the two youngsters. We were then pushed forward till we reached the forepart of the deck, and had to crawl down another steep ladder into the hold, where a pungent, foul smell met us. At the bottom of the stairs was a large and not too clean room where the Eritrean troops lived. To the right was our prison for the voyage.

It was a worse than comfortless room. Its ceiling was very low, and merely to put one's head inside was enough to make one wish to vomit, such was the stench that hit you. Fourteen bunks were ranged in tiers along the sides, looking like veritable cages, with iron bars in front; in six of these were prisoners who had evidently been brought on board at Tobruch, the last port of call on 'Italian' territory. These unfortunate people, who were of course all Arabs, looked shockingly ill. They were chained to the iron bars in front of the bunks, and their wrists were red and swollen from the handcuffs, which had without a doubt remained fastened on them during the whole of the three days' voyage from Tobruch to Derna. The rough sea and the nauseating air had evidently resulted in seasickness, for on the floor and the dirty mattresses on which they had been lying vomit was still to be seen, which they had had to clear away as best they could with their chained hands. Here we were in charge of an Eritrean soldier with revolver and magazine rifle, who kept watch the whole time.

I suppose the Italians on board had no idea that I was a European, for I still wore Arab dress; otherwise they would certainly have placed me somewhere else. I was grateful for this, for it gave me the chance to see what I sought for—the truth, without exaggeration or adornment. And I saw the truth here in this dirty room where the loaves which were to be our sole food during the voyage sailed about in vomit and other filth, where one had to drink from a glass which was never cleansed, and on which consequently the most incredible things were found, and where the mattresses were full of vermin; but where men had opportunities to prove themselves heroes. And rarely have I seen greater heroes than in that prison!

I was allotted the cage nearest the door. Again I was handcuffed, and the handcuffs were fastened with a chain to the bars of the bunk; and then each of us was chained to his cage, even the thirteen-year-old boy, who bravely kept back his tears, and whose only crime was that he belonged to the best family in Cyrenaica.

When the white-haired old man, who was honoured and esteemed by the others not merely because he was the eldest, but also by reason of his great piety, was chained up the prisoners all tried to take his hand. One of them, who came from Tobruch and who looked weak and ill, said, "Oh, sheik, to meet you here in chains! I might forgive the Italians for all they do to me, but that they should chain you up—I cannot bear it!" The old man answered gently: "*Ya*, Abd el Kadr, Allah is our witness that we are innocent. Let us therefore take refuge with him, who is the Lord of Mankind."

Abd el Kadr bowed his curly head in humility. "But they chain you up like a criminal—you who have done nothing wrong!"

"Allah alone is just!" murmured the old man.

They all knew each other, for the arrested men were either relations of Senoussi or ardent followers of his teaching. One of those who came from Tobruch asked who I was. The old man replied: "He is a stranger who came to Derna in his own car. He has seen the Arabs in the mountains, therefore they arrested him."

"But he is a Moslem?"

"Yes, he is a Moslem."

"May Allah protect you! May you soon be free!"

The hours dragged on. I tried, as the others did, to get hold of my bread, but it was very difficult with chained hands. It was stiflingly hot in the little room, where thirteen people were packed together. The sun was burning hotly as the ship was in harbour. At five o'clock Ibrahim came on board. He brought fruit for us, and could hardly keep back his tears when he saw me chained up; he went round and shook hands with everybody.

"Allah protect you!" he said as he left.

At six o'clock the steamer got under way, and we were soon out in the Mediterranean. It was evidently blowing hard, for the ship began to roll, and we were all seasick. The youngest of the lads was nearly killed by falling out of his bunk, and the Eritrean soldier hit him hard several times as he hauled him up again. The night was such that any description pales before the reality, and only in the morning, when the wind lessened and a porthole was opened, could the room be cleaned out by one of us whose handcuffs were taken off for the time being. Sleep had of course been impossible for any of us. Shortly before sunrise the old man called us to the morning prayer, *el Subr*. In his shaking voice he asked Allah to forgive us that we could not perform the ritual ablutions, and all the chained men leant their foreheads against the dirty mattresses and invoked Almighty God. The Eritrean, who wore a large silver cross round his

neck, grinned mockingly while the prayer was being recited.

About noon, when the heat had become unbearable, the engines stopped. Some of the soldiers went noisily up on deck, and a quarter of an hour later tramped down, pushing a new prisoner in front of them. He descended the ladder with difficulty, for his hands were manacled behind his back, and his feet were also fettered with a long chain. He was quite a young man in a ragged burnous. As he stood in the doorway his eyes roamed wildly over the room: his bare arms were bleeding from blows and scratches and his wrists were badly swollen.

