

# IN MOROCCO

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[SECOND PAPER]

VOLUBILIS, MOULAY IDRIS AND MEKNEZ

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

### I

#### VOLUBILIS



ONE day before sunrise we set out from Rabat for the ruins of Roman Volubilis.

From the ferry of the Bou-Regreg we looked backward on a last vision of orange ramparts under a night-blue sky sprinkled with stars; ahead, over gardens still deep in shadow, the walls of Salé were passing from drab to peach-color in the eastern glow. Dawn is the romantic hour in Africa. Dirt and dilapidation disappear under a pearly haze, and a breeze from the sea blows away the memory of fetid markets and sordid heaps of humanity. At that hour the old Moroccan cities look like the ivory citadels in a Persian miniature, and the fat shopkeepers riding out to their vegetable-gardens like Princes sallying forth to rescue captive maidens.

Our way led along the highroad from Rabat to the modern port of Kenitra, near the ruins of the Phenician colony of Mehedyia. Just north of Kenitra we struck the trail, branching off eastward to a European village on the light railway between Rabat and Fez. Beyond the railway-sheds and flat-roofed stores the wilderness began, stretching away into clear distances bounded by the hills of the Rarb,\* above which the sun was rising.

Range after range, these translucent hills rose before us; all around the solitude was complete. Village life, and even tent life, naturally gathers about a river-bank or a spring; and the waste we were crossing was of waterless sand bound together by a loose desert growth. Only

an abandoned well-curb here and there cast its blue shadow on the yellow *bled*, or a saint's tomb hung like a bubble between sky and sand. The light had the preternatural purity which gives a foretaste of mirage: it was the light in which magic becomes real, and which helps to understand how, to people living in such an atmosphere, the boundary between fact and dream perpetually fluctuates.

The sand was scored with tracks and ruts innumerable, for the road between Rabat and Fez is travelled not only by French government motors but by native caravans and trains of pilgrims to and from the sacred city of Moulay Idriss, the founder of the Idrissite dynasty, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun, the mountain ridge above Volubilis. To untrained eyes it was impossible to guess which of the trails one ought to follow; and without much surprise we suddenly found the motor stopping, while its wheels spun round vainly in loose sand.

The military chauffeur was not surprised either; nor was Captain de M., the French staff-officer who accompanied us.

"It often happens just here," they admitted philosophically. "When the general goes to Meknez he is always followed by a number of motors, so that if his own is stuck he may go on in another."

This was interesting to know, but not particularly helpful, as the general and his motors were not travelling our way that morning. Nor was any one else, apparently. It is curious how quickly the *bled* empties itself to the horizon if one happens to have an accident in it! But we had learned our lesson between Tangier and Rabat, and were able to produce a fair imitation of the fatalistic smile of the country.

\*The high plateau-and-hill formation between Tangier and Fez.

The officer remarked cheerfully that somebody might turn up, and we all sat down in the *bled*.

A Berber woman, cropping up from nowhere, came and sat beside us. She had the thin sun-tanned face of her kind, brilliant eyes touched with *khol*, high cheekbones, and the exceedingly short upper lip which gives such charm to the smile of the young nomad women. Her dress was the usual faded cotton shift, hooked on the shoulders with brass or silver clasps (still the antique *fibulae*), and wound about with a vague drapery in whose folds a brown baby wriggled.

The coolness of dawn had vanished and the sun beat down from a fierce sky. The village on the railway was too far off to be reached on foot, and there were probably no mules there to spare. Nearer at hand there was no sign of help: not a fortified farm, or even a circle of nomad tents. It was the unadulterated desert—and we waited.

Not in vain; for after an hour or two, from far off in the direction of the hills, there appeared an army with banners. We stared at it unbelievably. The *mirage*, of course! We were too sophisticated to doubt it, and tales of sun-dazed travellers mocked by such visions rose in our well-stocked memories.

The chauffeur thought otherwise. "Good! That's a pilgrimage from the mountains. They're going to Salé to pray at the tomb of the *marabout*: to-day is his feast-day."

And so they were! And as we hung on their approach, and speculated as to the chances of their stopping to help, I had time to note the beauty of this long parti-colored train winding toward us under drooping banners. There was something celestial, almost diaphanous, in the hundreds of figures turbaned and draped in white, marching slowly through the hot colorless radiance over the hot colorless sand.

The most part were on foot, or bestriding tiny donkeys, but a stately Caïd rode alone at the end of the line on a horse saddled with crimson velvet; and to him our officer appealed.

The Caïd courteously responded, and twenty or thirty pilgrims were ordered to harness themselves to the motor and haul

it back to the trail, while the rest of the procession moved hieratically onward.

I felt scruples at turning from their path even a fraction of this pious company; but they fell to with a saintly readiness, and before long the motor was on the trail. Then rewards were dispensed; and instantly those holy men became a prey to the darkest passions. Even in this land of contrasts the transition from pious serenity to rapacious rage can seldom have been more rapid. The devotees of the *marabout* fought, screamed, tore their garments and rolled over each other with sanguinary gestures in the struggle for our pesetas; then, perceiving our indifference, they suddenly remembered their religious duties, scrambled to their feet, tucked up their flying draperies, and raced after the tail-end of the procession.

Through a golden heat-haze we struggled on to the hills. The country was fallow, and in great part too sandy for agriculture; but here and there we came on one of the deep-set Moroccan rivers, with a reddish-yellow course channelled between perpendicular banks of red earth, and marked by a thin line of verdure that widened to fruit-gardens wherever a village had sprung up. We traversed several of these "sedentary"\* villages, *nourwals* of clay houses with thatched conical roofs, in gardens of fig, apricot and pomegranate that must be so many pink and white paradises after the winter rains.

One of these villages seemed to be inhabited entirely by blacks, big friendly creatures who came out to tell us by which trail to reach the bridge over the yellow *oued*. In the *oued* their womenkind were washing the parti-colored family rags. They were handsome blue-bronze creatures, bare to the waist, with tight black astrakhan curls and firmly sculptured legs and ankles; and all around them, like a swarm of gnats, danced countless jolly pickaninnies, naked as lizards, with the spindle legs and globular stomachs of children fed only on cereals.

