

Robert Hichens *The Garden of Allah* 1905

She wanted freedom, a wide horizon, the great winds, the great sun, the terrible spaces, the glowing, shimmering radiance, the hot, entrancing moons and bloomy, purple nights of Africa. She wanted the nomad's fires and the acid voices of the Kabyle dogs.

When Domini returned to her bed she found it impossible to read any more Newman. The rain and the scents coming up out of the hidden earth of Africa had carried her mind away, as if on a magic carpet. She was content now to lie awake in the dark.

...Her destination was Beni-Mora. She had chosen it because she liked its name, because she saw on the map that it was an oasis in the Sahara Desert, because she knew it was small, quiet, yet face to face with an immensity of which she had often dreamed. Idly she fancied that perhaps in the sunny solitude of Beni-Mora, far from all the friends and reminiscences of her old life, she might learn to understand herself.

Sometimes the station-master's children peered at the train with curious eyes, and depressed-looking Arabs, carefully wrapped up, their mouths and chins covered by folds of linen, got in and out slowly.

Once Domini saw two women, in thin, floating white dresses and spangled veils, hurrying by like ghosts in the dark. Heavy silver ornaments jangled on their ankles, above their black slippers splashed with mud. Their sombre eyes stared out from circles of Kohl, and, with stained, claret-coloured hands, whose nails were bright red, they clasped their light and bridal raiment to their prominent breasts. They were escorted by a gigantic man, almost black, with a zigzag scar across the left side of his face, who wore a shining brown burnous over a grey woollen jacket. He pushed the two women into the train as if he were pushing bales, and got in after them, showing enormous bare legs, with calves that stuck out like lumps of iron.

At last even the palms were gone, and the Barbary fig displayed no longer among the crumbling boulders its tortured strength, and the pale and fantastic evolutions of its unnatural foliage. Stones lay everywhere upon the pale yellow or grey-brown earth. Crystals glittered in the sun like shallow jewels, and far away, under clouds that were dark and feathery, appeared hard and relentless mountains, which looked as if they were made of iron carved into horrible and jagged shapes. Where they fell into ravines they became black. Their swelling bosses and flanks, sharp sometimes as the spines of animals, were steel coloured. Their summits were purple, deepening where the clouds came down to ebony.

Journeying towards these terrible fastnesses were caravans on which Domini looked with a heavy and lethargic interest. Many Kabyles, fairer than she was, moved slowly on foot towards their rock villages.

She started when a low voice spoke to her in French, and, turning round, saw a tall Arab boy, magnificently dressed in pale blue cloth trousers, a Zouave jacket braided with gold, and a fez, standing near her. She was struck by the colour of his skin, which was faint as the colour of cafe au lait, and by the contrast between his huge bulk and his languid, almost effeminate, demeanour. As she turned he smiled at her calmly, and lifted one hand toward the wall of rock.

"Madame has seen the desert?" he asked.

"Never," answered Domini.

"It is the garden of oblivion," he said, still in a low voice, and speaking with a delicate refinement that was almost mincing. "In the desert one forgets everything; even the little heart one loves, and the desire of one's own soul."

"How can that be?" asked Domini.

"Shal-lah. It is the will of God. One remembers nothing any more."

His eyes were fixed upon the gigantic pinnacles of the rocks. There was something fanatical and highly imaginative in their gaze.

"What is your name?" Domini asked.

"Batouch, Madame. You are going to Beni-Mora?"

"Yes, Batouch."

"I too. To-night, under the mimosa trees, I shall compose a poem. It will be addressed to Irena".

All the girls of the Ouled Nails were celebrated in these poems—Aishoush and Irena, Fatma and Baali. In them also were enshrined legends of the venerable marabouts who slept in the Paradise of Allah, and tales of the great warriors who had fought above the rocky precipices of Constantine and far off among the sands of the South. They told the stories of the Koulouglis, whose mothers were Moorish slaves, and romances in which figured the dark-skinned Beni M'Zab and the freed negroes who had fled away from the lands in the very heart of the sun.

All this information, not wholly devoid of a naive egoism, Batouch poured forth gently and melodiously as they walked through the twilight in the tunnel. And Domini was quite content to listen. The strange names the poet mentioned, his liquid pronunciation of them, his allusions to wild events that had happened long ago in desert places, and to the lives of priests of his old religion, of fanatics, and girls who rode on camels caparisoned in red to the dancing-houses of Sahara cities—all these things cradled her humour at this moment and seemed to plant her, like a mimosa tree, deep down in this sand garden of the sun.

She stepped out briskly. Her body seemed suddenly to become years younger, full of elasticity and radiant strength.

"Madame is very strong. Madame walks like a Bedouin."

Batouch's voice sounded seriously astonished, and Domini burst out laughing.

"In England there are many strong women. But I shall grow stronger here. I shall become a real Arab. This air gives me life."

The Arabs have a saying: 'The desert is the garden of Allah. Count Anteonio who built a garden in the oasis where he comes to think.

The sand-diviner?" he said in his low, strong voice.

"Yes."

She walked on into a tiny alley. He followed her.

"You haven't seen the thin man with the bag of sand?"

"No, Madame."

"He reads your past in sand from the desert and tells what your future will be

Very," said Father Roubier. "Although, of course, I am not in sympathy with their religion, I have often been moved by their adherence to its rules. There is something very grand in the human heart deliberately taking upon itself the yoke of discipline."

"Islam—the very word means the surrender of the human will to the will of God," said Count Anteonio. "That word and its meaning lie like the shadow of a commanding hand on the soul of every Arab, even of the absinthe-drinking renegades one sees here and there who have caught the vices of their conquerors. In the greatest scoundrel that the Prophet's robe covers there is an abiding and acute sense of necessary surrender. The Arabs, at any rate, do not buzz against their Creator, like midges raging at the sun in whose beams they are dancing."

