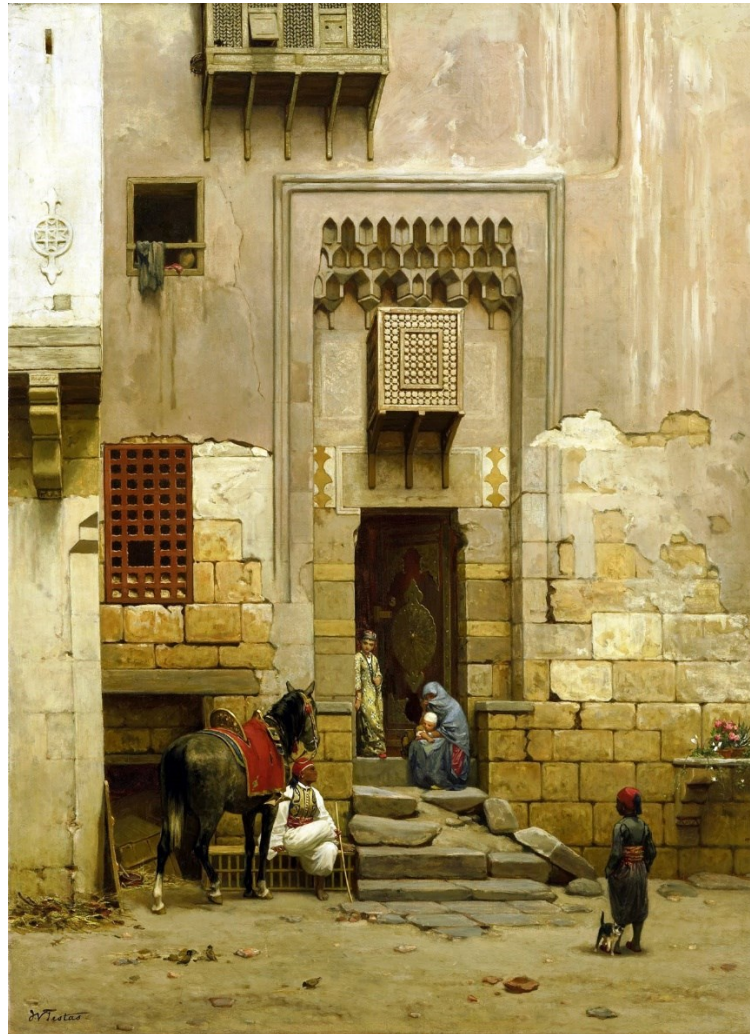


Gérard de Nerval

Travels in the Near East (Voyage en Orient, 1843)

Published with contemporaneous engravings.



The Courtyard of a house in Cairo, 1868 - 1881, Willem de Famars Testas
[Rijksmuseum](#)

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Lexicon



Ruins of the Temple of Esna, 1830, Otto Baron Howen
Rijksmuseum

*Note: The lexicon contains Romanised words found in Gérard de Nerval's French text, mostly of Arabic or Turkish usage, and with variant spellings. Those in **bold** are the spellings of words adopted in the translation, the variants chosen are wherever possible those widely-used elsewhere, and/or retrieved readily by search engines.*

*abbah, (**abaya**), a loose woollen coat, long or short, open at the front and sleeveless, worn by the Bedouins; in Turkish, fabric, jacket. A long-sleeved robe for women.*

***Abesch**, habesch, habesha, Abyssinian.*

*afrite, (in Arabic, **ifrit**, 'rebel') a kind of Medusa or Lamia, a demonic spirit.*

***Aga**, the title of an officer.*

***aioua**, yes.*

***akbar**, very great; an epithet of Allah.*

akkal, *akkalé*, holy, wise, learned, ‘spiritual’ man (or woman), among the Druze.

aliledj, **ahliledj**, *cuscuta epithymum*, or *dodder*, a sacred plant among the Druze.

anteri, a long dress.

araba, a type of canopied carriage (often pulled by oxen).

ardeb, a measure of capacity, a Cairo ardeb being 184 litres.

arif, the one who knows the chants of worship.

arouss, **arous**, wife, bride.

as-salamu alaykum: ‘peace be with you’ the appropriate response to the greeting being *wa ‘alaykumu s-salām* ‘and peace be with you’.

bahlonan, a rope-dancer.

Baïram, **Bayram**, a festival following Ramadan. This is the name given to the two main Muslim religious festivals. The lesser Bayram (*Eid al-Fitr*), which ends Ramadan, lasts three days. Seventy days or so later, the greater Bayram (*Eid al-Adha*) is celebrated.

baksheesh, **bakshish** (many variants), a tip, alms.

bakkaloum, ‘What matter!’

baklava, a cake, a kind of diamond-shaped millefeuille. A pancake made with sugar, jam, and sweet almond paste.

bamie, **bamieh**, *bamya*, **okra**, *ketmia*, a small vegetable with rough skin and tender flesh.

bandouguillah, (the pronunciation of *bunduqiyyal* in Upper Egypt), a rifle.

banian, a wretch, a poor thing.

barbarin, barbarian, an ordinary servant, generally a black African.

battal, bad.

Bedouin, *Bedaoui*, *Badawi*, man of the desert.

Benich, *benech*, a long coat worn over other clothes.

bent, **bint**, girl, woman.

besestain, *bedesten*, a large vaulted building, in a bazaar, where goods are stored, covered halls, literally a cloth market.

bey, gentleman.

bimbachi, commander, colonel.

bismillah, 'In the name of Allah'.

boğaz, gorge, defile, harbour bar.

Bohomet, ***Bahomet*** (perhaps from *bahoumid*, calf), an idol or talisman, used as identification, by the Druze.

Borgho, *borqo*, *burqu*, ***burka***, an elongated mask worn by women, a face-veil. A loose elongated covering for women.

bostangis, ***bostanjis***, gardeners belonging to the Sultan and forming a corps of guards.

bouza, a fermented drink made from millet boiled in water, similar to beer.

cachef, *kachef*, assistant to a bey in the Turkish and Egyptian armies.

cadi, *qadi*, judge.

cadine, ***qaden***, a slave who has had a child by her master, a high-born woman, the Sultan's favourite.

Cafa, *kafas*, a cage.

cafedji, ***kahwedji***, *kahwedji-bachi*, *gahwag-bachi*, the person who prepares coffee.

caffieh, *coufieh*, *couffieh*, ***keffiyeh***, *keffié*, *kouffeya*, a silk handkerchief embroidered with gold; a shawl used to cover the head; a traditional headdress of Arabs and Bedouins.

caftan, a type of dress or pelisse, lined with fur.

caïdji, boatman, rower of a caique.

caiique, a narrow boat five to seven meters long, shaped like an ice-skate, designed to go in either direction.

calam, *qalam*, calamus.

calender, a mendicant Dervish.

caliph, a successor of the Prophet.

calish, canal

cange, Nile boat, equipped with sails.

cavas, ***cavasse***, guard, policeman attached to personages; and usher attached to an institution. A doorman or embassy runner.

celebi, gentleman.

chebhazi, night-game or night-show.

cheytian, see *shintyan*.

chibouk, *chibouck*, an oriental pipe with a long wooden stem, and earthenware bowl.

cohel, *kohl*, black eye-shadow.

damascus, *damascene*, a type of sabre made in Damascus, consisting of an iron blade, with a steel cutting edge.

dabbe, a wooden lock.

day, *dai*, a Druze missionary.

dellaseh, a broker, middleman.

derwisch, *dervish*, perhaps from the Persian, meaning a beggar; more generally, a member of a brotherhood.

divan, a set of mattresses and cushions, generally raised by benches. The word may also mean a room, council chamber, or set of poems.

Dives, *div*, a species of Djinn who reigned over the world before the *Peris*. See *djinn*.

djahel, ignorant, uninitiated, profane, opposed to *oqqâl* (see *akkal*).

djerme, *djerm*, plural *djermes*, twin-sailed barque. Name of a small ship that sails along the coast of Alexandria and on the Nile.

djinn, *Jinn*, designates, in the Koran, those created by God before humankind, whose souls were born from fire.

dossah, a march, procession.

doum, a variety of palm-tree with branching trunks.

dourah, *durra*, *sorghum*, *corn*, *great millet*, Indian millet (the basis of the fellahin's diet); cereal also called *Guinea wheat*.

dragoman, an interpreter, intermediary, and guide.

durkah, the lower part of a sloping floor.

durrah, second wife, co-wife.

effendi, a gentleman, a man of distinction; also, the title of civil and religious officials.

eheb-bazi, night-theatre

eschraki, a member of a religious sect, a Dervish, an enlightened person.

essaouad, *eswed*, black, black African.

faskeyhe, a courtyard fountain.

Faqi, *faqhi*, religious teacher, schoolmaster.

fellah, peasant-farmer of the Nile Valley. Labourer. Plural *fellahin*.

feredje, a large coat with a collar worn by women in Constantinople.

feseekh, *fiseck*, salted fish.

fezzi, *fess* or *fez*: a red cap with a large braid of silk or blue wool, first made in Fez.

fil, elephant.

fine-jane, *fengan*, a small cup.

firman, an edict or decree of the Muslim sovereign; a passport for Europeans, obtained through the consulate allowing unobstructed travel.

foulouz, money.

Frangui, *Frengui*, *Frenguis*, Frank, European. Franks was the generic name for Europeans of all nationalities who lived in the Orient.

furn, an Egyptian oven.

Gawazy, a tribal name, traditional dancers, see *ghawazi*.

gellab, see *jellab*.

gelley, caked fuel, made of cattle dung and chopped straw.

ghafar, guardian

ghavasie, *ghawasie*, *ghawazy*, *ghawazi* dancers (plural form of female *gazyeh*, male *gazy*).

ghazi, gold coins of variable value, five centimes to five francs. In Arabic, this word means the conqueror; in Turkish, those who fought for Islam.

ghung, an undulating movement of the body.

ghurfa, Arabic for a room.

giaour, *yavour*, *gâvur* in Turkish, non-Muslim, infidel.

guayari, fortune-tellers.

habirah: *habbarah*, *habbara*, probably confused with *abaya*, a veil with which women cover their heads; or a loose over-garment worn by men and women.

habesch, *habesha*, see *abesch*, Abyssinian, Ethiopian.

hadji, one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

hakem, a doctor.

haïreti, a member of a Dervish sect.

hama, mother-in-law, guardian.

hamal, *hammal*, porter.

Hedjaz, western Saudi Arabia.

Hegira, *Hijhra*, the year when Muhammad transferred from Medina to Mecca.

hodja, used for *khodja*, the teacher subordinate to the imam who instructs children in schools attached to mosques.

hosch, an unpaved courtyard to a house.

Hospodar, title of the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia, vassals of the Sultan.

houva, a juggler.

hurriya, freedom

icoglan, a page in the seraglio.

iddah, period of waiting a woman undergoes after the death of her husband or divorce from him.

iman, *imam*: minister assigned to the functions of worship, including the five daily prayers.

iniglac, ‘to the right!’ (possibly for – *reglac*: ‘your foot! your leg!’), correctly **yeminak**.

irmelikalten, *virtilik altin*, a gold coin worth, at the time, one franc twenty-five centimes.

jellab, a slave trader.

juz, one of the thirty equal sections into which the Koran is divided, for reading or binding purposes.

kabibé, *habib*, *habibi*, darling, beloved.

kachef, an assistant to a bey in the Turkish and Egyptian armies.

kaddosch, sacred.

kaah, an elevated room in a harem.

Kadra Myriam, the Virgin Mary.

Kadri, *kadiri*, a Dervish of the Qadiriyya Sufi sect.

kafir, *keafir*, *kâfir*, an unbeliever, a heretic.

kahira, **qahirah**, victorious.

kahwedji, the servant who prepares coffee.

kaimakan, **kaymakam**, governor, sub-prefect in the Ottoman Empire.

kalpack, a large black sheepskin cap.

kamancheh, a stringed instrument.

kamasye, a coloured glass window, with designs.

Karagöz, an obscene Turkish puppet.

kasiaskier, **kasiasker**, *kadiulasker*, a religious leader exercising the functions of a judge, a high official (overseer of the military courts).

kavasse, guardian

kebab, mutton dish.

kekim doctor. See **hakem**.

kelb, dog.

kemal, *kamal*, perfection, maturity, fullness.

kemenieh or *rebab*, kind of viol.

kerd, **qird**, a monkey.

ketamis, barbarian troops.

khalouè, **khalwat**, a Druze temple, place of prayer.

khamiss, **qamis**, a woman's tunic.

khamsin, a violent sandy wind, a hot dry southerly.

khan, inn, caravanserai, *wikala*.

Khan, a title of the Ottoman sultans.

khanoun, *hanoun*, *khanoum*, **khanum**, the main lady of the house.

khatbé, **khatba**, see **wakil**, matchmaker.

khatibessir, *katem el serr*, secretary, keeper of secrets, spokesperson.

kahwedji-bachi, the one who makes the coffee.

khazindar, *khazendar*, treasurer, storekeeper.

khowal, **khawal**, dancer dressed as a woman, effeminate dancer.

kief, siesta, from *keyif*, hashish, well-being (particularly linked to drugs), slumber, idleness, calm, bliss.

kifen, a grave-garment, in which the corpse is clad.

kislar-aga, **kislar agha**, the head of the black eunuchs of the seraglio.

kouchouk, (*kutchuck*), dog or a wolf pup; in Egypt, a family of Turkish origin.

koulka, *koulkas*, colocase (plant), an arum with edible tuber and leaves.

k'tab (*kataba*), to write.

kumkum, *qumqum*, a long-necked bottle of scented water.

kurs, a female ornament worn on the head.

kussah-ahwas, an ornament circling the forehead.

kyaya, steward, minister of a princely child.

lailet-ul-eid, the night of the feast.

latakia, tobacco from Latakia (Syria).

ledin, opium, laudanum.

life, **laban**, milk.

locanda, inn.

loti, chorus-leader.

machallah, **mashalla**, 'As Allah willed!'

machlah, **mishlah**, bisht, aba, a long coat made of camel hair covering the entire body.

mafish! *mafeesh*, *mafisch* 'There are none', 'no', 'not at all'.

Maghrebi, a western Muslim from the Maghreb.

mabahim, entrance room.

Mahdi, the messiah and imam awaited by certain Muslim sects.

mahmal, a ceremonial passenger-less litter carried on the Hadj, with a textile cover, the *sitr*.

majlis, a gathering of people for administrative or religious purposes.

makhba, a domestic treasury.

maksourah, the grating surrounding the tomb of a saint.

Mamluk, *memlouk*, originally meant ‘owned’; the Mamluks of the 13th century were recruited from among the white slaves to form the personal guard of the Sultan.

mandarah, a room where men are received. A **makad** is similar.

Maronite, a Christian sect, from ‘mar’, lord, in Aramaic.

mastabah, a stone bench built into the wall of a house.

mech-mechs, *michmichs*, **meshmosh**, small apricots, or dried apricots.

medeneh, a minaret of a mosque.

medjnoun, madman; the hero of a poem by Jami.

Mekkadam, the Grand Sheikh of the Druze.

melbous (confusion with *meelous* or **majzub**), inspired, fanatical; inhabited by djinns.

meloukia, **mulukhiyah**, *molokheia*, melochia, the jute-mallow; a dish made with this plant.

memrack, a decorative lantern.

menseg, embroidery work.

Mèwelevis, **Mevlevis**, Dervishes, named after their founder, Mevlana, (from the Arabic *mawlana*, ‘the Master’, the poet Rumi).

mibkarah, a portable stove.

milayeh, *mélaya*, a large sheet, in which women wrap themselves.

miri, *miry*, a land tax collected for the benefit of the Ottoman Porte.

mirliva, *myrliva*, *amir léwa*, an officer, regimental leader, brigadier-general.

mirza, *myrza*, a title of a prince of royal blood, a learned man.

mishal, *meshal*, a light, torch, lantern.

mishlah, *bisht*, *aba*, cloak

moal, *mowwal*, strophic poem, nostalgic song close to elegy and romance.

moucharabi, *moucharaby*, *moucharabieh*, **moucharabia**, wooden grille, often artistically carved, placed in front of a window, and which allows one to see without being seen.

mouabazin, a theatrical farce.

moudhir, **mudir**, Turkish officer, commander, governor, administrator.

moukre, *moucre*, an adaptation of the Arabic *mokari*, a renter of horses, mules or transporter of goods, a driver of pack animals, a muleteer.

mouchir, marshal, high-ranking officer, informant.

moultezim, tax collector.

muballigh, *a preacher, a subordinate iman.*

muezzins, singers appointed to announce (*Ezzan*), from the top of minarets, the prayer of the five canonical hours of the day. They turn alternately to the four cardinal points to utter the sacramental phrase: *Alla ilaha illa-llah! Muhammad ressul Allah* (There is no God but God! Muhammad is his Prophet). This call is followed by the prayer (*Namaz*).

muggassil, a washer of the dead.

Muhammad, the Prophet.

mullakin, an ‘instructor’ of the dead.

mullah, doctor of Islamic theology, master, magistrate.

munasihi, one who gives advice, a Dervish who believes in the transmigration of souls.

mushaf, a copy of the Koran.

Muslim, literally: one who has surrendered to Allah.

musthilla, *hulla*, *mustahall*, *mustahull*, *mouhallil*, intermediary husband.

muta-darassim (*moutadarresin*), student.

mutahir, *mutaher*, purified, circumcised.

namaz, prayer (performed five times a day).

nashizah, rebellious.

naquib, an honorary official, one presiding at a wedding.

naz, **ney**, a single-pipe reed flute.

nazir, a Turkish senior official, minister, or director of an important service.

neddabih, a professional mourner.

nedji, breed of horses, from the Nedj region, in central Arabia.

nichan, **nishan**, Turkish decoration, instituted by Mahmoud II.

nopal, scientific name for the prickly pear cactus.

nukout, a gift of money made to newlyweds.

ocque, *oque*, a unit of weight; about 1.25 kg. in Egypt.

odaleuk, odalisque, concubine, servant.

okel, *okkel*, *okhel*, shopping district; a type of khan or caravanserai: a rectangular courtyard with one side opening onto the street, with rooms, passageways, shops, workshops, and storage areas on the ground floor.

oualems, *awalim*, singers and dancers (the plural of almée or *almah*).

ouled, little boy.

para, fortieth of a piastre.

pasha, Ottoman military rank equivalent to major general.

padisha, *padischa*, title of the Sultan; corresponding to that of emperor.

peri (Persian), a supernatural being descended from the fallen angels, see **djinn**.

piastre, worth twenty-five centimes.

Porte. The ‘Sublime Porte’, an epithet for the Ottoman Empire; the monumental gate of honour of the Grand Vizierate.

rahat-loukoum, a very sweet oriental confectionery.

Ramazan, Turkish form of the Arabic word **Ramadan**.

raba, a low-cost lodging house.

raya, non-Muslim Ottoman subjects.

raz, cap.

Rebab, *rabab*, viol, with one to three strings.

refik, companion in Druze Freemasonry.

reis, chief, officer; captain of a boat.

rikat, **rakat**, *rakaat*, a unit of prayer; a religious practice forming part of *Namaz* (the recitation of verses from the Koran, and bowing the body for prayer).

Roumi, European woman.

saba el-kher, *sal-kher*, *saba al-khair*, *sabah*, ‘good morning’, or ‘good evening’, ‘hello’.

saba'a, seventh.

safa, a braided hair ornament worn by women.

saic, **caique**, a Greek trading ketch employed in the Black Sea and Mediterranean.

sais, groom, escort, scout, messenger, responsible for opening the road, and protecting his master.

salem, peasant (among the Druze).

santon, holy-person, venerated because marked by the Divinity.

Saquié, **saquieh**, **saqiya** water-wheel.

sâry, **saariya**, pole, mast.

schaër, **sha'ir**, **sehaya**, **cha'i**, **rhapsodist**, poet. Plural **shuaara**.

sebbah, an Islamic rosary.

selikdar, **salahdar**, the one who carries the arms of a high personage, an attendant.

Sennar, place in the Sudan.

seradjbachi, **seragbachi**, a chief of the saddlers, higher ranked than the **sais**.

seraf, a banker

serdar, **serdap**, a commander in chief.

serdarbachi, a commander of border guards.

seriasker, **serasker**, a military commander.

shaheed, one who has died a Muslim. Literally, a witness to the faith.

sheik, literally an old man. By extension, the word designates a wise man, or a religious or civil authority.

shintyan, **cheytian**, **cheytan**, **shintyian**; loose trousers.

sirafeh, an offering of coins, a circumcised male.

sidi, master.

Siti, **sitti**, lady.

siwan, a tent.

skouradati, a trainer of performing animals, monkeys, dogs etc.

skyem, an entertainer.

Smalac, *chemalak*, the left-hand side.

sopha, *soffa*, **sofa**, a raised platform about twelve inches tall, covered with carpeting, and placed towards the rear of a room.

suffeh, a stone table on which vessels used for daily ablutions are placed.

sukkah, a food dressing.

spahi, a member of a Turkish cavalry-corps.

Surmeh, *surmeth*, surmé, sürme, eyeshadow also known as *surma*, *kajal*, *k'hol* or **kohl**, a preparation of antimony and gall-nuts, with which women blacken their eyelids and eyebrows.

takiè, **takieh**, *ta'eia*, bonnet, skullcap.

tahtabosch, a reception room.

taklid, a comedy, a farce.

taktikos, Greek skullcap embroidered with gold or silver, women's headdress from Smyrna; straw hat.

talari, twenty silver piastres.

taleb, a scholar.

talay bouckra, *taala bouckra*, 'Visit tomorrow'.

tandour, a table covered with a piece of carpet to the ground, beneath which is a stove filled with embers.

tantour, cone-shaped woman's hairstyle come headdress.

tarhah, **tarha**, a headdress, covering, an embroidered scarf.

tarabouk, *tar*, *darabokka*, *darbouka*, *darbouka*, **darbukalar**, a type of drum, made of a jug whose bottom is replaced by a stretched skin.

tarabouki, **tarabouki**, *darabouky*, player of the **tarabouk** drum.

tarbouch, a rimless hat

tarkiba, an oblong funeral monument.

tayeb, 'good', 'fine'.

tchéléby, **celebi**, a gentleman, an elegant person.

tchiboukji, *tchiboutji*, *chiboukchi*, the one who carries and maintains the **tchibouk**, *chibouk*, a long-stemmed pipe.

tekeh, *téké*, a Dervish monastery.

tob, a loose semi-transparent open dress.

ulama, a doctor of the law, a Muslim theologian. The Ulama, the Islamic religious authorities.

vizier, a generic term; a title of the ministers and principal officers of a Sultan.

Wékil, **wakil**, an envoy, ambassador; any person responsible for the interests of some person or company, a go-between, an intermediary.

wikala, a khan, or caravanserai.

wili, a devout person, saint.

wilwal, a cry of lamentation.

yafour, a dagger.

yalek, *yel'ek*, a dress with long, wide sleeves.

yamack, (*yachmack*, *yach-mack*, *yachmak*, *yasma*), **yashmak**, a muslin veil covering women's faces.

yamak, an apprentice, assistant, under-servant.

yaoudi, Jewish.

ya makbouba, *mahbouba*, 'O, dear friend', 'O beloved.'

ya ouled, *walad*, 'O, little boy.'

ya teyli, *ya leili*, **ya leyla**, 'O, night!'

yimeniyeh, a poor man, selected to attend a funeral.

yom, day, day of the week.

zaghareet, a trilling, or shrill ululation.

zalaar, a species of wild marjoram.

zebeck, *zeybeck*, irregular soldiers of Asia Minor.

zeman, the century, the age, time, destiny.

zikker, *zakkar*, a singer.

zikr, ceremony with religious songs where one remembers God (*zekra*: 'memory').

zukrah, a form of bagpipes.

zummarah, *zembr*, *zorah*, a wind instrument, fife, flute, conch-shell.

Part I: Introduction – Towards the Orient (1839-40, 1842-43)

From Paris to Cythera: Chapters 1-5



View of Villa Diodati, on Lake Geneva in Switzerland, c. 1835 - c. 1863

[Rijksmuseum](#)

Translator's Introduction

Gérard de Nerval was the pen-name of Gérard Labrunie (1808-1855), essayist, translator, poet, playwright, and travel writer. He was a major figure during the era of French Romanticism, and is best known for his novellas and poetry, especially the collection *Les Filles du feu* (*The Daughters of Fire*), which contained a set of eight novellas, including *Sylvie*, and a selection of poems including *El Desdichado*. Nerval played a major role in introducing French readers to the works of German Romantic authors, including Goethe and Schiller, initially through his prose translation of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*. His later work, merging poetry and journalism in a fictional manner, influenced Proust, particularly *Sylvie* which explored the theme of time lost and recalled. His last novella, *Aurélia ou Le Rêve et La Vie*, which drew on

his interest in the significance of dreams, also influenced André Breton and the Surrealist movement.

At college, he met Théophile Gautier, who became a lifelong friend, and later, in 1836, accompanied Gautier on a trip to Belgium. In 1840 he took over the latter's column in *La Presse*.

He began to experience serious mental health problems in 1841. In December 1842, Nerval departed for the Near East, later publishing articles deriving from his travels, and the work translated here, *Voyage en Orient*, which expanded on his journey. Between 1844 and 1847, Nerval travelled to Belgium, the Netherlands, and London, writing about his experiences. At the same time, he was writing novellas and opera librettos, and translating the poems of his friend Heinrich Heine, publishing a selection of translations in 1848. His last years were troubled by severe emotional and financial problems, and he sadly took his own life in January 1855. In 1867, Gautier wrote a touching reminiscence of him, '*La Vie de Gérard*', which was included in his *Portraits et Souvenirs Littéraires* of 1875.

It should be noted that Gérard did not traverse the complete route described in the later chapters of his Introduction to *Voyage en Orient*. In October 1839, he travelled from Paris to Vienna, passing through Geneva, but then returned to Paris in 1840. It was in December 1842, after the end of his first bout of mental problems, that he travelled from Paris, via Marseilles, to Malta, Syros, Egypt (Cairo), Lebanon (Beirut), and Turkey (Istanbul/Constantinople), then returned via Syros, Malta, Naples, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, before arriving in Marseilles in December 1843, and reaching Paris in January 1844. He failed for example to visit Cythera, and so a degree of creative freedom should be anticipated when reading the whole work. The idea of the Orient was as important to his efforts as the reality.

His own anti-hero, Gérard stumbles, intelligently and endearingly, through a Levant on the brink of change. His Cairo, Beirut, and Istanbul are rooted in the past, but increasingly touched by modernity. His main focus of interest is the various people who inhabit them, as he chases his personal dream which is fated to endlessly vanish, in accord with the lasting theme of his life and work, unrequited love. An heir to, and exponent of, Romanticism he therefore set the scene for the poetic and literary movements to follow, in which reality and disillusionment increasingly outweighed the claims of individual aspiration.

This enhanced translation of *Voyage en Orient* has been designed to offer maximum compatibility with current search engines. Among other modifications, the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to literary and other works etc, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added, here and there, to provide a reference, or clarify the meaning; while minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions, in the original text, have been eliminated from this new translation.

Chapter 1: The Route to Geneva (*addressed to a friend*)

I doubt you will find much to interest you in the peregrinations of a traveller departing Paris in mid-November. The tale is a sad enough litany of mishaps, a poor enough subject for description, a picture without horizon or landscape, where little or no use can be made of the three or four *views* of Switzerland and Italy I conceived before leaving: those melancholy reveries gazing at the sea, that vague poetry of the lakes, the alpine *studies*, and all the poetic flora of those climates beloved by the sun, that yield the bourgeoisie of Paris so much bitter regret at not being able to go further than Montreuil or Montmorency.

Indeed, the ground is everywhere covered with snow, and, on top of the snow that fell yesterday, heavy rain falls today. One traverses Melun, Montereau, and Joigny, and dines in Auxerre; there is nothing particularly piquant about this. Only imagine the imprudence of a traveller who, too capricious to agree to following the railway's well-nigh straight line, abandons himself to the vagaries of stagecoaches, all more or less full, in which he will spend the next few days! This bold fellow, abandoning, without regret, the swift diligence of Laffitte, Caillard and Co. (*general couriers whose routes traversed France at the time, in competition with the railway*), which has borne him to a well-served inn, smiles at the misfortune of the other guests, forced to leave half their dinner and drink, peacefully, with the three or four regular residents of the establishment, who still have an hour to spend at table. Content with his own ideas, he enquires further about the delights of the city, and is attracted finally to the debut of a certain Monsieur Auguste in *Buridan* (*a historical character in Dumas' play 'Le Tour de Nesle'*), performed in the choir of a church transformed into a theatre.

Next day, our man wakes at his usual hour; he has experienced two nights worth of sleep, thus, the *Générale* (*coach service*) has already departed. Why not join Laffitte, Caillard and Co. again, having done so the day before? He lunches: Laffitte passes by, and only has room on the cab.

'There is still the *Berline de Commerce* (*commercial sedan*),' says the host, eager to satisfy the traveller.

The *Berline* arrives at four o'clock, full of a company of weavers traveling to Lyon. It seems a very cheerful carriage: it sings and smokes along the road; but is already bearing two layers of travellers.

— 'There is still the *Chalonnaise*.'

— 'Which is?'

— 'The oldest coach service in France. It won't leave till five; you've time for dinner.'

The reasoning is attractive; I reserve a seat, and find myself, two hours later, in the coupé beside the driver.

The man is amiable; he was at the inn, and seemed in no hurry to leave. It is because he knew his carriage only too well!

— 'Driver, the city paving is atrocious!'

— 'Oh! Sir, don't tell me about it! A lot of the folk on the council don't get along too well any more.... They were offered English surfacing, *macadam*, wooden paving blocks, *édredons*

(*spreads*) of paving stones; well, they prefer pebbles, and rubble; whatever they can find to destroy a carriage!’

— ‘But, driver, here we are on the flat, and we’re bouncing about just as much’.

— ‘Sir, I hardly noticed... It’s because the horse is trotting.’

— ‘The horse?’

— ‘Why, yes; but we’ll harness another for the climb.’

At this thought, I shudder...

— ‘In truth, what is this *Chalonaïse*?’

— ‘Oh! It’s famous; it’s France’s premier carriage.’

— ‘The oldest?’

— ‘Exactly.’

At the next relay station, I descend, in order to examine the *Chalonaïse*, this work of great antiquity. It is fit to be exhibited in a museum, alongside flintlock rifles, stone cannon-balls, and wooden presses: the *Chalonaïse* is perhaps today the only carriage in France which lacks a suspension.

So, you’ll comprehend the remainder; resting only by hanging, momentarily, to the straps of the imperial (*luggage-rack*), taking a thirty-six-hour lesson in trotting without needing a mount, and ending by being deposited, neatly, on the pavement, in Chalon-sur-Saône, at two in the morning, amidst one of the finest storms of the season.

— ‘The steamboat leaves at five.’

— ‘Very well.’

Nothing is open. Is this truly Chalon-sur-Saône? Châlons-sur-Marne (*now Châlons-en-Champagne*), perhaps! No, indeed, it is the port of Chalon-sur-Saône, with its pebbled paths, over which you slide, pleasantly, towards the river, where two rival boats rest, side by side, waiting to compete in swiftness; one of them managed to sink its opponent quite recently. Perhaps it should be upgraded to a warship, and sent to the East.

Already the steamboat is filling with bulky tradesmen, the English, travelling salesmen, and those happy workers from the *berline*. All of them are travelling towards France’s second city (*Lyon*); but I shall disembark at Mâcon. Mâcon! I passed close to the town five years ago, at a happier time; I was heading for Italy, and the girls, in well-nigh Swiss costume, who appeared on the bridge offering monstrous bunches of grapes, were the first pretty country girls I had seen since Paris. Indeed, the Parisian has no idea of the beauty of the rural women, the female workers, as are seen in the towns of the South. Mâcon is a half-Swiss, half-southern French city, and in truth quite ugly.

I was shown Alphonse de Lamartine’s house, which is large and sombre; there is a pretty church on the hill. A glimpse of the sun came to liven for a moment the flat roofs, with their rounded tiles, and cause a few yellowed vine-leaves on the walls to fall; the promenade with its leafless trees still smiled beneath the shaft of light.

The carriage for Bourg-en-Bresse left at two; it visited every corner of Mâcon; we were soon driving slowly through the monotonous countryside of Bresse, so cheerful in summer; we arrived, at about eight o'clock, at Bourg.

Bourg deserves to be noted for its church, of the most charming architecture; Byzantine, if I divined it correctly at night, or perhaps the quasi-Renaissance style of Saint-Eustache, in Paris, that is so admired. You will kindly excuse a traveller, still recovering from the *Chalonnaise*, for not being able to resolve my doubts, being in complete darkness.

I had studied my route carefully on the map. As regards couriers, Laffitte carriages, the post-office stagecoach, in a word, according to the official route, I could have let myself be transported to Lyon, and then taken the coach for Geneva; but the road in that direction formed an enormous angle. I know Lyon well and knew nothing of Bresse. I took, as they say, the by-road... is the highway shorter?

O, Alphonse Karr! O, Jules Janin! The problem would interest you, undoubtedly; but what does that matter to me? I'm no novelist.

If the naive diary of an enthusiastic traveller has any interest for those who run the risk of becoming one, then understand that there is no direct coach from Bourg to Geneva. Take a detour of about forty-five miles to Lyon, and return on the Lyon coach for Geneva, a distance of thirty-five miles or so, to reach Pont-d'Ain, and you will solve the problem, while losing a mere ten hours.

However, it is much simpler to go from Bourg to Pont-d'Ain, and there await the coach from Lyon.

— 'You are right,' I am told, 'the coach passes at eleven o'clock; you will be there by three in the morning.'

A two-wheeler arrived at the appointed time, and, four hours later, the driver dropped me beside the main road with my luggage at my feet.

It was raining a little; the road was in darkness; I could see neither houses nor lights.

— 'Follow the road straight ahead', the driver said to me, in a kindly manner. 'About a mile further on you'll find an inn; they'll open up for you, if they're not asleep.'

And the carriage continued its journey in the direction of Lyon.

I pick up my suitcase, and hat-box.... I arrive at the designated inn; I knock loudly for an hour it seems.... But, once inside, my troubles are all forgotten....

The inn at Pont-d'Ain, is a house of plenty. Descending the stairs, the next morning, I found myself in a vast, grandiose kitchen. Poultry was turning on spits, fish were frying on the stove. A well-stocked table brought together a group of lively huntsmen. The host was a big man, and the hostess a sturdy woman, both very friendly.

I was somewhat worried about the coach for Geneva.

— 'It will pass by, dear sir,' they said, 'tomorrow, about two.'

— 'Oh! Oh, no!'

— ‘But there is the mail-coach this evening.’

— ‘The mail?’

— ‘Yes, the mail’.

— ‘Ah! Very well.’

I merely have to stroll about all day. I admire the appearance of the inn, a brick building with stone corners, dating from the time of Louis XIII. I visit the village, consisting of a single street crowded with cattle, children, and drunken villagers; it is a Sunday; and return along the banks of the Ain, a magnificent bluish river, whose swift current turns a host of mills.

At ten in the evening, the courier arrives. While he eats, I am taken, so as reserve my place, to the shed where his carriage awaits.

Surprise, surprise! It comprises a basket.

Yes, a simple basket suspended on a carriage frame, excellent for holding packages and letters; but a passenger must travel in it like any old parcel.

A tearful young lady in mourning had arrived from Grenoble in this incredible vehicle; I had to take the seat next to her.

The impossibility of finding a stable position, among the packages, necessarily confused our destinies: the lady ended up putting a stop to her tears, caused by the death of her uncle in Grenoble. She was returning to Ferney, her family’s dwelling place.

We talked of Voltaire, a good deal. We were travelling slowly, because of the continual ascents and descents. The courier below us, too disdainful of his carriage to take a seat himself, whipped the horse, who brushed the edge of the precipice from time to time.

The Rhône flowed to our right, a few hundred feet below the road; customs-posts were visible here and there among the cliffs, since the border with Savoy was on the far side of the river

From time to time, we stopped for a moment in small towns, in villages where we could only hear the cries of creatures awakened by our passage. The courier threw packages to invisible hands or paws, and then we set off again at a brisk trot behind his little horse.

Towards daybreak, we saw, from the top of the mountains, a large sheet of water, of vast size, like a sea traversing the distant horizon: it was Lake Geneva.

An hour later, we were having coffee in Ferney, while waiting for the Geneva coach.

From there, in two hours, through a charming countryside, still verdant, passing gardens and cheerful villas, I arrived in the homeland of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

It is rightly agreed that Europe today is perfectly well-known to all; a traveller can therefore only describe his itinerary, chronicle his adventures, and, if necessary, transcribe his dinner menu, as Louis XVIII did, in the most interesting itinerary ever made (*See, Louis XVIII: ‘A Narrative of the Journey to Brussels and Coblenz in 1791’*). For example, is it not of interest to know that in Geneva it is very difficult to obtain trout, and that these fish are as rare in Lake Geneva as oysters at Ostend, and carp on the Rhine? Last year, at an inn in Mannheim, I

wondered aloud at never being served carp, as I like it so much. (It should also be added that I was unable to obtain cider in Rouen, and liver pâté in Strasbourg, on the pretext that it was not the right season.)

— ‘Sir,’ replied a German, from that good town of Mannheim, ‘do you think one can fish a carp from the Rhine just like that?’

‘I was shown,’ I replied coolly, ‘at Germain Chevet’s shop in Paris, some such creatures which he claimed dwelt there.’

— ‘I am not saying, sir,’ observed the German, ‘that there are no carp in the Rhine...’

— ‘Say so, if you wish, sir; in Paris, we would call it a paradox; but, here, it may be perfectly true.’

— ‘Sir, said the German, the Rhine carp are very fine; a treat for crowned heads. We know how many there are, and the Rhine fishermen, who formed a corporation, have shared them among themselves for many a day. They know them all; and, when a fisherman meets one, he says: “Look, this is so-and-so’s carp,” and, to show his honesty returns it to the river.’

I believe the same is true of Lake Geneva’s trout. However, the cuisine is fairly good in Geneva, and the company very pleasant. Everyone speaks French perfectly, but with an accent that is somewhat reminiscent of Marseille pronunciation. The women are very pretty, and almost all possess a physiognomy that distinguishes them from others. They generally have black or brown hair; but their complexion is dazzlingly white and fine; their features are regular, their cheeks possess colour, their eyes are beautiful and calm. It seemed to me that the most beautiful were those of a certain age, or rather a settled age. Thus, their arms and shoulders were admirable, but their waists a little full. They were women whose ideas are those of Sainte-Beuve; *Laker* beauties (*The Lakers*, was Byron’s scornful epithet for the English Lake Poets); yet, if there are blue-stockings among them, they contain the loveliest of legs.

Chapter 2: The Ambassador’s Attaché

You have not yet asked me where I’m heading: do I know, myself? I wish to see places I’ve not yet seen; and then, at this time of year, there is scarcely a choice of routes; you have to take those that snow, flooding, or brigands have not blocked. (You don’t believe in brigands? Nor do I; I’ve never seen one though I’ve often imagined them.) Well, there are people here who believe in them; and the newspapers assure us that Bavaria is infested with them. But as regards the snow, we hear dreadful stories. Sometimes a guide disappears before the very eyes of the traveller, like a demon plunging beneath a trapdoor; elsewhere, a stagecoach remains submerged for seventeen days; travellers are forced to eat the horses; furthermore, an Englishman, who was seeking the Spring in Italy, was lost in the snow, and failed to be saved by a dog from the Saint-Bernard Pass, since the Théâtre de l’Ambigu-Comique (*on Boulevard du Temple, Paris*), which, as you know, is currently staging a play on such a theme, had

neglected to return them to their post. But the tales of flooding are, by far, the most terrible. I recently heard one, the circumstances of which are so odd I can't resist the urge to relate them.

A courier burdened with dispatches crossed the border in recent days, heading for Italy. He was a simple *attaché*, flattered to ride, at the State's expense, in a brand-new post-chaise, while well stocked with money and necessities; in a word, a young man in a fine position, with his valet behind, both wrapped in their cloaks.

The light was fading, the road was submerged in water, in several places; they came to a torrent more powerful than the others; the postilion hoped to cross it in the usual way; not at all, the water carried away the carriage, and the horses were obliged to swim; the postilion, keeping his head, managed to unyoke the team, but was never seen again.

The valet threw himself from his seat, swam two fathoms, and reached the bank. Meanwhile, the post-chaise, brand-new, as we said, and well-shuttered, quietly floated downriver. And, what was the *attaché* doing?... The happy youth was asleep.

However, he awoke as the carriage was buffeted. Considering the matter calmly, he judged the carriage would sink before long, hastened to remove his clothing, lowered the window which the water had not yet reached, gripped his dispatches in his teeth, and, being slender of figure, clambered out, swiftly.

Having swum bravely to shore, his valet had now gone to seek help. So, arriving on the bank, our diplomatic envoy found himself alone, and naked as our father Adam. As for the carriage, it was sailing along, far downriver.

Walking the margin for a while, the young man had the good fortune to find a Savoyard cottage, and hastened to seek refuge there. The sole inhabitants were two women, an aunt and her niece. You can imagine the cries and the signs of the cross they made when they saw this gentleman drawing near, disguised as a model at the Academy!

The *attaché* managed to explain the cause of his misadventure, and, seeing a pile of logs near the hearth, told the aunt to add them to the fire, and he would recompense her well.

— 'But how can you?' said the aunt. 'You're quite naked; you've not a penny.'

Her reasoning was unassailable. Fortunately, the servant arrived, having discovered where his master must be, and the situation was altered. The logs were added, the *attaché* wrapped himself in a blanket, and he and his servant held council.

They had no other recourse: this house was the only one within two leagues; it was therefore necessary to regain the border to seek help.

— 'You've money?' the *attaché* asked of his *Frontin* (*a stock-character, of the opéra-comique, the sly and witty servant*).

The latter rummaged in his pockets, like *Alceste's* valet (*Dubois; see Moliere's 'Le Misanthrope', Act IV, Scene IV*), bringing forth only a deck of cards, a piece of string, a button, and some small change, all soaking wet.

— ‘Sir,’ he cried, ‘an idea! I’ll wrap myself in your blanket, you take my trousers and coat. Walk vigorously, and you’ll be at A*** in four hours, and there you’ll find the good General T... who was so hospitable when we passed by.’

The attaché shuddered at the thought of donning his servant’s livery and, dressed as a valet, going off to introduce himself to the inhabitants of A***, the General, and his wife! He had seen enough performances of *Ruy Blas* (see *Hugo’s ‘Ruy Blas’ Act III, Scene IV*) to shun adopting such means.

— ‘Dear lady,’ he said to the Savoyarde, ‘I’ll to bed, and await the return of my servant, whom I’ve sent to A*** to obtain funds.’

The Savoyarde was none too happy; moreover, she and her niece slept in the only bed; However, our envoy’s diplomacy ultimately triumphed over this further obstacle. The servant left, and the master resumed, as best he could, that sleep, so rudely disturbed, of an hour before.

At daybreak he awoke to the sounds of knocking at the door. It was his valet, followed by seven lancers. The general had believed he must do no less for his young friend.... but sent no money.

The attaché leapt from the bed.

— ‘What the devil does the General want me to do with seven lancers? I’m not here to conquer Savoy!’

— ‘Why, sir,’ said the servant, ‘they’re here to retrieve the carriage.’

— ‘And where *is* the carriage?’

It was, in fact, scattered about the countryside. The torrent flowed on majestically, no trace of the vehicle remained. The Savoyards were concerned. Fortunately, our young diplomat did not lack for ideas. Dispatches in hand, he convinced the lancers of the importance of not losing an hour, and one of them agreed to lend him his uniform, and take his place in the bed, or before the fire, wrapped in the blanket, as he chose.

In the end, the attaché left for A***, the lancer remaining, as a pledge, with the Savoyards (we must hope nothing untoward resulted to trouble the harmony existing between their two governments). Reaching the town, he went off to find the General, who had difficulty recognising him dressed as a lancer.

— ‘General, I need clothes, and some funds.’

— ‘So, your carriage is lost?’ asked the General.

— ‘There’s no news yet; but give me some money, I’ll pay the locals to find it.’

— ‘Why the locals? Since you’ve lancers, who cost us nothing.’

— ‘But, General, lancers mustn’t be used so! Lend me some other clothes....’

— ‘Keep the uniform you have on; we’ve plenty in store....’

— ‘Well then, advance me some funds; I’ll return there.’

— ‘I’m sorry, my friend, I’ve nothing to offer except what the military places at your disposal....

— ‘For God’s sake, general, talk no more of your lancers!... I’ll arrange some funds in the town, but am no less obliged to you for the rest.’

— ‘At your service, my friend.’

The attaché failed to impress the town’s mayor and the notary, especially given the clothes he wore. He was forced to go to the nearest sub-prefecture, where, after many a negotiation, he obtained what he needed. The carriage was removed from the water, the lancer was relieved of his role, the Savoyards were well recompensed for their hospitality, and our diplomat left by the mail coach.

I trust he found a better carriage than the one that brought me to Ferney. Then there were the two days lost in delivering the dispatches, and who knows how many complications that might have been caused regarding the matter.

One could make a whole comedy of the tale, albeit eliminating certain details. The lancer, left there as a pledge, can’t hide in bed throughout: the young Savoyard must leave him the blanket. It would work well. Plenty of laughter; a marriage devised, and the attaché pays the dowry.

But only in the theatre are there tidy endings: reality never provides one.

Do you wish to know the attaché’s name?... It was my cousin Henri, who left Paris at the same time as I did, and was more uncomfortable in his post chaise than I was in the humble vehicles I encountered.

Deep down, these tales of misfortune terrify me; why should I not wait for spring in this good city of Geneva, where the women are so pretty, the cuisine passable, the wines are our wines of France, and I lack for nothing except, alas, fresh oysters, and carp from Lake Geneva, those which we see here being from Paris.

If I alter my resolution, I’ll write to you.

Chapter 3: Switzerland

So, I’ve reached Geneva: by what roads, alas! And in what vehicles! But, in truth, what would I have to write about, if I travelled like everyone else, in a good post-chaise or coupé, wrapped in a muffler, overcoat, and shawl, with a muff, and a footrest beneath me?... I like to sacrifice a little to chance: the accuracy of railway timetables, the precision with which steamboats arrive at a fixed hour on the day expected, hardly renders a poet, or a painter, joyful, nor even a simple archaeologist, or a mere collector of experiences such as I.

This indolent life in Geneva has completely repaired my initial fatigue. — Where shall I go? Where else could one wish to go in winter? I go to meet the Spring; I go to meet the Sun....

It blazes before my eyes midst the rainbow mists of the Orient. — The idea came to me while walking on the upper terraces of this city, which form a sort of hanging garden. The sunset view is magnificent from there.

I no longer possess the desire to amuse you with my moments of danger or misadventure, like the famous author of *The Journey to Saint-Cloud* (*Louis-Balthazar Néel, author of 'Le Voyage de Saint-Cloud par Mer et par Terre', 1748*). Yet you cannot prevent me from regretting those fine, if difficult, journeys through old France, as one finds them depicted by Cyrano de Bergerac, the Sieur d'Assoucy (*Charles Coypeau d'Assoucy*), or even the gastronomic travels of Bachaumont (*François Le Coigneux de Bachaumont*) and Chapelle (*Claude Emmanuel L'Huilier Chapelle*). Do you remember the joyful *Adventures of Baron de Foeneste* (by *Agrippa d'Aubigné*), who was careful to recover his expenses, when staying at inns, by taking, as a minimum, from his room, the towels, soap, and even the chamber-pot if it was made of tin? And, in the first chapters of *Marianne* (*'La Vie de Marianne' by Pierre de Marivaux*), what a journey the Bordeaux stagecoach made, that took three weeks to reach Paris, was overturned five or six times en route, and was attacked at least twice by thieves!

These are pleasures we no longer enjoy, a great source of interest now lost to modern traveller's tales. Once I leave France, I hope to strike such a vein again, especially in mountainous regions. But, alas, how rare is the unexpected, even in Switzerland, where people travel on foot half the time! The unexpected, that is to say a torrent which turns your carriage into a boat (let us not forget the attaché); an avalanche that buries you; a Bernese bear that comes to sniff at you as you pass by; a floe in a sea of ice, giving way beneath your feet, or perhaps (as strongly recommended), a brief encounter with brigands....

Forgive me, I wander too far astray; you no longer believe in brigands; brigands no longer exist, and you know, as well as I, that we are obliged to pay wretched people to declare themselves criminals, so that the magistrates, king's prosecutors, lawyers, and local gendarmerie have a reason for existing, and receiving their salaries, and so the galleys and prisons are still occupied. Such are the little comedies that play out, in the plain light of day, between the black robes and the jackets with holes in, and we can see by reading court papers how much invention and wit are expended there.

But, in the absence of any adventures, description at least remains to the literary tourist; he counts the stones of the monuments, the leaves in the forest; he sketches landscapes, receding views, horizons; the daguerreotype is now here, it cuts the ground from beneath him; already, in every town, we now encounter two or three such pieces of equipment, waiting only for a ray of sunlight to function; but the sun is rare in the season we are now in, and our automated landscapers are reduced to seeking it above the clouds, by engaging in perilous ascents.

For those, indeed, are the high Alps one sees on the horizon on every side. I admit I have never seen them till now. Someone claimed to show them to me, in Lyon, from the top of Fourvières; and in Nice, from the top of a mountain which dominates the city; but I had only the slightest, vaguest idea of them. So here I am facing Mont Blanc! I would like to remember the twenty lines of Delille which rendered it famous; but I only remember those which immortalise coffee:

*'And, I believe, genius, now awakening,
Drinks a ray of sunshine from every drop!'*

(Jacques Delille: 'Le Café')

And are in no way applicable! He was a most helpful poet, in times past, nailing a beautiful Alexandrine epigraph to each landscape. All nature was labelled as in a Botanical Garden. People everywhere encountered a ready-made welcome therein, like a set of pleasant New Year greetings. There are still many admirers of Delille in Geneva.

So, I sought Mont Blanc all evening; I followed the shores of the lake, I climbed the highest terraces of the city; I traversed the ramparts, not daring to ask: 'Which is Mont Blanc?' And I ended up admiring it in the form of an immense white sunlit cloud, which fulfilled the idea of it I had imagined. Sadly, while I was assessing the danger involved in planting a tricolour on the top, all the while imagining black bears padding around on the immaculate snow of its summit, my mountain suddenly lacked a base, found itself truncated and suspended in the sky, like the floating island of Laputa (*see Jonathan Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels': III, 'Voyage to the Island of Laputa'*); as for the real Mont Blanc, you understand, it made little impression on me.

But the Geneva promenade was very beautiful in the setting sun, with its views of the immense horizon, and its old lime-trees with leafless branches. The area of the city that one sees when turning to glance behind is also very tidy, presenting an amphitheatre of streets and terraces, more pleasant to look at than walk through.

I visited the theatre (*Théâtre de Neuve*), which is quite large, but appears not to be flourishing; three vaudevilles were being enacted there by a troupe of dramatic invalids, whose talent I was unable to sufficiently appreciate. Geneva has the same disadvantage Belgium has, of finding itself French without desiring to be so; these 'mock' Frances are always unfortunate, through servile deference or a pretension to individuality. Since 1830, France has given a helping hand to the one, and a kick to the other; which means that the French are scarcely liked in either place. In Geneva as in Brussels, I saw many caricatures of the French; most relate to the time of the threat of war, in 1836. There is one which represents a French light infantryman advancing upon the border, with the look of an extremely ferocious cavalryman with his sabre. On the Swiss side, a small but intrepid volunteer from Geneva is shown, who shouts at him:

*I am young, it is true,
but in souls, noble too, etc.*

I found it remarkable that these gentlemen had turned against us, like cannon, two lines by Corneille (*See 'Le Cid', Act II, Scene II*). I must admit, however, that it is less harsh than the famous caricature of the invasion of Belgium by *Fransquillons* (*French-speakers*).

Descending from the theatre towards the lake, I followed the main, Parisian-looking, street, the Rue de la Corraterie, where the most expensive shops are. The Rue du Rhône, which is at an angle with the latter, part of which enjoys the view of the port, is however the most commercial and the most lively. As for the rest, Geneva, like all the towns of the South, is paved with stone. Bitumen is appearing here and there; and, in fact, in many countries where sandstone is lacking, bitumen, of which Paris has tired so quickly, still has a bright future. Long dark passages, in ancient fashion, enable communication between the streets. The factories, which hide the end of the lake and the source of the Rhône, also grant the city an original appearance.

Shall I tell you of the new district, located on the far side of the Rhône, built wholly in the style of the Rue de Rivoli; and of the palace of the philanthropist Jean-Gabriel Eynard, countless lithographed portraits of whom you will know which were once sold for the benefit of Greeks and Africans? It is preferable to halt, in the middle of the bridge, at a level area planted with trees, where the statue of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*by James Pradier*) is located. The great man is there, draped like a Roman, in the position of Henri IV on the Pont Neuf; only, Rousseau is on foot, as befits a philosopher. He follows with his eyes the course of the Rhône, which emerges, beautifully clear and swift, from the lake – so blue, that it recalled, to the Russian Emperor Alexander, the River Neva, also blue as the sea!

The tip of Lake Geneva, nestling within the city quays, is partly covered with those ugly huts which serve as water-mills or laundry-rooms, and offers a spectacle more varied than imposing. On the other hand, when one turns one's back on the city and faces Lausanne, while the steamboat leaves the port crowded with little vessels, the view presented gives one the illusion of a wide sea. One never loses sight of the twin shores completely, but the lake cuts the horizon with an azure blade; white sails sway in the distance, and the banks fade to a violet hue, while palaces and villas show forth at intervals, as the sun rises; it is a paler image of the smiling straits of the Gulf of Naples, which one follows for so long before approaching the city. Yet, why describe the illustrious lake that Victor Hugo traversed twenty-five years after Byron? Why speak of Vevey, Clarens, Chillon, which, moreover, I failed to see? Before reaching those immortal places, the boat halts at Lausanne, and deposits me on the shore, with all my luggage, and into the arms of the customs officers. When it becomes clear that I am not importing French cigars (strictly controlled) for which Switzerland has an appetite, I am handed over to four customs agents, who wish to divide my possessions. One carries my suitcase, the other my hat, the other my umbrella, the last nothing at all. Then, they give me to understand with some difficulty, since use of the French language apparently ceases there, that I am involved in walking a long mile, forever ascending. An hour later, by treading the roughest yet pleasantest road in the world, I arrive in Lausanne, and cross the charming area that serves as a public promenade, and as a garden to the Casino.

The view from there is admirable. The lake extends to the right as far as the eye can see, sparkling in the sunlight, while to the left it seems almost like a river, lost between high

mountains, and obscured by their long shadows. Peaks of snow crown this opera perspective, while below the terrace, at one's feet, yellowing vines extend in a carpet to the edge of the lake. As an artist would say, the view is a cliché, an archetype of Swiss scenery: from decorations to watercolours, one finds it everywhere; all that is lacking are the locals in costume; but the latter only dress so when the English arrive for the season; otherwise, they are clad like you and I. Don't think Lausanne the most ridiculous city in the world. It is not so. But Lausanne is a city full of stairways; the districts are constructed in levels; the cathedral is on the seventh at least. It is a most beautiful Gothic church, spoiled and stripped today, for Protestant use, like all the cathedrals of Switzerland; magnificent on the outside, cold and bare within. When I entered, there was a queue at one of the doors, involving a certain amount of squabbling: the local *gamins* had arrived to secure their polling cards; because it seems that the sacristy acts as a branch of the municipality. I was surprised to see such little brats adorned with voting rights.

The view is even more beautiful from the belfry tower; the whole quirky town looks a little like Blois. Even the bell towers look awkward and provincial. There are a host of tin weather-vanes and pointed roofs, of a most cheerful appearance.

Though I was thinking about dining, on leaving the church I was told by all that it was not yet the hour so to do. I ended by visiting the Casino, as being the most obvious place to find a meal; there, the proprietor, accustomed to the strange whims of the English, merely smiled at my request, and proved willing to kill a chicken for me.

Not knowing how to spend the rest of the evening till the car left Berne, I settled into a café, where I found that its copies of *Le Constitutionnel* and *Le Siècle* were those from the day of my departure, which again forced me to depend on the local papers. The politics of smaller countries are most amusing, in the sense that they have the same nuances, the same divisions, the same angers, the same commonplaces as ours; it is a revolution in a teacup. Religious quarrels still create complexities that we no longer see; it appears, according to the *Premier-Lausanne* that I have before my eyes, that there are still *Straussians* in many places. The party of Strauss (*David Friedrich Strauss*), defeated in Zurich at one time, has raised its head in Lausanne; the Grand Council has struck a mighty blow. There is a certain Professor Scherr there, a declared Straussian, on whom the city bestows, as well as on the other professors, fifty gold louis, free lodging, a garden, and a supply of firewood: to punish him for an unorthodox speech, he has lost the garden, and, if he speaks again, he will lose the firewood; and so on. These temperate means are certainly more effective than a great parade of arms in Zurich, and better calculated to convince the schismatics. Formerly, they would have been treated more harshly, in a canton where John Calvin had Michael Servetus roasted *with green wood* so that his torment would last longer. Today, they are content to take away the wood supply; instead of having them burned in the public square, they are left to freeze in their houses.

I am so idle here that I soon pass from politics to the announcements. I find some of them very amusing; I would be happy to broadcast them further, but it would aid them little now. Their judicial notices are presented in a completely paternal manner; so, let me merely recommend the form of their epistles to our own investigating judges; it will reduce the number of police required, since, if criminals read the newspapers, they could not fail to be touched by such polite warnings.

The papers being none too entertaining after all, I was delighted to board the diligence, and to nestle warmly between two substantial ladies from Lausanne who were also travelling to Berne. Did I not say recently that all the women in Geneva seem forty years old? This is doubtless due to the fact that, the ladies there being generally very pretty, Paris collects them for their beauty, and only returns them to their own country when they are a little faded, and reduced.... There they remain for a few years, subject to their lost illusions, they go and admire their blue stockings in the blue lake; the vigorous school of Rousseau, Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant is still maintained there. Then, when the forty years in which they remain thirty begin to border on half a century, these beauties one day remove from Geneva to Lausanne by a gentle passage across Lake Geneva. There, the school is that of Étienne de Senancour, Barbara von Krüdener, Isabelle de Charrière, etc. which turns out fallen angels, dethroned, despondent, and distressed, to an extraordinary degree; till Balzac raises them up one day with his powerful breath. The fifty-year-old women seek to lean on our friend's cane. I simply transmit the wish to him, so as to let him know how greatly loved and longed-for he is in this country.

At last, I am departing this mystical, dreamy little version of France, which has endowed us with a whole literature and politics; I am off to savour the real Switzerland. We are passing Lake Neuchâtel on our left, which, all night long, casts its silver gleams towards us. We ascend and descend, we traverse woodlands and plains, the white serration of the Alps always shining on the horizon. At daybreak, we roll over a beautiful paved road, pass under several gates, and admire the large stone bears carved everywhere, like the bears of Bradwardine in *Waverley* (see *Walter Scott's novel, chapter VIII*): they are the insignia of Bern. I must therefore be in Bern, the most beautiful city in Switzerland.

Nothing is open. I walk along a wide street, a whole mile in length, lined with ponderous arcades which support enormous houses; here and there large square towers support vast clock-dials. This is a city where one always knows the time of day. In the centre of the pavement, a broad stream covered over with boards links a series of monumental fountains spaced about a hundred yards apart. Each is defended by a handsome sculpted knight brandishing his lance. The houses, of a rococo taste as regards architecture, are also decorated with coats of arms and their attributes: Berne has a semi-bourgeois, semi-aristocratic appearance which suits it, however, in every way. The other streets, less wide, are in more or less the same style. Descending to the left, I encounter the deeply entrenched river Aare, its bank covered in wooden huts, like Lake Geneva; There are some that display the title *Baths*, but are in no better state than the others. I am reminded of a chapter of Casanova's *Memoirs* (entitled '*Berne, La Mate*'), which claims that one is assisted there by naked attendants, chosen from among the most innocent girls of the canton. They refrain from leaving the water, out of a sense of modesty, having no other veil; but they frolic around you like Rubens' naiads (*compare Ruben's painting 'The Arrival of Marie de Médicis at Marseilles'*). I doubt, despite the attestations of more modern travellers, that this Bernese custom of the eighteenth century is still maintained. Besides, a cold bath at this time of year would be such as to destroy any feeling of pleasure.

As I return to the main street, I think about lunching, and for this purpose enter the *Auberge des Gentilshommes*, an aristocratic inn if ever there was one, decked out with coats of arms and mantling; I am told that it is not yet lunchtime: an echo of supper-time in Lausanne. I therefore decide to visit the other half of the city. The houses are still tall and heavy, the paving stones fine, the doors excellent, in short, a well-to-do city, as merchants say. The Gothic cathedral is as beautiful as that of Lausanne, but in a more severe style. A terraced walk, like all the walks in Switzerland, looks out over a vast horizon of valleys and mountains; the same river Aare I have already seen this morning also curves around this side of the town; the magnificent houses or palaces situated along this bank have terraced gardens which descend three or four levels to its rocky bed. It is a very fine sight of which one cannot tire. Once you know that Berne possesses a casino, a theatre, and many booksellers; that it is the residence of the diplomatic corps, and the palladium of the Swiss aristocracy; that only German is spoken there, and that the cuisine is rather poor, you will have learned all that is necessary, and will be in a hurry to make your way to Zurich.

Forgive me for covering so swiftly, and describing so poorly, places of such importance; but since Switzerland is so well known to you, and since I consulted in advance all the landscape paintings and all the various impressions of the travel-writers, we have no need to deviate from the road to view its curiosities.

I merely seek to observe the country's roads, the sturdiness of the carriages, and what is said, done and eaten, here and there, at the present time.

For example, I avoided asking for steak, fearing that it might have come from a bear; and having learned that, in the chalets, those *hospitable huts*, a cup of milk cost four francs, I refused to consume it. The experience of past travellers is thus invaluable: which is what should recommend this narrative to your attention.

So, having left Berne, and spent a tedious day traversing woods consisting of birch and fir-trees, adorned with mediocre chalets, and two large crowded villages with a population less beautiful than at the Opéra, you will be happy to take supper, at about eleven o'clock, at Aarau, at the house of a very pretty hostess, in a low-cut dress, wearing (out of pure kindness to you) the national costume. There, for a reasonable number of *batz* (*the batz was a coin worth four kreutzers*), you purchase a meal which lacks nothing, and which involves the true trout of the Swiss lakes and torrents, the small blue trout, striped with red, a strawberry of the animal kingdom, modest, delicate, and perfumed, which one must be careful not to confuse with the Geneva trout, which, assuming that it still exists, is nothing but a disguised salmon.

The walls of the dining room were decorated with views of Aarau, among which I noticed a depiction of the house of Heinrich Zschokke, the illustrious novelist. I was sad to finally leave that pleasant inn, where I would have liked, in many ways, to spend the night. The hostess gives one a gracious welcome, and I blushed when leaving, at slipping into her hand, the humble currency that Switzerland calls the *batz*. We will doubtless speak again of the currency, in connection with the German *kreutzer*, no less confusing to the traveller.

The uneven paving stones of Zurich woke me at five in the morning. Here was the famous city which recalled the days of William Tell by opposing the insolent David Strauss; here were

those mountains from which choruses of armed peasants descended; here is the beautiful lake which resembles that created by Eugène Cicéri (*see his set design for Fromental Halévy's 'La Juive'*). As for the rest, the place is as vulgar as possible. Except for a few old houses, decorated with serrations and convoluted sculptures, with railings and balconies of marvellous workmanship, the city fails to take advantage of its natural position. Its lake and mountains present superb views. The road leading to Lake Constance dominates this vast panorama for a long while, and the traveller's day is passed amidst the most beautifully contrasting valleys and mountains.

The landscape had already taken on a new character: offering less the tormented aspect of verdant Swabia, more the undulating gorges of the Black Forest, always immense, though cleared in parts to make way for roads and crops. Towards noon, we passed through the last Swiss town, whose main street glittered with gilded signs. It possessed a wholly German physiognomy; the houses were painted; the women were pretty; the taverns were filled with smokers and beer drinkers. Farewell, then, to Switzerland, and with scant regret. An hour later, our postilion's colours changed from blue to yellow. The rampant lion of Zähringen gleamed on the road posts, or on its field of gules, marking the border of the two countries. Now we were in the district of Constance, and already its lake sparkled in the gaps between the mountains.

Chapter 4: Lake Constance - Augsburg

Constance! A beautiful name and a most beautiful memory! The city's situation is the best in Europe, a splendid seal which unites the north of Europe with the south, west and east. Five nations come to drink from its lake, out of which the Rhine flows, already a river, as the Rhône from Lake Geneva. Constance is a little Constantinople, lying at the entrance to the immense lake, on both banks of the Rhine, as yet still at peace. One descends towards the reddish plain slowly, by way of slopes covered with those excellent vines whose produce spreads its name throughout the world; the horizon is immense, and the river, lake, and city offer a thousand marvellous aspects. Only, as one approaches the houses, one finds the cathedral somewhat less imposing than one had imagined, the houses modern, the streets, narrow as in the Middle Ages, displaying a commonplace lack of cleanliness. However, the beauty of the women amends this impression a little; they are worthy descendants of those who provided so many beautiful companions for prelates and cardinals of the Council: I mean as regards their charms; I have no cause to insult their morals.

The *Brochet's* table is really very well served. The company was amiable and brilliant that evening. I found myself seated close to a pretty English lady whose husband requested a bottle of champagne for dessert; his wife wished to dissuade him, saying that it would upset his stomach. In fact, the Englishman seemed to be in poor health. He insisted however, and the bottle was brought. Scarcely had his glass been filled, when the pretty lady seized the bottle, and offered some to her neighbours. The Englishman, persisting, asked for another; his wife

hastened to use the same means, without the invalid, who was most polite, daring to show annoyance. At the appearance of a third bottle, we were about to thank him; the Englishwoman begged us not to abandon him to his pious intention. The host finally understood her signs, and, at the request for a fourth, replied to *milord* that he was out of champagne, and those three bottles had been the last. It was high time, for there were only two of us left at the table with the lady, and our companionship was dangerously near to compromising our reason. The Englishman rose, with a cold expression, dissatisfied with having drunk only three glasses from his three bottles, and retired to bed. The host informed us that the pair were on their way to Italy, via Bregenz, to restore his health. I doubted whether his most intelligent better half would succeed so happily, in future, as regards keeping him to his diet.

Tomorrow, at five in the morning, the steamer will bear me to chilly Bavaria, and I am warned the crossing will be stormy. I would like to endure a fine tempest on Lake Constance; but it would be sad, having once escaped the abysses of the Mediterranean, to be drowned in a lake!

You will ask me why I chose not to stay a day longer in Constance, in order to see the cathedral, the council hall, the square where John Huss was burned at the stake, and so many other historical curiosities that our Englishman at the inn had admired at leisure. In truth it was because I had no wish to mar my imaginings in regard to Constance. I have told you how, in descending the mountain gorges of the Zurich canton, covered with thick forest, I had seen the town from afar, lit by a lovely sunset, amidst a vast landscape flooded with reddish rays, bordering the lake and river, like a western Istanbul; I have also told you how, on approaching, I found the city unworthy of its fame and its marvellous situation. I thought to see, I confess, the bluish cathedral, the squares with ornamented houses, the bizarre, winding streets, and all the picturesqueness of the Middle Ages with which our Opéra set designers have poetically endowed it; well, all that proved only a dream, an invention of my own: instead of Constance, imagine Pontoise, and you would be closer to the truth. Now, I feared the council hall would prove a hideous barn, the cathedral as mean inside as outside, and John Huss the victim of some country stove. Let us hasten, then, to quit Constance before daylight, and at least retain some doubt on the matter, with the hope that less strict travellers will later be able to say: 'But you passed through too swiftly! You saw nothing!'

