



THE MOORS OF MOROCCO.

ORDERING Algeria on the west, but far behind it in civilisation, is the Empire of Morocco—a country distant but a few days' sail from England, and separated from Spain only by the Straits of Gibraltar, yet to a great degree isolated from the rest of the world by its despotic government and fanatical religion. It is true that Tangier, which may be reached in three hours from Gibraltar, can be safely and comfortably visited. There the foreign consuls reside, and a stranger from a Christian nation may wander unmolested about the town, provided he respect the prejudices of the people and restrain his curiosity in regard to their holy places. Some other seaport towns have also a few European residents. But in the interior so bitter is the hatred commonly entertained by Moors for Christians that it is dangerous, even impossible, to travel without a special Government guard—provided by the consulate—who is responsible for the safety of his charge. The chief cities, which lie inland, are, therefore, comparatively unknown. A mixed people inhabit the empire: the shepherd Berber, the wandering Arab of the plain, the despised Jew, the enslaved Negro, and the Moor, the dominant race—but under the name Moors, the Arabs and Berbers are usually included.

The throne of Morocco is hereditary in one family of the Shereefs (or Sherifs), who are descendants of Mohammed. But the reigning Emperor, or Sultan, may choose his own successor, and usually does so; yet a son, brother, or some more distant relative of the sovereign may claim the throne, his success in obtaining it depending on popularity,

wealth, or some other favouring circumstance. When the claimant has been proclaimed Emperor by a council at Fez, the northern capital, his title is considered established, and other towns and communities are expected to send in their formal acts of submission to him. But often important distant centres resist the decision of Fez, and long civil strife follows. As the present Emperor has met with much resistance to his authority, the interior of the country has been in a turbulent condition for years.

The power of the Emperor is absolute; but he delegates a portion to bashaws, or governors of provinces, and they in turn give authority to sheiks, who collect taxes from the people; and, provided the sovereign receives as much money as he wants, he does not trouble himself as to the conduct of his officials. And, as they receive little or no compensation from the Government for their services, when the Emperor demands a certain sum from the bashaws each bashaw demands from the sheiks under him double the amount perhaps, and the sheiks in turn extort from the people twice as much as the bashaw asks. Thus, by exorbitant taxes, the common people are kept in abject poverty. Indeed, if any man, whether by avarice or prudence, amasses property, the despotic ruler of Morocco soon manages to get possession of it. The bashaws themselves are often charged with crime and imprisoned, merely to force their money from them. But the Moor loves gold, and is most unwilling to part with it.

As there are no banks in Morocco, it is a common practice to bury money, and many a man will die rather than reveal its hiding-place. Some years ago a bashaw living near Saffi employed two masons to build a treasure-vault.

While the work was in progress the men were not allowed to communicate with any one outside. A large amount of money was put into the vault and the opening closed. The men were paid and dismissed. They had gone but a short distance, however, when they were waylaid and killed by slaves sent after them by the bashaw. Thus was kept for awhile, at least, the secret of the vault.

Tangier, the principal seaport of Northern Morocco, being so near Europe, might naturally be supposed to show plainly the effects of the civilisation that touches its very shores. But improvements do not easily take root in Morocco. The Moors are contented to go on in long-accustomed ways, and look with suspicion on all innovations. Long ago Tangier fell into the hands of England as part of the dower of Catherine of Portugal, who married Charles II. But the Moors waged perpetual warfare against the English, and Tangier became such an item of expense to the British Government that the place was finally abandoned.

As seen from the sea, the houses of Tangier seem to rise one above another like stairs, for it is built on the sloping side of a promontory, and presents a very picturesque appearance. Steamer passengers are conveyed in boats as far towards the shore as the shallow waters permit, and then carried to land on the backs of semi-amphibious Moors and Jews, who wade out through the surf for this purpose. Narrow, steep, and winding are the streets of the town, with the exception of the chief one, and all are far from cleanly.

From the Kasba, or citadel, on the overlooking heights, a fine view is obtained. Some handsome mosques are seen, and the white, glittering houses, interspersed with the fresh green of the palm-tree, are thrown into full relief by the intense blue of the sea. Foreign officials in Tangier form a social circle among

themselves, and the consulate buildings are large and handsome. But in the Moorish quarter of the city the square, white, flat-roofed, windowless houses present a most cheerless aspect. Stalls for the sale of various wares line the narrow streets, and the Moor sits lazily with his goods so arranged that he can reach everything without change of position. Mules and donkeys, camels and horses, pass through even the narrowest streets, making walking an uncomfortable, if not perilous task.