Half terrified but wholly interested, these infants buzzed about the motor while we stopped to photograph them; and as we watched their antics we won-

\*So called to distinguish them from the tent villages of the less settled groups.

dered whether they were the descendants of the little Soudanese boys whom the founder of Meknez, the terrible Sultan Moulay-Ismaël, used to carry off from beyond the Atlas and bring up in his military camps to form the nucleus of the Black Guard which defended his frontiers. We were on the line of travel between Meknez and the sea, and it seemed not unlikely that these *nourwals* were all that remained of scattered outposts of Moulay-Ismaël's legionaries.

After a time we left *oueds* and villages behind us and were in the mountains of the Rarb, toiling across a high sandy plateau. Far off a fringe of vegetation showed promise of shade and water, and at last, against a pale mass of olive-trees, we saw the sight which, at whatever end of the world one comes upon it, wakes the same sense of awe: the ruin of a Roman city.

Volubilis (called by the Arabs the Castle of the Pharaohs) is the only considerable Roman colony so far discovered in Morocco. It stands on the extreme ledge of a high plateau backed by the mountains of the Zerhoun. Below the plateau, the land drops down precipitately to a narrow river-valley green with orchards and gardens, and in the neck of the valley, where the hills meet again, the conical white town of Moulay Idriss, the Sacred City of Morocco, rises sharply against a wooded background.

So the two dominations look at each other across the valley: one, the lifeless Roman ruin, representing a system, an order, a social conception that still run through all our modern ways; the other, the untouched Moslem city, more dead and sucked back into an unintelligible past than any broken architrave of Greece or Rome.

Volubilis seems to have had the extent and wealth of a great military outpost, such as Timgad in Algeria; but in the seventeenth century it was very nearly destroyed by Moulay-Ismaël, the Sultan of the Black Guard, who carried off its monuments piece-meal to build his new capital of Meknez, that Mequinez of contemporary travellers which was held to be one of the wonders of the age.

Little remains to Volubilis in the way of important monuments: only the frag-

ments of a basilica, part of an arch of triumph erected in honour of Caracalla, and the fallen columns and architraves which strew the path of Rome across the world. But its site is magnificent; and as the excavation of the ruins was interrupted by the war it is possible that subsequent search may bring forth other treasures comparable to the beautiful bronze *sloughi* (the African hound) which is now its principal possession.

It was delicious, after seven hours of travel under the African sun, to sit on the shady terrace where the Curator of Volubilis, M. Louis Châtelain, welcomes his visitors. The French Fine Arts have built a charming house with gardens and pergolas for the custodian of the ruins, and have found in M. Châtelain an archaeologist so absorbed in his task that, as soon as conditions permit, every inch of soil in the circumference of the city will be made to yield up whatever secrets it hides.

## II

### MOULAY IDRIS

WE lingered under the pergolas of Volubilis till the heat grew less intolerable, and then our companions suggested a visit to Moulay Idriss.

Such a possibility had not occurred to us, and even Captain de M. seemed to doubt whether the expedition were advisable. Moulay Idriss was still said to be resentful of Christian intrusion: it was only a year before that the first French officers had entered it.

But M. Châtelain was confident that there would be no opposition to our visit, and with the piled-up terraces and towers of the Sacred City growing golden in the afternoon light across the valley it was impossible to hesitate.

We drove down through an olive-wood as ancient as those of Mitylene and Corfu, and then along the narrowing valley, between gardens luxuriant even in the parched Moroccan autumn. Presently the motor began to climb the steep road to the town, and at a gateway we got out and were met by the native chief of police. Instantly at the high windows of mysterious houses veiled heads appeared and sidelong eyes cautiously inspected us.

But the quarter was deserted, and we walked on without meeting any one to the Street of the Weavers, a silent narrow way between low white-washed niches like the cubicles in a convent. In each niche sat a grave white-robed youth, forming a great amphora-shaped grain-basket out of closely plaited straw. Vine-leaves and tendrils hung through the reed roofing overhead, and grape-clusters cast their classic shadow at our feet. It was like walking on the unrolled frieze of a white Etruscan vase patterned with black vine garlands.

The silence and emptiness of the place began to strike us: there was no sign of the Oriental crowd that usually springs out of the dust at the approach of strangers. But suddenly we heard close by the lament of the *rekka* (a kind of long fife), accompanied by a wild thrum-thrum of earthenware drums and a curious excited chanting of men's voices. I had heard such a chant before, at the other end of North Africa, in Kairouan, one of the other great Sanctuaries of Islam, where the sect of the the Aïssaouas celebrate their sanguinary rites in the *Zaouia*\* of their confraternity. Yet it seemed incredible that if the Aïssaouas of Moulay Idriss were performing their ceremonies that day the chief of police should be placidly leading us through the streets in the very direction from which the chant was coming. The Moroccan, though he has no desire to get into trouble with the Christian, prefers to be left alone on feast-days, especially in such a stronghold of the faith as Moulay Idriss.

But "Geschehen ist geschehen" is the sum of Oriental philosophy. For centuries Moulay Idriss had held out fanatically on its holy steep; then, suddenly, in 1917, its chiefs saw that the game was up, and surrendered without a pretense of resistance. Now the whole thing was over, the new conditions were accepted, and the chief of police assured us that with the French uniform at our side we should be safe anywhere.

"The Aïssaouas?" he explained. "No, this is another sect, the Hamadchas, who are performing their ritual dance on the feast-day of their patron, the *marabout* Hamadch, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun.

\* Sacred college.

The feast is celebrated publicly in the market-place of Moulay Idriss."

As he spoke we came out into the market-place, and understood why there had been no crowd at the gate. All the population was in the square and on the roofs that mount above it, tier by tier, against the wooded hillside: Moulay Idriss had better to do that day than to gape at a few tourists in dust-coats.

Short of Sfax, and the other coast cities of eastern Tunisia, there is surely not another town in North Africa as white as Moulay Idriss. Some are pale blue and pinky yellow, like the Kasbah of Tangier, or cream and blue like Salé; but Tangier and Salé, for centuries continuously subject to European influences, have probably borrowed their colors from Genoa and the Italian Riviera. In the interior of the country, and especially in Morocco, where the whole color-scheme is much soberer than in Algeria and Tunisia, the color of the native houses is always a penitential shade of mud and ashes.

But Moulay Idriss, that afternoon, was as white as if its arcaded square had been scooped out of a big cream cheese. The late sunlight lay like gold-leaf on one side of the square, the other was in pure blue shade; and above it, the crowded roofs, terraces and balconies packed with women in bright dresses looked like a flower-field on the edge of a marble quarry.