Indeed, it is a painful experience, as one travels more widely, to lose, city by city, and country by country, all the beautiful universe one created for oneself when young, through reading, looking at pictures, and in dreams. The world that is thus created in children's heads is so rich, so beautiful, one knows not whether it is the exaggerated result of received ideas, or the memory of a previous existence and the enchanted landscapes of an unknown planet. However admirable certain aspects and certain countries may seem, there are none by which the imagination is completely amazed, and which present one with the astonishing and unheard-of. I make an exception as regards English tourists, who seem never to have seen or imagined anything at all.

The conscientious host of the *Brochet* awakened, in the dead of night, all the travellers destined to embark on the lake. The rain had stopped; but it was very windy, and we walked to the port by the light of lanterns. The boat began to raise steam; we were directed to the cabin,

and resumed our interrupted sleep on its benches. Two hours later, grey daylight penetrated the room; the waters of the lake were dark and agitated; on the left, the lake stretched to the horizon; on the right, the shore was merely a mire. We were thus constrained to the pleasures of society; few in number. The captain of the ship, a pleasant young man, conversed gallantly with two German ladies, who had come from the same hotel as I. As he was seated next to the younger one, I had no recourse but to entertain the elder, who was drinking coffee on my left. I began with a few rather well-turned sentences in German concerning the harsh temperature, and the uncertain weather.

— ‘Do you speak French?’ the German lady asked.

— ‘Yes, madam,’ I answered, a little humiliated; ‘indeed, I *also* speak French.’

We now communicated far more readily.

It must be said that the German tongue, as pronounced in various countries, presents great difficulties to a Frenchman who has only learned the language from books. In Austria, it becomes almost a whole other language, differing as much from German as Provençal does from French. What further contributes to a delay in the traveller’s education, in this regard, is that everywhere he is addressed in his own language, and involuntarily yields to that ease of use which makes his conversation more instructive to others than himself.

The storm having increased, the captain thought it necessary to assume a concerned but firm air, and departed to issue his orders, in order to reassure the ladies. This naturally led us to talk about maritime novels. The younger lady seemed very familiar with the genre, all of English or French import, Germany barely possessing a navy. We were not long in touching on Eugène Scribe and Paul de Kock. It must be confessed that, thanks to the European success of those two gentlemen, foreigners have a singular idea of Parisian society and conversation. The elderly lady spoke very well, moreover: she had seen *Les Français* in her time, as she said gaily; but the younger had a pretension to fashionable language, which sometimes led her to a strange deployment of new words.

— ‘Sir,’ she said to me, ‘know that Passau, where we live, is in no way behind in things; we have the most *ficelée* society in Bavaria. Munich is so boring at present that all the people *de la haute* visit Passau; they give parties of astonishing *chic* there! ...

Oh, Monsieur Paul de Kock! So, this is the French you teach our neighbours! But perhaps those of us who speak German *trop bien* fall into the same idiocies! I am not in such a state yet, fortunately.

‘There’s no company so good, one can’t dispense with it!’ said King Dagobert to his dogs ... as he threw them out of the window. May that ancient proverb, which I quote verbatim, serve as a means of transition between the departure of several of passengers who left us at Saint-Gall, and the picture, which I shall attempt to draw, of the entertainment our crew indulged in on deck, while waiting for the boat to resume its course towards Meersburg. The nature of it was trivial, but cheerfully conducted, and worthy of being deployed in maritime literature. There were three dogs on the steamboat. One of them, an improvident poodle, having come too close to the galley, a cabin boy took it into his head to dip his beautiful plume of a tail in the sauce. The dog resumed his perambulations; one of the others rushed after him and bit his

tail ardently. Seeing this farcical result, the third hastened to do the same to the second, then the first bit the third and there were the unfortunate animals turning in a circle without letting go, all eager to bite and furious at being bitten. 'A fine dog's tale!' as the Seigneur de Brantôme (*Pierre de Bourdeille*) might have said.... But what else is there to tell of, on crossing Lake Constance, in bad weather? The water was black as ink, the shore was everywhere flat, and the villages that passed by revealed nothing remarkable except their onion-shaped bell towers, adorned with scaly tin tiles, and bearing orbs of hard copper at their tips.

The most amusing thing about the voyage was that at each little jetty where one stops one becomes acquainted with a new nation. The Duchy of Baden, Württemberg, Bavaria, and Switzerland pose there, from time to time, as maritime powers...of fresh water. Their navies hunt down, specifically, the wretched French and Swiss newspapers which flutter about the lake under a neutral flag; there is one, rightly called *the Feuilles du Lac*, a progressive German newspaper, which, I believe, escapes the various censors only by being printed aboard, and distributed to its subscribers from boat to boat, without ever touching shore.

'The freedom of the waves!' as Byron cried (*see the opening lines of The Corsair 'O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea, our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free'*).

Turning to larboard, along the Baden shoreline, we finally saw the misty cliffs of the kingdom of Württemberg. A forest of masts, interspersed with pointed spires and bell-towers, soon announced the only port of Bavaria; Lindau, that is; further on, Austria possesses its Bregenz.

We were not subjected to quarantine; but the strict customs officers had our trunks transported to a large warehouse. While waiting for collection time, we were allowed to go and eat. It was noon: which is the hour when people still dine throughout Germany. I therefore made my way to the most visible inn, whose gilded sign shone from the midst of a bouquet of freshly cut fir-branches. The whole house was celebrating, and the numerous guests were dressed in their gala clothes. At the open windows I saw pretty girls, with gleaming hair in long blond braids, who called to others racing back from the church or market; the men sang and drank; some mountaineers intoned their plaintive calls of *tirily*.

The musicians dominated this din, while in the courtyard sheep were bleating. It was simply that I had arrived on market day. The host asked me if I would prefer to be served in my room.

— 'What do you take me for, venerable Bavarian? I never sit down to eat except at the inn table!'

And what a table! It covered all sides of the immense room. Those good people smoke while eating; the women waltz (also while eating) in the space between the seats. Moreover, there are Bohemian acrobats still, who go about the room creating human pyramids, so that one risks at any moment having a straw mattress fall onto one's plate.

Here was noise, enthusiasm, gaiety; the girls were beautiful, the peasants well-dressed; it was nothing like the miserable orgies of our *guinguettes*; wine and bitter competed for the honour of enlivening such wild joyfulness, and Homeric dishes disappeared in the blink of an eye. I therefore entered Germany under cheerful auspices; the meal done with, I walked through the city, every street and square of which was adorned with stalls and fairground booths, and

admired on all sides pretty girls from the surrounding countryside, dressed like queens, with their bonnets of gold weave cloth, and their gleaming bodices. Here at least was a country where women had not yet adopted the tasteless rags of our *grisettes*; such surprises are rare in travel writings, and will rarely appear in mine.

It was now a question of choosing a vehicle to journey to Augsburg; but I was not required to choose: it was the Royal post, everywhere the post; nowhere, on that side of the lake, were there any private diligences; no competitor whose rivalry one need fear — the horses manage the roads, the postilions manage the horses, the drivers manages the coaches, and all belongs to the State — no one is in a hurry to arrive, yet one always does arrive in the end; the river of life runs slower in these regions and takes on a majestic air. ‘Why make a fuss?’ as the old woman says in Goethe’s *Werther*.

Each of the governors of Germany therefore has a monopoly on traffic; I except the small countries of the confederation, criss-crossed by the network of feudal post stations belonging to the Prince of Thurn und Taxis. This prince, whose name you must have often heard repeated, is the *Marquis of Carabas* (*the fictional nobleman in the fairytale ‘Le Chat Botté’*) of Germany. You ask whose castle that might be? — The Prince of Thurn und Taxis — To whom those horses, carriages, newspapers, etc. belong? — The answer is the same (for he also owns newspapers in various countries, always on a *feudal basis*, notably the *Gazette des Postes* and the *Journal de Francfort*). His industrial holdings are innumerable. This prince, whose principality goes unnoticed, has the income of a powerful monarch; his host of postilions, writers and workers, seem to live happily under his laws, which are in effect over a distance of perhaps three hundred miles, north to south. Moreover, he enjoys such good fortune, that having a doctor always by his side, whom he had made one of his ministers, what do you imagine happened but lately? The doctor it was who died! The prince mourns him and does not seek another. *He* will never die; and yet they await his end so that a host of railway lines can be completed, whose execution his feudal rights hinder everywhere.

What can I tell you of the countryside I am travelling through at this moment? The road is rather monotonous: plains, mountains or rather ascents, and always, always, fir-trees; the greater part of Germany is like this; it is what renders it so green in poetic song. Let us hasten to arrive at Augsburg, a beautiful old city, such as we shall see few of in these parts, which reminds me of those fine cities on the banks of the Rhine. Augsburg deserves a river or a lake bathing its walls, yet lacks even a stream. Its cathedral is very beautiful; the streets are charming, their large houses frescoed from top to bottom by unknown Michelangelos and Caravaggios, whose works are abraded by rain every day; there are endless galleries of vast sacred or profane paintings, pierced by doors and windows, the sight of which delights the eyes of the passer-by; the majority of these paintings belong to the Rococo style of the last two centuries, and are often enhanced with dazzling sculptures and gilding. In the longest street, which is almost a lengthened square, one comes across the town hall, where foreigners are shown the famous Golden Chamber, all gleaming with gold and carved wood, and lit by an infinite number of windows. A large fountain of marble and bronze, in the Renaissance style, adorns the square next to this palace; it is one of the richest and most elegant that I have seen,

and is enough to put to shame the groups of naiads and tritons in cast-iron with which we decorate, most economically, our squares in Paris.

After admiring all these beauties and even visiting the offices of the *Augsburg Gazette*, the finest of Germany's newspapers, I desired to round off my evening with a piece of theatre. There were two posters on every street corner: one announced the incidental music written by Weber for the drama *Preciosa*, and the other a performance of *Doctor Faust* at the Marionette Theatre. I had the misplaced idea of neglecting an opportunity of seeing the naive and childish drama which inspired Goethe to write his eternal masterpiece, and instead took a stall seat at the Opera House. First, an act translated from a French vaudeville piece was played. This sort of thing opens the performance, throughout all Germany. Then, in the interval, a principal opera singer from Vienna was announced; in fact, the vaudeville done with, a door at the rear opened, and an enormous woman dressed in black appeared. She sang a verse in a superb bass voice. Could it be a man in disguise? Not at all: she sang the second verse with a soprano higher than Virginie Déjazet's. What kind of musical monster was this? In the third verse, she sang the first line in her bass voice, the second in her soprano voice, and so on. After this incredible feat, the audience's enthusiasm burst forth, the large woman was covered with flowers, and there were plenty of them. Then they began *Preciosa*. But I quickly noticed that the actors were simply declaiming the verses of the poem, while the orchestra played Weber's music in a muted tone. I hurried from the theatre, hoping to find the Marionette theatre still open, but arrived only to hear the last detonation amidst which Faust was borne away to Hell.

I, however, ultimately arrived in Munich, by train from Augsburg.

Chapter 5: A Day in Munich

In the days when people travelled less, for want of steamboats, railways, branch lines, and even simple roads, there were writers, such as Charles d'Assoucy, René Le Pays, and Cyrano de Bergerac, who rendered so-called *fabulous* voyages fashionable. These bold tourists described the moon, sun, and planets, and developed the fancies of Lucian of Samosata, Merlino Coccajo (*Teofilo Folengo*), and Rabelais. I remember reading, in one of these authors, the description of a planet that was peopled by poets. On their world, the currency was well-minted verses; one dined on an ode, and supped on a sonnet; those who had an epic poem in their portfolio disposed of a vast estate.

Another realm of this kind was inhabited only by painters; everything was governed there after their manner, and the various schools sometimes engaged in pitched battles. Moreover, all the types created by the great artists of the earth had material existence there, and one could converse with Caravaggio's *Judith*, Albrecht Durer's *Melencolia*, or Rubens' *Mary Magdalene*.

Entering Munich, one would think oneself suddenly transported to that extravagant planet. The poet-king who resides there (*Ludwig I of Bavaria*) could just as well have realised an

alternative dream, and enriched his colleagues forever like Apollo; but he loves only painters, they alone have the privilege of minting coins on their palette. Daubers flourish in this capital which he proclaims *the modern Athens*; but the poets turn away and cast upon it the curse of Minerva; there is nothing there for them.

On descending from the coach, and exiting the vast building of the Royal Post Office, you find yourself in front of the palace, on the most beautiful square in the city (*Max-Joseph-Platz*); you have to take out your binoculars and *guide-book* in haste; for the gallery is already open, paintings cover the walls, everything gleams and flickers in the open air, in broad daylight.

The new palace (*the Königsbau*) is built on the exact model of the Pitti Palace, in Florence; the theatre, after the Odeon in Rome; the post office, after some other classical model; the whole painted from top to bottom in red, green and sky blue. The square resembles those impossible stage-sets that theatres sometimes risk; a solid monument of bronze placed at the centre, and representing King Maximilian I, alone disturbs the illusion. The post office, painted in an oxblood red, called *antique red*, against which its yellow columns stand out, is brightened by frescoes in the style of Pompeii, representing equestrian subjects. The Odeon exhibits on its pediment an immense fresco in which blue and pink tones dominate, and which recalls our domestic screens of fifteen years ago; as for the king's palace, it is uniformly painted in a beautiful soft green. The fourth side of the square is occupied by houses in various hues. Following the street, which they indicate and which widens out further on, one traverses a second facade of the palace, older and more beautiful than the other, whose two immense doors are decorated with bronze statues and trophies. of a mannered but grandiose taste. Then the street widens further; bell-towers and graceful spires appear in the distance; to the left, a row of modern palazzos stretches as far as the eye can see, capable of satisfying admirers of our Rue de Rivoli; to the right, a vast building adjoining the palace, which, on the street side, is lined with brilliant boutiques and, on the garden side, presents an arcade that almost entirely encloses them. All this claims to resemble our arcades of the Palais-Royal; the cafes, the fashion merchants, the jewellers, the booksellers, are *in the Parisian style*. But a long series of frescoes representing the heroic splendour of Bavaria interspersed with views of Italy testify, from arcade to arcade, to King Ludwig's passion for painting; for all painting, it would seem. These frescoes, the guide-book admits, were created by mere students. It is a great saving of canvas; the walls bear all.

The royal garden, surrounded by these instructive galleries, is planted in a quincunx pattern and is of moderate extent; the palace facade which gives on this side, and has just been completed, presents a rather imposing colonnade; traversing the garden, one encounters another facade composed of irregular buildings, among which the *basilica* takes its place, the most successful of Munich's modern monuments.

This pretty church (*the Allerheiligen-Hofkirche*), though indeed quite small, is a real jewel; built on a Byzantine model, it sparkles inside with paintings on a gold background, executed in the same style. The interior forms a marvellous ensemble in every respect; what is not gold or painting is marble or precious wood; the visitor mars such a splendid interior, to which, in all Europe, one can compare only the Medici Chapel in Florence.

Leaving the basilica, in only a few steps, one reaches the new theatre. Since we have just circled the palace which all these buildings immediately adjoin, why not enter that vast residence? The king is just about to dine, and it is the time when visitors are admitted into the rooms where he, of course, is not.

One is first received in the *guardroom*, fully furnished with halberds, but guarded only by two sentries and as many ushers. This room is painted in grisaille, depicting bas-reliefs, columns and imaginary statues, according to the surprising and economical methods of Abel de Pujol. Seated on a bench that awaits us, we watch the comings and goings of the officers and courtiers. And they are, in fact, courtiers of stage-comedy, on the outside at least. When Eugène Scribe displays for us, at the Opéra-Comique, the interiors of German courts, the costumes and attitudes of the company are much more exact than one would think. A lady of the palace, who passed by in a hat surmounted by a bird of paradise, a ruff, a dress with tails, and wearing yellow diamonds, reminded me entirely of the soprano Marie-Julie Boulanger. Chamberlains decked out with medals seemed ready to perform some refrain of Daniel Auber's.

At last, the king's dinner service passed, escorted by two guards. It was then that we were able to enter the other rooms. I greatly pity his majesty, who denies being a constitutional monarch, for having imposed on himself the custom of admitting thirty people or so into his home twice a day. When he leaves the table, he finds his floors and furniture marked by alien footprints: what he touches has just been touched; the air is still full of impure breath; Englishmen have furtively engraved their names on the mirrors, and on the marble consoles. Who knows what has been taken, or what remains? Which reminds me that one day at the Trianon I was shown the Duke of Nemours' washbasin, next to that of Josephine, and a small piece of soap which the prince had used the last time he slept there!

I will refrain from describing in detail the interior of the Munich Palace, whose artistic riches have been enumerated in all the travel guides. What is most noteworthy is the hall decorated with frescoes, by Julius Schnorr to the designs of Peter von Cornelius; the subjects borrowed from the great Germanic epic of the *Nibelungenlied*. These paintings, though admirably composed, are of a somewhat heavy and garish execution, and the eye has difficulty in grasping their vagaries; moreover, the ceilings, loaded with gigantic and furious figures, crush the mean and poorly-decorated rooms; it seems that everywhere in Munich painting costs nothing, but marble, stone and gold are employed more sparingly. Thus, this superb palace is built of brick, to which plaster and whitewash give the appearance of hard, rough-cut stone; approach the dazzling walls, the columns of Siena and portor marble, strike them with your finger, all is stucco. As for the furniture, it is of the most excessively *Empire* taste that I know: mirrors are rare; the chandeliers and candelabras seem to belong to the adornments of a provincial club or casino; the riches are above on the ceiling, a dreamlike setting, wherein the poet-king can pursue, in passing, the magnificence of Olympus or the vague splendours of Valhalla.

I am far from wishing to belittle the beauty of the Residenz, and the Bavarian king's taste for the plastic arts is scarcely cause for ridicule; but I wonder if it is indeed true that Cornelius, when he visited Paris a few years ago, was unamazed by the riches of Versailles, and that he

spoke more or less like that Gascon who found the Louvre much resembled the stables in his father's castle; I believe him to be a man of too much taste and feeling for the story to prove accurate, especially as, if the palace of Munich displays incontestably beautiful works, it is Cornelius' talents alone that were engaged thereon, and it is for us alone to add to his glory.

The king's dinner being over, we can begin ours; there is only one restaurateur in the city, who is a Frenchman; otherwise, we must be careful to note the hours for dining. The cooking is quite good in Munich, the meat is tasty; that is a more important comment than one thinks as regards a foreign country. It is insufficiently known that half Europe is deprived of passable steaks and chops, and that veal dominates with a deplorable uniformity in certain countries. Reflect, Parisians, on the fact that Spain and Italy are absolutely lacking in butter! Perhaps, you have never paid much attention to that humble ingredient, butter. Well, when the steamboat from Naples arrives at Nice, a passenger's first thought is to head for the Café Royal on the main square, and there breakfast greedily, with butter and milk provided. Milk! Do you know how Italian ladies make their morning coffee, moreover? Those unfortunate women mix egg whites into their coffee for want of milk, and drink the result. Behold what few know!

Munich lacks oysters and fish from the sea, naturally; its wines are mediocre and expensive; but it boasts of its beer, which, indeed, has a great reputation throughout all Germany. One cannot speak of Munich beers among travellers who have only drunk Belgian and English. Faro, ale, and lambic are beers which one has no idea of, even in Paris; they are true wines of the North, which cheer and intoxicate more quickly than wine itself. The imperial and royal beers of Austria and Bavaria bear no relation to these noble drinks. Thus, they compete with tobacco for the privilege of numbing and stupefying, to a greater and greater extent, the vast body of German people.

You will forgive me this culinary *hors d'oeuvre*, which is, however, not out of place; for travellers are forever heroically hungry, and food is an undeniable *feature* of travel. The two cafés of the Royal Gallery are not very interesting, and lack French newspapers. A large reading room and a sort of casino, which is called the Museum, contain, on the other hand, most of the French papers that the censor allows to enter freely. From time to time, it is true, an edition is missed, and subscribers are left to read a notice instead, saying that a particular copy has been seized in Paris, at the post office, and in official places. This is repeated so often, that we suspect the Munich prosecutor's office of slandering that of Paris. As a result of this subterfuge, the brave Müncheners have continual doubts about the tranquility of our capital; theirs is so peaceful, so pleasant, and so open, that they fail to understand the simplest disturbance to our political and civil life; the population make no noise, the carriages roll dully on the dusty and unpaved roads. A Frenchman is recognized everywhere by the fact that he declaims, or hums, while walking; in the café, he speaks loudly; he forgets to take off his coat at the theatre; when sleeping, he rolls about constantly, and German bedmaking fails to last even ten minutes. Imagine sheets as big as towels, a blanket that cannot be tucked in, a massive eiderdown that balances above the sleeper. Well, a German goes to bed, and all remains neatly on top of him till morning; moreover, in his wisdom, he is granted charming pillows, embroidered round the edges in lace on a background of red or green silk. The poorest inn beds gleam with such innocent luxury.

Since I am talking of pillows, let me speak at once about stoves. Bavarian stoves are the most beautiful in the world; their construction is architectural, and their ornaments are, in truth, sculpture. If German stoves were well-known in Paris, we would no longer need fireplaces. They are a most beautiful piece of furniture, suitable for a bedroom as well as for a palace hall. I saw a German stove in the castle of Rastatt, enriched, I confess, with paintings and porcelain, which was estimated to be worth a hundred thousand florins. The most beautiful of these *monuments* are gradually vanishing from Germany, since princes and aristocrats are almost everywhere adopting the French fireplace; but the bourgeoisie still hold on to their old stoves, and they are right.

I can sense that you are eager to visit the Glyptothek and the Alte Pinakothek; but those museums are far from the city centre, and it takes time reach them. In desiring the indefinite enlargement of his capital, King Ludwig has taken care to build his principal monuments at vast distances from each other, at least those around which, it is hoped, houses will one day come to be grouped. The city of Munich was originally a small city, about the size of Augsburg at most; the Amphion's lyre of this poet-king has raised its walls and created superb buildings. Like Amphion, he would have moved great stones for this mighty work, but there was a lack of good building stone in his country. That is the great misfortune of this improvised capital of a kingdom in its infancy; hence the brick with painted stone edges, hence the stucco and papier-mâché imitations of stonework, hence the muddy or dusty streets, according to the season. Sandstone is lacking; the authorities hesitate between various projects submitted by the bitumen companies, the city balks at the expense, and Munich is still paved, like Hell, with good intentions only.

After many sites barely marked-out, many streets merely traced on the ground, whereon land is freely given, as in the outposts of America, to those who wish to build, one arrives at the Glyptothek, that is to say the museum of statuary. Munich is so Greek, that Athens has had to become Bavarian; at least that is what the Greeks themselves complain of.... The building is so classical in its proportions, that the steps leading to the entrance could only be climbed by titans; a small staircase hidden in a corner amends this inconvenience, which we will refrain from calling a defect of construction. Inside, the rooms are vast and practically the height of the building. They are coated everywhere with a dark madder dye, which the booklets continue to claim as *true antique red*. The ornamentation is in that Pompeian style that we weary of in our cafes, our arcades, and the decorations of the *Gymnase Dramatique*. One therefore has the right to reject our poor Parisian taste, especially when care is taken (in the authorised, and uncensored guide-book) to point out that the King of Bavaria, in the decoration of his palaces and museums, has always distanced himself from the bad taste which dominated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This seems directed against Versailles, and several allusions, which I no longer have to hand, confirm me in that thought.

The artists have indulged in the intemperate use of colour on the ceilings of the Glyptothek, which are far from meeting with my approval. The magnificent bas-reliefs by Phidias, the *Silenus*, and the pure marble sculptures by Canova, which one encounters further on, should have put to shame the pretentious compositions of the Germanic painters. We always except those of Peter von Cornelius, which were, in fact, only designed and not painted by him. He

has decorated an entire room with subjects taken from the Iliad, the drawings of which have been on view in Paris. I need not repeat what everyone knows today, that the drawings sent there as copies of frescoes of the Munich school give only a very false idea of the effect of the original paintings; there is not a traveller who has not made this same observation.

The Glyptothek contains a valuable collection of antiques and masterpieces by Canova, among which are *La Frileuse*, the *Venus Borghese* (*Venus Victrix*), a bust of Napoleon, and another of Prince Eugène. Some statues by the all-too-famous Bertel Thorwaldsen share, with those of Canova, the honour of an individual room, where their names are conflated with those of Phidias and Michelangelo. The French sculptors Pierre Puget and Jean Goujon are probably unknown in Munich.

The Alte Pinakothek, that is to say the art museum, is situated a short distance from the Glyptothek. Its exterior is much more imposing, although the Greek style presented is less pure. The two buildings are by the architect Leo von Klenze. For the Pinakothek, I have nothing but praise; the rooms are large and adorned only with paintings by old masters. An external gallery, recently opened to the public, is very gracefully painted and decorated, and the antique ornamentation has been interpreted in the Italian manner with richness and lightness. It would take too long to enumerate all the masterpieces that the Alte Pinakothek contains. Suffice it to say that the main gallery contains about sixty select paintings by Rubens, and his largest canvases. It is there that the *Last Judgment* of this master is found, to accommodate which it was necessary to raise the ceiling by ten feet. There also is the original of *The Battle of the Amazons*. After having traversed the large rooms devoted to large paintings, one returns through a series of small rooms divided in the same way, by school, where the smaller canvases are placed. This intelligent arrangement is very favourable as regards the effect of the paintings.

What remains to be seen of this city? One tires of all those *newly-built* edifices, of their Greek architecture, brightened by fresh paintings in classical style. For an Englishman, there are yet six ministries, with and without columns, to admire; a school for aristocratic girls; the library; several hospices or barracks; an obelisk the size of ours, but covered in bronze, intended to preserve the memory of thirty thousand Bavarians who lost their lives in the Russian campaign; a Romanesque church; another in the Byzantine style; another in that of the Renaissance; and then another, Gothic, one. The latter is in the suburbs; one can see its sharp spire from afar. You would scorn me for failing to visit a Gothic church built in 1839. So, I left the city, passing beneath a triumphal arch in the style of the Italian fourteenth century, decorated with a large fresco representing Bavarian battles, and a quarter of a league further on, came to the church, built, like all the other monuments, of brick edged with plaster imitating stonework. The church is small and not entirely finished inside. A crowd of little saints can be found there, statuettes in painted plaster. Papier-mâché stonework dominates; which is a great calamity. The stained-glass windows are *better* than the Gothic; since by utilising innovative processes, realised through fresh discoveries made in chemistry, it is now possible to depict large subjects on a single pane of glass instead of using small, leaded stained-glass panels; the pavement is of coloured bitumen, the wooden sculptures are perfectly done in coloured paste, the torches and crucifixes are of English metalwork, which cleans like silver. — I was able to ascend the spire, entirely built of cast iron, according to modern techniques, and which

reminded me of that of Rouen cathedral, rebuilt by Jean-Antoine Alavoine. The latter spire is a work of which the people of Rouen are very proud. We know that the old Rouen spire, a rival of those in Strasbourg and Antwerp, was lost to fire a few years ago. The municipal council of Rouen decided that it would be rebuilt in *cast iron*, which was done. Now, the spire will last longer than the church itself; it is light, economical, and incombustible; it can be dismantled by undoing the bolts, it can be resold by weight. It is only that, seen from below, the bell-tower is slight and mean; a spidery bell tower; it looks like a mast furnished with rigging; it is a skinny, emaciated spire; it spoils the view of Rouen, already spoiled to a great extent by its iron bridge and its quay lined with fine houses. — But let us return to Munich: let us not blame it too much for this sacrifice to progress. For, on the other hand, it still has the two beautiful towers of its cathedral, the only ancient monument it possesses, which can be seen from twenty miles away. At the time when that noble edifice was built, it took centuries to accomplish such works; they were made of solid stone, granite or marble; then, indeed, one could not improvise in a mere ten years a capital city that appears like an opera stage-set, ready to collapse at the sound of the stagehand's whistle. May the poet-king forgive me these harsh criticisms; before building monuments, he wrote books signed with his royal name, with the arms of Bavaria on the frontispiece; he has therefore always recognised himself as being subject to criticism.

Moreover, I accept that the old Duchy of Bavaria, which became a kingdom by the grace of Napoleon, has had the courage to make a capital out of a little old badly constructed town, while lacking stone for the masons; but even Napoleon could not have increased the population to match the excessive size of the new city; he might have simply deported families here, but they would have died of boredom; he could not have made a river out of the humble stream (*the Isar*) that flows through Munich and is tormented, in vain, by dams, embankments of wooden planks, and booms, so as to be able one day to bridge it, in the Roman style. Alas, Sovereign Lord of Bavaria, it is a great consolation to the lower orders; you are king, absolute prince, head of a monarchy ruling over several states, which you beg us not to confuse with our constitutional monarchy; but you cannot make water fill your river, or stone appear from the ground on which you build!

On entering the city, we came across several new monuments designed to immortalise Bavarian glory in all its forms. One notices above all, as I have said, an obelisk (*by Von Klenze, in the Karolinenplatz*) wholly similar to ours, but all in dark bronze like the statue of Maximilian. It is dedicated to the thirty thousand Bavarians who lost their lives in Napoleon's Russian campaign; I do not object to it.

At the theatre they were giving a vaudeville, in translation, and a performance of *Medea*, a prose melodrama, played by the soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, who is said to be the premier tragedienne in Germany. She reminded me of Joséphine Duchesnois at the end of her career. The play was a farce, full of staged battles, fire, and mayhem, and ended with a firework display with Bengal flames. Is this, then, what dramatic art, in Germany too, has been reduced to? But at least our authors of the boulevard do not choose classical subjects. A melodrama entitled *Medea* would find scant success at the Porte Saint-Martin theatre.

I spent only a day in Munich, having met, at the dining-table of the *Poule d'Or*, my excellent cousin Henri, of whom I have already spoken; I took a seat in his post-chaise, and

left for Vienna, whence I hope to reach Constantinople by descending the Danube. I saw Salzburg, where Mozart was born, and where his room is shown, at a chocolatier's. The city is a sort of sculpted rock, whose tall fortress dominates an admirable landscape. But Vienna calls to me, and will grant, I hope, a foretaste of the Orient.

Part II: Introduction – Towards the Orient (1839-40, 1842-43)

From Paris to Cythera: Chapters 6-11



Schönbrunn. The Palace Square, Vienna, 1815 - 1856, Rudolf von Alt
[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1899)

Chapter 6: Amorous Adventures in Vienna

You made me promise to send you my *sentimental* impressions of my travels, from time to time, which would interest you more, you told me, than any picturesque description. I will begin. Let Laurence Sterne (*see his 'Sentimental Journey through France and Italy'*) and Giacomo Casanova (*see his 'Memoirs'*) be of assistance to me in distracting you. I will simply advise you to reread them, while confessing that your friend has neither the style of the former nor the numerous merits of the latter, and that by parodying them he may seriously compromise the esteem in which you hold him. Yet, since it is, above all, a question of serving you by providing you with observations from which your philosophy may draw maxims, I have decided to tell you, at random, everything that happens to me, interesting or not, and day by

day if I can, in the manner of Captain James Cook, who writes that he saw a gull or a penguin on such and such a day, and only a floating tree trunk on another; or, here the sea was clear; there, muddy. But, amidst those idle signs, those changing waves, he dreamt of unknown, perfumed islands, and ended by landing, one evening, among those retreats of pure love and eternal beauty.

November 21st, 1839. —I was leaving the Leopoldstädter theatre. I must tell you first that I understand very little of the Viennese dialect. It is therefore important that I seek some pretty girl in the city who will be kind enough to acquaint me with the common tongue. Such was Byron's advice to travellers. For three days now I have been pursuing brunettes and blondes commonly called *sperls* (*sparrows: there are almost only blondes here*), through theatres, casinos and dance-halls, and generally received scant welcome from them. Yesterday, at the Leopoldstädter theatre, I was outside, having reserved a seat: a charming young blonde asked me, at the door, if the performance had started. I chatted with her, and obtained this information, that she was a maid, and that her mistress, wishing them to enter together, had told her to wait at the theatre door. I made, on receiving this news, the most exorbitant offers; I spoke of a front, a proscenium, box; I promised a splendid supper, but found myself refused with outrage. The women here are ready with such superlatives, which, however, one should not fear too much, to combat the insolent.

The girl seemed very worried by her mistress's non-arrival. She began to race along the boulevard; I followed her, taking her arm, a very beautiful one. During our travels, she spoke to me in various languages, which allowed me to grasp most of what she was saying. Here is her story. She was born in Venice, and was brought to Vienna by her mistress, who is French; so that, as she told me, smilingly, she knows no language well, but speaks a little of three of them. A concept fit for a comedy by Machiavelli or Molière! Her name is *Catarina Colassa*. I told her in good German (which she understands well, and speaks badly) that I could not bring myself to desert her, and I constructed a sort of rather pleasant madrigal. At that moment, we were in front of her house; She asked me to wait, then came back to tell me that her mistress was in fact at the theatre, and that we had to return.

Returning to the theatre door, I still offered a proscenium box; but she refused once more, and purchased an upper gallery seat at the ticket-office; I was obliged to follow, exchanging my lower gallery seat for an upper, which greatly astonished the ticket-seller. There, she gave herself over to expressions of joy on seeing her mistress in a box, beside a gentleman with a moustache. She was obliged to go and speak to her; on her return she told me the show did not amuse her, and that we would do better to go for a walk: they were performing a play by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer (*Robert der Tieger*); and, indeed, it was unamusing. So we went to the Prater, and I attempted, as you can imagine, the most complex of seductions.

My friend! Imagine her a beauty of the kind we have so often dreamed of — the ideal woman from some painting of the Italian school, the Venetian described by Marco Gozzi, *bionda e grassota* (*blonde and ample, see Gozzi's 'Memori Inutili: Book III'*), here she is, found! I regret not being well-skilled enough as an artist to sketch all her features exactly. Picture to yourself a ravishing blonde head; pale satin skin, as if it had been preserved under glass; the noblest features, an aquiline nose, high forehead, cherry-red lips; then a long, sleek

pigeon's neck, encircled by a pearl necklace; and firm white shoulders, implying the strength of Hercules yet the slenderness and charm of a two-year-old child. I explained to this beauty that she pleased me, above all, because she was, so to speak, *Austro-Venetian*, and that she realised in herself alone the whole Holy Roman Empire, which compliment seemed to move her but little.

I led her back to the theatre through a somewhat tangled web of streets. As I did not know the address where I might find her again, she was kind enough to write it down, by the light of a street lamp — and I enclose it for you to show you that it was no easier to decipher her writing than her speech. I am afraid that these characters are not in any known language; so, you'll see that I've traced a map in the margin so as to recognise her door the more surely.

Now, here is the sequel to my adventure. She had arranged to meet me in the street at noon: I arrived early to stand guard in front of the sacred dwelling, number 189. As no one descended, I ascended. I found an old woman on the landing, cooking on a large stove, and, as *an older woman usually announces one to a younger one*, I spoke to her; she smiled and made me wait. Five minutes later, the beautiful blonde appeared at the door and asked me to enter. It was a large room; she was having lunch with her mistress and asked me to sit behind her on a chair. The lady turned round: she was a tall, bony young person, who asked me, in French, my name, my intentions and all sorts of details; then said to me:

— 'That's all fine; but I need this young lady till five today; after that, she is free for the evening.'

The pretty blonde walked me out, smilingly, and said:

— 'At five o'clock'.

Here I am; I write to you from a café where I wait for the hour to strike; though all this seems very much like a shepherd mooning over his shepherdess.

November 22nd. — But that's another matter! Let me resume the thread of events. Yesterday, at five, Catarina, or rather Katty, as she is called at home, came to see me in the *kaffeehaus* where I awaited her. She was very charming, with a pretty silk headdress covering her beautiful hair; — hats here are worn only by society women. — We were to attend the Kärntnertortheater, to see Donizetti's opera *Belisario* performed; but now she wanted to return to the Leopoldstädter, telling me that she must return early. The Kärntnertortheater is at the other end of the city. Well! We reached the Leopoldstädter; she wanted to pay for her seat, declaring to me that she was not a *grisette* (as we say in French), and that she wished to pay or she would not enter. Ah! If only all ladies understood such delicacy!... It seems it remains a custom of this particular country.

Alas, my friend, I make a very feeble Don Juan! I tried the darkest seduction, but nothing worked. I was obliged to see her leave, and leave alone! At least, at the entrance to her street. But she made an appointment for five o'clock the next day, which is today.

Now here is where my Iliad begins to turn into an Odyssey. At five o'clock, I was walking in front of the door of number 189, treading the flagstones with a proud step; Catarina did not emerge from her house. I wearied of my patrol (may the National Guard protect you from such

a chore in bad weather!). I enter the house, I knock; a young girl comes out, takes my hand, and walks along the street with me. This is not a bad sign. Then, she explains to me that I must go away, that the mistress is furious, and that, moreover, Catarina had gone to my lodgings during the day to warn me. As for myself, I have lost the thread of her German; I imagine, on the strength of a verb of doubtful conjugation, that she means that Catarina cannot go out yet, and asks me to wait a little longer; I answer: 'That's fine!' and continue to beat the pavement in front of the house. Then, the girl returns, and when I explain to her that her pronunciation seems to alter the meaning of her words a little, she runs inside, and brings me a scrap of paper containing what she had said. The scrap of paper tells me that Catarina has gone to find me at the *Black Eagle*, where I am staying. So I run to the *Black Eagle*; the boy tells me that indeed a young girl has asked for me during the day; I let out eagle-like cries, and return to number 189: I knock; the person who had already spoken to me descends; there in the street, she listens to me with angelic patience; I explain my position; we fail to agree on a word; she enters, and returns with her written answer. Catarina does not live in the house; she only comes during the day, and for the moment she is not there. Will she return in the evening? She doesn't know; but I have achieved a greater clarity. The young person, a model, moreover, of kindness and patience (picture this girl in the street throwing ashes on the fire of my passion?) tells me that the lady, the mistress, was very angry (and she expresses this anger to me by expressive gestures).

— 'And so?'...

— 'It's just that Catarina has another lover in town.'

— 'Oh, indeed!' I said to that. (You understand me, I had no expectation of winning over a *freshly minted* heart). 'Well, enough; I know; I'm happy for her, I'll take care not to compromise her.'

— 'No, no,' replied the young girl (I'll edit this whole dialogue a little for you, or rather condense it), 'my mistress was angry because the *young man* came last night seeking Catarina, who had told him that her mistress needed her till evening; he found her absent, since she was with you, and they conversed for such a long time.'

Now, my friend, this is how I am situated: I was planning to take her to the play this evening, then to the *Gespräch*, where they play music and sing, and I am here, alone, at half-past six, drinking a glass of rosolio (*an Italian cordial comprised of spirits and sugar*) in the *gasthof*, waiting for the theatre to open. But poor Catarina! I shall not see her until tomorrow; I shall wait for her in the street as she passes on her way to her mistress's house, and I shall know all!

November 23rd. — I realise that I have not yet spoken about the city. However, I needed to set the scene a little with regard to my romantic adventures, because they are not yet at an end. Also, though I would like to describe Vienna for you, I have delayed so long in doing so that I no longer know what to say, or how to interest you; the task would have been easier for me immediately on arrival, because everything astonished me, everything was still new to me, the dress, the customs, the language, the appearance of this great city, situated almost at the extremity of civilised Europe, rich and proud like Paris, and which does not yet borrow from

Paris all its fashions, nor all its pleasures; these contrasts, I say, seized me vividly, and I was set to render them with warmth and poetry. Today, I am too familiar with all its novelties; now, I am as embarrassed as a Parisian would be if asked for a description of Paris; I have become quite the Viennese habitu  , living according to their customs without thinking of them further, and forced to make an effort to recall how they differ from ours. It is true that having penetrated deeper into society, I will now have to descend somewhat if I want to seek that local individuality which scarcely exists anywhere except in the lower classes. I need to do as the good Hoffmann's hero did, who, on New Year's Eve (*see Ernst Hoffman's tale of that name*) leaving the lawyer's party in his doublet and hose, had so imbibed of *aesthete's tea* that, on the way, he remembered '*the poor creature small beer*' (*see Shakespeare's 'Henry IV Part II, Act 2, Scene 2, Prince Hal speaking'*). It was then that, in defiance of a host of social and private considerations, he did not fear to descend, in gala dress, the worn steps of that illustrious beer-cellar, where he was to meet, at the same table, the fellow who'd lost his shadow, and the one who'd lost his reflection in the mirror.

Don't be surprised, then, if I speak to you alternately of the palace and the tavern; my status as a foreigner gives me the right to frequent both, to rub shoulders with a Bohemian or a Styrian peasant, dressed in animal skins, and a prince or a magnate, dressed in a black tailcoat like myself. But these last, you know them well; they are people of our Parisian world; they have rendered themselves our fellow citizens and our equals, in so far as they can, like those kings of the East who once showed themselves proud of the title of Roman bourgeoisie. Let us begin, then, with the street and the tavern, and later we will visit, if we wish, the palace, when adorned, illuminated, full of dazzling costumes and sublime artists; when, by dint of splendour and wealth, it has ceased to resemble our hotels and houses.

Well, this is a city that must be explored in every detail; for its inhabitants are singular, and yet at first appearance it reveals nothing but the most commonplace of aspects. One traverses broad suburbs with uniform housing; then, in the midst of a belt of walks, beyond an enclosure of ditches and walls, one finally encounters the city, as large, at most, as a district of Paris. Suppose one isolated the area around the Palais-Royal there, and, having endowed it with the walls of a fortified city, and boulevards a mile wide, ignored the whole extent of the surrounding suburbs, then you would have a complete idea of Vienna's situation, its degree of wealth, and activity. Might you not, immediately, think that a city built in such a way offers scant transition between luxury and misery, and that the central district, full of splendour and wealth, requires, indeed, bastions and ditches to isolate it, so as to keep the poor labouring suburbs in check? Though this is a view, entirely liberal and French in nature, which the happy people of Vienna have, certainly, never held. For my part, I recalled a few pages of a novel, entitled, I believe, *Frederick Styndall* (*by Auguste K  ratry*), whose hero felt mortally sad the day he arrived in this capital city. It was around three o'clock, on a misty autumn day; the wide avenues which separate the two regions of the city were filled with elegant men and brilliant women, whose carriages waited at the roadside; further on, a motley crowd pressed beneath the dark gates, and suddenly, on passing through the enclosure, the young man found himself in the very heart of the great city. And woe to him who does not drive a carriage on these beautiful granite paving stones, woe to the poor, the dreamer, the idle passer-by! There is room here only for the rich and their servants, for bankers and merchants. The carriages pass each

other noisily in the darkness, which descends so quickly in the middle of these narrow streets, between these tall houses; the shops soon burst with light and wealth; the large vestibules are lit up, and enormous Swiss, richly-braided, await, almost at every door, the carriages which are gradually returning. Unheard-of luxury in the city centre, and poverty in the districts surrounding it: that is Vienna at first glance. All this luxury frightened *Frederick Styndall*; he said to himself that it would take a lot of audacity to enter this special world, so well-walled and so well guarded, and it was while thinking of this, I believe, that he was knocked down by the carriage of a beautiful and noble lady, who became his patroness and the source of his fortune.

If I remember correctly, that is how the novel, forgotten today, begins. I regret not having gained any other impression, since that first one is just and true; at the same time, nothing is sadder than being forced to leave, in the evening, the ardent and illuminated centre, and traverse again, so as to regain the suburbs, the long promenades, with their lantern-lit avenues which intersect each other as far as the horizon: the poplars shiver under a perpetual breeze; one is forever forced to cross the black water of some river or canal, while the lugubrious sounds of the clocks alone warns one, on all sides, that one is in the heart of a city. But, on reaching the suburbs, one feels as if in another world, where one breathes more easily; it is the abode of a good, intelligent, joyful population; the streets are, at once, calm and animated; if carriages still circulate, it is only in the direction of the dance-halls and theatres. At every step, there's the sound of music and dancing, bands of cheerful companions singing opera choruses; cellars and taverns compete by means of illuminated signs and bizarre placards: here, one hears Styrian singers; there, Italian improvisers; comical monkeys, a Hercules, a premier singer from the Paris Opera; a Moravian lion-tamer, Isaac van Amburg, with his beasts; and a host of acrobats; in truth, everything that we see in Paris only on major holidays is lavished on these tavern regulars without the slightest hope of remuneration. On a higher note, the poster of a *sperl* framed in coloured glass, is addressed to the grand nobility, as well as honourable soldiers, and the amiable public; the masked balls, the *undress* balls, the balls dedicated to this or that saint, are uniformly directed by Johann Strauss or by Joseph Lanner, the Philippe Musard and Louis Jullien of Vienna; such is the whole country's taste. The former two illustrious conductors nonetheless preside, equally, over the festivities of the court and those of each wealthy mansion; and, as they are recognised, doubtless, everywhere they are announced, I suspect them of having had wax masks made in their image, which they distribute among their skilled lieutenants. But we will speak later of the *sperls*, and the dance-halls similar to our Prado in Paris, and Vauxhall Gardens in London; we will also dive without hesitation into a *cave*, and we will find there something truly German, that dense cigar-smoke which intoxicated Hoffmann, and that strange atmosphere amidst which Goethe and Schiller often make their grotesque or savage worker or student types move.

Let us enter the popular Leopoldstädter theatre, where they perform many an amusing local farce (*in Vienna, a 'locale posse'*), which I attend very often, since I am lodged in the Leopoldstadt suburb, the only one which borders on the central city, from which it is separated only by a branch of the Danube.

Chapter 7: Journal Entries Continued — I

November 23rd. —Yesterday evening, finding myself idling in the theatre, and almost alone among the so-called civilised, the rest being composed of Hungarians, Bohemians, Greeks, Turks, Tyroleans, Romans and Transylvanians, I thought of recommencing my role of Casanova, already quite well begun the day before yesterday. The role seemed more likely to succeed than might appear, given the customs of the country. I sat down near to two or three women, on their own, in succession; I ended by starting a conversation with one whose language was not overly Viennese; afterwards, I wanted to attend on her, but she only allowed me to touch her arm for a moment under her coat (another very beautiful arm!) among all sorts of silks, and pelts or furs. We walked for a very long time, then I left her at her door, she not seeking, however, to admit me; though she gave me an appointment for this evening at six.

A second adventure! This girl is not quite as attractive as the other, but seems to be of a higher class. I shall find out this evening. But does it not astound you, that a stranger could become intimately acquainted with two women in three days, that one should come to meet him, and that he should go to visit the other? And no suspicious appearance to all this. No, I had been told so, but refused to believe it; this is how love is handled in Vienna! Well, it is charming. In Paris, women make you suffer for three months, such is the rule; and few men have the patience to wait for them. Here, arrangements are made in three days, and one senses from the first that the woman would yield, if she were not afraid of giving you the impression of being a *grisette*; for that, it seems, is their great concern. Besides, nothing is more entertaining than this ready pursuit in the theatres, casinos and dance-halls; it is so well received that the most *honest* are not surprised in the least; at least two thirds of the women arrive at gatherings alone, or walk alone in the streets. If you happen to come across one of the *virtues*, your advances fail to offend her in the least, she talks with you for as long as you wish. Any woman you approach lets you take her arm and attend upon her; then, at her door, where you hope to enter, she gives you a very kind and mocking farewell, thanks you for having shown her home, and tells you her husband or father awaits her in the house. Make a point of seeing her again, and she will tell you clearly that, the next day, or the day following, she must attend a certain ball or a certain theatre. If at the theatre, while you are talking with a woman alone, the husband or lover, who has gone for a walk among the galleries, or down to the café, suddenly returns, he is not surprised to see you talking familiarly; he greets you and looks the other way, happy it seems to be relieved of his wife's company for a while.

I speak to you here from my own experience a little, and more from that of others — yet to what can it be due? For, truly, I have seen nothing like it even in Italy — doubtless, to the fact that there are so many beautiful women in the city, that the men who suit them are, in proportion, much less numerous. In Paris, pretty women are so rare, that they are put out to auction; they are pampered, kept, and feel the full worth of their beauty. Here, women belittle themselves and their charms; for it is evident that such are as common as those of beautiful flowers, creatures, birds, which, indeed, are commonplace so long as one takes care to tend and nourish them well. Now, the fertility of this country render life so easy, so pleasant, that there

are few ill-nourished women, and consequently, one sees none of those dreadful species of which our tradeswomen or countrywomen are composed. You cannot imagine how extraordinary it is to meet, at every moment, in the streets, radiant girls with wondrous complexions who are surprised that you even notice them.

This atmosphere of beauty, grace, and amorousness, has something intoxicating about it: one loses one's head, one sighs, one is madly in love, not with one, but with all these women at once. The *odor di femina* is everywhere in the air, and one breathes it in from afar, like Don Juan. What a pity it's not Spring! A sunlit landscape is needed to complete so beautiful an impression. However, the season is not yet without its charms. This morning, I entered the great Imperial Garden, at the end of the city; there was no one visible. The wide paths ended, far away, in charming grey and blue views. Beyond there is a large hilly park with ponds, which is full of birds. The flowerbeds were so spoiled by the bad weather, that the flowers on the ruined rosebushes were left trailing in the mud. Beyond, the view gave on the Prater and the Danube; it was delightful in spite of the cold. Ah! You see, we are still young, younger than we thought. But then Paris is such an ugly city, and populated by such stupid people, that it makes one despair of all creation, of women and poetry too....

December 7th. — I am transcribing five lines onto another sheet. Days have passed since the four preceding pages were written. You have received letters from me, you have seen the cheerful side of my situation, and a fortnight separates me from those first impressions of my stay in Vienna. However, there is a close connection between what I am about to say and what I wrote previously. The outcome you might have foreseen by reading my first pages has remained in suspension all this time.... You know very well I'm incapable of telling stories merely for fun, or spending my feelings on imaginary events, do you not? Well, if you've taken an interest in my first adventures in Vienna, read and learn....

December 13th. — So many events have happened since those first four days which provided the commencement to my letter, that I find it difficult to connect them to what is happening today. I dare not claim my career as Don Juan has continued with the same good fortune.... Katty is in Brünn (*Brno*) at this moment with her mother, who is ill; I was to go and join her there by the fine stretch of track, thirty leagues in length, which begins at the Prater; but that kind of journey strains my nerves in the most unbearable manner. Meanwhile, here is a further adventure, which has only just commenced, and of which I faithfully send you the initial details.

As a general observation, know that in this city no woman has a natural way of progressing. You note one, you follow her; she makes the most incredible turns and zigzags from street to street. Choose a somewhat deserted place to approach her, and she will never refuse you an answer. This is widely accepted. A Viennese woman will not demur. If she has someone already (I am not talking about the husband, who is never of any account), if, ultimately, she is too preoccupied for various reasons, she will tell you so and advise you not to seek a meeting till the following week, or to be patient, without fixing a date. It is never long denied; the lovers who have preceded you become your best friends.

Thus, I had followed a beauty whom I had noticed in the Prater, where crowds hasten to view the sleighs, and reached her door without our speaking, since it was broad daylight. These

sorts of adventures amuse me infinitely. Fortunately, there was a café almost opposite the house. So, I returned, at dusk, to sit near the window. As I had expected, the lovely person in question soon emerged. I followed her, spoke to her, and she told me simply to give her my arm, so that passers-by would not note us. Then she led me through all sorts of neighbourhoods: first to a shop on the Kohlmarkt, where she bought some mittens; then to a pastry-maker, where we shared a cake; finally, she took me back to the house from which she had exited, spent an hour conversing with me on the doorstep, and told me to return the following evening. Next day, I returned faithfully, knocked at the door, and suddenly found myself in the midst of a group consisting of two other young girls, and three men dressed in sheepskins, and wearing something akin to Wallachian hats. Since the company received me cordially, I prepared to be seated: but no. The candles were extinguished, and we set off for somewhere in the suburbs. No one disputed my conquest of the day before, though one of the individuals was after a wife, and we arrived, finally, at a smoke-filled tavern. There, representatives of the seven or eight nations who share the good city of Vienna seemed to have gathered for their entertainment. It seemed they were drinking sweet red wine, mixed with an older white wine. We drank a few carafes of the mixture. It was pleasant enough. At the rear of the room, there was a sort of platform where they were singing plaintively in an obscure language, the lyrics seeming to greatly amuse those who understood them. The young man lacking a wife sat down beside me, and, as he spoke fluent German, a rare thing in this country, I enjoyed the conversation. As for the woman with whom I had come, she was absorbed in the spectacle in front of us. Indeed, true comic-opera scenes were being played out, before us. Four or five singers, performed, left the stage, and then reappeared in fresh costumes. They played complete pieces, with songs and choruses. During the intervals, the Moldavians, Hungarians, Bohemians and others consumed dishes of hare and veal. The woman, who sat near me, gradually became more animated, thanks to the red wine blended with white. She looked most charming then, being ordinarily a little pale. She is a true Slavonic beauty; broad, solid features indicating her unmixed heritage.

It should be noted that the most beautiful women here are those of the commoners, and the aristocracy. I am writing to you from a café, where I am waiting for the hour when the entertainment begins; but the ink is of poor quality, and I shall delay continuing my observations.

Chapter 8: Journal Entries Continued — II

December 31, 1839. New Year's Eve. — ‘A devil of a *sugar-candy* lawyer!’ as Hoffmann said, on this very day (*see again Hoffman's story 'New Year's Eve' where the hero fleeing the lawyer's diabolical party, dreams that the latter is made of sugar candy*). You'll understand the import of my comment.

I write to you, not from that smoky tavern, from the depths of that fantastic cellar whose steps were so worn that, as soon as one set foot on the first, one felt oneself unwittingly borne downstairs, and seated at a table, between a jug of old wine and one of new, while at the other

end were ‘the man who had lost his reflection’ and ‘the man who had lost his shadow’ in grave conversation; rather I’ll describe a tavern no less smoky, but much more brilliant than the *Rathskeller* in Bremen, or *Auerbachs Keller* in Leipzig; a certain cellar that I discovered near the Red Gate (*Rotenturmtor*), and which you should know about; for it is the very one concerning which I have already said a few words in my previous letter.... There the preface to my amorous adventure was sketched.

It is indeed a cellar, vast, and deep: to the right of the door is the host’s counter, surrounded by a tall rail laden with pewter pots; from there flow, in abundance, the imperial beers of Bavaria and Bohemia, as well as the red and white wines of Hungary, notable for their bizarre names. To the left of the entrance is a vast buffet loaded with meat, pastries, and sweets, and where the wiener schnitzel, that favourite dish of the Viennese, continually steams. Lively serving-girls distribute the dishes, table to table, while the waiters undertake the more strenuous task of delivering beer and wine. All sup in this way, with aniseed cakes for bread, or cakes with a salty glaze which rouses a thirst. Let us not linger in the first room, which serves both as an office for the host and a backstage for the actors. Here, there are only dancers donning their shoes, young leading-ladies dabbing on their rouge, and soldiers dressed as extras; there, are the waltzers’ dressing-room, and the refuge of those surly dogs who are hostile to music and dance, and the rest room for the Jewish tradesmen, who go about, in the intervals between the plays, waltzes, and songs, offering their perfumes, oriental fruits, or innumerable tickets for the great Meidling lottery.

It is necessary to climb several steps, and push through the crowd, in order to reach the main room at last: it is, as usual, a regularly arched vault, walled-about; tightly-packed tables line the walls, but the centre is left free for dancing. The decoration is painted en rocaille; and, at the back, behind the musicians and actors, there is a sort of bower of vines and trellises. As for the company, it’s very mixed, one might say; nothing low however; the costumes are extravagant rather than poor. The Hungarians wear semi-military dress, for the most part, with bright silk braid, and large silver buttons; the Bohemian peasants have long white coats, and small round hats crowned with ribbons or flowers. The Styrians are remarkable for their green hats decorated with feathers, and their Tyrolean hunter’s costumes; Serbs and Turks are scarcer amidst this bizarre assembly of the many peoples to which Austria is home, and among which the true Austrian population is perhaps the least numerous.

As for the women, apart from a few Hungarians, whose costume is half-Greek, they are generally dressed very simply; almost all are beautiful, lissom, and well-made, most of them blonde, and of a magnificent complexion. They abandon themselves to the waltz with singular ardour. Scarcely has the orchestra finished playing a prelude than they rush from the tables, leaving their half-empty glasses and their interrupted suppers, and there commences, amidst the noise and thick tobacco smoke, a whirlwind of waltzes and gallops of which I had no previous idea. These are not our ‘barrier’ dances, those timid bacchanals of ribald Parisians, where the municipal official plays the role of Modesty, and poses from time to time like a stern caryatid. Here, the municipality is entirely lacking (or, at least, what takes the place of that institution in Vienna); the waltz is the sole dance of the people; but the waltz as they understand it is that of a pagan orgy or Gothic sabbath; Goethe had this very model before his eyes when

he described Walpurgis Night, and had Faust circle in the arms of the mad witch, who, in an intoxication of pleasure, released red mice from her lovely mouth.

However, there is no subversive intent, no equivocal gestures in these wild dances, which would make our depraved suburbanites blush; it is all as simple and serious as are nature and love; it is a voluptuous not a lascivious waltzing, worthy of an ardent and honest population that has neither read Voltaire nor sung Béranger's songs. What is astonishing is the endurance of the men, and the grace, calmness, and constant freshness of the indefatigable women, who never have to fear their revealing tired and tarnished features at daybreak; moreover, it must be noted that they seem indifferent to each other: the woman waltzes with a man, without the man; I cannot describe how far they seem to take ease, coldness, and abandonment.

The waltz over, all begin eating and drinking again; singers and acrobats appear at the back of the room, behind a sort of barrier covered with a tablecloth, and lit with candles; or, more often still, a drama or comedy is performed without further ado. This is both part-theatre and part-parade; but the pieces played are mostly very amusing, and executed with great verve and naturalness. Sometimes, one hears small Italian comic operas, *con Pantaleone e Pulcinella* (*commedia dell'arte characters*). The narrow stage is not always sufficient to contain the action; then, the actors reply to each other from several points; fights even take place in the middle of the room between costumed extras; the barrier becomes a besieged city or a ship attacked by the corsairs. Apart from the costumes and this minimal staging, there is no more decoration than in the London theatres of Shakespeare's day, and not even the signs which announced on his stage that there was a city here, and a forest there.

When the play is over, whether comedy or farce, they sing its theme to the audience, to a popular tune, which is always the same, which seems to charm the Viennese greatly; then the artists spread out, and move from table to table receiving congratulations and kreutzers. The majority of the actresses and female singers are very pretty; they sit down at the tables without ceremony, and there is not one of the workmen, students, or soldiers who does not invite them to drink from his glass; these poor girls do little more than wet their lips with the contents, but it is a politeness they cannot refuse. Then comes some improviser, or rhapsodist, declaiming poetry.

One evening my ears were struck by the sound of Napoleon's name, which seemed to me to resound loudly beneath the vault, in the midst of this gathering of so many half-civilised people. It was that magnificent ballad by Joseph Christian Zedlitz, the *Nightly Review* ('*Die nächtliche Heerschau*'), which was thus recited. This magnificent poetry was applauded with enthusiasm, since Germany now remembers only its glorious conquests; yet it did not prevent the waltz from resuming with fury, once that elegy, invoking so many sacred shades lost to the fields of Germany and France, had ended.

Such, my friend, are the lively pleasures of the people. They do not numb themselves, as is widely believed, with tobacco and beer; they are witty, poetic, and curious like the Italians, but with a more marked trait of good-nature and seriousness; I should note their apparent need to exercise all the senses at once, and indulge simultaneously in food, music, tobacco, dance, and theatricals. I'm reminded of that passage from Rousseau's *Confessions* in which he describes the supreme pleasure he experienced, sitting in a good armchair, in front of an open window,

before a vast horizon, at sunset, reading a book that pleased him, while dipping a biscuit in a glass of champagne: meanwhile the Angelus sounded in the distance, and the garden sent to him its perfumed breezes. Is it right to believe that several impressions combined destroy each other or weary the senses? Is it not rather the case that collectively they result in a sort of harmony, precious to active minds?

On leaving the tavern, one is astonished to find a large crucifix over the door, and often, in the corner, an image of a saint in wax and dressed in tinsel. For here, as in Italy, religion is never hostile to joy or pleasure. The tavern has something serious about it, just as the church often wakens thoughts of celebration and love. On Christmas Eve, eight days ago, I was able to realise their alliance, so alien to us. The festive population passed from the church to the dance-hall with almost no change of mood; and the streets, moreover, were filled with children who carried fir-trees, their foliage adorned with candles, cakes and sweets. These Christmas trees offered, in their multitude, an image of that mobile forest which marched to meet Macbeth. The interiors of the churches, that of St. Stephen's especially, were magnificent and radiant. What I admired was not only the immense crowd in festive attire, the gleam of the silver altar in the middle of the choir, the hundreds of musicians hanging, so to speak, from the slender balustrades that surmount the pillars, but also the sincere and frank faith that united all those voices in a prodigious hymn. The effect of these thousands of voices is truly surprising to the French, accustomed to the uniform baritone of the cantors or the shrill tenor of the devout. Then, the violins and trumpets in the orchestra, the voices of the singers rising from the stalls, the theatrical pomp of the service, all that, doubtless, would seem most unreligious to our sceptical population. But it is only amongst us that people are possessed by the idea of a Catholicism so severe, so guarded, so full of thoughts of death and deprivation, that few people feel worthy of practicing and believing in it. In Austria, as in Italy and Spain, religion retains its hold, because it is amiable, and straightforward, and demands faith more than sacrifice.

Thus, all that noisy crowd, which had come, like the first believers, to rejoice, at the feet of God, over the *happy birth*, would end its night of celebration by dining and dancing, to the notes of the very same instruments. I was pleased at attending, once more, those beautiful solemnities that our Church has proscribed, and which truly ought to be celebrated in countries where belief is taken seriously by all.

I feel you would wish to know of the denouement to my latest adventure. Perhaps I was wrong to tell you of all that went before. I must seem a wretch, a pedant, a foolish traveller who represents his country only in taverns, and whose immoderate taste for imperial beer, and fanciful encounters leads far too readily to love affairs. I will come, shortly, to more serious adventures ... and, as regards the one I spoke to you of before, I regret greatly not having given you all the details as they occurred: but it is too late. I am too far behind in my journal, and all the little facts I would have complacently detailed to you then, I would fail to recapture today. Be content with learning that, as I was conducting the lady home, at a rather late hour, a dog became involved in our amorous affair, which ran about like Faust's poodle, and appeared mad. I took it immediately for a fatal augury. The lovely woman began to caress the dog, which was all wet; then told me that it had probably lost its master, and that she wished to take him indoors

with her. I asked to enter too, but she answered me: *Nicht!* or, if you like: *Nix!* with a resolute accent that made me think of the 1814 invasion. I said to myself:

— ‘It’s that rascal of a black dog bringing me bad luck. It’s obvious that without him I would have been received.’

Well, neither the dog nor I entered. The moment the door opened, he sped away like the fantastic being he was, and the lovely woman made an appointment with me for the next day.

Next day I was furiously annoyed; it was very cold; I had business to effect. I failed to arrive on time, but did so later in the day. A male individual opened the door and asked me, like Jacques Cazotte’s camel’s head (*see his tale, ‘Le Diable Amoureux’*): *Che vuoi?* As he was less frightening, I was ready to answer: ‘I wish to see Miss ...’ But, oh misfortune! I realised that I was completely ignorant of my mistress’s surname, though, as I told you, I had known her for three days. I stammered; the gentleman looked at me as if I were some sort of intriguer; I left. Ah, well.

In the evening, I wandered about the street; I saw her reach home; I apologised, and said to her very tenderly:

— ‘Miss, would it be indiscreet of me to ask your name, now?’

— ‘Vhahby’.

— ‘I beg your pardon?’

— ‘Vhahby’.

— ‘Ah! Please write it for me. Ah! So, you are Bohemian or Hungarian?’

She is from Olmütz (*Olomouc*), this dear child... Vhahby is a Bohemian name, indeed, and yet the girl is sweet and blond, and says her name so softly, that she seems like a lamb speaking in its mother tongue.

And so, it drags on; I understand that there is a courtship to be performed. One morning, I go to see her, and she tells me with great emotion:

— ‘Oh! My God! He’s ill.’

— ‘Who is?’

She pronounces a name as Bohemian as her own; and says to me: — ‘Come’.

I enter a second room, and see, lying on the bed, the tall dolt who had accompanied us to the tavern, and the evening’s entertainment I described, who is currently dressed as a comic-opera huntsman. The lad welcomes me with demonstrations of joy; a large greyhound is lying close to the bed. Not knowing what to say, I said: ‘That’s a fine dog’ I stroked the creature, I addressed it, all this went on for a very long time. Above the bed hung the gentleman’s rifle; which, however, given his cordiality, was not at all menacing. He told me he had a fever, which troubled him greatly, because the hunting was currently very good. I asked him, naively, if he hunted chamois; he pointed to some dead partridges with which some children were amusing themselves in a corner.

— ‘Ah! Well done, sir.’

To maintain the conversation, as the lovely woman failed to return, I said, in my most bourgeois manner:

— ‘Now, are these children being schooled? Why are they not there?’

The hunter replied:

— ‘They’re not old enough.’

I replied that in my country children are sent to mutual schools (*run on the monitorial system*) from the cradle. I continued with a series of observations on that mode of teaching. Meanwhile, Vhahby appeared with a cup in her hand; I said to the hunter:

— ‘Is it quinquina (*aromatised wine containing cinchona bark, so providing quinine for his fever*)?’

— ‘Yes,’ he said.

It appeared he had failed to understand, since I saw him, a moment later, dipping bread into the cup; I had never heard of quinquina soup, and, in fact, it was broth. The sight of this lad eating his soup was as uninteresting as the story I am telling you involving that same ... What a charming encounter I have been granted. I say farewell to the hunter, wishing him better health, and return to the other room.

— ‘Ah,’ said I, to the young Bohemian girl, ‘is this sick gentleman your husband?’

— ‘No.’

— ‘Your brother?’

— ‘No.’

— ‘Your lover?’

— ‘No, no.’

— ‘Who is he, then?’

— ‘He’s a hunter. That’s all.’

It must be observed, for the better understanding of my interrogation, that there were three beds in the second room, and that she had told me one was hers, and that it was this which prevented her from receiving me. In conclusion, I have never been able to understand the presence of this personage. She told me, however, to return the next day; still, I thought, if I was to enjoy the hunter’s conversation it would be better to wait until he had recovered. I did not see Vhahby again until eight days later; she was no more surprised at my return than at my having waited so long without returning. The hunter had recovered, and gone.... I did not understand the reason for her lack of hospitality, she told me the children were in the other room.

— ‘Are the children yours?’

— ‘Yes.’

— ‘The devil they are!’

There were three of them, blonde as ears of corn, blonde as she was. I found it all so constraining that I've not yet returned to the house; I will return when I choose. The three children, the hunter, and the girl will still be there — I shall revisit them all when I have time.

Chapter 9: Journal Entries Continued — III

Such is my life: every morning I rise, and exchange a few greetings with some Italians who are also lodging at the *Black Eagle*; I light a cigar, and amble along the main street of the suburb of Leopoldstadt. On the corner, overlooking the quay beside the Wien, a little river that separates us from the city centre, there are two cafés, where crowds of Jewish men, always meet, and form a sort of stock-exchange there, some in the open air, others, the wealthiest, in the inner rooms of the cafés. There, one sees marvellous beards, and hears a continual humming like that of a hive.