"No," assented the priest. "At least in that respect they are superior to many who call themselves Christians. Their pride is immense, but it never makes itself ridiculous."

"You mean by trying to defy the Divine Will?" said Domini.

"Exactly, Mademoiselle."

She thought of her dead father.

T. E. Lawrence *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

To S.A.

I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands
and wrote my will across the sky in stars
To earn you Freedom, the seven-pillared worthy house,
that your eyes might be shining for me
When we came.

It was an Arab war waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia. My proper share was a minor one, but because of a fluent pen, a free speech, and a certain adroitness of brain, I took upon myself, as I describe it, a mock primacy... In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it.

I went up the Tigris with one hundred Devon Territorials, young, clean, delightful fellows, full of the power of happiness and of making women and children glad. By them one saw vividly how great it was to be their kin, and English. And we were casting them by thousands into the fire to the worst of deaths, not to win the war but that the corn and rice and oil of Mesopotamia might be ours. The only need was to defeat our enemies (Turkey among them), and this was at last done in the wisdom of Allenby with less than four hundred killed, by turning to our uses the hands of the oppressed in Turkey. I am proudest of my thirty fights in that I did not have any of our own blood shed. All our subject provinces to me were not worth one dead Englishman.

Bedouin ways were hard even for those brought up to them, and for strangers terrible: a death in life. A man who gives himself to be a possession of aliens leads a Yahoo life, having bartered his soul to a brute-master. He is not of them. He may stand against them, persuade himself of a mission, batter and twist them into something which they, of their own accord, would not have been. Then he is exploiting his old environment to press them out of theirs. Or, after my model, he may imitate them so well that they spuriously imitate him back again. Then he is giving away his own environment: pretending to theirs; and pretences are hollow, worthless things. In neither case does he do a thing of himself, nor a thing so clean as to be his own (without thought of conversion), letting them take what action or reaction they please from the silent example.

In my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only. Easily was a man made an infidel, but hardly might he be converted to another faith. I had dropped one form and not taken on the other, and was become like Mohammed's coffin in our legend, with a resultant feeling of intense loneliness in life, and a contempt, not for other men, but for all they do. ...Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.

... In this group of oases lay the true centre of Arabia, the preserve of its native spirit, and its most conscious individuality. The desert lapped it round and kept it pure of contact.

The desert which performed this great function around the oases, and so made the character of Arabia, varied in nature. South of the oases it appeared to be a pathless sea of sand, stretching nearly to the populous escarpment of the Indian Ocean shore, shutting it out from Arabian history, and from all influence on Arabian morals and politics. Hadhramaut, as they called this southern coast, formed part of the history of the Dutch Indies; and its thought swayed Java rather than Arabia. To the west of the oases, between them and the Hejaz hills, was the Nejd desert, an area of gravel and lava, with little sand in it. To the east of these oases, between them and Kuwait, spread a similar expanse of gravel, but with some great stretches of soft sand, making the road difficult. To the north of the oases lay a belt of sand, and then an immense gravel and lava plain, filling up everything between the eastern edge of Syria and the banks of the Euphrates where Mesopotamia began. The practicability of this northern desert for men and motor-cars enabled the Arab revolt to win its ready success.

.... If tribesman and townsman in Arabic-speaking Asia were not different races, but just men in different social and economic stages, a family resemblance might be expected in the working of their minds, and so it was only reasonable that common elements should appear in the product of all these peoples. In the very outset, at the first meeting with them, was found a universal clearness or hardness of belief, almost mathematical in its limitation,

and repellent in its unsympathetic form. Semites had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were a people of primary colours, or rather of black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were a dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings. They knew only truth and untruth, belief and unbelief, without our hesitating retinue of finer shades.

..... I had been many years going up and down the Semitic East before the war, learning the manners of the villagers and tribesmen and citizens of Syria and Mesopotamia. My poverty had constrained me to mix with the humbler classes, those seldom met by European travellers, and thus my experiences gave me an unusual angle of view, which enabled me to understand and think for the ignorant many as well as for the more enlightened whose rare opinions mattered, not so much for the day, as for the morrow. In addition, I had seen something of the political forces working in the minds of the Middle East, and especially had noted everywhere sure signs of the decay of imperial Turkey.

I had believed these misfortunes of the revolt to be due mainly to faulty leadership, or rather to the lack of leadership, Arab and English. So I went down to Arabia to see and consider its great men. The first, the Sherif of Mecca, we knew to be aged. I found Abdulla too clever, Ali too clean, Zeid too cool.

Then I rode up-country to Feisal, and found in him the leader with the necessary fire, and yet with reason to give effect to our science. His tribesmen seemed sufficient instrument, and his hills to provide natural advantage. So I returned pleased and confident to Egypt, and told my chiefs how Mecca was defended not by the obstacle of Rabegh, but by the flank-threat of Feisal in Jebel Subh.

Abdulla, on a white mare, came to us softly with a bevy of richly-armed slaves on foot about him, through the silent respectful salutes of the town. He was flushed with his success at Taif, and happy. I was seeing him for the first time, while Storrs was an old friend, and on the best of terms; yet, before long, as they spoke together, I began to suspect him of a constant cheerfulness. His eyes had a confirmed twinkle; and though only thirty-five, he was putting on flesh. It might be due to too much laughter. Life seemed very merry for Abdulla. He was short, strong, fair-skinned, with a carefully trimmed brown beard, masking his round smooth face and short lips. In manner he was open, or affected openness, and was charming on acquaintance. He stood not on ceremony, but jested with all comers in most easy fashion: yet, when we fell into serious talk, the veil of humour seemed to fade away. He then chose his words, and argued shrewdly. Of course, he was in discussion with Storrs, who demanded a high standard from his opponent.