The bright dresses were as unusual a sight as the white walls, for the average Moroccan crowd is the color of its houses. But the occasion was a special one, for these feasts of the Hamadchas occur only twice a year, in spring and autumn, and as the ritual dances take place out of doors, instead of being performed inside the building of the confraternity, the feminine population seizes the opportunity to burst into flower on the housetops.

It is rare, in Morocco, to see in the streets or the bazaars any women except of the humblest classes, household slaves, servants, peasants from the country or small tradesmen's wives; and even they (with the exception of the unveiled Berber women) are wrapped in the prevailing grave-clothes. The *filles de joie* and dancing-girls whose brilliant dresses enliven



certain streets of the Algerian and Tunisian towns are invisible, or at least unnoticeable, in Morocco, where life, on the whole, seems so much less gay and brightly-tinted; and the women of the richer classes, mercantile or aristocratic, never leave their harems except to be married or buried. A throng of women dressed in light colors is therefore to be seen in public only when some street festival draws them to the roofs. Even then it is probable that the throng is mostly composed of slaves, household servants, and women of the lower *bourgeoisie*; but as they are all dressed in mauve and rose and pale green, with long earrings and jewelled head-bands flashing through their parted veils, the illusion, from a little distance, is as complete as though they were the ladies in waiting of the Queen of Sheba; and that radiant afternoon at Moulay Idriss, above the vine-garlanded square, and against the background of piled-up terraces, their vivid groups were in such contrast to the usual gray assemblages of the East that the scene seemed like a setting for some extravagantly staged ballet.

For the same reason the spectacle unrolling itself below us took on a blessed air of unreality. Any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aïssaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over, to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage than Aïssaouas, and carry much farther their display of cataleptic anæsthesia; and, knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace. But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror. In that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolical: it was like one of those strange animal masks which the Middle Ages brought down from antiquity by way of the satyr-plays of Greece, and of which the half-human protagonists still grin and contort themselves among the Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals.

At one end of the square, the musicians stood on a stone platform above the dancers. Like the musicians in a bas-

relief they were flattened side by side against a wall, the fife-players with lifted arms and inflated cheeks, the drummers pounding frantically on long earthenware drums shaped like enormous hour-glasses and painted in barbaric patterns; and below, down the length of the market-place, the dance unrolled itself in a frenzied order that would have filled with envy a Paris or London impresario.

In its centre an inspired-looking creature whirled about on his axis, the black ringlets standing out in snaky spirals from his haggard head, his cheek-muscles convulsively twitching. Around him, but a long way off, the dancers rocked and circled with long raucous cries dominated by the sobbing booming music; and in the sunlit space between dancers and holy man, two or three impish children bobbed about with fixed eyes and a grimace of comic frenzy, solemnly parodying his contortions.

Meanwhile a tall grave personage in a doge-like cap, the only calm figure in the tumult, moved gravely here and there, regulating the dance, stimulating the frenzy, or calming some devotee who had broken the ranks and lay tossing and foaming on the stones. There was something far more sinister in this passionless figure, holding his hand on the key that let loose such crazy forces, than in the poor central whirligig who merely set the rhythm of the convulsions.

The dancers were all dressed in white caftans or in the blue shirts of the lowest classes. In the sunlight something that looked like fresh red paint glistened on their shaved black or yellow skulls and made dark blotches on their garments. At first these stripes and stains suggested only a gaudy ritual ornament like the pattern on the drums; then one saw that the paint, or whatever it was, kept dripping down from the whirling caftans and forming fresh pools among the stones; that as one of the pools dried up another formed, redder and more glistening, and that these pools were fed from great gashes which the dancers hacked in their own skulls and breasts with hatchets and sharpened stones. The dance was a blood-rite, a great sacrificial symbol, in which blood flowed so freely that all the rocking feet were splashed with it.

Gradually, however, it became evident that many of the dancers simply rocked and howled, without hacking themselves, and that most of the bleeding skulls and breasts belonged to negroes. Every now and then the circle widened to let in another figure, black or dark yellow, the figure of some humble blue-shirted spectator suddenly "getting religion" and rushing forward to snatch a weapon and baptize himself with his own blood; and as each new recruit joined the dancers the music shrieked louder and the devotees howled more wolfishly. And still, in the centre, the mad *marabout* spun, and the children bobbed and mimicked him and rolled their diamond eyes.

Such is the dance of the Hamadchas, of the confraternity of the *marabout* Hamadch, a powerful saint of the seventeenth century, whose tomb is in the Zerhoun above Moulay Idriss. Hamadch, it appears, had a faithful slave, who, when his master died, killed himself in despair, and the self-inflicted wounds of the brotherhood are supposed to symbolize the slave's suicide; though no doubt the origin of the ceremony might be traced back to the depths of that ensanguined grove where Mr. Fraser plucked the Golden Bough.

The more naïve interpretation, however, has its advantages, since it enables the devotees to divide their ritual duties into two classes, the devotions of the free men being addressed to the saint who died in his bed, while the slaves belong to the slave, and must therefore simulate his horrid end. And this is the reason why most of the white caftans simply rock and writhe, while the humble blue shirts drip with blood.

The sun was setting when we came down from our terrace above the market-place. To find a lodging for the night we had to press on to Meknez, where we were awaited at the French military post; therefore we were reluctantly obliged to refuse an invitation to take tea with the Caïd, whose high-perched house commands the whole white amphitheatre of the town. It was disappointing to leave Moulay Idriss with the Hamadchas howling their maddest, and so much besides to see; but as we drove away under the long shadows of the olives we counted

ourselves lucky to have entered the sacred town, and luckier still to have been there on the day of the dance which, till a year ago, no foreigner had been allowed to see.

A fine French road runs from Moulay Idriss to Meknez, and we flew on through the dusk between wooded hills and open stretches on which the fires of nomad camps put orange splashes in the darkness. Then the moon rose, and by its light we saw a widening valley, and gardens and orchards that stretched up to a great walled city outlined against the stars.

### III

#### MEKNEZ

ALL that evening, from the garden of the Military Subdivision on the opposite height, we sat and looked across at the dark tree-clumps and moonlit walls of Meknez, and listened to its fantastic history.

