



POWDER PLAY IN THE SÔK, TANGIER.

A PROBLEM FOR EMPIRES:

SOME NOTES ABOUT MOROCCO.

BY S. L. BENSUSAN.

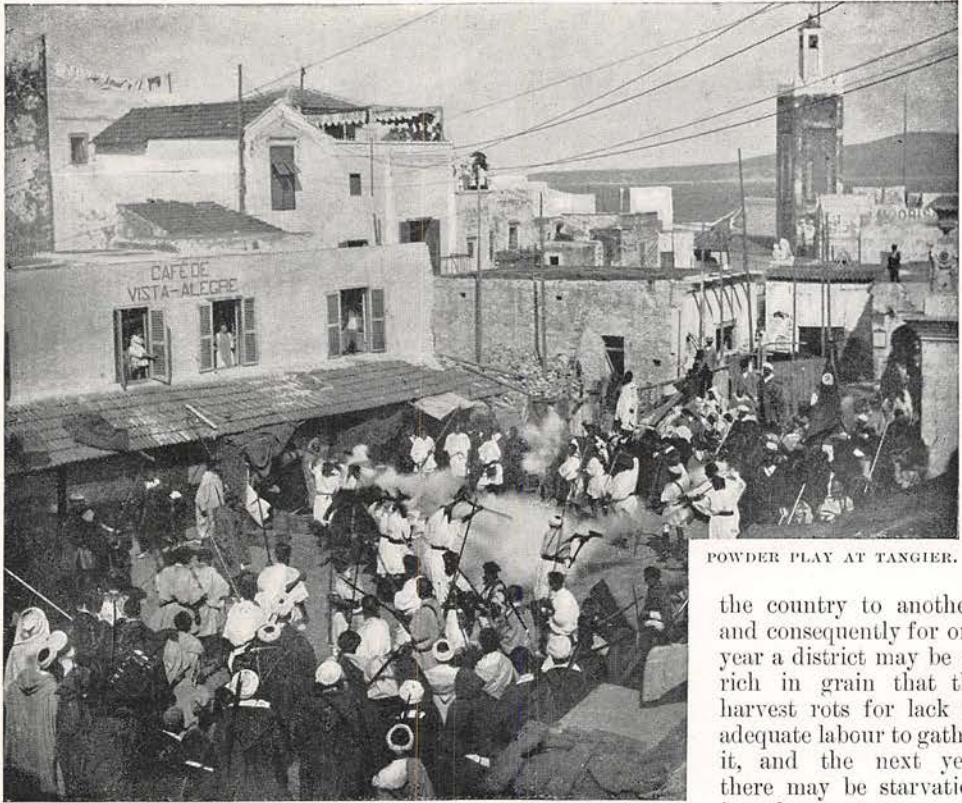
Photographs by A. Cavilla, Tangier.

IT is very surprising that in these days of universal travelling Morocco should still remain to the great mass of Englishmen an unknown land. Some few sunshine-seekers visit Tangier, a few sportsmen seek their favourite pastime in the great forest of Argan, lying beyond Mogador; the men who travel inland to Marakesh, Mequinez, Fez, Wazzan, and the delectable district of the Sus may be numbered on the fingers of one hand. And yet the country of the Moors has a fascination that stirs the heart and fires the blood, that calls forth not a few of the adventurous Englishman's best qualities; for it lies beyond the lands of conventional civilisation, and a man lives as he lists, not without some little danger, but with a compensating joy of life that the countries of the Great Powers can hardly offer.

It seems strange to pass from the grim rock on which England guards the Mediterranean Sea and to cross in three short hours to a country that seems to have re-risen from the pages of the "Arabian Nights." It is a land of arbitrary Cadis and evil-working Bashas; of a plenty that satisfies nobody, often

succeeded by famine that lays whole districts waste; a world of fighting tribes that are equally careless of life and death; a land where the rich grind the faces of the poor, and the governors grind the rich, and the Sultan or his Grand Vizier grinds the governors. As an Empire, Morocco is even more rotten than Turkey, and seemingly nearer its end, for the corruption and cruelty pass belief, intrigue is rife in every quarter, and the reins of government, so long held by a strong man with a broken constitution, are now in the hands of an untried man. "In a very few years all England will have heard of Morocco—perhaps they will hear of it too late." So said an experienced diplomat in the course of a recent conversation; and the more I pondered his words, the more clearly I realised the gravity of the crisis that will come with a change of the balance of power in that corner of Africa.