The Arabs thought Abdulla a far-seeing statesman and an astute politician. Astute he certainly was, but not greatly enough to convince us always of his sincerity. His ambition was patent. Rumour made him the brain of his father and of the Arab revolt; but he seemed too easy for that. His object was, of course, the winning of Arab independence and the building up of Arab nations, but he meant to keep the direction of the new states in the family. So he watched us, and played through us to the British gallery.

To Ali himself I took a great fancy. He was of middle height, thin, and looking already more than his thirty-seven years. He stooped a little. His skin was sallow, his eyes large and deep and brown, his nose thin and rather hooked, his mouth sad and drooping. He had a spare black beard and very delicate hands. His manner was dignified and admirable, but direct; and he struck me as a pleasant gentleman, conscientious, without great force of character, nervous, and rather tired. His physical weakness (he was consumptive) made him subject to quick fits of shaking passion, preceded and followed by long moods of infirm obstinacy. He was bookish, learned in law and religion, and pious almost to fanaticism. He was too conscious of his high heritage to be ambitious; and his nature was too clean to see or suspect interested motives in those about him. Consequently he was much the prey of any constant companion, and too sensitive to advice for a great leader, though his purity of intention and conduct gained him the love of those who came into direct contact with him. If Feisal should turn out to be no prophet, the revolt would make shift well enough with Ali for its head. I thought him more definitely Arab than Abdulla, or than Zeid, his young half-brother, who was helping him at Rabegh, and came down with Ali and Nuri and Aziz to the palm-groves to see me start. Zeid was a shy, white, beardless lad of perhaps nineteen, calm and flippant, no zealot for the revolt. Indeed, his mother was Turkish; and he had been brought up in the harem, so that he could hardly feel great sympathy with an Arab revival; but he did his best this day to be pleasant, and surpassed AM, perhaps because his feelings were not much outraged at the departure of a Christian into the Holy Province under the auspices of the Emir of Mecca. Zeid, of course, was even less than Abdulla the born leader of my quest. Yet I liked him, and could see that he would be a decided man when he had found himself.

.. The long ride that day had tired my unaccustomed muscles, and the heat of the plain had been painful. My skin was blistered by it, and my eyes ached with the glare of light striking up at a sharp angle from the silver sand, and from the shining pebbles. The last two years I had spent in Cairo, at a desk all day or thinking hard in a little overcrowded office full of distracting noises, with a hundred rushing things to say, but no bodily need except to come and go each day between office and hotel. In consequence the novelty of this change was severe, since time had not been given me gradually to accustom myself to the pestilent beating of the Arabian sun, and the long monotony of camel pacing. There was to be another stage tonight, and a long day to-morrow before Feisal's camp would be reached.

... Tafas said something to a slave who stood there with silver-hilted sword in hand. He led me to an inner court, on whose further side, framed between the uprights of a black doorway, stood a white figure waiting tensely for me. I felt at first glance that this was the man I had come to Arabia to seek--the leader who would bring the Arab Revolt to full glory. Feisal looked very tall and pillar-like, very slender, in his long white silk robes and his brown head-cloth bound with a brilliant scarlet and gold cord. His eyelids were dropped; and his black beard and colourless face were like a mask against the strange, still watchfulness of his body. His hands were crossed in front of him on his dagger.

... [after the victory] Feisal, smiling through the tears which the welcome of his people had forced from him, put it aside to thank the Commander-in-Chief for the trust which had made him and his movement. They were a strange contrast: Feisal, large-eyed, colourless and worn, like a fine dagger; Allenby, gigantic and red and merry, fit representative of the Power which had thrown a girdle of humour and strong dealing round the world.

EPILOGUE

Damascus had not seemed a sheath for my sword, when I landed in Arabia: but its capture disclosed the exhaustion of my main springs of action. the strongest motive throughout had been a personal one, not mentioned here, but present to me, I think, every hour of these two years. ...Next in force had been a pugnacious wish to win the war: yoked to the conviction that without Arab help England could not pay the price of winning its Turkish sector. When Damascus fell, the eastern war--probably the whole war--drew to an end...Then I was moved by curiosity. 'super flumina babylonis', read as a boy, had left me longing to feel myself the node of a national movement. We took Damascus, and I feared. more than three arbitrary days would have quickened in me a root of authority.

There remained historical ambition, insubstantial as a motive by itself. I had dreamed, at the city school in Oxford, of hustling into form, while I lived, the new Asia which time was inexorably bringing upon us. Mecca was to lead to Damascus; Damascus to Anatolia, and afterwards to Bagdad; and then there was Yemen. Fantasies, these will seem, to such as are able to call my beginning an ordinary effort.

Gertrude Bell

The Desert and the Sown: Travels in Palestine and Syria

عَالِ تَابَيْكَ حَمْرًا
يَرَى الْوَحْمَةَ الْأَنْسَ الْأَيْبَسَ وَيَبْتَدِي * بِحَبِيْبِكَ اهْتَدَيْتَ أُمَّ النَّجْمِ الشَّوَابِلِ

*He deems the Wild the sweetest of friends, and travels on where
travels above him the Mother of all the clustered stars.*

TA'ABATA SHARRAN.