Meknez was built by the Sultan Moulay-Ismaël, around the nucleus of a small town of which the site happened to please him, at the very moment when Louis XIV was creating Versailles. The coincidence of two contemporary autocrats calling cities out of the wilderness has caused persons with a taste for analogy to describe Meknez as the Versailles of Morocco: an epithet which is about as instructive as it would be to call Phidias the Benvenuto Cellini of Greece.

There is, however, a pretext for the comparison in the fact that the two sovereigns took a lively interest in each other's affairs. Moulay-Ismaël sent several embassies to treat with Louis XIV on the eternal question of piracy and the ransom of Christian captives, and the two rulers were continually exchanging gifts and compliments.

The governor of Tetouan, who was sent to Paris in 1680, having brought as presents to the French King a lion, a lioness, a tigress, and four ostriches, Louis XIV shortly afterward despatched M. de Saint-Amand to Morocco with two dozen watches, twelve pieces of gold brocade, a cannon six feet long and other firearms. After this the relations between the two courts remained friendly till 1693, at



*From a photograph from the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc.*

Volubilis.

The western portico of Basilica of Antoninus Pius.

which time they were strained by the refusal of France to return the Moorish captives who were employed on the king's galleys, and who were probably as much needed there as the Sultan's Christian slaves for the building of Moorish palaces.

Six years later the Sultan despatched

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Abdallah-ben-Aïssa to France to reopen negotiations. The ambassador was as brilliantly received and as eagerly run after as a modern statesman on an official mission, and his candidly expressed admiration for the personal charms of the Princesse de Conti, one of the French monarch's legitimatized children, is sup-



posed to have been mistaken by the court for an offer of marriage from the Emperor of Barbary. But he came back without a treaty.

Moulay-Ismaël, whose long reign (1673 to 1727) and extraordinary exploits make him already a legendary figure, conceived, early in his career, a passion for Meknez; and through all his troubled rule, with its

with revolted tribes in the Atlas, to defeat one Berber army after another, to carry his arms across the High Atlas into the Souss, to adorn Fez with the heads of seven hundred vanquished chiefs, to put down his three rebellious brothers, to strip all the cities of his empire of their negroes and transport them to Meknez ("so that not a negro, man, woman or



*From a photograph from the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc.*

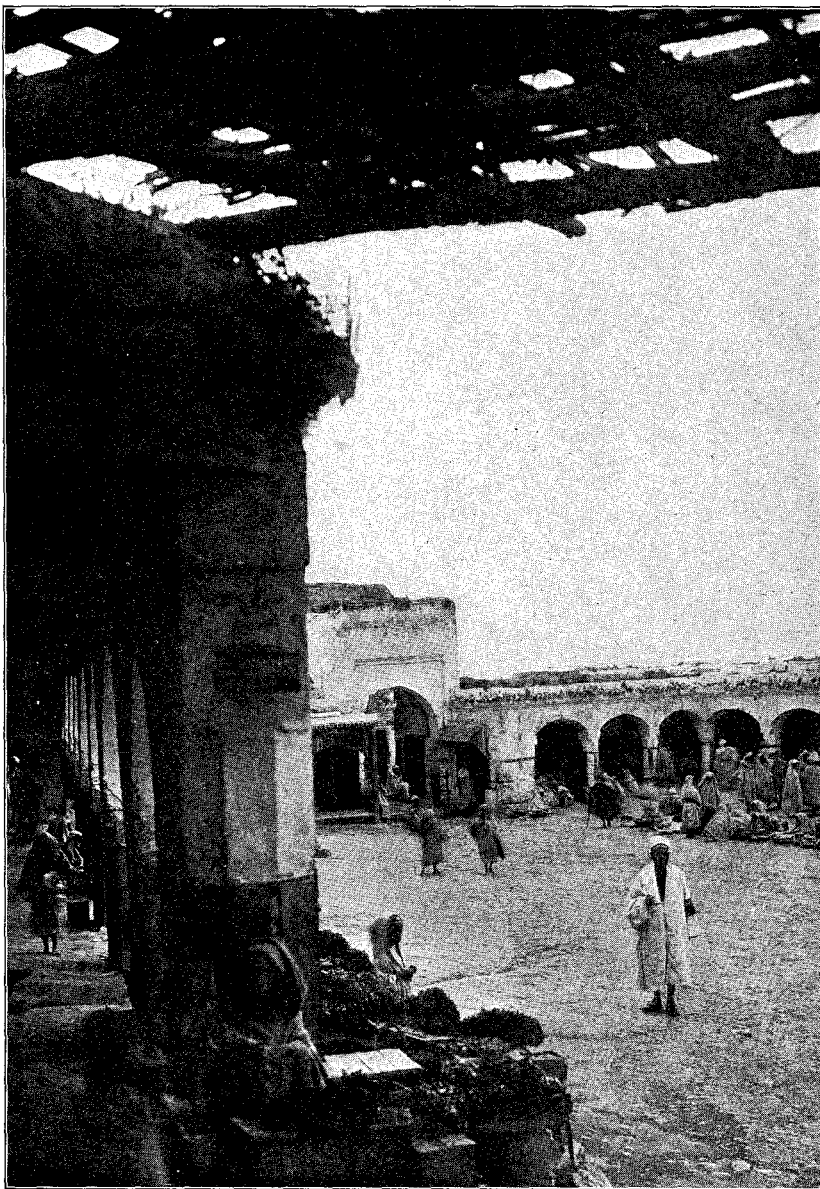
Moulay Idriss (9,000 inhabitants).

alternations of barbaric warfare and far-reaching negotiations, palace intrigue, crazy bloodshed and great administrative reforms, his heart perpetually reverted to the wooded slopes on which he dreamed of building a city more splendid than Fez or Marrakech.

"The Sultan" (writes his chronicler Aboul Kasim-ibn-Ahmad, called "Ez-ziani") "loved Meknez, the climate of which had enchanted him, and he would have liked never to leave it." He left it, indeed, often, left it perpetually, to fight

child, slave or free, was left in any part of the country"); to fight and defeat the Christians (1683); to take Tangier, to conduct a campaign on the Moulouya, to lead the holy war against the Spanish (1689), to take Larache, the Spanish commercial post on the west coast (which furnished eighteen hundred captives for Meknez); to lay siege to Ceuta, conduct a campaign against the Turks of Algiers, repress the pillage in his army, subdue more tribes, and build forts for his Black Legionaries from Oudjda to the Oued Noun. But al-





*From a photograph from the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc.*

Moulay Idriss.  
The market-place.

most each year's bloody record ends with the placid phrase: "Then the Sultan returned to Meknez."

