

Sunset in Marrakech

BY ERIC C. GIFFORD

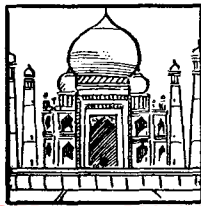
MARRAKECH is the most African city north of the High Atlas. Its miles of apricot-colored walls, which in the sunset flush to a deep pink, enclose not only the huddled, flat-roofed houses, the mosques and the palaces, but also acre upon acre of gardens and wastelands. Further walls separate the different quarters of the town. The Kasbah or Citadel, where the Sultan's unfinished palace stares with its vacant-eyed windows across the vast ceremonial courtyards, is walled off from the Mellah, the Jewish quarter, called the Place of Salt, because to the Jews fell the task of salting the heads of executed criminals. The Mellah in its turn is separated from the quarters beyond it. Arched gateways, many of whose heavy, nail-studded doors are still closed at night, give access from one quarter to another.

Each quarter has its mosques, but reigning over them all is the Koutoubia or Library Mosque. Rising proudly above the buildings and palm trees, its soaring twelfth century minaret pierces the sky. The Koutoubia and the Djemaa el Fna, or Place of the Departed,

so called because there the heads salted in the Mellah used to be exposed on spikes, are Marrakech. Seen from the Djebilet, the mountains which fringe the north of the oasis, the minaret dominates the town, of which it is the outstanding landmark. It dwarfs the buildings around it and even the mosque itself.

Separated from it by the fine old Arab palace with its high-walled, formal garden which houses the French general in charge of the Region, and by a tiny triangle of public park, lies the Djemaa el Fna. This is the center of Marrakech life. An open space of uneven shape several acres in extent, it is said never to be empty. This is probably true. I have been in it myself at all times of the day and night, and even in the small hours of a winter's morning there has always been someone, a woman selling bowls of hot, highly peppered bean soup, an early workman, or a late reveller.

Here stand the booths, crudely made of posts and straw matting, which house the fruit and vegetable sellers, the women



with their piles of hot round loaves, and the open-air restaurants where spicy soups, fried fish, stuffed green peppers, brochettes and stews of various sorts are cooking over open charcoal fires and sending up their pungent, appetizing odors.

These booths which look as if a strong wind would blow them away, as indeed it sometimes does when the hot, dust-laden *shergui* blows in from the desert, fill what might be described as the inner side of the Place as opposed to the outer side, along which runs the motor road from which it is separated merely by a deep gutter. On this outer side, and backing the stalls of the food merchants, are others which sell such diverse objects as laundry soap; perfumes (of which orange flower water and jasmine are the most popular — but beware of being sprinkled with jasmine, even dry cleaning will not remove its smell); patent medicines; and holy or historical pictures — the Kaaba at Mecca, Hassan and Hussein, the Fall of Damascus. The whole scene is enlivened occasionally by an advertisement for Coca Cola or Palmolive Soap.

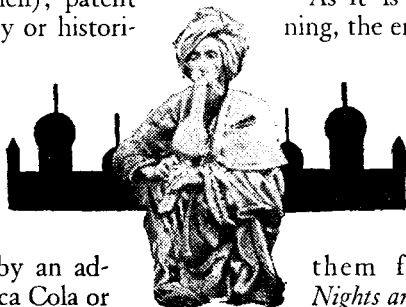
On the ground, with their merchandise spread in front of them, sit other less opulent dealers: an old man with a collection of broken tools, locks without keys, rusty nails,

screws and china door knobs; another with a selection from the Moorish pharmacopoeia — herbs and powders of various colors, a dried hedgehog, the dusty wing feathers of an eagle, a little heap of copper sulphate and two live white doves.

IN THE SHADE of one of the booths a dentist is plying his trade. He has just extracted a decayed molar and is holding it up for the admiration of the crowd which has gathered to admire his skill, while the patient sits groaning and holding his swollen face. Three water-sellers in wide-brimmed straw hats hung with colored wooden baubles, with leather aprons decorated with what look like horse brasses, are being photographed by a tourist. They are standard tourist material and know it; their price for a photo is a day's wage for a local laborer.