To A. C. L. WHO KNOWS THE HEART OF THE EAST
PREFACE

I desired to write not so much a book of travel as an account of the people whom I met or who accompanied me on my way, and to show what the world is like in which they live and how it appears to them. And since it was better that they should, as far as possible, tell their own tale, I have strung their words upon the thread of the road, relating as I heard them the stories with which shepherd and man-at-arms beguiled the hours of the march, the talk that passed from lip to lip round the camp-fire, in the black tent of the Arab and the guest-chamber of the Druze, as well as the more cautious utterances of Turkish and Syrian officials. Their statecraft consists of guesses, often shrewd enough, at the results that may spring from the clash of unknown forces, of which the strength and the aim are but dimly apprehended; their wisdom is that of men whose channels of information and standards for comparison are different from ours, and who bring a different set of preconceptions to bear upon the problems laid before them. The Oriental is like a very old child. He is unacquainted with many branches of knowledge which we have come to regard as of elementary necessity; frequently, but not always, his mind is little preoccupied with the need of acquiring them, and he concerns himself scarcely at all with what we call practical utility. He is not practical in our acceptance of the word,

any more than a child is practical, and his utility is not ours. On the other hand, his action is guided by traditions of conduct and morality that go back to the beginnings of civilisation, traditions unmodified as yet by any important change in the manner of life to which they apply and out of which they arose. These things apart, he is as we are; human nature does not undergo a complete change east of Suez, nor is it impossible to be on terms of friendship and sympathy with the dwellers in those regions. In some respects it is even easier than in Europe. You will find in the East habits of intercourse less fettered by artificial chains, and a wider tolerance born of greater diversity. Society is divided by caste and sect and tribe into an infinite number of groups, each one of which is following a law of its own, and however fantastic, to our thinking, that law may be, to the Oriental it is an ample and a satisfactory explanation of all peculiarities. A man may go about in public veiled up to the eyes, or clad if he please only in a girdle: he will excite no remark. Why should he? Like every one else he is merely obeying his own law. So too the European may pass up and down the wildest places, encountering little curiosity and of criticism even less. The news he brings will be heard with interest, his opinions will be listened to with attention, but he will not be thought odd or mad, nor even mistaken, because his practices and the ways of his thought are at variance with those of the people among whom he finds himself. "A dat-hu : " it is his custom. And for this reason he will be the wiser if he does not seek to ingratiate himself with Orientals by trying to ape their habits, unless he is so skilful that he can pass as one of themselves. Let him treat the law of others respectfully, but he himself will meet with a far greater respect if he adheres strictly to his own. For a woman this rule is of the first importance, since a woman can never disguise herself effectually. That she should be known to come of a great and honoured stock, whose customs are inviolable, is her best claim to consideration.

...I do not know either the people or the language of Asia Minor well enough to come into anything like a close touch with the country, but I am prepared, even on a meagre acquaintance, to lay tokens of esteem at the feet of the Turkish peasant. He is gifted with many virtues, with the virtue of hospitality beyond all others.

I have been at some pains to relate the actual political conditions of unimportant persons. They do not appear so unimportant to one who is in their midst, and for my part I have always been grateful to those who have provided me with a clue to their relations with one another. But I am not concerned to justify or condemn the government of the Turk. I have lived long enough in Syria to realise that his rule is far from being the ideal of administration, and seen enough of the turbulent elements which he keeps more or less in order to know that his post is a difficult one. I do not believe that any government would give universal satisfaction; indeed, there are few which attain that desired end even in more united countries. Being English, I am persuaded that we are the people who could best have taken Syria in hand with the prospect of a success greater than that which might be attained by a moderately reasonable Sultan. We have long recognised that the task will not fall to us. We have unfortunately done more than this. Throughout our command, as I believe, a considerable amount of goodwill within the Turkish empire and the memories of an ancient friendship, it should not be impossible to recapture the place we have lost.

But these are matters outside the scope of the present book, and my apology had best end where every Oriental writer would have begun: " In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!"

Edith Wharton *In Morocco* (1920)

Preface

Having begun my book with the statement that Morocco still lacks a guide-book, I should have wished to take a first step toward remedying that deficiency. But the conditions in which I travelled, though full of unexpected and picturesque opportunities, were not suited to leisurely study of the places visited. The time was limited by the approach of the rainy season, which puts an end to motoring over the treacherous trails of the Spanish zone... This left me only one month in which to visit Morocco from the Mediterranean to the High Atlas, and from the Atlantic to Fez, and even had there been a Djinn's carpet to carry me, the multiplicity of impressions received would have made precise observation difficult. The next best thing to a Djinn's carpet, a military motor, was at my disposal every morning; but war conditions imposed restrictions, and the wish to use the minimum of petrol often stood in the way of the second visit which alone makes it possible to carry away a definite and detailed impression.

...Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture, and above all too much of a novelty, not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel as soon as Mediterranean passenger traffic is resumed. Now that the war is over, only a few months' work on roads and railways divide it from the great torrent of "tourism"; and once that deluge is let loose, no eye will ever again see Moulay Idriss and Fez and Marrakech as I saw them. In spite of the incessant efforts of the present French administration to preserve the old monuments of Morocco from injury, and her native arts and industries from the corruption of European bad taste, the impression of mystery and remoteness which the country now produces must inevitably vanish with the approach of the "Circular Ticket." Within a few years far more will be known of the past of Morocco, but that past will be far less visible to the traveller than it is to-day. Excavations will reveal fresh traces of Roman and Phœnician occupation; the remote affinities between Copts and Berbers, between Bagdad and Fez, between Byzantine art and the architecture of the Souss, will be explored and elucidated, but, while these successive discoveries are being made, the strange survival of mediæval life, of a life contemporary with the crusaders, with Saladin, even with the great days of the Caliphate of Bagdad, which now greets the astonished traveller, will gradually disappear, till at last even the mysterious autochthones of the Atlas will have folded their tents and silently stolen away.

...For the use, therefore, of the happy wanderers who may be planning a Moroccan journey, I have added to the record of my personal impressions a slight sketch of the history and art of the country. In extenuation of the attempt I must add that the chief merit of this sketch will be its absence of originality. It will also be deeply indebted to information given on the spot by the brilliant specialists of the French administration and to the many other cultivated and cordial French officials, military and civilian, who, at each stage of my journey, did their amiable best to answer my questions and open my eyes.