From time to time one hears reports of the vast wealth of Morocco, and people who never set a foot in the country hasten to say it has no existence save in the imagination of story-tellers. Yet the few who have travelled through the interior tell of a



POWDER PLAY AT TANGIER.

mineral wealth that bids fair to rival the Transvaal, undeveloped and unexploited—first, because the Moors believe it is against the will of Allah to break into the bowels of the earth; secondly, because the Sultans and their advisers have been quick to realise that with the advent of the mining industry the downfall of the native Government can no longer be delayed. The fate of Major Spilsbury's endeavour on behalf of the Globe Venture Syndicate, formed to trade with the Sus, will not be forgotten in this connection, and other attempts on a smaller scale have been made, with less *réclame*, but no better result. The restrictions that hamper this branch of industry find counterpart in other directions. Morocco is reckoned, throughout vast tracts of land, to be one of the most fertile countries of the world. It has corn-growing districts even richer than our valley of the Dee at home; for here the land must be served by the sweat of man's brow, while in Morocco it needs but to be tickled with a hoe in order to laugh with a harvest. There, again, a most pernicious system of restriction comes in. The Shereefian Government will not permit grain to be sent from one part of

the country to another, and consequently for one year a district may be so rich in grain that the harvest rots for lack of adequate labour to gather it, and the next year there may be starvation in the same quarter.

There is little or no storage in any of the inland towns; for, so soon as a man shows even slight signs of wealth, the Governor comes upon him for a heavy subsidy, and if he does not pay he is thrown into prison and left to starve. Industry is paralysed. In order to realise how such a state of things becomes possible, it should be noted that every governor of a Moroccan town pays the Sultan heavily for his post. It is clearly understood that he will get his capital back, together with a very large interest, from the unhappy people he is called upon to govern! Morocco is roughly parcelled out among certain tribes, all owing fealty to the Sultan. In some cases the fealty is merely nominal, in others the fealty might almost be said to exist on the other side, for the Sultan has to subsidise certain tribes to keep them quiet. When the late Sultan, Muley Hassan, took his woeful journey to Tafilet, a journey which brought about his death, he went with an army estimated at forty thousand men. These men ate whole districts clear of food; but on his return journey the Sultan had to bribe some of the fiercer tribes very heavily to keep his own hordes from annihilation.

Mr. Walter Harris, who has the honour of being the one Englishman who has made his way to Taflet, says that the expedition was only saved from annihilation on the return journey by subsidies and the expedient of keeping the Sultan's death private.

I have, perhaps, said enough to give some small general idea of life in a country whose fascination is but little affected in the eyes of Europeans by the native maladministration. It is interesting to turn to the action of the Great Powers. Though the Sultan's Court is nearly always at Marakesh or Fez, the Legations are all at Tangier. France has military missions with the Court and at Rabat, on the coast, the Court doctor is French, but the military organisation is to some extent under the supervision of Kaid Harry Maclean, C.M.G., an adventurous and gallant Englishman, who has spent a quarter of a century in the Shereefian service, and lives at Marakesh with his wife and family, in high favour with the Court. In Tangier, however, the Ambassadors are all installed; Sir Arthur Nicholson representing England; M. Révoil, aided by M. de Lamartinière, France; and Sr. Don Ojeda, who will