Plain as is the external appearance of Moorish houses, those of the wealthier classes are luxurious within. All are constructed on the same general plan, the entrance being by a small door, through a vestibule, into a handsome court, with which all the rooms communicate, either directly or by passages and stairways. No visitor is admitted until the women are sent out of sight. Religion and custom, forbid to any man except the master, a glimpse of the faces of his household. Women of the better classes keep closely within doors, taking air and exercise upon the terraced roofs, and when, occasionally, they go out, their faces are hidden by a peculiar adjustment of the *haik*, a loose outer garment, only one eye being visible.

The master of the house receives his guests sitting cross-legged upon a mat on the floor. Divans, cushions, skins of wild animals, thick, soft, richly-coloured mats and carpets are strewn here and there with attractive negligence indicative of a luxurious indolence, in keeping with Oriental habits. The ceilings and walls are finely decorated in Arabesque patterns and brilliant colours, but the room has little furniture besides the rugs, unless it be some ornaments of Moorish pottery, or a little table, which serves to receive the tea-tray. For no matter what time of day a visitor comes, after salutations are exchanged, and he is seated, tea or coffee is served in small cups without milk.

Tea-parties are a special dissipation of Morocco, indulged in at all times of day, regardless of the effect on health or the loss of time. Indeed, time is of no value to a Moor. The tea equipage is often elegant—the teapot being of silver, and cups fine specimens of Oriental porcelain. Only the finest green tea is used by the wealthy: and at a party several courses of tea are served, each impregnated with some added flavour, often disagreeable to the novice; and unfortunately it is quite contrary to etiquette for the guest to refuse to drink of any course. A Moorish dinner-party is not less trying to the uninitiated, since there are neither chairs, table, knives, forks, or spoons. The national dish *kuskussoo*, is usually served in one central tray, into which each person thrusts his right hand, and taking some of the contents, moulds it into a ball, which he dextrously tosses into his mouth, unless, as a special mark of courtesy, the host does this for the guest. Fortunately it is the custom to wash the hands before eating. A genuine hospitality exists among the people, and having eaten with a Moor, he thereafter regards you as a friend. A little incident illustrates the Moorish idea of hospitality.

A wealthy man of Tangier received with his usual courtesy certain guests at the evening meal, lodged them comfortably at night, and chatted cheerfully at breakfast; but as they were about to depart, he asked them to remain to the funeral of his only son, to whom he was tenderly attached, who had been killed by an accident just before their arrival the night before. It was contrary to his ideas of hospitality to sadden his friends by speaking of his affliction until their visit was ended.

An abundant supply of water is a feature of Moorish towns. Frequent ablutions are enjoined as a religious duty, and every household has plenty of water for ordinary uses, but drinking-water is obtained from public fountains,

which are numerous. Many of these are held sacred, and thousands flock to them, believing that the healing virtue of the waters will cure their diseases. Around these public fountains, which generally are enclosed in archways, a motley crowd gather at all times of day, lazily waiting to fill their vessels. One charming result of the free supply of water is seen in the beautiful verdure of the gardens, which in some cases, like Morocco city, encircle almost the entire town.

Mohammedanism is the national religion of Morocco, a faith which so suits Oriental tastes and traditions that it has spread far and wide throughout the East. A few years ago it was estimated that there were no less than 280,000,000 Mohammedans in the world, an estimate, doubtless, far too high. Although mingled with the wildest superstitions and most degrading practices, the Moslem's faith has some excellent points. He adores and venerates Allah, the true God, and regards Mohammed as the mediator between God and man. Prayer, fasting, and charity are inculcated in the Koran. Five times every day a flag is unfurled from the minaret which surmounts every mosque, and a voice rings out this reminder to duty: "God is great; there is one God, and Mohammed is his prophet; come, ye faithful, come to prayer." No matter where the Mussulman is, or what he is doing, at this call, he instantly spreads his mat or haik, and with outstretched hands and face towards the East, begins his devotions. The prayer is usually some passage from the Koran, and is accompanied with many genuflexions, so that hands, head, feet, and knees touch the ground, which he kisses three times. On Friday, the Mohammedan Sabbath, prayer must be made in the mosque, but at other times, whether in the city or the desert, in the crowded market or in the solitary tent, the call to prayer is obeyed with a reverence that appears most intense.