Leaving Tangier

At the first turn out of Tangier, Europe and the European disappear, and as soon as the motor begins to dip and rise over the arid little hills beyond the last gardens one is sure that every figure on the road will be picturesque instead of prosaic, every garment graceful instead of grotesque. One knows, too, that there will be no more omnibuses or trams or motorcyclists, but only long lines of camels rising up in brown friezes against the sky, little black donkeys trotting across the scrub under bulging pack-saddles, and noble draped figures walking beside them or majestically perching on their rumps. And for miles and miles there will be no more towns—only, at intervals on the naked slopes, circles of rush-roofed huts in a blue stockade of cactus, or a hundred or two nomad tents of black camel's hair resting on walls of wattled thorn and grouped about a terebinth-tree and a well.

Between these nomad colonies lies the bled, the immense waste of fallow land and palmetto desert: an earth as void of life as the sky above it of clouds. The scenery is always the same; but if one has the love of great emptinesses, and of the play of light on long stretches of parched earth and rock, the sameness is part of the enchantment. In such a scene every landmark takes on an extreme value. For miles one watches the little white dome of a saint's grave rising and disappearing with the undulations of the trail; at last one is abreast of it, and the solitary tomb, alone with its fig-tree and its broken well-curb, puts a meaning into the waste. The same importance, but intensified, marks the appearance of every human figure. The two white-draped riders passing single file up the red slope to that ring of tents on the ridge have a mysterious and inexplicable importance: one follows their progress with eyes

that ache with conjecture. More exciting still is the encounter of the first veiled woman heading a little cavalcade from the south. All the mystery that awaits us looks out through the eye-slits in the grave-clothes muffling her. Where have they come from, where are they going, all these slow wayfarers out of the unknown? Probably only from one thatched douar[A] to another; but interminable distances unroll behind them, they breathe of Timbuctoo and the farthest desert. Just such figures must swarm in the Saharan cities, in the Soudan and Senegal. There is no break in the links: these wanderers have looked on at the building of cities that were dust when the Romans pushed their outposts across the Atlas.

Marrakech

THE WAY THERE There are countless Arab tales of evil Djinns who take the form of sandstorms and hot winds to overwhelm exhausted travellers. In spite of the new French road between Rabat and Marrakech the memory of such tales rises up insistently from every mile of the level red earth and the desolate stony stretches of the bled.

Dark, fierce and fanatical are these narrow souks of Marrakech. They are mere mud lanes roofed with rushes, as in South Tunisia and Timbuctoo...The Souks of Marrakech seem, more than any others, the central organ of a native life that extends far beyond the city walls into secret clefts of the mountains and far-off oases where plots are hatched and holy wars fomented—farther still, to yellow deserts whence negroes are secretly brought across the Atlas to that inmost recess of the bazaar where the ancient traffic in flesh and blood still surreptitiously goes on. All these many threads of the native life, woven of greed and lust, of fetichism and fear and blind hate of the stranger, form, in the souks, a thick network in which at times one's feet seem literally to stumble. Fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques, fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's-hair turbans, mad negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty slave-girls with earthen oil-jars resting against swaying hips, almond-eyed boys leading fat merchants by the hand, and bare-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay, trading their striped blankets, or bags of dried roses and irises, for sugar, tea or Manchester cottons—from all these hundreds of unknown and unknowable people, bound together by secret affinities, or intriguing against each other with secret hate, there emanates an atmosphere of mystery and menace more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the souks

... Then the singing-girls would come out from Marrakech, squat round-faced young women heavily hennaed and bejewelled, accompanied by gaunt musicians in bright caftans; and for hours they would sing sentimental or obscene ballads to the persistent maddening twang of violin and flute and drum. Meanwhile fiery brandy or sweet champagne would probably be passed around between the steaming glasses of mint-tea which the slaves perpetually refilled; or perhaps the sultry air, the heavy meal, the scent of the garden and the vertiginous repetition of the music would suffice to plunge these sedentary worthies into the delicious coma in which every festive evening in Morocco ends. The next day would be spent in the same manner, except that probably the Chleuh boys with sidelong eyes and clean caftans would come instead of the singing-girls, and weave the arabesque of their dance in place of the runic pattern of the singing. But the result would always be the same: a prolonged state of obese ecstasy culminating in the collapse of huge heaps of snoring muslin on the divans against the wall. Finally at the week's end the wool-merchant and his friends would all ride back with dignity to the bazaar

And how can it seem other than a dream? Who can have conceived, in the heart of a savage Saharan camp, the serenity and balance of this hidden place? And how came such fragile loveliness to survive, preserving, behind a screen of tumbling walls, of nettles and offal and dead beasts, every curve of its traceries and every cell of its honeycombing? Such questions inevitably bring one back to the central riddle of the mysterious North African civilization: the perpetual flux and the immovable stability, the barbarous customs and sensuous refinements, the absence of artistic originality and the gift for regrouping borrowed motives, the patient and exquisite workmanship and the immediate neglect and degradation of the thing once made.

Wyndham Lewis

Journey into Barbary: Travels Across Morocco (1932)

Foreword

Headed for the High Atlas, then the Sous, and the Rio de Oro — tickets bought, hurriedly I sold my goods, "liquidated" my belongings, sold my barrels, upon which stood my lamps, put in store my books,... with a loupe, water and oil colours, wood and clay palettes, razors for pencils, inks, insecticide, an *Arabic Without Tears*, a *Berber for the British*, and a *Fool-proof Tifinar*, a map of the Sahara and one of the High, Middle and Anti-Atlas — *Stovarsel* against dysentery, a Kodak (an unfortunate purchase)—unaccompanied, I set out. Departure in the heroic style: though of course it was unsaluted that I left, shrouded in anonymity I "stole silently away" (in fact quite like the proverbial Arab, having struck my tent first—and in order, as it happened, to go out in search of that proverbial Bedouin). The sedentary habits of six years of work had begun, I confess, to weary me. Then the atmosphere of our dying European society is to me profoundly depressing. Some relief is necessary from the daily spectacle of those expiring Lions and Eagles, who obviously will never recover from the death-blows they dealt each other (foolish beasts and birds) from 1914 to 1918, and all the money they owe our dreary old chums the Bankers for that expensive encounter.