possibly be recalled before these lines are published, Spain. The other Powers have their Embassies there, but interest centres round the Embassies of England, France, and Spain. In any question affecting the vital interests of Morocco, England must make her voice heard, for with a hostile power holding Tangier, our Mediterranean control would be seriously threatened. Ceuta, the other Moorish port opposition on the Mediterranean, belongs to Spain, and is commanded by Gibraltar, which faces it across the Strait. No small sensation was caused by a recent report that it was to be leased to Russia, a report seemingly without foundation. So far as can be seen, England is not taking steps to extend her influence in Morocco. France, on the other hand, has been showing an extraordinary activity for some years past. Algeria lies on Morocco's eastern boundary, and by means of her railway running from Oran to Tlemcen, and turned south—under past diplomatic pressure—to Figuig, commands the city of Fez, the northern capital of Morocco. The intervening country has been mapped out by French "scientific missions,"



THE PROCESSION OF THE HOLY CARPET THROUGH TANGIER ON ITS WAY TO MECCA.

like the one that seized the Oases of Tuat in January. Moreover, there are thousands upon thousands of Moors—I fear to quote the numbers given to me, lest they sound exaggerated—who are to all intents and purposes Frenchmen. A system of protection prevails throughout Morocco—England is the only Great Power that does not grant it freely—by which the protected Moor becomes the subject of the protecting Power. In this way he avoids the extortion and cruelty of his own rulers and is doubtless reckoned upon against the day when the Moorish Empire will come to earth with a crash that will shake half Europe. France recruits soldiers for her Algerian army and

Wazzan. This town, which is of great interest, is nearly fifty miles inland from Laraiche, the first port of size on the western coast; it is the residence of the Shereefs of Wazzan, who claim direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed, and wield no little political power. The Shereefs have all accepted French protection and will doubtless throw their influence into the French scale when the proper time arrives. The young Shereef, son of the late Shereef Sidi Haj Absolom, was educated at a French military school, and the widow of the late Shereef is living in Tangier under the protection of France and in receipt of a French pension. In Wazzan, I am told,

the slave trade flourishes unchecked. It is not French policy to alter any of the existing evils; for only when the distress and discontent reach their height will she be able to act—nominally, no doubt, in the interests of civilisation.

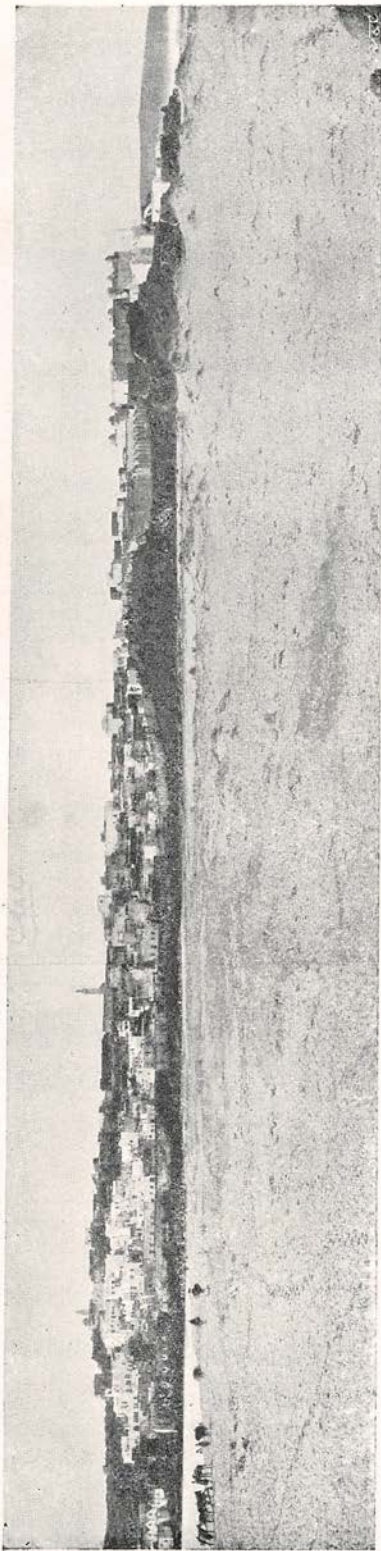
Spain's position in Morocco is peculiar. Well-informed opinion represents her as anxious to extend her influence in the country and to seek at her threshold, so to speak, a solace for the disappointments and disasters of her recent war. Ceuta is a position capable of exercising great influence in the Mediterranean, but it is not like Gibraltar, and could not be made in any degree equal to it without an expenditure that Spanish resources are quite unable to endure.