It is pleasant, in the morning, to sip a small glass of kirsch in one of the cafés; then one can venture on to the Red Bridge, which communicates with the *Rotenturmtor*, the fortified gate of the city. Let us stop, however, on the glacis to read the theatre posters on the wall at the corner. There are almost as many as in Paris. The Burgtheater, which is the city's Comédie-Française, announces plays by Goethe or Schiller, the Corneille and Racine of *classical* German theatre; then comes the *Kärntnertortheater*, or theatre of the Carinthian Gate, which will perform Meyerbeer, Bellini, and Donizetti; after which, we have the *Theater an der Wien*, with melodramas and vaudevilles, mostly translated from French; then the theatres of Josephstadt, Leopoldstadt, etc., not to mention a host of café-theatres, the like of which I described earlier.

Once I have decided where to spend the evening, I traverse the Red Gate below the rampart, and head to the left, towards a certain *gasthof*, where the Hungarian wines are of quite decent quality. *Tokay* is sold there at six kreutzers a jug, and is used to wash down fresh mutton or pork chops, the taste of which is enhanced by a wedge of lemon.

There is a charming means of payment here; one carries no purse; one has change only in the form of small kreutzer coins, worth about seventeen French sous. These serve only for a tip; otherwise, one pays in notes. Pretty 'assignats' graduated in value from one franc to the wildest sums, fill your wallet and are decorated with intaglio engravings done to astonishing perfection. A delightful profile of a woman, entitled *Austria* inspires in one the keenest regret at parting with these imprints, and a greater desire to acquire new ones. It is important to note that these notes are of two kinds, either in *conventional* currency, worth only half the value represented, or in *real* currency, whose face value is supported more or less, according to political circumstances.

I know not if all these details interest you, but they are precious to me at the moment, especially since the number of imprints I possess is decreasing day by day. Let us not dwell on this detail, but go and take our coffee in the city centre, near the brilliant Graben square, whose funereal name (*tomb*) hardly corresponds to its splendours.

Usually, after lunch, I follow the *Rotenturmstrasse*, a shopping street, animated by the proximity of the markets, until I find myself on the square housing St. Stephen's Church, the famous Viennese cathedral, whose spire is the tallest in Europe. The tip leans slightly, having been struck long ago by a cannonball fired by the French army. The roof of the building presents a brilliant patterned mosaic of glazed tiles, which reflect the rays of the distant sun. The brown stone of this church reveals unheard-of refinements of feudal architecture. Leaving this illustrious monument on the left, one arrives at the corner of two streets, one of which leads to the Carinthian Gate, the other to the *Mahlmarkt*, and the third to the Graben. At the corner of the first two is a sort of pillar whose purpose is very strange. It is called the *Stock im Eisen*. It is simply a tree trunk which, it is said, was once part of the forest on the site of which Vienna was built. This venerable stump has been religiously preserved, embedded in the front of a jeweller's shop. Every journeyman of that trade who arrives in Vienna must hammer a nail into the tree. For many years, it has been impossible to drive yet one more in, and bets are made on this subject with newcomers. Happy the people that still enjoys such pranks!... I wonder, sometimes, if there will ever be a revolution in Vienna. The granite paving stones, admirably cut, are welded, so to speak, with bitumen and meshed one with the other, so that it seems impossible to move them and construct barricades. Each paving stone costs the government a *zwanzig* (*twenty kreutzers*). Will such a sacrifice prevent revolution?

Here we are on the Graben; it is the central and brilliant square of Vienna; the square is an oblong, which is the shape of all the city's squares. The houses are eighteenth century; rocaille flourishes in all the ornamentation. In the centre is a monumental column resembling a giant cup and ball. The ball is formed of sculpted clouds which support gilded angels. The column itself appears twisted, like those of the Solomonic order, and the whole is loaded with festoons, ribbons and other ornaments. Think of the elegant shops in the richest districts of Paris, and the comparison will appear all the more just, since most of the shops are occupied by fashion houses and traders in novelties who are part of what is called here the French colony. There is, in the middle of the square, a shop dedicated to Archduchess Sophie, who must have been a very beautiful woman if the sign painted on its door is anything to go by.

There is only one more small street to follow to reach the main café on the Kohlmarkt, where your friend is now indulging in the pleasures of what is called a *mélange*, which is nothing other than coffee with milk served in a stemmed glass, while reading those French newspapers that the censor allows him to receive.

January 11th, 1840. — I find myself forced to interrupt this narrative of the day's pleasures to inform you of an adventure much less gracious than the others, which has come to disturb my serenity.

You should know that it's very difficult for a foreigner to prolong his stay beyond a few weeks in the capital of Austria. One can barely stay here twenty-four hours, if one fails to possess a recommendation from a banker, who is personally responsible for the debts one may incur. Then there is the matter of politics. From my first day here, I thought my every action was being noted... You know with what speed and investigative eagerness I travel the streets of a foreign city, so that the task of the spy following me cannot have proved easy.

In the end I noted a particular man, with dull blond hair, who seemed to follow, assiduously, the same streets as I did. I made up my mind; I traversed a passage, then halted suddenly, and, turning around, found myself face to face with the gentleman who served as my shadow. He was very out of breath.

‘It is useless,’ I said, ‘to tire yourself so much. I am accustomed to walking very quickly, but I can adjust my pace to yours and thus enjoy your conversation.’

The poor fellow seemed most embarrassed; I put him at his ease, by telling him that I knew what precautions the Vienna police were obliged to take with regard to foreigners, and particularly the French.

— ‘Tomorrow,’ I added, ‘I will go and see your director and reassure him of my good intentions.’

The lackey said little in answer, and slipped away, pretending not to understand my poor German.

To reassure you as to my tranquillity as regards the whole affair, I must tell you that a journalist friend of mine had given me an excellent letter of recommendation for one of the chief inspectors of the Viennese police. I had promised myself to profit from it only for a serious reason. The next day, therefore, I went to the headquarters of the *Politzey*.

I was greeted profusely: the person in question, who is called Baron Joseph Christian von Zedlitz, is a former lyric poet, ex-member of the *Tugendbund* (*The League of Virtue, a quasi-masonic and revolutionary organisation*) and various other secret societies, who joined the police as he grew older, much as one settles oneself down after the follies of youth.... many German poets have found themselves in the same situation. In Vienna, moreover, the police have something patriarchal about them which supports this kind of transition better than elsewhere.

We spoke of literature, and von Zedlitz after ascertaining my position, gradually admitted me to a sort of intimacy.

— ‘Do you know, he said to me, that your adventures amuse me infinitely?’

— ‘What adventures?’

— ‘Why those you relate so charmingly to your friend, and that you send by post to Paris.’

— ‘Ah! You read them?’

— ‘Oh! Don’t concern yourself; nothing in your correspondence is of a nature to compromise you. And even the government thinks highly of those foreigners who, far from fomenting intrigues, eagerly profit from the pleasures of our good city of Vienna.’

I was far from surprised by this confidence; I knew perfectly well that all letters passed through a *black room*, not only in Austria, but in most German countries. I turned the whole thing into a joke — so much so that I advanced far in the confidence of Baron von Zedlitz, who himself would provide me with many a subject for observation. Are we not also, we writers, members of a sort of moral police?...

He ended up encouraging me to come, whenever I wanted, to read the newspapers opposing the police, ... since it was the freest place in the empire.... One could talk about anything there without danger.

January 14th. — Yesterday, Baron von Zedlitz summoned me to his house, and said: ‘Enjoy reading this letter.’ Great was my astonishment on recognising that it was addressed to my uncle, from Périgord, being a copy of a letter to him from my cousin Henri, the diplomat, who left Vienna a few days ago.

Here are the contents:

‘My dear uncle,

Since the moment when the Minister of Foreign Affairs deigned, on your powerful recommendation, to initiate, at last, my diplomatic career, by attaching me to the Swedish embassy, I may say that a new day has dawned for me! My mind, benefitting from your advice and experience, asks to be deployed widely in this sphere, where you once obtained such splendid triumphs. Although I must, according to that advice, confine myself, for the present, to writing, in legible style, the dispatches, notes, memoranda, conference minutes, etc., the copying of which will be entrusted to me; to drawing up legalisation paperwork and visas, in the absence of the Chancellor; to summarising reports, and above all to producing envelopes and forming wax seals of a satisfactory circularity, I feel that I shall not always be restricted to these preliminaries of the diplomatic art, which are, no doubt, not to be neglected, but which cover, as with a veil, the profound political arcana to which I long to be soon initiated.

And first of all, since you have allowed me to submit my personal observations to you with all possible prudence, I am taking advantage of a special courier to send you this letter, which will not be read at the post office, as those may be which I will send by ordinary means during the course of my journey.

Are you not be surprised, knowing that I left for chilly Sweden, to receive my letter dated from Vienna, the Austrian capital? I am quite surprised myself, and can only attribute what is happening to me to the new complications which have suddenly arisen with regard to the Eastern question.

Only a week ago, I was about to take leave of my superiors in order to depart the same evening for my destination; I had chosen the land route, given the advanced season, and intended to go straight to Frankfurt, then to Hamburg, halting in each of those two cities, with then, as you know, only a short sea crossing to make from Hamburg to Stockholm. I studied the map a hundred times while waiting for my audience with the minister; but the latter decided otherwise. His Excellency was, that day, visibly preoccupied. I was received in a passageway after many difficulties. “Ah! is that you, Monsieur? Your uncle is still in good health, is he not?” — “Yes, Monsieur the Minister, but a little unwell ... that is to say, he thinks he is ill.” — “A fine intelligence, sir! These are the men we still need; those of whom Bonaparte said: *There is a new breed to be created!* And he created it. But, here, it is dying out like the rest....” I was about to reply that I hoped to follow your example in everything, when the Cabinet Secretary came in: “Not a single courier!” he said to the minister; “The one who was to arrive from Spain is ill; the others have left, or have not arrived, the roads being so bad!” — “Well,” said the

minister, “we have Monsieur here; give him your letters; even an attaché may be of some use!” — “Can you leave today?” the Secretary asked me. “I was planning to leave this very evening.” — “Which route are you taking?” — “By way of Trier and Frankfurt.” — “Well, you can take this package to Vienna. That will take you a little out of your way,” said the Minister, in a kindly tone, “but you will be able to learn more of Germany on the way, which is useful.... Do you have a post-chaise?” — “Yes, Minister.” — “You will need six days, six and a half days perhaps, due to the floods,” the Secretary observed. — “Anyway, today is Thursday, you will be there next Thursday.” Such were the Minister’s last words, and I left the same evening.

“You can imagine my joy, dear uncle, in seeing myself charged with a message of State! And what good advice you gave me to buy the post-chaise, which my aunt found so expensive! “An attaché without a post-chaise,” you said to me, “is like a snail ... (I think that was the comparison you employed) ...without a shell.” The image seems very apt to me, apart from the speed of the creature you mentioned, which is in no way appropriate.

I like a jest, I’ve even committed many youthful follies; but I reflect seriously on my career, I concern myself with my future, after your good advice; sadly, not all young people think the same. Who do you think I met in Munich at the table d’hôte of the Hôtel d’Angleterre?... I heard myself addressed from the other end of the table, I turn, I think I am mistaken... Not at all: it is my cousin Fritz, who left Paris eight days before me, and left to visit you in your Périgord.

Understand, dear uncle, that the idea was not his, but his father’s, who always imagines that I am courting you at my cousin’s expense. You yourself know if I have ever spoken the slightest ill word concerning him. That he has rejected all sensible occupation, or at least that he has given himself over to a thousand frivolous occupations; that he has dissipated all his mother’s property, and a third of our estate at M***; that he wanders about the world, the matter of his artistic tastes, his pretensions of wit, his mad love affairs, and his thousand whims which shock all accepted ideas, as you know, my uncle, concern me scarcely at all. However, I will admit that it is never pleasant for me to meet such a scatterbrain in the high society to which my position calls me.

That is not the case here, we merely met at an inn in Munich. However, I know not why I chose not to dine in my apartment, which would have spared me the encounter. Whenever one does not act sensibly, one can be sure of having to repent of it; it is one of your principles that I never forget. Here, in sum, is the conversation established at a distance between the two of us; you may imagine that I only answered in monosyllables. The seats were full only of English and Germans, but we were understood nonetheless. He jested, with the wit that you know him to possess, regarding my new diplomatic position, and asked if I brought war or peace, along with other such foolish questions. I made a sign to him that it was imprudent to speak thus; and, indeed, I learned afterwards that there was at that very table a Prussian spy, and likewise an English spy; I myself was considered a French spy, despite my title of attaché. The Germans are unaware of, or wish not to believe, the fact that our government does not avail itself of such means and that we never affect anything but a sound, constitutional policy.

In the end, I rose, took him aside, and gave him to understand how indiscreet his conduct was. “We are no longer young fools,” I told him; “the government in its wisdom has granted

me a new title and duties. The post-chaise which is transporting me to Vienna is perhaps charged with the destinies of a great country....” “Are you in a post-chaise?” my cousin replied immediately. “I myself travel in no other way — it is convenient indeed when one prefers not to go on foot. I travel on foot when the countryside is beautiful — a great pleasure — however, this country is very dull: flat, sandy countryside, and only pine forests for variety; rivers without water, towns without paving, taverns without wine, women....” I hastened to stop him speaking, for he would have compromised me still further. “I must retire,” I said; “I only stopped in Munich for dinner.” — that is to say, for supper, for we dine here at one o’clock, and it was now eight. — “Good-bye then. You are not staying to see old Schroeder-Devrient in *Medea*?” — “I have more pressing duties.” — “I am capable of doing something crazy” says he. — “No doubt.” — “Here’s my situation. I left Paris to visit our uncle; I took the road through Burgundy, so as to avoid the monotony of the highway. I made a detour to see the Jura, then to see Constance, the city of councils (our Opéra sets are quite inaccurate, by the way); the most beautiful thing in Constance is the steamboat which bears you away from there, and allows you to touch on five different nations in six hours. I had longed to set foot in Bavaria; but, at Lindau, I was told of the wonders of Munich. I have toured the city in a day, and had enough; you have an empty seat in your post-chaise, you are off to Vienna, I’ll accompany you there. I’m very curious to see that capital.”

I thought I would stop the flow by asking him if he had letters of credit; he showed me a note from one of the Rothschilds, who recommended him to all his correspondents. I have no idea what the note is worth, it seeming to me to be a simple recommendation written out of politeness; but, in Vienna, I may judge for myself. I have learned, from a good source, that twenty-four hours is all they allow a foreigner whose wallet is not well, and validly, stocked.

Meanwhile, his conversation distracted me during the journey, which was not at all comfortable, especially around Salzburg, one of the most untamed regions on earth. In Vienna he stayed at a suburban inn, wishing, he said, to keep the strictest incognito. I am charmed by that, as I wish to frequent him as little as possible. He will probably write to you to apologise for having taken the road to Vienna instead of that towards Périgord. It is likely that, the earth being round, nothing will prevent him from paying you his respects during the course of next year.’

Such is the youth’s letter.... What say you? This is how one is served by one’s parents.

Baron von Zedlitz urged on me the greatest secrecy regarding this friendly communication; one finds the paternal Vienna police good for something ... at least, when one has friends!

Vienna appears to me like Paris in the eighteenth century, in 1770, for example; and I myself regard myself as a foreign poet, lost in this society half glittering aristocracy, and half carefree populace, or so it would seem. The Magyars, Tyroleans, Illyrians, and so on, are more than preoccupied with their diverse national affairs, and lack the means to reach a joint understanding, in the event that their objectives should coincide. Moreover, the cautious and ingenious imperial police refuse to allow even one unemployed worker to remain in the city. All the trades are organised in corporations; a journeyman who arrives from the provinces is subject to well-nigh the same rules as a foreign traveller. He must be recommended by a patron or by a notable citizen who must answer for his conduct and the debts he may incur. If he fails

to offer such a guarantee, he is allowed a twenty-four-hour stay, in order to view the monuments and attractions, then his pass is stamped for any other city he is pleased to indicate, where the same difficulties await him. In the event of his resistance, he is returned to his place of birth, whose municipality is then responsible for his conduct, and usually makes him work on the land, if work is unavailable in the cities.

The whole regime is extremely despotic, I agree; and but remain to be convinced that Austria is the China of Europe. I have passed beyond its Great Wall ... and only regret that it lacks literate mandarins.

Such an organisation, conducted with intelligence, might, indeed, present fewer drawbacks: that is the question that the philosopher-emperor, Joseph II, imbued with Voltairean and Encyclopedist ideas, wished to resolve. The current administration despotically follows that tradition, but, being no longer philosophical, tends to appear simply *Chinese*.

The idea of establishing a learned hierarchy may indeed be excellent; but, in a country where hereditary rule dominates, it is quite common to think that the son of a learned man must be one himself. He receives the appropriate education, writes verses and tragedies, as one learns to do at school, and succeeds to the genius and employment of his father, without rousing the least objection. If he is entirely incapable, a history book, a volume of verses or a heroic tragedy is written for him by his tutor, and the same effect obtained.

What proves whether the patronage granted to literature by the Austrian nobility is intelligently applied or no, is that I have witnessed the most illustrious German writers, unknown and enslaved, trailing their degraded grandeur in lowly employment.

I possessed a letter of recommendation to one of them, whose name is perhaps more famous in Paris than in Vienna; I had much difficulty finding him in the humble corner of the ministerial office which he occupied. I sought to ask him to introduce me to various salons, where I only wished to be introduced under the auspices of talent; I was surprised and distressed by his response.

— ‘Simply introduce yourself,’ he said to me, ‘as a foreigner; and say that you are related to an embassy attaché (my cousin Henri!), and you will be perfectly-well accepted; for here everyone is kind, and happy to welcome the French, at least those who do not offend the government. As for ourselves, poor poets, what right have we to go and shine among princes and bankers?’

I felt sorry for his confession, and the ironic misanthropy of a famous man, whom fate had nevertheless forced to accept a wretched job in a society which nonetheless knows his worth, yet which grants his talent only sterile laurels.

The situation regarding musicians is not the same: they possess the advantage of providing instant entertainment for the nobility, who welcome them with every mark of sympathy and admiration. They easily become familiars and friends of great lords, whose self-esteem is flattered by granting them visible patronage. They are therefore invited to all the parties. Only, they must bring their instrument with them, their livelihood: that is, their ball and chain. — One of them, who affects socialist ideas, took it into his head to declare Prince *** *his friend*,

remarked that he was also a friend of the princess, and said that he wished to appear simply as a guest, at the next party to be given in the palace, and not play his instrument.

‘That’s fine,’ said the prince; ‘I shall say you are unwell.’

— ‘No, I don’t wish to appear unwell.’

— ‘Well, my friend, I will ask my friends what they think.’

The result was that the musician failed to receive an invitation. He left, in a fury, for Hungary, where magnificent ovations compensated him for the foolish etiquette of the Vienna salons.

January 18th. —Let us speak a little more of the pleasures the Viennese pursue; it’s a more cheerful subject. The Carnival approaches, and I frequent the ballrooms of the *Sperl Saal* and the *Goldenen Birn*, which are more amusing than others and which cater especially for the bourgeoisie. They are vast establishments and splendidly decorated. The women are better dressed, that is to say, in a more Parisian fashion, than those of the lower class; they represent here that of the Parisian *grisette*. The waltz is as energetic, as wild, as in the taverns, and the cloud of tobacco smoke it emits scarcely less dense.

At the *Sperl Saal*, one dines or sups too amidst dancing and music, and the *gallop* winds about the tables without disturbing the diners. My first view of the *Sperl* recalled somewhat that of the *musicos* of Holland; I like to think, however, that the dancers commonly belong to a more respectable level of society than those whose grandmothers provided so many models for Rubens and who would not be tolerated by the paternal government of Austria. Presumptuous foreigners assure you that this system is far from having delivered moral improvement, and each of them, having spent only a winter in Vienna, will enumerate for you the *two hundred and thirty* conquests, at least, which form the German contingent on *Don Juan*’s list. But these are mere exaggerations; the ease with which Viennese women enter into conversation with the cavaliers who place themselves beside them, in the theatre or ballroom, may have given rise to the phenomenon. If you are told, also, that great ladies are always a little eighteenth century in behaviour, here, where the nineteenth has not yet begun, do not believe the tales propagated by our modern Casanovas; rather reflect on the fact that the number of lovely women in Austria is so great that most of them behave less stand-offishly since they are less appreciated.

The beauty of its women also strikes the stranger with astonishment when passing through Lintz, the first Austrian town over the border from Bavaria. I arrived there on a Sunday, and viewed the countrywomen on their way to church; they almost all wore the national costume: a brightly coloured petticoat, an embroidered vest, a necklace, and a large bonnet of gold-embroidered cloth, fit to delight a theatre director. These women were generally of a dazzling beauty; travel books fail to warn travellers of the fact, and, in that respect at least, they are perfectly correct. I spent the day traversing the squares and streets without my admiration tiring. However, in Lintz, the physiognomy is always more or less the same: they are tall women with regular, mild faces, beautiful eyes, blonde-haired and pale, with a delicacy of complexion which is the same among peasant women as among the city dwellers. In the end, one would no doubt weary of this uniformity of features, which explains their beauty, in the

way breeding, and the excellence of the climate, may explain some beautiful strain of domestic creature.

In Vienna, on the contrary, features vary greatly, though it is still possible to classify a small number of analogous types. In general, blondes and brunettes both have extremely pale and delicate skin, perfect figures, and superb arms and shoulders. It might be said that the middle class is less favoured; but the beautiful aristocratic women, who gather at the grand soirées and concerts, and those of the lower class, who rarely miss the dances at the *Sperl* and the *Volksgarten*, compete to an equal degree in beauty, freshness, and often even in elegance and grace.

These are cheerful countries, especially when one thinks of the sad creatures who populate our cities and countryside; it is the sign at once of the well-being of the lower class, and of the easy labour which is sufficient to procure it for them. Without claiming to pen here a panegyric of the Austrian government, I can assure you that it is the most favourable of all to the happiness of the people, as well as the upper classes; as for the bourgeoisie, we know, from our own experience, that it is the only class which ever gains from a revolution.

I regret that I can only speak to you of the winter pleasures of the Viennese. The Prater, which I have only seen when stripped of its verdure, has not lost all its beauty; especially in the snow, it presents a charming sight, and crowds invade its numerous cafes, casinos, and elegant pavilions, betrayed at first by the bareness of the trees. Troops of roe-deer roam freely about the park, where they are fed, and several branches of the Danube split the woods and meadows into islands. On the left, the road from Vienna to Brünn (*Brno*) commences. A mile further on is the Danube (for Vienna is no more *on* the Danube than Strasbourg is *on* the Rhine). Such is the Champs-Élysées of this capital. Its largest public garden is found a short distance away, in the Leopoldstadt district. When I entered it, its long paths were empty, its flowerbeds yellowed. From time to time, one discovers charming views; mountains crowned with castles indicate the distant banks of the Danube. Another garden, called the Volksgarten, is located within the ramparts, near the imperial castle.

The gardens of Schönbrunn were no less desolate when I traversed them. Schönbrunn is the Versailles of Vienna; the village of Hietzing which adjoins it is still, every Sunday, the rendezvous of joyful companies. Johann Strauss the Younger presides all day over his orchestra at the Hietzing casino, and nevertheless returns, in the evening, to conduct waltzes at the *Sperl*. To reach Hietzing, one crosses the courtyard of Schönbrunn castle; marble Chimeras guard the entrance; its deserted courtyard, decorated in eighteenth century taste, is wholly neglected; the castle itself, whose façade is imposing, contains nothing of interest internally except the immensity of its rooms, where whitewash almost everywhere coats the old gilded rocailles. But, on leaving the gardens, one enjoys a magnificent view, the impression of which is not diminished by memories of Saint-Cloud and Versailles.

The pavilion of Marie-Thérèse (*the Belvedere*) situated on a hill beneath which immense sheets of greenery unfurl, is of a completely enchanting architecture, to which nothing compares. Composed of a long open colonnade whose four arches at the centre are alone glazed with mirrors to form a lounge, the building is both a palace and a triumphal arena. Seen from the road, it crowns the full width of the castle and seems a part of it, because the hill on which

it is built raises its base to the level of the roofs of Schoenbrunn. It is necessary to ascend for a long time through pine-tree avenues, and over lawns, and past fountains sculpted in the style of Pierre Puget and Edmé Bouchardon, admiring all the divinities of this mannered Mount Olympus, in order to reach, finally, the steps of a temple worthy of them, which rises so boldly in the air, and offers, floating there, all the festoons and astragals of George Scudéry's poem (*Alaric*, 1654)

I escaped through the garden to return to the suburbs of Vienna by the beautiful avenue of Mariahilf, adorned for a league or so with a double row of immense poplars. The Sunday crowd make their way towards Hietzing, halting on numerous occasions in the cafes and casinos which line the entire road. It is the most beautiful entrance to Vienna: it is a decent, and bourgeois La Courtille (*a pleasure area in Belleville, a village then, now a suburb of Paris*) which the finest carriages do not scorn.

To finish my comments on the suburbs of Vienna, which are barely separated from Schönbrunn and Hietzing, I must speak to you again of the three theatres which complete the series of popular amusements. The Theater an der Wien (*of Vienna*), and those of Josephstadt and Leopoldstadt, are, in fact, theatres dedicated to the popular taste, comparable to our boulevard theatres. The other theatres of Vienna, that of the Burgtheater for comedy and drama, and that of the Carinthian Gate (*the Kärntnertortheater*) for ballet and opera, are situated within the walls. The Theater an der Wien, in spite of its humble location, is the most beautiful in the city and the most magnificently decorated. It is as large as the Paris Opéra, and resembles, greatly, in its design and ornamentation, the great theatres of Italy. Historical dramas, grand fairy-tale ballets, and some small introductory pieces, imitative generally of our vaudeville pieces are played there. When I arrived in Vienna, a melodrama by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer, *The Styrians*, was enjoying great success. At the same time, another play by the same lady was being performed in Leopoldstadt, as I have already informed you. Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer is the Joseph Bouchardy of the German theatre. She frankly calls her plays popular dramas; but it would be doing her too much honour to compare her to our compatriot otherwise than by her successes. I also saw Schiller's *William Tell* performed at the Vienna theatre; which proves that imperial censorship is not as fierce as it is made out to be; for, assuredly, no one would contest its right to proscribe a performance of *William Tell*.

Yet the censor also allowed us to see *Ruy Blas* performed in Leopoldstadt, under the title of *Master and Valet*; it is true that the outcome is slightly modified. Ruy Blas only threatens his master with the famous sword that he so boldly snatches from him. The rest follows; the valet finds his parents again, like Figaro; but, more happily than the latter, he finds them to be rich and noble. I even believe that in the outcome he marries the queen, and becomes a sort of Saxe-Coburg husband (*a consort, like Prince Albert*), which is even more constitutional.

The theatres of Leopoldstadt and Vienna are both served by an acting troupe under the direction of Carl-Carl (*the stage name of Karl Bernbrunn*). The basis of their repertoire is composed of *local farces*, a species of bizarre spectacular, of which the Viennese never tire. To form an idea of them, one would, in France, be obliged to combine Jean-Gaspard Debureau's pantomimes with the most eccentric vaudevilles of the Théâtre des Variétés. *Les Saltimbanques* (by Théophile Dumersan, and Charles Varin, 1838) would provide a kind of

preview. The logical, ordered mind of the average Parisian bourgeois would prove unable to endure the wild freedom and comic gaiety of these compositions. The most famous, and so to speak the model of the genre, is entitled: *Thirty Years in the Life of a Scoundrel* ('*Dreissig Jahre aus dem Leben eines Lumpen*', 1828). Almost all of these local farces have as their author an actor named Johann Nestroy, who plays the main roles with great verve and wit.

The Josephstadt theatre, whose interior resembles the hall of the Gymnasium, has been occupied for the past two months by sessions involving a physicist-magician named Ludwig Dobler. This artist fails to rise much above the level of the Italian magician Bartolomeo Bosco, who is at this moment charming the people of Constantinople. Since his departure, Josephstadt has rejuvenated the eternal subject of *The Rebellion in the Seraglio* ('*La Révolte au Serail*', libretto by Filippo Taglioni, score by Theodore Labarre, 1833), which, thanks to the pretty extras on stage, and the tribulations of the unfortunate Europeanised Turks, is all the rage at the moment; the Viennese people have only recently begun to mock the Turks, which also explains their excessive satisfaction with the piece.

I witnessed, at Josephstadt, a performance of which we have scarcely any notion in France. It was an *Academy* given by the famous Moritz Saphir, one of the most distinguished journalists and poets in Germany. A crowd of artists, moreover, competed in this *literary session*. It began with a scene in verse, by Saphir, entitled *The Conjugation of the Verb to Love*. Three of the prettiest actresses of the Imperial Theatre represented, one the mistress, the other two the schoolgirls. This ingenious idea was charmingly executed. Then, the nocturne, *En Rêve*, sung by an actor from the *Kärntnertortheater*, was accompanied on the piano by Franz Liszt himself. Then Miss Caroline Miller played a solo comedy in three acts, fortunately very short, also composed by Saphir. It was a sort of parody in which the witty beneficiary criticised our modern comedies. Miss Miller shared the applause given to the work. It is known that this actress is called the Mademoiselle Mars (*Anne Salvétat*) of Germany. A journalist from Vienna recently remarked, in this connection, that it would perhaps be more appropriate to say that Mademoiselle Mars is the Caroline Miller of France. I declare that I do not disagree. The *Academy* session, after several verse readings, ended with a *humorous reading* that Saphir enacted in person. We had first conceived some anxiety about the fate of this long literary production, which came after the singers, the actors, after the music of Franz Liszt, and Charles-Auguste de Bériot. If someone chose to read to a French audience an unpublished article by Voltaire, they would quickly demand, like Georges de Buffon, their carriage, or a comedy. Well, all that brilliant Viennese audience stayed to hear the article, which was a development of a philosophical paradox, and they applauded Saphir, and asked for an encore. This is what an *Academy* is in the cities of Germany; a man of letters gives concerts involving poetry and music, like a simple artistic performer. Saphir's *Academy* brought him in three thousand florins. It is impossible to give a more extensive idea of the pleasures of *high society* in Vienna; one must separate, completely, the former from the latter; for, here, there is still a high society, do not doubt it.

Such are the pleasures of Vienna in the winter. And it is only in winter that one can study this city in all the original nuances of its semi-Slavonic, semi-European character. In summer, the *beau monde* vanishes, travels to Italy, Switzerland, and the spa towns, or goes and sits in

its castles in Hungary and Bohemia; the populace transfer to the Prater, the Augarten, or to Hietzing, all the ardour and intoxication of their festivals, waltzes, and interminable suppers. It is necessary, therefore, to take the Danube boat, or the imperial post-coach, and leave this capital to its everyday life, so varied and yet, at the same time, so monotonous.

Vienna, in the summertime, becomes as tedious a city as Munich is at all times.

Chapter 10: Journal Entries Continued — IV

February 1st, 1840 — Let me resume the story of my adventures.... And let me now sound the trumpet; and clothe my past defeats in the triumphs of today. They are fine flags, flags of linen and silk that I raise now. Here I reach the city from the suburbs, and from the city....

But not yet.

My friend, so far, I have faithfully described to you my affairs with humbly-placed beauties; poor affairs! Nonetheless, they were very pleasant and sweet. The first gave me all the love she could; then departed, like a lovely angel, to visit her mother in Brünn (*Brno*). The other two welcomed me in a most friendly manner, and opened their smiling lips to me like flowers waiting to fruit; it was only right of them to take their time, for the honour of the city and its suburbs. But, my faith, my beauties, the Frenchman is fickle!... the Frenchman has broken the Viennese ice which presents obstacles to the simple traveller, the one who passes by and flits away. Now I have a right to citizenship, a street address, I turn my attention to *the* great ladies!... ‘They are *grandes dames*, you see!’ as my friend, the actor, Bocage (*Pierre-Martinien Touzet*) used to declaim (*As Buridan, in Gaillardet’s ‘Tour de Nesle’ which Alexandre Dumas rewrote in 1832*).

You will think me overjoyed; but no, I am very calm; things are as I say, that’s all.

I hesitate to continue my confession, my dear friend! For, as you read, I have long hesitated to send this letter. Is not my conduct perfidious towards these good creatures, who could not have imagined that the secrets of their beauty their whims would be scattered to the universe, and travel almost eight hundred miles to delight the thoughts of a jaded moralist (yourself, that is), and furnish him with a series of physiological observations.

Do not go about revealing, especially to Parisians, the details of our confidences, or else say it is all pure imagination; and, moreover, that it is happening far away (as Racine said in the preface to *Bajazet*!) and finally, see that names, addresses and other information are sufficiently disguised that nothing here resembles an indiscretion. And, anyway, what does it matter?... We don’t simply live, we don’t merely love. We study life, we analyse love, we are philosophers, for goodness’ sake!

Picture to yourself a large fireplace of carved marble. Fireplaces are rare in Vienna, and exist only in palaces. The armchairs and sofas have gilded feet. Around the room there are

gilded console tables; and the panelling ... well, there is also gilded panelling. The scene is complete, as you see.

Before this fireplace, three charming ladies are seated: one is Viennese; of the other two, one is Italian, the other English. One of the three is the mistress of the house. Of the men who are there, two are counts, another is a Hungarian prince, another is a minister, and the others are young men *full of promise*. Among them are the ladies' husbands and known, and avowed, lovers; but, as you know, lovers generally become husbands, that is to say they no longer count as masculine individuals. The thought is deep, think on it.

Your friend is therefore the only man in this company, if you consider his position carefully; setting aside the mistress of the house (which must be the case), your friend therefore has a chance of gaining the attention of the two remaining ladies, though even he can win little merit by it, for the reasons I've just explained.

Your friend has dined comfortably; he has drunk the wines of France and Hungary, and taken coffee and liqueurs; he is well dressed, his linen is of an exquisite fineness, his hair is silky and lightly curled; your friend exemplifies a paradox, which had been among us for ten years, but is brand-new here. Foreign lords are not powerful enough to compete on the firm ground that we have seized. Your friend blazes and sparkles; when you touch him, flames emerge.

Here is a well-set young man; he pleases the ladies prodigiously; the men are most charmed too. The people of this country are so nice! Your friend therefore passes for a pleasant conversationalist. People complain that he says little; but, when he warms up, he talks excellently!

I will tell you that, of the two ladies, there is one I like very much, and the other greatly too. However, the Englishwoman has such a sweet way of speaking, she sits so neatly in her armchair; she has such beautiful blonde hair with red highlights, such white skin; such silk, padding, tulle, pearls and opals, that one does not really know what's in the midst of it all, but it is so well-composed!

This is a kind of beauty and charm that I am beginning to comprehend now; I am growing old. So much so that here I am, occupying myself all evening with a pretty woman in an armchair. The other one seems to be enjoying herself greatly in the conversation of a gentleman of a certain age who seems very much in love with her, in the manner of a Teutonic *patito* (*suitor*) which is not pleasant. I was talking with the little lady in blue; I was ardently revealing my admiration for the hair and complexion of true blondes. At this, the other, who was listening to us with one ear, suddenly quit the conversation with her suitor and joined in ours. I wished to avoid being questioned. She had heard everything. I hastened to establish a distinction between brunettes with pale skin and others; she answered me that hers was dark.... So, here is your friend reduced to quibbles, conventional phrases, protestations. I thought I had greatly displeased the brunette. I was sad, because after all she was very beautiful and very majestic in her white dress, and resembled Giulia Grisi in the first act of Mozart's *Don Juan*. The memory served, however, to temper things a little. Two days later, I met one of the counts who was there, at the Casino; we chanced to go to dinner together, and then to the theatre. We became

friends in an instant. The conversation turned to the two ladies I mentioned above; he suggested that I introduce myself to one of them: the dark-skinned one. I raised my previous clumsiness.

He told me that on the contrary, it had gone very well. The man is deep.

I feared, at first, that he was the lady's lover and was trying to rid himself of her, especially since he said:

— 'It's very useful to know her, because she has a box at the Kärntnertortheater, and you can attend whenever performances you wish'.

— 'Dear Count, that is excellent; introduce me to the lady.'

He warned her, and the next day, today, here am I at this beautiful lady's house, at about three. The drawing room is full. My presence hardly seems to register. However, a tall Italian makes her a bow, and departs, then a large fellow, who reminds me of Hoffman's registrar, Heerbrand (*see his tale, 'The Golden Pot'*), then my count, who has business elsewhere. The Hungarian prince and the *patito* remain. I wish to depart in turn; the lady restrains me by asking if ... (I was going to write a sentence that would yield you a clue). Anyway, simply know that she asks for a small favour I can perform for her. The prince goes off to play a game of tennis. The old man (we'll call him a marquis, if you like), the old marquis holds firm. She says to him:

— 'My dear Marquis, I am not sending you away, but I must write something.'

He rises, and she says to me:

— 'No, stay; I must give you the letter.'

Here we are alone. She continues:

— 'There is no letter; let us talk a little; it is so tedious to talk to several people at once! I wish to visit Munich, tell me how things are there?'

I answer:

— 'I have a superb guide-book, with engravings, I will bring it tomorrow.'

That was quite clever of me; then I said a few words about Munich, and we moved on to other topics of conversation.

But ... it seems I am in the process of relating the most common adventure in the world. Brag about it? Why? I will even admit it ended badly. I had allowed myself, with complacency, to describe my love affairs, but only as a study in foreign customs, with regard to women who speak almost none of the European languages ... and, as for the rest, I remembered in time Friedrich Klopstock's line: 'Here, discretion beckons me with its bronze finger.' (*see 'Ma Patrie', in Gérard's selection 'Poésies Allemandes', 1830*)

P.S. — Do not be too severe on this letter made of fragments.... In Vienna this winter I have continually lived in a dream. Is the sweet atmosphere of the Orient already acting upon my head and heart? —I am, however, only halfway there.

Chapter 11: The Adriatic

(Translator's note : Gérard de Nerval's eventual route to Cairo and the Near-East was not that described here. From Vienna, he, in fact, returned, penniless, to Paris in March, or at the start of April, 1840. He left Marseilles on his actual route at the end of December 1842, taking ship via Livorno, Civitavecchia, Naples, Malta, and Syros, arriving in Alexandria around January 14th, 1843. He then made a five-day boat journey to Cairo.)

What a catastrophe, my friend! How am I to tell you all that has happened, or rather dare to deliver this confidential letter to the imperial post office! Remember I am still on Austrian territory, that is to say, on a wooden deck that forms part of it — that of the *Francesco Primo*, a vessel belonging to the shipping company Österreichischer Lloyd. I am writing to you in sight of Trieste, a rather gloomy city, situated on a strip of land that juts out into the Adriatic, with wide streets that transect it at right angles, and through which a continual wind blows. Doubtless, there are beautiful views to be had of the dark mountains that pierce the horizon; but you can read admirable descriptions of those in *Jean Sbogar* (1818) by Charles Nodier, the author of *Mademoiselle de Marsan* (1832); why repeat them? As for my journey from Vienna here, I came by train, except for about twenty leagues through mountain gorges covered with fir trees powdered with frost.... It was very cold. It was not cheerful, but it was in keeping with my inner feelings. Be content with this confession.

You will ask me why I did not travel eastwards via the Danube, as was my first intention. Let me inform you that the pleasant adventures which kept me in Vienna far longer than I wished, led me to miss the last steamboat which goes downriver to Belgrade and Semlin, from which one usually takes the Turkish post-coach. The river was iced over, it was no longer possible to sail. I was minded to finish the winter in Vienna and not leave again till the spring ... perhaps never. The gods decided otherwise.

No, you know nothing of this as yet. I must set an expanse of sea between myself and ... a sweet, sad memory.

Do you know where I am going now, on this beautiful Österreichischer Lloyd vessel?

I will dream of my amours... on the island of Cythera.

We sail south, in the Adriatic, in terrible weather; it is impossible to see anything but the misty coasts of Illyria to the east, and the numerous islands of the Dalmatian archipelago. The country of the Montenegrins is only a dark silhouette on the horizon, which we perceived as we passed Ragusa, a wholly Italian city. We put in to Corfu later, to take on coal and receive a party of Egyptians, commanded by a Turk named Soliman-Aga. These brave folk have established themselves on deck, where they remain, squatting during the day and lying down, each on his own mat, at night. The head of the group alone sits with us, between decks, and takes his meals at our table. He speaks a little Italian and seems a cheerful enough companion.

The storm has increased as we approached Greece. The rolling was so violent during dinner that most of the guests gradually regained their hammocks.

In these circumstances, where, after many attempts at bravado, the table, at first full, gradually becomes empty, to great bursts of laughter from those who resist the effect of the pitching and tossing of the ship, a sort of maritime fraternity is established among the latter. What was for all but a meal becomes for those who remain a feast, which is indulged in for as long as possible. It is a little like the game of pool in billiards; the aim is not to 'die'.

To die!... you will decide if the allusion is apt. There were four of us left at the table, after having seen thirty guests fail shamefully. Besides Soliman and I, an English captain and a Capuchin from the Holy Land, named Father Charles. He was a fine fellow who laughed heartily with us and who pointed out that, today, Soliman-Aga had not poured himself any wine, which he usually drank in abundance. He told him so jestingly.

— 'Today,' replied the Turk, 'the thunder is too loud.'

Father Charles rose from the table, and took a cigar from his sleeve, which he offered to me very graciously.

Lighting it, I still wished to keep company with the two who remained; but soon felt it healthier to go and take the air on deck.

I stayed there only a moment. The storm was still in full force. I hastened to return to steerage. The Englishman indulged in great bursts of laughter, and ate every dish, saying that he could willingly consume the dinner of a whole barracks (it is true, the Turk helped him powerfully). To complete his bravado, he asked for a bottle of champagne, and offered us some; none of those who had retired accepted his invitation. He then said to the Turk:

— 'Well, we'll drink it together!'

But at this moment there was a rumble of thunder, and Soliman-Aga, perhaps believing it a temptation of the devil's making, left the table, and vanished without answering.

The Englishman, annoyed, cried out:

— 'Well, so much the better! I'll drink it all by myself, and down another after that!'

Next morning the storm had abated; the cabin boy, on entering the cabin, found the Englishman lying half on the table, his head resting on his arms. They shook him. He was dead!

— '*Bismillah!*' cried the Turk.

Which is the word the Turks say to ward off any fatal thing (*equating to 'In the name of Allah,' a truncation of 'Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim', meaning 'In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful)* ...

The Englishman was indeed dead. Father Charles regretted that he could not pray for him as a priest; though he certainly prayed for him, silently, as a man.

A strange fate! The Englishman was a former captain of the East India Company, suffering from a heart condition, who had been advised to drink only Nile water. The wine had failed to mix with the water in time.

All being said, was it not a most unhappy way to die?

We will stop at Cythera to leave the Englishman's body there. That will allow me to land on the isle, at which the vessel does not usually stop. You will have understood, no doubt, the reason that made me leave Vienna so abruptly.... I tear myself away from such memories. — I will add not a word more. I am reticent in my pain, like a wounded animal that retreats to solitude, to suffer there awhile, or succumb without complaint.

(Translator's note: on Gérard's route, in 1843, he viewed Cythera only from a distance, in passing, at dawn on January 10th, aboard the 'Minos'.)

Part III: Introduction – Towards the Orient (1839-40, 1842-43)

From Paris to Cythera: Chapters 12-21



View of the Cyclades, 1845, Claude-Félix-Théodore Caruelle d'Aligny
[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collectie/AK-MAK-1845-01-01-01)

(Translator's note: the narrative now follows Gérard's actual route, of 1843. Having sailed from Marseilles via the Italian coast and Malta, he passed Cythera, at dawn, on January 10th, 1843)

Chapter 12: The Archipelago

We had left Malta two days before, and no new land had appeared on the horizon. Doves — perhaps from Mount Eryx (*the site, in Sicily, of the famous temple of Venus-Aphrodite*) — had taken passage with us for Cythera or Cyprus, and were resting at night on the yards and in the tops.

The weather was fine, the sea calm, and we had been promised that on the morning of the third day we would be able to see the southern tip of the Morea. Must I confess? The appearance of the isles of Greece, reduced to their rocks, stripped by hostile winds of the little sandy earth that had remained after centuries, hardly corresponds to the idea that I had of them yesterday when I awoke. However, I was on deck at five o'clock, searching for the absent land, closely examining the edge of the dark blue circle traced by the waters beneath the azure dome of the sky, waiting to catch sight of Mount Taygetus, far away, like the apparition of some deity. The horizon was still dark; but the daystar shone, with a clear shaft of fire furrowing the sea. The wheels of the ship chased away the dazzling foam, which left far behind us its long trail of phosphorus. 'Beyond this sea,' said Corinne (*See 'Corinne' by Madame de Staël, XV, 9*), turning towards the Adriatic, 'lies Greece.... Is not this idea enough to move us?' And I, happier than she, happier than Johann Winckelmann, who dreamed of it all his life, and happier than the modern Anacreon (*Pierre-Jean de Béranger, according to Gérard*), who wishes to die there — I was about to see her at last, luminous, rise from the waters with the sun!

I saw her thus, I have seen her, my day began like a song of Homer! It was truly rosy-fingered Aurora (*goddess of the dawn*) who opened the gates of the Orient to me! And let us speak no longer of dawn in our countries, the goddess does not reach so far. What we barbarians call dawn, or daybreak, is only a pale reflection, tarnished by the impure atmosphere of our deprived climes. Behold, already, with the ardent line which widens on the circle of waters, a sheaf of pink rays blooming, reviving the azure of the air which higher above still remains dark. Would one not say that the brow of a goddess, and her outstretched arms, are gradually lifting the veil of night, still glittering with stars? She appears, she approaches, she glides, lovingly, over the divine waves which gave birth to Cytherea (*the goddess Venus-Aphrodite*) But what say I? Before us, on the horizon there, that vermilion coast, those purple hills which seem like clouds, reveal the very island of Venus, it is ancient Cythera with its porphyry rocks: Κυθήρη πορφυροῦσσα (*Cythera purpurea*) Currently, the island is called Cerigo, and belongs to the English (1809-1864).

This was my dream ... and this my awakening! The sky and the sea are still here; the sky of the East, the sea of Ionia grant each other, each morning, the sacred kiss of love; but the earth is dead, dead beneath the hand of man, and the gods have flown!

'I will teach you the truth of the oracles of Delphi and Claros,' Apollo said to his priest. 'Formerly, there came forth from the bosom of the Earth, and the woods, an infinity of oracles and exhalations which inspired the divine furies. But the Earth, by the continual changes that time brings, has gathered up and drawn back into its fount, all exhalations and oracles.' This is what Porphyry reported, according to Eusebius (*in the latter's 'Contra Porphyrium', of which only fragments exist*).

Thus, the gods themselves die, or quit the Earth, to which human love no longer summons them! Their groves have been cut down, their springs exhausted, their sanctuaries profaned; where can they manifest their presence again? O Venus Urania, queen of this isle and this mount, whence your features threatened the world; Venus Armata (*Venus Victrix*), who has reigned over me since the Capitol, where I saluted (*in the museum*) your extant statue, why have I not the courage to believe in you and to invoke you, goddess, as our forefathers did, for

centuries, with fervour and simplicity? Are you not the source of all love, all noble ambition, the second of the sacred mothers who sit enthroned at the world's heart, guarding and protecting the eternal idea of womankind from the double assault of death which transforms them, or nothingness which seduces them? ... But you are there still, amidst the glittering stars; mankind is forced to recognise you in the heavens, and science to name you. O you, the triple goddess, do you forgive the ungrateful earth for having neglected your altar?

To revert to prose, it must be admitted that Cythera has preserved, of all its beauties, only its porphyry, as melancholy to the sight as simple sandstone. Not a tree on the coast that we followed, not a rose, alas, not a shell along this shore from which the Nereids chose Aphrodite's conch-shell. I sought Jean-Antoine Watteau's shepherds and shepherdesses, their boats adorned with garlands approaching flowery banks; I dreamed of those mad bands, the pilgrims of love, in cloaks of shimmering satin.... I only saw a gentleman shooting woodcock and pigeon, and some blonde, dreamy Scottish soldiers, searching the horizon perhaps for the mists of their homeland.

We stopped, shortly, at the port of St. Nicolas, at the eastern tip of the island, opposite Cape Malea, which could be seen some seventeen miles away across the sea. The short duration of our stay did not allow a visit to Capsali, the capital of the island; but, to the south, one could see the rock which dominates the town, and from which one can view the whole island of Cythera, as well as a part of the Morea, and even the coast of Crete when the weather is clear. It is on this height, crowned today with a military fortification, that the temple of Celestial Venus stood. The goddess was dressed as a warrior, armed with a javelin, and appeared to dominate the sea, and guard the fate of the Greek archipelago from those cabalistic figures of the Arabian tales, that must be overcome in order to destroy the spells brought about by their presence. The Romans, descended from Venus through their ancestor Aeneas, were the only ones able to remove her statue of myrtle-wood, whose powerful contours draped in symbolic veils recalled the primitive art of the Pelasgians, from this superb rock. It was indeed the great goddess of generation, Aphrodite Melaenis, or the Black One, wearing the hieratic *polos* crown (*tall and cylindrical*) on her head, with irons on her feet, as if chained by force to the destiny of Greece, which had conquered her beloved Troy.... The Romans transported her to the Capitol, and soon Greece, in a strange twist of fate, belonged to the regenerated descendants of the vanquished royalty of Ilion.

Who, however, would recognize, in the cosmogonic statue that we have just described, the frivolous Venus of the poets, the mother of Cupid, the amorous wife of lame Vulcan?

She was called the provident, the victorious, the dominatrix of the seas — Euploia, Pontia — Apotrophia, who expels criminal passion; and again, was named the eldest of the Fates, a dark idealisation. On either side of the painted and gilded idol stood the two gods of love, Eros and Anteros, dedicating poppies and pomegranates to their mother. The symbol that distinguished her from the other goddesses was a crescent surmounted by an eight-rayed star; this sign, embroidered on purple, still reigns over the East, and truly among those who wear it Venus has ever a veil on her head, and chains on her feet.

This was the austere goddess worshipped in Sparta, Corinth, and in a certain place on Cythera with its rugged rocks; she was truly the daughter of a mother fertilised by the divine blood of Uranus, emerging cold as yet from the torpid flanks of Nature and Chaos.

The other Venus — since many poets and philosophers, especially Plato, recognise two separate Venuses — was the daughter of Jupiter and Dione; she was called Venus Pandemos (*the earthly Venus, of the people*), and had, in another part of the island of Cythera, altars and followers quite different from those of Venus Urania (*celestial Venus*). The poets were able to occupy themselves freely with the former, who unlike the other, was not protected by the laws of a severe theogony, and they lent her all their amorous fancies, which have transmitted to us a false image of the serious worship enacted by the pagans. What would be thought, in the distant future, of the mysteries of Catholicism, if posterity was reduced to judging them via the ironic interpretations of Voltaire or Évariste de Parry? Lucian, Ovid, Apuleius, belonged to no less sceptical eras, and they alone have influenced our superficial minds, which lack the curiosity required to study the old cosmogonic poems derived from Chaldean or Syriac sources.

Chapter 13: Venus's Mass

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* ('*Poliphilo's Dream*', attributed to Francesco Colonna, latinised as *Franciscus Columna*) gives some curious details regarding the cult of the Celestial Venus in the island of Cythera, and, without admitting as an authority this book, many pages of which imagination has coloured, we can often find there the result of studied and faithful impressions.

Two lovers, Poliphilo and Polia, prepare for a pilgrimage to Cythera.

They visit the sea-shore, and the sumptuous temple of Venus Physizoe (*the Giver of Life*). There, priestesses, led by a mitred *praying woman*, first address orations to the gods Foricula, and Limentina, and to the goddess Cardea (*the three divinities of the door, the sill, and the door-hinges*). The nuns were dressed in scarlet, and wore, in addition, short, light cotton surplices; their hair hung over their shoulders. The first held the book of ceremonies; the second, an *almusse* (*cap*) of fine silk; the others, a golden shrine, the *cecespita* or sacrificial knife, and the *prefericulum*, or libation-bowl; the seventh wore a golden mitre with pendants; the smallest held a candle of virgin wax; all were crowned with flowers. The *almusse* worn by the praying woman had attached, in front of the forehead, a golden clasp inlaid with an *ananchyte*, a talismanic stone used to evoke the figures of the gods.

The praying woman led the lovers to a cistern situated in the midst of the temple, and opened its lid with a golden key; then, reading in the holy book, by the light of the candle, she blessed the sacred oil, and poured it into the cistern; then she took the candle, and moved the torch near to the opening, saying to Polia: 'My daughter, what do you ask?' — 'Lady, she said, I ask grace for him who is with me, and desire that we may visit, together, the kingdom of the great divine Mother to drink from her holy fountain.' Whereupon the praying woman, turning

to Poliphilo, made a similar request of him, and urged him to plunge the torch completely into the cistern. Then she tied with a cord, a vessel, called a *lepaste* (*shaped like a cylix, resting on a broad stand*), which she lowered into the holy water, drew some forth, and had Polia drink it. Finally, she shut the cistern, and implored the goddess to be favourable to the two lovers.

After these ceremonies, the priestesses entered a sort of circular sacristy, to which two white swans and a vase full of sea water were brought, and then two turtledoves tied to a basket, filled with shells and roses, which were placed on the sacrificial table; the young girls knelt around the altar, and invoked the most holy Graces, Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne, ministers of Cytherea, praying them to leave the *anclabris mensa*, (*the sacrificial table*) which is at Orchomenus, in Boeotia, where they reside, and, as divine Graces, to descend, and accept the religious tribute made to their mistress in their name.

After this invocation, Polia approached the altar which was covered with spices and perfumes, set it on fire, and fed the flame with branches of dried myrtle. Then she placed upon it the two turtledoves, which were struck with the *cecespita*, and plucked on the *anclabris mensa*, the blood being set aside in a sacred vessel. Then began the divine service, intoned by a *cantoress*, to which the others responded; two young nuns, placed in front of the praying woman, accompanied the office with Lydian flutes in the natural Lydian tone. Each of the priestesses carried a branch of myrtle and, singing in tune with the flutes, danced around the altar while the sacrifice was consumed.

I have merely summarised, for the benefit of artists, the main details of Venus's Mass as sometimes performed.

We shall see what other ceremonies were performed, on Cythera itself, in that realm of the mistress of the world — κυποια κυθηπειον και εανθου κοσμου — today ruled by another gracious female power, Queen Victoria.

Chapter 14: Poliphilo's Dream

I am far from wanting to cite Poliphilo as a scientific authority; Poliphilo, that is to say Francesco Colonna, was doubtless swayed by the ideas and vision of his day; but that does not prevent his having drawn certain contents of his book from authentic Greek and Latin sources, while I might have done the same, but preferred to cite him.

May Poliphilo and Polia, those holy martyrs of love, forgive me for touching on their memory! Chance — if it was chance — placed their mystical history in my hands, and I was unaware that, at that very moment, a more learned poet, more learned than I, had shed the last gleam of genius that his bowed forehead concealed on those same pages. He was, like those martyrs, one of the most faithful apostles of pure love... and, among us, one of the last.

Accept this souvenir from one of your unknown friends, good Nodier, beautiful divine soul, who immortalised the pair, while dying (*see Charles Nodier's last work, 'Franciscus Columna', published 1844*)! Like you, I believe in them, and, like them, in the celestial love

whose flame Polia rekindled, and whose splendid palace on the Cytherean rocks Poliphilo rebuilt in thought. You know who the true gods are today, doubly-crowned spirits: pagans as regards genius, Christians at heart!

And I, who am going to disembark at this sacred isle that Francesco described without ever having seen it, am I not still, alas, the child of a century disinherited of illusion, who needs to touch in order to believe, and to dream of the past ... among its ruins? It sufficed only for me to commit the flesh and ashes of all I loved to the tomb, to confirm that it is we, the living, who walk in a world of ghosts.

Poliphilo, wiser than I, knew the true Cythera without visiting it, and true love, through having rejected its mortal image. It is a touching story that may be read in Charles Nodier's last novella, if one has not been able to divine it veiled in the poetic allegories of Poliphilo's Dream.

Francesco Colonna, the author of this work, was a poor fifteenth century artist, who fell madly in love with a princess, Lucrezia Polia of Treviso. An orphan, taken in by Jacopo Bellini, father of the most illustrious painter we know (*Giovanni Bellini*), he did not dare raise his eyes to the heiress of one of the greatest houses in Italy. It was she herself who, taking advantage of the freedom of a Carnival night, encouraged him to tell her everything, and showed herself touched by his pain. She is a noble figure, this Lucretia Polia, the poetic sister of Juliet (*see Shakespeare's play 'Romeo and Juliet'*), Leonora (*the heroine of Beethoven's opera 'Fidelio'*) and Bianca Capello (*the lover of Francesco I de' Medici*). Their difference in status made marriage impossible; the altar of Christ ... the God of equality! ... was forbidden them; they dreamt of more indulgent deities, they invoked the ancient Eros and his mother, Aphrodite, and their homage rose towards distant skies unaccustomed to our prayers.

From that hour, imitating the chaste love of the followers of Venus Urania, they committed themselves to living apart during life, so as to be united after death, and, strangely enough, it was according to the forms of the Christian faith that they accomplished this pagan vow. Did they think to see in the Virgin and her son an ancient symbol of the divine Great Mother, and the celestial child who sets hearts ablaze? Did they dare to penetrate through the mystical darkness to the primitive Isis of the eternal veil, the changing mask, holding in one hand the ansate cross (*the ankh*), and on her knees the child Horus, the saviour of the world?...

Well, such strange assimilations were then in great fashion in Italy. The Neoplatonic school of Florence triumphed over Aristotle, and feudal theology opened like black tree-bark to the fresh buds of the philosophical Renaissance which flourished on all sides. Francesco became a monk, Lucrezia a nun, and each kept in their heart the pure and beautiful image of the other, passing their days in the study of ancient philosophy and religion, and the nights in dreaming of their future happiness, adorning it with the splendid details revealed to them by the ancient Greek writers. O happy and blessed double existence, if we are to believe the book that immortalises their love! Sometimes the pompous festivals of the Italian clergy brought them together in the same church, streets, squares where solemn processions took place, and alone, unknown to the crowd, they greeted each other with a sweet and melancholy look: 'Brother, we will die!' – 'Sister, we will die!' that is to say: we have only a short time left to drag our chain behind us...the smile exchanged said nothing but that.

However, Poliphilo wrote and bequeathed to future lovers the noble and admirable story of their struggles, their pains, their joys. He described those enchanted nights where, escaping from our world full of the law of a harsh God, in spirit he joined his sweet Polia in the holy dwelling-places of Cytherea. The faithful soul could not wait, and the whole mythological realm opened to them from that moment. Like the hero of a more modern and no less sublime poem (*Goethe's 'Faust, Part II'*), they traversed in their twin dream the immensity of space and time; the Adriatic Sea and dark Thessaly, where the spirit of the ancient world was extinguished on the field of Pharsalus (*where Julius Caesar defeated Pompey*)! The fountains began to well up in their caves, the rivers became streams again, the arid summits of the mountains were crowned with sacred woods; the Peneus flooded its changed shores once more, and everywhere could be heard the muffled labours of the Cabeiri (*pre-Olympian chthonic deities*) and the Dactyls (*the male followers of Cybele-Rhea, the Great Goddess*) constructing, for them, the phantom of a universe. The star of Venus grew like a magical sun, to pour golden rays on these deserted beaches, that their deaths would repopulate; the faun awoke in his lair, the naiad in her fountain, and the hamadryads escaped their green groves. Thus, the holy aspiration of two pure souls restored to the world, for an instant, its fallen powers, and the guardian spirits of its ancient fertility.

It was then that the pilgrimage took place, and continued night after night, which led our two lovers, over the plains and rejuvenated mountains of Greece, to all the renowned temples of Celestial Venus, and finally brought them to the principal sanctuary of the goddess, on the isle of Cythera, where the spiritual union of the two adherents, Poliphilo and Polia, was accomplished.

Brother Francesco died first, having completed his pilgrimage and his book; he bequeathed the manuscript to Lucrezia, who, great and powerful lady that she was, did not fear to have it printed by Aldus Manutius, and illustrated with drawings, most of them very beautiful, representing the principal scenes of the dream, the ceremonies of sacrifice, the temples, figures and symbols of the divine Great Mother, the goddess of Cythera. This book of platonic love was for a long time the gospel of loving hearts, in the lovely country of Italy which did not always pay such refined tributes to the Celestial Venus.

Could I do better than reread, before touching on Cythera, that strange book by Poliphilo, which, as Charles Nodier has pointed out, reveals a charming and unique feature; the author has signed his name and indicated his love, by employing the letters at the head of each chapter, chosen to form the following legend: *Poliam frater Franciscus Columna peramavit* (*brother Francesco Colonna loved Polia dearly*). What is the love of Abelard and Héloïse compared to this?

Chapter 15: St. Nicolas

When I set foot on the soil of Cythera, I had difficulty accepting that this island, in the early years of the century, belonged to France (1807-1813). Heir to the possessions of Venice, our

homeland has, in turn, seen itself despoiled by England, which, there, as in Malta, announces to passers-by on a marble tablet, in Latin that ‘the treaty of Europe, and the *love* of these islands, have, since 1814, assured it of sovereignty.’ — Love! God of the Cythereans, have you, indeed, ratified this claim?

While we were skirting the coast, before taking shelter at St. Nicolas, I noticed a small monument, vaguely outlined against the azure sky, and which, from the top of a rock, seemed the extant statue of some protective divinity.... But, as we approached nearer, we clearly distinguished the object which drew the traveller’s attention to this stretch of the coastline. It was a gibbet, a gibbet with three arms, only one of which was furnished. The first real gibbet that I have yet seen, it was on the soil of Cythera, an English possession, that I first chanced to see it!

I shall not visit Capsali (*Chora*); I know nothing remains of the temple that Paris built, dedicated to Venus Dionaëus, when bad weather forced him to remain in Cythera, for sixteen days, with Helen, whom he had abducted from her husband, Menelaus. It is true that the fount which supplied water to the crew, the basin where that most beautiful of women washed her clothes, and those of her lover, with her own hands, is still shown; but a church was built on the ruins of the temple, and can be seen in the midst of the port. Nothing remains too, of the temple of Venus Urania on the cliff top, which was replaced by the Venetian fort, today guarded by a company of Scots.

Thus, the Celestial Venus, and Venus Pandemos, revered, one on the heights, and the other in the valleys, have left no traces in the capital of the island, and no one has bothered to excavate the ruins of the ancient city of Skandia, near the port of Avlemonas, hidden deep in the bosom of the earth; there, perhaps, one might find some relics of the third Venus, the eldest of the Fates, the ancient queen of mysterious Hades.

For, it must be noted – so as to escape the maze into which the last of the Latin poets and the modern mythologists have led us – that each of the great goddesses had three masks, and was worshipped in three forms; those of heaven, earth, and hell; a triplicity, however, that should not seem strange to the Christian mind, which accepts three persons in one deity.

The port of St. Nicolas offered to our eyes only a few huts on a sandy bay, where a stream flowed forth, and a few fishing boats had been pulled ashore; others spread their lateen sails on the horizon, on the dark line traced by the sea, beyond Cape Spathi, the northernmost point of the island, and Cape Malea, which could be clearly seen on the Greek side. No one came to inspect our papers when we disembarked; the islands belonging to the English do not abuse their use of police and the law, and, if their legislation still provides for a whip below, and a gibbet above, foreigners at least have nothing to fear from those methods of repression.

I was eager to taste the wines of Greece, instead of the dense, dark Maltese wine which had been served us, for two days, on board the steamship. So, I did not disdain to enter the humble tavern, which also served as a common rendezvous for English coastguards and Greek sailors. The painted front displayed, as in Malta, the names of English beers and liqueurs inscribed in gold. Seeing me dressed in a mackintosh bought in Livorno, the host hastened to fetch me a glass of whiskey; I tried, for my part, to remember the name that the Greeks gave to wine, and

pronounced it so perfectly that I was not understood at all. – What use is it now to have been granted a bachelor's degree by François Guizot, Abel-François Villemain, and Victor Cousin (*Ministers of Public Instruction*) combined, or to rob France of twenty minutes of their time to witness to my knowledge? College has made me such a great Hellenist that I find myself in a tavern on Cythera asking for wine so expertly that the host, immediately withdrawing the whiskey I have refused, serves me a jug of beer. I managed to scrape together three words of Italian, and, as no one had ever taught me that language, I easily succeeded in having a bottle of Cytherean liquid brought to my table.

It was a good little red wine, smelling somewhat of the wineskin in which it had been kept, and also of tar, but full of warmth and recalling the taste of the bone-dry *asciutto* wines of Italy — oh, generous blood of the grape!... as George Sand names you (see '*Les Lettres d'un Voyageur, X*'), as soon as you are inside me, I am no longer the same; are you not truly the blood of a god? And perhaps, as the Bishop of Cloyne (*George Berkeley*) said, the blood, too, of those rebellious spirits who fought in ancient times on earth, and who, vanquished, annihilated in their first form, return, in wine, to agitate us with their passion, their anger and their strange ambition!...

But no, that which comes from the holy veins of this isle, from the *porphyrous* and long-blessed earth where Celestial Venus reigned, can only inspire good and sweet thoughts. So I thought of nothing thenceforth but to seek out, piously, some trace of the ruined temples of the goddess of Cythera; I climbed the cliffs of Cape Spathi, where Achilles built a shrine, before he left for Troy; I looked for Cranae, on the other side of the gulf, which was the site of Helen's abduction; but the isle of Cranae merged in the distance with the coast of Laconia, and not a stone of the temple remained on the cliffs, from whose summit one discovers, on gazing towards the island, only water-mills set in motion by a small river which flows into the bay of St. Nicolas.

On the way down, I met some of the other passengers, who planned on visiting a small town, a few miles away, a more considerable place even than Capsali. We mounted mules, and, under the guidance of an Italian who knew the countryside, we sought a route through the mountains. One would never believe, on seeing from the sea the approaches to Cythera bristling with the rocks, that the interior contains so many fertile plains; it is, after all, an island which is seventy miles or so in circumference, and whose cultivated areas are clothed with cotton, olive, and mulberry trees, sown among the vines. Oil and silk are the principal products providing the inhabitants with a livelihood, and the Cythereans — I prefer not to call them *Cerigots* (*Cerigo was the Venetian name for the island*) — find, in preparing the latter, a labour gentle enough for their lovely hands; the cultivation of cotton has been affected, on the contrary, by the English having taken possession....

Do you not admire all these beautiful details in the style of a guidebook? It's only that modern Cythera, not being on the usual route taken by travellers, has never been described at length, and I will at least have the merit of having said more than the English tourists have done.

The goal of my companions' trip was Potamos, a small town with an Italianate appearance, though poor and dilapidated; mine was the hill of Aplunari, situated a short distance away,

where I had been told I would find the remains of a temple. Dissatisfied with my journey to Cape Spathi, I hoped to compensate for it, and be able, like the good Abbé Delille (*the poet, Jacques Delille*), to fill my pockets with mythological debris. Oh happiness! I encountered, as we approached Aplunari, a small wood of mulberry and olive trees where a few rare pines, here and there, extended their dark parasols; aloes and cacti bristled amidst the undergrowth, and on the left the great blue eye of the sea that we had lost sight of for some time opened once more. A stone wall seemed to partly enclose the wood, and, on a piece of marble the remains of an ancient arch that surmounted a square door, I could distinguish these words: ΚΑΡΔΙΩΝ ΘΕΡΑΠΙΑ (*kardion therapia, the healing of hearts*).

The inscription made me sigh.