...I stepped on shore in Algeria better documented than most guides, although I had never so much as seen an Arab before, except in France selling carpets. The climate of Europe is changing. Indeed the climate of the world is doing so...But in Morocco they say, on the other hand, the climate has become European (European in the old, superseded sense of seasonal)—"Now we have your European seasons," as one Vieux Morocain said to me, with some pride, as if it were a result of the French Protectorate.

[THE POLICEMEN OF THE DESERT]

Upon the ocean these Barbarians or Berbers expressed themselves in the most perfect manner yet, it would seem—for sand or sea was all one to them. As Saharan bandits afloat, naturally they could but behave according to their nature. They behaved as if the sea had always been their element: Norsemen could not have been more at home on it, and, being upon it, could not have been more conspicuously lawless and piratic. They soon knew all the trade routes and the times of passing of the fleets of the civilized powers, just as they had always known the itinerary and time-tables of the trans-Saharan caravans. They became the great and menacing factor of Chaos upon the ocean. That they remained for half a millennium. Give the Berber a waste—a sandy one or one of salt water, it is immaterial—and he will be entirely *chez lui*. In their nature, like the early Celts and Germans, these people despise trade and agriculture. They cannot see why, when you can plunder, you should do what they for their part always got Negroes to do. Indeed, the Touaregs, the purest Berbers of the Desert, who still exist in the old manner of the veiled Men who were the Almoravides, have a saying that I think I have already quoted: "With the plough enters in dishonour."... But the Touareg, the white suzerain of the Desert before the coming of the French, even if he were not the intelligent person that, according to all accounts, he is, would be bound to be better provided with arguments upon this point than upon any other man: for the relationship involved in the above story from Timbuctoo is the main fact in his existence. The pros and cons of the Tent-versus-Oasis, and how it may be best arranged that both should live, a little bitterly, one for the other—that has always been the great problem of the Desert.

By the blackmail of tax and toll the professional bandit of the Sahara has lived, preying upon the sedentary Haratin populations of the Oasis, and the traders of the caravaners. But the important fact is that the bandit was an institution, of the same order as a "robber baron" of the Dark Age in Europe, or as the Bank-Baron today. He was not, or is not, an irresponsible outlaw: he is an armed ruffian with whom a pact must be made. He polices, against graft, the trade-route: he is a very violent and high handed policeman. Generally he is reputed to have kept his pact.

But these "Barbari" are fighting a losing fight. The time is coning when France and Spain, the Powers most interested in the matter will, by perpetual pressure, get the better of some softer-headed "Caliph of our lord Mohammed, enthroned by Allah his will," and the steam-whistle on the Tangier-Fez railroad shall destroy not only "feudalism." but fanaticism and privacy, lethargy and independence. Not will the European occupant, after the danger and damage of defeating a nation of *fous furieux*, of fanatics brave to desperation, find great difficulty of securing his conquests. The invader has only to follow the frontier-policy of ancient Rome, ably imitated by the modern Briton. He

will buy Maroccans to fight Maroccans: pay them liberally, officer then ably, and arm them efficiently. Wild races always and everywhere prove how greatly gold downweighs patriotism.

[Kasbah and Souk]

The only terms upon which a Berber can standstill, much less lie down, is to build himself a fortress. This is an absolute rule for the whole of Maghreb. Berbery is indeed the Bled-el-khouf—the "Pays de la Peur." ...There are only two sorts of Berber—the Berber incessantly on the move—the "nomad"; or the Berber who lives in a towered and battlemented stronghold. All that is not kasbah, or fortress, is Souk. These entrenched and fortified villages, with their watch-towers always manned (as much a matter of course as a look-out in the crow's-nest of a ship)—always at war with each other or preparing for war, must nevertheless buy and sell, in a simple way. The men must get their hair cut, or be bled or branded: and the women have to be constantly adding to the mass of rough jewelry with which they are already everywhere overwhelmed, or they require an amulet against the indigestion, caused by couscous or too much cheap green tea. Rifles and knives are necessary. Donkeys and camels have to be sold. In a more peaceful country these requirements would be met by a "market-town." Upon some naturally central spot a small township would spring up, and there, once a week, the villagers from the surrounding country would meet and engage in a little barter and gossip. This is not at all what happens in Maghreb. All villages there are fortified, barred and bolted: and no village would dream of consenting to a horde of people from other villages pouring into it once a week, however much they paid it for the privilege.—This is the "Pays de la Peur." Such a "market-town" would be inconceivable. ...So, seeing that they cannot meet in a fortified town or village, what they do is this. A certain number of villages select a deserted and unprepossessing spot, for preference in the middle of a stony desert. There they build a sort of empty shell-village of low stone huts, with no doors. Usually this village takes the form of a street, the rows of gaping cells facing each other. Sometimes there is more than one street: sometimes only a one-sided street. This they call a Souk (pronounced "sook"). For this strange place they next find a name. They call it not Stonehill Market, or Market-Hungerford, or Market-Gallowshill—they call it just Wednesday, or Monday. It is an abstract trysting place. Souk-el-Arba—Souk-el-Thnine: the Souk of Wednesday, the Souk of Monday. To these souks, until very recently, everyone would come armed with rifles, and of course daggers. (Every Berber carries a dagger, hung upon a cord which passes over his right shoulder: it is the equivalent of the sword of the European gentleman and is today in the nature of an ornament. The Jew is not allowed, or was not until recently allowed, to carry one, not being a "gentleman.") so this is the invariable rule of the Souk—it is a rough, miniature, open, village, left empty, except upon a specified day—The Souk in this sense is the only place in "Barbary" which has not defensive fortifications of ramparts and towers.