Further down the coast, where the Mediterranean is wider, Spain owns a very large expanse of territory, including Melilla, like Ceuta, a convict station. In the war with Morocco, now nearly two score years old, Spain seized Tetuan and only gave it up in consideration of an indemnity that was probably never paid; and it is quite reasonable that, when Spain can again look abroad, she should seek to extend her power in Morocco. What France will say remains to be seen. France is the tried friend, with money, who holds the bulk of Spanish securities and has a big voice in controlling Madrid's foreign policy; but at the same time Paris must never be obnoxious to Madrid, for some three hundred thousand men would be required to

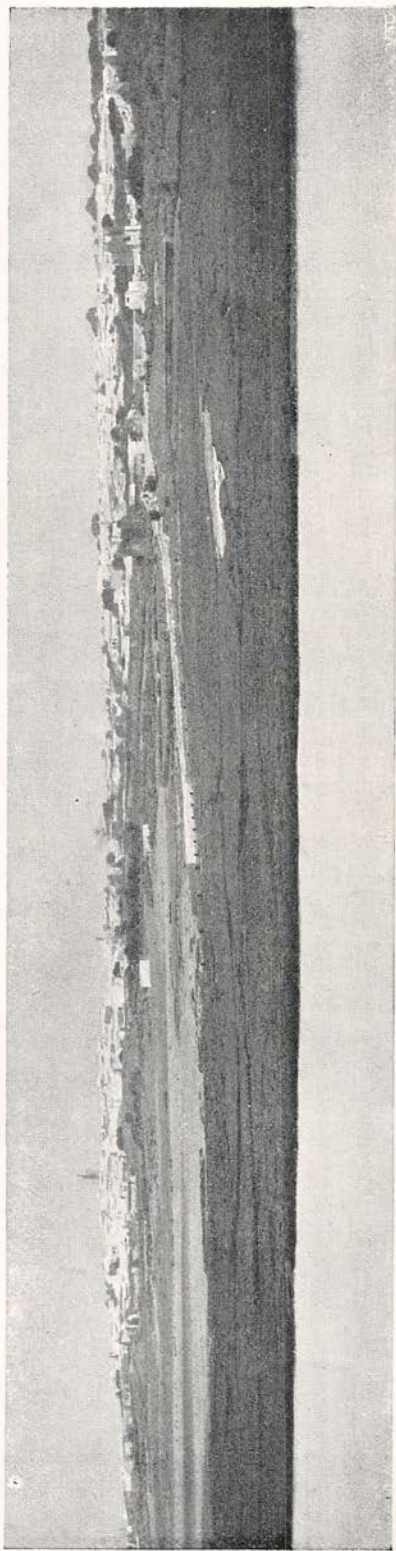


A MOORISH MEAL.

gives protection to the recruits and their families in return for one year's military service. She supplies the Shereefian army with artillerymen, and, as I have said, has two important military missions in the country, one inland, the other on the coast. These owe their creation largely to the skill and ingenuity of M. de Lamartinière, a clever diplomat who, though he is content with the nominal position of first secretary to the French Legation, exercises a very great influence in the country to which he may, sooner or later, be made Ambassador. He is a very versatile man, who has written a good book on the route to Fez, and well-informed people trace to his influence the French protection of the sacred city of



LARAICHE, THE FIRST MOORISH PORT ON THE ATLANTIC.



RABAT, STATION OF THE FOREIGN MILITARY MISSIONS.