As it is getting on to evening, the entertainers are there in force. The venerable old man in the white turban is telling stories which were old when Richard Burton collected them for his *Thousand Nights and a Night*. His audience forms a spellbound ring,

the inner rows squatting in the dirt, silent except for an occasional outburst of obviously ribald laughter. The snake charmer's assistant is tightening a drum by heating it



over a handful of burning straw, while his master negligently arranges a placid-looking cobra which is visibly bored by the whole procedure. He has taken it from its basket and, seeing a group of tourists, holds it in front of his face so that the forked tongue licks languidly at his forehead.

Further along, two funny men are hitting one another with sticks, to the roars of laughter of the crowd, while a depressed-looking, bare-rumped monkey tries out a few tricks in a corner for the benefit of two foreign ladies who would obviously much rather not look.

Now the Chleuh dancing boys have arrived with their master. Round-faced and putty-skinned, their eyes darkened with antimony, they are busy arranging wool turbans on their shaven heads. They shuffle their feet in the dust and one of them plucks at the strings of his *gimbri* as they wait for a crowd.

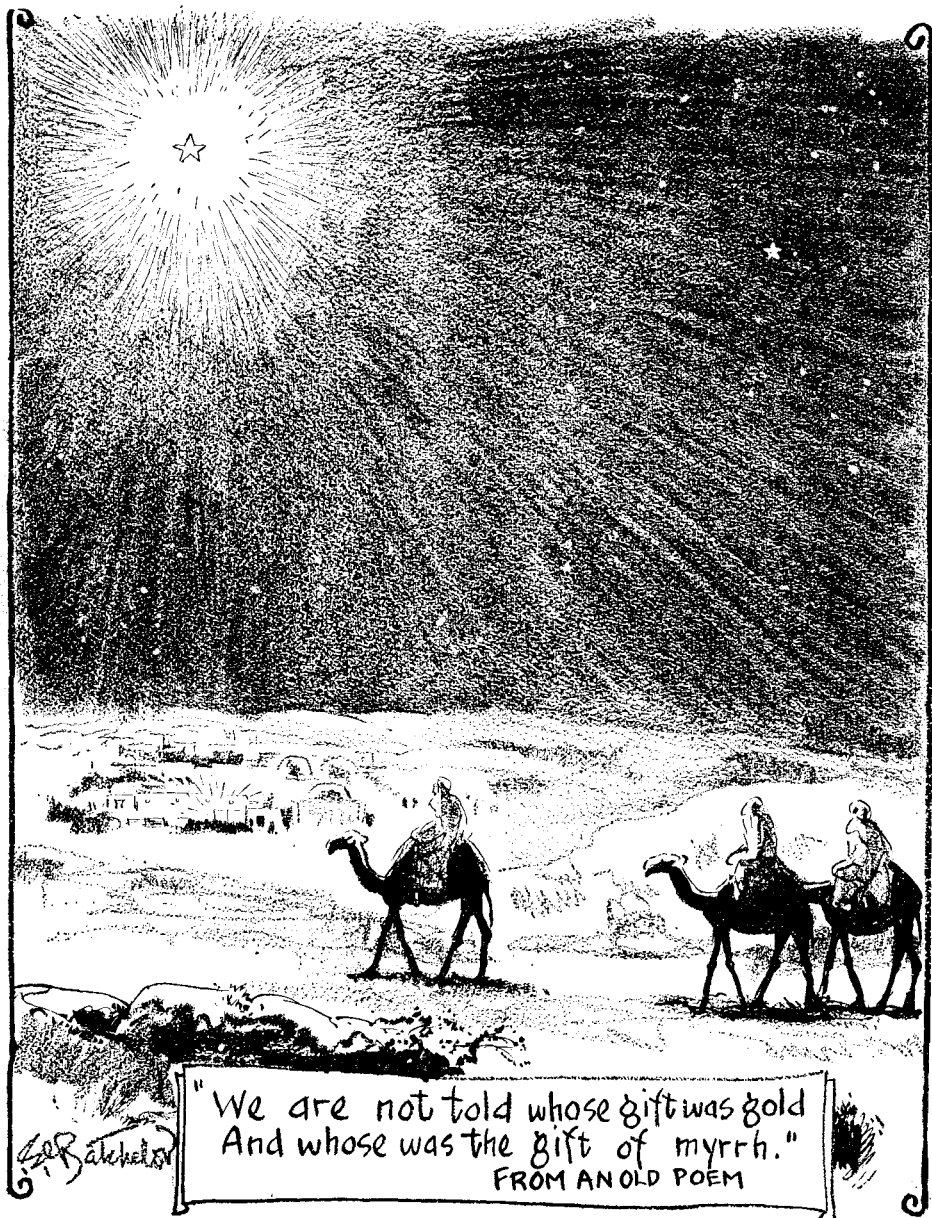
IN THE OLD DAYS there was hardly a *pasha* or a *kaid* who did not have his personal troupe of dancing boys for the entertainment of his guests. Now such private troupes are rare. In Marrakech there are only two troupes; the principal one with a house in the Kasbah. They may be hired out for an evening's entertainment or the tourist may go to the house itself, where he can see a more equivocal performance than that given in the Djemaa el Fna.