A soldier pushed him from behind, and he pitched forward on to the floor, hurting his face. His nose began to bleed, and the blood flowed down his dirty burnous. With difficulty he crawled into the cage opposite mine, and was chained to the bars like the rest of us. His chest heaved spasmodically; he lay quite still with his eyes shut, then he asked for some water.

The eighteen-year-old Arab was freed from his chains for a moment, and he held the glass to the lips of the newcomer. Then the poor fellow asked for something to eat, and the young teacher opened his bundle, which contained bread, of the same sort as ours, and onions. He asked if any of us wanted some onions, but of course nobody would take them from him.

The engines had started again. The next time we stopped it would be at Benghazi. The Eritrean soldier on guard had again chained the boy into his cage. The little lad who had been ill in the night began to complain that the handcuffs were eating into his wrists, but the guard took no notice of him.

The newcomer lay for a long time as if stunned; then he began to stare around.

"Where do you come from?" I asked him.

"From Cyrene." He groaned: it was evident that he was in pain from the maltreatment he had suffered.

"What have you done?" I continued.

"I don't know. They seized me on the road and put me in prison. That was four days ago."

"Are you going to be tried in Benghazi?"

"No, I've already been condemned in Cyrene to thirty years' work in the salt-lakes. If only they had sentenced me to death it would have been all over now."

He had been sentenced to unspeakable sufferings. The salt-lakes are far out in the Libyan desert, and as the Italians cannot get free labour to carry the salt up in the burning sun, they use convicts. Anyone who has tried living in the desert, where water is scarce, where the tongue begins to swell and the lips to split if one is without water; where a hot and merciless wind makes the sand drift so that it fills nostrils and ears; where the fierce, steady light alone makes it an inferno—can faintly comprehend what a hellish punishment it must be to work in a salt-lake under such conditions. The salt eats the flesh off the bones of those unfortunate people, who must suffer tortures each day worse than any devised by medieval princes of the Church. It was fortunate for this man that death was sure to be more merciful than life; the thirty years would at the most be only two or three.

"But what have you done, then?"

"I don't know. They asked me where I had been and why I was in the prohibited area."

"Had you a rifle?"

"No. I had only a small packet of food, and I told them, as was the truth, that I had been out in the mountains to see my brother."

"And what was your brother doing?"

"He is out in the mountains with Ahmar Moktar's people. Then they accuse me of being a traitor, saying

that I had had communication with the rebels. By Allah, I only wanted to see my brother whom I had not seen for a long time!"

"And then you were sentenced straight away?"

"Yes. First they sentenced me to death, then I was pardoned the next day, and now I am going to the salt-lakes."

"Allah in his mercy look on you and on us all!" murmured the old man. He sighed deeply, and for some hours silence reigned in the narrow room with its pestilential air, which even the hardened Eritrean soldier could not endure for long at a time. Night came again. It was not as bad as the previous one. The weather was better, though the vermin worried us. We could not change our clothes, as all the luggage was sealed up, and the old mattresses were full of lice and fleas, against whose onslaught we, with our chained hands, were utterly defenceless. At length the last morning came, and with it Benghazi.

We were released from our cages, and sent up on deck. The ship had anchored in the middle of the harbour, though not with the intention of avoiding a crowd of curious onlookers, for the Islamic population kept away, and the Italian youths who are interested spectators of all executions count the transportation of prisoners as an everyday and utterly uninteresting occurrence. We were herded together like cattle on a hatch amidships, and had to wait for two hours in the broiling sun. The Eritrean soldiers stood in a circle round the hatch with their rifles cocked. But who could think of flight?

Chained together we had to descend the rope-ladder to the boat which was to put us ashore. Had one of us fallen into the water the rest must have followed, and death would have been certain. Two large motor-lorries with iron bars waited for us on shore, and also a lorry with machine-guns. We were divided into two groups,

and kicked and pushed into the cars; then we were driven to the prison.

The prison, which lies a short distance outside the town, has four towers, and looks like some medieval keep. In each tower is a sentry with a machine-gun. The great iron gate opened, and the three cars rolled into the yard. We got out, were searched, taken through a long passage, and came into another court, which was full of prisoners. We were all allocated to one large room and were each given a mattress to sleep on. A loaf of the coarse grey bread and a little vegetable soup constituted our provisions for the day.