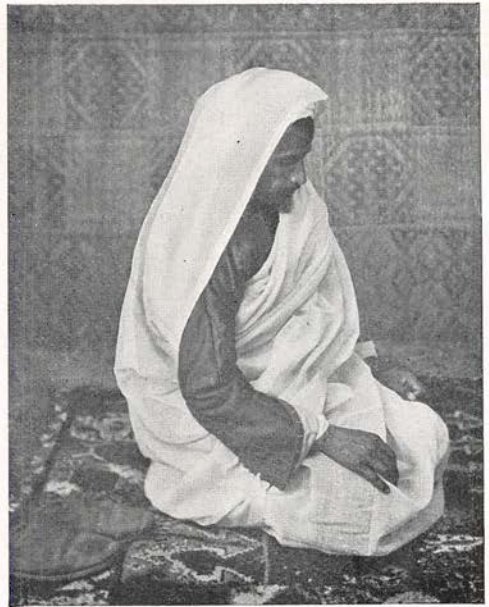
guard the Pyrenean frontier in case of a war between France and any other Great Power, unless Spain were friendly.

The other Great Powers are not active in Morocco, though they might actively resent any *coup d'état*. Russia's Embassy only came into existence eighteen months ago, at the request of France. There are no Russians in Morocco, or very few; outside the Embassy there is said to be only one Russian subject in Tangier.

Quite apart from the political problems awaiting solution, the fascination of Morocco is apparent to every man who can ride, shoot, and take care of himself. In the coast towns there is little or no danger; even in the interior it is probably less dangerous than people have said. On the coast a knowledge of Spanish will take a man anywhere; for the interior a knowledge of Arabic, most difficult of languages to speak accurately or write fluently, is imperative. The coast town natives are quite harmless, but the majority of the tribesmen from the interior, the warlike Riffians and Tuaregs, Berbers both, the Shenouahs from Abyssinia, the coal-black Soudanese from Kitchener's country, and the many other tribes of men who come through the interior with caravans bearing all kinds of merchandise, are a quarrelsome crowd.

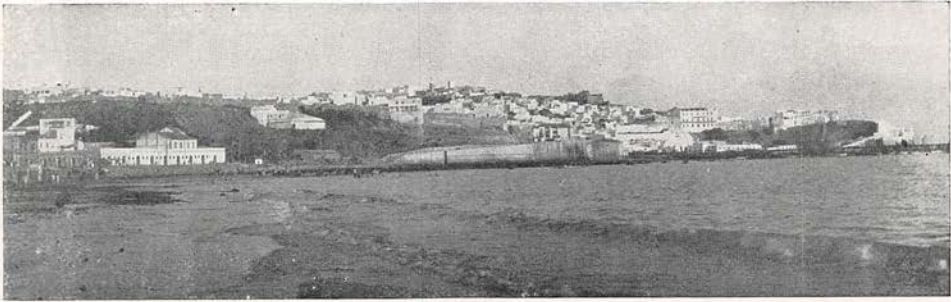


GRINDING CORN, TANGIER.



A MOOR AT HIS PRAYERS.

There is more than a strong suspicion that human merchandise finds a big place in caravans that start from the south and never approach the coast. If the Powers were not divided against themselves, these abuses would not last six months; as things are, they will endure as long as the Moroccan Empire endures in its present form. The scenes in the great markets held in all large towns are most interesting and picturesque. One spends hours among them and never knows fatigue. Moorish *cafés* and Moorish prisons, Moorish shops and Moorish street scenes, marriage and burial customs, actions at law, civil or criminal—of one and all a volume might be written without exhausting the possibilities of the subject. It is probable that Japan has been more influenced by Western ideas than Morocco; for even in Tangier, the town to which most English and American visitors come, the natives do not abate one jot of their ceremonial life; the scenes in the market-place alone would make the average Englishman believe he was a thousand miles away from the civilisation of the West. Caravans of camels are still the ships of the desert, and come to the Sök with skins of



TANGIER, FROM THE BEACH.