The charity enjoined in the Koran is the giving alms, not love, the charity of our Bible, for the Mohammedan hates all religions but his own, and all people who hold another faith. The profane foot of an unbeliever is never allowed within the sacred precincts of the mosques; and generally women are excluded from them, although in one mosque at Fez there is place of prayer for women, a privilege scarcely granted elsewhere in Morocco.

Among the numerous fasts observed there is one which continues thirty days, during which time all "true believers" are forbidden to eat, drink, or smoke, from sunrise to sunset. To Orientals these privations are severe. Naturally they grow cross and quarrelsome, and the fasting season is marked by fierce fights in the streets. From dusk to dawn they may take food; and there is something painfully ludicrous in the eager, hasty feasting that instantly follows the announcement of sunset.

From time immemorial Mecca has been the sacred city of the Moslem. As the birthplace of Mohammed, it is held in supreme veneration; and once, at least, during his life, every faithful follower of the prophet—unless excused by absolute inability—is expected to make the pilgrimage thither. Many go several times. Moors who perform this journey are entitled to wear the turban, and receive the title "Hadji," which is accounted the highest of honours. Even camels and horses that have carried burdens to the sacred city, are held in veneration, and exempted from labour on their return. At a fixed time every year, thousands of devotees from all parts of Morocco assemble at Fez for the purpose of joining a caravan to Mecca. Fez is the *dépôt* for trade with the East, and also with Central Africa—trade caravans starting from there regularly for Timbuctoo, by the way of Lafilet. Mecca is doubtless the object of the pilgrim's sincere adoration; neverthe-

less he generally manages to turn his pilgrimage to some pecuniary advantage by the purchase and sale of goods along the route. Some caravans go almost the entire distance by land, and some only as far as Alexandria, while others sail from Tangier. But Alexandria is the great seaport, where gather pilgrims from all parts of the East, taking their departure thence, by various routes, to Mecca. Since the introduction of steamboats on the Red Sea, the number of pilgrims has increased. In 1873, there are said to have been about 200,000, nearly half going in caravans—some by the way of the Suez Canal, others by way of Jeddah, and other ports on the Red Sea. Even by the shortest route from Fez, this laborious pilgrimage occupies three or four months, and is inevitably attended with much discomfort and suffering.

The pilgrim's first duty when within the gates of Mecca is to visit the sacred mosque. Complicated and fatiguing ceremonies occupy his time for several days; but his devotion never flags. Some hope, by their zeal, to be cured of diseases: others feeling death near, only desire to die on holy ground. Occasionally a European, disguised as a Mohammedan, has made this pilgrimage, but it is an undertaking full of danger.

Few countries in the world have kept themselves so closed to foreigners as Morocco. But slowly despotic rule and fanaticism are yielding to civilised courtesies and modern improvements. Tangier and other seaports are now easily visited. But the Emperor and his people know that Morocco's strength lies in her inland towns, and these are still difficult of access. Quite recently, however, certain travellers have visited the sacred city of Wazan, which is about midway between Tangier and Fez, and under the protection of a letter from the Grand Shereef, made the journey safely, receiving great courtesy on the route.

Education, although in an extremely

backward state, is not wholly neglected. Boys of the better classes receive some education, but it is chiefly from the Koran. At Fez, the ancient seat of learning in Morocco, there was once a celebrated University, and all the literature of the Empire still centres there, although fanaticism has destroyed its former character. Fez, being the great centre of trade, and the northern capital, is a very important place. It is said that anciently it contained 700 mosques—now there are a hundred, or more, some of which are very handsome. There are also various manufactories, and some skilful artisans there. Morocco being famous for its fine leather, it is interesting to know that the *red* morocco is a speciality of Fez, the *yellow* of Morocco city, and the *green* of Tafilet, beyond the Atlas mountains.

An event took place in 1873 which, it was

believed, would have considerable effect towards promoting friendly intercourse between Morocco and other nations. This was the marriage of the Grand Shereef of Wazan to an English lady, Miss Keane. The Grand Shereef is the highest religious dignitary in Northern Africa: he stands next the Emperor in rank, and is received by him as an equal. Miss Keane was a governess in the family of the British Consul when the Shereef saw her, and fell in love with her. She consented to marry him on certain conditions, to which he agreed; and the ceremony was performed according to the rites of the Church of England, at the British Legation. The Grand Shereef is an intelligent and enlightened man, and he has cordially adopted many European customs which have naturally been introduced into his family.