The door of our cell was left open, and we moved freely about in the courtyard, where political prisoners and ordinary criminals were mixed together. Most of the political prisoners were highly cultured Arabs, whom the Italians feared, for it was easier to manage the ignorant crowd in the highways and byways, whom they endeavour to keep in blank ignorance.

I talked for a long time to the young teacher. He told me he had taught in a school at Derna, but that it was now practically impossible to impart information to his pupils, who were allowed to know nothing, and had to learn from schoolbooks beginning thus: "In the old days there was savagery and barbarism in this country, but now the Romans have returned . . ." He had obtained a post as teacher when he was only eighteen years old because all the possible candidates who were older had either been arrested or deported to some unknown destination.

At three o'clock the Italian gaoler, heavily armed, ordered us into our cell. It was very spacious, but there was only one small window right up under the ceiling. As soon as we were in, the old man called us to prayer, and recited the beautiful words of *el Agr*. Then he said:

"We pray Allah the Almighty to protect us, and to lead us on the right path. And we call Allah the Merciful and Just to witness that we are here through no fault of our own. We pray to Allah to cleanse our hearts and to give us true humility, which is true greatness, and to bring us continually nearer to His Presence. When our eyes behold the corner of His cloak, no harm can come to us." Then he recited the *sura* which says that man takes refuge in Allah alone.

The prayer was scarcely finished when the door opened, and the gaoler stepped in. He came up to me.

"You are to come with me," he said.

"Do I come back here?"

"I don't know." He shook his bunch of keys. "Hurry!"

He took me back to the courtyard we had first entered. Here stood the detective with whom on my first day in Benghazi I had had an encounter because I did not speak Italian. He smiled triumphantly.

"Now, Mr Spy, pretence is no use any longer. No one can come into Fascist Italy to spy without being punished."

He tied my hands with a thin iron chain, and we went outside where a car was waiting. We drove to the Public Prosecutor. I was examined for two hours. I had to explain all my motives—had to prove that I really was the person I said I was; had to relate all that had happened since I crossed the Libyan frontier. When the examination was over I asked the Prosecutor, "Where is my American friend, Tarbox?"

The Prosecutor smiled. "You can thank him for your arrest. We questioned him, and he told us that you were a Moslem and spoke Arabic. Then of course we wanted to have a word with you."

"Yes, but I protest against my arrest. I have done

nothing wrong. I cannot see that there is anything wrong in studying the life of the Arabs. I only wanted to get through to Egypt."

"For the present you will still have to go back to prison," the Prosecutor replied.

"Can I be allowed to speak to Tarbox?"

He answered evasively, "I'll see."

I was taken back to prison, where I remained three days. On Saturday, June 23, I was again brought from my cell to the Prosecutor.

"You are free," he said.

I could not believe it. "But why . . . ?" I asked.

"We are now convinced that you are not a spy. You can thank Mr Tarbox for your arrest. I do not think he was quite normal."

It was all most puzzling. I hurried to the Albergo Italia. Signor Malvicini told me that Tarbox had left for Italy the day before. I was very angry with Tarbox till, quite by accident, I came upon the solution of the riddle. I met Signor Greco, who told me, "Your friend was here on the Friday, the day he was to leave, and the day before you were released. He had probably been sent away because they did not want him to have a chance to talk to you."

I told him the whole story, and he said: "I can say quite definitely that your friend has done nothing against you. On the Friday when he came to see me he wept, and said that he could not understand why the Italians should have arrested you, and why they had asked him to leave so that he would not have any opportunity to speak to you."

"Yes, but why should they have arrested me at all?" I asked in surprise.

"That I cannot tell you, but you are sure some time to find the complete solution of the puzzle. Probably it

was a way of preventing you from continuing your journey. They did not wish you to see any more. I can only tell you that Tarbox is not to blame. He is on his way to America now."

That was the end of my motor trip across Africa. I never reached Egypt by car. Greco was right: I had been arrested in order to prevent me from passing through the war zone between Derna and the Egyptian frontier. The proof of this I got when I asked for permission to return to Derna and continue my journey by car. It was refused. I protested. The local Italian Government offered to pay the expenses of the journey for me from Benghazi to Alexandria, and for my car from Derna to Alexandria. I refused the offer. If I was to reach Egypt with a car at all then I would arrive driving it myself. So I sold it and all my baggage as it stood in Derna, and sailed for Alexandria on June 25. The adventure in Cyrenaica was over.