wild animals from the land of the B'ni M'Gild, and dates from Tafilet; the Arab story-teller yet finds a crowd to sit round him in a circle, heedless of the scorching sun, the vicious flies, and the cries of the sellers far and near, and listening entranced to stories of genii and princesses, of magic and enchantments, of love and war. The *muezzin* still calls the faithful from their bargain and sale, to stretch a piece of carpet upon the sand, turn towards Mecca, and pray devoutly. The Basha still administers what he is pleased to call justice by the gate of the Kasbah, and beyond the hills wild tribes meet and decide their differences with old flint-lock guns calculated to do most harm to those who stand behind them. A fair horse may be purchased for five pounds, though it may never be taken out of the country; fruit and vegetables are always cheap; a fowl may be bought for ninepence,

and native servants are readily procured; so that for a very few pounds per month a man may live in comfort amid surroundings whose charm becomes apparent so soon as the first sense of novelty has worn off. Trade is restricted and land is hard to buy. There are a few other disadvantages, but to all the coast ports trading steamers pay visits at short intervals, when the weather permits, while the service between Tangier and Gibraltar is daily, and Spain can be reached from Tangier and from Ceuta.

How soon will the great change come? That is the question asked on all sides, for troubles and intrigues have been dangerously on the increase in the last two years, and the watchers on the spot are conscious that the end is near. Upon the late Grand Vizier, "Abu Hamed," a man of extraordinary versatility and capacity for intrigue, who took the reins of government in his hands when

the late Sultan Muley Hassan died, the future of Morocco was thought to depend. "Abu Hamed" rose from the lowest position to be Chamberlain, and there were many intrigues against his influence; but he brought off a sudden *coup*, obtained the dismissal and downfall of the Grand Vizier and the Minister of War, took the first post himself, and gave the other to his brother. He has been to Morocco what the Dowager



MARKET-PLACE, TETUAN.

Empress has been to China, but, if report speaks truly, he was careful enough to accept French protection, thus keeping his life and liberty secure in the event of losing power as suddenly as he acquired it. The Sultan Muley Abdul Aziz is still little more than a boy; the Vizier kept him amused, and the Sultan was long content to show his interest in State affairs by inspecting any gifts of artillery that were made by foreign Powers. The Grand Vizier was a party to all the evils that make Morocco the scourge of its native population, but he saved the country from revolution and the sudden upheaval that might play directly into the hands of France. On this account it is, perhaps, unfortunate that "Abu Hamed" is dead, but at the time of writing it is impossible to predicate the political results of his death.

It is quite certain that in any questions relating to the ultimate disposition of the Moroccan Empire there will be many conflicting interests. With England the Mediterranean question is paramount, quite apart from the vast agricultural and mineral resources that must be opened in the near future. With Frenchmen there is the dream of pushing the Algerian occupation to the west until it stops on the borders of the Atlantic, and in this way establishing an African Empire not unworthy of comparison with our own. To this end France has been working assiduously for years, while other interested Powers have been quiescent. Spain's interest has been discussed, and of course no Mediterranean Power can be indifferent to the fate that awaits a country with such an extensive seaboard. While Sir

John Drummond Hay was our Minister to the Moroccan Court, English prestige was at its height. I have been told that he would call upon Sid Mohammed Torres, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, and ask as a matter of course to see the latest despatches from the Shereefian Court. Sir Charles Euan Smith made a bold attempt to develop English prestige, but was not backed up by the Home Government, and retired into private life, a disappointed man. Sir Kirby Green's tenure of office was not productive of any great developments, and of Sir Arthur Nicholson no more can be said at present than that he is very popular and is believed to have great gifts. It is likely that he will soon have occasion to show them.

Morocco has been the subject of many interesting books. The most modern are written by Messrs. R. B. Cunninghame Graham, Walter B. Harris, and Budget Meakin, and the student who wishes to learn all he can about a country that must soon loom large in European politics may be recommended to give these writers an earnest study. French writers include Pierre Loti and M. de Lamartinière, to whose book I have referred. A single magazine article cannot hope to deal adequately with any aspect of a country whose history in the present as in the past is so complicated. I have been content to write in the hope of awakening an interest against the time when everybody will be speaking about the country, and few will be acquainted with either the events that have led to the forthcoming troubles or the people and interests most concerned in them.