Chapter 16: Aplunari

The hill of Aplunari possesses only a few ruins, but has preserved the even rarer remains of the sacred vegetation which once adorned the cliff-face; evergreen cypresses, and a few ancient olive trees whose cracked trunks are the refuge of bees, have been preserved by the kind of venerable tradition attached to such illustrious places. The remains of a stone enclosure protect, but only on the seaward side, this little grove which is the heritage of a single family; the door has been surmounted by an arched stone, retrieved from the ruins, whose inscription I have already given. Beyond the enclosure is a small house surrounded by olive trees, the home of these poor Greek peasants, who for fifty years have seen the Venetian, French, and English flags succeed one another on the towers of the fort, which protects St. Nicolas and can be seen at the other end of the bay. The memory of the French Republic, and of Bonaparte who had freed them (1797-1799), and later, as the Emperor Napoleon, dissolved the Russo-Ottoman Republic of the Seven Isles (*in 1807*), is still present in the minds of the older inhabitants.

England has shattered this fragile liberty since 1815, and the inhabitants of Cythera have watched, joylessly, the triumph of their brothers of the Morea. England does not make the people she conquers or rather that she acquires, English; she makes helots of them, sometimes servants; such is the fate of the Maltese, such would be that of the Greeks of Cythera if the English aristocracy did not disdain this dusty and sterile island as a residence. However, there is a kind of wealth of which our neighbours have nonetheless stripped ancient Cythera: I mean the bas-reliefs and statues which still indicated sites worthy of memory. They removed, from Aplunari, a marble frieze on which one could read, despite some abbreviations, these words, which were transcribed in 1798 by commissioners of the French republic: Ναὸς Ἀφροδίτης θεᾶς κυρίας Κυθηρίων, καὶ Παντὸς κόσμου (*the temple of the goddess Venus, ruler of the Cythereans and the whole world*).

This inscription leaves no doubt as to the character of the ruins; but, in addition, a bas-relief, also removed by the English, had long served as the covering of a tomb in the wood of Aplunari. There, the images of two lovers could be discovered, bringing an offering of doves to the goddess, and advancing towards the altar, near which was placed the vase of libations.

The young girl, dressed in a long tunic, presented the sacred birds, while the young man, leaning with one hand on his shield, seemed with the other to assist his companion in placing her gift at the feet of the statue; Venus was dressed much like the young girl, and her hair, braided at the temples, fell in curls on her neck.

It is evident that the temple situated on this hill was not consecrated to Venus Urania, the Celestial Venus worshipped in other parts of the island, but to the second Venus, Venus Pandemos, the Earthly Venus, who presided over marriage. The first, brought here by inhabitants of the ancient city of Ascalon in Syria, a stern divinity, symbolically complex, of doubtful sex, had all the characteristics of primitive images loaded to excess with attributes and hieroglyphics, such as the Diana of Ephesus or the Cybele of Phrygia; she was adopted by the Spartans, who were the first to colonise the island; the second, more cheerful, more human, whose cult, introduced by the victorious Athenians, was the subject of civil wars between the inhabitants, was represented by a statue renowned throughout Greece as a wondrous work of art; she was naked, and held in her right hand a sea-shell; her sons Eros and Anteros accompanied her, and before her were grouped the three Graces, two of whom were looking towards her, and the third of whom was turned in the opposite direction. In the eastern part of the temple was a notable statue of Helen; which is probably the reason why the inhabitants of the country name these ruins the Palace of Helen.

Two young men offered to conduct me to the ruins of an ancient city of Cythera, whose dusty mound could be seen on the coast, between the hill of Aplunari and the port of St. Nicolas; I had passed them on my way to Potamos via the interior; but the road was only passable on foot, and the mule had to be returned to the village. I left with regret the little grove, richer in memories than in the few fragments of pillars and capitals disdained by the English collectors. Outside the wooded enclosure, three truncated columns still stood in the midst of a cultivated field; other fragments had been used to build a small house with a flat roof, situated at the steepest point on the mountain, but whose solidity is guaranteed by an ancient stone causeway. This remainder of the temple foundations also serve to form a sort of terrace which retains the topsoil necessary for crops, so rare on the island since the destruction of the sacred forests. There is an excavation site which may be examined there; a white marble statue draped in the antique style, badly mutilated, has been extracted; but it was impossible to determine its original characteristics. Descending among the dusty rocks, sometimes varied by olive trees and vines, we crossed a stream which plunges down to the sea in cascades and which flows among mastic trees, oleanders and myrtles. A Greek chapel has been erected on the banks of this beneficent water, and appears to have succeeded an older monument.

Chapter 17: Paleokastro

We followed the edge of the sea, walking the sand, and admiring, from time to time, caves into which the waves rush during storms; the quails of Cythera, much appreciated by hunters, were fluttering here and there on the neighbouring rocks, among tufts of sage with ashen-

coloured leaves. Having reached the end of the bay, we were able to take in the whole hill of Paleokastro covered with debris, and dominated still by the ruined towers and walls of an ancient city. The enclosure is marked out on the slope facing the sea, and the remains of the buildings are partly hidden beneath the sand piled up by the waves at the mouth of a little river. It would seem that the greater part of the city has gradually vanished due to the force of the rising tide, and an earthquake, of which all these places bear traces, has altered the surface of the land. According to the inhabitants, when the waters are very clear, the remains of considerable buildings can be distinguished on the sea-bed.

Crossing the little river, one arrives at ancient catacombs carved from the cliff which dominates the ruins of the city, and to which one climbs by a path cut into the stone. The catastrophe revealed by certain features of the desolate beach, has split this funerary rock from top to bottom and opened to the light of day the hypogea (*underground chambers*) it contains. One can distinguish, through the opening, the opposite sides of each room, parted as if by miracle; it is only after having climbed the rock that one can descend to these catacombs, which seem to have been inhabited recently by shepherds; perhaps they served as a refuge during wars, or at the time of the Ottoman occupation.

The summit of the rock itself is an oblong platform, bordered by, and strewn with, debris which indicates the ruins of a superior building; it was, doubtless, a temple dominating the tombs, and beneath the shelter of which rested pious ashes. In the first room that I entered, I noted two sarcophagi cut in stone and covered with a curved arch; the slabs that closed them, and of which one can no longer see anything but the remnants, were lying apart; on both sides, niches had been made in the wall, either for lamps or lachrymatory vases, or to contain funerary urns. But, if there were urns here, what need for the sarcophagi? It is true that it was not always the custom of the ancients to immolate bodies, since, for example, one of the two Ajaxes was buried in the earth; but, if the custom varied over time, would the one and the other mode have been indicated in the same monument? Could it be that what appear to us to be tombs were only multiple vats of lustral water for the use of the temples? Here, doubt is allowed. The decoration of these rooms seems to have been architecturally simple; no sculpture, or column, to vary their uniform construction; the walls are squarely cut, the ceiling flat; only, one notices that originally the walls were covered with a mastic on which appear traces of ancient paintings, executed in red and black in the Etruscan manner.

Out of curiosity, people have cleared the entrance to a larger room dug into the mountain massif; it is vast, square and surrounded by rooms or cells, separated by pilasters, which may have been either tombs or chapels; since, according to many, this immense excavation may be the site of a temple dedicated to the underworld divinities.

Chapter 18: The Three Venuses

It is hard to say whether it was on this rock that the temple of Celestial Venus was built, which was indicated by Pausanias (*in his 'Description of Greece', III, 23*) as dominating Cythera, or

if that monument stood on the hill still covered with the ruins of the city which some authors (*Jacob Spon and George Wheler, see 'Voyage du Levant fait aux années 1675 et 1676, I, p.96'*) also call the City of Menelaus. In any case, the singular arrangement of this rock reminded me of that of another temple of Urania which the Greek author describes elsewhere as being placed on a hill outside the walls of Sparta. Pausanias, himself a Greek of the decadent period, a pagan in an era when the meaning of the old symbols had been lost, was astonished by the very primitive construction of the two superimposed temples dedicated to the goddess. In one, the lower, we see her covered in armour, *like Minerva*, as an epigram of Ausonius describes her (*see Ausonius: 'Epigrams XLII and XLIII'*); in the upper temple, she is represented covered, entirely, with a veil, with chains on her feet. This last statue, carved in cedar wood, was said to have been erected by Tyndareus and was called *Morpho*, another epithet of Venus (*Pausanias III, 15*). Is this the subterranean Venus, the one the Romans called *Libitina*, the one who was represented uniting Pluto with chilly Persephone in the underworld, and who, still, under the nickname of Eldest of the Fates, is sometimes confused with the beautiful and pale Nemesis?

People have smiled at the concerns of that poetic traveller 'so concerned to stress the whiteness of the marble he viewed,' and perhaps people will be surprised, in this day and age, to see me spend so much effort on establishing the triple personality of the goddess of Cythera. Certainly, it is not difficult to find, in her three hundred nicknames and attributes, proof that she belonged to the class of those *pantheistic* divinities, who presided over all the forces of Nature in the three regions of the heavens, the earth, and the subterranean places. But I wish to show, above all, that the cult of the Greeks was mainly addressed to the austere, ideal, and mystical Venus, whom the Neoplatonists of Alexandria would oppose, shamelessly, to the Virgin of the Christians. The latter, more human, easier to understand for all, has now conquered the philosophical Urania. Today, the Greek *Panagia (the Virgin Mary)* has succeeded, on these very shores, to the honours of the ancient Aphrodite; the church or chapel is rebuilt from the ruins of the temple, and applies itself to concealing its foundations; the same superstitions are attached almost everywhere to very similar attributes; the Panagia, who holds in her hand a ship's prow, has taken the place of Venus Pontia; another receives, like Venus Calva (*the Bald Venus*), the tribute of hair that young girls hang on the walls of her chapel. Elsewhere arose the Venus of the Flames, or the Venus of the Abyss; the Venus Apostrophia, Venus the Preserver, who warded off impure thoughts, or the Venus Peristeria, Venus of the Doves, who had the sweetness and innocence of those birds: the Panagia is sufficient to realise all these epithets. Do not demand new beliefs from the descendants of the Achaeans: Christianity has not conquered them, they have bent it to their ideal; the female principle, or, as Goethe says (*at the end of 'Faust, Part II'*), the *eternal feminine* will always reign on these shores. The dark, cruel Diana of the Bosphorus, the prudent Minerva of Athens, the Armed Venus of Sparta, such were the emblems of their most sincere religious devotion: today's Greece replaces all these various holy virgins with a single one, and counts for little the masculine trinity and all the saints of legend, with the exception of Saint George, that young and brilliant cavalier.

Quitting this strange rock, pierced with funereal rooms, whose base the sea assiduously gnaws, we arrived at a cave which stalactites have decorated with pillars and wondrous sheets of stone; shepherds had sheltered their goats, there, against the heat of the day; but the sun soon

began to decline towards the horizon, casting its purple light on the distant rock of Cerigotto (*Antikythera*), an old retreat of pirates; the cave was dark, and poorly lit at this hour, and I was not tempted to enter it with torches; however, everything within reveals the antiquity of this land loved by the heavens. Petrified fossils, even piles of antediluvian bones have been extracted from this cave, as well as from several other sites on the island. So it is not without reason that the Pelasgians placed there the cradle of this daughter of Uranus, of this Venus so different from that of the painters and poets, whom Orpheus invoked, in a manner similar to this (see '*Orphic Hymn, 54: To Aphrodite*'): 'Venerable Goddess, who loves the darkness... visible and invisible... from which all things emanate, for you give laws to the whole world, and even command the Fates, O Sovereign of the night!'

Chapter 19: The Cyclades

Kythera and Antikythera still displayed their angular outlines on the horizon; soon we rounded the point of Cape Malea, passing so close to the Morea that we could distinguish all the details of the landscape. A singular dwelling attracted our attention; five or six stone arches supported the front of a sort of grotto behind a small garden. The sailors told us that it was the dwelling-place of a hermit, who had long lived and prayed on this isolated promontory. It is a magnificent place, indeed, to dream to the sound of the waves like some romantic Byronic monk! The ships that pass sometimes send a boat to bring alms to this solitary, who is probably a prey to the curiosity of the English. He did not show himself: perhaps he was dead.

At two in the morning the sound of the anchor chain being dropped woke us all, and announced to us amidst our dreams that, on that very day, we would tread the soil of a truly regenerated Greece. The vast harbour of Syros surrounded us in a crescent.

I have been living since this morning in complete rapture. I would like to remain forever among these good Hellenic people, in the midst of these islands with sonorous names, from which exhale the perfumes of *The Garden of Greek Roots* (see *Claude Lancelot's etymological dictionary 'Le Jardin des Racines Greques, 1657'*) Ah! How I now thank my good teachers, so often cursed, for having taught me the means of deciphering, in Syros, the barber's, shoemaker's and tailor's signs. Why! Here are the same round letters and the same capitals ... which I know how to read at least, and so grant myself the pleasure of spelling them aloud in the street.

— 'Καλιμέρα (*kaliméra: good day*)', the merchant said to me in an affable manner, doing me the honour of believing me not to be a Parisian.

— 'Πόσα (*pósa: how much*)?' I said, choosing some trifle.

— 'Δέκα δράγμαι (*déka drágmai: ten drachmas*)', he answers me in a classic tone.

Happy the man though, who knows Greek from birth, and does not suspect that he is speaking at this moment like a character from Lucian.

However, the boatman still pursues me on the quay and shouts to me like Charon to Menippus (see *Lucian's 'Dialogues of the Dead, 2, Charon and Menippus'*):

— ‘Ἀπόδος, ὦ κατάρατε, τὰ πορθμεῖα (*apódos, ó katárate, ta porthmeia: pay me, your fare, you rascal!*)’

He is not satisfied with half a franc that I gave him; he wants a drachma (ninety centimes): he will not gain even an obol. I answer him valiantly with a few sentences from the *Dialogues of the Dead*. He withdraws, muttering Aristophanes’ curses.

It seems to me that I am walking about in the midst of a comic-opera. How can one believe in these people in embroidered jackets, and petticoats with deep pleats (*fustanella*), wearing red bonnets, whose thick silken braid falls to the shoulder, their belts bristling with gleaming weapons, and clad in leggings and slippers! It is the exact same costume as adorns the actors in *Pirate Island* (*L’île des Pirates*, 1835, music by Rossini, Beethoven et al) or *The Siege of Missolonghi* (*Le Dernier Jour de Missolonghi*, by Georges Ozaneaux and Ferdinand Hérold, 1828). Yet everyone passes by without suspecting that they look like an extra, and it is my hideous Parisian clothing alone that sometimes provokes a justifiable burst of hilarity.

Yes, my friends! it is I who am the barbarian, a rude son of the North, and who stands out amidst your motley crowd. Like the Scythian, Anacharsis (see *Jean-Jacques Barthélemy's 'Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Grèce'*, 1788) ... Oh! I beg pardon, wishing to extricate myself from that tiresome parallel.

But it is the Eastern sun, and not the pale sun of the chandeliers, that lights this pretty town of Chora, whose first appearance produces the effect of an impossible stage-set. I walk amidst full local colour, the sole spectator of an alien scene, where the past is reborn within the envelope of the present.

Behold, a young man with curly hair, who passes by, bearing on his shoulder the bulging skin of a black kid.... You mighty gods! It’s a wineskin, a Homeric wineskin, moist and hairy. The boy smiles at my astonishment, and graciously offers to untie one of the legs of the creature, so as to fill my cup with honeyed Samian wine.

— O young Greek, into what will you pour this nectar? I have no cup, I will confess.

— ‘Πίθι (*pithi: a drink*)?’ he asks, taking from his belt a truncated horn trimmed with copper and causing a stream of foamy liquid to spurt from the kid’s foot.

I swallow it all without grimacing and without regurgitating, out of respect for the soil of ancient Scyros, that the feet of young Achilles trod (see *Gérard's later correction, Syros is not to be confused with Scyros*).

I can say today that it smelled horribly of leather, molasses and resin; but surely this was the same wine that was drunk at Peleus’ wedding, and I bless the gods who gifted me the stomach of a Lapith, and the legs of a Centaur.

These latter were not useless to me either in this strange city, built in steps, and divided into two towns, one bordering the sea (the new one), and the other (the old town) crowning the top of a sugar-loaf mountain, which one must ascend two thirds of before arriving there.

May the chaste Pierides prevent me from speaking ill, today, of the craggy mountains of Greece! They are the powerful bones of this ancient mother (the mother of us all) that we tread with feeble steps. This rare lawn where the sad anemone blooms, finding barely enough soil to spread a remnant of its yellowed mantle thereon. O Muses! O Cybele!... What! Not even brushwood, or a tuft of tall grass signalling some nearby spring!... Alas! I forgot that, in the new town which I have just traversed, pure water is sold by the glass, and I have only met with a single wine-bearer.

So here I am at last, in the countryside, between the two towns. The one, on the shore, displaying its luxurious favours for merchants and sailors; its half-Turkish bazaar, its shipyards, its stores and new factories, its main street lined with haberdashers, tailors and booksellers; and, on the left, a whole district of merchants, bankers, and shipowners, whose houses, already splendid, climb to gradually cover the rock, which hangs sheer above a deep blue sea. The other, which, seen from the port, seems to form the point of a pyramidal construction, now appears detached from its apparent base, by a wide fold of land which must be crossed before reaching the mountain, whose summit it strangely caps.

Who does not remember Jonathan Swift's fine city of *Laputa*, suspended in the air by magical force and landing, from time to time, somewhere on earth to stock up on what it lacks. This is the exact portrait of old Syros, minus the power of locomotion. It is of she who 'from level to level, climbs the clouds,' with her twenty rows of small flat-roofed houses, which diminish regularly until they reach the Cathedral of Saint George, the last level of this pyramidal peak. Two other higher mountains rise behind this one in a double peak, between which stands out, from afar, that pyramid of whitewashed houses. It makes for a most particular sight.

Chapter 20: The Cathedral of Saint George

We climb for a long time through the crops; small dry stone walls indicate the boundary of the fields; then the climb becomes steeper and we walk over bare rock; finally we reach the first houses; the narrow street spirals towards the top of the mountain; poverty-stricken shops, ground-floor rooms in which women converse or spin, groups of children with hoarse voices and charming features, running here and there or playing on the thresholds of their hovels, young girls hastily veiling themselves, quite fearful at seeing something as rare as a passer-by in the street; suckling-pigs and poultry, disturbed in their peaceful possession of the public road, and fleeing back towards the interiors of the houses; here and there enormous matrons summoning or hiding their children to protect them from the evil eye: such is the common spectacle which meets the stranger everywhere.

Stranger! Am I really so in this land of the past? Ah no, already kindly voices have saluted my mode of dress, of which just now I was ashamed.

‘Καθολικός! (*Katholikós, a Catholic*) That is the word the children repeat, around me.

And I am led with great shouts towards the Cathedral of Saint George, which dominates the town and the mountain. Catholic! Indeed, my friends; a Catholic, truly I had forgotten. I tried to think, then, of the immortal gods, who have inspired so many noble geniuses, so many elevated virtues! I evoked, from the empty sea and the arid soil, the ghostly laughing divinities that their fathers had dreamed of, and said to myself, viewing the sadness and nakedness of this archipelago of the Cyclades, these bare coasts, these inhospitable bays, that the curse of Neptune has struck neglectful Greece.... The green naiad has died, exhausted, in her cave; the gods of the groves have disappeared from this shadowless earth; and all those divine animations of matter have withdrawn little by little, like life itself from an icy body. Oh! Have none understood that last cry, uttered by a dying world, when pallid seamen reported that, passing the coast of Thessaly, at night, they had heard a great voice crying: 'Pan is dead!' Dead, oh, the companion of simple and joyful spirits, the god who blessed the fruitful marriage of humankind to the Earth! He is dead, he through whom all was brought to life! Dead, without a struggle, at the foot of profaned Olympus, dead as only a god can die, for want of incense and homage; struck to the heart as a father is by ingratitude and forgetfulness! Silence now, children, let me contemplate this ancient stone, sealed by chance in the wall of the terrace which supports your church, and which recalls his cult; let me touch its sculpted features, depicting a cittern, cymbals, and, at the centre, a cup crowned with ivy; it's a remnant of his rustic altar, which your ancestors surrounded, with fervour, in times when nature smiled on human effort, when Syros was Homer's Syrie....

Here, I close a somewhat lengthy paragraph to provide a helpful parenthesis. I previously confused *Syros* with *Scyros*. For want of a *c*, this amiable island must lose much in my esteem; for it is decidedly elsewhere that young Achilles was raised among the daughters of Lycomedes, and, if I believe my guide-book, Syros can boast only of having given birth to Pherecydes, Pythagoras' master and the inventor of the compass.... How learned these guide-books are!

The beadle was sent for, to open the church; and I sit down, while waiting, on the edge of the terrace, in the middle of a troop of children, brown and blond as everywhere, but beautiful as those of ancient marble, with eyes that marble fails to render, and whose agitated brilliance cannot be fixed in a painting. Little girls dressed like tiny Sultanas, with turbans of braided hair, boys dressed like girls, thanks to the pleated Greek skirt, and the long braid of hair down to the shoulders, these are what Syros ever produces, in the absence of flowers and shrubs; Youth is still smiling, on the barest of soils.... Is there, in their language, some naive song corresponding to that roundel of our young girls, which mourns the deserted woods, and the felled laurels? But Syros would reply that her woods furrowed the waters, her laurels were exhausted in crowning the brows of her sailors!... For have you not also been a great nest of pirates, O virtuous rock, twice Catholic, Roman on the hill above, and Greek on the shore: are you not always the seat of usurers?

My guide-book adds that most of the rich merchants in the lower town made their fortune during the War of Independence by trading as follows: their ships, under the Turkish flag, seized those that Europe sent that brought money and arms to aid Greece; then, under the Greek flag, they resold those arms, and provisions, to their brothers in the Morea, or on Chios; as for

the money, they did not hold it, but lent it, under secure pledge, to the Independence cause, and thus reconciled their habits as usurers and pirates with their duties as Hellenes. It must also be said that the upper town customarily supported the Turks because of its Romanised Christianity. General Charles Nicolas Fabvier, landing on Syros, and believing himself among Orthodox Greeks, was nearly assassinated there.... Perhaps they would have sold the body of that illustrious warrior to a grateful Greece as well.

What! Might your fathers have done that, O beautiful children with hair of ebony and gold, who watch in admiration as I leaf through this guide-book which is more or less accurate, while waiting for the beadle? No! I prefer to believe in your gentle eyes; what your fathers are reproached for must rather be attributed to that gathering of foreigners without name, religion, or country, who still swarm in the harbour of Syros, the crossroads of the Archipelago. And, moreover, there is the calmness of your deserted streets, the sense of order, the poverty.... Here comes the beadle, bearing the keys of the Cathedral of St. George. Let us enter: no ... I know what's there.

A modest colonnade, a country-parish altar, a few old worthless paintings, a Saint George on a gold background, overcoming the one who always arises once more ... is it worth the risk of a chill gained beneath its damp vaults, between these massive walls that burden the ruins of a temple of the abolished gods? No! Not for one day I spend in Greece, do I wish to brave the wrath of Apollo! I will not expose my body, heated by the divine fires that have survived the days of its glory, to the shade. Away, breath of the tomb!

All the more so since there is, in the guide-book, a passage that struck me deeply: 'Before reaching Delphi, one finds, on the road to Livadeia, several ancient tombs. One of them, whose entrance takes the form of a colossal portal, was split by an earthquake, and from the crack emerges the trunk of a wild laurel.' Edward Dodwell (*author of 'A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece' published 1819*) tells me that there is a tradition in the country that at the moment of Christ's death, a priest of Apollo, offering a sacrifice in this very place, halted suddenly, and cried out that a new god was born, whose power would equal that of Apollo, but who would nevertheless end up yielding to him. Scarcely had he uttered this *blasphemy*, when the rock split, and he fell dead, struck by an invisible hand.

And I, child of a doubting century, did I not do well in hesitating to cross the threshold, and remaining instead on the terrace, to contemplate nearby Tinos, Naxos, Paros, and Mykonos, scattered on the waters, and further away that low and deserted coastline, still visible at the sky's edge, which is Delos, once the island of Apollo!...

Chapter 21: The Windmills of Syros

I need say little more about Greece. Merely a word or two. I have brought the reader with me to the summit of that sugar-loaf mountain crowned with houses, which I compared to the suspended city of Laputa — the reader must be brought to the shore again; otherwise, his or

her mind will remain perched forever on the terrace of that church of the great Saint George, that overlooks the old city of Syris. I know of nothing sadder than an uncompleted journey — I suffered more than anyone from the death of poor Victor Jacquemont (*the geologist and botanist, who died of cholera in Mumbai, in 1832*) who left me with one foot in the air poised on some summit of the Himalayas, and it vexes me greatly every time I think of India. Good Yorick himself (*Laurence Sterne*) did not hesitate to condemn us, voluntarily, to the eternal and painful curiosity of knowing what happened between that Reverend personage and the Piedmontese lady in the famous two-bedded room of which we know (*see Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey: The Case of Delicacy'. 'Parson Yorick' was Sterne's pseudonym in the book*). This is among the petty miseries which seem so great in human life: — it seems one must deal with those unhappy enchanters who draw you into a magical conspiracy, from which they no longer know how to extricate you, and who leave you there, transformed — into what? — into a question mark.

What restrained me, it must be said, was the desire to tell — and the fear of not being able to properly relate — a certain adventure that happened to me, inside one of those six-sailed windmills that so strangely decorate the heights of all the Greek islands, while I was descending the mountain.

A windmill, with six sails that beat the air, joyfully, like the long membranous wings of cicadas, spoils the perspective much less than our dreadful mills of Picardy; yet it cuts a mediocre figure beside the solemn ruins of antiquity. Is it not sad to think that the coast of Delos is covered with them? Windmills grant the only shade in these sterile places, formerly covered with sacred woods. Descending from old Syros, to Ermoupoli, the new Syra, built on the seashore on the ruins of ancient Hermopolis, I had to rest in the shadow of these windmills, the ground floor of which is generally a tavern. There are tables in front of the door, and you are served, in bottles wrapped in straw, a little reddish wine that smells of tar and leather. An old woman approached the table where I was sitting and said:

— ‘Κοκόνιτσα! Καλὶ!’ (*Kokónitza! Good! ...*)

It is already known that modern Greek is much closer to ancient Greek than is thought. This is true to the point that the newspapers, most of them written in classical Greek, are nevertheless understood by everyone.... I do not present myself as a Hellenist of the first order; but I recognised, in the second word, that it was a question of something ‘good’. As for the noun *Κοκόνιτσα*, I searched in vain for its root in my memory, furnished only with the classical stanzas of Claude Lancelot (*author of that etymological dictionary 'Le Jardin des Racines Grecques'*).

— After all, I said to myself, this woman recognises in me a foreigner; perhaps she wants to show me some ruin, to direct me to some curiosity. Perhaps she has been entrusted with some daring message, for we are in the Levant, a realm of adventures.

As she motioned for me to follow her, I did so. She led me further on, to another windmill. It was no longer a tavern: a sort of wild band of seven or eight ill-dressed rogues filled the interior of the low room. Some were sleeping, others were playing knucklebones. There was nothing gracious about the scene within. The old woman invited me to enter. Understanding

more or less the purpose of the establishment, I pretended to wish to regain the honest tavern where the old woman had encountered me. She dragged me back, by the hand, shouting again:

— ‘Κοκόνιτσα! Κοκόνιτσα!’

On my reluctance to enter, she made a sign to me to stay where I was.

She walked away a few steps, and lay in wait behind a hedge of cacti that bordered a path leading to the town. Country girls passed by, from time to time, bearing large copper vases; on their hips, when they were empty, on their heads, when they were full. They were going to the spring located nearby, or returning from it. I have since learned that it was the only spring on the island. Suddenly the old woman began to whistle, one of the peasant women stopped and rushed through one of the openings in the hedge. I understood at once the meaning of the word Κοκόνιτσα! It was a kind of hunting call for summoning *young girls*. The old woman whistled ... the same tune no doubt that the ancient serpent whistled under the tree of evil ... and a poor peasant girl had just been caught by the decoy.

In the Greek isles, all the women when outside are veiled as if they were in a Turkish country. I will admit that I was not sorry, on the only day that I spent in Greece, to see at least one female face. And yet, was not this simple traveller's curiosity already a sort of acceptance of that dreadful old woman's intrigues? The young woman seemed trembling and uncertain; perhaps it was the first time that she had yielded to the temptation lurking behind that fatal hedge! The old woman lifted the poor girl's blue veil. I saw a pale, regular face, with somewhat wild eyes; two large braids of black hair were coiled about her head like a turban. There was nothing there of the dangerous charm of the ancient *hetaira* (*courtesan*); moreover, the peasant woman turned every moment with anxiety towards the countryside, saying:

— ὦ ἄνδρός μου! ὦ ἄνδρός μου! (*Oh, my husband! My husband!*)

Wretchedness, rather than amorousness, dominated her whole attitude. I confess I gained little merit by resisting the seduction. I took her hand, into which I put two or three drachmas, and made a sign to her that she should go back whence she came.

She seemed to hesitate for a moment; then, putting her hand to her hair, she pulled from between the twisted braids around her head one of those amulets worn by all women in oriental countries, and gave it to me, saying a word that I could not understand.

It was a small fragment of an antique vase or lamp, which she had probably picked up in the fields, wrapped in a piece of red paper, and on which I thought I could make out a small figure of a spirit mounted on a winged chariot between two serpents. However, the relief is so crude that one could see in it anything one wished.... Let us hope it will bring me luck on my travels.

A sad spectacle, in short, is the corruption of manners seen in oriental countries whereby a false spirit of morality has suppressed those joyful and carefree courtesans depicted by the poets and philosophers — on the one hand, the passion of Corydon (*the rustic youth in Virgil's 'Eclogues'*) succeeds to that of Alcibiades — on the other, the entire sex is depraved so as to avoid perhaps a lesser evil; the stain widens without being erased; poverty makes a furtive gain

which corrupts it without enriching. It is no longer even the pale image of love; it is only its fatal and painful shadow. — One may see how far this social prejudice extends, so clumsy and so impotent at the same time. The Greeks love the theatre, as ever; there are theatres in the smallest towns. Only, all the women's roles are played by men.

On my way back down to the port, I saw posters bearing the title of a tragedy, *Marcos Botzaris*, by Panagiotis Soutsos, followed by a ballet, all printed in Italian for the convenience of foreigners. After dining at the Grand Hôtel d'Angleterre, in a large room decorated with 'character' wallpaper, I was guided to the *Casino*, where the performance was taking place. Before entering, the attendees long cherry-wood pipes were deposited at a sort of *pipe* office: the locals no longer smoke in the theatre so as not to inconvenience the English tourists who rent the best boxes. There were hardly any men there, except for a few women who were strangers to the locality. I waited impatiently for the curtain to rise to assess the actors' mode of pronunciation. The play began with an exposition scene between Botzaris and a Palikari (*a young Greek who fought the Ottoman Turks*) his confidant. Their emphatic guttural delivery would have hidden the meaning of the lines from me, even if I had been learned enough to understand them; moreover, the Greeks pronounce eta as an *i*, theta as an English *th*, beta as a *v*, upsilon as a *y*, and so on. It is probable that this was indeed the ancient pronunciation, but the University teaches otherwise.

In the second act, I saw Moustai Pacha (*the Pacha of Scutari, Albania*), in the midst of the women of his seraglio, who were simply men dressed as odalisques; as I said, women are not allowed to appear on the stage in Greece. What morality! Moustai Pacha had his confidant beside him, like a Greek hero; he seemed as Turkish as the fierce *Acomat* presented by Saint-Aulaire (*the author and diplomat Charles de Beaupoil. 'Acomat' is a character in Racine's play 'Bazajet'; Saint Aulaire encouraged Rachel's acting career*). As I followed the play, I gradually came to understand that *Marcos Botzaris* was a modern Leonidas, repeating with three hundred Palikaris, the last stand of the three hundred Spartans, at Thermopylae. This Hellenic drama was warmly applauded; after developing according to classical rules, it ended with rifle shots.

On returning to the steamer, I enjoyed the unique spectacle of that pyramidal city of Syros illuminated to its highest houses. It was truly *Babylonian*, as the English would say.

I left the Austrian vessel at Syros, and embarked on the *Leonidas* (on January 11th, 1843), a French ship leaving for Alexandria, which involved a three-day crossing.

Egypt is a vast tomb; that is the impression it made on me when I landed on the beach in Alexandria, which, with its ruins and mounds, offered nothing but tombs, scattered over an ashen landscape, to the eye.

Shades, draped in bluish shrouds, moved among the debris. I visited Pompey's Pillar and Cleopatra's Baths. The *Mahmoudia* promenade, with its evergreen palm trees, alone recalled living Nature I shall not describe the large, wholly-European square formed by the palaces housing consulates, the mansions containing bankers, the ruined Byzantine churches, nor the modern buildings of the Pasha of Egypt, bordered by gardens that appear like greenhouses. I

would have preferred monuments of Greek antiquity; but all that is destroyed, razed, unrecognisable.

I embark this evening, on the *Mahmoudia* canal, in order to travel from Alexandria to Al-Atf village (*later incorporated in the city of El Mahmoudia, on the Nile*), then I will board a sail-boat and ascend the river as far as Cairo: a journey of a hundred and fifty miles or more, in all, that takes six days or so.

Part IV: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – Coptic Marriage



View of the market at the Bab Zuweila gate of Cairo, 1846 - 1855, David Roberts

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl)

Chapter 1: The Mask and the Veil

Cairo is the city of the Levant where women are still the most hermetically veiled. In Constantinople, in Smyrna, a face-covering of white or black gauze sometimes allows the features of beautiful Muslim women to be guessed at, and even the most rigorous edicts rarely

succeed in forcing them to adopt a denser version of the frail fabric. They are graceful and coquettish nuns who, devoting themselves to a single husband, are not sorry, however, to endow the world with a regret or two. But Egypt, serious and pious, is still the country of enigma and mystery; beauty surrounds itself there, as in the past, with veils and wrappings, and this gloomy attitude easily discourages the frivolous European. Such, leave Cairo after a week or so, and hasten to visit the cataracts of the Nile, and meet with other disappointments that science has in store, which they will never acknowledge.

Patience was the greatest virtue of the ancient initiates. Why progress so swiftly? Let us halt here, and seek to lift a corner of the austere veil of the goddess of Sais (*Isis*). Besides, is it not encouraging to see that in a country where women pass for prisoners, the bazaars, streets and gardens nonetheless present them to us by the thousands, walking, aimlessly, alone, or in pairs, or accompanied by a child? Really, European women have less freedom: the women of distinction go about, it is true, perched on donkeys and therefore in an inaccessible position; but, among us, women of the same rank hardly venture out except in carriages. There remains the veil ... which, perhaps, does not create as severe a barrier as one might believe.

Among the rich Arabian and Turkish costumes that Reform spares, the mysterious dress of the women grants the crowd that fills the streets the joyous aspect of a masked ball; the colour of the dominoes varies only from blue to black. The great ladies hide their waists beneath the *abaya* (loose-fitting robe) of light taffeta, while the ordinary women drape themselves, gracefully, in a simple blue tunic of wool or cotton (*quamis*), like antique statues. The imagination has more to work on in feminine faces that pass by incognito, a mystery which fails to extend to all their charms. Beautiful hands adorned with talismanic rings and silver bracelets; arms of pale marble escaping entirely, on occasion, from their wide sleeves raised to the shoulder; bare feet laden with rings which the slipper abandons at each step, and whose ankles resonate with a silvery noise, are what one is allowed to admire, to guess at, to surprise, without the crowd becoming concerned or the woman herself seeming to notice. Sometimes the floating folds of the white and blue chequered veil that covers the head and shoulders are disturbed a little, and the gap that appears between that garment and the elongated covering that is called a *burqa* reveals a graceful temple where brown hair twists in tight curls, as in the busts of Cleopatra; or a small, firm ear from which a cluster of gold sequins, or a plaque worked with turquoise and silver filigree hangs to tremble about the neck and cheek. Then, one feels the need to interrogate the eyes of the veiled Egyptian, and they are the most dangerous. The *burqa* is composed of a long, narrow piece of black haircloth that descends from head to foot, and is pierced with two holes like the hood of a penitent; a few shiny ringlets thread the space between the forehead and the rest of the mask, and it is behind this rampart that ardent eyes await you, armed with all the seduction they can borrow from art. The eyebrow, the orbit of the eye, even the eyelid behind the eyelashes, are brightened with dye, and it would be impossible to better highlight that small portion of her person that a woman, here, has the right to reveal.

I did not, at first, understand what is so attractive about this mysterious mode of dress in which the more interesting half of the people of the Orient envelop themselves; but a few days were enough for me to learn that a woman who feels noticed generally finds a way to let herself

be seen, if she is beautiful. Those who are not, know better how to maintain their veils, and who can blame them. This is indeed the land of dreams and illusions! Ugliness is concealed like a crime, while one can always glimpse something of what constitutes form, grace, youth and beauty.

The city itself, like its inhabitants, only gradually reveals its most shaded retreats, its most charming interiors. On the evening of my arrival in Cairo, I was mortally sad and discouraged. In a few hours of riding on a donkey, and in the company of a *dragoman* (*guide and interpreter*), I had succeeded in convincing myself that I was about to spend there the six most tedious months of my life, and yet everything was fated in advance so that I could not reside there one day less.

— ‘What! Is this,’ I said to myself, ‘the city of the *Thousand and One Nights*, the capital of the Fatimid Caliphs, and the Sultans?’...

And, as evening approached, the shadows descending quickly, thanks to the dust that stains the sky and the tops of the houses, I plunged into the inextricable network of narrow, dusty streets, amidst the ragged crowd, the congested throng of dogs, camels, and donkeys,

What can one hope for from this confused labyrinth, perhaps as large as Paris or Rome, from these palaces and mosques that number in their thousands? All this was once splendid and marvellous, no doubt, but thirty generations have passed; everywhere the stone is crumbling and the wood rotten. It seems that one is moving in a dream, in a city of the past, inhabited only by ghosts, who populate it without animating it. Each district, surrounded by crenellated walls, closed by solid doors as in the Middle Ages, still preserves the appearance that it doubtless had at the time of Saladin (*Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, the Kurdish founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, and the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria*); long vaulted passages, here and there, lead from one street to another; more often one enters a cul-de-sac and must return. Little by little everything shuts down; only the cafes are still lit, while smokers occupying palm-frond chairs, beneath the vague glow of night-lights swimming in oil, listen to some long story delivered in a nasal tone. However, the *moucharabias* are lit up: these are wooden grilles, curiously worked and cut, which extend onto the street and serve as windows; the light which penetrates them is not enough to guide the passer-by; especially since the hour of curfew soon arrives; everyone carries a lantern, and one scarcely encounters anyone outside except Europeans, or soldiers making their rounds.

As for me, I could no longer find anything to do in the streets at that hour, that is to say ten in the evening, and I went to bed, in a sad mood, telling myself that it would doubtless be like this every day, and despairing of the pleasures of this fallen capital.... My initial bout of sleep was disturbed, in an unexplained manner, by the vague sounds of a bagpipe and a hoarse viol, which irritated my nerves greatly. This obstinate music repeated the same melodic phrase in various tones, and awakened in my mind the memory of some Burgundian or Provençal Christmas carol. Did it belong to dream, or reality? I hovered a while, but found myself waking completely. It seemed to me that I was being borne away, in the manner of a burlesque yet a serious manner too, amidst both religious chants, and drinkers crowned with vine-branches; a kind of patriarchal gaiety was fused with a mythological sadness in this strange concert, where church lament formed the basis of a hectic tune suitable for marking the steps of a dance of

Corybantes (*the priests of Cybele*). The noise drew closer, grew louder; I had risen, still quite numb, when a great light, penetrating the trellis outside my window, informed me, finally, that here was a completely earthly spectacle. However, what I had thought mere dream was true, in part: near-naked men, crowned like ancient wrestlers, fought in the midst of the crowd with swords and shields; but they constrained themselves to striking the bronze with the blade in time to the music, and, setting off again, began the same simulacrum of wrestling, only further on. Numerous torches, and pyramids of candles carried by children, lit the street, brightly, leading a long procession of men and women, the details of which I could not distinguish. Something like a crimson ghost, wearing a jewelled crown, advanced slowly between two stern matrons, while a confused group of women in blue brought up the rear, uttering at each station a shrill cackle, to most singular effect.

It was unmistakably a wedding, there was no longer room for error. I had seen in Paris, among the engraved plates of the artist Louis-François Cassas, a complete depiction of such ceremonies (*see his 'Voyage Pittoresque de la Syrie etc.', issue VI, Plate VI*); but what I had just seen through the window-lattice was not enough to extinguish my curiosity, and I desired, whatever might happen, to follow the procession and observe it further, at my leisure. My dragoman, Abdallah, to whom I communicated this idea, pretended to shudder at my boldness, caring little for racing through the streets in the depths of night, and spoke to me of the danger of being assassinated or beaten. Fortunately, I had bought one of those camel-hair cloaks called a *mishlah* (*also a bisht, or aba*) which cover a man from shoulders to feet; with my already-long beard and a handkerchief twisted around my head, the disguise was complete.

Chapter 2: A Wedding by Torchlight

The difficulty lay in catching up with the procession, which had vanished into the labyrinth of streets and cul-de-sacs. The dragoman had lit a paper-lantern, and we raced along at random, guided or misled from time to time by the distant sound of bagpipes or by the glare of light reflected from the corners of crossroads. At last, we reached the entrance to a different district than ours; the houses were lit, the dogs howled, and there we were in a long street flamboyant and resounding, filled with people even on the housetops.

The procession advanced slowly, to the melancholy sound of instruments that imitated the creaking noise of an obstinate door, or a cart trying out its new wheels. The culprits of this din about twenty in number, marched along surrounded by men carrying fiery lances. Next came children carrying enormous candelabra whose candles threw a bright light everywhere. The wrestlers continued to fence at each other during the numerous halts the procession made; others, mounted on stilts and wearing feathered headdresses, attacked each other with long sticks; further on, young men were carrying flags, or poles surmounted by golden emblems and wreaths, such as were borne in Roman triumphs; others, again, carried small trees decorated with garlands and crowns, resplendent with lighted candles and leaves of tinsel, like Christmas trees. Large plates of gilded copper, raised on poles and covered with embossed ornaments and

inscriptions, reflected here and there the brilliance of the lights. Next walked the singers (*awalim*) and the dancers (*ghawazi*), dressed in striped silk dresses, their *tarbouch* (a rimless hat with a flat, circular crown) capped with a gold tassel, their long braids streaming with sequins. Some had their noses pierced with long rings, and showed faces painted red and blue, while others, though singing and dancing, remained carefully veiled. They were generally accompanied by cymbals, castanets, and snare drums. Two long lines of slaves came next, carrying chests and baskets in which gleamed the presents given to the bride by her husband and her family; then the procession of guests, the women in the middle, carefully draped in their long black mantillas and veiled with white masks, like people of quality; the men richly dressed; for, on that day, the dragoman told me, even the simple *fellahin* (labourers) know how to procure suitable clothing. At last, amidst the dazzling light of torches, candelabras and fire-pots, the crimson phantom I had already glimpsed slowly advanced, that is to say the new bride (*el arous*), entirely veiled in a long cashmere dress the folds of which fell to her feet, and whose rather flimsy material doubtless allowed her to see without being seen. Nothing is as strange as this tall figure advancing beneath its sharply-pleated veil, magnified still further by a sort of dazzling, jewelled, pyramidal diadem. Two matrons dressed in black support her under the elbows, so that she seems to slide slowly along the ground; four slaves stretch a purple canopy over her head, and others accompany her progress to the sound of cymbals and tympani.

However, a further halt was made, at the moment when I was admiring her apparel, and children distributed seats so that the wife and her parents could rest. The *awalim*, retracing their steps, sounded out their improvisations and choruses, accompanied by music and dancing, and all the assistants repeated some passages of their songs. As for me, who at that moment found myself visible to all, I opened my mouth like the others, imitating as much as possible the *eleisons* or *amens* which serve as *responses* to the most profane couplets; but a greater danger threatened my incognito. I had failed to notice that, for some time, slaves had been traversing the crowd pouring a clear liquid into small cups which they distributed as they went. A tall Egyptian dressed in red, who was probably a member of the family, presided over the distribution and received the thanks of the drinkers. He was only two steps from me, and I had no idea what words of greeting I should address to him. Fortunately, I had taken the time to observe all my neighbours' movements, and, when it was my turn, I took the cup in my left hand and bowed, placing my right hand to my heart, to my forehead, and finally to my mouth. The movements are easy, yet one must be careful not to reverse the order or fail to reproduce them with ease. I had the right, from that moment, to swallow the contents of the cup; but, then, my surprise was great. It was brandy, or rather a kind of anisette. I had not anticipated that Muslims would distribute such liquor at their weddings? In fact, I had only expected a lemonade or a sorbet. It was, however, easy to see that the *almahs*, musicians, and minstrels of the procession had more than once taken part in these distributions. At last, the bride rose and resumed her walk; the female *fellahin* dressed in blue, followed her in a crowd clucking wildly, and the procession continued its nocturnal promenade to the house of the newly-weds.

Content with having appeared a true inhabitant of Cairo, and behaving well enough at this ceremony, I signalled to summon my dragoman, who had gone a little further, to return to the passage where the brandy distributors stood; but he was in no hurry to do so, having taken a liking to the celebrations.

— ‘Let’s follow them into the house,’ he said, quietly.

— ‘But how will I answer, if someone speaks to me?’

— ‘You must simply say: *Tayeb!* It’s an answer to everything.... And, besides, I am here to turn the conversation elsewhere.’

I already knew that in Egypt *tayeb* was the foundation of the language. It is a word which, depending on the intonation you give it, means all sorts of things; however, you cannot compare it to the *goddam* of the English, unless it’s to mark the difference between a people who are certainly very polite, and a nation that is at most merely civilised. The word *tayeb* means in turn: *very good*, or *that is fine*, or *that is perfect*, or *at your service*, the tone and especially the gesture adding infinite nuance. This method seemed to me much safer, moreover, than that of which a famous traveller speaks; Giovanni Belzoni, I believe. He had entered a mosque, admirably disguised and, repeated all the gestures that he saw his neighbours make; but, as he could not answer a question that was put to him, his dragoman said to the curious: ‘He does not understand: he is an English Turk!’

We entered, via a door decorated with flowers and foliage, a most beautiful courtyard illuminated by coloured lanterns. The frail woodwork of the moucharabias was outlined against the orange background of rooms, well-lit, and full of people. We were forced to halt, and find a place under the interior arcade. Only the women went into the house, where they took off their veils, and one could no longer see anything but the vague shape, the colours, and radiance of their costumes and jewellery, through the turned-wood lattice.

While the ladies were being welcomed, and feted within by the new wife and the women of the two families, the husband had dismounted from his donkey; dressed in a red and gold coat, he received the compliments of the men, and invited them to take their places at low tables set in great numbers in the rooms on the ground floor, which were laden with dishes arranged in pyramids. All that was needed was to cross one’s legs on the ground, pull a plate or cup towards oneself, and eat in a proper manner, with one’s fingers. Everyone, moreover, was welcome. I did not dare risk, however, participating in the feast, for fear of seeming ill-mannered. Besides, the most brilliant part of the festival was taking place in the courtyard, where the dancing was going on to great noise. A troupe of Nubian dancers were performing strange steps in the centre of a vast circle formed by the assistants; they came and went, guided by a veiled woman dressed in a broadly-striped cloak, who, holding a curved sabre in her hand, seemed to alternately threaten the dancers and flee from them. During this time, the *awalim*, or almahs, accompanied the dance with their songs by striking with their fingers on terracotta goblet-shaped drums (*darbukalar*) held in the hand at ear-height. The orchestra, composed of a host of bizarre instruments, did not fail to play its part in this ensemble, and the assistants joined in, also, by beating time with their hands. In the intervals between the dances, refreshments were circulated, among which there was one that I had not anticipated. Black Africans, holding small silver flasks in their hands, shook them here and there over the crowd. It was perfumed water, the sweet scent of which I only recognised when I felt the drops, scattered at random, trickle down my cheeks and beard.

Moreover, one of the most prominent characters of the wedding party advanced towards me and said a few words to me in a very civil manner; I replied with the all-conquering *tayeb*, which seemed to satisfy him fully; he addressed my neighbours, and I was able to ask the dragoman what he had said.

— ‘He invites you to enter his house’, the latter said, ‘to view the bride’.

Without a doubt, my answer had been deemed an assent; but, as, after all, it was only a question of a parade of hermetically-veiled women around rooms filled with guests, I did not think it appropriate to take the adventure further. It is true that the bride and her friends would appear in their brilliant costumes that were hidden by the black veil they had worn in the street; but I was not yet sufficiently sure of the pronunciation of the word *tayeb* to venture into the bosom of the two families. The dragoman and I managed to regain the outer door, which opened onto Esbekieh Square.

‘That’s a shame,’ the dragoman said, ‘you would have seen the performance afterwards.’

— ‘What?’

— ‘Yes, the comedy.’

I immediately thought of the illustrious *Karagöz* (*an obscene marionette of Turkish origin*), but that was not it. *Karagöz* only appears during religious festivals; it is a myth, a symbol of the highest gravity; the spectacle in question, here, would simply consist of small comic scenes played by men, and which can be compared to our ‘society proverbs’ (*dialogues, illustrating proverbs, performed in a social setting, for example those of Louis Carrogis, known as Carmontelle, or those of Théodore Leclercq*). They are designed to entertain the guests, pleasantly, for the remainder of the night, while the spouses retire with their parents to the part of the house reserved for women.

It seems that the festivities of this wedding had already lasted eight days. The dragoman informed me that there had been, on the day of the contract, a sacrifice of sheep on the threshold before the passage of the bride; he also spoke of another ceremony in which a candied ball is broken open which contains two pigeons; an omen is drawn from the flight of these birds. All these customs are probably connected with ancient tradition.

I returned to my lodgings, quite moved by this nocturnal scene. Here, it seemed to me, is a people for whom marriage is a great thing, and, although the details of this one indicated some wealth between the spouses’ families, it appears that the poor marry with almost as much splendour and noise. They are not required to pay the musicians, jesters and dancers, who are their friends, or who take a collection among the crowd. The costumes are lent to them; each assistant holds his candle or his torch in his hand, and the bride’s diadem is no less loaded with diamonds and rubies than that of a Pasha’s daughter. Where else can one seek truer equality? The young Egyptian, who is perhaps neither beautiful beneath her veil, nor rich beneath her diamonds, has her day of glory on which she advances, radiantly, through the city, which shows its admiration, and sees her parade, displaying the purple robes and gems of a queen, yet unknown to all, and as mysterious beneath her veil as the ancient goddess of the Nile. One man alone, will possess the secret of this beauty, or this unknown grace; one alone can pursue his ideal in peace all day long, and believe himself the favourite of a Sultana or a fey; even a

disappointment leaves his self-esteem intact; and, besides, does not every man have the right, in this happy country, to re-enact that day of triumph and illusion more than once?

Chapter 3: Abdallah, the Dragoman

My dragoman is a valuable fellow; but I fear he is too noble a servant for so minor a lord as myself. It was at Alexandria, on the deck of the steamship *Leonidas*, that he was revealed to me in all his glory. He had come alongside the ship, a boat at his command, with a little black African servant to carry his long pipe and a younger dragoman to act as retinue. A long white tunic covered his clothes and brought out the hue of his face, where Nubian blood tinted a mask borrowed from the Egyptian Sphinx's; he was doubtless the product of a mixed inheritance; large gold rings burdened his ears, and his indolent walk in his long clothes completed the ideal portrait of a freedman of the Late Empire.

There were no Englishmen among the passengers; our man, a little annoyed, attached himself to me for want of anyone better. We disembarked; he hired four donkeys for himself, for his retinue and for me, and took me straight to the *Hotel d'Angleterre*, where they were willing to receive me for sixty piastres a day; as for himself, he limited his claim to half this sum, out of which he undertook to maintain the second dragoman, and the little black African boy.

After walking all day with this imposing escort, I became aware of the redundant nature of the second dragoman, and even of the little lad. Abdallah (that was the character's name) had no difficulty in parting with his young colleague; as for the little black African boy, he kept him at his own expense, reducing the total of his own fee to twenty piastres a day, about five francs.

Arriving in Cairo, the donkeys took us straight to the *Hotel d'Angleterre* on Esbekieh Square; I restrained his fine ardour on learning that the terms for staying there were the same as in Alexandria.

— 'Would you prefer to try the *Waghorn Hotel*, in the Frankish quarter?' honest Abdallah asked me.

— 'I'd prefer a hotel that wasn't English'.

— 'Well, there's *Demergue's French Hotel*.'

— 'Then, let's go.'

— 'Pardon me, I'll take you there; but I won't stay there.'

— 'Why not?'

— 'Because they only charge forty piastres per day; I can't stay there.'

— 'But it's fine for me.'

— ‘You are unknown; I’m from the city; I usually serve the English; I have my status to maintain.’

However, I considered the price of the hotel most reasonable, even in a country where everything is about six times cheaper than in France, and where a man for a day costs a piastre, or five sous in our currency.

‘There is,’ said Abdallah, ‘a way of arranging matters. You will lodge two or three days at the *Domergue Hotel*, where I will visit you, as a friend; meanwhile, I’ll rent a house in the city for you, and shall then be able to stay there, and be at your service, without difficulty.’

It seems that many Europeans rent houses in Cairo, if they are dwelling there, and, informed of this circumstance, I granted Abdallah full authority to do so.

The *Domergue Hotel* is located at the end of a cul-de-sac, off the main street of the Frankish quarter; it is, all things being equal, a very decent and well-kept hotel. The buildings surround a square courtyard painted with limewash, covered with an airy trellis, on which vines are intertwined; a French painter, most amiable though a little deaf, and very talented though keen on the daguerreotype process, has made a studio of an upper gallery. There, from time to time, he brings orange-sellers and sugar-cane sellers from the city who are willing to serve as *models* for him. They make no difficulty over allowing the physical form of the principal Egyptian types to be studied; but most of them insist on keeping their faces veiled; the last refuge of oriental modesty.

The French hotel has, moreover, a rather pleasant garden; its table d’hôte successfully avoids the difficulty of obtaining various European dishes in a city where beef and veal are lacking. It is this circumstance which mainly explains the high cost of the English hotels, in which the cooking is done with preserved meats and vegetables, as it is on board ship. The Englishman, in whatever country he may be, never changes his usual fare of roast-beef, potatoes, and porter or ale.

I met at the table d’hôte a colonel, a bishop *in partibus (that is, in the land of the unbelievers)*, an artist, a language-teacher, and two Indians from Bombay, one of whom served as tutor to the other. It seems that the host’s very southern cooking seemed bland to them, since they took from their pockets silver flasks containing pepper and mustard for their own use, with which they anointed all their dishes. They offered me some. The sensation one would surely experience in chewing on lighted embers would give an exact idea of the strong effect of those condiments.

You may complete the picture of residency at the French Hotel by envisaging a piano on the first floor and a billiard-table on the ground floor, and say to oneself that one has as good as not left Marseilles at all. I prefer, for my part, to sample oriental life complete. I rent a most beautiful house with several floors, and with courtyards and gardens, for three hundred piastres (approximately seventy-five francs) per annum, Abdallah having shown me several in the Coptic quarter and the Greek quarter. The rooms were magnificently decorated with marble paving, and fountains, galleries, and staircases as in the palazzos of Genoa or Venice, courtyards surrounded by columns, and gardens shaded by valuable trees; sufficient to lead the life of a prince, on the condition of one populating those superb interiors with servants and

slaves. Yet in all this, however, not a habitable room without going to enormous expense, not a pane of glass in those windows, so curiously shaped, open to the evening wind and the nights' humidity. Men and women live thus in Cairo; but ophthalmia often punishes them for their imprudence, which explains the need for air and freshness. In the end, I was somewhat dubious of the pleasure of living camped, so to speak, in a corner of an immense palace; it must also be said that many of these buildings, former residences of an extinct aristocracy, date back to the days of the Mamluk Sultans, and are in danger of serious collapse.

Abdallah, ultimately, found me a much smaller house, but safer, and more thoroughly secure. An Englishman, who had recently lived there, had installed glazed windows, and this was considered a curiosity. I had to obtain the aid of the sheikh of that district to deal with a Coptic widow, who was the owner. This lady owned more than twenty houses, but by proxy, on behalf of foreigners, the latter not being permitted to be legal owners in Egypt. In reality, the house belonged to a diplomat at the English consulate.

The deed was drawn up in Arabic; it was necessary to pay a fee, make presents to the sheikh, to the lawyer, and to the head of the nearest guardhouse, and then to give the scribes and servants *bakshish* (*tips*); after which, the sheikh handed me the key. This instrument does not resemble ours but is composed of a simple piece of wood similar to a baker's tally, at the end of which five or six nails are planted as if at random; though chance is not involved: one introduces this singular key into a notch in the door, and the nails are found to correspond to small internal and invisible holes beyond which hangs a moveable wooden bolt which allows passage.

It is not enough to have the wooden key to one's house ... a key which it is impossible to place in one's pocket, but which one can slip into one's belt: one must also have furniture corresponding to the luxury of the interior; but this detail is, for all the houses of Cairo, of the greatest simplicity. Abdallah took me to a bazaar where they weighed out for me a few *ocques* of cotton (*an 'ocque' weighed a little less than three pounds*); with this and some Persian cloth, carders established at your house, will make, in a few hours, divan cushions, which become, at night, mattresses. The body of each piece of furniture is composed of a large frame that a basket maker constructs with palm fronds, before one's eyes; it is light, elastic and stronger than one would believe. With a small round table, a few cups, long pipes or hookahs, unless one wants to borrow all that from the neighbouring café, one can receive the noblest of city society. The Pasha alone has a complete set of furniture, lamps, and clocks; but, in reality, this is only to show himself a friend to European trade and progress.

Mats, carpets, and even curtains are still needed for those who want to display luxury. I met a Jewish person in the bazaar who, most obligingly, interposed himself between Abdallah and the tradesmen, so as to prove to me that I was being robbed on both sides. He took advantage of the furniture being installed to settle himself down, as a friend, on one of the sofas; I was obliged to hand him a pipe, and have coffee served to him. His name is Yousef, and he devotes himself to raising silkworms for three months of the year. The rest of the time, he told me, he has no other occupation than to view the leaves of the mulberry trees to make sure they are growing, and see if the harvest will be good. He seems, moreover, perfectly disinterested, and

seeks the company of foreigners only to inform his taste, and strengthen his knowledge of the French language.

My house is located on a street in the Coptic quarter which leads to the city gate, connecting with the alleyways of Shubra. There is a café opposite, a little further a donkey station, which rents the animals at a piastre an hour; further still, a small mosque accompanied by a minaret. The first evening that I heard the slow and serene voice of the muezzin (*mu'adhin*), at sunset, I felt seized by an inexpressible melancholy.

— 'What does he say?' I asked the dragoman.

— '*Alla ilaha illa-llah*... there is no other God but Allah!'

— 'I know that formula; and then?'

— 'Oh: you, who are about to sleep, commend your souls to Him who never sleeps!'

It is true that sleep is another life, which must be taken into account. Since my arrival in Cairo, all the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights* have been running through my head, and I see in my dreams all the genies and giants unleashed since Solomon. In France, people scorn, laughingly, the demons that sleep gives birth to, and recognise in them only the product of an intense imagination; but is sleep a lesser state in relation to us, and do we not experience in that state all the sensations of real life? Sleep is often heavy and troubling in a climate as hot as that of Egypt, and the Pasha, it is said, always has a servant standing at his bedside to wake him from sleep whenever his movements or his face betray restlessness. So, it suffices perhaps to simply recommend oneself, with fervour and confidence ... to the One who never sleeps!

Chapter 4: The Disadvantages of Celibacy

I have related the history of my first night, above, and it is understandable then that I awoke somewhat late. Abdallah announced to me the visit of the sheikh of my neighbourhood, who had already visited once in the morning. This fine white-bearded old man was waiting in the cafe opposite, along with his secretary and the black African boy bearing his pipe, for me to awake. I was not surprised at his patience; any European who is neither an industrialist nor a merchant is a character in Egypt. The sheikh sat down on one of the sofas; his pipe was filled, and he was served coffee. Then he began his speech, which Abdallah translated for me as follows:

— 'He comes to bring you the money you paid to rent the house'.

— 'Why? What reason does he give?'

— 'He says: we don't know your way of life, we've no knowledge of your morals.'

— 'Has he observed that they are bad?'

— 'That's not what he means; he knows nothing about them.'

— ‘And yet, he holds a poor opinion of them?’

— ‘He says he thought a woman would live with you in the house.’

— ‘But I’m not married.’

— ‘It’s none of his business whether you are or not; but he says your neighbours have wives, and will be anxious if you do not. Besides, it is the custom here.’

— ‘What does he wish me to do?’

— ‘Quit the house, or find a woman to live with you.’

— ‘Tell him that, in my country, it is not right to live with a woman without being married.’

The old man’s reply to this moral observation was accompanied by a very paternal expression which the translation can only render imperfectly.

— ‘He offers you a little advice’, Abdallah told me: ‘he says that a gentleman (an *effendi*) like you should not live alone, and that it is always honourable to support a woman, and do her some good. It is even better, he adds, to support several, when the religion one follows permits it.’

The Turk’s reasoning touched me; however my European conscience struggled with his point of view, the justice of which I only understood after studying more closely the situation of women in this country. I communicated a reply for the sheikh, asking him to wait until I had inquired from my friends what it would be appropriate to do.

I had rented the house for six months, I had furnished it, I was very comfortable there, and I only wanted to find out how to resist the sheikh’s pretension to the breaking of our treaty, and to his demanding I leave on grounds of celibacy. After much hesitation, I decided to take advice from the artist residing at the *Hotel Domergue*, who had already been kind enough to introduce me to his studio, and initiate me into the wonders of the daguerreotype. The artist was so deaf that a conversation through an interpreter would have been amusing, though probably at the cost of his own hearing.

However, I was on my way to his house, and crossing Esbekieh Square, when at the corner of a street that turns towards the Frankish quarter, I heard exclamations of joy rising from a large courtyard where some very fine horses were, at that moment, being walked. One of the grooms sprang upon my neck and hugged me; he was a big lad dressed in blue woollen serge, wearing a yellowish woollen turban, and whom I remembered having noticed on the steamship, because of his face, which was very reminiscent of those large painted heads that one sees on the lids of mummies’ coffins.

— *Tayeb! Tayeb!* (Fine! Fine!) I said to this expansive mortal, freeing myself from his embraces and looking behind me to locate my dragoman, Abdallah.

But the latter had lost himself in the crowd, probably not caring to be seen accompanying the friend of a simple groom. This Muslim, spoiled by chaperoning tourists from England, forget that Muhammad was once a camel driver.

Meanwhile the Egyptian plucked me by the sleeve and led me into the courtyard, which belonged to the Pasha of Egypt's stud farm, and there, at the back of an arcade, half lying on a wooden sofa, I recognised another of my travelling companions, a little more respectable socially: Soliman-Aga, of whom I have already spoken, and whom I'd met on the Austrian boat, the *Francisco Primo*. Soliman-Aga also recognised me, and, though more restrained in his demonstrations than his subordinate, he made me sit near him, offered me a pipe and asked for coffee.... Let me add, that the simple groom, as a point of manners, judging himself momentarily worthy of our company, sat down with his legs crossed on the ground and accepted, as I, a long pipe, and one of those small cups full of a hot mocha that one holds in a sort of gilded egg-cup so as not to burn one's fingers. A circle soon formed around us.

Abdallah, seeing the situation take a more fitting turn, had finally shown himself, and deigned to favour our conversation. I already knew Soliman-Aga to be a very amiable guest, and, although we had achieved, during our mutual sea-crossing, only a pantomime conversation, our acquaintance was sufficiently advanced for me to be able, without indiscretion, to discuss my affairs with him and ask his advice.

— '*Mashallah!*' ('*As Allah has willed it*') he cried, at first, 'the sheikh is quite right; a young man of your age should have already married several times!'

— 'You know,' I observed timidly, 'that in my religion one can only marry one woman at a time, and then one must support her forever, so that ordinarily one takes time to think, wishing to choose the most suitable.'

— 'Ah! I am not speaking,' he said, striking his forehead, 'of your *Roumi* (European) women; they belong to all, not only to you; those poor foolish creatures show their faces entirely naked, not only to those who wish to see them, but to those who do not.... imagine,' he added, bursting into laughter and turning towards the other Turks who were listening 'every woman, in the street, gazed at me with eyes of passion, and some even pushed their shamelessness to the point of wanting to kiss me.'

Seeing the audience scandalised to the utmost degree, I believed I ought to inform them, for the honour of us Europeans, that Soliman-Aga had doubtless confused the interested eagerness of certain women with the honest curiosity of the majority.

— 'Again,' added Soliman-Aga, without replying to my observation, which seemed dictated only by national self-esteem, 'if only these beauties were worthy of kissing a believer's hand! But they are wintry plants, without colour or taste, sickly figures tormented by famine, for they hardly eat, and their bodies would fit within my two hands. As for marrying them, that's another thing; they have been raised so badly, that there would be war and unhappiness in the house. With us, the women live together, and the men live together, it is the means of establishing tranquility everywhere.'

— 'But do you not live,' I said, 'among your women in your harems?'

— 'Lord above!' he cried, 'who would not be maddened by their babbling? Do you not see that, here, men who have nothing to do spend the time walking, bathing, at the café, at the mosque, as members of an audience, or in visits made to one another? Is it not more pleasant

to talk with friends, or to listen to stories and poems, or to smoke while dreaming, than to talk to women preoccupied with vulgar interests, fashion, or slander?

— ‘But of necessity, you must accept this when you take your meals with them.’

— ‘Not at all. They eat together, or separately, at their choice, and we eat alone, or with our parents and friends. A small number of the faithful do act otherwise, but they are ill-regarded and lead a cowardly and useless life. The company of women makes men greedy, selfish and cruel; it destroys fraternity, and charity among us; it causes quarrels, injustice and tyranny. Let each live with his fellows! It is enough that the master, at the hour of the siesta, or when he returns in the evening to his lodging, finds to receive him smiling faces, amiable forms richly adorned,... and if the almahs who are brought in dance and sing before him, then he can dream of paradise in advance, and believe himself to be in the third heaven, where the true beauties dwell, pure and unblemished, those who alone will be worthy of being the eternal spouses of true believers.’

Is this the opinion of all Muslims, or only of a certain number of them? One might perhaps see in it less a contempt for women than a remnant of ancient Platonism, which elevates pure love above perishable objects. The adored woman is herself only the abstract phantom, the incomplete image of a divine woman, betrothed to the believer for all eternity. It is these ideas which led us to think that Orientals deny women a soul; but we know, these days, that truly pious Muslim women hope themselves to see their ideal realised in heaven. The religious history of the Arabs has its saints and its prophetesses, and the daughter of Muhammad, the illustrious Fatima, is the queen of this feminine paradise.

Soliman Aga finally advised me to embrace Islam; I thanked him with a smile and promised to consider it. At this, I was more embarrassed than ever. However, it remained for me to visit, and consult, the deaf painter at the *Hôtel Domergue*, as I had originally intended.