In the year 1701, Ezziani writes, the indomitable old man "deprived his rebellious sons of their principalities; after which date he consecrated himself exclusively to the building of his palaces and

the planting of his gardens. And in 1720 (nineteen years later in this long reign!) he ordered the destruction of the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss for the purpose of enlarging it. And to gain the necessary space he bought all the adjacent land, and the workmen did not leave these new labors till they were entirely completed."

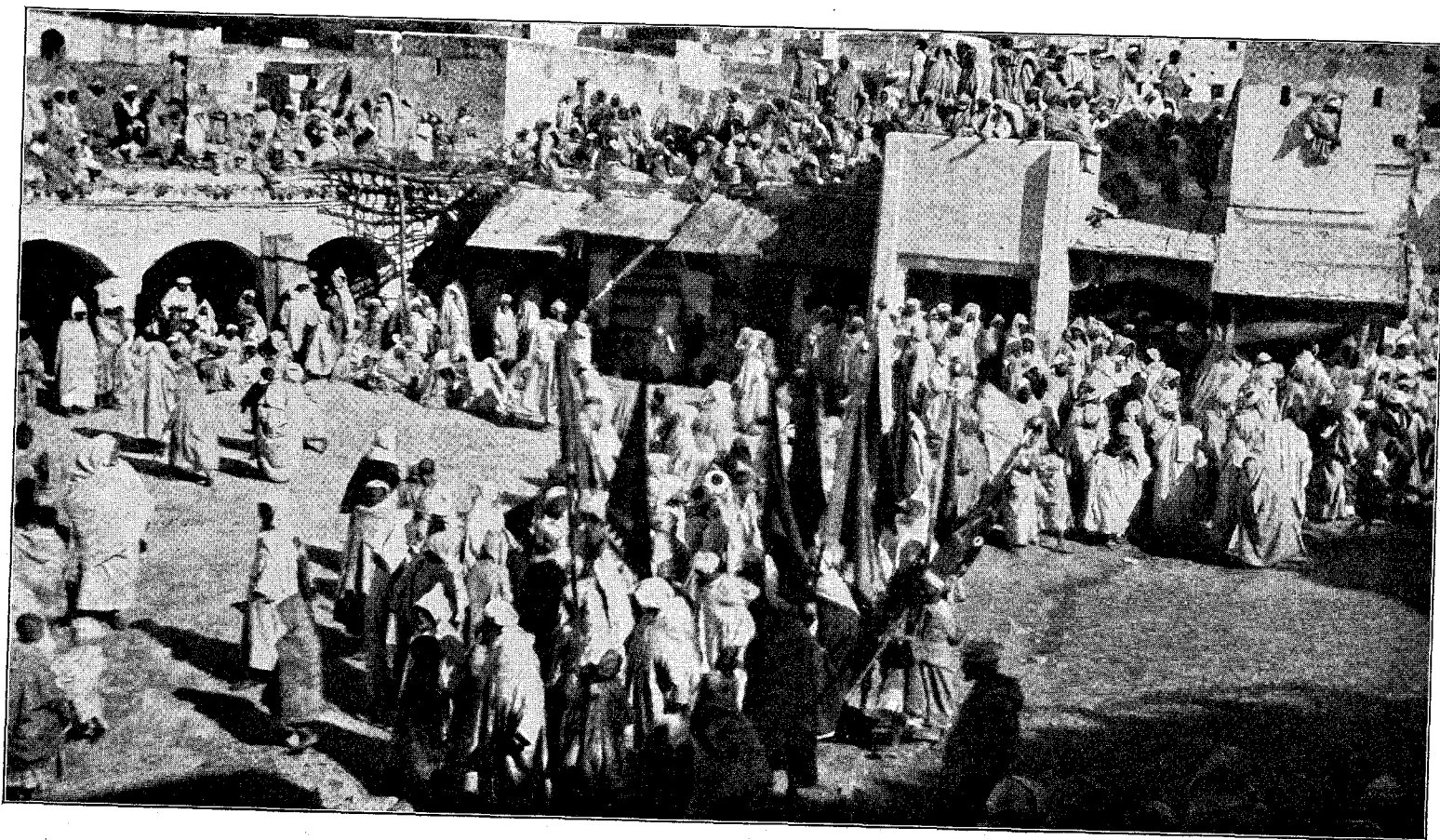




Moulay Idriss.

Market-place on the day of the ritual dance of the Hamadchas.





Moulay Idriss.  
The market-place. Procession of the confraternity of the Hamadchas.



In this same year there was levied on Fez a new tax which was so heavy that the inhabitants were obliged to abandon the city.

Yet it is written of this terrible old monarch, who devastated whole districts, and sacrificed uncounted thousands of lives for his ruthless pleasure, that under his administration of his chaotic and turbulent empire "the country rejoiced in the most complete security. A Jew or a woman might travel alone from Oudjda to the Oued Noun without any one's asking their business. Abundance reigned throughout the land: grain, food, cattle were to be bought for the lowest prices. Nowhere in the whole of Morocco was a highwayman or a robber to be found."

And probably both sides of the picture are true.

What, then, was the marvel across the valley, what were the "lordly pleasure-houses" to whose creation and enlargement Moulay-Ismaël returned again and again amid the throes and violences of a nearly centenarian life?

The chronicler continues: "The Sultan caused all the houses near the Kasbah\* to be demolished, and compelled the inhabitants to carry away the ruins of their dwellings. All the eastern end of the town was also torn down, and the ramparts were rebuilt. He also built the Great Mosque next to the palace of Nasr. . . . He occupied himself personally with the construction of his palaces, and before one was finished he caused another to be begun. He built the mosque of Elakhdar; the walls of the new town were pierced with twenty fortified gates and surmounted with platforms for cannon. Within the walls he made a great artificial lake where one might row in boats. There was also a granary with immense subterranean reservoirs of water, and a stable *three miles long* for the Sultan's horses and mules; twelve thousand horses could be stabled in it. The flooring rested on vaults in which the grain for the horses was stored. . . . He also built the palace of Elmansour, which had twenty cupolas; from the top of each cupola one could look forth on the plain and the mountains around Meknez. All

about the stables the rarest trees were planted. Within the walls were fifty palaces, each with its own mosque and its baths. Never was such a thing known in any country, Arab or foreign, pagan or Moslem. The guarding of the doors of these palaces was intrusted to twelve hundred black eunuchs."