There was a short epilogue after we had left Benghazi, when the ship had dropped anchor outside Derna. I wanted to go ashore, but was refused permission. Ibrahim, however, came on board, his face shining.

"Allah be praised that you are free!" he said.

"How are things with you in town?"

"Very bad. Yesterday they shot four Bedouins and a merchant. You knew him."

The siren sounded; Ibrahim went off in the dinghy, and the palms of Derna disappeared in the distance. The people and their struggle were left only as a memory, but a memory never to be forgotten. Always I can see before me the patient prisoners, the salt-lakes, the smoking rifles, and the gallows.

As I had promised my friends the Bedouins who had taken me prisoner in the mountains, I went to see the leader of the Senoussi, Sidi Idriss Senoussi, in Alexandria.

He lived outside the town, and it was already late in the afternoon when I let the knocker fall on the heavy gate. It was opened by a gigantic negro, who asked me suspiciously what I wanted. I told him that I had the same day arrived from Cyrenaica, and that I was most anxious to speak to Sidi Idriss. I gave my card to the negro, having written the object of my visit on the back of it.

When I had waited a few minutes the gate was opened, the negro beckoned me to follow him, and showed me into a beautifully furnished study on the first floor of the house. A man was waiting in the room, and as I entered he rose and bowed. I told him my name and that I had just come from Cyrenaica.

"I myself am of the Senoussi family," he said, and shook his head sadly, "but like so many others, I cannot return to the country which by rights is ours."

At that moment Sidi Idriss entered. He was a middle-aged man, dressed as a European except for the fez.

"You have written on your card that you come from Cyrenaica?" he asked with keen interest.

"Yes, the Italians threw me into prison. I bring greetings from some of your people whom I met in the prison."

"Why did they imprison you?"

"Because I had been captured by the Bedouins in the mountains. The Italians thought I was a spy. I also bring greetings from the Bedouins."

Sidi Idriss sighed deeply.

"Yes, these unfortunate people who are fighting to the end—what can they do? The Italians can import as many Eritreans as they like to fight the people in the mountains. Allah alone can help us now!"

"Furthermore, I can tell you that six days ago the Italians closed all the Senoussi mosques in Cyrenaica, and prohibited the teaching of Senoussi."

Sidi Senoussi looked at me sharply. "Do you know the teaching of the Senoussi?"

"I have embraced Islam, and I have heard much about your teaching, but I have not myself studied it," I replied.

"The Senoussi only aim at piety and nobility of heart. And how shall this be attained? By excluding everything but God from our thoughts, by moderation, and by abstaining from all enjoyments which do not bring us nearer God."

"Why then do the Italians take action against the Senoussi?"

"Because the man who follows our teaching becomes healthy in body and mind. The Italians are interested in making the entire population of Cyrenaica degenerate, as in so many places in the world of Islam. If that happens the Italian civilization can advance more rapidly. So long as our teaching rules it will not happen."

"Why not?"

"Our teaching is not intolerant towards any other form of Islam or towards any other religion. It is simplicity itself: the body must be strengthened by a healthy and abstemious life, so that it becomes a worthy dwelling for the soul. You are not permitted to enjoy any narcotics, not even tobacco. You must be a slave of nothing save God, that is, you must be the master of circumstances. The civilization which the Italians want to introduce into Cyrenaica makes us the slaves of circumstances: therefore we must fight against it."

"How does it make us slaves of circumstances?"

"It overestimates the outward—technical progress, machinery; it makes external splendour and power the ruling factor in the judgment of a person or nation, and it despises the inner development. I can only tell you that where the Senoussi rule there is peace and contentment on all sides."

"Where do the Senoussi rule?"

Sidi Idriss smiled bitterly. "You can see for yourself. I am the lawful ruler of Cyrenaica, and I have to live in Alexandria as an exile and cannot even return to my own country. We rule over those few who are fighting in the mountains, and in Kufra."

"I have heard a great deal about Kufra. That is where two Italian officers were kept prisoners."

"Kufra is a small community in itself, which has always lived at peace with its neighbours till now, when the Italians are trying to subjugate the whole country. I am afraid that before long they will try to conquer Kufra too. Possibly they may succeed—at any rate they have Eritreans enough to fight for them. Do you know why the Italians are using Eritrean troops?"

"No."

"Because the Eritreans are Christians. The Italians have created a religious war in Cyrenaica."

"That is true. I myself have seen their soldiers with a cross sewn on their breast," I remarked.

"Yes, it is to such measures that a nation which purports to have come to spread culture has sunk. I have been told that Christianity is love. But the Italians introduce it to create hate."