Chapter 5: El Mosky

When one turns the corner, leaving the stud farm’s courtyard on your left, one begins to feel the bustle of a big city. The roadway that encircles Esbekieh Square possesses only a meagre avenue of trees to protect you from the sun; but already, on one side of the street, broad, tall stone houses block the dusty rays it projects. The place is usually very crowded, noisy, populated by sellers of oranges, bananas, and still-green sugar cane, whose sweet pulp the people chew with delight. There are also singers, wrestlers, and snake-charmers who have large serpents wrapped around their necks; also, occurrences of a spectacle which realises certain images of Rabelais’ droll fantasies. A jovial old man makes small figures, their bodies traversed by a string, dance on his knee, like those shown by our Savoyards, but engaging in a much less decent pantomime. However, this is not the illustrious *Karagöz*, who usually only appears in a Chinese shadow-theatre performance. A wondering circle of women, children and soldiers naively applauds these shameless puppets. Elsewhere, it is a monkey-trainer who has taught an

enormous ape to counter, with a stick, the attacks of the city's stray dogs, which the children incite to battle. Further on, the street narrows, and darkens due to the height of the buildings. Here on the left is a convent of whirling dervishes, who perform a public session every Tuesday; then a large carriage entrance, above which one may admire a large stuffed crocodile, signals the station from which the carriages leave that cross the desert from Cairo to Suez. These are light vehicles, whose prosaic shape recalls that of a cuckoo-clock, the wide openings giving passage to the wind and dust, which is no doubt necessary; their iron wheels have a dual system of spokes, starting from each side of the hub and meeting at the narrow circle which replaces the rim. These singular wheels cut the ground rather than resting on it.

But let us move on. Here on the right is a Christian tavern, that is to say a vast cellar where drinks are served on barrel-heads. Usually, a mortal with an illuminated face and long moustache, stands before the door, who majestically represents the native *Franks*, or those, to put it better, who belong to the Orient. Who knows if he is Maltese, Italian, Spanish or Marseillais by origin? What is certain is that his disdain for the costume of the country, and his awareness of the superiority of European fashions have led him to refinements of dress which grant a certain originality to his dilapidated wardrobe. To a blue frock-coat whose frayed loops have long since parted from their buttons, he has had the idea of attaching loops of cord to imitate frogging. His red trousers fit into the remnants of thick boots armed with spurs. A wide shirt-collar and a white hat with green turn-ups soften what is too martial in this costume, and restore its civilian character. As for the truncheon he holds in his hand, it is still a privilege of the Franks and Turks, which is too often exercised at the expense of the shoulders of the poor and patient *fellahin*.

Almost opposite the tavern, the eye plunges into a narrow alley where a beggar lacking hands and feet crawls; this poor devil begs charity of the English, who pass at every moment, for the *Waghorn Hotel* is situated in this dark alley, which, moreover, leads to the Cairo theatre and to the reading room of Monsieur Bonhomme, announced by a vast sign painted in French lettering. All the pleasures of civilisation are evident there, and cannot but rouse great envy in the Arabs. Resuming one's progress, one finds, on the left, a house with an architectural facade, sculpted and adorned with painted arabesques, the sole offering, seen so far, to the artist and the poet. Then the street bends away, and one must struggle for twenty paces against a perpetual crowd of donkeys, dogs, camels, cucumber-sellers, and women selling bread. Donkeys gallop, camels bellow, dogs stand stubbornly in rows at the doors of three butchers. This little corner would not lack an Arabian physiognomy, if one did not see in front of one the sign denoting a *trattoria* filled with Italians and Maltese.

Here before us, in all its luxury, is the great shopping street of the Frankish quarter, commonly called the *Mosky*. The first section, half covered with canvas and boarding, presents two rows of well-stocked shops, in which the European nations exhibit their best-known products. England dominates as regards fabrics and crockery; Germany, sheets; France, fashions; Marseilles, groceries, smoked meats and small assorted objects. I do not include Marseilles with France, because, in the Levant, one does not take long to realise that the Marseillais form a 'nation' apart; granting the word its most favourable sense, moreover.

Among these shops, where European industry at its best attracts the richest inhabitants of Cairo, the reformist Turks, as well as the Copts and Greeks more readily attuned to our habits, there is an English bar-restaurant where one can counteract, with the help of Madeira, porter, or ale, the sometimes-emollient action of the waters of the Nile. Another place of refuge from oriental life is the Castagnol pharmacy, where often the *beys* (*gentlemen*), *mudirs* (*officers*) and *nazirs* (*officials*) originating from Paris come to converse with travellers, and find some token of the homeland. One is not surprised to see the chairs of the pharmacy, and even the outside benches, filled with dubious Orientals, their chests covered with gleaming stars, who converse in French and read the newspapers, while the *sais* (*grooms*) keep ready at their disposal dashing horses, the saddles embroidered with gilt. This gathering is also explained by the proximity of the Frankish post office, located in the cul-de-sac that contains the *Domergue Hotel*. People attend every day, awaiting letters and journals, which arrive from time to time, depending on the state of the roads or the diligence of the messengers. The English steamboat only ascends the Nile once a month.

I am near the end of my journey, for at the Castagnol pharmacy I encounter my artist from the French hotel, who is waiting for gold chloride, used for toning his daguerreotypes, to be prepared. He suggests that I go with him to view the city; so, I dispense with the dragoman, who hastens to settle down in the English brasserie, having gained, I fear, from contact with his previous masters, an immoderate taste for strong beer and whiskey.

In accepting the proposed walk, I thought of a better idea still: it was to allow myself to be led to the most complex part of the city, abandon the artist to his labours, and then wander at random, without an interpreter, and without a companion. This is what I had not been able to achieve until then, the dragoman claiming to be indispensable, and all the Europeans I had met proposing to show me 'the beauties of the city.' One must have travelled in the South a little to understand the full scope of their hypocritical proposal. Do you think the amiable resident offers to be your guide from mere goodness of soul? Think again; he has nothing to do, he is dreadfully bored, he needs you to amuse him, to distract him, to 'make conversation with him', but he will show you nothing you would not have discovered yourself: he doesn't even know the city, and has no idea of what goes on there; his aim is to take a walk, bore you with his remarks, and amuse himself with yours. Besides, what is a beautiful perspective, a monument, a curious detail, without chance, without the unexpected?

A prejudice of the Europeans in Cairo is that they cannot walk ten steps without mounting a donkey escorted by a donkey-driver. The donkeys are very beautiful, I agree, they trot and gallop wonderfully; the donkey driver serves as your *kavasse* (*guardian*) and makes the crowd part by shouting: *Ha! ha! Yeminac! Smalac!* which means: 'To the right! To the left!' Since women have thicker ears or heads than other passers-by, the donkey driver shouts at every moment: *Ia bint!* (*Hey, girl!*) in an imperious tone intended to convey, clearly, the superiority of the male sex.

Chapter 6: An Adventure in the Besestain Bazaar

We rode along like this, the artist and I, followed by a donkey which carried the daguerreotype, a complicated and fragile machine that it was a matter of establishing somewhere in such a way as to do us honour. After the street I have described, one comes to a covered and boarded passageway, where European trade displays its most brilliant products. It is a sort of market where the Frankish quarter ends. We turned right, then left, in the midst of an ever-increasing crowd; we followed a long, very straight street, which offers to one's curiosity, from time to time, mosques, fountains, a convent of dervishes, and a whole bazaar of hardware and English porcelain. Then, after a thousand detours, the road becomes quieter, more dusty, more deserted; the mosques are falling to ruin, the houses collapsing here and there, the noise and the tumult no longer register except in the form of a band of howling dogs, determined to chase our donkeys, and especially to pursue our hideous black European clothes. Fortunately, we pass beneath a gate, thus moving from one quarter to another, and the animals cease their growling at the extreme limit of their domain. The whole city is divided into fifty-three quarters surrounded by walls, various of which belong to the Coptic, Greek, Turkish, Jewish, and French inhabitants. The dogs themselves, swarming peaceably about the city without belonging to anyone, recognise these divisions, and would not risk venturing beyond them. A new canine escort soon replaces the one which has quit us, and leads us to the *casinos* situated on the bank of a canal which traverses Cairo, and which is called the *Calish* (*the Amnis Trajanus*).

Here we are in a kind of suburb separated from the main districts of the city by the canal; numerous cafes and casinos line the inner bank, while the outer presents a wide boulevard adorned with a few dusty palm-trees. The water of the canal is green and somewhat stagnant; but a long series of arches and trellises festooned with vines and creepers, serving as a backcloth for the cafes, presents a most cheerful view, while the flat water which surrounds them pleasantly reflects the colourful costumes of the smokers. Oil-flask lanterns alone light the day, glass hookahs gleam, and amber liquor swims in the fragile cups that black African waiters distribute from their gilt-filigreed containers.

After a short halt at one of these cafes, we transported ourselves to the far bank of the Calish, and set up, on legs, the apparatus by means of which the god of daylight exercises, so agreeably, the profession of landscape-artist. A ruined mosque with a curiously carved minaret, a slender palm-tree springing from a grove of mastic trees, was, with all the rest, enough to compose a picture worthy of the artist Prosper Marilhat. My companion is in raptures, and, while the sun works on his freshly-toned plates, I thought to begin an instructive conversation, by making him answer in pencil those questions which his infirmity did not prevent him from answering orally.

— 'Don't marry' he cried, 'and above all don't adopt the turban. What do they seek? That you take a wife into your house. A fine affair! One can have as many women as one wants. Those orange-sellers in blue tunics, adorned with silver bracelets and necklaces, are very beautiful. They take the very shape of Egyptian statues, with a well-developed chest, superb shoulders and arms, a slightly protruding hip, and thin, lean legs. It's live archaeology; all they lack is a hawk's head, bandages round their bodies, and an *ankh* in their hand, to represent Isis or Hathor.'

— ‘But you forget,’ I said, ‘that I am no artist; and, besides, these women have husbands or families. They are veiled: how can one know if they are beautiful?... I know only one word of Arabic, as yet. How can one persuade them?’

— ‘Dalliance is strictly forbidden in Cairo; but nowhere is love forbidden. You meet a woman whose gait, whose figure, whose grace in draping her clothes, something careless in the veil or hairstyle, indicates youth, or the desire to appear amiable. Just follow her, and if she looks you in the face at a moment when she thinks herself unnoticed by the crowd, take the road to your house; she will follow you. In matters regarding women, trust only yourself. The dragoman would serve you badly. You must pay your respects in person, it is safer.’

— ‘And, truly,’ I said to myself as I quit the painter, leaving him to his work, surrounded by a respectful crowd who believed him to be employed in some magical endeavour; ‘why have I relinquished hope of pleasing? The women are veiled; but I am not. My European complexion may have some charm for the women of this country. In France I would pass for an ordinary fellow; but in Cairo I am transformed into an amiable child of the North. This Frankish costume, which rouses the dogs, at least earns me some notice; that is much.’

Indeed, having entered the crowded street, and now pushing my way through the crowd all astonished to see a Frank on foot, and without a guide, in the Arab part of the city, I stopped in the doorways of shops and workshops, examining everything with the air of an inoffensive idler, which merely raised a few smiles. Saying to one another: ‘He has lost his dragoman, or perhaps he lacks the money to take a donkey...’ they pitied the foreigner astray in the immense hubbub of the bazaar, in the labyrinth of the streets. As for me, I had stopped to watch three blacksmiths at work who seemed men of bronze. They were singing an Arabic song whose rhythm guided the successive blows they gave to pieces of metal that a child brought in turn to the anvil. I shuddered to think that if one of them had missed the measure by half a beat, the child would have had his hand crushed. Two women had stopped behind me, and were laughing at my curiosity. I turned around, and saw clearly, by their black taffeta mantillas, and their green Levantine coats, that they did not belong to the class of the orange-sellers of Mosky. I turned to meet them, but they lowered their veils and escaped. I followed them, and soon arrived in a long street, interspersed with rich stalls, which crossed the whole city. We entered a vault of grandiose appearance, formed of carved frames in an antique style, varnish and gilding enhancing a thousand details of their splendid arabesques. This is perhaps the *Besestain* of the Circassians, in which the story told by the Coptic merchant to the *Sultan of Kashgar* took place. Here I am in the midst of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Why am I not one of the young merchants before whom these two ladies are leafing through rolls of cloth, as did the daughter of the emir before Bedreddin’s shop! I would say to them like the young man of Baghdad: ‘Let me view your face as the price of this golden-flowered fabric, and I will be paid with interest!’ But they disdain the silks of Beirut, the brocaded fabrics of Damascus, and the *mantillas* from Brousse (*Bursa, in Turkey, a major centre of the silk trade*) which each seller displays at will.... There are no shops here: they are simple stalls whose shelves rise to the vault above, surmounted by a sign covered with letters and gilded emblems. The merchant, his legs crossed, smokes his long pipe or his hookah on a narrow platform, and the women go thus from

merchant to merchant, contenting themselves, after having looked at everything on one stall, with passing on to another, while granting it a disdainful glance.

My smiling beauties absolutely long for fabrics from Constantinople. Constantinople sets the fashion in Cairo. They are shown hideous printed muslins, to a cry of: *Istamboldan* (it's from Istanbul)! They exclaim, in admiration. Fashionable women are the same everywhere.

I approach with an air of connoisseurship; I raise a corner of yellow fabric with wine-red patterns, and exclaim: *Tayeb (Fine)*! My observation seems to please; I make this my choice. The merchant employs a sort of tape-measure which is called a *pick*, and a little boy is charged with carrying the roll of fabric.

At this, it appeared to me that one of the young ladies looked me in the face; moreover, their uncertain steps, the laughter they stifled as they turned around, and saw me following them, the black mantilla (*habirah*) lifted from time to time to reveal a white mask, a sign of the superior class, finally all those indecisive allurements that a domino who wants to seduce you displays at the Opéra ball, seemed to indicate to me that she did not altogether dislike me. It seemed the moment had come, therefore, to forge on, and take the road to my house; but how to find it? In Cairo, the streets have no signs, the houses no numbers, and each district, surrounded by walls, is in itself a complete and utter labyrinth. There are ten cul-de-sacs for every street that leads anywhere. When in doubt, I always follow. We left the bazaar, full of tumult and light, where everything shone and glittered, where the luxury of the displays contrasted with the character of the architecture, and forsook the splendour of the principal mosques, painted with horizontal yellow and red bands; here, now, were vaulted passages, narrow, dark alleys, where the wooden window-trellises overhang, as in our streets in the Middle Ages. The coolness of these almost subterranean ways is a refuge from the heat of the Egyptian sun, and provides the population with many of the advantages of a temperate latitude. This explains the dull whiteness that a large number of women preserve under their veil, because many of them have never left the city except to go and rejoice beneath the shade in Shubra.

But what to think of all the twists and turns I was forced to take? Am I, in reality, being fled from, or are they my guides, while preceding me, on this adventurous journey? However, we entered a street that I had crossed the day before, and which I recognised above all by the charming odour given off by the yellow flowers of a strawberry-tree. This tree, beloved of the sun, projected its branches, covered with perfumed tufts of flower, above the wall. A low fountain occupied a corner, a pious installation intended to quench the thirst of stray animals. Here stood a house of fine appearance, decorated with ornaments, sculpted in plaster; one of the ladies introduced into the door one of those rustic keys of which I had already had experience. I plunged after them into a dark corridor, without hesitating, without thinking, and here I am in a vast and silent courtyard, surrounded by galleries, dominated by the thousand-meshed pattern of the *moucharabia*.

Chapter 7: A Dangerous House

The ladies having disappeared down some dark staircase at the entrance, I turned around with the serious intent of returning to the door; a tall, robust Abyssinian slave was closing it. I sought for a word to convince him that I was in the wrong house, that I had thought I was heading home; but the word *tayeb*, universal as it may be, did not seem to me sufficient to express all these things. During this time, a great noise was heard at the rear of the house, and astonished *sais* emerged from the stables, red caps appeared on the terraces of the first floor, and a most majestic Turk advanced from the back of the main gallery.

At such times, the worst thing is to be too curt. I think that many Muslims understand the Frankish language, which, at root, is only a mixture of all sorts of words from the southern dialects, which one uses randomly until one has made oneself understood; it is the language of Molière's Turks. So, I gathered up all I might know of Italian, Spanish, Provençal, and Greek, and I composed of it all a very captious speech.

— 'Besides,' I said to myself, 'my intentions are pure; at least one of the women may well be his daughter or his sister. I shall marry, and adopt the turban; well, there are things one cannot avoid. I believe in destiny.'

And then, this Turk looked like a kindly devil, and his well-fed face did not suggest cruelty. He scowled with some malice when he saw me, heaping on me the most baroque nouns that had ever sounded on the bass scale of the Levant, and said to me, holding out towards me a plump hand loaded with rings:

— 'My dear sir, take the trouble to come this way; we can talk more comfortably.'

Oh, surprise! This brave Turk was a Frenchman like myself!

We entered a very beautiful room whose windows overlooked the garden; we took our places on a rich divan. Coffee and pipes were brought. We talked. I explained as best I could how I had entered his house, believing I was entering one of the many passages that intersect the main islands of houses in Cairo; but I understood from his smile that my beautiful strangers had found time to work my betrayal. This did not prevent our conversation from quickly taking on an intimate character. In Turkish lands, acquaintances are soon made between compatriots. My host was kind enough to invite me to his table, and when the time came, I saw two very beautiful ladies enter, one of whom was his wife, and the other his wife's sister. They were my strangers from the Circassian bazaar, and both French.... That was the most humiliating thing! They made war on me over my daring to travel through the city without a dragoman, and without a donkey driver; They laughed at my diligent pursuit of two dubious dominoes, which clearly disguised their forms, and might have concealed old women or black Africans. These ladies did not thank me in the least for taking a risk in which none of their charms were involved, because it must be admitted that the black *abaya*, less attractive than the veil of simple fellahin girls, renders every woman a shapeless package, and, when the wind swells it, gives her the appearance of a half-inflated balloon.

After dinner, served entirely in the French style, I was shown into a much more ornate room, with walls covered with painted porcelain, and with carved cedar cornices. A marble

fountain lifted its thin streams of water in the midst; Venetian carpets and mirrors completed the ideal of Arabian luxury; but a surprise that awaited me there soon attracted all my attention. There were eight young girls seated around an oval table, occupied with various labours. They rose, bowed to me, and the two youngest came to kiss my hand, a ceremony which I knew one could not refuse in Cairo. What astonished me most in this seductive apparition was that the complexion of these young people, dressed in oriental style, varied from swarthy to olive, and attained, in the last of them, the darkest chocolate. It would have been inappropriate perhaps to quote in front of the palest one Goethe's verse:

'Do you know the land where the lemon-trees grow?' (Mignon's song)

However, they would all have passed for beauties of mixed race. The mistress of the house and her sister had taken their places on the sofa, laughing aloud at my admiration. The two little girls brought us liqueurs and coffee.

I was infinitely grateful to my host for having introduced me to his harem; but I said to myself that a Frenchman could never make a good Turk, whose self-esteem at showing off his mistresses or wives must conquer the fear of exposing them to seduction. I was still at fault in the matter. These charming flowers of varied colours were not the women, but the daughters of the house. My host belonged to that military generation which devoted its existence to the service of Napoleon. Rather than recognising themselves as subjects of the Restoration, many of these brave men went to offer their services to the sovereigns of the Orient. India and Egypt welcomed a large number; there were in those two countries fine remnants of French glory. Some adopted the religion and customs of the peoples who gave them asylum. Who could blame them? Most of them, born during the Revolution, had hardly known any cult other than that of the Theophilanthropists (*The 'Friends of God and Man', a deistic sect*) or the Masonic lodges. Islam, in the countries over which it rules, possesses grandeurs which strike even the most sceptical mind. My host had given himself over while still young to the seductions of a new homeland. He had obtained the rank of *bey* by his talents, and his services; his seraglio had been recruited in part from the beauties of Sennar (*on the Nile, in the Sudan*). Later, and at a more advanced age, the idea of Europe had returned to mind: he had married the lovely daughter of a consul, and, as Suleiman the Magnificent did on marrying Roxelana, he dismissed his entire seraglio, though the children had remained with him. His girls I now saw; the boys were studying in military schools.

Amidst so many marriageable girls, I felt that the hospitality granted me in this house presented certain dangerous risks, and I did not dare to expose my real situation too much before knowing more.

I was conducted to my house that evening, and won from the whole adventure a most gracious memory.... But, in truth, it would not be worth going to Cairo simply to marry into a French family.

The next day, Abdallah came to ask my permission to accompany a party of Englishmen to Suez. It was a week's work, and I did not want to deprive him of the lucrative errand. I suspected that he was not very satisfied with my conduct of the day before. A traveller who does without a dragoman all day, who wanders on foot through the streets of Cairo, and then

dines who knows where, risks being considered a very odd person. Abdallah introduced to me, moreover, as his stand-in, a *barbarian* friend of his, named Ibrahim. The *barbarian* (this is the name given here to common servants) commands only a little of the Maltese patois.

Chapter 8: The Wakil (*Envoy*)

Yousef, my Jewish acquaintance from the cotton-market, came every day to sit on my couch and perfect his conversation.

— ‘I understand,’ he said to me, ‘that you wish to take a wife, and I’ve found you a *wakil*.’

— ‘A *wakil*?’

— ‘Yes, it means an envoy, an ambassador; but, in the present case, an honest man charged with reaching an agreement with the parents of girls to be married. He will bring them to you, or conduct you to them.’

— ‘Oh! But whose are these girls?’

— ‘They are daughters of most honest people, and there are only such people in Cairo, since His Highness relegated the other kind to Esna, a little below the first cataract.’

— ‘I would like to believe it. Well, we shall see; bring me this *wakil*.’

— ‘I have brought him; he’s downstairs.’

The *wakil* was a blind man, whom his son, a tall and robust fellow, guided with a most modest air. The four of us mounted a donkey, and I laughed a great deal inwardly as I compared the blind man to Amor, and his son to Hymenaeus the god of marriage. Yousef, heedless of those mythological characters, instructed me as we went.

‘You can marry, here,’ he said to me, ‘in four different ways. The first way is by marrying a Coptic girl *before the Turk*.’

— ‘Who is this, *Turk*?’

— ‘He is a virtuous man to whom you give money, who says a prayer, assists you before the *cadi* (*Judge*) and fulfils the functions of a priest: these men are saints in this country, and everything they do is well done. They never concern themselves with your religion, if you do not concern yourself with theirs; but such a marriage is not that of very honest girls.’

— ‘Good! Let’s move on to the next method.’

— ‘That’s a serious matter. You are a Christian, and so are the Copts; there are Coptic priests who will marry you, though a schismatic, on condition that you leave a dowry for the wife, in case you divorce later.’

— ‘That’s reasonable; but what dowry?’...

— ‘Oh! That depends on custom. You must always give at least two hundred piastres.’

— ‘Fifty francs! Well, I would marry, and at no great expense.’

— ‘There’s yet another kind of marriage for very scrupulous people; those of good family. You are betrothed before the Coptic priest, he marries you according to his rite, and you can never divorce.’

— ‘Oh! Wait a moment, that is very serious!’

— ‘Pardon me; you must also arrange a dowry in case you leave the country.’

— ‘So, the woman is then free?’

— ‘Certainly, and you also; but, as long as you remain in the country, you are bound.’

— ‘Indeed, that is only just; but what about the fourth type of marriage?’

— ‘That method, I advise you not to consider. You would be married twice: in the Coptic church and at the Franciscan convent.’

— ‘It’s a double-marriage?’

— ‘A very solid marriage: if you leave, you must take the wife with you; she can follow you everywhere, and place her children in your arms.’

— ‘So, once it’s over, one is married without remission?’

— ‘There are still many ways of rendering it null and void.... But above all, beware of one thing: allowing yourself to be led before the Consul!’

— ‘But that would be a European marriage.’

— ‘Exactly. You have only one resource then; if you know someone at the consulate, you arrange that the banns are not read in your country.’

The knowledge this silkworm-breeder possessed on the subject of marriage astounded me, but he told me he’d often been employed in such matters. He served as an intermediary for the wakil, who knew only Arabic. All these details, moreover, interested me in the last degree.

We had arrived almost at the edge of the city, in the part of the Coptic quarter which connects to Esbekieh Square on the Bulaq side. A rather poor-looking house at the end of a street crowded with herb-sellers and fried-food merchants, was the place where the introduction was to take place. I was informed that this was not the parents’ house, but neutral ground.

‘You will see two of them,’ Yousef said, ‘and if you are not satisfied, we’ll bring others.’

— ‘That’s perfect; but if they remain veiled, I warn you I’m not marrying them.’

— ‘Oh! Don’t worry, it’s not like the Turks here.’

— ‘The Turks have the advantage of an imbalance in numbers.’

— ‘Indeed, it’s quite different.’

The lower room of the house was occupied by three or four men in blue coats, who seemed to be asleep; however, thanks to the proximity of the city gate, and a guardhouse located nearby, this was not at all disturbing. We ascended a stone staircase to an interior terrace. The room which we entered overlooked the street, and the large window, with its meshed grille, projected,

according to custom, a foot and a half beyond the house. Once seated in this kind of cupboard, one's gaze covered both ends of the street; one could view passers-by through the lateral openings. Such is usually the women's place, from which, as if from beneath a veil, they can observe everything without being seen. I was made to sit there, while the wakil, his son and Yousef took their places on the sofas. Soon a veiled Coptic woman arrived, who, after a greeting, raised her black *burqa* above, which, with the veil thrown back, formed a sort of Israelite headdress. This was the women's *khatba* (*matchmaker*), or *wakil*. She told me that the young people were finishing dressing. Meanwhile, pipes and coffee had been brought to everyone. A white-bearded man in a black turban had also joined our company. He was the Coptic priest. Two veiled women, probably the mothers, remained standing at the door.

The matter was becoming serious, and my expectation was, I confess, mingled with some anxiety. At last, two young girls entered, and came to kiss my hand, successively. I invited them by signs to take a place near me.

— 'Let them remain standing,' Yousef said to me, 'they are your servants'.

But I was far too French not to insist on them being seated. Yousef spoke, to clarify, no doubt, that it was a strange custom of the Europeans to have women sit in front of them. They finally took their places beside me.

They were dressed in flowered taffeta and embroidered muslin. It was very Spring-like. The headdress, composed of a red tarbouch entwined with gauze, let loose a tangle of ribbons and silken braids; bunches of small gold and silver coins, probably imitations, completely hid the hair. Yet it was easy to see that one was brunette and the other blonde; every objection had been anticipated. The first 'was slender as a palm tree and had the black eyes of a gazelle,' with a slightly swarthy complexion; the other, more delicate, fuller in contour, and of a paleness that astonished me because of the latitude, had the mien and bearing of a young queen born in the land of sunrise.

This latter particularly attracted me, and I had her say all kind of sweet things, without however entirely neglecting her companion. However, time passed without my broaching the main question; then, the *khatba* made them stand and uncover their shoulders, which she struck with her hand to show their firmness. For a moment, I feared that the exhibition would go too far, and I was myself a little embarrassed in front of these poor girls, whose hands covered their half-betrayed charms with gauze. Finally, Yousef asked: 'What do you think?'

— 'There is one that I like very much, but I would like to reflect on it: one should not get too excited. We will return and meet with them again.'

The assistants would certainly have liked more of an answer. The *khatba* and the Coptic priest pressed me to make a decision. I finally rose to my feet, promising to return; but I felt their lack of confidence.

The two young girls had exited during this negotiation. When I crossed the terrace to reach the stairs, the one I had noticed particularly seemed busy tending shrubs. She stood up, smiling, and, doffing her tarbouch, spread, over her shoulders, her magnificent golden tresses, to which the sun gave a bright reddish glow. This last effort of coquetry, quite legitimate however,

almost triumphed over my prudence, and I sent word to the family that I would certainly send presents.

— ‘My goodness,’ I said as I left, to the obliging Israelite, I would marry that one before the *Turk*.

— ‘The mother would not wish it; they are attached to the Coptic priest. They are a family of scribes: the father is dead; the girl you preferred has only been married once, and yet she is sixteen years old.

— ‘What! Is she a widow?’

— ‘No, divorced.’

— ‘Oh! But that changes the situation!’

I still sent a small length of cloth as a present.

The blind man and his son set forth again to find me other fiancées. The ceremony was always more or less the same, but I took a liking to my review of the Coptic fair sex, and, in exchange for a few lengths of fabric and little jewels, they were not too offended by my uncertainty. There was a mother who brought her daughter to my lodgings: I believe that she would have gladly celebrated a marriage *before the Turk*; but, all things considered, the girl was of an age to have already been married more times than seemed reasonable.

Chapter 9: The Rosetta Gardens

The *barbarian* who was covering for Abdallah, being perhaps a little jealous of Yousef’s assiduity and his *wakil*, brought me a very well-dressed young man, who spoke Italian, named Mahomet, who had a very distinguished marriage to propose to me.

— ‘This,’ he said, ‘would take place before the Consul. They are rich, and the girl is only twelve years old.’

— ‘She is a little young for me; but it seems that here it’s the only age at which one does not risk them being already widowed or divorced.’

— ‘*Signor, è vero!* They are most impatient to see you, for you occupy a house previously occupied by Englishmen; therefore, they have a high opinion of your rank. I said you were a general.’

— ‘But I’m not a general.’

— ‘Come! You are not a worker, nor a merchant. Do you do nothing?’

— ‘Not a great deal.’

— ‘Well, that grants you at least the rank of a *mirliva* (*a brigadier-general in the Ottoman army*), here.’

I already knew that in Cairo, as in Russia, all positions were classified according to military rank. There are writers in Paris for whom it would have been no little distinction to be transformed into an Egyptian general; I could see in it only an oriental amplification. We mounted donkeys and headed towards the Mosky. Mahomet knocked at the door of a fairly good-looking house. A black African girl opened the door and cried out with joy; another black African, a slave, being curious, leant over the balustrade of the staircase, clapped her hands and laughed loudly, as I heard conversation ring out in which, I guessed, the arrival of the *mirliva* was being *discussed*.

On the first floor I find a formally-dressed individual, wearing a cashmere turban, who sat me down and introduced a tall young man as his son. Here, was the father. At the same moment a woman of about thirty years old, as yet very pretty, entered; coffee and pipes were brought, and I learned from the interpreter that they were from Upper Egypt, which gave the father the right to wear a white turban. A moment later, the young girl arrived followed by the Africans who were standing outside the door; she took a tray from them, and served us various sorts of jam in crystal pots from which it was scooped with silver-gilt spoons. She was so petite, and so pretty, that I could not believe anyone would think of her marrying. Her features were not yet well-formed; but she resembled her mother so much, that one could perceive, from the latter's face, her future beauty. She attended school in the Frankish quarter, and already knew a few words of Italian. The whole family seemed to me so respectable that I regretted having presented myself there without serious intent. They made me a thousand courtesies, and I left them promising a prompt answer. There were grounds for mature reflection.

The day after next was the Jewish Passover, which corresponds to our Palm Sunday. Instead of boxwood wreaths, as in Europe, all the Christians carried the biblical frond, and the streets were full of children who shared the spoils of the palm-trees. To visit the Frankish quarter, I crossed the Rosetta Garden, the most charming promenade in Cairo. It is a green oasis amidst the dusty houses, on the boundary of the Coptic quarter and the Mosky. The houses of two consulates, and that of Doctor Clot-Bey (*Antoine Clot, medical consultant to Mohammed Ali, the Governor of Egypt*) line one side of this retreat; the Frankish houses which border the *Waghorn Hotel's* alleyway the other; the stretch of ground is considerable enough to present to the eye a horizon verdant with date-palms, orange-trees and sycamores.

It is not easy to find the way to this mysterious Eden, which has no public gate. We entered via the house of the Sardinian Consul, giving his people a few *paras* (*the para being a fortieth of a piastre in value*) and found ourselves amidst orchards and flowerbeds belonging to the neighbouring houses. A path between them leads to a small farm surrounded by fences where several giraffes, which Doctor Clot-Bey's Nubians had raised, ambled about. A dense orange grove extends further, to the left of the road; to the right are planted mulberry-trees between which corn is grown. Then the path bends, and the vast space that one sees on this side ends in a curtain of palm-trees interspersed with banana-trees with their long leaves of a bright green. There is a pavilion there supported by tall pillars, covering a square basin around which groups of women often come and rest, seeking its coolness. On Friday, they are Muslim women, always veiled as fully as possible; on Saturday, Jewish women; on Sunday, Christian women. On the latter two of these days, the veils are a little less discreet; Many women tell their slaves

to spread carpets near the pool, and are served fruit and pastries. A passer-by can sit in the pavilion itself without a mass retreat warning him of his indiscretion, which does sometimes happen on Friday, the day of the Turks.

I was passing near there, when a good-looking boy came up to me with a cheerful air; I recognised the brother of my last intended. I was alone. He made various signals to me that I failed to understand, and ended by inviting me, by means of a more intelligible mime, to wait for him in the pavilion. Ten minutes later, the door of one of the little gardens bordering the houses opened and gave exit to two women whom the young man led towards me, and who came and took their places near the basin, raising their veils. They were his mother and sister. Their house overlooked the promenade on the opposite side to that on which I had entered the day before yesterday. After the first friendly greetings, there we were, looking at each other and making conversation at random, smiling at our mutual ignorance. The little girl said nothing, doubtless out of reserve; but, recalling that she was learning Italian, I tried a few words in that language, to which she responded with the guttural accent of the Arabs, which renders conversation most unclear.

I tried to express what was singular in the resemblance between the two. One was the miniature of the other. The still vague features of the child were more clearly defined in the mother; one could foresee between these two ages a charming season which it would be sweet to see in bloom. Nearby there was a palm-trunk which had been blown down a few days before, by the wind, and whose branches were dipping into the far end of the basin. I pointed to it with my finger, saying:

— ‘*Oggi è il giornodelle palme (Today is Palm Sunday)*

Now, the Coptic festivals, being regulated by the primitive calendar of the Church, do not fall at the same time as ours. However, the little girl went and broke off a branch, which she held in her hand, saying:

— ‘*Io cosi sono Roumi*’. (*I too am a Roman!*)

From the Egyptian point of view, all we Franks are *Romans*. I could therefore take this as a compliment and as an allusion to the future marriage.... O Hymen, Hymeneus! I saw you draw near, that day! Your only role, according to our European ideas, is to be the younger brother of Amor. Yet would it not be charming to see the wife one has chosen grow and develop near oneself, to play the father awhile before becoming the lover!...

But, for the husband, what danger!

As I left the garden, I felt the need to consult my friends in Cairo. I went to see Soliman-Aga.

— ‘Marry then, in the name of Allah!’ he said to me, rather like Pantagruel to Panurge (*See Rabelais: Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book III, Chapter 3.IX*).

From there I went to see the artist at the *Domergue Hotel*, who shouted at me, in his voice rendered harsh due to deafness:

— ‘If it’s before the Consul ... don’t marry!’

There is, whatever one does, a certain religious prejudice which dominates the European in the East, at least in serious circumstances. To marry *after the Coptic fashion*, as they say in Cairo, is simple indeed; but to wed a very young child, who is delivered to one, so to speak, and who contracts an illusory bond with oneself, is truly a serious moral responsibility.

As I was giving myself over to these delicate feelings, I saw Abdallah arrive, returning from Suez; I explained my situation.

‘I knew they’d take advantage of my absence to make you do something stupid,’ he cried. ‘I know the family. Have you asked about the dowry?’

— ‘Oh! I don’t care; I know here it’s virtually nothing.’

— ‘We’re talking of twenty thousand piastres (five thousand francs)’.

— ‘Well, that’s always useful.’

— ‘What! But it is you who have to pay them.’

— ‘Ah! That’s quite different.... So, I have to grant a dowry, instead of receiving one?’

— ‘Naturally. Did you not know this is the custom here?’

— ‘I was told it would be a European form of marriage....’

— ‘The marriage, yes; but a dowry must always be paid. It is to compensate the family.’

I understood from then on, the eagerness of parents in this country to marry off little girls. Nothing is more just, in my opinion, than to recognise, by means of a dowry, the trouble the good people have taken to bring a graceful and well-formed young child into the world, and raise her. It seems that the dowry, or rather the dower, the minimum value of which I’ve indicated above, increases in proportion to the beauty of the bride and the status of the parents. Add to that the cost of the wedding, and you will see that a marriage *after the Coptic fashion* is rather a costly formality. I regretted that the last proposal was, at that moment, beyond my means. Besides, Abdallah’s opinion was that for the same cost, one could acquire, at the slave-market, an entire seraglio.

Part V: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – The Slaves



Dancing Almeh, 1828, Otto Baron Howen
[Rijksmuseum](#)

Chapter 1: Sunrise

How strange our life is! Every morning, in that half-waking state where reason gradually triumphs over the deranged content of dream, I feel that it is natural, logical, and in keeping with my Parisian origins to wake to the light of a grey sky and the sound of wheels grinding on paving stones, in some sad-looking room, furnished with angular furniture, where imagination strikes the windows like a trapped insect, and it is with ever-lively astonishment that I find myself a thousand leagues from my homeland, and that I open my senses little by little to the vague impressions of a world that is the perfect antithesis of ours. The voice of the Turk chanting from the neighbouring minaret; the bell and heavy trot of a passing camel, and sometimes its strange howl; the rustling and indistinct whistling that bring the air, the wood, and the walls to life; the early dawn silhouetting the thousand-fold mesh of the windows on the ceiling; a morning breeze laden with penetrating scents, which lifts the curtain at the doorway and reveals, above the walls of the courtyard, the floating heads of the palm trees; all this surprises me, delights me ... or saddens me, depending on the day; for I would not wish to

imply that an eternal summer renders life always joyful. The black sun of melancholy, which pours dark rays on the brow of Albrecht Durer's dreaming angel (*see Durer's etching, 'Melencolia I'*), also rises sometimes above the luminous plains of the Nile, as on the banks of the Rhine, over a cold Germanic landscape. I will even admit that in the absence of fog, dust is a sad veil to the brightness of an Eastern day.

I sometimes ascend to the terrace of the house where I live in the Coptic quarter, to see the first rays which set ablaze the distant plain of Heliopolis, and the slopes of the Mokattam, where the 'City of the Dead' lies, between Cairo and El Matareya. It is usually a beautiful spectacle, as dawn gradually colours the domes and slender arches of the tombs dedicated to the three dynasties of Caliphs (*the Fatimids*), Emirs (*the Ayyubids*), and Sultans (*the Mamluks*) who, from about the year 1000, governed Egypt. One of the obelisks of an ancient temple of the sun remains standing, alone, in this plain, like a forgotten sentinel; it rises from the centre of a dense clump of palm trees and sycamores, and always receives the first glance of the god who was formerly worshipped at its feet.

Dawn, in Egypt, has the beautiful vermilion hues one admires in the Cyclades, or on the coast of Crete; the sun bursts forth suddenly, at the edge of the sky, preceded only by a vague white glow; sometimes it seems to have difficulty in raising the long folds of a greyish shroud, and appears pale and deprived of rays, like Osiris in the underworld; its discoloured imprint further saddens the arid sky, which then resembles, to the point of being mistaken for, the overcast skies of Europe, but which, far from bringing rain, absorbs all humidity. The thick dust which burdens the horizon is never dispersed as fresh clouds like our mist: the sun, at the height of its strength, scarcely succeeds in piercing the ashen atmosphere, in the form of a red disk, which one would think had issued from the Libyan forge of Ptah (*the ancient Egyptian god of creation*). One understands, then, the profound melancholy of ancient Egypt, that frequent preoccupation with suffering and tombs that the monuments transmit to us. It is Typhon (*the serpentine giant who opposed Zeus*) who triumphs for a time over the benevolent divinities; he irritates the eyes, dries the lungs, and scatters clouds of insects over the fields and orchards.

I saw them pass like messengers of death and famine, the atmosphere was charged with them and, looking above my head, for want of a point of comparison I took them at first for clouds of birds. Abdallah, who had ascended to the terrace at the same time as myself, made a circle in the air with the long stem of his *chibouk* (*Turkish pipe*), and two or three of them fell to the floor. He shook his head as he looked at these enormous green and pink cicadas, and said to me:

— 'You've never eaten them?'

I could not help but wave away such food, and yet, if you remove their wings and legs, they must look very much like salt-water shrimps.

— 'They are a great resource in the desert', said Abdallah; 'they are smoked, salted, and have, more or less, the taste of red herring; with *durra* (*sorghum*) paste, they form an excellent dish.'

— ‘Apropos of that,’ I said, ‘would it not be possible to find an Egyptian cook for me here? I find it tedious to visit the hotel twice a day to eat.’

— ‘You are right,’ said Abdallah ‘you ought to hire a cook.’

— ‘Well, doesn’t the *barbarian* know something of it?’

— ‘No! Nothing. He’s here to open the door, and keep the house clean, that’s all.’

— ‘And you yourself, are you not, when it comes to it, capable of setting a piece of meat on the fire, and preparing something?’

— ‘Is it I you speak of?’ cried Abdallah in a deeply hurt tone. ‘No, sir, I know nothing of that sort.’

— ‘That’s unfortunate,’ I said, as if continuing a jest; ‘we might have had locusts for breakfast this morning; but seriously, I would like to take my meals here. There are butchers in the town, and fruit and fish merchants.... I don’t find my suggestion so extraordinary.’

— ‘Nothing is simpler, in fact: employ a cook. Except, a European cook will cost you a *talari* (*twenty silver piastres*) a day. And even the beys, pashas, and hoteliers themselves have difficulty finding a chef.’

— ‘I want one from this country, who can prepare the dishes everyone eats.’

— ‘Very well, we can find one at Monsieur Jean’s. He is one of your compatriots who keeps a tavern in the Coptic quarter, where people seeking a position meet.’

Chapter 2: Monsieur Jean

Monsieur Jean is a glorious remnant of our Egyptian army. He was one of the thirty-three Frenchmen who took service with the Mamluks after the retreat of Napoleon’s expeditionary force. For a few years, he had, like the others, a palace, women, horses, and slaves: at the time of the destruction of that powerful militia, as a Frenchman, he was spared; but, having returned to civilian life, his wealth soon melted away. He thought of selling wine publicly, something new at the time in Egypt, where Christians and Jews only intoxicated themselves with brandy, arrack, and a certain beer called *bouza* (*made from fermented millet seed*). Since then, the wines of Malta, Syria, and the Archipelago have competed, with spirits, and the Muslims of Cairo seem unoffended by the innovation.

Monsieur Jean admired my resolution of escaping hotel life.

— ‘But,’ he said to me, ‘you will find difficulty setting up a house for yourself. In Cairo, one must employ as many servants as one’s various needs. Their self-esteem allows each of them to undertake only one task; though they are so lazy one doubts it is calculated. Every complication tires them or escapes them, and they even abandon one, for the most part, as soon as they’ve earned enough to spend a few days doing nothing.’

— ‘Then how do the locals manage?’

— ‘Oh! They let them have their way, and employ two or three for each job. In all cases, the master has his secretary (*khatibessir*), his treasurer (*khazindar*), his pipe-holder (*tchiboukji*), the *selikdar* to carry his weapons, the *seradjabchi* to hold his horse, the *kahwedjibachi* to make his coffee wherever he stops, not to mention the *yamaks* to help all these people. Inside, many more are needed; for the porter would not consent to take care of the rooms, nor the cook to make the coffee; it is necessary even to have a water-carrier in his pay. It is true that by distributing to them a piastre, or a piastre and a half, that is to say from twenty-five to thirty centimes per day, one is regarded by each of these idlers as a most magnificent patron.’

— ‘Well,’ said I, ‘all this is still far below the sixty piastres a day one spends in the hotels.’

— ‘But it’s a price no European resists paying.’

— ‘I will try, it will be instructive.’

— ‘The food will be abominable.’

— ‘I will get to know the local dishes.’

— ‘We will have to keep an account book, and discuss the cost of everything.’

— ‘That will teach me the language.’

— ‘You can try, then; I will send you the most honest ones; you will choose.’

— ‘Are they such thieves?’

— ‘*Carroteurs* (*pilferers*), at best, the old soldier said, recalling his military slang. Thieves! Egyptians?... They lack the courage.’

I find that in general the poor folk of Egypt are despised by Europeans. Thus, the Franks in Cairo, who today share the privileges of the Turks, also adopt their prejudices. The Egyptians are doubtless poor and ignorant, and their habituation to slavery keeps them in a state of abjection. They are more dreamers than men of action, and more intelligent than industrious; but I believe them to be good and of a character similar to that of the Hindus, which perhaps also derives from their almost exclusively vegetarian diet. We carnivores greatly respect the Tartars and the Bedouins, our equals, and are inclined to abuse our energy with regard to sheepish populations.

After leaving Monsieur Jean, I crossed Esbekieh Square to visit the *Hôtel Domergue*. The square is, as you know, a vast area located between the city walls and the first line of houses in the Coptic and Frankish quarters. There are many splendid palaces and hotels there. The house where General Kléber was assassinated, and the one where the sessions of the *Institut d’Egypte* are held stand out in particular. A small wood of sycamores and *Pharaoh fig-trees* (*ficus sycomorus*) is linked to the memory of Bonaparte, who had them planted. At a time of flooding, this whole square is covered with water and crisscrossed by painted and gilded *canges* (*single-sailed Nile boat*) and *djermes* (*dahabeahs*, *twin-sailed*) belonging to the owners of the neighbouring houses. This annual transformation of a public square into a boating lake does not prevent gardens from being laid out there and canals dug in more usual times. I saw, there, a great number of fellahin working on a trench; the men were digging the ground, and the

women were carrying away heavy loads in baskets of rice-straw. Among the latter there were several young girls, some in blue shirts, and those under eight years of age entirely naked, as one sees in the villages on the banks of the Nile. Inspectors armed with sticks supervised the work, and from time to time struck the less active. The whole was under the direction of a sort of soldier wearing a red tarbouch, shod in strong boots with spurs, dragging a cavalry sabre, and holding in his hand a whip of rolled hippopotamus-skin. This was addressed to the noble shoulders of the inspectors, as the latter's sticks were to the shoulder-blades of the fellahin.

The supervisor, seeing me stop to watch the poor young girls bending under the bags of earth, spoke to me in French. He was another compatriot. I did not much like the thought of the blows of the stick distributed upon the men, limited in force though they were; however, Africa has other ideas than we do of the matter.

— 'But why,' I said, 'must these women and children work?'

— 'They are not forced to,' the French inspector replied, 'it is their fathers or husbands who prefer to see them work, under our gaze, rather than leave them alone in the city. They are paid from twenty paras to a piastre, according to their strength. A piastre (*twenty-five centimes*) is generally the price per day per man.

— 'But why are some of them chained? Are they convicts?'

— 'They are lazy; they prefer to spend their time sleeping or listening to stories in cafés than making themselves useful.'

— 'How do they make enough to live?'

— 'One lives on so little here! At need, they'll find fruit or vegetables to steal from the fields, won't they. The government has a lot of trouble getting essential work done; but when absolutely necessary, they surround a neighbourhood or block a street with troops, arrest the people who pass by, bind them, and bring them to us; that's it.'

— 'What! Everyone, without exception?'

— 'Oh! Everyone; however, once arrested, each can have their say. The Turks and the Franks make themselves known. Among the others, those who have money redeem themselves from forced labour; several refer themselves to their masters or patrons. The rest are recruited, and work for a few weeks or months, depending on the importance of the tasks to be done.'

What to say, with regard to all this? Egypt is still stuck fast in the Middle Ages. Such forced labour was formerly imposed for the benefit of the Mamluk beys. The pasha is today the sole suzerain; the fall of the Mamluks has abolished individual serfdom, that's all.

Chapter 3: The Khawals (*The Male Dancers*)

After lunching at the hotel, I went to sit in the most beautiful café in Mosky. There I saw for the first time *almahs* dancing in public. I would like to describe the stage-set, but in truth the

decorations lacked any trefoils, or little columns, or porcelain panels, or suspended ostrich-eggs. It is only in Paris that one encounters such oriental cafés. Imagine rather a square, and humble whitewashed shop, where the painted image of a clock placed in the middle of a meadow between two cypresses was several times repeated in arabesque. The rest of the ornamentation consisted of mirrors also painted, and which were intended to reflect the gleam of a palm-branch loaded with flasks of oil, in which night lights swam, which in the evening is quite effective.

Sofas of very hard wood reigned around the room, bordered by palm-frond baskets, serving as stools for the feet of the smokers, to whom were distributed from time to time the elegant little cups (*fengans*) of which I have already spoken. It is there that the fellah in a blue blouse, the Copt in a black turban, or the Bedouin in his striped coat, take their places along the wall, and watch without surprise and without umbrage the Frank sit down at their side. The *kahwedji* well knows that the cup must be sweetened for the latter,, and the company smiles at this strange concoction. The stove occupies one corner of the shop and is usually its most precious ornament. The corner-piece which surrounds it, decorated with painted earthenware, displays festoons and rocaille-work, with something of the appearance of a German stove. The hearth is always furnished with a multitude of small red-copper coffee pots, because it is necessary to boil a coffee pot for each of these *fengans* as small as an egg-cup.

And now here are the almahs who appear among us in a cloud of dust and tobacco-smoke. They struck me at first sight by the brilliance of the golden caps which surmounted their braided hair. Their heels which struck the ground, while the raised arms repeated a swift gesture, made bells and rings resonate; their hips quivered with voluptuous movement; their waists appeared bare under muslin, in the gap between the jacket and the rich belt, loosened, and descending very low, like the girdle sported by Venus (*the cestus*). In the midst of their rapid whirling, one could scarcely distinguish the features of these seductive people, whose fingers shook small cymbals, the size of castanets, and who exerted themselves, valiantly, to the primitive sounds of the flute and the tambourine. Two were most beautiful, with proud faces, Arab eyes brightened by *kohl*, and full and delicate cheeks covered with light make-up; but the third, it must be said, betrayed a less tender sex with an eight-day beard: so that on examining things closely, and when, the dance being over, it was possible for me to distinguish better the features of the other two, I was soon convinced that we were dealing there only with charming ... men.

O, Oriental life, full of surprises! And I, I was about to get excited with regard to these ambivalent beings, I was preparing, imprudently, to stick gold coins to their foreheads, according to the fine tradition of the Levant.... People will think I am prodigal; I hasten to point out that these are gold coins called *ghazis*, worth from fifty centimes to five francs. Naturally, it is only with the smallest in value that one creates gold masks for the dancers, when, after a graceful step, they come to bow their moist brows before each of the spectators; but, for dancers merely dressed as women, one may well deprive oneself of such ceremony and throw them a few *paras*.

In all seriousness, Egyptian morality is particular in its operation. A few years ago, dancing-girls roamed the city freely, livened public festivals, and delighted the customers of casinos and cafés. Today, they can only be seen in homes, and at special festivals, and scrupulous

people find these male dancers, with effeminate features and long hair, whose arms, waists, and bare necks parody so deplorably the half-veiled charms of the female dancers, much more acceptable.

I have spoken of the latter under the name of *almahs*, yielding, for the sake of clarity, to European prejudice. Female dancers are called *ghawazi*; female singers *almahs*; the plural of this word is *awalim*, pronounced *oualem*. As for these dancers authorised by Muslim morality, they are called *khawals*.

Leaving the café, I re-crossed the narrow street which leads to the Frankish bazaar to enter the *Waghorn's* cul-de-sac, and reach the Rosetta Garden. Clothing merchants surrounded me, displaying before my eyes the richest embroidered costumes, belts of cloth of gold, weapons inlaid with silver, tarbouches trimmed with a silken tassel after the fashion in Constantinople, very seductive things which excite a feeling of altogether feminine coquetry in a man. If I had been able to observe myself in the mirrors of the café, which were, alas, only paint, I might have taken pleasure in trying out a few of these costumes; and I certainly have no wish to delay donning Oriental costume. But, before all, I was obliged to think about satisfying my interior needs.

Chapter 4: The Khanum (*The Lady*)

I returned home full of these thoughts, having long since sent the dragoman to await me there, for I am beginning to find my way about the streets; I discovered the house to be full of people. First there were cooks sent by Monsieur Jean, who were smoking quietly in the vestibule, where they had coffee served to them; then there was Yousef, on the first floor, indulging in the delights of the hookah, and yet other people still making a loud noise on the terrace. I woke the dragoman who was having his *kief* (*siesta, the word also means hashish*) in the back room. He cried out like a man in despair:

— ‘I told you so, this morning!’

— ‘But, what?’

— ‘That you were wrong to remain on the terrace.’

— ‘You told me that it was good to go there only at night, so as not to worry the neighbours.’

— ‘And you stayed there till after sunrise’.

— ‘Well?’

— ‘Well, there are workers up there who are labouring at your expense and whom the sheikh of the district sent an hour ago.’

I found, in fact, trellis-makers working hard to block the view of one whole side of the terrace.

— ‘On that side,’ said Abdallah, ‘is the garden of a *khanum* (*the principal lady of a house*) who complained about you gazing at her.’

— ‘But I didn’t see her... sadly.’

— ‘She saw you, that was enough.’

— ‘And how old is this lady?’

— ‘Oh! She is a widow; she is quite fifty years old.’

This seemed so ridiculous to me that I removed, and threw outside, the fence with which they were about to surround the terrace; the workmen, surprised, withdrew without saying anything, for no one in Cairo, unless of Turkish origin, would dare resist a Frank. The dragoman and Yousef shook their heads without saying anything. I had the cooks attend on me, and kept the one among them who seemed to me the most intelligent. He was an Arab, with dark eyes, whose name was Mustafa; he seemed very satisfied with the piastre and a half per day that I promised him. One of the others offered to assist him for only a piastre; I did not think it appropriate to increase my household expenses to this extent.

I began to talk to Yousef, who was explaining his ideas on the cultivation of mulberry-trees and the breeding of silkworms, when there was a knock at the door. It was the old sheikh who was back with his workmen. He sent word to me that I was compromising his position, that I did not seem to recognise his generosity in renting me the house. He added that the *khanum* was furious, especially because I had thrown the trellis-work on my terrace into her garden, and that she might well complain to the *cadi* (judge).

I foresaw a series of inconveniences, and tried to excuse myself for my ignorance of the customs, assuring him that I had seen nothing, and could not see anything in this lady’s house, having very poor eyesight....

— ‘You will understand,’ he said to me again, ‘our fear, here, of indiscreet eyes penetrating the interiors of gardens and courtyards, by the fact that blind old men are always chosen to announce the prayer from the top of the minarets.’

— ‘I know that.’ I told him.

— ‘It would be fitting,’ he added, ‘for your wife to pay a visit to the *khanum*, and offer her a present, a handkerchief, or some other trifle.’

— ‘But, you know,’ I replied, embarrassed, ‘that, till now....’

— ‘*Mashallah!*’ he cried, striking his forehead, I had forgotten! Ah! how unfortunate it is to have *Frenguis* (*Franks, foreigners generally*) in our neighbourhood! I gave you eight days to obey the law. Even if you were a Muslim, a man without a wife can only live in a *wikala* (*a khan or caravanserai*); you cannot remain here.’

I calmed him as best I could; I represented to him that I still had two days left of those he had granted me; in truth, I wanted to gain time and make sure if there was not some trickery in all this aimed at obtaining a sum of money in addition to my rent, now paid in advance. So, I resolved, following the sheikh’s departure, to seek out the French Consul.

Chapter 5: A Visit to the French Consul

When travelling, I forgo letters of recommendation, in as far as I can. From the day one is known in a city, it is no longer possible to view anything. Our worldly people, even in the East, would never consent to show themselves other than in certain places recognised as suitable, or talk publicly with people of a lower class, or walk around in casual dress at certain hours of the day. I greatly pity those gentlemen always coiffured, trussed, gloved, who dare not mingle with the people so as to observe a curious detail, a dance, or a ceremony, and who fear to be seen in a café, in a tavern, to follow a woman, or even to fraternise with an expansive Arab who cordially offers you the mouthpiece of his long pipe, or has coffee served to you at his door, if he sees you halt, moved by curiosity or fatigue. The English, especially, are perfection, and I never see one pass without being greatly amused. Imagine a gentleman mounted on a donkey, his long legs almost dragging on the ground. His round hat is trimmed with a thick covering of white pique cotton. It was invented to counter the heat of the sun's rays, which are absorbed, it is said, in this headdress half-mattress, half-felt. The gentleman's eyes are each covered by a kind of walnut shell in blue steel-mesh, to hide the glare from the ground and the walls; he wears over all this a green woman's veil to trap the dust. His rubber overcoat is covered further by one of oilcloth to protect him from the plague, and the chance contact of passers-by. His gloved hands hold a long stick which keeps any suspect Arab away from him, and he, usually, only goes about if flanked to right and left by his groom and his dragoman.

I am rarely exposed to such caricatures, the English never speaking to anyone who is not introduced to them; but have many compatriots who live to a certain extent in the English manner, and, from the moment one has met one of these amiable travellers, one is lost, society envelops one.

In this particular case, I finally decided to seek, at the bottom of my trunk, the letter of recommendation I had to our Consul General, who was temporarily living in Cairo. That same evening, I dined at his house without the accompaniment of English, or any other gentlemen. There was only Doctor Clot-Bey, whose house was next door, and Émile Lubbert, the former director of the Opéra, who had become *historiographer* to the Pasha of Egypt.

These two gentlemen, or, if you will, these two *effendis*, which is the title of every personage distinguished in science, literature or civic functions, wore the Oriental costume with ease. Gleaming stars of the Royal Order (*nishan*) decorated their chests, and it would have been difficult to distinguish them from Muslims. The shaved hair, beard and light tan which one acquires in hot countries, quickly transform the European into a very passable Turk.

I leafed, eagerly, through the French newspapers spread out on the Consul's couch. Human frailty! To read newspapers in the land of papyrus and hieroglyphics! To be unable, like Madame de Staël on the banks of Lake Geneva, to forget the stream on the Rue du Bac!

Egypt formerly had two newspapers of its own, a sort of Arabian *Moniteur*, which was printed in the district of Boulaq, and the *Phare d'Alexandrie*. At the time of its struggle against the Porte (*the Ottoman Empire*), the pasha brought a French editor to Cairo at great expense, who battled for several months the newspapers of Constantinople and Smyrna. The newspaper is an engine of war like any other; in this area too, Egypt has been disarmed; which does not prevent it still from receiving many a broadside from the public newspapers of the Bosphorus.

During dinner, a matter was discussed which was considered most serious, and was causing a great stir in Frankish society. A poor devil of a Frenchman, a servant, had decided to become a Muslim, and what was most unusual was that his wife also wanted to embrace Islam. The authorities were busily seeking ways to prevent this scandal: the Frankish clergy had taken the matter to heart, but the Muslim clergy's self-esteem invested in achieving a triumph on their side. Some Muslims offered the disloyal couple money, a good position, and various benefits; others said to the husband: 'You can do whatever you wish, but by remaining a Christian, you will always be what you are: your life is determined in advance; in Europe, we have never seen a servant become a lord. In our country, the lowest of valets, a slave, a kitchen-boy, may become an emir, pasha, or minister; he may marry the Sultan's daughter: age has nothing to do with it; hopes of achieving the first rank only cease when one dies.' The poor devil, who was ambitious perhaps, yielded to these hopes. For his wife, too, the prospect was no less brilliant; she would immediately become a *quaden*, the equal of great ladies, with the right to despise any Christian or Jewish woman, and to wear the black *abaya* and yellow slippers; she could divorce too, a thing perhaps even more attractive; marry a great personage; inherit; and possess land, which is forbidden to *yavours* (*giaours, infidels*); not to mention the chances of becoming the favourite of some princess or her mother, the Sultana, who governs the empire from the depths of the seraglio.

This is the dual perspective presented to the poor, and it must be admitted that the possibility of those from the lower ranks of society reaching, through chance or natural intelligence, the highest positions, without their background, education, or initial circumstances being a hindrance, realises quite effectively that principle of equality which, among us, is only codified. In the East, even a criminal, if he has paid his debt to society, finds no career closed: moral prejudice ceases to be a barrier to him.

Yet, it must be said, despite all the seductions of Turkish law, apostasies are very rare. The importance attached to the affair of which I speak is proof of this. The Consul thought of having the pair kidnapped during the night, and embarked on a French ship; but how to transport them from Cairo to Alexandria? It takes five days to descend the Nile, and reach the canal. By putting them in a covered boat, there was a risk that their cries would be heard on the way. In Turkish countries, change of religion is the only circumstance in which the power of consuls over their subjects ceases.

— 'But why seek to have these poor people removed?' I said to the Consul, 'would you have the right to do so under French law?'

— 'Absolutely; in a sea port I see no difficulty.'

— 'But if one accepts their religious convictions?'

— ‘What then; must we become Turks?’

— ‘There are Europeans who have adopted the turban.’

— ‘Doubtless; senior employees of the pasha, who otherwise would not have been able to receive the rank conferred on them, or would not, otherwise, have been obeyed by the Muslims.’

— ‘I like to think that in most people change is sincere; otherwise, I would have to believe all merely motivated by self-interest.’

— ‘I think as you do; but here is why, in the ordinary case, we oppose, with all our power, a French subject abandoning their religion. With us, religion is divorced from civil law; among Muslims, these two principles are confused. Those who embrace Islam become Turkish subjects in every respect, and lose their nationality. We can no longer act in their regard; they belong to the stick and the sabre; and, if they return to the Christian faith, Turkish law condemns them to death. By becoming a Muslim, one does not only lose one’s faith, one loses name, family, country; one is no longer the same person, one is a Turk; it is most serious, as you see.’

The Consul then had us taste a quite fine assortment of wines from Greece and Cyprus, the various nuances of which I had difficulty appreciating, because of a pronounced flavour of tar, which, according to him, proved their authenticity. It takes time to become used to this Hellenic refinement, undoubtedly necessary for the preservation of genuine Malvasia, Commandery, or Tenedos wines.

I found a moment in the course of conversation to explain my domestic state; I related the tale of my failed attempts at marriage, and my humble adventures.

‘I have no idea,’ I added, ‘of playing the seducer here. I came to Cairo to work, to study the city, to investigate its history, and now it is impossible to live here on less than sixty piastres a day; which, I admit, upsets my calculations.’

‘You will understand,’ the Consul said, ‘that in a city which foreigners pass through, on their way to India, during certain months of the year, and where lords and nabobs cross paths, the three or four hotels that exist can easily agree to raise prices, and stifle all competition.’

— ‘No doubt; so, I have rented a house for a few months.’

— ‘That’s the wisest thing to do.’

— ‘Well, now they wish to turf me out, under the pretext that I lack a wife.’

— ‘They have the right: Monsieur Clot-Bey recorded this detail in his book (*Aperçu sur l’Égypte, II, 39*). William Lane, the English Consul, relates in his (*Modern Egyptians*) that he himself was subjected to this necessity. Moreover, read the work of Benoît de Maillet, Louis XIV’s Consul General, and you will see that it was the same in his day; one must marry.’

— ‘I have rejected it. The last girl I was offered spoiled me with regard to the others, and unfortunately, I cannot afford to dower her.’

— ‘That’s another matter.’

— ‘But slaves are far less expensive: my dragoman advised me to buy one, and establish her in my house.’

— ‘That’s a good idea.’

— ‘Is it within the terms of the law?’

— ‘Completely.’

The conversation continued on this subject. I was a little surprised at the facility Christians are granted to acquire slaves in a Turkish country: it was explained to me that this only covered women more or less of colour; but there were Abyssinian women who were almost white. Most of the merchants established in Cairo possess a few. Monsieur Clot-Bey raises several for employment as midwives. Another proof that I was given that this right is not contested, is that a black slave, having recently escaped from Monsieur Lubbert’s house, had been returned to him by the police.

I was still full of European prejudice, and learnt these details with some surprise. One must reside awhile in the East to realise that slavery is in principle only a sort of adoption. The condition in which the slave lives there is certainly better than that of the free *fellah* or the *raya* (*Turkish subject, especially a non-Muslim*). Moreover, I already understood, from what I had learned about marriage here, that there was little difference between the Egyptian woman sold by her parents, and the Abyssinian woman exposed in the bazaar.

The Consuls of the Levant differ in opinion concerning the rights of Europeans over slaves. The diplomatic code contains nothing formal on this subject. Our Consul assured me, however, that he was most anxious that the present situation should not change in this regard, and here’s the reason. Europeans cannot be landowners in Egypt, but, with the help of legal fictions, they do nonetheless acquire property and run factories; in addition to the difficulty of making the people of this country undertake work, who, as soon as they have earned the least sum, go off to live in the sun till the money is exhausted, they are often up against the ill-will of the sheikhs, or powerful rivals in industry, who can suddenly commandeer all their workers under the pretext of public need. With slaves, they can at least obtain regular and continuous labour, if the latter consent to it, and a slave who is dissatisfied with their master can always force him to sell them at the bazaar. This detail is one of those which best explains the mild effects of slavery in the East.

Chapter 6: The Dervishes

When I left the Consul’s mansion, it was already late at night; the *barbarian* was waiting for me at the door, sent by Abdallah, who had thought it appropriate to retire to bed; there was nothing to say: when one has many servants, they share the work, it is natural.... Besides, Abdallah would not have allowed himself to be placed in that category! A dragoman is, in his own eyes, an educated man, a linguist, who consents to place his science at the service of the traveller; he is also willing to fulfil the role of a guide, and would not even reject, if necessary,

the amiable attributions of Lord Pandarus of Troy (*the go-between in Chaucer's 'Troilus and Criseyde'*); but that is where his specialty ends; that is what your twenty piastres a day buy you!

Though he should, at least, be always there, to explain every obscure thing. Thus, I would have liked to know the reason for a certain commotion in the streets, which astonished me at that hour of night. The cafés were open and filled with people; the mosques, illuminated, resounded with solemn chants, and their slender minarets bore rings of light; tents were pitched on Esbekieh Square, and everywhere one could hear the sounds of drums and reed flutes. After leaving the square, and entering the streets, we had difficulty in pushing through the crowd that pressed between the shops, which were open, as if in broad daylight, and each lit by hundreds of candles, and adorned with festoons and garlands of gilt and coloured paper. In front of a small mosque, half-way along the street, there was an immense candelabrum bearing a multitude of small glass lamps in a pyramid shape, and, around it, clusters of hanging lanterns. About thirty singers, seated in an oval around the candelabrum, provided the chorus of a song of which four others, standing in their midst, intoned the stanzas in succession; there was sweetness and a sort of devoted expression in this nocturnal hymn, rising to the sky with that touch of melancholy which among the Orientals accompanies joy as well as sadness.

I stopped to listen, despite the insistence of the *barbarian*, who wished to disengage me from the crowd; moreover, I had noticed that the majority of the listeners were Copts, recognisable by their black turbans; it was therefore clear that the Turks willingly admitted the presence of Christians at this solemnity.

Fortunately, I remembered that Monsieur Jean's shop was not far away, and I managed to make the barbarian understand that I wanted to be led there. We found the former Mamluk very awake and exercising to the full his trade in liquor. An arbour, at the back of the courtyard, united Copts and Greeks, who came to refresh themselves, and rest, from time to time, from the emotions of the festival.

Monsieur Jean informed me that I had just attended a choral ceremony of remembrance, or *zekra*, in honour of a holy dervish interred in the neighbouring mosque. This mosque being located in the Coptic quarter, it was the wealthy folk of that religion who paid the annual expense of the solemnity; this explained the mixture of black turbans with those of other colours. Moreover, the Christian commoners willingly celebrate certain *dervishes*, or religious *saints*, whose bizarre practices often do not belong to any specific cult, and perhaps date back to ancient superstitions.

Indeed, when I returned to the place of the ceremony, to which Monsieur Jean was kind enough to accompany me, I found that the scene had taken on an even more extraordinary character. The thirty dervishes held hands with a sort of pitching movement, while the four members of the chorus gradually entered into a half-tender half-wild, poetic frenzy; their hair, in long tresses contrary to Arab custom, floated with the swaying of their heads, covered not by the tarbouch, but a cap of ancient form, similar to the Roman *petasus* (*low-crowned and broad-brimmed*); their humming psalmody took on a dramatic accent at times; the verses evidently answered each other, and the performance was addressed, with plaintive tenderness, to I know not what unknown object of love. Perhaps it was thus that the ancient priests of Egypt

celebrated the mysteries of Osiris found and lost; such doubtless were the complaints of the Corybantes, or of the devotees of the Cabeiri, and this strange choir of dervishes howling and striking the earth in cadence still conformed perhaps to the old tradition of rapture and ecstasy which formerly resounded over the whole eastern shore, from the oases of Ammon to chilly Samothrace. Merely listening, I felt my eyes fill with tears, and enthusiasm gradually inspired all those present.