But there are the Souks of the city. That there are so few cities in Morocco is the result, of course, of the conditions described above. For no village ever becoming a town, or common centre, it cannot obviously become a city. A few very great and powerful conquerors, like Tachefin, have founded a city. Marrakech was his. And, as I have said, it was a monster Souk. It was a tribal Place of *rendezvous*—a market-city, which Tachefin was powerful enough to guarantee as safe. It was not a souk that six days out of the seven was empty. Mud huts gathered round it: craftsmen were installed in it, it was a permanent Souk. The extreme paucity of cities is one of the main characteristics of Morocco. To use Budgett Meakin's enumeration—"There are only three inland cities properly so called, Fez ... Marrakech ... and Mequinez (Meknes). With these exceptions the only great centres of population are on the coast." There are nine of these: but they are much smaller, and owe their existence today largely to Europeans. In the South of Morocco, however, there are only Marrakech and Taroudant. The Souk (the Souk of the bled) explains this entirely.

Whenever a Berber puts his hand to his forehead and remarks that he has a headache, you know that he is reflecting that it is about time he was bled or cupped, again. The neck is scratched with the razor, a tin cup is clapped on it, the air in the cup is exhausted by the barber sucking a tube, which enters the cup near the top. The patient bends back so that the tin cup may hang down. The barber is also the dentist. He does not stop teeth, but with an old key-wrench (manufactured for backward countries in France or Germany) he will pull a tooth out. The Berber teeth are splendid, so he does not do much of this—Branding I believe is fairly common. If a man complains of a pain in the kidney, he is "fired"—that is to say some smith will burn him with a piece of hot iron somewhere in the direction of the kidney.

Paul Bowles *THE SHELTERING SKY* (1949)
BOOK ONE TEA IN THE SAHARA

Chapter 2 On the terrace of the Cafe d'Eckmuhl-Noiseux a few Arabs sat drinking mineral water; only their fezzes of varying shades of red distinguished them from the rest of the population of the port. Their European clothes were worn and gray; it would have been hard to tell what the cut of any garment had been originally. The nearly naked shoeshine boys squatted on their boxes looking down at the pavement, without the energy to wave away the flies that crawled over their faces. Inside the cafe the air was cooler but without movement, and it smelled of stale wine and urine. At the table in the darkest corner sat three Americans: two young men and a girl. They conversed quietly, and in the manner of people who have all the time in the world for everything. One of the men, the thin one with a slightly wry, distraught face, was folding up some large multicolored maps he had spread out on the table a moment ago. His wife watched the meticulous movements he made with amusement and exasperation; maps bored her, and he was always consulting them. Even during the short periods when their lives were stationary, which had been few enough since their marriage twelve years ago, he had only to see a map to begin studying it passionately, and then, often as not, he would begin to plan some new, impossible trip which sometimes eventually became a reality. He did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveler. The difference is partly one of time, he would explain. Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler, belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly, over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. Indeed, he would have found it difficult to tell, among the many places he had lived, precisely where it was he had felt most at home. Before the war it had been Europe and the Near East, during the war the West Indies and South America. And she had accompanied him without reiterating her complaints too often or too bitterly.

At this point they had crossed the Atlantic for the first time since 1939, with a great deal of luggage and the intention of keeping as far as possible from the places which had been touched by the war. For, as he claimed, another important difference between tourist and traveler is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveler, who compares it with the others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking. And the war was one facet of the mechanized age he wanted to forget. In New York they had found that North Africa was one of the few places they could get boat passage to. From his earlier visits, made during his student days in Paris and Madrid, it seemed a likely place to spend a year or so; in any case it was near Spain and Italy, and they could always cross over if it failed to work out.

Chapter 4

"How friendly are they? Their faces are masks. They all look a thousand years old. What little energy they have is only the blind, mass desire to live, since no one of them eats enough to give him his own personal force. But what do they think of me? Probably nothing. Would one of them help me if I were to have an accident? Or would I lie here in the street until the police found me? What motive could any one of them have for helping me? They have no religion left. Are they Moslems or Christians? They don't know. They know money, and when they get it, all they want is to eat. But what's wrong with that? Why do I feel this way about them? Guilt at being well fed and healthy among them? But suffering is equally divided among all men; each has the same amount to undergo. Emotionally he felt that this last idea was untrue, but at the moment it was a necessary belief. It is not always easy to support the stares of hungry people. Thinking that way he could walk on through the streets. It was as if either he or they did not exist. Both suppositions were possible. The Spanish maid at the hotel had said to him that noon: "La vida es pena." "Of course," he had replied, feeling false even as he spoke, asking himself if any American can truthfully accept a definition of life which makes it synonymous with suffering. ... The few scattered people sitting at the tables were for the most part silent, but when they spoke, he heard all three of the town's tongues: Arabic, Spanish and French.

...A wind that was dry and warm, coming up the street out of the blackness before him, met him head on. He sniffed at the fragments of mystery in it, and again he felt an unaccustomed exaltation.

Even though the street became constantly less urban, it seemed reluctant to give up; huts continued to line it on both sides. Beyond a certain point there were no more lights, and the dwellings themselves lay in darkness. The wind, straight from the south, blew across the barren mountains that were invisible ahead of him, over the vast flat sebkha to the edges of the town, raising curtains of dust that climbed to the crest of the hill and lost themselves in the air above the harbor... Port raised his eyes to the sky: the powdery course of the Milky Way was like a giant rift across the heavens that let the faint white light through.