"What do you think of the future?"

"It looks very dark. Turkey as an Islamic state exists no longer. Mustapha Kemal has finished with religion, and thinks that a strong Turkey must be built without it. We Senoussi, by the way, have been linked to Turkey in a strange manner. My uncle, Ahmet Sherif, who until a few years ago was the head of the Senoussi family, helped the Turks during the World War, as you doubtless know, first and foremost because he was a faithful friend to the Khalifate in Stamboul, and secondly because the Italians had already at that time begun to occupy Cyrenaica. But

when Mustapha Kemal came into power my uncle broke with the Turks, and, friendless, was driven away to Mecca, where he still lives. To a certain extent I myself believe in the French. They have shown great understanding of Islam and of Islamic culture. If foreigners must be here, the French are by no means the worst, though they have committed many and grave errors. But I believe more than anything in the new King of Hejaz, the King in Nejd, Abd el Aziz Ibn Saud. He is an excellent man, and the Wahabi ideals and our own are much akin."

"And in Egypt?"

"You are here now. See for yourself, then you can judge." He was silent for a moment, then he said: "Would you like to go to Kufra? That is the best way to learn what things are like."

"Yes, indeed, I would very much like to go to Kufra."

"Excellent. I will give you a letter, then you will be well received. But I am afraid I shall have to say good-bye for the present. If you can manage to call again I shall be pleased."

He sat down at his writing-desk and wrote the letter to Kufra. Then I took leave of him and his relative and was shown out by the negro. I went back to my hotel. The road led through the prostitutes' quarter. European jazz music filled the street; in all the doorways stood brown, yellow, and white prostitutes with heavily powdered faces. In the middle of it all an electric piano wailed out the Moonlight Sonata; half the notes were missing, and the Sonata became a thing of staccato, halting horror. Men of all races and all tongues slouched through these streets, followed by the monotonous cries of the women. Three drunken German sailors were hauled into a house by a woman who tried to cover the ravages of fifty years beneath a thick layer of paint. Little boys slunk guiltily

about, looking with curious eyes on this hell which seemed to them to be heaven itself.

Dirt, brawling, and disputes were on every side. I emerged from the narrow streets filled with an indescribable odour of whisky, incense, and sweating bodies, and passed the last prostitute sitting on a step, her eyes dilated with cocaine. Soon I reached my hotel. Here was peace. Outside the *cafés* men were smoking their hookahs while they discussed the events of the day. In the distance I saw Ibrahim Pasha Square, where the trams tear along, and I could hear the honking of the cars. High above my head from a minaret belonging to a blue-cupola'd mosque the muezzin called to prayer, and above it all shone the slender crescent moon.

But events in Egypt took such a course that I was obliged to return to Denmark, and temporarily abandon my expedition to Kufra and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

One morning I stood on the deck of the East Asiatic Company's *Asia*. We passed the statue of de Lesseps, and soon Africa lay on the horizon. We glided out into the Mediterranean; and I understood that it was not an empty phrase when Mussolini says: "This sea is an Italian lake." Fascism stretches its tentacles far into the distance.

Early one morning a fortnight after leaving Port Said, we sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar. I had asked to be called when we passed the Rock, and went on deck. The sky reddened faintly in the east, and to the south I could just make out the dark contours of the Riff mountains and the lights of Ceuta and Tangier. There was Ceuta, which I had left nine months ago. The words of the Englishman still rang in my ears: "You will see Africa as no one else has seen it if you go dressed as an Arab." And truly I had seen Africa and the desperate struggle of its inhabitants to hold what is their own.

The sun was rising. The morning mist lay round the tops of the Riff mountains: in the deep valleys was darkness. Here it was that a handful of brave mountaineers fought under Abd el Krim.

The boat headed north, towards the luxury and comfort which civilization has created. But as I gazed at the African coast receding slowly from sight my heart ached for the poor, hardy people whom I had learnt to know, and for their hopeless struggle.

Perhaps justice will be victorious some day—a justice which is not a rapacious lust for power, but which radiates the urge to comprehend all that is beautiful on the whole earth. And surely Kipling was only superficially right when he said, "East is East and West is West." Deep down within themselves the peoples of the East and the West are alike. They are two branches of the same tree.

And when man, regardless of whence he comes, seeks deep in his heart, he will feel the longing for the root of the tree.

Perhaps that is why the old legend has grown up about Africa: "He who once has felt the soil of Africa beneath his feet must always return."