Monsieur Jean, an old sceptic of the Republican army, did not share our emotion; he found it quite ridiculous, and assured me that the Muslims themselves took pity on these dervishes.

— ‘It’s the common people who encourage them, he told me; otherwise, nothing is less in conformity with Islam, and, in any case, what they sing makes no sense.’

I nevertheless asked him to give me an explanation.

— ‘It’s of no account’, he said to me; love songs that they sing for no one knows what purpose; I know several of them; here is the one they sang:

“My heart is troubled with love — my eyelids close no more! — will my eyes ever see the beloved again?

In the exhaustion of sad nights, absence kills hope — my tears roll down like pearls — my heart is ablaze!

O dove, tell me — why do you so lament — does absence make you moan too — or do your wings lack flight?”

She answers: “Our sorrows are alike — I am consumed by love — alas, this evil too — the absence of my beloved, makes me moan.”

And the refrain with which the thirty dervishes accompany these verses is always the same: “There is no God but God!”

— ‘It seems to me,’ I said, ‘that this song may indeed be addressed to the Divinity; it is doubtless a question of divine love.’

— ‘Not at all; we hear them, in other verses, compare their beloved to the gazelle of Yemen, telling her that her skin is fresh, that she has barely had time to drink milk this,’ he added, ‘is what we would consider questionable.’

I was not convinced; rather, I found in other verses which he also quoted for me a certain resemblance to the Song of Songs.

— ‘Besides,’ added Monsieur Jean, ‘you will see them commit many other follies the day after tomorrow, during the feast of Muhammad; only, I advise you then to adopt Arab costume, because the feast coincides this year with the return of the pilgrims from Mecca, and, among the latter, there are many Mahgrebis (*Western Muslims from the Maghreb*) who do not like Frankish clothes, especially since the conquest of Algiers.’

I promised myself to follow his advice, and I made my way back home, in the company of the *barbarian*. The celebration was to continue all night.

Chapter 7: Domestic Disturbances

Next morning, I told Abdallah to order my lunch from the cook, Mustafa. The latter sent answer that it was first necessary to acquire the necessary kitchen utensils. Nothing could be more just, and I must say again that the equipment was scarcely complicated. As for the provisions, the female fellahin take up their stand in every street, with cages full of chickens, pigeons and ducks; even chicks hatched in the famous ovens of this country are sold by the bushel; Bedouins arrive in the morning bringing grouse and quail, whose legs they hold tightly between their fingers, forming a crown around the hand. All these, without counting fish from the Nile, vegetables, and the enormous fruits of this ancient land of Egypt, are sold at ridiculously modest prices.

By valuing, for example, chickens at twenty centimes, and pigeons at half that, I could flatter myself I would escape the hotel regime for many a day; unfortunately, it was impossible to find fat poultry: they were small feathered skeletons. The fellahin find it more advantageous to sell them than feed them for a long time on corn. Abdallah advised me to buy a certain number of cages, in order to be able to fatten them ourselves. This done, the chickens were set free in the courtyard and the pigeons in a room, and Mustafa, having noticed a small cockerel less bony than the others, prepared, at my request, to prepare a couscous.

I shall never forget the fierce spectacle offered by the Arab, drawing from his belt his *yatagan* (*short sabre*) intent on the murder of an unfortunate cockerel. The poor bird had a fine air, while there was little beneath its plumage, which was as colourful as that of a golden pheasant. On feeling the knife, it uttered hoarse cries which tore at my heartstrings. Mustafa severed its head entire, and left it still fluttering on the terrace, until it ceased, its legs stiffened, and the body collapsed in a corner. These bloody details were enough to quell my appetite. I am very fond of cooking, as long as I don't have to watch ... and I considered myself infinitely more guilty of the death of the little cockerel than if it had perished in the hands of an innkeeper. You will find the reasoning cowardly; but what can one do! I could not manage to tear myself away from my memories of ancient Egypt, and at certain moments would have had qualms about my plunging the knife into the body of a vegetable, for fear of offending some ancient god.

I would not wish, however, to exaggerate the sense of pity attached to the murder of a lean cockerel, any more than the interest that legitimately inspires the man forced to feed on it: there are many other provisions in this great city of Cairo, and fresh dates and bananas always suffice for a suitable lunch; but I was not long in recognising the accuracy of Monsieur Jean's observations. The butchers of the city sell only mutton, and those of the suburbs add, for variety, meat from camels, the immense quarters of which appear hanging at the back of their shops. As regards the camel-meat, one can never doubt its identity; but, as regards the 'mutton', the least of my dragoman's weak jests was to feign that it was often dog. I declare I could not have allowed myself to be so deceived. Sadly, I have never been able to understand their system of weights and methods of preparation, which meant that each dish cost me about ten piastres; it is true that it is necessary to add to this the obligatory seasoning of *mulukhiyah* (*the jute-*

mallow plant) or *bamieh* (*okra*), tasty vegetables, one of which more or less replaces spinach, and the other of which has no analogy with our European vegetables.

Let us return to more general comments. It seemed to me that, in the East, the hoteliers, dragomans, valets and cooks were united against the traveller. I understand now, that unless one possesses a great deal of resolution and even imagination, one needs an enormous fortune to be able to stay long here. Monsieur de Chateaubriand admits that he was ruined by the costs incurred here; Monsieur de Lamartine's expenditure was wild to excess; regarding other travellers, most did not leave the seaports, or only passed through the country quickly. As for myself, I wish to attempt a project that I believe will serve me better. I will buy a slave, since I am also required to have a wife, and will gradually manage to replace the dragoman, and the *barbarian* perhaps, with her, and to close my account completely with the cook. In calculating the cost of a long stay in Cairo, and that which I may yet incur in other cities, it is clear that this will prove a great economy. By marrying, I would have achieved the opposite. Determined, after these reflections, on my course of action, I told Abdallah to lead me to the slave-market.

Chapter 8: The Okel of the Jellabs (*The Market-Hall of the Slave-Dealers*)

We crossed the whole city to reach the quarter where the great bazaars are sited, and there, after following a dark street which formed an angle with the main one, we entered an irregular courtyard, without being obliged to dismount from our donkeys. In the centre was a well, in the shade of a sycamore tree. On the right, along the wall, a dozen black Africans were standing, looking more anxious than sad, dressed for the most part in the blue sleeveless tunic of the common people, and offering every possible variant of colour and form. We turned to the left, where the flooring of a series of small rooms projected into the courtyard, like a platform, about two feet from the ground. Several swarthy merchants swiftly surrounded us, asking:

— 'Eswed? Habesha? (Black Africans? Abyssinians?)'

We walked towards the first room.

There, five or six black women, seated in a circle on mats, the majority of whom were smoking, greeted us with bursts of laughter. They were dressed in little more than blue rags; none could reproach the dealers for adorning their merchandise! Their hair, divided into hundreds of small tight braids, was generally restrained by a red ribbon which divided it into two voluminous tufts; the line of flesh was dyed with cinnabar; they wore bracelets of tin on their arms and legs, necklaces of glass beads, and some of them bore copper rings passed through the nose or ears, completing a sort of barbarous look, whose character various tattoos and staining of the skin enhanced still further. They were black women from Sennar (*in the Sudan*), and furthest removed, indeed, from the type of beauty agreed upon among the French. Their jaws, brows, and lips, gave these poor creatures a different appearance, and yet, except for the mask, alien to us, with which Nature has endowed them, the body is of a rare perfection;

virginal and pure forms were outlined beneath their tunics, and their voices rose sweet and vibrant from mouths bursting with freshness.

Well! I shall not excite myself too much over these charming foreigners; but, certainly, the lovely ladies of Cairo seem to like surrounding themselves with such maids. Which creates a delightful juxtaposition of colour and form; these Nubians are not ugly in the true sense of the word, but do form a perfect contrast with beauty as we have understood it. A pale-skinned woman contrasts, admirably, with these girls, dark as night, whose slender forms are fated to braid hair, stretch fabrics, and carry bottles and vases, as in the ancient frescoes.

If I were in a position to lead an Oriental life to the full, I would not deprive myself of such picturesque creatures; but, wishing to acquire only one slave, I asked to see others too, in some of whom the facial angle was more open, and the black tint less pronounced.

— ‘It depends on the price you wish to pay,’ Abdallah told me. ‘Those you see, there, cost only two purses (two hundred and fifty francs); they are guaranteed for eight days: you can return them at the end of that time, if they possess any defect or infirmity.’

— ‘But,’ I observed, ‘I would willingly pay something more; a somewhat pretty woman costs no more to feed than another.’

Abdallah did not seem to share my opinion.

We passed on to the other rooms; they were all girls from Sennar. There were some younger and more beautiful ones, but the facial type dominated with a singular uniformity.

The merchants offered to have them undressed, parted their lips so that their teeth could be seen, made them walk about, and, especially, made the most of the elasticity of their breasts. The poor girls let this be done with marked indifference; most of them laughing almost continually, which rendered the scene less painful. Be it understood, however, that any condition was preferable for them than to remain in the *okel*, or even compared to their previous existence in their native country.

Finding only pure black Africans there, I asked the dragoman if there were any Abyssinians present.

— ‘Oh!’ he said, ‘they are not shown publicly; you must go up to the house, and the merchant must be convinced that you are not here out of mere curiosity, like most travellers. Besides, they are much more expensive, and you could perhaps find a woman who would suit you among these slaves from Dongola. There are other *okels* that one can visit. Besides this, of Jellab, where we are now, there is also the Kouchouk *okel* and the Khan Ghaafar.’

A merchant approached us, and told me that some Ethiopian women had just arrived, who had been lodged outside the city so as not to pay the entrance fee. They were in the countryside, beyond the Bab-el-Madbah gate. I wished to see them first.

We entered a fairly deserted quarter, and, after many detours, found ourselves in the plain, that is to say, in the midst of tombs, for they surround that whole side of the city. We had passed the monuments of the Caliphs on our left; we rode between dusty hills, covered with mills, and formed of the debris of ancient buildings. The donkeys were halted at the gate of a small walled

enclosure, probably the remains of a ruined mosque. Three or four Arabs, dressed in a costume foreign to Cairo, showed us within, and I found myself in the midst of a sort of tribe whose tents were pitched in this enclosure, fenced on all sides. The bursts of laughter of a certain number of black women greeted me, as at the okel; their simple natures clearly reflect every impression they receive, and I am not sure, therefore, why European dress seems so ridiculous to them. All these girls were busy about various household tasks, and there was a very tall and beautiful woman in the middle who was watching attentively over the contents of a large cauldron set on the fire. Nothing being able to distract her from this preoccupation, I had the others appear before me, who hastened to leave their work and themselves detail their charms. It was not the least of their coqueties that hair, all in braids of an extraordinary volume, such as I had already seen, but entirely impregnated with butter, streamed from their heads over their shoulders and breasts. I thought that it was to counter the lively action of the sun on their heads; but Abdallah assured me that it was a question of fashion, in order to make their hair shiny and their faces glow.

— ‘Except,’ he said, ‘that once they have been bought, they hasten to bathe their hair and untangle their braids, which are only worn this side of the Mountains of the Moon.’

The review was soon over; these poor creatures had a wild air that was doubtless very curious, but not very attractive from the point of view of cohabitation. Most of them were disfigured by a host of tattoos, grotesque incisions, stars and blue suns that stood out against the slightly greyish darkness of their skin. Viewing the forms of these unfortunates, whom we accept as human-beings, one reproaches oneself, philanthropically, for having sometimes been lacking in consideration for the apes, those unrecognised relatives that our racial pride persists in rejecting. Their gestures and attitudes reflected the connection, and I even note that our extremities, elongated and developed doubtless long ago by the habit of climbing trees, are clearly related to those of *quadrumana*.

They shouted at me on all sides: *Bakshis! Bakshis!* and I hesitantly took a few piastres from my pocket, fearing that their masters would profit, exclusively, from them; but the latter, to reassure me, offered to distribute dates, watermelons, tobacco, and even brandy; then, there were transports of joy everywhere, and many began to dance to the sound of the *tarabouk* and the *zummarah*, the melancholy drum and flute of the African tribes.

The tall, beautiful girl in charge of the kitchen barely turned to watch, and was still stirring a thick porridge of *durra* (*sorghum*) in the cauldron. I approached; she looked at me with a disdainful air, and her attention was only attracted by my black gloves. At these, she folded her arms, and cried out in admiration. How could I have black hands, and a white face? That was beyond her comprehension. I increased this surprise by removing one of my gloves, and then she began to cry out:

— ‘*Bismillah! Enté crumbrit? Enté Seythan?* (God, forbid! Are you a spirit? Are you the Devil?)’

The others showed no less astonishment, and one cannot imagine how much all the details of my dress struck these ingenuous souls. It is clear that, in their country, I could have earned a living by displaying myself widely. As for the principal of these Nubian beauties, she was

not long in returning to her original pre-occupation, with the inconstancy of creatures who are distracted by everything, but whose ideas are fixed on nothing for more than an instant.

I took the fancy to ask what she cost; but the dragoman told me that she was the slave trader's particular favourite, and that he did not wish to sell her, hoping that she would make him a father... when she would be still more dear to him.

I did not insist on the details.

— 'Decidedly,' I said to the dragoman, 'I find all these too dark in hue; let us move on to other tints. Are Abyssinian women so rarely on the market?'

— 'The supply is a little lacking at the moment,' Abdallah said, 'but the great caravan from Mecca will soon arrive. It has stopped at Birket-el-Hadji, and will make its entry tomorrow at daybreak, and we will then have something to choose from; for many pilgrims, lacking money to finish their journey, get rid of one of their wives, and there are always merchants who bring them back from the Hedjaz (*western Saudi Arabia*).'

We left the okel, without anyone showing the least surprise that I had made no purchase. An inhabitant of Cairo had, however, concluded a deal during my visit and was returning to Bab-el-Madbah with two very well matched young black girls. They walked in front of him, dreaming of the unknown, wondering doubtless whether they were going to become favourites or servants, and with butter, rather than tears, flowing down their breasts exposed to the rays of a burning sun.

Chapter 9: The Cairo Theatre

We returned by following Hazanieh Street, which led us to the one that separates the Frankish Quarter from the Jewish Quarter, and which runs along the Calish (*canal*), crossed at intervals by single-arched Venetian bridges. There is a very fine café there, the rear room of which overlooks the canal, and where one can purchase sorbets and lemonades. Moreover, there is no lack of refreshments in Cairo, where pretty shops display here and there glasses of lemonade, and drinks mixed with sweetened fruit, at prices that are accessible to all. Turning off Turkish Street to cross the passage that leads to the Mosky, I saw on the wall lithographed posters announcing a show that evening at the Cairo Theatre. I was not sorry to find this memory of civilisation: I dismissed Abdallah and went to dine at the *Domergue*, where I was told that amateur actors from the city were giving a performance for the benefit of the impoverished blind, who are, sadly, very numerous in Cairo. As for the season of Italian music, it would not be long before it started; but for the moment one could only view a simple evening of vaudeville.

At about seven o'clock, the narrow street off which runs the Waghorn cul-de-sac was crowded with people, and the Arabs were amazed to see a whole crowd entering a single building. It was a cause for great celebration among the beggars and donkey-drivers, who shouted '*Bakshis!*' from all sides. The entrance, very dark, leads into a covered passage which

opens at the back onto the Rosetta Garden, and the interior recalls our smallest popular halls. The stalls were filled with Italians and Greeks in red tarbouches who made a great noise; some of the Pasha's officers appeared in the orchestra stalls, and the boxes were quite full of women, mostly dressed in Levantine costume.

The Greek women were distinguished by the *taktikos* of red cloth festooned with gold that they wore slanting over their ears; the Armenian women, by the shawls and gauzes that they intertwined to make enormous headdresses. Married Jewish women, unable, according to rabbinical proscription, to let their hair be seen, instead wore rolled cockerel-feathers that adorned their temples, and represented tufts of hair. It was the headdress alone that distinguished the races; the costume was almost the same in all other respects. They wore a Turkish jacket cut to the breasts, a dress split and tight about the loins, a belt, the pleated trousers (*cheytian*), which give any woman freed from the veil the gait of a young boy; the arms were universally covered, but the varied sleeves of the waistcoat, whose tight buttons the Arabian poets compared to camomile flowers, were left hanging, at the elbow. Add to this the braiding, flowers, and diamond butterflies that adorn the costumes of the wealthiest, and you will understand that the humble *Teatro del Cairo* still owes a certain brilliance to these Levantine toilettes. For my part, I was delighted, after the many black faces that I had seen during the day, to rest my eyes on merely yellowish beauties. If I were less kind, I might have reproached their eyelids for abusing the resources of dye, their cheeks for still employing the rouge and beauty-spots of the last century, and their hands for borrowing, to little advantage, the orange tint of henna; but I was obliged, regardless, to admire the charming contrasts afforded by so many diverse beauties, the variety of fabrics, the brilliance of the diamonds, of which the women of this country are so proud, that they willingly wear on their persons their husbands' fortunes; finally I was refreshing myself a little this evening after a long drought of fresh faces which had begun to weigh on me. Besides, not a woman was veiled; and not one strict Muslim woman attended, consequently permitting the particular nature of the performance. The curtain was raised; I recognised the first scenes of *La Mansarde des Artistes* ('*The Artists' Attic*', by Eugène Scribe, Henri Dupin, and Antoine Varner, 1824).

Oh, the endless glories of vaudeville! Young men from Marseilles played the principal roles, and the young lead was acted by Madame Bonhomme, the owner of the French reading-room. My gaze rested, with surprise and delight, on a perfectly white and blonde head; for two days now, I had been dreaming of the cloudy skies of my homeland, and the pale beauties of the North; I owed this preoccupation to the first breath of the *khamzin* (a hot, dry wind) and to an excess of black female faces, which decidedly lend themselves little to the classical ideal.

As they left the theatre, all these richly adorned women had universally donned an *abaya* of black taffeta, covered their features with a white *burqa*, and were mounting donkeys, like good Muslim women, by the light of torches held by the *sais* (grooms).

Chapter 10: The Barber's Shop

The next day, thinking of the festivities that were being prepared for the arrival of the pilgrims, I decided, in order to see them at my leisure, to don the costume of the country.

I already owned the most important piece of Arab clothing, the *mishlah*, a patriarchal cloak, which can be worn either over the shoulders, or draped over the head, without ceasing to envelop the whole body. In the latter case only, one's legs are uncovered, and one is coiffed like a Sphinx, a form of headgear which is not lacking in character. I limited myself for the moment to reaching the Frankish quarter, where I wanted to complete my transformation, according to the advice of the artist at the *Domergue Hotel*.

The cul-de-sac which contains the hotel, opens on the main street of the Frankish quarter, a street then continues opposite which describes several zigzags until it is lost beneath the vaults of the long passages corresponding to the Jewish quarter. It is in this capricious street, sometimes narrow and lined with Armenian and Greek shops, sometimes wider, and bordered by long walls and tall houses, that the commercial aristocracy of the Frankish citizens reside; there are the bankers, the brokers, the merchants who handle the products of Egypt and the Indies. On the left, at the widest part, a vast building, of which nothing on the outside announces its purpose, contains both the principal Catholic church and the Dominican convent. The convent is composed of a host of small cells opening onto a long gallery; the church is a vast room on the first floor, decorated with marble columns, and with rather elegant Italian taste. The women dwell apart in galleries, behind grilles, and are never without their black mantillas, cut according to the Turkish or Maltese fashions. It was not at the church that we halted, however, since it was a question of shedding at least the appearance of Christianity, in order to be able to attend the Muslim festivals. The artist led me on still further, to a point where the street narrows and darkens, and to a barber's shop, which was a marvel of ornamentation. One can admire, there, one of the last monuments in the ancient Arabian style, which everywhere gives way, in decoration as in architecture, to the Turkish taste of Constantinople, a sad and cold pastiche half-Tartar, half-European.

It is in this charming shop, whose windows, gracefully formed, overlook the Calish, or Cairo, canal, that I was shorn of my European hair. The barber wielded the razor with great dexterity, and, at my express request, left me a single lock on the top of my head like that worn by the Chinese and the Muslims. There is disagreement though as to the motive for this custom: some claim that it is to offer a grip to the hands of the angel of death; others believe that there is a material cause. The Turk always foresees the case where his head could be cut off, and, as it is then customary to show it to the people, he does not want it to be lifted by the nose or mouth, which would be very ignominious. Turkish barbers vent their malice on the Christians by shaving everything off; as for me, I am sufficiently sceptical not to reject any superstition.

The thing done, the barber made me hold a pewter basin under my chin, and I soon felt a column of water trickling down my neck and ears. He had climbed onto the bench near me, and was emptying a large ewer of cold water into a leather pouch suspended above my forehead. When the moment of surprise had passed, I had to endure another thorough washing in soapy water; after which, my beard was trimmed according to the latest Istanbul fashion.

Then he took further care over my hair, which was not difficult to handle; the street was full of tarbouch merchants and fellahin women who labour to make the little white caps called *taqiyahs*, one of which was immediately set on my head; one sees some very delicately stitched with thread or silk; some are even edged with lace made to overlap the edge of the red cap. As for the latter, they are generally of French manufacture; it is, I believe, our city of Tours which has the privilege of covering the heads of the whole Orient.

With the two caps on top of each other, my neck bare, and my beard trimmed, I had difficulty recognising myself in the elegant mirror, inlaid with tortoiseshell, that the barber presented to me. I completed my transformation by buying from the dealers a large pair of knee-length trousers of blue cotton and a red waistcoat trimmed neatly with silver embroidery: whereupon the artist was kind enough to tell me that I could now pass for a Syrian mountaineer from Saida (*Sidon*) or Jarabulus. The assistants granted me the title of *celebi* which is the name for an elegant gentleman in their country.

Chapter 11: The Mecca Caravan

I finally left the barber's, transfigured, delighted, proud to no longer defile the picturesque quarter by displaying a sack coat and a round hat. This last adornment seems so ridiculous to Orientals that, in schools, a French hat is always employed to punish ignorant or unruly children: it is the dunce's cap of the Turkish school-boy.

My present purpose was to go and view the pilgrims' entry to the city, which had been taking place since the beginning of the day, but which was to last till evening. It is no small thing for about thirty thousand people to suddenly swell the population of Cairo; and the streets of the Muslim quarters were therefore crowded. We managed to reach Bab al-Futuh, that is to say the Gate of Conquests. The whole length of the street leading to it was full of spectators whom the troops made to stand in line. The sound of trumpets, cymbals, and drums regulated the progress of the procession, in which the various nations and sects distinguished themselves by trophies and flags. As for me, I was preoccupied with the memory, to which I had fallen prey, of an old opera, well-known in the days of the Empire; I hummed the *March of the Camels* (from the opera '*La Caravane du Caire*', music by André Grétry, 1783), and I still expected to see the brilliant figure of *Saint-Phar* (a bold French slave, in the opera) appear. The long lines of dromedaries tied one behind the other, and ridden by Bedouins with long rifles, filed on monotonously, however, and it was only in the countryside that we were able to grasp the whole of that spectacle unique in all the world.

It was akin to a nation on the move that was set to merge with an immense population, filling the hills near the mount of Mokattam on the right, and on the left the many thousand edifices, usually deserted, of the City of the Dead; the crenellated summits of the walls and towers, striped with yellow and red bands, and built by Saladin were also teeming with spectators; there was no longer need to think of the Opéra, or the famous caravan that Bonaparte received and celebrated at this same Gate of Conquests. It seemed to me that the intervening

centuries had vanished, and that I was witnessing a scene from the time of the Crusades. Squadrons of the Viceroy's guard, spaced amidst the crowd, with their glittering cuirasses and knightly helmets, completed the illusion. Further off still, in the plain through which the Calish winds, one could see thousands of multi-coloured tents, where the pilgrims had halted to refresh themselves; there was no lack of dancers and singers among the party either, and all the musicians of Cairo rivalled in noise the trumpeters and timpanists of the procession, a monstrous orchestra perched on camels.

None were more bearded, more bristling, or fiercer than the immense mob of Mahgrebis, composed of people from Tunis, Tripoli, Morocco and also our *compatriots* from Algiers. The entry of the Cossacks into Paris in 1814 would give only a faint idea of the scene. It was also among them that the most numerous brotherhoods of *santons* (*Turkish holy men*) and dervishes were distinguished, who enthusiastically shouted their endless canticles of love interspersed with the name of Allah. Flags of a thousand colours, poles loaded with emblems and arms, and here and there emirs and sheikhs in sumptuous clothes, their caparisoned horses, streaming with gold and precious stones, added to this somewhat disordered march all the brilliance one can imagine. It was also a most picturesque thing to see the numerous palanquins of the women, singular constructions, comprising a bed surmounted by a tent and placed crosswise on the back of a camel. Whole households seemed grouped, at ease, including the children and furniture, in these pavilions, furnished for the most part with brilliant hangings.

About two-thirds of the way through the day, the sound of the citadel's cannons, and cheers and trumpets, announced that the *Mahmal*, a kind of holy ark covered by the cloth-of-gold robe of Muhammad, had arrived in sight of the city. The most beautiful part of the caravan, the most magnificent horsemen, the most enthusiastic *santons*, the aristocracy of the turban, indicated by the green colour, surrounded this palladium of Islam. Seven or eight dromedaries filed past, their heads so richly adorned and plumed, and covered with harnesses and carpets so dazzling, that, beneath these accoutrements, which disguised their forms, they looked akin to the salamanders or dragons that are said to serve as mounts for faeries. The first carried young bare-armed kettledrum players, who raised and lowered their gilded drum-sticks from the midst of a cluster of fluttering flags arranged around the saddle. Then came an old man with a long white beard, crowned, symbolically, with foliage, and seated on a sort of golden chariot, on the back, in his case, of a camel, then the Mahmil, consisting of an ornate pavilion in the shape of a square tent, covered with embroidered inscriptions, surmounted at the top and its four corners by enormous silver orbs.

From time to time the Mahmil halted, and the whole crowd prostrated themselves in the dust, bowing, with their foreheads on their hands. An escort of *cavasses* (*guards*) had great difficulty in repelling the black Africans, who, more fanatical than the other Muslims, aspired to be crushed by the camels; volleys of blows from sticks conferred on them at least a foretaste of martyrdom. As for the *santons*, a kind of saint even more enthusiastic than the dervishes and of a less recognised orthodoxy, several were visible who had pierced their cheeks with pointed sticks, and thus walked covered in blood; others were devouring live snakes, and yet others had filled their mouths with lighted coals. Women took little part in these practices, and one could only distinguish, in the crowd of pilgrims, troops of *almahs* attached to the caravan who sang

their lengthy guttural plaints in unison, and were not afraid to appear without veils, their faces tattooed in blue and red and their noses pierced by heavy rings.

The artist and I mingled with the varied crowd, that followed the Mahmil, shouting ‘Allah!’ with the rest at the various halts of the sacred camels, which, swinging their adorned heads majestically, seemed thus to bless the crowd with their long, curved necks and their strange neighing. At the entrance to the city, the cannon salvos recommenced, and they took the road to the citadel, via the streets, while the caravan continued to fill Cairo with its thirty thousand faithful who had the right henceforth to the title of *hadjis*.

It was not long before we reached the great bazaars, and the immense Salahieh Street, where the mosques of Al-Azhar, Al-Muayyad, and the Bimaristan, display their architectural marvels and raise to the sky sheaves of minarets mingled with domes. As we passed before each mosque, the procession diminished by the departure of a section of the pilgrims, and mountains of slippers formed at the doors, each person entering only barefoot. However, the Mahmil did not pause; it entered the narrow streets which ascend to the citadel, and entered it by the northern gate, in the midst of the assembled troops and to the acclamations of the people gathered on Al Rumaila Square (*now Salah al-Din Square*). Unable to enter the enclosure of the palace of Mehemet-Ali, a new palace, built in the Turkish style and to rather mediocre effect, I went to the terrace, from which one overlooks the whole of Cairo. One can only faintly render the effect of this perspective, one of the most beautiful in the world; what especially catches the eye in the foreground is the immense mosque complex of Sultan Hasan, striped and mottled with red, which still preserves traces of French cannon-fire from the famous Revolt of Cairo (1798). The city occupies the whole horizon in front of you, which terminates in Shubra’s verdant shade; to the right, is the extended city of Muslim tombs, the countryside of Heliopolis and the vast plain of the Arabian desert, interrupted by the Mokattam hills; to the left, the course of the Nile with its reddish waters, and its narrow margin of date-palms and sycamores; Boulaq on the banks of the river, serving as a port for Cairo, which is a mile or more away; the island of Rhoda (*Rawda*), green and flowering, cultivated as an English garden and ending in the Nilometer building, opposite the pleasant country houses of Giza; the distant pyramids beyond, set on the last slopes of the Libyan chain, and, towards the south again, at Sakkara, other pyramids interspersed with hypogea (*subterranean chambers*); further still, the forest of palm trees which covers the ruins of Memphis; and, on the opposite bank of the river, returning towards the city, old Cairo, built by Amr (*Amr ibn al-As*) on the site of the ancient Babylon of Egypt, half hidden by the arches of an immense aqueduct, at the foot of which opens the Calish, which borders the plain of the tombs of Quarafa.

There lay the immense panorama animated by the spectacle of a festive people swarming in the squares and over the neighbouring countryside. But already night was near, and the sun had plunged its brow into the sands of the long ravine of the desert of Ammon that the Arabs call the *waterless sea*; one could no longer distinguish anything in the distance but the course of the Nile, where thousands of *canges* traced silvery nets as at the festivals of the Ptolemies. We must descend, we must turn our gaze away from mute antiquity of which the Sphinx, half-vanished in the sand, guards the eternal secrets; let us see if the splendours and beliefs of Islam can sufficiently repopulate that twin solitude of the desert and the tombs, or if we must weep

again over a poetical past that is slipping away. Are the Arab Middle Ages, three centuries behind us, ready to collapse in turn, as Greek antiquity did, at the careless feet of Pharaoh's monuments?

Alas, as I turned around, I saw above my head the last red columns of the old palace of Saladin! On the ruins of its architecture, dazzling in its boldness and grace, but frail and fleeting, like the visitation of a genie, a square construction has recently been built, wholly of marble and alabaster, but otherwise without elegance or character, which looks like a grain market, and which is claimed to be a mosque. It will be a mosque, in truth, in the manner in which La Madeleine in Paris is a church: modern architects always take the precaution of building dwellings for God which can be used for something else when people no longer believe.

Meanwhile, the government appeared to have celebrated the arrival of the Mahmil, to general satisfaction; the Pasha and his family had respectfully received the robe of the prophet brought back from Mecca, the sacred water from the Zamzam Well, and other elements of the pilgrimage; the robe had been shown to the people at the door of a small mosque situated behind the palace, and already the city's illumination produced a magnificent effect from the top of the platform. The great buildings were vivified in the distance, by the glow, their architectural lines lost in the shadows; strings of lights encircled the domes of the mosques, and the minarets once again donned those luminous necklaces which I had already noted; while verses from the Koran gleamed on the front of the buildings, traced everywhere in coloured glass. I hastened, after admiring this spectacle, to reach Esbekieh Square, where the most beautiful part of the festival was taking place.

The neighbouring districts were bright with the splendour of their shops; the pastry-vendors, fried-food sellers, and fruit merchants had invaded all the ground floors; and confectioners displayed sugared marvels in the form of buildings, animals, and other creations. Pyramids and branches of lights lit everything as if it were broad daylight; in addition, small illuminated vessels were paraded on ropes stretched at intervals, perhaps a souvenir of the festivals of Isis, preserved, like so many others, by the good Egyptian people. The pilgrims, dressed in white for the most part, and more tanned than the people of Cairo, received everywhere a fraternal hospitality. It was to the south of the square, in the part which adjoins the Frankish quarter, that the principal festivities took place; tents were erected everywhere, not only for the cafés, but also for the *zikk* or gatherings of devout singers; large flagpoles supporting chandeliers were used to light the performances of the whirling dervishes, who should not be confused with the howlers, each having their own way of reaching that state of enthusiasm which yields them visions and ecstasies: it is about these poles that the former whirl, shouting only in a stifled tone: '*Allah zeyt!*' that is to say: 'The living God!' These poles, four in number erected in a line, are called *saariyas*. Elsewhere, people crowded to see jugglers, rope dancers, or to listen to a poet (*sha'ir*) who recite portions of the romance of *Abu-Zeyd Al Hillali*. These recitals continue every evening in the city's cafés, and are, like our newspaper serials, forever interrupted at the most salient point, in order to draw the regulars, eager for new adventures, back to the same café the next day.

Swings, games of skill, the most varied *Karagöz* figures in the form of puppets or Chinese shadow characters, completed the animation of this carnival, which was to be repeated for two more days for the anniversary of the birth of Muhammad, which is called *El-Mouled-en-Neby* (*Mahwliid*).

The next day, at daybreak, I left with Abdallah for the slave bazaar located in the Souk el Ezzi district. I had chosen a very handsome donkey striped like a zebra, and arranged my new costume with some coquetry. Simply because one is going to purchase women, that is no reason to frighten them. The disdainful laughter of the black girls had taught me that lesson.

Chapter 12: Abd-el-Kerim

We arrived at a very beautiful house, probably the former residence of a *Kaschef* or Mamluk Bey, and whose vestibule extended into a gallery with a colonnade on one side of the courtyard. At the back there was a wooden sofa covered with cushions, on which sat a well-looking Muslim, dressed with some care, who was nonchalantly telling his aloe-wood rosary. A young black lad was relighting the coals of the hookah, and a Coptic writer, seated at his feet, was doubtless serving as secretary.

— ‘Here,’ said Abdallah to me, is Lord Abd-el-Kerim, the most illustrious of slave traders: he can procure for you very beautiful women, if he wishes; but he is rich and often keeps them for himself.’

Abd-el-Kerim gave me a gracious nod, placing his hand on his chest, and said to me: ‘*Saba al-kair* (*Good morning*)’. I responded to this greeting with a similar Arabic formula, but in an accent which told him my origin. He invited me, however, to take a seat near him and had a narghile (*pipe*) and coffee brought.

— ‘He sees you in my company,’ Abdallah said to me, ‘and that endows him with a good opinion of you. I will tell him that you are here to settle in the country, and that you are prepared to adorn your house richly.’

Abdallah’s words seemed to make a favourable impression on Abd-el-Kerim, who addressed a few polite words to me in poor Italian.

The fine and distinguished face, penetrating eye, and graceful manners of Abd-el-Kerim made it seem natural that he should do the honours of this palace, where nevertheless he carried on such a sad business. There was in him a singular mixture of the affability of a prince and the pitiless resolution of a pirate. He sought to tame the slaves by the fixed expression of his melancholy eye, and leave them, even after having made them suffer, with regret that they no longer had him for a master.

— ‘It is quite obvious’, I said to myself, ‘that the woman who will be sold to me here will have yielded to this Abd-el-Kerim.’

No matter; there was such fascination in his gaze that I understood it was scarcely possible not to do business with him.

The square courtyard, where a large number of Nubians and Abyssinians walked, offered porticoes and galleries, everywhere superior in their elegant architecture; vast moucharabias, in turned carpentry, overhung a vestibular staircase adorned with Moorish arches, by which one ascended to the apartment of the most beautiful slaves.

Many buyers had already entered and were examining the, more or less dark, black African men gathered in the courtyard; they were made to walk, their backs and breasts were struck, and they were made to stick out their tongues. One alone of these young men, dressed in a yellow and blue-striped *mishlah*, his hair braided, and falling straight like a medieval headdress, carried on his arm a heavy chain which he made to clink as he walked past with a proud step; he was an Abyssinian of the Gallas nation (*the Oroma of south-eastern Abyssinia*), doubtless captured in the war.

There were several low rooms around the courtyard, inhabited by black African women, such as I had already seen, most of them wildly carefree, laughing at every moment; another woman, however, draped in a yellow blanket, wept, hiding her face against a column in the vestibule. The gloomy serenity of the sky and the luminous embroidery traced by the rays of the sun casting long angles in the courtyard protested in vain against this eloquent despair; I felt my heart breaking.

I passed behind the pillar, and, although her face was hidden, I saw that this woman was almost white; a little child was pressing against her, half wrapped in her cloak.

However one seeks to accept Oriental life, one yet feels French ... and sensitive to such moments. I had for a moment the idea of redeeming her if I could, and of granting her freedom.

— ‘Pay no attention to her,’ Abdallah said to me; ‘this woman is the favourite slave of an effendi who, to punish her for a fault, sends her to the market, where they may feign to sell her and the child. When she has spent a few hours here, her master will come and take her back and will doubtless forgive her.’

So, the only slave there who was crying, was crying at the thought of losing her master; the others only seemed to fear being left too long without finding one. This certainly speaks in favour of the character of the Muslims traders. Compare this to the fate of slaves in the Americas! Indeed, in Egypt, it is the fellah alone who works the land. The strength of the slave, who is costly, is spared and he is hardly ever employed except in domestic service. This is the immense difference that exists between slavery in Turkish countries and that of Christian countries. And, moreover, who could prevent slaves who are excessively badly treated from fleeing into the desert, and reaching Syria? While, on the contrary, our slave possessions are islands, or countries well-guarded at their borders. What right have we, then, in the name of our religious or philosophical ideas, to condemn slavery among the Muslims!

Chapter 13: The Javanese Woman

Abd-el-Kerim had left us for a moment to see to the Turkish buyers; he came back to me, and told me that they were in the process of dressing the Abyssinian women he wished to show me.

— ‘They are’, he said, ‘part of my harem, and treated exactly like the members of my family; my wives have them eat with them. In the meantime, if you wish to see some very young ones, we will bring them.’

A door was opened, and a dozen little copper-coloured girls rushed into the courtyard like children at playtime. They were left to play, under the stairwell, with the ducks and guinea fowls who were bathing in the basin of a sculpted fountain, a remnant of the vanished splendour of the *okel*.

I gazed at these young girls with eyes so large and black, dressed like little Sultanas, but doubtless torn from their mothers to satisfy the debauchery of the rich inhabitants of the city. Abdallah told me that several of them did not belong to the merchant, and were put up for sale on behalf of their parents, who made the journey from Cairo on purpose, and believed that they were thus preparing the happiest situations for their children.’

— ‘Be aware, however,’ he added, ‘that they are more expensive than marriageable women.’

— ‘*These girls have been sewn (infibulated)*’ said Abd-el-Kérim in his corrupt Italian.

— ‘Ah! One can rest easy, and purchase with confidence,’ observed Abdallah in a knowledgeable tone, ‘the parents have thought of everything.’

— ‘Well,’ I said to myself, ‘I will leave these children to others; the Muslim, who lives according to his law, can in all conscience answer to God for the fate of these poor little souls; but, for my part, if I buy a slave, it is with the thought that she will be free, free even to leave me.’

Abd-el-Kerim came to join me, and had me ascend to the upper floor. Abdallah remained discreetly at the foot of the stairs.

In a large room with sculpted panelling, still enriched by the remains of painted and gilded arabesques, I saw five rather beautiful women lined up against the wall, whose complexions recalled the brilliance of Florentine bronzes; their faces were regular, their noses straight, their mouths small; the perfect oval of their heads, the graceful shape of their necks, the serenity of their physiognomy, gave them the air of those madonnas the Italians painted whose colours have yellowed with time. They were Abyssinian Catholics, descendants perhaps of Prester John or Queen Candace.

The choice was difficult; they all looked alike, as we tend to view those of ‘primitive’ races. Abd-el-Kerim, seeing me undecided, and believing that I did not like them, brought another who, with an indolent step, went to take a place near the wall.

I gave an enthusiastic cry; I had just recognised the almond-shaped eye, the oblique eyelid, of those Javanese women whom I had seen in paintings in Holland; as for complexion, the woman obviously belonged among the yellow-skinned peoples. I do not know what taste for

the strange and the unexpected, which I could not defend myself from, decided me in her favour. She was very beautiful, moreover, and of a solidity of form one could not hesitate to admire; the metallic brilliance of her eyes, the whiteness of her teeth, the distinction of her hands, and the length of her hair, which was of a dark mahogany tone, as I was shown when she took off her tarbouch, left me no reason to object to the satisfaction that Abd-el-Kerim expressed by exclaiming:

— ‘Bono! Bono!’ (*‘Good! Good!’ in Italian*)

We descended. and then conversed, with Abdallah’s help. This woman had arrived the day before, following the caravan, and had only been at Abd-el-Kerim’s since then. She had been taken as a slave when very young, in the Indian archipelago, by corsairs of the Imam of Muscat.

— ‘But,’ I said to Abdallah, ‘if Abd-el-Kerim placed her, yesterday, among his women...’

— ‘Well?’ replied the dragoman, opening his eyes in astonishment.

I saw that my observation was poorly regarded.

— ‘Do you imagine,’ said Abdallah, finally understanding my drift, ‘that his lawful wives would allow him to court others?... And then a merchant, just think on it! If such were known, he would lose all his customers.’

This seemed most reasonable. Abdallah swore to me further that Abd-el-Kerim, as a good Muslim, had spent the night in prayer at the mosque, given the solemnity of the feast of Muhammad.

It remained only to agree the price. Five ‘purses’ were asked (six hundred and twenty-five francs); I had the idea of offering only four ‘purses’; but, thinking that I was haggling over a woman, the sentiment seemed somewhat base to me. Moreover, Abdallah pointed out to me that a Turkish merchant never set more than one price.

I asked for her name.... Naturally, I was buying her name too.

— ‘Z’n’b!’ said Abd-el-Kérim.

— ‘Z’n’b!’ Abdallah repeated, with a great effort in nasal contraction.

I failed to understand how a sneeze, of three consonants, could represent a name. It took me some time to guess that it could be a pronunciation of ‘Zeynab’.

We left Abd-el-Kerim, after handing over a deposit, to go and collect the remainder, which was in my account with a banker in the Frankish quarter.

As we crossed Esbekieh Square, we witnessed an extraordinary spectacle. A large crowd had gathered to see the *Dohza* (*Dhossa*) ceremony. The sheikh or emir of the caravan had to ride over the body of the whirling and howling dervishes who had been practicing since the day before, around the masts and under tents. These unfortunates had stretched out flat on their stomachs on the road to the house of Sheikh El-Bekry, leader of all the dervishes, situated at the southern end of the square, and formed a human road of about sixty bodies.

This ceremony is regarded as a miracle intended to convince the infidels; so, the Franks are willingly allowed to attend as guests. A public miracle has become a rather rare thing, since

man has taken it into his head, as Heinrich Heine says, 'to peek up the good Lord's sleeves'.... But this one, if it is one, is incontestable. I saw with my own eyes the old sheikh of the dervishes, covered in a white *benich* (*a long coat*), and wearing a yellow turban, pass on horseback over the loins of sixty believers, arranged in a solid line, their arms crossed under their heads. The horse was shod. They all rose, in a line, singing 'Allah!'

The strong minds of the Frankish quarter claim that it is a phenomenon similar to that which formerly made the convulsionaries (*religious fanatics, especially the Jansenists*) endure blows in the stomach from andirons (*fire-dogs*). The state of exaltation which these people generate in themselves grants them a nervous strength which suppresses feelings of pain, and provides the organs with extraordinary powers of resistance.

Muslims refuse to accept this explanation, and claim, moreover, that the horse had previously been made to gallop over glasses and bottles without breaking any.

That, I would have liked to have seen.

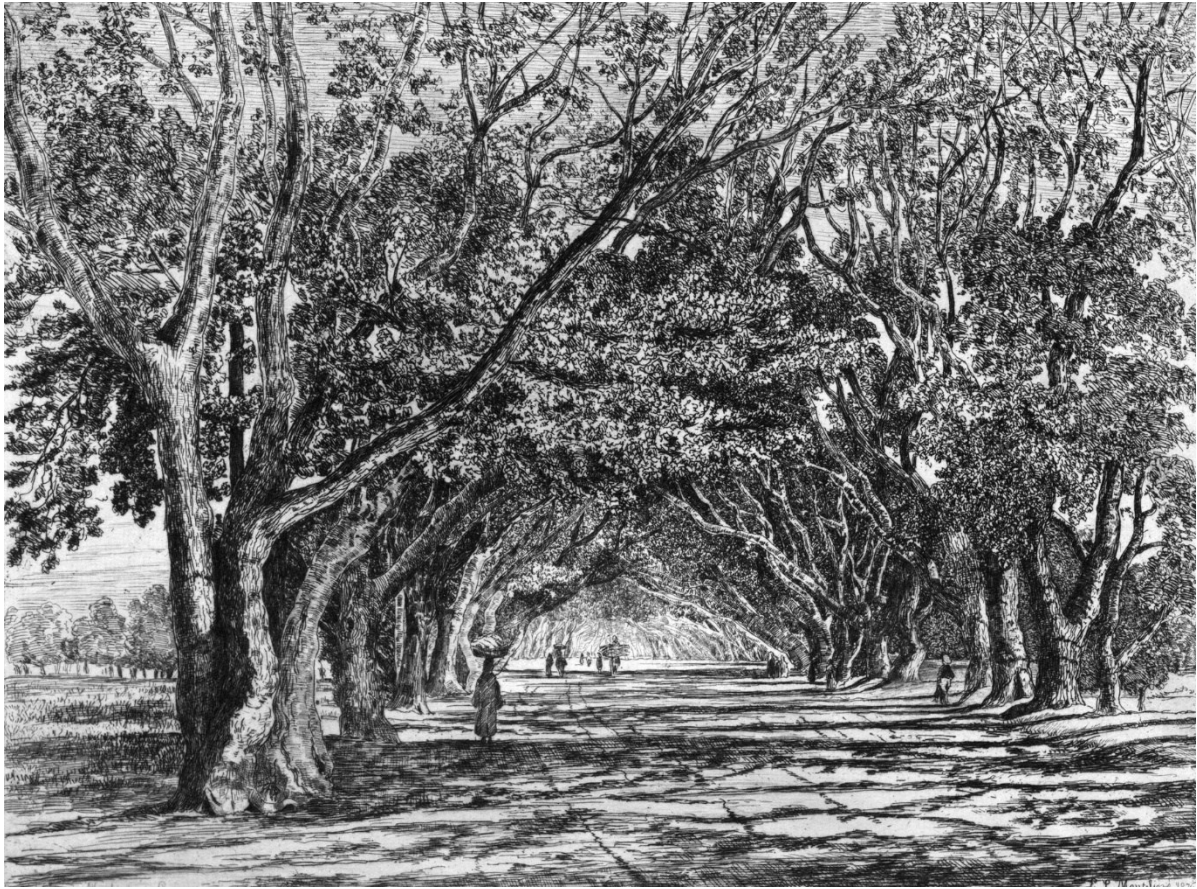
It had taken no less than such a spectacle to make me lose sight for a moment of my acquisition. That same evening, I triumphantly brought the veiled slave to my house in the Coptic quarter. Only just in time, since it was the last day of the grace-period granted to me by the sheikh of that quarter. A servant from the *okel* followed her with a donkey burdened by a large green box.

Abd-el-Kerim had done me proud. There were two complete costumes in the trunk.

'It is hers,' he had said to me; 'it was given by a sheikh of Mecca to whom she belonged, and now it is yours.'

There is surely no more delicate a transaction known.

Part VI: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – The Harem



View of an avenue in Shubra, Cairo, 1876, Nicolai Yegorovich Makowski

[Rijksmuseum](#)

Chapter 1: Egypt's Past and Future

I had no regrets over settling in Cairo, for some time, and rendering myself, in all respects, a citizen of the place, which is, undoubtedly, the only way to grow to understand and love it; travellers rarely take the time to grasp its inner life and penetrate its picturesque beauties, contrasts, and history. Yet it is the only Oriental city where one can find the distinctive layers of several past ages. Neither Baghdad, Damascus, nor Constantinople have retained such subjects for study and reflection. In the first two, the foreigner encounters only fragile constructions of brick and dry-earth; the interiors alone offer splendid decoration, but the conditions for serious and lasting art were never established there; Constantinople, with its painted wooden houses, is renewed every twenty years, preserving only its uniform physiognomy of bluish domes and pale minarets. Cairo owes to the inexhaustible quarries of Mokattam, as well as to the constant serenity of its climate, the existence of innumerable

monuments; the eras of the Caliphs, Emirs, and Mamluk Sultans are evidenced, naturally, by their corresponding systems of architecture of which Spain and Sicily possess, to some extent, mere counterparts, or for which they provided the model. The memory of the Moorish marvels of Granada and Cordoba can be traced, at every step, in the streets of Cairo, in a mosque door, a window, a minaret, an arabesque, whose cut or style indicates their distant origin. The mosques, by themselves, tell the entire history of Muslim Egypt, since each ruler had at least one built, wishing to enshrine forever the memory of his era and his glory; it is Amr ibn al-As (c573-664AD), Ahmad ibn Tulun (835-884), Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (985-1021), Saladin (1137-1193), Baybars (*Al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqdari*, 1223-1277) and Barquq (*Al-Malik Az-Zahir Sayf ad-Din Barquq*, 1336-1399), whose names are thus preserved in the memory of the people; however the oldest of these monuments offer nothing more than crumbling walls and devastated enclosures.

The first mosque, that of Amr, built after his conquest of Egypt, occupies a site, deserted today, between the new city and the old. Nothing prevents the profanation of this place so revered in the past. I traversed the forest of columns which still supports the ancient vault; I was able to climb into the sculpted pulpit of the imam, erected in year 94 of the Hegira (*Hijrah*, 712AD), and of which it is said that there was none more beautiful or nobler after that of the Prophet; I went through the arcades and recognised, in the centre of the courtyard, the place where the tent of that lieutenant of Caliph Omar (*Umar ibn al-Khattab*) was pitched, when the idea came to him of founding a city, Old Cairo.

A dove had made its nest above the pavilion; Amr, conqueror of an Egypt under Greek rule, who had just sacked Alexandria, did not wish the poor bird to be disturbed; the place seemed to him to be consecrated by the will of heaven, and he first had a mosque built around his tent, then around the mosque a city which took the name of *Fustat* (*founded 641*), that is to say *the tent*. Today, this site is no longer even within the city, and is once again, as the chronicles once depicted it, in the midst of vineyards, gardens and palm-groves.

I found, at the other end of Cairo, within the walls, near the Bab-el-Nasr gate, the mosque, no less abandoned, of Caliph Hakim, built three centuries later (990-1013), and linked to the memory of one of the strangest heroes of the Muslim Middle Ages. Hakim, whom our old French orientalisks called *the Chacamberille*, was not content with being the third of the Fatimid Caliphs, the heir by conquest of the treasures of Harun-al-Rashid, the absolute master of Egypt and Syria; the dizzying heights of grandeur and wealth rendered him a sort of Nero, or rather Heliogabalus. Like the first, he capriciously set fire to his capital; like the second, he proclaimed himself a god and laid down the rules of a religion which was adopted by a part of his people, and became that of the Druze. Hakim is the last 'revealer', or, if you like, the last god who appeared in the world and who still retains more or less numerous followers. The singers and narrators of the cafés of Cairo relate a thousand adventures involving him, and I was shown, on one of the peaks of Mokattam, the observatory from which he consulted the stars; since those who do not believe in his divinity at least portray him as a considerable astronomer.

His mosque is even more ruined than that of Amr. The exterior walls, and two of the towers or minarets situated at the corners, alone offer forms of architecture that can be recognized;

they date from the period which corresponds to the oldest monuments in Spain. Today, the enclosure of the mosque, dusty and strewn with debris, is occupied by ropemakers who twist their hemp in that vast space, and whose monotonous spinning-wheel has succeeded the hum of prayers. Yet, is the edifice of the faithful Amr any less abandoned than that of the heretic Hakim abhorred by true Muslims? Old Egypt, forgetful as much as credulous, has buried under its dust many another prophet and many another god!

Thus, the foreigner has nothing to fear, in this country, as regards the religious fanaticism or racial intolerance of other parts of the Orient; the Arab conquest has never succeeded in transforming the character of the inhabitants to any great extent: is it not always, moreover, to this ancient and maternal land that our Europe, via the Greek and Roman world, traces its origins? Religion, morality, industry, everything started from this centre at once mysterious and accessible, from which the geniuses of early times passed their wisdom to us. They entered, in terror, those strange sanctuaries where the future of men was elaborated; and emerged, their foreheads surrounded by a divine glow, to reveal to their people traditions established prior to the flood, and dating back to the first days of the world. So, Orpheus, Moses, and that legislator well-known to us, whom the Indians call Rama, bore away a common fund of teachings and beliefs, which would alter according to place and nation, but which everywhere constituted lasting civilisation. What defines the character of Egyptian antiquity is precisely the thought of universality, and even of proselytism, that Rome later imitated, in the interest of power and glory. A people which founded indestructible monuments and engraved on them all the processes of their art and industry, and who spoke to posterity in a language that posterity is beginning to understand, certainly deserves the recognition of all men.

When mighty Alexandria had fallen, it was still, principally, Egypt, under the Saracens, which preserved and perfected that scientific knowledge on which the Christian world drew; the domination of the Mamluks extinguished its final glories, and it should be noted that the kind of obscurantism into which the Orient has fallen for three centuries, is not the result of Islam and the principles laid down by Muhammad, but of Turkish influence, in particular. Arab genius, which covered the world with wonders, was stifled by the unenlightened domination of the Turks; the angels of Islam lost their wings, the genies of the *Thousand and One Nights* saw their talismans broken; a sort of arid, dark Protestantism gripped all the peoples of the Levant. The Koran became, through Turkish interpretation, what the Bible was for the Puritans of England, a means of levelling everything. Islamic art, literature, and science have vanished since that time; the poetry of its primitive customs and beliefs has left only slight traces here and there, and it is Egypt which has preserved the most profound of them.

Today, its people, oppressed for so long, live only through foreign ideas; Egypt needs the return of those scattered luminaries to which it was, for centuries, home; and with what gratitude, what studious application it already imbues itself, and strengthens itself, by means of everything that flows from Europe? The masterpieces of our science and literary efforts are swiftly translated into Arabic, and immediately replicated in print; thousands of young people, raised for war, employ the leisure of peace in this labour. Should we despair of this people with inner strength, through whom Mehemet-Ali (*Muhammad Ali*) in recent times renewed and reconquered the ancient empire of the Caliphs, and which, without European intervention,

might have overthrown Ottoman rule in but a few days? I can already foresee that in the absence of that military venture, which left Egypt exhausted by a great effort betrayed, civilisation and industry will absorb its strength and intelligence, called to action now for a different purpose. In Constantinople, recent institutions have proved sterile; in Cairo, they will yield great results when several years of peace have developed Egypt's natural prosperity.

Chapter 2: Domestic Life On Days When The Khamsin Blows

During the khamsin, I take advantage of the long days of inaction imposed on me by studying and reading as much as possible. Since morning, the air has been hot and dusty. For fifty days, whenever the south wind blows, it is impossible to go out before three in the afternoon, when the breeze from the sea rises.

I live in the interior rooms, which are covered in tiles or marble, and refreshed by jets of water; one can spend the day in the baths, too, amidst that warm fog which fills a vast enclosure whose dome is pierced with holes, to resemble the starry sky. The majority of such baths are actual monuments that would serve very well for mosques or churches; the architecture is Byzantine, and Greek baths probably provided the first models; between the pillars on which the circular vault rests there are small marble-clad rooms, where elegant fountains are dedicated to cold-water ablution. You can isolate yourself, or mingle with the crowd, in turn; a crowd which reveals none of the sickly aspect attached to our collective bathing, and is generally composed of fine healthy-looking men, draped, in the ancient manner, in long linen cloths. Their shapes are vaguely outlined through the milky mist traversed by the pale rays from the ceiling, and one might believe oneself to be in a paradise populated by fortunate shades. Except that, Purgatory awaits you in the neighbouring rooms. There one finds tubs of boiling water in which the bather undergoes various kinds of braising; there, terrible opponents their hands armed with horsehair-gloves rush upon you, and detach from your skin long molecular rolls whose thickness scares you, and makes you fearful of being gradually abraded like an over-scoured dish. One can, however, escape these ceremonies, and rest content with the well-being the humid atmosphere of the large bath provides. The notable effect of this artificial heat is to ease one after the heat outside; the earthly fire of Ptah combats the too lively ardour of celestial Horus. I cannot speak more highly of the delights of a massage, and the charming rest that one savours on one of the beds ranged round the high balustraded gallery which dominates the entrance room of the baths. Coffee, sorbets, a hookah, interrupt, or induce, that light meridian sleep, so dear to the peoples of the Levant.

Moreover, the southerly wind never blows continuously during the days of the khamsin; it often ceases for whole weeks, and literally allows you to breathe. Then the city resumes its lively aspect, crowds spread themselves about the squares and gardens; the alleys of Shubra fill with walkers; veiled Muslim women seat themselves in the kiosks, and on the rims of fountains, and tombs interspersed with shade, where they dream the day away surrounded by joyous children, and even have their meals brought to them. Oriental women have two great

means of escaping the solitude of the harem: the cemetery, where they always have some dear person to mourn, and the public baths, which custom obliges their husbands to allow them to visit at least once a week.

This detail, of which I was unaware, has been for me the source of some domestic sorrow against which I must warn any European who may be tempted to follow my example. I had no sooner brought my Javanese slave back from the bazaar, than I found myself assailed by a crowd of reflections which had not yet presented themselves to my mind. The fear of leaving her a day longer among the women of Abd-el-Kerim had precipitated my resolution, while (must I say it?) the first glance I had cast upon her had been all-powerful.

There is something very seductive in a woman from a distant and unusual country, who speaks a language unknown to one, whose costume and habits are already striking due to their very strangeness, and who, in sum, lacks those detailed vulgarities that habit reveals to us in the women of our country. I suffered for some time this fascination with alien airs; I listened to her babble; I saw her display her various costumes; it was like possessing a splendid bird in a cage; but would these effects last forever?

I had been warned that if the merchant had deceived me regarding the slave's merits, if there was any redhibitory defect, I had eight days to cancel the transaction. I scarcely thought it possible that a European would have recourse to so unworthy a clause, even if he had been deceived. Only, I saw, with a degree of pain, that this poor girl had, beneath the red headband that encircled her forehead, a burn-scar as big as a six-livre gold écu, beginning at the hairline. On her chest could be seen another scar of the same shape, and, within these two marks, a tattoo that presented the image of a sun. Her chin was also tattooed in the shape of a spearhead, and her left nostril pierced to accept a ring. As for her hair, it straggled away in front, from the temples, and around the forehead, and, except for the burnt area, fell thus to the eyebrows, which a black line extended and united according to custom. As for her arms and feet which were dyed orange, I knew that it was the effect of a preparation of henna, which would leave no mark after a few days.

What was to be done? To dress a yellow-complexioned woman in the European style would have been the most ridiculous thing in the world. I merely made a sign to her that her hair at the front should be allowed to grow again, which seemed to astonish her greatly; as for the burn on her forehead and that on her chest, which probably resulted from a custom in her land, since nothing of the sort is seen in Egypt, it could be hidden by means of a jewel or some ornament; I had therefore little to complain of, all things considered.

Chapter 3: Household Cares

The poor child had fallen asleep while I, with the solicitude of a landlord who is concerned about what has been done to damage the property he has just acquired, had been examining her hair. I heard Ibrahim call from without: '*Ya, sidi!* (Hey, sir!)' then further words from which I

understood that someone was visiting me. I left the room, and found the Jewish silk-grower, Yousef, in the gallery, wishing to speak with me. He noted that I did not ask him to enter, and we walked about smoking.

— ‘I have learned,’ he said, ‘that you have been obliged to buy a slave; I am very upset.’

— ‘And why so?’

— ‘Because you will have been cheated or robbed: a dragoman always colludes with the slave trader.

— ‘That seems most likely.’

— ‘Abdallah will have asked at least a purse for her.’

— ‘What would you have?’

— ‘The transaction is not done with as yet. You’ll be embarrassed by owning this woman, when you choose to leave, but he’ll offer to buy her back for a small price. That is what he’s accustomed to do, and that’s why he dissuaded you from concluding a marriage in the Coptic manner; which is much simpler and less costly.’

— ‘But, after all, you well know that I had some scruples about making such a marriage, which always requires a sort of religious consecration.’

— ‘Well, why didn’t you say so? I could have found you an Arab servant who’d have wed you as many times as you wished!’

The strangeness of this proposition made me burst out laughing; but when one is in Cairo, one quickly learns not to be too surprised at anything. The details which Yousef gave me taught me that there were people who were wretched enough to enter into such an arrangement. The ease with which Orientals take wives and divorce at will, makes this arrangement possible, and only a complaint from the woman can reveal it; but it is simply a means, evidently, of evading the Pasha’s severity with regard to public morals. Every woman who does not live alone or with her family must have a legally recognised husband, even though she might be divorced after eight days, unless, as a slave, she has a master.

I told Yousef how much such a convention would have repelled me.

— ‘Well!’ he said to me, ‘what does it matter ... among Arabs!’

— ‘You might also say: among Christians’.

— ‘It’s a custom,’ he added, ‘which the English introduced, being so wealthy!’

— ‘So, it’s expensive?’

— ‘It used to be expensive; but now, there’s competition, and it’s within everyone’s reach.’

And this is where the moral reforms attempted here have led. An entire population becomes depraved to avoid an evil that is certainly a lesser one. Ten years ago, Cairo had public *bayaderes* (*devadasi*) like India, and courtesans, as in antiquity. The Ulama (*Muslim authorities*) complained, and for a long time without success, because the government levied a fairly considerable tax on these women, who were organised as a corporation, the majority of

whom resided outside the city, in Al Matariyyah. Finally, the devout of Cairo offered to pay the tax in question; it was then that all these women were exiled to Esna, in Upper Egypt. Today, that city of the ancient Thebaid is a sort of Capua (*the luxurious capital of ancient Campania, in Italy*), to foreigners who ascend the Nile (*note Flaubert's visit, with Maxime du Camp, to the celebrated Sofia, called Kuchuk Hanem, at Esna, in 1850*). The likes of Lais of Corinth, and Aspasia of Miletus (*mistress to Pericles*), reside there, and lead a fine life, having enriched themselves, particularly at the expense of the English. They have palaces, slaves, and are rich enough that they could have a pyramid built, like the famous Rhodope (*ex-courtesan, and Queen of Memphis, she is said to have built the third pyramid*), if it were still fashionable today to pile stones above one's body to prove one's glory; they prefer diamonds.

I quite understood that Yousef did not cultivate my acquaintance without some motive; the uncertainty I possessed with regard to the matter had already prevented me warning him of my visits to the slave bazaars. The foreigner in the Orient always finds himself in the same position as the naive lover or the son of a family in Molière's comedies. One must navigate between *Mascarille* (*the wily valet in several Molière plays*), and Sbrigani (*the schemer in Molière's comic ballet 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac'*). To put an end to his speculation, I complained that the price of the slave had almost exhausted my purse.

— 'What a misfortune! cried Yousef; 'I wanted you to share in a magnificent transaction which, in a few days, would have returned you ten times your money. I have several friends who buy the whole harvest of mulberry leaves in the vicinity of Cairo, and we resell it, in parcels, at whatever price we want, to the silkworm breeders. You need a little cash; which is the rarest thing in this country: the legal rate of interest is twenty-four per cent. However, in a sensible speculation, money multiplies.... Anyway, let us not speak of it anymore. I will give you but one piece of advice: you do not know Arabic; do not let the dragoman converse with your slave; he will communicate bad ideas to her without you realising it, and she will abscond one day; which happens.'

His words gave me food for thought.

If the custody of a woman is difficult for a husband, how much more difficult it proves for a master! That is the position of *Arnolphe* (*in Molières 'L'École des Femmes'*), or Georges Dandin (*in Molières play of that name*). What can one do? The eunuch and the duenna are not suited to a foreigner; while to grant a slave the independence of a Frenchwoman, all at once, would be absurd in a country where women, it seems, show little resistance against the most vulgar methods of seduction. How can I leave her alone in the house? And how can I go about with her, in a country where no woman has ever appeared on the arm of a man? Can one understand how I failed to foresee all this?

I told Yousef to ask Mustafa to prepare dinner for me; obviously, I could not take the slave to the table d'hôte of the *Domergue Hotel*. As for the dragoman, he had taken himself off to await the arrival of the Suez coach; since I did not keep him busy enough, he sought, from time to time, to guide some Englishman around the city. I told him, on his return, that I only wanted to employ him for certain days, that I would not keep all these people around me, and that having a slave, I would very quickly learn how to exchange a few words with her, which was enough for me. As he had believed himself more indispensable than ever, this declaration

surprised him somewhat. However, he ended by taking the matter well, and told me that I would find him at the *Waghorn Hotel* whenever I needed him.

He probably expected to use me as an intermediary to at least get to know the slave; but jealousy is a thing so well understood in the East, reserve is so natural in everything that has to do with women, that he never so much as mentioned it to me.

I had returned to the room where I had left the sleeping slave. She was awake and sitting on the window-sill, looking right and left into the street, through the side grilles of the moucharabia. Two houses away, there were young men in Turkish Reform costume; officers no doubt in the entourage of some personage, who were smoking nonchalantly in front of the door. I understood that danger lay there. I searched my mind in vain for a word that could make her understand that it was not good to gaze at soldiers in the street, but I found only the universal *tayeb* ('very good'), an optimistic interjection well worthy of characterising the spirit of the gentlest people on earth, but quite insufficient in this situation.

O woman! In your company everything changes. I was happy, content with everything. I said *tayeb* at every turn, and Egypt smiled at me. Today, I must search for other words to be found perhaps in the language of this benevolent nation. It is true that I had surprised among the natives a negative word, and gesture. If something fails to please them, which is rare, they say: '*Lah!*', raising their hand carelessly to the height of the forehead. But how can one say in a harsh tone, and yet with a languid movement of the hand: '*Lah!*' This, however, was what I was reduced to, for want of anything better; after that, I led the slave back to the sofa, and signalled that it was more appropriate to stand there than at the window. Further, I made her understand that I would not be long in requiring dinner.

The question now was whether I should let her uncover her face before the cook; that seemed to me contrary to custom. No one, until then, had sought to view her. The dragoman himself had not ascended the stairs with me when Abd-el-Kerim showed me his women; it was therefore clear that I would be despised if I acted differently from the people of the country.

When dinner was ready, Mustapha shouted from outside:

— '*Sidi!*'

I left the room; he showed me an earthenware pot containing chicken pieces in rice.

— '*Bono! bono!*' I said to him.

Then I continued to urge the slave to replace her mask, which she did.

Mustapha set the table, and laid a green tablecloth on it; then, having arranged a pyramid of pilau on a platter, he brought, in addition, several vegetables, on little plates, notably some *koulkas* (*taro, colocasia esculenta*) in vinegar, as well as large slices of onion swimming in a mustard sauce. Ambivalent in manner, the fellow looked untroubled. Then he discreetly withdrew.

Chapter 4 : First Lessons in Arabic

I motioned to the slave to take a chair (I had been so weak as to purchase chairs); she shook her head, and I realised that my idea was ridiculous given the table's lack of height. So, I put some cushions on the floor, and took a seat, inviting her to sit on the other side; but nothing could persuade her. She turned her head away and put her hand over her mouth.

— 'My child,' I said to her, 'do you wish to die of hunger?'

I felt that it was better to speak, even with the certainty of not being understood, than to indulge in a ridiculous pantomime. She answered in a few words which probably meant that no, she did not understand, and to which I replied: '*Tayeb*'. It was the beginning of a dialogue, at least.

Byron said that in his experience the best way to learn a language was to live alone for some time with a woman; but it would still be necessary to add some elementary text-books; otherwise, one only learns nouns, the verb is always missing; and then, it is hard to remember words without writing them down, and Arabic is not written with our letters, or at least the latter give only an imperfect idea of the pronunciation. As for learning Arabic writing, it is such a complicated matter because of the elisions, that the Comte de Volney (*Constantin François de Chassebœuf*), the scholar, found it simpler to invent a mixed alphabet, the use of which unfortunately other scholars failed to encourage. Science loves difficulty, and never wishes to over-popularise its studies: if one learned by oneself, what would become of the professors?