Such were the wonders that seventeenth century travellers toiled across the desert to see, and from which they came back dazzled and almost incredulous, as if half-suspecting that some djinn had deluded them with the vision of a phantom city. But for the soberer European records, and the evidence of the ruins themselves (for the whole of the new Meknez is a ruin), one might indeed be inclined to regard Ezziani's statements as an Oriental fable; but the briefest glimpse of Moulay-Ismaël's Meknez makes it easy to believe all his chronicler tells of it, even to the three miles of stables.

Next morning we drove across the valley and, skirting the old town on the hill, entered, by one of the twenty gates of Moulay-Ismaël, a long empty street lined with half-ruined arcades. Beyond was another street of beaten red earth bordered by high red walls blotched with gray and mauve. Ahead of us this walled road stretched out interminably (Meknez, before Washington, was the "city of magnificent distances"), and down its empty length only one or two draped figures passed mournfully, like shadows on the way to Shadowland. It was clear that the living held no further traffic with the Meknez of Moulay-Ismaël.

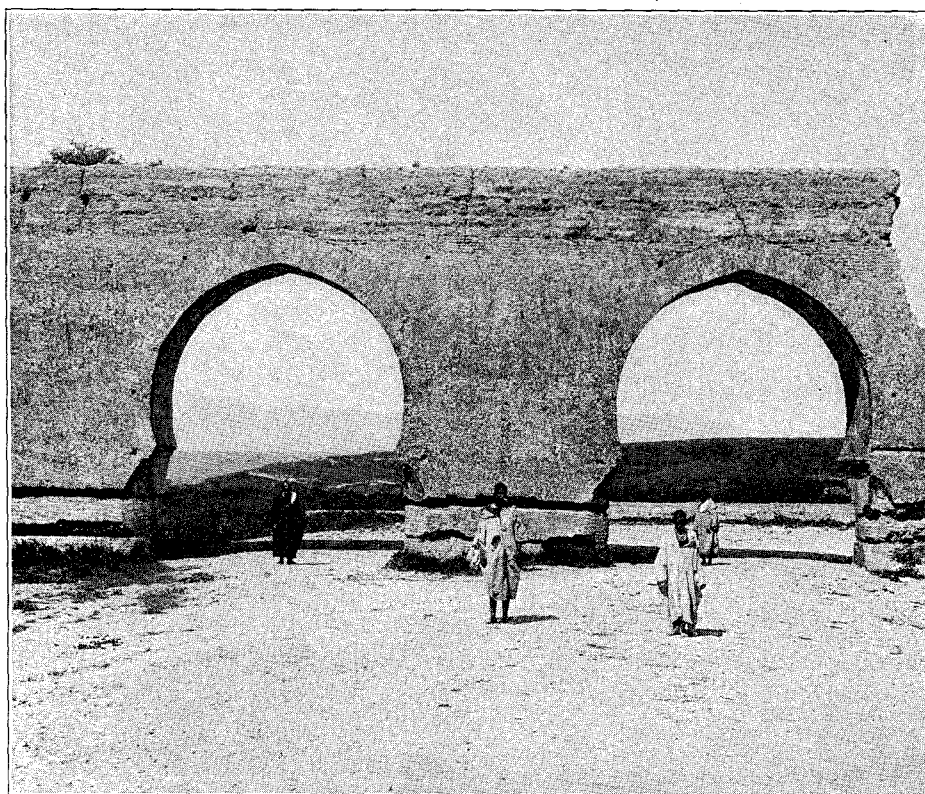
Here it was at last. Another great gateway let us, under a resplendently jewelled arch of turquoise-blue and green, into another walled emptiness of red clay; a third gate opened into still vaster vacancies, and at their farther end rose a colossal red ruin, something like the lower stories of a Roman amphitheatre that should stretch out indefinitely instead of forming a circle, or like a series of Roman aqueducts built side by side and joined into one structure. Below this indescribable ruin the arid ground sloped down to an artificial water which was surely the lake that the Sultan had made for his boating-parties; and beyond it more red earth stretched away to more walls and

\*The citadel of old Meknez.

gates, with glimpses of abandoned palaces and huge crumbling angle-towers.

The vastness, the silence, the catastrophic desolation of the place, were all the more impressive because of the relatively recent date of the buildings. As Moulay-Ismaël had dealt with Volubilis, so time had dealt with his own Meknez; and the destruction which it had taken

archæologists disagree as to the uses of the crypt of rose-flushed clay whose twenty rows of gigantic arches are so like an alignment of Roman aqueducts. Were these the vaulted granaries, or the subterranean reservoirs under the three miles of stabling which housed the twelve thousand horses? The stables, at any rate, were certainly near this spot, for the



*From a photograph from the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc.*

Meknez.

The ruins of the palace of Moulay-Ismaël.

thousands of lash-driven slaves to inflict on the stout walls of the Roman city, neglect and abandonment had here rapidly accomplished. But though the sun-baked clay of which the impatient Sultan built his pleasure-houses will not suffer comparison with the firm stones of Rome, "the high Roman fashion" is visible in the shape and outline of these ruins. What they are no one knows. In spite of Ezziani's text (written when the place was already partly destroyed)

lake adjoins the ruins as in the chronicler's description; and between it and old Meknez, behind walls within walls, lie all that remains of the fifty palaces with their cupolas, gardens and mosques and baths.

This inner region is less ruined than the mysterious vaulted structure, and one of the palaces, being still reserved for the present Sultan's use, cannot be visited; but we wandered unchallenged through desert courts, gardens of cypress and olive where dried fountains and painted

summer-houses are falling into dust, and barren spaces enclosed in long empty façades. It was all the work of an eager and imperious old man, who, to realize his dream quickly, built in perishable materials; but the design, the dimensions, the whole conception, show that he had not only heard of Versailles but had looked with his own eyes on Volubilis.