"*Venez voir les danseurs nus,*" cry the touts when all other lures fail. But business is bad these days and the performance in the open brings in a few francs and provides a certain amount of publicity. A crowd has gathered around them now and they start off at a rapid double shuffle, stamping their bare feet and jiggling up and down to the tinkling of iron clappers and the plucking of strings, while one of them bursts into tripping, atonal song.

The sun is setting. In the fading light, colors have become deeper and richer. Here and there among the booths, lanterns and carbide flares have been lit and pinpoint the dusk. The cafés are filling with customers, for it is the hour of *l'aperitif*. Lights appear, too, on the minarets of the mosques. From the Koutoubia, the voice of the *muezzin* throbs across the sky and is taken up from the other minarets. There is a momentary hush. "God is Great. There is no God but God." Dusk falls quietly over the city.



C. D. BATCHELOR'S CARTOON



In the MERCURY's Opinion **By RUSSELL MAGUIRE**

OUR NATION has lost its way because you and I have failed to fulfill our sacred duties as trustees and custodians of a great Christian heritage. We have tolerated much crime and wrongdoing. We have ignored numerous acts of treason. We have let ourselves rot and fall apart on the basic eternal truths. Now is the time to remake ourselves spiritually, morally and physically.

Let us *listen* to God's plan for America. From this day forward let us sincerely work for meeting the deepest needs of our people. We need a better way of life.

Listening to ourselves has failed. We have become warped and ruled by sinister men. William Penn said: "Men must be governed by God or they will be ruled by tyrants!" Edmund Burke said: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men will do nothing." We have proved this point.

Let's clear the record of our betrayal at Yalta, Tehran and Geneva. Let us never again have to apologize to the Poles for hiding the facts on the Katyn Forest Massacre; to Korea for permitting ourselves to be part of their betrayal; to Chiang Kai-shek for putting a knife in his back; to those we have heartlessly forgotten in countries behind the godless Iron Curtain; from our own troops and citizens whom we neglected and still neglect in the dark

prisons of the Soviet and their "captive nations."

At the same time *let us clean house here at home*. We want no Fifth Amendment citizens. They are a disgrace to our country.

By this time surely we also know that the United Nations is a swamp and death-trap. Let's rid ourselves of this outfit and the spies they brought into our country to destroy us and our institutions.

Our many sinful compromises with godless Russia write the darkest pages in our nation's history. We should break off diplomatic relations with Russia and electrify with hope the people behind the Iron Curtain. The Russian gangsters won't have time to stir up international troubles — they will be too busy trying to put out the fires in their own country.

Our world is in the throes of a titanic struggle for the wills and hearts of men. Let us stop being difficult and part of the problem. Let us become part of the cure. Who is right is not important. What is right is all important.

Let us try a renaissance directed by God who made us all and the world in which we live. Let's put beauty and integrity back into our nation and the world. It starts with you and with me.

God tells us: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."