— 'After all,' I said to myself, 'this young girl, born in Java, perhaps follows the Hindu religion; she probably only feeds on fruit and herbs.'

I made a sign of adoration, pronouncing the name Brahma in a questioning manner; she did not appear to understand. In any case, my pronunciation was doubtless deficient. I enumerated again all the names I knew relating to that same cosmogony; it was as if I had spoken French. I began to regret having gratified the dragoman; I was especially angry with the slave trader for having sold me this beautiful golden bird without telling me how to feed it.

I simply presented her with some bread, the best that was baked in the Frankish quarter; she said in a melancholy tone: *Mafish!* an unknown word whose expression saddened me greatly. I then thought of some poor bayaderes brought to Paris some years ago, whom I had been shown, in a house on the Champs-Élysées. Those Indian women only ate food that they had prepared themselves in new receptacles. This memory reassured me a little, and I resolved to go shopping with the slave, after my meal, to clear up this point.

The distrust that Youssef had inspired in me regarding my dragoman had the secondary effect of setting me on my guard against him; that is what had led to this unfortunate position. It was therefore a question of taking someone reliable along as an interpreter, in order at least to become acquainted with my new acquisition. I thought for a moment of Monsieur Jean, the Mamluk, a man of respectable age; but how could I take this woman to an inn? On the other hand, I could not leave her, and send the two hazardous servants outside awhile; was it prudent to leave a slave alone in a house closed only by a wooden lock?

A sound of little bells rang out in the street; I saw through the lattice a goatherd in a blue smock leading some goats towards the Frankish quarter. I pointed him out to the slave, who said to me with a smile: '*Aioua!*', which I assumed meant *yes*.

I summoned the goatherd, a boy of fifteen, with a tanned complexion, enormous eyes, and possessing, moreover, the large nose and thick lips of the Sphinx's head, a pure Egyptian type. He entered the courtyard with his animals, and began to milk one into a new earthenware vase that I showed to the slave before he used it. The latter repeated *aioua*, and, from the top of the gallery, she watched, although veiled, the goatherd's activities.

All this was as simple as an idyll, and I found it very natural that she should address these two words to him: '*Talé bouckra*'; I understood that she was doubtless urging him to come back the next day. When the cup was full, the goatherd looked at me with a savage air and cried:

— '*At foulouz!*'

I had cultivated donkey drivers sufficiently well to know that this meant: 'Give money.' After I had paid him, he shouted again: '*Bakshis!*' another favourite expression of the Egyptian, who demands a tip at every turn. I answered him: '*Talé bouckra!*' as the slave had. He went away satisfied. That is how one learns the language, little by little.

She was content to drink her milk without seeking to dip bread in it; however, this light meal reassured me a little; I feared that she was of that Javanese people that feeds on some kind of rare earth which one could perhaps not have obtained in Cairo. Then I sent for some donkeys, and made a sign to the slave to don her outer garment (*milayeh*). She looked with a certain disdain at this checked cotton fabric, which is nevertheless worn everywhere in Cairo, and said to me:

— '*An' aouss abaya!*'

How one learns! I understood that she hoped to wear silk instead of cotton, the clothes of great ladies instead of those of simple bourgeois women, and I said to her: *Lah! Lah!* shaking my head in the Egyptian manner.

Chapter 5: The Kindly Interpreter

I had no desire to go and buy an abaya, nor to take a simple walk; it had occurred to me that by taking out a subscription to the French reading room, the gracious Madame Bonhomme would be willing to serve as my go-between for an initial conversation with my young captive. I had only seen Madame Bonhomme before in the illustrious amateur performance which had inaugurated the season at the *Teatro del Cairo*; but the vaudeville she had played lent her in my eyes the quality of an excellent and obliging person. The theatre has this peculiarity, that it gives you the illusion of knowing a stranger perfectly. Hence the great passions which actresses inspire, whereas one scarcely falls in love, in general, with women one has only seen from afar.

If an actress has the privilege of exposing to all an ideal that the imagination of each interprets and realises at will, why not realise this generally benevolent function in a pretty and, if you like, even a virtuous merchant, and so to speak initiator, who might open a useful and charming conversation on behalf of a foreigner.

We know how delighted the good Doctor Yorick was (*see Sterne's 'A Sentimental Journey'*), when unknown, anxious, and lost in the great tumult of Parisian life, he found a welcome at the home of a kind and obliging glove-maker; how much more useful then, such an encounter in an Oriental city!

Madame Bonhomme accepted, with all possible grace and patience, the role of interpreter between myself and my slave. There were people in the reading room, so she showed us into her shop, selling toiletries and assorted goods, which was attached to the bookstore. In the Frankish quarter, every trader sells everything. While the slave, astonished, examined with delight the wonders of European luxury, I explained my position to Madame Bonhomme, who, moreover, had, herself, a black slave to whom, from time to time, I heard her issuing orders in Arabic.

My story interested her; I requested her to ask the slave if she was happy to belong to me.

— '*Aioua!*' was the reply.

To this affirmative, she added that she would be very happy to be dressed like a European. This pretension made Madame Bonhomme smile, and she went off to fetch a tulle bonnet with ribbons and adjusted it on the slave's head. I confess that it did not suit her very well; the whiteness of the bonnet made her look sickly.

— 'My child', said Madame Bonhomme, 'you must remain as you are; the tarbouch suits you much better.'

And, since the slave gave up the bonnet reluctantly, she fetched her a Greek woman's taktikos, festooned with gold, which, this time, was most effective. I saw that there was, clearly, some intention to urge the sale; but the price was moderate, in spite of the exquisite delicacy of the work.

Certain now of her redoubled benevolence, I had the adventures of this poor girl related to me in detail. It resembled all the stories of slaves, of Terence's *Andrian*, of Mademoiselle Aïssé (*a Circassian girl purchased by the Comte de Ferrol, Ambassador to Constantinople, during the Regency*) ... understand that I did not flatter myself I would be told the whole truth. Born of noble parents, abducted as a child from the sea-shore, something that would be unlikely today in the Mediterranean but which remains probable from the point of view of the South Seas. And, besides, where could she have come from? There was no doubt about her Malay origin. The subjects of the Ottoman Empire cannot be sold under any pretext. Any person that is neither white nor black, in terms of slavery, can therefore only belong to Abyssinia or the East Indian archipelago.

She had been sold to a very old sheikh in the territory of Mecca. This sheikh having died, merchants from the caravan had taken her, and exposed her for sale in Cairo.

All this was very natural, and I was happy to believe that, in fact, she had only been owned before by that venerable sheikh, chilled by age.

— ‘She is eighteen years old,’ said Madame Bonhomme; ‘but she is very strong, and you would have paid more for her, if she were not of a people rarely seen here. The Turks are creatures of habit, they must have Abyssinians or African blacks; rest assured that she has been paraded from town to town without their being able to ride themselves of her.’

— ‘Well,’ I said, ‘then I was fated to pass by. It was reserved for me to affect her fortune for good or ill.’

This viewpoint, in accord with oriental fatalism, was transmitted to the slave, and earned me her assent.

I asked her why she had not wished to eat in the morning, and whether she was of the Hindu religion.

— ‘No, she is a Muslim.’ Madame Bonhomme told me, after speaking to her. ‘She has not eaten today, because it is a day of fasting, till sunset.’

I regretted that the woman did not belong to the Brahmanic religion, for which I had always had a weakness; as for language, she expressed herself in the purest Arabic, and had retained of her primitive language only the memory of a few songs or *pantouns*, which I promised myself I would have her repeat.

— ‘Now, said Madame Bonhomme, ‘how will you manage to converse with her?’

— ‘Madame,’ I said to her, ‘I already know a word with which one shows oneself satisfied with everything; only indicate to me another which expresses the opposite. My intelligence will supply the rest, while waiting for me to acquire further learning.’

— ‘Are you already at the refusal stage?’ she asked me.

— ‘I have some experience,’ I replied, ‘one must plan for everything.’

— ‘Alas!’ Madame Bonhomme whispered to me, ‘that terrible word, here, is: *Mafish!* It covers all possible negatives.’

Then I recalled that the slave had already uttered it, when she was with me.

Chapter 6: The Island of Roda

The Consul-General invited me to visit the environs of Cairo. This was not an offer to be neglected; consuls enjoy innumerable privileges facilitating the convenience of their excursions. I had, moreover, the advantage, in this case, of having at my disposal a European carriage, a rare thing in the Levant. A carriage in Cairo is a luxury; all the finer, as it is impossible to employ it in the city; the sovereign and his representatives alone have the right to crush men and dogs in the streets, except that the narrow and tortuous form of the latter

would prevent them taking advantage of it. But the Pasha himself is obliged to keep his carriages close to the city gates, and can only be conveyed to his various country houses; So, nothing is rarer than to see a coupé or a carriage, from Paris or London, and in the latest style, with a turbaned coachman on the seat, holding his whip in one hand, and his long cherry pipe in the other.

Thus, one day, I was visited by a janissary from the consulate, who knocked loudly on the door with his big cane with a silver knob, to honour me with his presence in the neighbourhood. He told me I would be expected at the consulate for the agreed excursion. We were to leave the next day at daybreak; but what the Consul did not know was that my bachelor's lodgings had become a household, since his first invitation, and I wondered what to do about my amiable companion, during an absence of an entire day. To take her with me would have been indiscreet; to leave her alone with the cook and the porter would have been to fail in common prudence. I was much embarrassed. Finally, I thought that I must either resolve to buy a eunuch, or confide in someone. I had her mount a donkey, and we were soon in front of Monsieur Jean's shop. I asked the former Mamluk if he knew of an honest family to whom I could entrust my slave for a day. Monsieur Jean, a resourceful man, directed me to an aged Copt, named Mansour, who, having served several years in the French army, was trustworthy in every respect.

Mansour had been a Mamluk, like Monsieur Jean, but one of the Mamluks of the French army. The latter, as he informed me, were composed mainly of Copts who, during the retreat of the Egyptian expedition, had followed our soldiers. Poor Mansour, with several of his comrades, was hurled into the water at Marseilles, by the populace, for having supported the emperor after Bourbon rule was renewed, but, as a true child of the Nile, he managed to save himself by swimming, and landed elsewhere on the shore.

We went to the home of this good man, who lived with his wife in a large, partly-collapsed house: the ceilings were bulging, and threatened the heads of the inhabitants; the wooden mesh of the windows was ripped in places like torn lace. Only the remains of furniture, and ragged cloths, adorned the ancient dwelling, where the dust and sunlight evoked an impression as gloomy as that which the rain and mud create on penetrating the poorest recesses of our cities. I felt a pang at heart to think that the greater part of the population of Cairo lived thus, in houses which the rats had already abandoned as unsafe. I refused to think, for even a moment, of leaving my slave there, but I asked the old Copt and his wife to return to my house. I promised to take them into my service, even if it meant dismissing one or other of my current servants. Besides, at a piastre and a half, or forty centimes per head, per day, I would hardly be showing prodigality.

Having thus secured the tranquillity of my household, by countering, like some clever tyrant, two suspect parties, who might have conspired against me, with a loyal one, I saw no difficulty in attending on the Consul. His carriage was waiting at the door, filled with provisions, while two janissaries accompanied us on horseback. There too, besides the secretary of the legation, was a grave personage in oriental costume, named Sheikh Abou-Khaled, whom the consul had invited, so that he might explain things to us; he spoke fluent

Italian, and was considered one of the most elegant of poets, and learned as regards Arabic literature.

— ‘He is quite a man of the past,’ said the Consul to me. ‘Reform is odious to him, and yet it would be hard to find a more tolerant spirit. He belongs to that generation of philosophical Arabs, *Voltaireans* even, in a manner of speaking, quite unique to Egypt, who are not at all hostile to French domination.’

I asked the sheikh if there were many poets, in addition to himself, in Cairo.

— ‘Alas!’ said he, ‘we no longer live in the days when, for a fine piece of verse, the sovereign ordered the poet’s mouth to be filled with gold coins, as many as it could hold. Today, we are merely useless mouths. What good might poetry do here, except to amuse the common people at the crossroads?’

— ‘And why,’ I said, ‘should the people themselves not replace the generous sovereign?’

— ‘They are too poor,’ replied the sheikh, ‘and, besides, their ignorance is, now, such that they no longer appreciate anything but thin and artless novels, lacking any concern for purity of style. Sordid and blood-curdling tales of adventure suffice to amuse the café regulars. Even then, at the most interesting stage, the narrator stops, saying he will only continue the story when he’s received a certain sum; yet he forever delays the denouement until tomorrow, and this goes on for weeks at a time.’

— ‘Oh!’ I said, ‘All that’s no different to home!’

— ‘As for the illustrious poems of Antar (*Antarah ibn Shaddad al-Absi, 525-608AD*) or Abu-Zayd (*Abu Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Zayd, 1186-1219*),’ continued the sheikh, ‘people no longer want to listen to them except during religious festivals, out of habit. Do any understand their beauty? The people of our day can barely read. Who would believe that the most learned experts in literary Arabic, today, are two Frenchmen?’

— ‘He refers,’ the Consul said, ‘to Doctor Nicolas Perron and Monsieur Fulgence Fresnel, Consul of Jeddah. You have, however,’ he added, turning to the sheikh, ‘many holy ulama with white beards who spend all their time in the libraries, within the mosques?’

— ‘Is that learning,’ said the sheikh, ‘to spend one’s whole life smoking one’s hookah, rereading the same small number of books, under the pretext that nothing is more beautiful, and that doctrine is superior to all things? Better to renounce our glorious past, and open our minds to the science of the Franks..., who nevertheless learned everything from us!’

We had exited the city wall, and left Boulaq and the smiling villas surrounding it on the right, and were driving along a wide, shady avenue, traced between the crops, which crossed a vast cultivated area belonging to Ibrahim Pasha (*the general, politician, and eldest son of Muhammad Ali*). It was he who had planted date palms, mulberry trees, and pharaoh’s fig-trees over all this formerly barren plain, which today seems like a garden. Large buildings serving as manufactories occupy the centre of these plantations a short distance from the Nile. Passing them, and turning right, we found ourselves in front of an arch through which one descends to the river to reach the island of Roda.

The branch of the Nile at this point appears as a small river flowing among kiosks and gardens. Thick reeds line the banks, and tradition indicates this point as being the one where Pharaoh's daughter found the cradle containing Moses. Turning towards the south, one sees on the right the port of old Cairo, on the left the buildings of the *Mekkias*, or *Nilometer*, intermingled with minarets and domes, which cover the tip of the island.

The latter is not only a delightful princely residence, it has also become, thanks to Ibrahim's care, the Botanical Garden of Cairo. One might expect it to be precisely the reverse of ours; that instead of concentrating heat in greenhouses, it would be necessary to create artificial rain, cold, and fog here to preserve our European plants. The fact is that, of all our trees, they have only been able to raise a poor little oak, which does not even produce acorns. Ibrahim was more fortunate in his cultivation of plants from India. The species are completely different from those of Egypt, while this latitude is even a little chilly for them. We walked with delight beneath the shade of tamarinds and baobabs; the fronds, shaped like ferns with slender stems, of coconut trees quivered here and there; and, amidst a thousand strange verdancies, I distinguished infinitely graceful bamboo avenues forming a curtain as do our poplar-trees; a small river wound across the lawns, where peacocks and pink flamingos shone in the midst of a crowd of domestic birds. From time to time, we rested in the shade of a kind of weeping willow, whose tall trunk, straight as a mast, spread around it very thick sheets of foliage; one thus believes oneself to be in a tent of green silk, flooded with gentle light.

With difficulty, we tore ourselves away from this magical scene, from its freshness, from those penetrating scents of another region of the world, to which it seemed we had been transported as if by a miracle; walking to the northern end of the island, we soon encountered plantings of a wholly different nature, doubtless intended to complete the array of tropical vegetation. In the midst of a wood composed of flowering trees which seemed like gigantic bouquets, traversing narrow paths, hidden under arches of lianas, one arrives at a sort of labyrinth of artificial rocks, surmounted by a belvedere. Between the stones, at the edge of the path, over your head, at your feet, twist, intertwine, bristle, and grimace the strangest 'reptiles' of the plant world. One is scarcely free of anxiety in setting foot in the lairs of sleeping serpents and hydras, among these almost living trees and plants, some of which seem to parody human limbs and recall the monstrous conformation of the tentacular gods of India.

Arriving at the summit, I was struck with admiration on seeing, in all their glory, rising above Giza which borders the other side of the river, the three famous pyramids, sharply outlined against the azure sky.

I had not seen them so clearly, and the transparency of the air allowed us, although at a distance of three leagues, to distinguish all their details.

I disagree with Voltaire, who claimed to prefer our 'fours à poulets' (*dried-brick incubators for hatching chickens*) to the Egyptian pyramids (*see Voltaire's 'Troisième Diatribe de l'Abbé Baxin'*); nor was it a matter of indifference to me to be looked down upon by forty centuries; but it was from the viewpoint of Cairo legends, and the thoughts of an Arab regarding these, that the spectacle interested me at that moment, and I hastened to ask the sheikh, our companion, what he thought of an age of four thousand years being attributed to these monuments, by European science.

The old man took a seat on the wooden sofa in the kiosk and addressed us:

— ‘Some authors think that the pyramids were built by the *pre-Adamite* king Jan-ibn-Jan; but, according to a tradition more widespread among us, there existed, three hundred years before the flood, a king named Surid ibn Salhouk, who dreamed one night that everything on Earth was overturned, men fell on their faces, and their houses on the men; stars clashed in the sky, and their debris covered the ground to a great height. The king awoke, utterly terrified, entered the temple of the Sun, and remained a long time bathing his cheeks and weeping, then he summoned the priests and the diviners. The priest Akliman (*or Philemon*), the most learned among them, told him that he himself had dreamt a similar dream, “I dreamt,” he said, “that I was with you on a mountain, and I saw the sky descend until it approached the top of our heads, and the people were crowding towards you as to their refuge, begging you to raise your hands above you and prevent the sky from falling further, and that I, acting with you, should do the same. At this moment, a voice came from the sun saying: ‘The heavens will return to their place, when I have made three hundred circuits.’ The priest having spoken thus, King Surid had *readings* of the stars taken, and investigated what events they foretold. It was augured that a deluge of water would be followed by a deluge of fire. It was then that the king had the pyramids built, in triangular form, suitable for withstanding the clash of the stars and the descent of the sky, and laid down those enormous stones, connected by tenons, and cut with such precision, that neither the fire of heaven nor the deluge could penetrate them. There, if necessary, the king and the nobles of the kingdom were to take refuge, with the books and images appertaining to their science, their talismans, and everything that it was important to preserve for the future of the human race.’

I listened to this legend with close attention, and told the Consul that it seemed to me much more satisfying than the supposition accepted in Europe, that these monstrous constructions were merely tombs.

— ‘But,’ I said, ‘how could people who had taken refuge in the rooms of the pyramids have breathed’

— ‘We can still see,’ the sheikh continued, ‘the outlines of wells and canals lost beneath the sand. Some of these communicated with the waters of the Nile, others correspond to vast underground caves; the water entered through narrow conduits, then emerged further away, forming immense cataracts, and continually stirring the air with a frightful noise.’

The Consul, a ‘positivist’, welcomed these traditions only with a smile; he had taken advantage of our halt in the kiosk to have the provisions brought from his carriage and laid out on a table, and Ibrahim Pasha’s *bostanjis* (*gardeners, and guards*) came to offer us, in addition, flowers and rare fruits, completing our feeling of being in Asia.

In Africa, one dreams of India, as in Europe one dreams of Africa; the ideal always gleams beyond our current horizon. As for me, I still questioned our good sheikh with avidity, and made him relate all the fabulous stories of his forefathers. I believed, with him, in King Surid more firmly than in the Cheops (*Khufu*) of the Greeks, their Chephren (*Kafre*) and their Mycerinus (*Menkaure*).

— ‘And what was found,’ I asked him, ‘in the pyramids when they were first opened by the Arab Sultans?’

— ‘They found,’ he said, ‘the statues and talismans that King Surid had established to guard them. The guard of the eastern pyramid was an idol of black and white tortoiseshell, seated on a throne of gold, and holding a spear, to look at which meant death. The spirit attached to this idol was a beautiful and laughing woman, who still appears in our day, and makes those who encounter her lose their minds. The guard of the western pyramid was an idol of red stone, also armed with a spear, having on its head a coiled serpent; the spirit who served it had the form of an old Nubian man, carrying a basket on his head and in his hands a censer. As for the third pyramid, it had for guard a small idol of basalt, with the same base, which attracted to it all those who looked at it, and left them unable to detach themselves from it. The spirit still appears in the form of a young man, beardless and naked. As for the other pyramids, at Sakkara, each also has its ghost: one is a swarthy, blackish old man, with a short beard; another is a young black woman, with a black child, who, when one gazes at her, displays long white teeth and white eyes; another has the head of a lion with horns; another looks like a shepherd dressed in black, holding a staff; another finally appears in the form of a monk who emerges from the sea and is reflected in its waters. It is dangerous to meet these ghosts at noon.’

— ‘So,’ I said, ‘the East has ghosts of the day, as we have those of the night?’

— ‘That’, observed the consul, ‘is because everyone sleeps at midday in these regions, and this good sheikh tells us tales likely to induce sleep.’

— ‘But,’ I cried, ‘is all of this more extraordinary than the many natural things that we cannot explain? Since we believe in Creation, the Angels, the Flood, and since we cannot doubt the movement of the stars, why should we not admit that spirits are attached to these stars, and that the first men were able to establish contact with them through worship and monuments?’

— ‘Such was, in fact, the aim of primitive magic,’ said the sheikh, ‘the talismans and statues only acquired power by being consecrated to individual planets and signs, combined with their ascending and declining. The prince of the priests was called the *Kater*, that is to say, the master of celestial influences. Beneath him, each priest served a single star alone, as *Pharouïs* (Saturn), *Rhaouiïs* (Jupiter) and the rest. Also, each morning, the *Kater* would ask a priest: “Where is the star, now, that you serve?” The latter would reply: “It is in such a such a sign, degree, and minute,” and, according to previous calculation, one wrote down what it was appropriate to enact that day. The first pyramid was therefore reserved for the princes and their family; the second contained the idols associated with the stars, and the tabernacles of the celestial bodies, according to the astrological, historical, and scientific texts; there too, the priests would find refuge. As for the third, it was intended solely for the preservation of the coffins of the kings and priests, and, as it soon proved insufficient, the pyramids of Sakkara and Dahshur were built. The purpose behind their solid construction was to prevent the destruction of the embalmed bodies which, according to the ideas of the time, would be resurrected at the end of a certain revolution of the stars, the exact duration of which was unknown.’

— ‘Given that were so,’ said the Consul, ‘there are numerous mummies who will be most surprised to wake one day under museum glass, or in some Englishman’s cabinet of curiosities.’

— ‘In fact, I observed, ‘they may be real human chrysalises from which the butterfly has not yet emerged. Who says they will not hatch some day? I have always regarded it as impious to strip bare and dissect the mummies of the poor Egyptians. How is it that the consoling and invincible faith of so many accumulated generations has not disarmed our foolish European curiosity? We respect the dead of yesterday; but are the dead of one particular age?’

— ‘They were infidels’, said the sheikh.

— ‘Alas!’ said I, ‘At that time, neither Muhammad nor Jesus were born.’

We discussed this point for some time, on which I was surprised to see the Muslim imitate Catholic intolerance. Why should the children of Ishmael curse ancient Egypt, which only enslaved the children of Isaac? To be truthful, however, Muslims generally respect the tombs and sacred monuments of various peoples, and only the hope of finding immense treasure had prompted the Caliph to open the pyramids. Their chronicles report that, in the so-called King’s Chamber, a statue of a man in black stone, and a statue of a woman in white stone, were discovered upright on a table, one holding a lance and the other a bow. In the middle of the table was a hermetically-sealed vase, which, when opened, was found to be full of fresh blood. There was also a cockerel of reddish-gold, enamelled with hyacinths, which crowed and flapped its wings when one entered. All this is somewhat reminiscent of *The Thousand and One Nights*; but what prevents us from believing that these chambers contained talismans and cabalistic figures! What is certain is that modern scholars have found no bones there other than those of an ox. The supposed sarcophagus in the King’s Chamber was doubtless a vat for lustral water. Besides, is it not more absurd, as the Comte de Volney has noted, to suppose that those many stones were piled up merely to house a five-foot long corpse?

Chapter 7: The Viceroy Ibrahim’s Harem

We soon resumed our walk, visiting a charming palace decorated in rocaille which the Viceroy’s wives sometimes inhabited in the summer. Turkish-style flowerbeds, imitating carpet-designs, surrounded this residence, which we were allowed to enter, freely. The ‘birds’ were missing from their cage, and nothing living occupied the rooms except musical clocks, which announced the quarter-hours with a little serinette (*barrel-organ*) air from French opera. The layout of a harem is the same in all Turkish palaces, and I had already seen several. There are always small rooms, surrounding larger lounges, with divans everywhere and, for additional furniture, small tables inlaid with tortoiseshell; and recesses, of ogive form, set in the woodwork, here and there, serve to hold hookahs, vases of flowers, and coffee cups. Only three or four rooms are decorated in the European style, and contain articles of cheap furniture which

would be the pride of a porter's lodge; but these are sacrifices to progress, perhaps the whims of some favourite, and none are of serious use to them.

But what is generally lacking in the most princely of harems are beds.

— 'Where do these women, and their slaves, sleep?' I asked the sheikh.

— 'On the sofas.'

— 'And do they have blankets?'

— 'They sleep fully dressed. However, there are woollen or silk blankets for the winter.'

— 'And where is the husband's place in all this?'

— 'Well, the husband sleeps in his room, the wives in theirs, and the slaves (*odalisques*, or *odaleuk*) on the sofas in the large rooms. If the sofas and cushions seem uncomfortable, mattresses are arranged in the middle of the room, and they sleep like that.'

— 'Fully clothed?'

— 'Always, but retaining only the simplest of garments: trousers, a jacket, a dress. The law forbids men, as well as women, to uncover themselves in front of each other from the throat downwards. The privilege of the husband is to view, freely, the faces of his wives; if his curiosity leads him further, his eyes are cursed: it is a formal proscription'.

— 'I understand,' I said, 'that the husband may not wish to spend the whole night in a room full of fully-dressed women, and that equally he likes to sleep on his own; but if he should take with him two or three of these ladies....'

— 'Two or three!' cried the sheikh, indignantly, 'What dogs do you think them to be who would act so? By living Allah! Is there a single woman, even an unfaithful one, who would consent to share with another the honour of sleeping next to her husband? Is that the way things are done in Europe?'

— 'In Europe?' I answered. Certainly not; but Christians have only one wife, and they suppose that the Turks, having several, live with them as we do with one.'

— 'Were there any Muslims,' the sheikh said, 'depraved enough to act as the Christians suppose, their legitimate wives would immediately seek a divorce, and the slaves themselves would have the right to leave them.'

— 'Behold,' I said to the Consul, 'the persistent error in Europe concerning the customs of these people. The life of the Turk is for us the ideal of power and pleasure, and yet I see that they are not even masters in their own house.'

— 'In reality,' the Consul replied, 'the majority have only one wife. Daughters of good families almost always make it a condition of the alliance. A man rich enough to support and maintain several women properly, that is to say, to give each a separate lodging, a servant, and two complete sets of clothing a year, as well as a fixed sum every month for her maintenance, can, it is true, take up to four wives; but the law obliges him to devote one day of the week to each, which is not always very agreeable. Consider also that the intrigues of four women, with almost equal rights, would make his life most unhappy, if he were not a very rich and highly-

placed fellow. Among the latter, the number of women is a luxury like that of horses; but they prefer, in general, to limit themselves to a legitimate wife, while possessing beautiful slaves, with whom they still do not always have the easiest relations, especially if the wife is from a noble family.'

— 'Poor Turks!' I cried, 'How they are slandered! But if it is simply a matter of having mistresses here and there, every rich man in Europe has the same option.'

— 'The Turks have the better of it,' the Consul told me. 'In Europe, our institutions are fierce on these points; but morality takes its revenge. Here, religion, which regulates everything, dominates both the social order and the moral order, and, as it demands nothing impossible, it is made a point of honour to observe it. It is not that there are no exceptions; however, they are rare, and hardly occurred until the reforms. The devout of Constantinople were indignant against Sultan Mahmud I, when it was learned that he had built a magnificent bathroom whereon he could watch his wives wash; but this is very unlikely, and is doubtless only a European invention.'

We walked, thus, in conversation, along a path paved with oval pebbles formed in black and white designs, and surrounded by a high border of clipped boxwood. I saw in my mind pale *quadens* (*favoured slaves*), dispersing about the paths, dragging their slippers over the mosaic pavements, and assembling in verdant rooms where large yew trees highlighted the balustrades and arches; doves must surely alight there, at times, like plaintive souls of this solitude, and I reflected that a Turk, amidst all this, could do nothing but pursue the phantom, pleasure. The Orient no longer sees great lovers or even great voluptuaries; the ideal loves of *Medjnoun* (see '*Medjnoun and Leila*', by the Persian poet Nur ad-Din Abd ar-Rahman Jami) or *Antar* (see the tale of '*Antar and Aba*', attributed to Al-Asmai) are forgotten by modern Muslims, while the inconstant ardour of Don Juan is unknown to them. They have beautiful palaces without loving art; beautiful gardens without loving nature; beautiful women without understanding love. I do not say this in respect of Muhammad Ali, an Albanian by origin, and who, on many occasions, showed the spirit of an Alexander; but I regret that his son and he were unable to re-establish in the East the pre-eminence of the Arab race, so intelligent, and so chivalrous in the past. The Turkish spirit prevails on the one side, the European spirit on the other; it is a mediocre result, given so much effort!

We returned to Cairo after visiting the Nilometer building, where a graduated pillar, formerly dedicated to Serapis (*the solar deity of Memphis*), plunges into a deep basin, and serves to determine the height of the floods each year. The Consul wished to show us the cemetery of the Pasha's family. To view a cemetery after the harem made a sad contrast; but, in fact, a major criticism of polygamy is inherent. This cemetery, dedicated only to the children of the family, seems large enough to serve a city. There are more than sixty tombs there, large and small, new for the most part, with white marble cippi (*low gravestones*). Each of these cippi is surmounted either by a turban or a woman's head-dress, which gives all Turkish tombs a look of funereal reality; it seems as if one were walking amidst a petrified crowd. The most important of these tombs are draped in rich fabrics, and bear turbans of silk and cashmere: here, the illusion is even more poignant.

It is comforting to think that, in spite of all these losses, the Pasha's family is still quite numerous. Moreover, the mortality of Turkish children in Egypt seems a fact as old as it is indisputable. Those famous Mamluks, who dominated the country for so long, and who brought there the most beautiful women in the world, have not left a single offspring.

Chapter 8: The Mysteries of the Harem

I pondered on what I had heard.

Here is another illusion to be done away with: the delights of the harem, the omnipotence of the husband or master, the bevy of charming women uniting to make one man happy! Religion or customs singularly temper this ideal, which has seduced so many Europeans. All those who, on the basis of our prejudice, understood oriental life in this way, found themselves soon discouraged. Most of the Franks who formerly entered the service of the Pasha, and, for reasons of self-interest or pleasure, embraced Islam, have today returned, if not to the bosom of the Church, at least to the sweetness of Christian monogamy.

To fully comprehend this idea, understand that a married woman, throughout the Turkish empire, has the same privileges as among us, and that she can even prevent her husband from taking a second wife, by making this point a clause in the marriage contract. And, if she consents to live in the same house as another woman, she has the right to live apart, and does not in any way contribute, as is believed, to forming graceful vignettes with the slaves, beneath the eyes of a master and husband. Let us even beware of thinking that these lovely ladies may consent to sing or dance to entertain their lord. Those are talents which seem to them unworthy of an honest woman; but every husband has the right to bring *almahs* and *ghawasi* into his harem, and so provide entertainment for his wives. It is also essential that the master of a seraglio not concern himself with the slaves he has granted to his wives, because they are thenceforth their personal property; and, if it pleases him to acquire some for his own use, he would be wise to establish them in a separate house, though nothing prevents him from employing this means of increasing his posterity.

Now, it must also be understood that, each house being divided into two completely separate parts, one devoted to the men and the other to the women, there is indeed a master on one side, but on the other, there is a mistress. The latter is the mother, or the mother-in-law, or the oldest wife, or the one who gave birth to the eldest child. The first is called *the great lady*, and the second *the parakeet (durrah)*. In the case where the women are numerous, which only exists among the wealthy, the harem is a sort of convent where austere rule prevails. Its members mainly take care of raising the children, embroidery, and directing the slaves in their housework. The husband's visits are ceremonious, as are those of close relatives, and, as he does not eat with his wives, all he can do to pass the time there is to smoke his hookah gravely and to drink coffee or sherbets. It is customary for him to see that his visits are announced some time in advance. Moreover, if he finds slippers at the door of the harem, he takes care not to

enter, because it is a sign that his wife or wives are receiving a visit from their friends, and their friends often stay for one or two days.

As for the freedom to go out and make visits, it can hardly be contested in the case of a woman of free birth. The husband's right is limited to making sure she is accompanied by slaves; but this is insignificant as a precaution, because of the ease with which the woman can subvert them, or don a disguise, either to visit the baths, or the house of one of their friends, while the guards wait at the door. The masks, and uniformity of dress, in reality, allow them more freedom than European women, if they are disposed to intrigues. The merry tales told in the evening in the cafes often revolve around the adventures of male lovers who disguise themselves as women to enter a harem. Nothing is easier, in fact; only, it must be said that this belongs more to Arab imagination than Turkish custom, which has dominated the Orient for two centuries. Let me add further that Muslim men are not given to adultery, and would find it distasteful to possess a woman who was not wholly theirs.

As for the adventures of Christians, they are rare. Formerly, there was a risk of death to both parties; today, the woman alone risks her life, but only in the situation of being caught in *flagrante delicto* in the marital home. Otherwise, adultery is simply a cause for divorce, and some degree of punishment.

Muslim law, moreover, has nothing that reduces women, as has been thought, to a state of slavery and abjection. They can inherit, they can own things personally, as everywhere else, and even beyond the scope of their husband's authority. They have the right to initiate a divorce for reasons regulated by law. The privilege the husband commands is to be able to divorce without giving a reason. He only has to say to his wife in front of three witnesses: 'You are divorced', and she can only reclaim the dowry stipulated in her marriage contract. All know that, if he wishes to take her back afterwards, he can only do so if she has remarried in the meantime, and since become free. The use of a *hulta*, who is called in Egypt a *musthilla*, and who plays the role of an intermediary husband, is sometimes adopted on behalf of rich people only. The poor, marrying without written contract, leave each other, and take each other back, without difficulty. Finally, although it is mainly the wealthy and powerful who, through love of ostentation or personal taste, practice polygamy, there are in Cairo poor devils who marry several wives in order to live on the products of their labour. They thus have three or four households in the city, who are perfectly ignorant of each other. The discovery of such secrets usually leads to comedic disputes, and the expulsion of the lazy fellah from the houses of his various wives; for, if the law allows him several wives, it imposes on him, at the same time, the obligation to support them.

Chapter 9: The French Lesson

I found my lodgings in the same state as I had left them: the old Copt and his wife busy putting everything in order, the slave sleeping on a divan, the cocks and hens in the courtyard pecking corn, and the barbarian, who was smoking in the café opposite, waiting, attentively, for me.

Further, it was impossible to find the cook; the Copt's arrival had doubtless made him think he was about to be replaced, and he had left suddenly without saying anything; this is a frequent occurrence as regards servants or workmen in Cairo. They take care, however, to be paid every evening so they can act as they please.

I had no objection to replacing Mustapha with Mansour; and his wife, who came to help him during the day, seemed to me an excellent guardian of household morals. Except that this most respectable couple were completely ignorant of the elements of cooking, even Egyptian cuisine. Their food consisted of boiled wheat, and vegetables sliced in vinegar, they having failed to advance to the art of blending sauces or roasting. What they attempted to achieve in such directions made the slave cry out, and she commenced to shower insults on them. This character trait displeased me greatly.

I told Mansour to inform her that it was now her turn to cook, and that, wishing her to accompany me on my excursions, it would be good for her to prepare for them. I cannot convey, fully, the expression of wounded pride, or rather of offended dignity, with which she countered us all.

— 'Tell the *sidi*,' she replied to Mansour, 'that I am a *cadine* (lady) and not an *odaleuk* (servant), and that I will write to the Pasha, if he does not grant me an appropriate position.'

— 'To the Pasha?' I cried. 'What has the Pasha do with the matter? I purchase a slave to serve me, and if I cannot afford to pay servants, which may very well be the case, I cannot see why she should not do the housework, as women do in all countries.'

— 'She says,' said Mansour, 'that as for the Pasha, every slave has the right to be resold, and thus exchange masters; that she is of the Muslim religion, and will never resign herself to menial tasks.'

I value pride of character, and, since she possessed the right she claimed, which Mansour confirmed as a fact, I limited myself to saying that I had been jesting; that, she need only apologise to him for her outburst; but Mansour translated this to her in such a way, that the apology, I believe, was on his side.

It was now clear that I had committed a folly in purchasing this woman. If she persisted in her idea, and remained for the rest of my stay merely an object of expense, at least she might be able to serve as my interpreter. I told her that, since she was such a distinguished person, it was fitting that she should learn French, while I learned Arabic. She did not reject the idea.

So, I granted her a lesson in speaking and writing; I made her draw letters on a sheet of paper, like a child, and taught her a few words. This quite amused her, and the pronunciation of French eliminated the guttural intonation produced by Arabian women, which is so graceless. I amused myself, greatly, by making her pronounce entire sentences whose meaning she could not as yet understand, for example: 'I am a little savage,' which she pronounced: *Ze souis one bétit sovaze*. Seeing me laugh, she decided I was obliging her to say something inappropriate, and called Mansour to translate the sentence for him. Not finding much harm in it, she repeated with great grace:

— ‘*Ana bétit sovaze?... Mafish* (not at all)!’ Her smile was charming.

Bored with tracing letters, in strokes thick or thin, the slave made me understand that she wanted to write (*k’tab*), according to her own idea of the matter. I assumed she knew how to write Arabic and gave her a blank page. Soon I saw a strange series of hieroglyphs being born beneath her fingers, which obviously did not belong to the calligraphy of any known people. When the page was full, I had Mansour ask her what she wanted me to do.

— ‘I have written for you; read it!’ she said.

— ‘But, my dear child, it represents nothing. It is only what a cat’s claws dipped in ink could trace.’

This astonished her greatly. She believed that, whenever one thought of a thing by randomly moving the pen over the paper, the idea would, thus, be clearly translated for the reader’s eye. I undeceived her, and communicated that she must state what she had wished to write, since writing would take a great deal more time to learn than she supposed.

Her naive request consisted of several items. The first renewed her claim, previously mentioned, to wear an abaya in black taffeta, like the ladies of Cairo, in order not to be confused with the ordinary fellahin women; the second indicated the desire for a dress (*yalek*) in green silk; and the third and last for the purchase of yellow boots, which one could not, as a Muslim, refuse her the right to wear.

It must be said here that these boots are hideous and give women a certain air of web-footedness which is most unattractive, and the rest makes them look like an enormous bundle of clothing; but, as the yellow boots, in particular, involved serious question of social pre-eminence, I promised to think about it all.

Chapter 10: Shubra

My answer appearing favourable to her, the slave stood up, clapping her hands and repeating several times:

— ‘And the *fil!* (*The elephant!*)’

— ‘What is this?’ I asked Mansour.

— ‘The *siti* (lady)’, he said to me after questioning her, ‘would like to go and see the elephant she has heard about, which is at the palace of Muhammad-Ali, in Shubra.’

It was only right to reward her application to her studies, and I had the donkey-drivers summoned. The city gate, on the Shubra side, was a mere hundred paces from our house. The gate is armed with large towers dating from the time of the Crusades. We crossed a bridge over a canal which widens on the left, forming a small lake surrounded by fresh vegetation. Casinos, cafes and public gardens take advantage of the freshness and shade. On Sundays, one encounters many Greeks, Armenians, and ladies from the Frankish quarter. They only remove

their veils within the gardens, and then, once more, one can study the intriguing contrasts between the various peoples of the Levant. Further on, these cavalcades are lost in the shade of the Shubra promenade, certainly the most beautiful in the world. The sycamore and ebony trees which shade it for a mile and more, are all of enormous size, and the canopy formed by their branches is so dense that darkness of a sort reigns over the whole path, relieved in the distance by the burning edge of the desert, which glows on the right, beyond the cultivated land. On the left is the Nile, which runs alongside vast gardens for a similar distance, until the path borders it, and is brightened with the purple reflection of its waters. There is a café decorated with fountains and trellises, situated halfway to Shubra, and much frequented by walkers. Fields of corn and sugar-cane, and here and there a few pavilions, continue on the right, until one arrives at some large buildings which belong to the Pasha.

It was here that a white elephant given to His Highness by the English government was being shown. My companion, transported with joy, never wearied of admiring the animal, which reminded her of her own country, and which, even in Egypt, constituted a curiosity. Its tusks were adorned with silver bands, and the mahout had it perform several exercises in front of us. He even managed to make it achieve poses which seemed to me of questionable decency, but, when I signalled to the slave, veiled but scarcely blind, that we had seen enough, one of the Pasha's officers said to me, gravely: *Aspettate!... È per ricreare le donne.* (Wait a moment!... It is to entertain the ladies.) There were several there, who were not at all scandalised, in fact, and who laughed out loud.

Shubra is a delightful place. The palace of the Pasha of Egypt, quite simple and of ancient construction, overlooks the Nile, opposite the plain of Embabeh, so famous for the rout of the Mamluks (*at the Battle of the Pyramids, in 1798*). On the garden side, a kiosk has been built whose galleries, painted and gilded, are of the most brilliant appearance. There, a truly oriental taste triumphs.

One can visit the interior, where there are aviaries of rare birds, reception rooms, baths, billiard-rooms, and, penetrating further, into the palace itself, one finds rooms uniformly decorated in the Turkish style, but furnished in the European style, which everywhere constitutes the luxury of princely residences. Various landscape paintings, lacking perspective, and varnished with egg-white, on the panels and above the doors, orthodox creations, in which no living creature appears, yield a mediocre idea of Egyptian art. However, the artists have allowed themselves a few fabulous animals, like hydras, hippogriffs and sphinxes. As for battles, their paintings only depict sieges and maritime combats; ships whose crews are not seen visibly fighting, fortresses where the garrison makes its defence without itself appearing; cannons and bombards which seem to fire by themselves, ladders conquering walls, the soldiers absent. Seemingly, this is the only way they had of representing the main scenes of Ibrahim's Greek campaign.

Above the room where the Pasha dispenses justice, one may read the beautiful maxim: 'Fifteen minutes of clemency is worth more than seventy hours of prayer.'

We descended to the gardens. What roses! The roses of Shubra say everything there is to say about Egypt; those of Fayoum are only used for producing oil and confitures. The *bostangis* (*gardeners*) came from all sides, to offer them to us. There is another luxury at the Pasha's:

they refrain from harvesting the lemons or oranges, so their golden orbs can delight the eyes of those who walk there for as long as possible. However, anyone may gather them after they have fallen. But I have not said anything yet about the gardens. One may criticise the taste of the Orientals as regards the interiors, but their gardens are unassailable. Everywhere there are orchard-groves, flower-beds, and hedges of clipped yews that recall the style of the Renaissance; it is the landscape of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. It is probable that the first models for these gardens were created by Italians. There are no statues, but the fountains are in delightful taste.

A glazed pavilion which crowns a series of terraces arranged in a pyramidal shape, is highlighted against the horizon to truly magical effect. The Caliph Harun al-Rashid probably never possessed a more beautiful one; but that is not all. We exited, after admiring the luxury of the interior, and the silk draperies which fluttered, in the open air, amidst garlands and festoons of greenery; we followed paths, their lengths bordered by lemon trees trimmed to a distaff shape, we traversed banana groves in which the transparent leaves shone like emeralds, and arrived, at the far end of the garden, at baths too marvellous and too well-known to be described at length here. There is an immense basin of white marble, surrounded by arcades and supported by columns in the Byzantine style, with a tall fountain in the middle, from which the water escapes through the mouths of stone crocodiles. The entire enclosure is lit by gas, and, on summer nights, the Pasha is taken for a ride on the pool in a gilded boat (*cange*) the oars of which are plied by the women of his harem. These beautiful ladies also bathe there under the eyes of their master, but in silk crepe dressing gowns... the Koran, as we know, not permitting nudity.

Chapter 11: The Ifrits (*Evil Spirits*)

I was not indifferent to the idea of studying in one Oriental woman the likely character traits of all the others, yet I feared attaching too much importance to minutiae. However, imagine my surprise when, entering the slave's room one morning, I found a garland of onions hanging above the door, and other onions arranged symmetrically above the bed where she slept. Believing that it was a simple childish thing, I detached these ornaments, so unsuitable for adorning the room, and set them down, carelessly, in the courtyard; but lo, the slave rose, furious and with a desolate air, and went to gather them up, weeping, before returning them to their places with signs of adoration. It was necessary, in order to obtain an explanation, to await Mansour's arrival. Meanwhile I suffered a deluge of imprecations, the clearest of which was the word: *Pharaoh!* I was unsure whether to be angry, or to pity her. Finally, Mansour arrived, and I learned that I had nullified *a spell*, and was thus the cause of the terrible misfortunes that would now befall her, and myself.

— 'After all,' I said to Mansour, 'we are in a country where onions have been worshipped as gods (*or at least treated as sacred, according to Juvenal 'Satire XV,9', and Pliny the Elder's*

'*Natural History*, XIX, 32'); if I have offended them, I am only too happy to acknowledge it. There must be some way of appeasing an Egyptian onion's resentment!'

But the slave would not listen and kept repeating, while turning towards me: *Pharaoh!* Mansour told me that this meant 'impious and tyrannical being'. I was affected by this reproach, and less than pleased to learn that the title of the ancient rulers of the country had now become an insult. There was no cause to be angered, however. I was informed that this onion ceremony was commonplace in the houses of Cairo on a certain day of the year; it served to ward off epidemic diseases.

The poor girl's fears were confirmed, probably due to her own excessive powers of imagination. She fell quite seriously ill, and, whatever I tried, refused to follow the doctor's prescription. During my absence, she had called to two women in the neighbouring house, conversing from one terrace to the other, and I found them installed beside her, reciting prayers, and uttering, as Mansour informed me, conjurations against the *Ifrites* or evil spirits. It seems that my profanation of the onions had annoyed the latter, and that there were two who were especially hostile to each of us, one of whom was named the Green One, and the other the Golden.

Seeing that the evil was mostly imaginary, I let the two women alone, they summoning, finally, another very aged woman. She was a renowned *santon*. She brought a stove which she placed in the centre of the room, and on which she burned a piece of what appeared to be alum. This was intended to greatly annoy the *Ifrites*, whom the women saw clearly, amidst the smoke, begging for mercy. But it was necessary to eradicate the evil completely; the slave was made to rise, and lean over the smoke, which caused her to cough violently; during this time, the old woman struck her on the back, while all droned Arab prayers and imprecations.

Mansour, as a Coptic Christian, was shocked by all these practices; but if the illness had a spiritual cause, what harm was there in allowing a corresponding treatment to take effect? The fact remains that, the very next day, there was an obvious improvement, and recovery ensued.

The slave no longer wished to be separated from the two neighbours she had called, and continued to require their services. One was called Cartoum, and the other Zabetta. I saw little need for so many people in the house, and took care not to offer them any payment; however, she gave them gifts from her own effects; and, as these were those that Abd-el-Kerim had left to her, there was nothing to say; however, it was necessary to replace them with others, and to achieve the much-desired acquisition of the *abaya* and the *yalek*.

Oriental life plays such tricks on us; everything seems at first simple, inexpensive, easy. Soon it becomes complicated by needs, customs, fancies, and one finds oneself drawn into an *exorbitant* existence, which, combined with disorder and inaccuracy in accounting, exhausts the best-stocked of purses. I had wished to involve myself, for some time, in the intimate life of Egypt; but little by little I saw my future resources drying up.

— 'My poor child,' I said to the slave, when explaining my situation, 'if you wish to stay in Cairo, you are *free*.'

I expected an explosion of delight, in recognition.

— ‘Free!’ she said, ‘what good is that? Free! But where shall I go? Sell me back to Abd-el-Kerim instead!’

— ‘But, my dear, a European does not sell women; to receive such money would be shameful.’

— ‘Well,’ she said, crying, ‘how can I earn a living? What could I do?’

— ‘Can’t you put yourself at the service of a lady of your religion?’

— ‘Me, a servant? Never. Sell me again: I will be bought by a *Muslim*, by a sheikh, by a Pasha perhaps.

I might become a great lady! You want to leave me?... Take me to the bazaar.’

Behold, a singular country where slaves have no wish for liberty!

I felt, moreover, that she was right, and I already knew enough about the true state of Muslim society not to doubt that her condition as a slave was superior to that of the poor Egyptian women employed, as they were, in the hardest labour, and saddled with wretched husbands. To give her freedom was to condemn her to the saddest state, perhaps to disgrace, and I recognised myself to be morally responsible for her destiny.

— ‘If you don’t wish to stay in Cairo,’ I said to her, finally, ‘you must follow me to other lands.’

— ‘*Ana enté sava-sava* (you and I will go together)!’ she replied.

I was pleased with this resolution, and went to the port of Boulaq to book a *cange* which would take us to the branch of the Nile that leads from Cairo to Damietta.

Part VII: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – The Pyramids, and The Cange



Landscape with pyramids and a caravan, 1830, Otto Baron Howen

[Rijksmuseum](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1839)

Chapter 1: The Ascent

I had resolved to visit the pyramids before leaving Cairo, and I visited the Consul General again to seek his advice regarding the excursion. He wished to accompany me, as before, and we headed towards the Old City. He seemed melancholy during the journey, and coughed a great deal, with a dry cough, as we crossed the plain of Karafeh (*Qarafa*).

I knew he had been ill for a long time, and he himself had told me that he at least wished to examine the pyramids, before he died. I thought he was exaggerating his poor state of health; but when we arrived at the banks of the Nile, he said:

— ‘I feel tired already... I prefer to stay here. Take the boat (*cange*) I’ve arranged; I’ll follow you with my eyes, and believe I’m beside you. I only ask that you count, for me, the

exact number of steps of the Great Pyramid, regarding which the scholars disagree, and, if you reach the other pyramids of Sakkara, I'd be obliged if you'd bring me back a mummified ibis.... I would like to compare the ancient Egyptian ibis with the degenerate race of Eurasian curlews that one meets with on the banks of the Nile.'

I was obliged then to embark alone, from the tip of the island of Roda, thinking sadly of the strength of spirit shown by a man in ill-health who could yet dream of mummified birds on the edge of his own tomb.

The branch of the Nile between Roda and Giza is so wide that it takes about half an hour to cross.

When one has traversed Giza, paying limited attention to its cavalry school, and its chicken hatcheries (*fours à poulets*), and without spending time analysing its ruins, whose thick walls were constructed in a peculiar way, with tiers of mud-brick bordered by masonry, a method of building more light and airy than solid, one still has before oneself five miles of cultivated plain to cover before reaching the sterile plateaux where the great pyramids are placed, on the edge of the Libyan desert.

The closer one gets, the smaller these colossi seem. This is an effect of perspective, probably due to the fact that the width of their base equals their height. However, when one arrives at the foot, in the very shadow of these man-made mountains, one is both terrified and filled with admiration. To reach the summit of the first pyramid one must climb a staircase, each step of which is about a yard high. As they rise, these steps diminish a little — the last by a third at most.

A tribe of Arabs have taken it upon themselves to protect travellers and guide them in their ascent of the Great Pyramid. As soon as these people spot a sightseer heading towards their realm, they race to meet them on their horses, at full gallop, creating a fantastic but peaceful sight, even though they are firing pistol shots into the air to indicate they are at your service, and ready to defend you against the attacks of any thieving Bedouins who may by chance present themselves.

Today, the supposition makes travellers smile, reassured in advance in that regard; but, in the last century, these men indeed laboured in countering a band of mock brigands, who, after having frightened and robbed travellers, surrendered their arms to this protective tribe, who then received a large reward for dealing with the dangers and injuries of a simulated combat.

The King of Egypt's police ended such deceptions. Today, one can trust, utterly, in these Arabs who guard the only ancient wonder of the world that time has preserved for us.

I was assigned four men to guide and support me during my ascent. At first, I did not quite understand how it was possible to climb steps of which the first alone reached chest height. But, in the blink of an eye, two of the Arabs had sprung onto this gigantic seat, and each seized one of my arms. The other two grasped me under the shoulders, while all four, at each movement of this manoeuvre, sang in unison an Arabic verse ending with the ancient refrain: *Eleison!*

I counted two hundred and seven steps, and it took me little more than a quarter of an hour to reach the platform. If you stop for a moment to catch your breath, you see little girls before you, barely covered by blue linen smocks, each of whom, from the step above the one you are climbing, extends, at the height of your mouth, a jug of Theban earthenware, whose icy water refreshes you for a moment.

Nothing is more fantastic than these bare-footed young Bedouin girls, clambering about like monkeys, who know every crevice of the enormous superimposed stones. Arriving at the platform, they are handed *bakshish*, and granted a kiss, then one feels oneself lifted by the arms of the four Arabs, who carry one in triumph to view the horizon's four quarters. The surface of the platform is about a hundred and twenty square yards. Irregular blocks indicate that it was formed only by the destruction of the summit, which was doubtless similar to that of the second pyramid, with its granite covering, which has been preserved intact, and which one can admire close to. The three pyramids of Cheops (*Khufu*), Chephren (*Kafre*) and Mycerinus (*Menkaure*) were all adorned with reddish granite envelopes of this kind, which could still be seen in Herodotus' day. They were gradually stripped when Cairo needed to build the palaces of the Caliphs and Sultans.

As one might imagine, the view from the summit of this platform is very beautiful. The Nile extends to the east, from the tip of the Delta to beyond Sakkara, where eleven pyramids smaller than those of Giza can be distinguished. To the west, the chain of Libyan mountains rises, its undulations marking the dusty horizon. The palm-groves which occupy the site of ancient Memphis, spread towards the south like a greenish shadow. Cairo, backed by the arid Mokattam hills, raises its domes and minarets on high, at the threshold to the Syrian desert. All this is too familiar to lend itself to lengthy description. But, containing one's admiration, and running one's eyes over the stones of the platform, one finds enough there to quell any over-enthusiasm. Every English traveller who has risked the ascent has naturally inscribed his name on a stone. Speculators have even had the idea of carving their address for the benefit of the public, while a manufacturer of shoe-polish, based in Piccadilly, has even had the merits of his discovery, secured by *improved patent* in London, carefully engraved on an entire block. It needs no saying that one will find, among the graffiti, '*Crédeville Voleur*' (*the name, perhaps of an escaped thief, frequently daubed on the walls of Paris in the 1820's*), an inscription no longer in fashion, and the caricature of '*Bouginier*' with its large nose (*another 1820's daub, perhaps an artist mocked by his friends*), along with other eccentricities transplanted by our travelling artists, so as to provide a contrast with the monotony of mighty ruins.

Chapter 2: The Platform

I ask the reader's pardon for commenting on so well-known a subject as the pyramids. However, the little I have to tell has escaped the observation of most of those illustrious scholars who, since the heroic Benoît de Maillet, Louis XIV's Consul General in Cairo, climbed the ladder, the summit of which served me for a moment as a pedestal.

I fear to admit that Napoleon himself only saw the pyramids from the plain. He would not, of course, have compromised his dignity by allowing himself to be carried about in the arms of four Arabs, like a mere parcel passed from hand to hand, and he would have confined himself to acknowledging with a salute, from below, the *forty centuries* which, according to his own calculation, looked down upon him as he lead our year of glory in Egypt.

Having viewed the entire surrounding panorama, and carefully read those modern inscriptions which will torment the scholars of the future, I was preparing to descend, when a fair-haired *gentleman*, of fine stature and high colour, perfectly gloved, ascended, as I had done a short time before him, the last step of the four-sided staircase, and offered me a most formal salute, owed to me as the first comer. I took him for an English gentleman, while he recognised me, at once, as French.

I immediately repented of having classified him too readily. An Englishman would not have greeted me, as there was no one on the platform of Cheops pyramid who could introduce us to each other.

— ‘Sir,’ said the stranger to me with a slightly Germanic accent, ‘I am happy to find someone civilised here. I am simply an officer in the guards of His Majesty the King of Prussia. I have obtained leave to join Karl Lepsius’ expedition, and, as they have been here for some weeks, I am required to bring my knowledge up to date ... by visiting what they have already seen.’

Having finished this speech, he gave me his card, inviting me to visit him, if ever I passed through Potsdam.

— ‘But,’ he added, on seeing that I was preparing to descend, ‘you know that it is customary to take a small collation here. These good people who surround us expect to share our modest provisions ... and, if you have an appetite, I will offer you your share of a pâté which one of my Arabs has brought.’

When travelling, one quickly makes acquaintances, and, in Egypt especially, at the top of the Great Pyramid, every European becomes a *Frank*, with regard every other, that is to say a compatriot; the geographical map of our little Europe loses, at that distance, its sharp divisions.... I make an exception in the case of the English, who always prove insular.

The Prussian’s conversation pleased me greatly during our meal. He carried letters giving the latest news of the expedition of Karl Lepsius, who, at that moment, was exploring the environs of Lake Moeris (*Qarun*), and the subterranean cities of the ancient Serapeum. The scholars from Berlin had discovered entire cities hidden beneath the sand, of brick construction; subterranean Pompeiis, and Herculaneums, which had never seen the light of day, and which perhaps dated back to the time of the troglodytes. I could not but recognise that it was a noble ambition for these Prussian scholars to have wished to follow in the footsteps of our *Institut d’Égypte*, whose admirable work they could, however, merely augment.

To eat a meal on the pyramid of Cheops is, in fact, an obligation forced upon tourists, in a similar manner to that commonly consumed on the top of Pompey’s column, at Alexandria. I was happy to meet this educated and amiable companion, who reminded me of that same. The Bedouin girls had kept back enough water, in their porous earthenware pitchers, to allow us to

refresh ourselves and mix with the water some brandy, from a flask which one of the Arabs attached to the Prussian was carrying.

However, the sun had become too hot for us to remain long on the platform. The pure and invigorating air one breathes at that height, had long prevented our feeling the heat.

It was a question now of leaving the platform, and entering the pyramid itself, the entrance to which is about a third of the way up the face. We were made to descend a hundred and thirty steps by a process opposite to that which had allowed us to climb. Two of the four Arabs suspended us by the shoulders from the top of each course, and delivered us to the outstretched arms of their companions. There is some risk in this proceeding, and more than one traveller has broken his skull or limbs there. However, we arrived without accident at the entrance to the pyramid.

It is a sort of cave with marble walls, a triangular vault, surmounted by a large stone which records, by means of a French inscription, the visit of our soldiers to the monument: it forms the visiting card of the Army of Egypt, sculpted on a block of marble sixteen feet wide. While I was reading it, respectfully, the Prussian officer pointed out to me another legend lower down written in hieroglyphics, and, strange to say, quite freshly engraved.

— ‘They were wrong,’ I said, ‘to have cleaned and refreshed this inscription....’

— ‘Then, you don’t understand hieroglyphics?’ he replied.

— ‘I have taken a vow not to understand them.... I have read too many explanations. I began with Sanchuniathon the Phoenician; I continued with Father Athanasius Kircher’s *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, and ended with Jean-François Champollion’s grammar, after having read the observations in William Warburton’s essay, and those of Baron Cornelius de Pauw. What disenchanted me with these opinions was a pamphlet by Abbé Denis-Auguste Affre — who was not yet Archbishop of Paris — in which he claimed, after discussing the meaning of the Rosetta inscription, that the scholars of Europe had agreed on a fictitious explanation of hieroglyphics, in order to be able to establish throughout Europe chairs specialising in the language, and commonly remunerated at a salary of six thousand francs.’

— ‘Or fifteen hundred thalers’, the Prussian officer added judiciously... ‘which is approximately the corresponding sum with us. But let us not joke about it: you French unravelled the grammar; I know the alphabet, and I shall read this inscription to you as readily as a schoolboy reads Greek once he knows the letters, except that he would hesitate more at the meaning of the words.’

The officer did indeed know the meaning of these modern hieroglyphs, written according to Champollion’s system of grammar; he began to read, looked up the syllables in his notebook, and said to me:

— ‘It says that the scientific expedition sent by the king of Prussia, and led by Karl Lepsius, has visited the pyramids of Giza, and that they hope to overcome, with like success, the other difficulties of their mission.’

I immediately repented of my scepticism, thinking of the fatigue and danger braved by those scholars who were exploring, at that very moment, the ruins of the Serapeum.

We had passed the entrance to the cave: about twenty bearded Arabs, their belts bristling with pistols and daggers, rose from the ground where they had been taking a nap. One of our guides, who seemed to be directing the others, said to us:

— ‘See how terrible they are!... Look at their pistols and rifles!’

— ‘Do they seek to rob us?’

— ‘On the contrary! They are here to defend you in case you are attacked by the desert hordes.’

— ‘It is said there are none left under Muhammad Ali’s rule!’

— ‘Oh! There are still many wicked people, over there, beyond the mountains.... However, for a *colonatte* (a *Spanish piastre*, a *piece of eight*) the people you see, will act as your defence against any external attack.’

The Prussian officer inspected the weapons, and seemed unimpressed with regard to their destructive power. It was, in fact, a matter of a levy of a mere five francs and fifty centimes in our money, or a thaler and a half in the Prussian’s. We accepted the bargain, sharing the cost, while observing that we were not fooled by the claim.

— ‘It often happens,’ said the guide, ‘that enemy tribes invade this area, especially when they suspect the presence of rich foreigners here.’

— ‘Come,’ I said to him, ‘that is proverbial, as is accepted by all!’ I then remembered that Napoleon himself, visiting the interior of the pyramids, in company with the wife of one of his colonels, had exposed himself to the danger that the guide supposed. A party of Bedouins, who had arrived unexpectedly, had, it is said, dispersed his escort and blocked with large stones the entrance to the pyramid, which is only five feet in height and width. A squadron of hunters who had arrived by chance pulled him out of danger.

Indeed, the tale is not impossible, and it would be a sad matter to find oneself trapped, and sealed, inside the Great Pyramid. The fee paid to the guards assured, at least, that in all conscience they would not play that joke on us too readily.

But what sign was there that these good people possessed such thoughts, even for a moment? The energy involved in their preparations, some eight torches being lit in the blink of an eye, the charming detail of our being preceded again by the water-bearers, those girls of whom I spoke, all this, without doubt, was very reassuring.

It was a question of bending our heads and backs, and placing our feet skilfully in the two stone grooves which reign on both sides of this descent. Between the two grooves, there is a sort of abyss as wide as the space between one’s parted legs, into which one must avoid falling. One advances, therefore, step by step, one’s feet straddling the gap, as best one can, to right and left, though supported a little, it is true, by the hands of the torch-bearers, and one descends thus, always bent double, for about a hundred and fifty paces.

From there on, the risk of falling into the enormous crack that one can see between one’s feet suddenly ceases, and is replaced by the inconvenience of passing, flat on one’s stomach,

beneath a vault partly obstructed by sand, and dust. The Arabs only clean this passage on payment of another *Spanish piastre*, a fee usually acceded to by wealthy and corpulent people.

When one has crawled for some time, under this low vault, employing hands and knees, one rises again, at the entrance to a fresh corridor, hardly taller than the previous one. After another two hundred paces, all uphill, one reaches a sort of crossroads, the centre of which is a vast, deep, dark well, around which one must turn to reach the staircase leading to the King's Chamber.

On arriving there, the Arabs fired pistol shots, and lit fires made of branches, to frighten away, they said, the bats and snakes— though, surely, snakes would be careful not to inhabit such remote dwellings. As for the bats, they do exist, and make themselves known by uttering cries and fluttering around the fires. The room in which we stood, vaulted like a donkey's back, is thirty-four feet long and seventeen feet wide. It is difficult to comprehend that this limited space, intended either for tombs or for some chapel or temple, was arranged to form the principal retreat within the immense stone ruin which now surrounds it.

Two or three similar chambers have since been discovered. Their granite walls are blackened by the smoke of torches. There is no trace of tombs in any of these, except a porphyry sarcophagus eight feet in length which may well have served to enclose the remains of a Pharaoh. However, the tradition of the oldest excavations only records the discovery in the pyramids of the bones of an ox.

What astonishes the traveller, in the midst of those funereal chambers, is that one breathes there only hot air impregnated with bituminous odours. Moreover, one sees nothing but corridors and walls — no hieroglyphics or sculptures — smoky walls, vaults, and rubble.

We returned to the entrance, quite disenchanted with our arduous journey, and wondered what this immense building could represent.

— 'It is obvious,' the Prussian officer said to me, 'that these are not tombs. Where was the need to build such enormous constructions to preserve perhaps only a king's coffin? It is obvious that such a mass of stones, brought from Upper Egypt, could not have been assembled and put in place during the lifetime of a single man. Why should this sovereign have possessed the desire to be set apart in a tomb five hundred feet high — when almost all the dynasties of Egyptian kings were interred modestly in hypogea, and subterranean sanctuaries? It would be better to rely on the opinion of the ancient Greeks, who, being closer than we are to the priests and institutions of Egypt, saw in the pyramids only religious monuments dedicated to sacred initiation.'

On returning from our rather unsatisfactory exploration, we had to rest at the entrance to the marble cave — and wondered what the purpose was of the strange corridor which we had just ascended, with its two stone rails separated by an abyss, ending further on at that crossroads in the midst of which was the mysterious well, the bottom of which we had been unable to see.

The Prussian officer, consulting his notebook, gave me a fairly logical explanation of the purpose of such a monument. No one is more adept than a German in the mysteries of antiquity. Here, according to his notes, the purpose of the low gallery, complete with its rails, that we had descended and re-ascended with such difficulty, was described: the initiate who

presented himself to undergo the religious test, was seated in a cart; the cart descended the corridor's steep slope. Having arrived at the centre of the pyramid, the initiate was received by the priests below who showed him the well, and urged him to hurl himself therein.

The neophyte naturally hesitated, which was considered a sign of prudence. Then, a sort of helmet surmounted by a lighted lamp was brought to him; and, equipped with this device, he was required to descend, cautiously, into the well, where he encountered here and there iron steps on which he could place his feet.

The initiate descended for a long time, his path illuminated somewhat by the lamp he carried on his head; then, about a hundred feet down, he encountered the entrance to a corridor closed by a gate, which immediately opened before him. Three men instantly appeared, wearing bronze masks with the face of Anubis, the jackal-headed god. It was necessary to disregard their threats, and walk on, after toppling the men to the ground. The initiate then travelled some distance, and arrived at a considerable space, as dark as a dense forest.

As soon as he set foot on the main path, all was illuminated instantly, producing the effect of a vast fire. But nothing was employed other than fireworks and bituminous substances held in iron frames. The neophyte had to cross this 'forest', at the cost of a few burns, and generally succeeded.

Beyond was a river that had to be swum across. Scarcely had he reached the middle when an immense agitation of the waters, caused by the movement of two gigantic wheels, halted him and thrust him back. At the moment when his strength was almost exhausted, he saw an iron ladder appear before him which seemed to offer him an escape from perishing in the water. This was the third test. As the initiate placed a foot on each rung, the one he had just left broke loose, and fell into the river. This painful situation was complicated by a dreadful gale which made the ladder and the neophyte tremble at the same time. At the moment when he was about to lose his grip, he needed the presence of mind to seize two steel rings which descended towards him, and from which he was forced to hang, suspended by his arms, until he saw a door open, which he could reach only by a violent effort.