To build on such a scale, and finish the work in a single lifetime, even if the materials be malleable and the life a long one, implies a command of human labor that the other Sultan at Versailles must have envied. The imposition of the *corvée* was of course even simpler in Morocco than in France, since the material to draw on was unlimited, provided one could assert one's power over it; and for that purpose Ismaël had his Black Army, the hundred and fifty thousand disciplined legionaries who enabled him to enforce his rule over all the wild country from Algiers to Agadir.

The methods by which this army were raised and increased are worth recounting in Ezziani's words:

"A *taleb* \* of Marrakech having shown the Sultan a register containing the names of the negroes who had formed part of the army of El Mansour, Moulay-Ismaël ordered his agents to collect all that remained of these negroes and their children. . . . He also sent to the tribes of the Beni-Hasen, and into the mountains, to purchase all the negroes to be found there. Thus all that were in the whole of Moghreb were assembled, from the cities and the countryside, till not one was left, slave or free.

"These negroes were armed and clothed, and sent to Mechra Erremel (north of Meknez) where they were ordered to build themselves houses, plant gardens and remain till their children were ten years old. Then the Sultan caused all the children to be brought to him, both boys and girls. The boys were apprenticed to masons, carpenters, and other tradesmen; others were employed to make mortar. The next year they were taught to drive the mules, the third to make *adobe* for building; the fourth year they learned to ride horses bareback, the fifth they were taught to ride in the saddle

\* Learned man.

while using firearms. At the age of sixteen these boys became soldiers. They were then married to the young negresses who had meanwhile been taught cooking and washing in the Sultan's palaces—except those who were pretty, and these were given a musical education, after which each one received a wedding-dress and a marriage settlement, and was handed over to her husband.

"All the children of these couples were in due time destined for the Black Army, or for domestic service in the palaces. Every year the Sultan went to the camp at Mechra Erremel and brought back the children. The Black Army numbered one hundred and fifty thousand men, of whom part were at Erremel, part at Meknez, and the rest in the seventy-six forts which the Sultan built for them throughout his domain. May the Lord be merciful to his memory!"

Such was the army by means of which Ismaël enforced the *corvée* on his undisciplined tribes. Many thousands of lives went to the building of imperial Meknez; but his subjects would scarcely have sufficed if he had not been able to add to them twenty-five thousand Christian captives.

M. Augustin Bernard, in his admirable book on Morocco, says that the seventeenth century was "the golden age of piracy" in Morocco; and the great Ismaël was no doubt one of its chief promoters. One understands his unwillingness to come to an agreement with his great friend and competitor, Louis XIV, on the difficult subject of the ransom of Christian captives when one reads in the admiring Ezziani that it took fifty-five thousand prisoners and captives to execute his architectural conceptions.

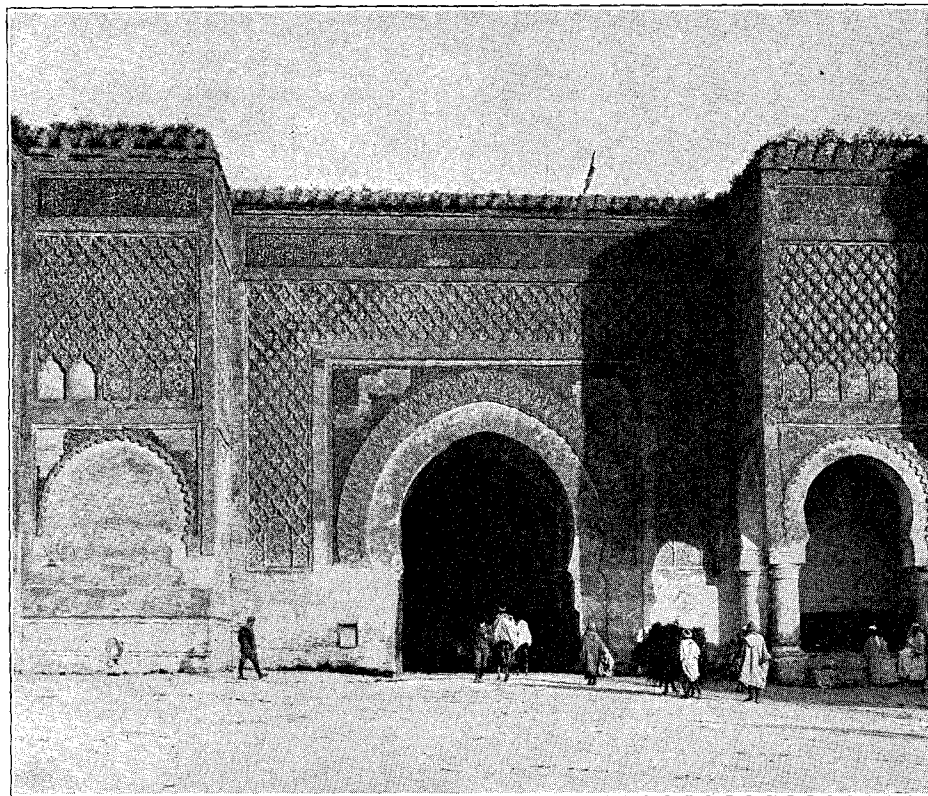
"These prisoners, by day, were occupied on various tasks; at night they were locked into subterranean dungeons. Any prisoner who died at his task was *built into the wall he was building*." (This statement is confirmed by John Windus, the English traveller who visited the court of Moulay-Ismaël in the Sultan's old age.) Many Europeans must have succumbed quickly to the heat and the lash, for the wall-builders were obliged to make each stroke in time with their neighbors, and were bastinadoed mercilessly if they broke



the rhythm; and there is little doubt that the expert artisans of France, Italy, and Spain were even dearer to the old architectural madman than the friendship of the palace-building despot across the sea.

Ezziani's chronicle dates from the first part of the nineteenth century, and is an Arab's colorless panegyric of a great Arab ruler; but John Windus, the Eng-

downward, and thin. He has lost all his teeth, and breathes short, as if his lungs were bad, coughs and spits pretty often, which never falls to the ground, men being always ready with handkerchiefs to receive it. His beard is thin and very white, his eyes seem to have been sparkling, but their vigor decayed through age, and his cheeks very much sunk in."



*From a photograph from the Service des Beaux-Arts au Maroc.*

Meknez.

Gate: "Bab-Mansour."

lishman who accompanied Commodore Stewart's embassy to Meknez in 1721, saw the imperial palaces and their builder with his own eyes, and described them with the vivacity of a foreigner struck by every contrast.