NOTES

SIDI AHMET IDRISS flourished in the middle of the eighteenth century, and taught in the mosque at Fez. One of the most important *sufis* of his time, and a man of great piety, he was held in honour through all the world of Islam. After making a pilgrimage on foot from Fez to Mecca he was created Emir and *imam* by the people of Asir, in whose country in Southern Arabia he stayed until his death. One of the most important characters in this book, Sidi Ahmed Senoussi, came strongly under his influence.

SIDI AHMED SENOUSSI was born at Mostagenem. At Mecca he made the acquaintance of Sidi Idriss. Subsequently he established his rule over the Kufra oasis. His influence spread to the mountainous country of Cyrenaica (between Tripoli and Egypt), over which he was absolute ruler until its conquest by the Turks. At the conclusion of peace between Turkey and Italy, in 1912, the Turks ceded Cyrenaica, which they had never really subjugated. But the people of the mountains took no more kindly to their new masters, with whom they remain in conflict. As the present book shows, this deeply religious folk is gradually being exterminated.

SIDI BEN ESAU taught at Meknes, where he lies buried. His teaching lacks the simplicity and wisdom of that of Sidi Ahmet Idriss and Sidi Ahmed Senoussi. Ben Esau sought to justify the ecstasy. According to him, man can attain to this state by moving his body in quick, rhythmical movements and continuously repeating the name of Allah. For the followers of the prophet ecstasy is the consummation of happiness. The sect may be compared with certain orders of howling Dervishes which used to exist in Turkey, but whose tenets pure Islamic teaching rejected.

WAHABISM, a Puritan form of Islam, which is spreading in present-day Arabia under the leadership of Ibn Saud, aims at bringing man back to the doctrines of the Koran and making him healthy and strong. The teaching of Ibn Saud is akin to the teaching of Sidi Ahmet Idriss and Sidi Ahmed Senoussi.

MARABOUT. This is the title given to a prophet such as Sidi Idriss or Senoussi. The marabout is to be found in the Orient. The tomb which stands over his bones bears his name, and often serves as a mosque. Wahabism prohibits these practices, as they are tantamount to worship of man. God alone should be worshipped.

FATALISM. A Moslem (a follower of Islam) does not believe directly in fate or predestination; rather he holds that all that happens does so because God wills it for the good of man. But man must do his duty by living according to the Koran. Thus it is that a Bedouin can die with surprising equanimity.

Salaam aleikum, or *Salaam aleik*: "Peace be with you." This greeting is used on all occasions.

Subr el hrer: "Good morning."

Kif halek, or *Kif haleikum*: "How are you?"

Saïak, or *Saïda*. To this everyday greeting the answer is *Allahi hafarsak*, or *Allahi berekfik*.

Ya means "O." It finds its way into practically all forms of address. Thus, *Ya rasjel* means "O man," and *Ya waled* means "O boy."

Allah Kerim: "God is just." It is used to counsel patience.

Masch'Allah is an expression of surprise.

In' cha' Allah: "If God will." This phrase is uttered at the beginning of any task or undertaking.

Burnous is the ordinary Arabic expression for the outer garment, and *Djelabia* a special Maghreb name for the same thing.

Fez is a *tarbush*, a small head covering.

Wadi means "river" or "river bed." As an example may be given the Spanish river Guadalquivir, El Wadi el Debir, "the Big River."

Abd: "servant." The word occurs in all names coined from descriptions of God. For example, Abd Allah is "God's servant"; Abd el Kerim is "the servant of the Just (One)"; and Abd el Wahat is "the servant of the One."

La: "No."

Ayoa, naam, or *malum*: "Yes."

The ISLAMIC PRAYER is recited by all true Moslems five times a day, and preceded by the ablutions *Wudu*. The first repetition comes at sunrise (*el Subr*), the second when the sun hangs highest in the sky (*el Dorr*), the third about 3 P.M. (*el Asr*), the fourth at sunset (*el Moghreb*), and the fifth at bed-time (*el Aschïa*). This prayer—not including the quotations from the Koran which are chosen at random—has as its object the promotion of Islam (*es-salam*, "peace") in the mind of the worshipper, and the awakening of noble qualities, which are of God, in man. This concentration on the idea of God makes the corner-stone of Islam.

The taking of narcotics is prohibited, because to keep the body healthy is a religious duty.

On Friday (*Youm el djama*) worshippers forgather in the mosque. This day is not otherwise a holiday. During the rest of the week prayers are said at home.