... Through a doorway he caught a glimpse of the long succession of tiny, brightly-lit rooms, and the men seated everywhere on the reed matting that covered the floors. They all wore either white turbans or red chechias on their heads, a detail which lent the scene such a strong aspect of homogeneity that Port exclaimed: "Ah!" as they passed by the door. When they were on the terrace in the starlight, with an oud being plucked idly in the dark nearby, he said to his companion: "But I didn't know there was anything like this left in this city." The Arab did not understand. "Like this?" he echoed. "How?" "With nothing but Arabs. Like the inside here. I thought all the cafes were like the ones in the street, all mixed up; Jews, French, Spanish, Arabs together. I thought the war had changed everything."

The Arab laughed. "The war was bad. A lot of people died. There was nothing to eat. That's all. How would that change the cafes? Oh no, my friend. It's the same as always."

... Marhnia addressed a question to Smail which seemed to include Port. "She wants to know if you have heard the story about Outka, Mimouna and Aicha," said Smail. "No," said Port. "Goul lou, goul lou," said Marhnia to Smail, urging him.

"There are three girls from the mountains, from a place near Marhnia's bled, and they are called Outka, Mimouna and Aicha." Marhnia was nodding her head slowly in affirmation, her large soft eyes fixed on Port. "They go to seek their fortune in the M'Zab. Most girls from the mountains go to Alger, Tunis, here, to earn money, but these girls want one thing more than everything else. They want to drink tea in the Sahara." Marhnia continued to nod her head; she was keeping up with the story solely by means of the place-names as Smail pronounced them. "I see," said Port, who had no idea whether the story was a humorous one or a tragic one; he was determined to be careful, so that he could pretend to savor it as much as she clearly hoped he would. He only wished it might be short.

"In the M'Zab the men are all ugly. The girls dance in the cafes of Ghardaia, but they are always sad; they still want to have tea in the Sahara." Port glanced again at Marhnia. Her expression was completely serious. He nodded his head again. "So, many months pass, and they are still in the M'Zab, and they are very, very sad, because the men are all so ugly. They are very ugly there, like pigs. And they don't pay enough money to the poor girls so they can go and have tea in the Sahara." Each time he said "Sahara," which he pronounced in the Arabic fashion, with a vehement accent on the first syllable, he stopped for a moment. "One day a Targui comes, he is tall and handsome, on a beautiful mehari; he talks to Outka, Mimouna and Aicha, he tells them about the desert, down there where he lives, his bled, and they listen, and their eyes are big. Then he says: 'Dance for me,' and they dance. Then he makes love with all three, he gives a silver piece to Outka, a silver piece to Mimouna, and a silver piece to Alcha. At daybreak he gets on his mehari and goes away to the south. After that they are very sad, and the M'Zabi look uglier than ever to them, and they only are thinking of the tall Targui who lives in the Sahara." "Many months go by, and still they can't earn enough money to go to the Sahara. They have kept the silver pieces, because all three are in love with the Targui. And they are always sad. One day they say: 'We are going to finish like this-always sad, without ever having tea in the Sahara-so now we must go anyway, even without money.' And they put all their money together, even the three silver pieces, and they buy a teapot and a tray and three glasses, and they buy bus tickets to El Golea. And there they have only a little money left, and they give it all to a bachhamar who is taking his caravan south to the Sahara. So he lets them ride with his caravan. And one night, when the sun is going to go down, they come to the great dunes of sand, and they think: 'Ah, now we are in the Sahara; we are going to make tea.' The moon comes up, all the men are asleep except the guard. He is sitting with the camels playing his flute." Smail wriggled his fingers in front of his mouth. "Outka, Mimouna and Aicha go away from the caravan quietly with their tray and their teapot and their glasses. They are going to look for the highest dune so they can see all the Sahara. Then they are going to make tea. They walk a long time. Outka says: 'I see a high dune,' and they go to it and climb up to the top. Then Mimouna says: 'I see a dune over there. It's much higher and we can see all the way to In Salah from it.' So they go to it, and it is much higher. But when they get to the top, Aicha says: 'Look! There's the highest dune of all. We can see to Tamanrasset. That's where the Targui lives.' The sun came up and they kept walking. At noon they were very hot. But they came to the dune and they climbed and climbed. When they got to the top they were very tired and they said: 'We'll rest a little and then make tea.' But first they set out the tray and the teapot and the glasses. Then they lay down and slept. And then" -Smail paused and looked at Port- "Many days later another caravan was passing and a man saw something on top of the highest dune there. And when they went up to see, they found Outka, Mimouna and Aicha; they were still there, lying the same way as when they had gone to sleep. And all three of the glasses," he held up his own little tea glass, "were full of sand. That was how they had their tea in the Sahara."

Chapter 13 She pinched his arm. "Look there!" she whispered. Only a few paces from them, atop a rock, sitting so still that they had not noticed him, was a venerable Arab, his legs tucked under him, his eyes shut. At first it seemed as though he might be asleep, in spite of his erect posture, since he made no sign of being conscious of their presence. But then they saw his lips moving ever so little, and they knew he was praying.

"Do you think we should watch like this?" she said, her voice hushed.

"It's all right. We'll just sit here quietly." He put his head in her lap and lay looking up at the clear sky. Over and over, very lightly, she stroked his hair. The wind from the regions below gathered force. Slowly the sky lost its intensity of light. She glanced up at the Arab; he had not moved.

"You know," said Port, and his voice sounded unreal, as voices are likely to do after a long pause in an utterly silent spot, "the sky here's very strange. I often have the sensation when I look at it that it's a solid thing up there, protecting us from what's behind."

Kit shuddered slightly as she said: "From what's behind?"

"Yes."

"But what is behind?" Her voice was very small.

"Nothing, I suppose. Just darkness. Absolute night-"