Moulay-Ismaël was then about eighty-seven years old, "a middle-sized man, who has the remains of a good face, with nothing of a negro's features, though his mother was a black. He has a high nose, which is pretty long from the eyebrows

Such was the appearance of this extraordinary man, who deceived, tortured, betrayed, assassinated, terrorized and mocked his slaves, his subjects, his women and children and his ministers like any other half-savage Arab despot, but who yet managed through his long reign to maintain a barbarous empire, to police the wilderness, and give at least an appearance of prosperity and security where all had before been chaos.

The English emissaries appear to have

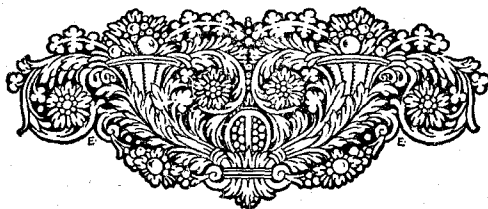
been much struck by the magnificence of his palaces, then in all the splendor of novelty, and gleaming with marbles brought from Volubilis and Salé. Windus extols in particular the sunken gardens of cypress, pomegranate and orange trees, some of them laid out seventy feet below the level of the palace-courts; the exquisite plaster fretwork; the miles of tessellated walls and pavement made in the finely patterned mosaic work of Fez; and the long terrace walk trellised with "vines and other greens" leading from the palace to the famous stables, and over which it was the Sultan's custom to drive in a chariot drawn by women and eunuchs.

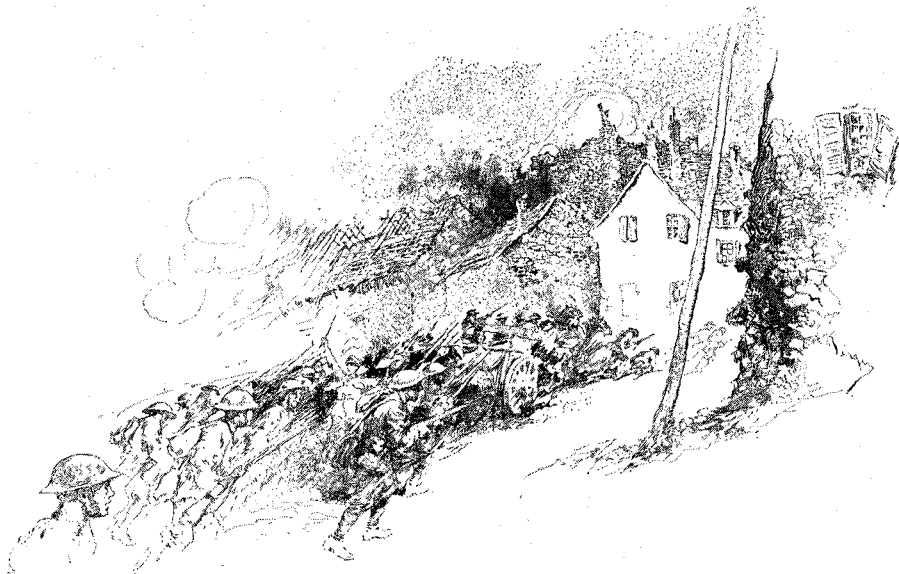
Moulay-Ismaël received the English ambassador with every show of pomp and friendship, and immediately "made him a present" of a handful of young English captives; but just as the negotiations were about to be concluded Commodore Stewart was privately advised that the Sultan had no intention of allowing the rest of the English to be ransomed. Luckily a diplomatically composed letter, addressed by the English envoy to one of the favorite wives, resulted in Ismaël's changing his mind, and the captives were finally given up, and departed with their

rescuers. As one stands in the fiery sun, among the monstrous ruins of those tragic walls, one pictures the other Christian captives pausing for a second, at the risk of death, in the rhythmic beat of their labor, to watch the little train of their companions winding away across the desert to freedom.

On the way back through the long streets that lead to the ruins we noticed, lying by the roadside, the shafts of fluted columns, blocks of marble, Roman capitals: fragments of the long loot of Salé and Volubilis. We asked how they came there, and were told that, according to a tradition still believed in the country, when the prisoners and captives who were dragging the building materials toward the palace under the blistering sun heard of the old Sultan's death, they dropped their loads with one accord and fled. At the same moment every worker on the walls flung down his trowel or hod, every slave of the palaces stopped grinding or scouring or drawing water or carrying faggots or polishing the miles of tessellated floors; so that, when the tyrant's heart stopped beating, at that very instant life ceased to circulate in the huge house he had built, and in all its members it became a carcass for his carcass.

[Mrs. Wharton's third article, "Fez," will appear in the September number.]





## THE IMAGE

By Edward H. Sothern

ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. M. BERGER

**I**T is mankind that is crucified," said my mate; "mankind! in the person of each individual, common man! Take one such from each of the warring nations. There would be twenty of them, would there not? Lay the dead, tortured, mangled bodies in a row and contemplate them, what can one feel but bitter, fierce, rebellious pity for their agony? Pity for friend and foe alike. Close your eyes, can you not see each separate wretch upon his cross? Each has given his life for an ideal, a dream, and each, perchance, has cried out in his anguish: 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'"

We were awaiting the signal to attack. It wanted but five minutes to the hour. The giant guns had been doing their work of preparation for two nights and a day. Behind the lines we had rehearsed our particular business with minute and exhaustive care. Our objective was a wrecked village beyond the enemy's third line. We had studied every street and every building until we knew them by

heart. The village church, as we had learned from our airmen, had been transformed into a fortress. We were to take and hold it at all costs. The morning was dark and misty, and as we stood in our trench, knee-deep in the slush, despite the excitement of the anticipated charge, the blood was chilled.

"Yes," said I. "I suppose the bravest sometimes weaken; but in our stronger moments we must feel that the sacrifice is not in vain. Those who come after will remember. If we win, they will have owed the victory, the redemption, to us."

"And if we fail?" said my friend.

"The manner of our going will teach them how to 'follow on.'"

My companion had but recently joined our regiment—a youngster of twenty-two, fresh from a sedentary occupation in the city of London; the toughening process of his training had not yet inured him to the horrors of war. He had been in action only once since coming to the front, and after the fury of the slaughter was past he had sobbed like a child at the thought of what he had called the