This was the last of the four elementary tests. The initiate then continued, and reached the temple, walked around the statue of Isis, and was received and congratulated by the priests.

Chapter 3: The Initiation Tests

Such are the legends with which we sought to repopulate the imposing solitude. Amidst the Arabs, who had resumed their sleep, waiting to leave the marble grotto until the evening breeze had refreshed the air, we added the most diverse hypotheses to those facts actually recorded by ancient tradition. The bizarre initiation ceremonies so often described by Greek authors, who were alive to witness them, took on a greater interest for us, their stories being perfectly in keeping with the layout of the place.

— ‘How wonderful it would be,’ I said to the German, ‘to present and perform Mozart’s *Magic Flute* here! How could a wealthy man not fancy granting himself the spectacle? For very little money, one could have all these conduits cleared, and then it would suffice to bring an entire Italian troupe from the Cairo theatre to this place, in full costume. Imagine the thunderous voice of *Sarastro* resonating from the depths of the King’s Chamber, or the *Queen of the Night* appearing on the threshold of the Queen’s Chamber, as they have named it, and launching her cascade of bright trills towards the dark vault. Imagine the sounds of the magic flute through these long corridors, and the grimaces and terror of *Papageno*, forced to follow in the footsteps of the initiate, his master, and confront the triple Anubis, then the burning forest, then the dark canal stirred by iron wheels, then that strange ladder from which each step detaches itself, as one climbs, and makes the water echo with a sinister lapping sound....’

— ‘It would be difficult,’ said the officer, ‘to carry all this out within the interior of the pyramid itself.... I have said that the initiate followed a corridor, from the pool, of some distance in length. This underground path led him to a temple situated at the gates of Memphis, the location of which you saw from the top of the platform. When, his trials completed, he saw the light of day again, the statue of Isis still remained veiled: so that he had to undergo a final, spiritual test, of which none had warned him, and whose goal remained hidden. The priests had carried him in triumph, as if he had become one of them; the choirs and the instruments had celebrated his victory. He still had to purify himself by a fast of forty-one days, before being able to contemplate the great goddess, the widow of Osiris. This fast ended each day at sunset, when he was allowed to restore his strength with a little bread, and a cup of Nile water. During this long penance, the initiate could converse, at certain hours, with the priests and priestesses, whose entire life was spent in the subterranean chambers. He had the right to question each one, and to observe the customs of this group of mystics who had renounced the external world, and whose immense number terrified Semiramis the Victorious, when, in laying the foundations of the Babylon of Egypt (Old Cairo), she witnessed the collapse of one of these necropolises, inhabited by the living.’

— ‘And after the forty-one days, what happened to the initiate?’

— ‘He still had to undergo eighteen days of retreat, during which he had to keep complete silence. He was only allowed to read and write. Then he was made to undergo an examination, during which all the actions of his life were analysed and critiqued. This lasted another twelve days; then he was made to sleep for nine more days behind the statue of Isis, after having implored the goddess to appear to him in his dreams and to inspire him with wisdom. Finally, after three months or so, the trials were over. The neophyte’s devotion towards the Divinity, aided by readings, instructions, and fasting, brought him to such a degree of enthusiasm that he was finally worthy of seeing the sacred veils of the goddess fall. There, his astonishment reached its height on seeing the cold stone come to life, whose features had suddenly acquired a resemblance to the woman he loved the most, or of the ideal that he had formed of the most perfect beauty.

At the moment when he stretched out his arms to seize her, she vanished in a perfumed cloud. The priests entered in great pomp, and the initiate was proclaimed as akin to the gods.

Then taking his place at the banquet of the sages, he was allowed to taste the most delicate dishes, and to intoxicate himself with the earthly ambrosia which was not lacking at these festivals. Only one regret remained to him, it was to have admired for only a moment that divine apparition which had deigned to smile upon him.... His dreams would return her to him. A long sleep, doubtless due to the juice of the lotus squeezed into his drinking-cup during the feast, allowed the priests to transport him many miles from Memphis, to the edge of the famous lake which still bears the name of Quarun. A *cange* received him, still asleep, and transported him to the delightful oasis of Faiyum, which is a rose-garden, even today. There was a deep valley there, partly surrounded by hills, also separated in part from the rest of the countryside by chasms dug by human hands, where the priests had gathered together the scattered riches of earth. Trees from India and Yemen united their dense foliage, and alien flowers, with the richest vegetation of Egypt.

Tamed creatures gave life to this marvellous stage-set, and the initiate, laid asleep on the grass, found himself, on awakening, in a world which seemed the very perfection of created Nature. He rose, to breathe the pure morning air, reborn in the heat of the sun which he had not seen for a long time; he listened to the tuneful song of the birds, admired the fragrant flowers, the calm surface of the waters bordered with papyrus and studded with red lotuses, where pink flamingos and ibises displayed their graceful curves. But something was still missing to animate the solitude. A woman, an innocent virgin, so young that she herself seemed to emerge from a pure dawn dream, so beautiful that on looking at her more closely one could recognise there the lovely features of Isis as if glimpsed through mist: such was the divine creature who became the companion and reward of the triumphant initiate.'

Here I felt obliged to interrupt the Berlin scholar's colourful story:

— 'You appear,' I said, 'to be retelling the story of Adam and Eve.'

— 'Very much so,' he replied.

Indeed, the last ordeal, so charming, and unexpected, of the Egyptian initiation was the same that Moses recounted in the second chapter of Genesis. In this marvellous garden existed a certain tree whose fruits were forbidden to the neophyte admitted to paradise. It is so certain that this last victory over the self was a feature of the initiation, that four thousand years old bas-reliefs have been found in Upper Egypt, representing a man and a woman beneath the branches of a tree, the fruit of which the latter offers to her companion in solitude. Around the tree is twined a serpent, a representation of Typhon, the god of evil. It generally happened that the initiate, having conquered all material perils, allowed himself to be seduced by this creature, the outcome of which was his exclusion from the earthly paradise. His punishment was then to wander the world and spread the instructions he had received from the priests among foreign nations.

If, on the contrary, he resisted the last temptation, which was very rare, he became the equal of a king. He was paraded in triumph through the streets of Memphis, and his person was sacred.

It was for having failed this test that Moses was deprived of the honour he expected. Wounded by the outcome, he entered into open war with the Egyptian priests, fought against

them with science and marvels, and ended by delivering his people, by means of a scheme whose result is well known. The Prussian who told me all this was obviously a follower of Voltaire.... The fellow was still of the school, sceptical of religion, espoused by Frederick II. I could not help but make that observation to him.

— ‘You are mistaken, he said to me: we Protestants analyse everything; but we are no less religious. If it appears demonstrable that the idea of the earthly paradise, of the apple and the serpent, was known to the ancient Egyptians, that in no way proves that the tradition is not of a divine nature. I am even disposed to believe that this last test of the mysteries was only a mystical representation of the scene which must have taken place in the first days of the world. Whether Moses learned this from the Egyptians, the depositaries of primitive wisdom, or whether he used, in writing Genesis, the experiences which he himself had undergone, that does not invalidate primal truth. Triptolemus, Orpheus, and Pythagoras also underwent the same tests. The first founded the mysteries of Eleusis, the second those of the Cabeiri of Samothrace, the third the mystic cults of Lebanon.

Orpheus was less successful than Moses though; he failed the fourth test, in which one required the presence of mind to grasp the rings suspended above, as the iron rungs began to fail under one’s feet.... He fell back into the pool, from which he was dragged with difficulty, and, instead of reaching the temple, was forced to turn back, and climb to the pyramid’s exit. During the test, he had been robbed of his wife, by one of those natural accidents which the priests easily mimicked. He was allowed, thanks to his talent and status, to take the tests again, and failed them a second time. Thus, it was that Eurydice was lost to him forever, and that he found himself reduced to mourning her in exile.’

— ‘On that basis,’ I said, ‘it is possible to explain all religion materialistically. But what will we gain by it?’

— ‘Nothing. We have spent two hours talking about history and origins. Now, evening is falling; let us return to the plain and visit the Sphinx of Giza.’

The Sphinx has been too often described for me to speak here of anything other than the admirable preservation of its form — sixty-six feet high. It is evident that this granite rock was sculpted at a time when art was quite advanced. Its broken nose grants it, from a distance, an Ethiopian air; but the rest of the face belongs to one of the most beautiful races of Asia. — We then contented ourselves with admiring the other two pyramids, which have preserved a part of their limestone covering. The second has been opened; but only two or three stone tables similar to those we had visited in the first were found there; the third, the smallest, which the Arabs call *The Daughter’s Pyramid* — in memory, no doubt, of the courtesan Rhodope, who is supposed to have had it built — is unexplored. Around the sandy plateau of the three pyramids are the remains of temples and hypogea. A few broken sarcophagi lie about, here and there, as well as a multitude of greenish faience figurines, among which one rarely finds whole ones. The Arabs wanted to sell us some; but it seemed probable that they had not been found on the spot. There must be factories that turn them out in Cairo, like those producing the Etruscan vases sold in Naples.

We spent the night in an Italian *locanda* (*inn*), situated nearby, and, the next day, were taken to the site of Memphis, situated about six miles to the south. The ruins there are unrecognisable; and, moreover, the whole is covered by a forest of palm-trees, in the midst of which one finds an immense statue of Sesostri (Ramesses II), sixty feet high, but lying flat on its stomach in the sand. Shall I make mention again of Sakkara, where we next arrived, and of its pyramids, smaller than those of Giza, among which one can distinguish the great pyramid of bricks built by Hebraic workmen? A more curious spectacle is the interior of the tombs of sacred animals, found in the plain in great numbers. There are those of cats, crocodiles and ibises. They are very difficult of entry; one breathes ashes and dust, sometimes dragging oneself through conduits where one can only pass on one's knees. Then one finds oneself in the midst of vast underground passages where one finds millions of these animals, symmetrically arranged, that the good Egyptians took the trouble to embalm and bury, like people. Each cat-mummy is wrapped in several yards of bandages, on which, hieroglyphics are inscribed, from end to end, probably extolling the life and virtues of the animal. The same is true of the crocodiles.... As for the ibises, their remains are enclosed in earthenware Theban vases, also heaped over an incalculable area like jars of jam in a country pantry.

I was able to fulfil, there, the commission I had been charged with by the Consul; after which I parted from the Prussian officer, who continued his route towards Upper Egypt, while I returned to Cairo, descending the Nile by boat.

I hastened to take to the consulate that ibis obtained at the cost of so much effort; but I was informed that, during the three days devoted to my exploration, our poor Consul had felt his illness worsen, and had embarked for Alexandria.

I afterwards learnt that he had died in Spain.

Chapter 4: Departure

It is with regret that I leave this ancient city of Cairo, in which I have found the last traces of Arabian genius, and which has not betrayed the idea I had formed of it, based on the stories and traditions of the Orient. I had seen it so many times in the dreams of my youth, that it seemed to me I had dwelt there in some past age; I recreated my Cairo of yesteryear amidst deserted streets and crumbling mosques! It seemed to me that I was imprinting my feet on the traces of my ancient steps. I walked about, repeating this phrase to myself: 'In turning this corner, in traversing this doorway, I will see such and such a thing! ...' and the thing was there, ruined but still real.

Let me think of it no more. That Cairo lies beneath ashes and dust; the spirit of modern progress has triumphed over it, like death. In a few months, European streets will criss-cross, at right angles, that dusty and silent old city that is crumbling peacefully around the poor fellahin. What gleams, what shines, what expands, is the Frankish quarter, the city of the Italians, the Provençaux, and the Maltese, the future warehouse of Anglo-India. The Orient of

yesteryear still wears its old costumes, its ancient palaces, its former customs, but is living its last days; it can say like one of its sultans: 'Fate has fired its arrow: all is over for me, I am done with!' What the desert still defends, by burying it little by little in the sand, lies beyond the walls of Cairo, in the city of tombs, and the valley of the Caliphs, which, like Herculaneum, have sheltered vanished generations, and whose palaces, arches, and columns, whose precious marbles, painted and gilded interiors, enclosures, domes and minarets, multiplied to excess, have served only to cover coffins. This cult of death is an eternal characteristic of Egypt, one which serves at least to protect and transmit to the world the dazzling history of its past.

The Cange (*The Boat*)

Chapter 1: Preparations for the Voyage

The *cange* which bore me to Damietta, contained all the domestic items which I had gathered in Cairo during my eight-month stay, namely: the golden-skinned slave sold by Abd-el-Kerim; the green chest which contained the effects which the latter had left her; another chest filled with those which I had added myself; another still, containing my Frankish clothes, the last being in case of misfortune, like that shepherd's smock which an emperor kept to remind him of his former status; then all the utensils and movable objects with which it had been necessary to furnish my home in the Coptic quarter, consisting of jugs and glasses suitable for containing water for refreshment; pipes and hookahs; cotton mattresses; and frames (*cafes*) made of palm fronds serving alternately as sofa, bed, and table, which had moreover the advantage for the journey of being able to contain my various farmyard and dovecote birds.

Before departing, I went to take leave of Madame Bonhomme, that blonde and charming mentor to the traveller.

— 'Alas!' I said to myself, 'I will see only foreign faces for many a day; I will brave the plague that reigns in the delta, the storms of the Gulf of Syria, that must be crossed in a frail boat; the sight of her will represent for me the last smile of my homeland!'

Madame Bonhomme belongs to that type of blonde southern beauty that Carlo Gozzi celebrated in his Venetian pieces, and that Petrarch sang of, in honouring the women of Provence. It seems that these graceful anomalies owe to the proximity of Alpine uplands the *frizzy gold* of their hair, and that their black eyes alone are kindled by the ardour of Mediterranean shores. That complexion, fine and clear as the pink satin skin of Flemish women, is coloured, in places the sun has touched, with a faint amber tint that makes one think of autumn vines, when the white grape is half-veiled beneath the vermilion shoots. O figures beloved by Titian and Giorgione, is it here on the banks of the Nile you will leave me with only a regret and a memory? However, I had still near me another woman with hair as black as

ebony, with a firm mask that seemed carved in portoro marble, a stern and serious beauty like that of the idols of ancient Asia, and whose very grace, at once servile and wild, sometimes recalled, if one dares to unite the two words, the serious liveliness of a captive animal.

Madame Bonhomme had ushered me into her shop, which was cluttered with travel goods, and I listened to her, admiringly, as she detailed the merits of all those charming utensils which, for the English, reproduce, at need, in the desert, all the comforts of modern life. She explained to me in her light Provençal accent how one could establish, at the foot of a palm tree or an obelisk, complete rooms for masters and servants, with furniture, and kitchenware, all transported on camelback; and give European dinners in which nothing is lacking, neither stews nor early vegetables, thanks to those cans of preserves which, it must be admitted, are often a fine resource.

— ‘Alas!’ I said to her, I have become quite a Bedouin; I eat durra cooked on a metal plate, dates fried in butter, apricot-paste, smoked locusts..., and I know a method of boiling a chicken in the desert, without even taking the trouble to pluck it.’

— ‘I am unaware of that refinement,’ said Madame Bonhomme.

— ‘Here’, I replied, ‘is the recipe, given to me by a very industrious renegade, who saw it practiced in the Hedjaz. One takes a hen....’

— ‘One requires a hen?’ said Madame Bonhomme.

— ‘Absolutely, like the hare for a stew.’

— ‘And then?’

— ‘Then one lights a fire between two large stones; one obtains water....’

— ‘That’s already a fair number of ingredients!’

— ‘Nature provides them. Even if there is only sea water, it’s all the same, and saves the need for salt.’

— ‘And into what will you place the chicken?’

— ‘Ah! Here is the most ingenious part. One pours water into the desert sand... another requisite granted by nature. This produces a fine clean clay, extremely useful for the purpose.’

— ‘Must I eat a chicken boiled in sand?’

— ‘I ask one last moment of your attention. One forms a thick ball of this clay, taking care to insert this same chicken or other poultry’.

— ‘This is becoming interesting.’

— ‘One sets the ball of clay on the fire, and turns it from time to time. When the crust has hardened sufficiently and has taken on a good colour everywhere, it must be removed from the fire: the poultry is cooked.’

— ‘And that’s it?’

— ‘Not yet: one breaks the ball of baked clay, and the feathers of the bird, trapped in the clay, are freed as we rescue it from the fragments of our improvised pot.’

— ‘But this is a savage feast!’

— ‘No, it is merely baked chicken.’

Madame Bonhomme saw that, clearly, there was nothing to be done for such an accomplished traveller; she returned all the kitchen utensils to their place, also the hotplates, rubber tents, cushions, and the beds stamped, in English: ‘*Improved patent.*’

— ‘However,’ I said to her, ‘I would like to purchase from you something of real use to me.’

— ‘Well,’ said Madame Bonhomme, ‘I’m sure you’ve forgotten to bring a flag. You will need a flag.’

— ‘But I’m not going to war!’

— ‘You are about to descend the Nile.... You need a tricolour flag at the stern of your boat, to gain the respect of the fellahin.’

And she showed me, along the walls of the store, a series of flags of all the European navies.

I was already drawing towards me the gold-tipped pole from which our colours unfurled, when Madame Bonhomme grasped my arm.

— ‘You may choose; one is not obliged to reveal one’s nationality. All such gentlemen, usually, take an English flag; it offers one greater security.’

— ‘Oh! Madame,’ I replied, ‘I am not one of those gentlemen.’

— ‘I thought so,’ she said, with a smile.

I like to believe that no Parisian would parade English colours on the waters of the ancient Nile, in which the flag of the Republic was once reflected. Legitimists, on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, select instead the flag of Sardinia, which avoids any such drawback.

Chapter 2: A Family Celebration

We left from the port of Bulaq. The palace of some Mamluk bey, which is now the Polytechnic School; the white mosque next to it; the potters’ stalls on the shore, on the shelves of which are displayed the porous faience pots made in Thebes, that navigation of the upper Nile reveals; the construction sites that still line the right bank of the river to quite a distance, all these disappeared in a few minutes. We tacked towards an alluvial island, situated on the stretch between Bulaq and Imbabah, whose sandy shore soon received the shock of our prow; the lateen sails of the cange shivered without catching the wind.

— ‘*Battal! Battal!*’ cried the *reis* (captain).

That is to say: ‘Bad! Bad!’

It was probably the wind. Indeed, the reddish wave, raised by a contrary breath, threw its foam in our faces, and the eddy took on the hue of slate, dyeing the reflections of the sky.

The men went ashore to clear the cange, and turn it over. Then began one of those songs with which Egyptian sailors accompany all their manœuvres and which invariably have as their refrain: *eleison!* While five or six fellows, stripped in an instant of their blue tunics, who looked like Florentine bronze statues, laboured at this work, their legs plunged into the mud, the *reis*, seated like a pasha on the bow, smoked his hookah with an air of indifference. A quarter of an hour later, we returned to Boulaq, half-leaning over the oar-blade, with the tips of the yards dipping in the water.

We had barely covered two hundred paces of the river's course: we had to turn the boat around, this time caught in the reeds, to reach the sandy island again.

— '*Battal! Battal!*' the *reis* cried, from time to time.

I recognised, on my right, the gardens of the smiling villas that line the Shubra promenade; the monstrous sycamores that form it resounded with the shrill croaking of crows, sometimes interrupted by the sinister cries of kites.

As for the rest, not a lotus, not an ibis, not a trace of the local colour of yesteryear; only, here and there, large buffaloes plunged into the water, and Pharaoh cockerels, a sort of small pheasant with golden feathers, fluttered above the orange and banana trees of the gardens.

I forgot to mention the obelisk of Heliopolis, which marks with its stone finger the neighbouring edge of the Syrian desert, and which I regretted having seen only from afar. This monument never left the horizon that day, because the cange continued to pursue its course in zigzags.

Evening came, the sun's disk was sinking behind the unmoving line of the Libyan mountains, and suddenly Nature passed from the violet shadows of twilight, to the bluish darkness of night. I saw from afar the lights, swimming in their pools of transparent oil, of a café; the strident chord of the *ney* (*flute*) and *rebab* (*viol*) accompanied that well-known Egyptian melody: *Ya leyla!* (*O Night!*)

Other voices formed the *responses* to the first verse: 'O night of joy!' They sang of the happiness of friends gathered together, of love and desire, divine flames, radiant emanations of the *pure light* which exists only in heaven; they invoked *Ahmad* (*a diminutive of Muhammad, the Prophet*), the chosen one, head of the apostles, and children's voices took up in chorus the antistrophe of that delightful and sensual utterance which calls on the Lord to bless the nocturnal joys of the earth.

I saw that it was, clearly, a family celebration. The strange clucking of the fellahin women succeeded the children's chorus, and might well have celebrated a death as easily as a marriage; for, in all the ceremonies of the Egyptians, one recognizes that mixture of plaintive joy, or plaint interspersed with joyful transport, which, in the ancient world, once presided over all life's events.

The *reis* had moored our boat to a stake planted in the sand, and was preparing to disembark. I asked him if we were only stopping awhile in the village before us; he replied that we would

spend the night there and even remain there next day until three, when the southwest wind rises (it was the monsoon season).

— ‘I thought,’ I said to him, ‘that the boat would be hauled by ropes when the wind was against us.’

— ‘That is not,’ he replied, ‘in the agreement.’

It was true that, before leaving, I had signed a document before the *cadi*; and these people had obviously included everything they desired. However, I am never in a hurry to arrive, and this circumstance, which would have made an English traveller leap with indignation, only provided me with the opportunity to study more closely the ancient branch of the Nile, barely cleared, which contains the river’s flow from Cairo to Damietta.

The *reis*, who had expected me to complain violently, admired my serenity. Hauling a boat is relatively expensive, since, in addition to a larger crew, it requires the assistance of relay men stationed from village to village.

A *cange* contains two cabins, elegantly painted and gilded inside, with window-grilles overlooking the river, and framing the landscape on either side in a most pleasant manner; painted flower-baskets, and complicated arabesques, adorn the panels; a pair of wooden chests flank each room, and allow one, during the day, to sit cross-legged, and at night, to stretch out on mats or cushions. Ordinarily, the first cabin serves as a *divan*, the second as a *harem*. The whole is closed, and hermetically sealed, except against the privileged rats of the Nile, whose society one must, however, accept. Mosquitoes and other insects prove even less pleasant companions; but one avoids their perfidious approaches at night by means of a long shirt whose front one fastens after entering as if into a sack, and which clothes the head in a double veil of gauze, beneath which one can breathe perfectly well.

It seemed that we were to spend the night aboard, and I was already preparing to do so, when the captain who had gone ashore, came to me, and invited me, ceremoniously, to accompany him. I had some scruples about leaving the slave in the cabin, and he himself suggested that it would be better to take her with us.

Chapter 3: The Mutahir (*The Circumcised*)

As I climbed down onto the bank, I realized that we had landed at Shubra. The Pasha’s gardens, with the myrtle arches which decorated the entrance, were before us; a cluster of dilapidated dwellings built of mud-brick stretched to our left on both sides of the path; the *café* which I had noticed, bordered the river, and the neighbouring house was that of the *reis* himself, who asked us to enter.

— ‘It was hardly worth spending the whole day on the Nile,’ I said to myself, ‘when here I am only a few miles from Cairo!’

I wanted to return there, and spend the evening reading the newspapers at Madame Bonhomme's; but the reis had already invited us into his house, and it was clear that a celebration was in progress, which it was requisite to attend.

In fact, the songs we had heard had come from there; a crowd of swarthy people, with Nubians intermingled, seemed to be giving themselves over to transports of joy. The reis, whose Frankish dialect seasoned with Arabic I understood only imperfectly, finally gave me to understand that it was a family celebration in honor of the circumcision of his son. I understood then why we had travelled so short a distance.

A ceremony had taken place the day before at the mosque, and this was merely the second day of the festivities. Family celebrations among the poorest Egyptians are public feasts, and the street was full of people: about thirty children, school-friends of the young man to be circumcised (*the mutahir*), filled a low-ceilinged room; the women, relatives or friends of the wife of the reis, formed a circle in the back room, and we halted at this door. From afar, the reis indicated, to the slave who followed me, a place near his wife, and the former without hesitation, went to sit on the carpet of the *khanum* (*the lady*), after having made the customary greetings.

Coffee and pipes were distributed, and the Nubian women began to dance to the sound of the *darbukalars* (*terracotta drums*), which several women held, grasping a drum in one hand, and striking it with the other. The family of the reis was doubtless too poor to employ Egyptian *almahs*, but the Nubians danced for pleasure. The *loti* or chorus-leader performed the usual antics while guiding the steps of four women who were engaged in the wild saltarello that I have already described, and which hardly varies except as regards the greater or lesser ardour of the performers.

During one of the intervals in the music and dancing, the reis had me take a seat near an old man whom he told me was his father. This good man, on learning my country of origin, welcomed me with an oath, French in essence, which his pronunciation transformed in a comical way. It was all he had retained of the language of the victors of 1898. I answered him by shouting:

— 'Napoleon!'

He appeared not to understand. This surprised me; but I quickly realised that the name only dated from the Empire.

— 'Did you know Bonaparte?' I asked him in Arabic.

He leant his head back, and, in a sort of solemn reverie, began to sing at the top of his voice:

— '*Ya salaam, Bounabarteh*' ('Peace be with you, Bonaparte'!)

I could not help bursting into tears as I listened to the old man repeat that Egyptian song in honour of him whom they called Sultan Kebir (*the Grand Sultan*). I urged him to sing the whole; but his memory retained only a few lines.

‘You have made us sigh by your absence, O general who takes sugar with coffee! O charming general whose cheeks are so pleasing; you whose sword struck the Turks! Greetings to you!

O you whose hair is so lovely! Since the day you entered Cairo, this city has shone with a light like that of a crystal lamp; greetings to you!’

However, the reis, indifferent to these memories, had gone to find the children, and everything was ready for a new ceremony.

Indeed, the children quickly ranged themselves in two lines, and the other people gathered in the house rose; for it was a question now of parading the circumcised child about the village, having already been paraded in Cairo the day before. A richly-harnessed horse was brought, and the little fellow, who might have been seven years old, dressed in women’s clothes and ornamentation (all probably borrowed), was hoisted onto the saddle, where his parents supported him, one either side. He was as proud as an emperor, and held, according to custom, a handkerchief over his mouth. I did not dare to look at him too closely, knowing that Orientals fear the *evil eye* in such cases; but I took note of all the details of the procession, which I had not been able to observe as closely in Cairo, where such processions of *mutahirs* hardly differ from those of weddings.

There were no naked jesters here, simulating combat with lances and shields; but Nubians, mounted on stilts, chased each other with long sticks: this was to attract a crowd; then the musicians began the parade; next came the children, dressed in their finest costumes, and guided by five or six *faqihs* or santons, who sang religious *moals* (*elegiac songs*); then the child on horseback, surrounded by his parents, and finally the women of the family, in the midst of whom walked the unveiled dancers, who, at each halt, recommenced their voluptuous stamping. Present, too, were bearers of perfumed censers, and children shaking *kumkums*, flasks of rose water, with which they sprinkle the spectators; but the most important personage in the procession was undoubtedly the barber, holding in his hand the mysterious instrument (which the poor child was later to test), while his assistant waved at the end of a lance a sort of ensign bearing the attributes of his trade. In front of the mutahir was one of his comrades, carrying, hung about his neck, a writing case decorated by the schoolmaster with calligraphic masterpieces. Behind the horse, a woman was continually throwing salt to ward off evil spirits. The march was closed by the hired women, who serve as mourners at funerals and accompany the ceremonies of marriage and circumcision too, with their identical ‘*olouloulou*’, the tradition of which is lost in remotest antiquity.

While the procession was passing through the few streets of the little village of Shubra, I remained with the grandfather of the mutahir, having experienced every difficulty in preventing my slave from following the other women. It had been necessary to employ that ‘*mafisch*’, all-powerful among the Egyptians, to forbid her what she regarded as a religious duty required out of politeness. The Nubians were preparing the tables and decorating the room with greenery. Meanwhile, I tried to excite in the old man a few flashes of memory, by filling his ears, employing the little Arabic that I knew, with the glorious names of Jean-Baptiste Kléber and Jacques-François Menou. He remembered only Colonel Barthélémy (*Jacques Barthélémy Marin*), the former chief of police of Cairo, who was remembered by the people, because of

his great height, and the magnificent costume he wore. Barthélémy inspired love songs of which not only the women have preserved the memory:

— ‘My *beloved* wears an embroidered hat — bows and rosettes adorn his belt.’

— ‘I wanted to kiss him; he said to me: *Aspetta* (*wait*)! Oh! how sweet his Italian!

— Allah save him whose eyes are those of a gazelle!’

— ‘How handsome you are, Bart-el-Roumy, when you proclaim peace, *firman* (*edict*) in hand!’

Chapter 4: The Sirafeh (*The Circumcision*)

At the entrance of the mutahir, all the children came to sit, four by four, around the circular tables where the schoolmaster, the barber, and the santons occupied the places of honour. The other adults waited until the end of the meal to take part in turn. The Nubians sat down in front of the door and, receiving the remains of the food, distributed these last remnants to poor folk attracted by the noise of the feast. It was only after passing through two or three ranks of subsidiary guests that the bones reached a final circle of stray dogs attracted by the scent of the meat. Nothing is lost in these patriarchal celebrations, where, however poor the host, every living creature can claim a share of the feast. It is true that well-off people are in the habit of paying for their share with small presents, which somewhat softens the burden that poorer families impose on themselves on these occasions.

However, the painful moment for the mutahir, that was to close the festival, arrived. The children were made to rise, and they entered alone into the room where the women were standing. They sang: ‘O you, his paternal aunt! O you, his maternal aunt! come and prepare his *sirafeh*!’ From this moment on, the details were given to me by my slave, who was present at the sirafeh ceremony.

The women gave the children a shawl, the corners of which were held by four of them. The writing case was placed in the middle, and the head pupil of the school (*arif*) began to chant a song, each verse of which was then repeated in chorus by the children and the women. They prayed to Allah who knows all, ‘who knows the progress of the black ant, and its work in the darkness,’ to grant his blessing to this child, who already knew how to read, and could understand the Koran. They thanked, in his name, the father, who had paid for the master’s lessons, and the mother, who, from the cradle, had taught him speech.

‘Allah grant,’ said the child to his mother, ‘that I see you seated in paradise and greeted by Maryam, by Zeynab, daughter of Ali, and by Fatima, daughter of the prophet!’

The rest of the verses were in praise of the *faqih*s and the schoolmaster, for having explained and taught the child the various chapters of the Koran.

Other less serious chants followed these litanies.

— ‘O you, young girls, who surround us,’ said the *arif*, ‘I commend you to the care of Allah when you paint your eyes and look at yourselves in the mirror!’

— ‘And you, married women, gathered here, by virtue of sura thirty-nine: *fecundity*, be blessed! — but if there are women here who have grown old in celibacy, let them be driven forth with a kick!’

During this ceremony, the boys carried the *sirafeh* round the room, and each woman placed gifts of small change on the tablet; after which the coins were poured into a handkerchief which the children donated to the *faqihs*.

On returning to the men, the *mutahir* was placed on a tall seat. The barber and his assistant stood on either side with their instruments. A copper basin was placed before the child, in which each came to place an offering; after which he was taken by the barber into a separate room, where the operation was performed before the eyes of his parents, while cymbals clanged to drown his cries.

The assembly, without concerning themselves further, spent the greater part of the night drinking sherbets, coffee and a kind of thick beer (*bouza*), an intoxicating drink, which was mainly drunk by the Nubians, and which is undoubtedly the same that Herodotus names as *κυλλήστις*: *cyllestis*, and describes as a wine made from barley (*‘Histories 2:77’*).

Chapter 5: The Forest of Stone

I was unsure how to occupy myself the next morning, while awaiting the hour when the wind should rise. The *reis* and his people gave themselves over to sleep with that profound carelessness in life which the people of the North have difficulty comprehending. I thought of leaving the slave for the whole day in the hut, and going for a walk alone, towards Heliopolis, only a mile or so distant.

I suddenly remembered the promise I had made to a brave naval commissioner who had lent me his rifle during the crossing from Syra to Alexandria.

‘I only ask one thing of you,’ he told me, when, on arrival, I thanked him for gathering some fragments, on my behalf, from the petrified forest which lies in the desert, not far from Cairo, ‘which is to hand them, when passing through Smyrna, to Madame Carton, on the Rue des Roses.’

Such commissions are sacred among travellers; the shame of having neglected this one made me immediately resolve on a straightforward expedition. Besides, I myself wanted to see the forest, whose origin I could not explain. I woke the slave, who was in a very bad mood, and who asked to remain with the *reis’* wife. I thought then of taking the *reis*; further reflection, and the experience I had acquired of the customs of the country convinced me that, amidst that honourable family, the innocence of poor Zeynab was in no danger.

Having made the necessary arrangements, and having informed the reis, who sent for an alert donkey-driver, I headed towards Heliopolis, leaving on the left Hadrian's Canal, dug long ago to link the Nile to the Red Sea, and whose dry bed would later be our road through the sand dunes.

All the surroundings of Shubra are beautifully cultivated. After a sycamore wood which encircles the stud farm, one leaves on the left a host of gardens where orange trees are grown in gaps between date palms planted in quincunxes; then, crossing a branch of the Calish, or Cairo, canal, one reaches in a short time the edge of the desert, which begins at the limit of the Nile flood. There the fertile checkerboard of the plain terminates, a plain carefully moistened by the channels which flow from the *saqiya*s or water-wheels; it is there that, with an aspect of death and melancholy which has overcome nature itself, the strange suburb of sepulchral constructions begins, which ends only at Mokattam, and which is called on the Cairo side the *Valley of the Caliphs*. It is there that Tulun (*Ahmad ibn Tulun, founder of the ninth century Tulunid dynasty*), Baybars (*Abu al-Futuh, the fourth Mamluk Sultan*), Saladin, and Al-Malik Al-Adil (*Al-Adil I, brother to Saladin*), and a thousand other heroes of Islam, rest not in simple tombs, but in vast palaces still shining with arabesques and gilding, interspersed with vast mosques. It seems that the ghosts, inhabitants of these vast dwellings, still require places of prayer and assembly, which, if we are to believe tradition, are filled on certain days with a sort of historical phantasmagoria.

As we left this sad city, whose outward appearance produces the effect of a sunlit district of Cairo, we reached the Heliopolis embankment, built long ago to shelter that city from the highest flooding. The whole plain that can be seen beyond is dotted with small hills formed of piles of rubble. These are mainly the ruins of a village which covered the lost remnants of primitive constructions. Nothing of those has remained standing; not one ancient stone rises above ground, except an obelisk, around which a vast garden has been planted.

The obelisk is the central meeting-point of four avenues of ebony trees that divide the enclosure; wild bees have established their hives in the crevices of one face of the pillar which, as is known, is damaged. The gardener, accustomed to visiting travellers, offered me flowers and fruits. I was able to sit down and reflect for a moment on the splendours described by Strabo (*'Geography, Book XVII, Chapter I:27'*), on the three other obelisks of the Temple of the Sun, two of which are in Rome and the other of which has been destroyed; on those avenues of yellow marble sphinxes of which only one could still be seen in the last century; and finally on that city, the cradle of science, where Herodotus and Plato came to be initiated into the mysteries. Heliopolis arouses other memories from the Biblical point of view. It was there that Joseph gave that fine example of chastity that our era only appreciates with an ironic smile. In the eyes of the Arabs, this legend has quite another character: Joseph, and Zuleika (*the wife of Potiphar*), are consecrated as examples of pure love, of the senses conquered by duty, and of the triumph over a double temptation; for Joseph's master was one of the Pharaoh's eunuchs. In the original legend, often treated by the poets of the Orient, the tender Zuleika is not sacrificed as in the version we know. Wrongly condemned, at first, by the women of Memphis, she is forgiven by all, as soon as Joseph, released from his prison, convinces the Pharaoh's whole court to admire the charm of her beauty.

The feeling of platonic love which the Arabian poets suppose Joseph to have felt for Zuleika, and which certainly makes his sacrifice all the finer, did not prevent that patriarch from later uniting with the daughter of a priest of Heliopolis, named Azima. It was a little further, towards the north, that he established his family at a place called Goshen, where it is thought that in our day the remains of a Jewish temple built by Onias IV (*deposed as High Priest of Israel, in 175BC*) has been found.

I have not had time to visit this cradle of Jacob's posterity; but I will not let slip the opportunity to cleanse an entire people, whose patriarchal tradition we accept, of a dishonest act for which philosophers have harshly reproached them. I discussed the flight from Egypt of the Hebrew people with a *humorist* from Berlin who was a scholar with Karl Lepsius' expedition:

— 'Do you believe, then,' he asked me, 'that so many honest Hebrews would have been so indelicate as to *borrow* the silver dishes of people who, though Egyptians, had evidently been their neighbours and friends?'

— 'Yet,' I observed, 'one must believe this, or deny Scripture.'

— 'There may be an error in the version or an interpolation in the text (*see 'Exodus 12:35'*); but pay attention to what I am about to say.... The Hebrews have had, always, a talent for banking and lending. In this still naive era, one could hardly lend except on pledge... and convince yourself that this was their principal means of making a living.'

— 'But historians depict them as busy moulding bricks for the pyramids (which, in truth, are made of stone), and the payment for this work was in onions and other vegetables.'

— 'Well, if they were able to retain a few onions, I firmly believe they knew how to make the most of them, and bring them many more.'

— 'What do you conclude from all this?'

— 'Nothing more than that the silver they departed with probably acted as security for the loans they had been able to render in Memphis. The Egyptians were negligent; they doubtless allowed the interest and charges to accumulate, and any rent at the legal rate....'

— 'So, there was no need to pursue any further claim?'

— 'I am sure of it. The Hebrews took only what was theirs, according to all the laws of natural and commercial equity. By this act, certainly legitimate, they founded, thenceforth, the true principles of credit. Moreover, the Talmud says in precise terms: "They took only what was theirs."'

I give this Berliner's paradox for what it is worth. I was eager to find, a few steps from Heliopolis, richer memories of biblical history. The gardener who watches over the preservation of every monument of this illustrious city, originally called *Ayn Shams* or The Eye of the Sun, gave me one of his fellahin to take me to El Matareya. After a few minutes of walking amidst the dust, I reached a new oasis, that is to say, a grove entirely of sycamores and orange-trees; a spring flowed from the entrance to the enclosure, which is, it is said, the only source of fresh water there that the nitrous soil of Egypt filters and releases. The inhabitants

attribute this to a divine blessing. During the stay that, according to legend, the holy family made in El Matareya, it was to this source that the Virgin came to bleach the linen of the infant Christ. It is also thought that the water cures leprosy. Poor women standing near the spring offer you a cup for a small fee.

There remained to be seen, within the grove, the dense sycamore under which the holy family took refuge, being pursued by a band of brigands, led by one Dismas. The latter, who in time appears as the 'good thief', discovered the fugitives; but sudden faith touched his heart, such that that he offered hospitality to Joseph and Mary, in one of his houses situated on the site of Old Cairo, which was then called the Babylon of Egypt. This Dismas, whose occupation seems to have been lucrative, possessed property everywhere. I had already been shown, in Old Cairo, in a Coptic convent, an old vault, roofed in brick, which is considered to be the remains of the hospitable house of Dismas, and the very place where the holy family slept.

This legend belongs to the Coptic tradition; but the marvellous tree of El Matareya receives the homage of all Christian communities. Without accepting that this sycamore dates to high antiquity as supposed, one may credit that it is the product of shoots of that ancient tree, so that, for centuries, no one has visited it without carrying away a fragment of the wood or bark. However, it is still of enormous dimensions and has the appearance of a baobab-tree from India; the immense extent of its branches and suckers vanishes beneath the weight of *ex-votos*, rosaries, inscriptions, and holy images, which are hung there, or nailed there, on every side.

On leaving El Matareya, we soon encountered traces of Hadrian's Canal, which served us as a roadway for some time, and on which the iron wheels of carts from Suez have left deep ruts. The desert is much less arid than one might think; tufts of balsamic plants, mosses, lichens, and cacti cover the ground almost everywhere, and large rocks covered with scrub clothe the horizon.

The Mokattam range slid past to the right, towards the south; the defile, as it narrowed, soon hid the view of it, and my guide pointed out to me the singular composition of the rocks which flanked our path: there were blocks containing oyster-shells, and others of all kinds. The waters of the Flood, or perhaps only the Mediterranean which, according to scholars, once covered the whole of the lower Nile Valley, has left these incontestable marks. What could be stranger to the eye? The valley opens; an immense horizon stretches as far as the eye can see. No further trace of the canal, no paths; the ground is striped everywhere with long, rough, greyish columns. Wondrous! Here lay the petrified forest.

What frightful tempest had felled these gigantic palm trunks at the very same moment? Why all on the same side, complete with branches and roots, and why had the vegetation solidified and hardened, leaving the woody fibres, and the veins which held sap, distinctly visible? Each vertebra had been broken and detached in a similar manner; yet all lay end to end like a reptile's backbone. Nothing in the world is more astounding. Here was no petrification produced by natural chemical action; everything was flat on the ground. That is the manner in which the vengeance of the gods fell on Phineus and his companions (*Phineus, brother of Cepheus in Greek myth, was turned to stone by the Gorgon's head*). Could it be a tract of land abandoned by the sea? But nothing there indicates a typical retreat by the waters. Was it a

sudden cataclysm, an effect of the Flood? But why, in that case, did the trees not float? The mind is confused; it seems best to give it no further thought!

I finally left that strange valley, and swiftly returned to Shubra. I barely noticed the hollows in the rocks inhabited by hyenas, or the whitened bones of dromedaries abundantly sown by the passage of caravans; I bore away in my mind an impression even greater than that which strikes one on first viewing the pyramids: their forty centuries are slight indeed compared with the irrefutable signs of a primitive world instantly destroyed!

Chapter 6: Lunch in Quarantine

Here was I on the Nile, once more. As far as Batn al-Baqarah, the *Belly of the Cow*, where the lower Delta begins, the banks of the river were unchanging. The points of the three great pyramids, tinged with pink in the morning and evening, which one admires for so long before reaching Cairo, and again after leaving Bulaq, finally vanished wholly from the horizon. We were now sailing the eastern branch of the Nile, that is to say the true course of the river; for the Rosetta (*Rashid*) branch, more frequented by travellers from Europe, is merely a wide channel which disappears to the west.

It is from the Damietta branch that the main deltaic canals start; it is also this branch which presents the richest and most varied landscape. It no longer displays the monotonous shoreline of the other branches, bordered by a few slender palm trees, their villages built of raw bricks, and, here and there, tombs of saints brightened by minarets, dovecotes adorned with strange swellings, thin panoramic silhouettes always outlined on a horizon which lacks secondary planes; the Damietta branch, or artery if you wish, bathes considerable cities, and everywhere traverses fertile countryside; the palm-trees are more beautiful and bushier; the fig-trees, pomegranates and tamarinds display infinite shades of verdure on both sides. The banks of the river, at points where tributaries feed the numerous irrigation canals, are covered with primeval vegetation; from the heart of the reeds, that once provided papyrus, and the varied water lilies, among which perhaps one might find the purple lotuses of the ancients, thousands of birds and insects are seen darting from place to place. Everything flutters, sparkles, and sounds, without regard to humankind, for not ten Europeans pass through there per year, which means that gunshots rarely disturb those populous solitudes. The wild swans, pelicans, pink flamingos, white egrets, and teal, play around the *djermes* and *canges*; but flights of doves, more easily frightened, scatter here and there, forming long streaks on the azure of the sky.

We had passed Charakhanieh, situated perhaps on the site of the ancient *Cercasorum*, on our right; Dagoueh, an old retreat of the Nile brigands who followed the boats at night by swimming, their heads encased in hollowed-out gourds; Tell el-Atrib, which covers the ruins of Athribis; and Mit Ghamr, a modern, well populated town, whose mosque, surmounted by a square tower was a Christian church, they say, before the Arab conquest.

On the left bank, is the site of Busiris under the name of Bana Abu Sir, but no ruins pierce the ground; on the other side of the river, the domes and minarets of Minyet Samannoud, formerly Sebennitus, spring from its verdant heart. The remains of an immense temple, which appears to be that of Isis, are found some miles from there. The sculpted heads of women served as capitals for each column; most of the latter have been re-used by the Arabs to make millstones.

We spent the night above Mansoura, and I was therefore unable to visit the famous chicken hatcheries of that city, nor the house of Ibrahim ben Lokman, in which Saint Louis lived as a prisoner (*Louis IX was captured at the Battle of Faraskur, in 1250AD*). Bad news awaited me when I awoke: the yellow flag indicating plague was hoisted over Mansoura, and was awaiting us at Damietta, so that it was impossible to think of taking on provisions other than live animals. This was certainly enough to spoil the most beautiful view in the world; sadly too, the banks were becoming less fertile; the sight of flooded rice fields, and the unhealthy smell of marshland, beyond Faraskur, decidedly eclipsed the beauties of Nature.

It was necessary to wait till evening to at last encounter the magical spectacle of the Nile widening to a gulf; the palm-groves bushier than ever; and ultimately Damietta, bordering both banks, with Italianate houses and green terraces; a spectacle that can only be compared to that offered by the entrance to the Grand Canal in Venice, and where, moreover, the thousand needles of its mosques rose amidst the coloured mist of evening.

The cange was moored beside the main quay, in front of a large building decorated with the French flag; but we had to wait until next day to be recognised, and obtain the right to enter in robust health the heart of a plague-ridden city. The yellow flag flew sinisterly over the Naval Headquarters, while the regulations were wholly in our interest. However our provisions were exhausted, and that promised only a sad luncheon that day.

At daybreak, however, our flag had been sighted, which proved the effectiveness of Madame Bonhomme's advice, and the janissary of the French Consulate came to offer us his services. I had a letter for the Consul, and asked to see him in person. After having departed to warn him, the janissary returned to guide me, and told me to be careful not to touch anyone, nor be touched, on the way. He walked in front of me with his silver-headed cane, and drove the curious aside. We finally ascended the steps and entered a vast stone building, sealed by enormous doors, which had the appearance of an *okel* or caravanserai. It was, however, the residence of the Consul or rather of the Consular Agent of France, who is at the same time one of the richest rice merchants in Damietta.

I entered the chancellery; the janissary pointed out his master to me, and I went to him directly, and placed my letter into his hand.

— '*Aspetta! Wait!*' he told me, with a less graceful air than that of Colonel Barthélémy when one sought to embrace him.

And he pushed me aside with the white cane that he held in his hand. I understood the reason, and simply presented the letter. The Consul exited for a moment without saying anything, and returned holding a pair of tongs; he then seized the letter, placed a corner beneath

his shoe, very skilfully tore the envelope open with the tip of his tongs, and then unfolded the sheet, which he held at a distance before his eyes, using the same instrument.

Then, his countenance lightened a little, he summoned his chancellor, who alone spoke French, and invited me to lunch, warning me however that it would be partaken of *in quarantine*. I had no idea what such an invitation was worth, but thought first of my companions in the cange, and asked what the city could provide for them.

The consul issued orders to the janissary, and I was able to obtain for them bread, wine, and chickens, the only articles of consumption that are supposed not to transmit the plague. The poor slave was distressed at being shut in the cabin; I allowed her out so as to present her to the Consul.

Seeing me come back with her, the latter frowned.

— ‘Do you seek to take this woman to France?’ the chancellor asked me.

— ‘Perhaps, if she agrees, and if I can; in the meantime, we are leaving for Beirut.’

— ‘You know that once in France, she will be free?’

— ‘I consider her free from this moment.’

— ‘Do you also know that if she finds life in France tedious, you will be obliged to bring her back to Egypt at your own expense?’

— ‘No, I did not know that!’

— ‘You had better think on it. It would be better to sell her here.’

— ‘In a city afflicted by plague? That would be most ungenerous!’

— ‘Well, that’s your business,’ said the chancellor.

He explained everything to the Consul, who smiled, ultimately, and wished to introduce the slave to his wife. In the meantime, we were shown into the dining-room, the centre of which was occupied by a large round table. Here began a new ceremony.

The Consul pointed to one end of the table where I was to sit; he took his place at the other end with his chancellor, and a little boy, doubtless his son, whom he fetched from the women’s salon. The janissary stood to the right of the table to clearly mark the separation in rank.

I thought that poor Zeynab would be invited too; but she sat down, cross-legged, on a mat, with the most perfect indifference, as if she were still in the slave-bazaar. Perhaps she believed deep down that I had brought her there to resell her.

The Chancellor spoke and told me that our Consul was a Catholic merchant, born in Syria, and that since it was not the custom, even among Christians, to admit women to the table, the *khanum* was going to join us, solely to honour me.

Indeed, the door opened; a woman of about thirty years of age, and of a marked plumpness, advanced majestically into the room, and took her place opposite the janissary on a tall chair, without arms, set back against the wall. On her head she wore an immense conical headdress, draped in yellow cashmere with gold ornamentation. Her braided hair, and her bosom, sparkled

with diamonds. She looked like a Madonna, and her lily-white complexion brought out the dark brilliance of her eyes, the eyelids and eyebrows painted according to custom.

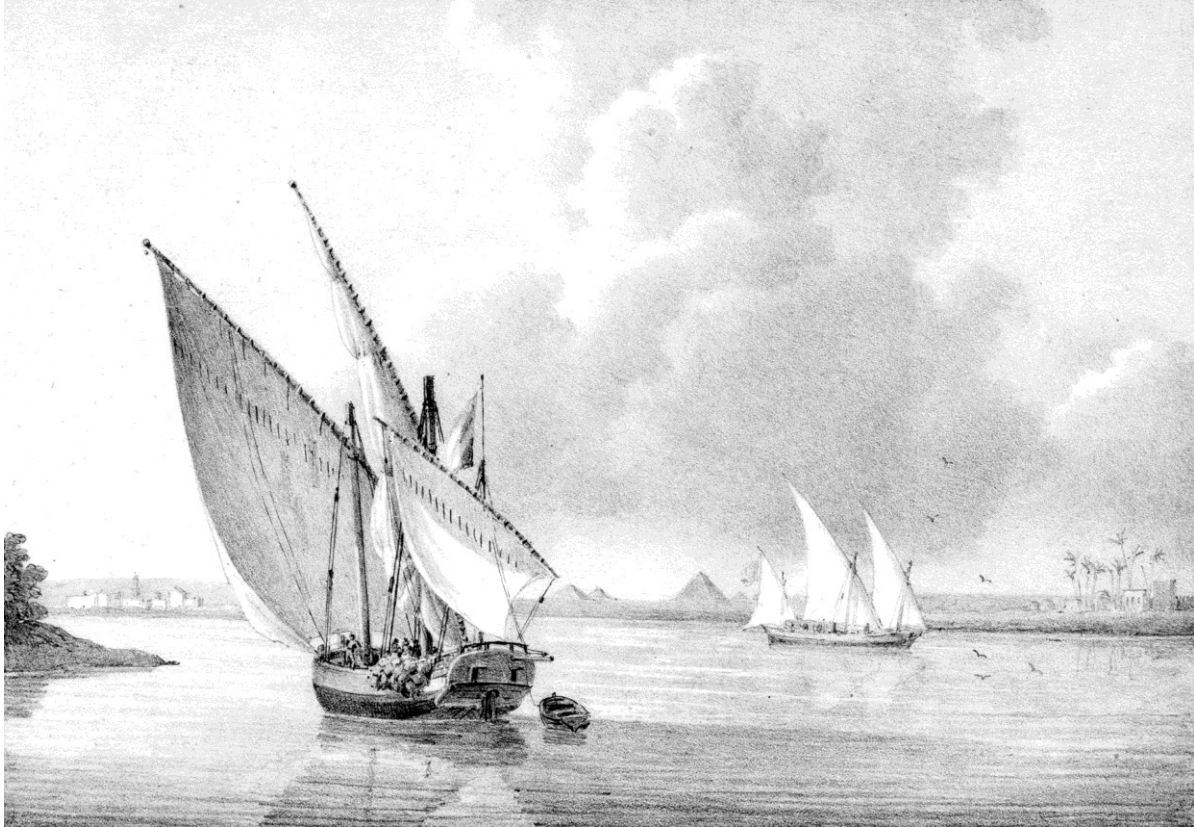
Servants, placed on each side of the room, served us the same food in different dishes, and it was explained to me that those on my side were not *in quarantine*, and that there was nothing to fear if by chance they touched my clothes. I could hardly understand how, in a plague-ridden city, people could be completely isolated from the contagion. However, I was myself an example of this singularity.

When lunch was over, the *khanum*, who had been silently watching us without taking a seat at our table, having been informed by her husband of the presence of the slave I had with me, addressed her, asked her questions, and ordered that she be served food. A small round table similar to those of that country was brought, and she was served *in quarantine*, as I had been.

The chancellor was then kind enough to accompany me, so as to show me the city. The magnificent row of houses that line the Nile is, so to speak, mere theatrical decoration; all the rest is sad and dusty; fever and plague seemed to breathe from the walls. The janissary walked in front of us, pushing aside a livid crowd dressed in blue rags. I saw nothing remarkable except the tomb of a famous santon, honoured by Turkish sailors, an old church built by the Crusaders in the Byzantine style, and a hill at the gates of the city entirely formed, it is said, from the bones of Saint Louis' army.

I feared I would be obliged to spend several days in that desolate city. Fortunately, the janissary informed me, that same evening, that a bombard (*a vessel like a two-masted English ketch*), the *Santa-Barbara*, was about to sail at daybreak for the coast of Syria. The Consul was kind enough to arrange my passage and that of the slave; that same evening, we left Damietta to go aboard the vessel, which was commanded by a Greek captain.

Part VIII: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – The Santa-Barbara



Sailing boats on a river in Egypt, 1828, Otto Baron Howen

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl)

Chapter 1: A Companion

‘Istanbul’dan! Ah! Yélir firman!

Yélir! Yélir! Istanbul’dan!’

It was a deep, gentle voice, the voice of some blond young man or dark-haired girl, a voice with a fresh and penetrating timbre, resonating like the song of a cicada, filtered through the dusty mist of an Egyptian morning. To hear it better, I had half-opened one of the windows of the hut, whose gilded grille looked out, alas, on an arid shore; we were already far from the cultivated plains and rich palm groves which surround Damietta. Having left the city at the onset of night, we had reached in a short time the shore of Esbet-el-Bourg (*Izbat-el-Burj*), which was supposedly the maritime port, and original site, of the Crusader city. I was only half-

awake, astonished at no longer being rocked by the waves, while the song continued to resound at intervals as if issuing from a person seated on the shore, but hidden by the elevation of the banks. And the voice continued again with a melancholy sweetness:

'Kaikélir! Istanbul'dan!...

Yélir! Yélir! Istanbul'dan!'

I recognised that the song celebrated Istanbul, yet in a dialect whose words were new to me, and which no longer had the hoarse consonances of Arabic or Greek, of which my ear was weary. The voice was a distant proclamation of new peoples, fresh shores; I already glimpsed, as in a mirage, the Queen of the Bosphorus amidst her blue waters and dark verdure, and, I must admit, that a contrast with the monotonous and scorched nature of Egypt attracted me deeply. Even if it should mean mourning the banks of the Nile, later, beneath the green cypresses of Pera (*Beyoğlu*), I summoned, to the aid of my senses, softened by the summer, the invigorating air of Asia. Fortunately, the presence, on the boat, of the janissary whom our Consul had charged with accompanying me, assured me of a prompt departure.

We were waiting for the right time to pass the *boğaz*, that is to say the bar formed by the waters of the sea which opposed the course of the river, since a *djerme* loaded with rice, which belonged to the Consul, was to transport us on board the Santa-Barbara, anchored a few miles out to sea.

Meanwhile, the voice continued:

'Ah! Ah! Ah! Drommatina!

Drommatina dieljédelim! ...'

— 'What can this mean?' I asked myself. 'It must be Turkish'.

And I asked the janissary if he understood.

— 'It's a provincial dialect,' he replied; 'I only understand the Turkish spoken in Constantinople; as for the person who sings, it is a good-for-nothing, a poor devil without shelter, a *banian* (*wretch*)!'

I have always noticed, with sorrow, the endless contempt of the man who fulfils servile functions towards poor people who seek to make a living and maintain their independence. We had disembarked, and from the top of the embankment I saw a young man lying, nonchalantly, in the middle of a tuft of dry reeds. Turned towards the rising sun, which was gradually piercing the mist spread over the rice fields, he continued his song, whose words I easily gathered, in many-times repeated refrain:

*'Déyouldoumou! Bourouldoumou!
Aly Osman yadjénamdah!'*

There exists, in certain southern languages, a syllabic charm, a grace of intonation which suits the voices of women and young people, and which one would willingly listen to for hours without understanding a word. And then, that languid chant, those quavering modulations which recalled our old folksongs, all this charmed me with the force of contrast and the unexpected; something pastoral and amorously dream-like sprang, for me, from these words rich in vowels, and with the cadence of birdsong.

— 'It may be', I said to myself, 'some song of the shepherds of Trebizond, or Marmara. I seem to hear doves cooing amidst the branches of yew-trees; a song of bluish valleys where the fresh waters light, with silver reflections, the dark branches of larches, where roses bloom above tall hedges, where goats clamber among verdant cliffs as in an idyll of Theocritus.'

Meanwhile, I had neared the young man, who at last saw me, and, rising, greeted me by saying;

— 'Bonjour, Monsieur'.

He was a handsome boy with Circassian features, dark eyes, a white complexion, and blond hair, close cut, but without his head being shaved according to the custom of the Arabs. A long, striped silk robe, then an overcoat of grey cloth, composed his attire, and a simple tarbouch of red felt served as his headdress; except that its tuft of blue silk, more amply-shaped and fuller than that of Egyptian hats, indicated a direct subject of Abdul-Medjid (*Abdülmecid I*). His belt, made of a cheap cashmere weave, bore, instead of the collections of pistols and daggers which customarily bristled at the waist of every free man or hired servant, a writing-set of copper half a foot long. The handle of this oriental instrument contains the ink, and the scabbard contains the reeds which serve as pens (*calami*). From a distance, it might pass for a dagger; yet it is the peaceful insignia of the simple scholar.

I suddenly felt full of kindness towards this colleague, and was somewhat ashamed of my warrior's attire which, in contrast, concealed my profession.

— 'Do you live in this country?' I asked the stranger.

— 'No, sir; I came with you from Damietta.'

— 'What, with me?'

— 'Yes, the boatmen received me in the cange, and brought me here. I would have liked to introduce myself to you; but you were lying down.'

— 'That's fine,' I said, 'and where are you heading?'

— 'I will ask your permission to also board the djerme, to reach the ship on which you are going to embark.'

— 'I don't see any problem with that,' I said, turning to the janissary.

But the latter took me aside.

— ‘I do not advise you,’ he said to me, ‘to take this boy with you. You will be obliged to pay for his passage, for he has nothing but his writing-set; he is one of those vagabonds who scribble verse and other nonsense. He presented himself to the consul, who could get nothing else from him.’

— ‘My dear, fellow,’ I said to the stranger, ‘I would be delighted to help you, but I have barely enough to get to Beirut, and must await money there.’

— ‘That’s fine,’ he answered, ‘I can live here for a few days with the fellahin. I’ll wait for an Englishman to pass by.’

His reply left me filled with remorse. I went off with the janissary, who guided me amidst the flooded countryside, by having us follow a path traced here and there among the sand dunes, so as to reach the shore of Lake Manzala. The time it took to load the djerme with the bags of rice, brought by various boats, left us all the leisure necessary for this expedition.

Chapter 2: Lake Manzala

We had passed on the right the village of Esbet-el-Bourg, built of raw brick, amidst which one can distinguish the remains of an ancient mosque, and the ruins of arches and towers belonging to ancient Damietta, destroyed by the Arabs, at the time of Saint Louis, as being too open to surprise. The sea formerly washed the walls of this city, and is now some few miles from it. This shows the extent of land gained by Egypt every six hundred years. The caravans which cross the desert towards Syria encounter, at various stages, regular lines and shapes, where one can see, here and there, ancient ruins buried in the sand, but whose contours the desert wind sometimes delights in reviving. These spectral cities stripped, for a time, of their dusty shrouds, frighten the imaginative Arabs, who attribute their construction to genies. European scholars, by following these traces, have found a series of cities built on the seashore, under this or that dynasty of Shepherd Kings, or Theban conquerors. It is by calculating this retreat of the sea’s waters, as well as by counting the various layers of the Nile’s flooding imprinted in the silt, the traces of which are discovered by excavation, that they have succeeded in revealing forty thousand years of Egypt’s ancient existence. This perhaps does not fit well with the account in Genesis; however, those long ages devoted to the mutual movement of the land and the waters, could have constituted the time when the Earth was, as the Bible claims: ‘without form, and void,’ the ordering of things being the only true principle of creation.

We had reached the eastern edge of the strip of land on which Damietta is built; the sand where we walked glistened in places, and it seemed to me that I saw solid puddles whose glassy surface our feet crushed; they were layers of sea salt. A curtain of slender rushes, perhaps of the kind which once provided papyrus, still hid the edges of the lake from us; we finally arrived at a harbour established for the fishermen’s boats, and from there I thought I saw the sea itself on a day of calm. Except that distant islands, tinged pink by the rising sun, and crowned here

and there with domes and minarets, indicated a more peaceful location, though boats with lateen sails circulated, by the hundreds on the smooth surface of the waters.

This was Lake Manzala, the ancient Mareotis, whose principal island ruined Tanis still occupies, and where Pelusium bounded the neighbouring extremes of Syria; Pelusium, the ancient gate of Egypt, through which Cambyses, Alexander, and Pompey passed in turn, the latter, as we know, to find death there.

I regretted not being able to voyage around the charming archipelago scattered over the waters of the lake, and view one of those magnificent catches which provide fish for the whole of Egypt. Birds of various species soared over this inland sea, swam near the edges, or took refuge in the foliage of the sycamores, cassias, and tamarinds; the streams and irrigation-canals which cross the rice fields everywhere offer varieties of marshy vegetation, where reeds, rushes, water-lilies, and doubtless also the lotus of the ancients enamel the greenish water, and rustle with the flight of numerous insects which the birds pursue. Thus, is accomplished that eternal stir of primitive nature amidst which fertile, and deadly, creatures compete.

When, after crossing the plain, we returned to the jetty, I heard, once more, the voice of the young man who had spoken to me; repeating continually: '*Yeli! Yeli! Istanbul'dan!*' I feared that I had been wrong to refuse his request, and I sought to enter into conversation with him by questioning him about the meaning of what he was singing.

— 'It is a song,' he said, 'that was made at the time of the massacre of the Janissaries. I was lulled to sleep with this song.'

— 'What!' I said to myself, 'these sweet words, this languid air, contain ideas of death and carnage! That is somewhat far removed from the eclogue.'

The song meant, roughly:

— 'It comes from Stamboul, the firman (the one that announced the destruction of the Janissaries)! — A ship brings it — Ali-Osman awaits it — a ship arrives — but the firman does not come — all the people are anxious — A second ship arrives; here at last is the one that Ali-Osman was waiting for — All the Muslims don their embroidered clothes — and go off to amuse themselves in the countryside — for it has certainly arrived this time, the firman!'

What gain was there in trying to delve into it all? I decided, thenceforth, to ignore the meaning of the words. Instead of a shepherd's song, or the dream of a traveller who thinks of Stamboul, I had nothing left in my memory but a trite, political ditty.

— 'I would wish for nothing more,' I said in a low voice to the young man, 'than to let you share the djerme; but your song may have upset the janissary, though he appeared not to understand it....'

— 'He, a janissary?' he said to me. 'There are none left in the whole empire; the Consuls still give that name, by habit, to their *cavas* (*guards*) — but he is simply an Albanian, as I am an Armenian. He is angry with me, because, at Damietta, I offered to conduct foreigners around the place; now, I am on my way to Beirut.'

— 'I gave the janissary to understand that his resentment was groundless.'

— ‘Ask him,’ he replied, ‘if he has enough to pay for his passage aboard ship.’

— ‘Captain Nicolas is my friend,’ answered the Armenian.

The Janissary shook his head, but made no further comment. The young man rose nimbly, picked up a small package that barely showed beneath his arm, and followed us. All my baggage had already been transported on the heavily laden djerme. The Javanese slave, whom the pleasure of a change of scene rendered indifferent to her memories of Egypt, clapped her brown hands with joy when she saw that we were about to leave, and saw to the moving of our cages of chickens and pigeons. The fear of running out of food acts strongly on these naive souls. The state of public health in Damietta had not allowed us to gather more varied provisions. Rice not being lacking, moreover, we were doomed for the whole crossing to a diet of pilau.

Chapter 3: The Bombard

We descended the Nile for another few miles; the flat, sandy banks stretched as far as the eye could see, and the *boğaz* which prevents ships from reaching Damietta now presented nothing more than an almost imperceptible bar. Two forts protect this obstacle, often crossed in the Middle Ages, but almost always fatal to ships.

Their voyages are today, thanks to steam, so devoid of danger, that it is not without some anxiety that one ventures on a sailing ship. Then there’s a renewed chance of that fatality which grants fish their revenge for human voracity, or at least the prospect of wandering for ten years on an inhospitable shore, like those heroes of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. Now, if ever a primitive and questionable vessel, out of some such fantasy, furrowed the blue waters of the Syrian Gulf, it was that bombard baptised with the name of Santa-Barbara which realised its purest incarnation. From the moment I saw that black carcass, like a coal ship, bearing on its single mast a long yardarm arranged for a single triangular sail, I understood that I had come to a dark time, and I had the idea, for a moment, of refusing the means of transport. However, how to do so? Returning to a plague-ridden town to wait for a European brig to pass by (steamships do not ply that course) was hardly less cheerful. I looked at my companions, who did not seem either displeased or surprised; the janissary seemed convinced that he had arranged things for the best; no thought of mockery pierced the bronzed masks of the rowers of the djerme; it seemed therefore that this ship had nothing ridiculous or impossible about it according to the customs of the country. However, its aspect of a deformed galley, of a gigantic clog, sunk in water up to the gunwale by the weight of those sacks of rice, scarcely promised a rapid crossing. If the winds were against us, we risked acquainting ourselves with the inhospitable homeland of the *Laestrygones*, or the *porphyrous* rocks of the ancient *Phaeacians*. O Ulysses! Telemachus! Aeneas! Was I doomed to verify for myself your deceptive itinerary?

However, the djerme came alongside the ship, they threw us a rope ladder made of sticks, and there we were, hoisted onto the planking, and initiated into the joys of life on deck.

— ‘Kalimera (Good day!)’, said the captain, dressed like his sailors, but making himself known by this Greek greeting.

And he hastened to return to the loading of goods far more important than ours. The sacks of rice formed a mountain at the stern, beyond which a small portion of the deckhouse was reserved for the helmsman and the captain; it was therefore impossible to walk anywhere but over the sacks, the middle of the ship being occupied by the ship’s boat, and the two sides cluttered with cages of hens; only a single, fairly narrow, space existed in front of the galley, entrusted to the care of a very alert young cabin boy.

As soon as the latter saw the slave, he cried out:

— ‘Kokona! Kali! Kali (A woman! Beautiful! Beautiful!)’

This was a departure from the Arab reserve which does not allow one to appear to notice either a woman or a child. The janissary had gone aboard with us and was supervising the loading of the goods which belonged to the Consul.

— ‘Ah, now! I said to him, ‘where are we to lodge? You told me we would be given the captain’s cabin.’

— ‘Don’t worry,’ he replied, ‘we’ll stow all these bags away, and then you’ll be fine.’

Whereupon he bade us farewell and descended into the djerme, which soon drifted away.

So here we are, the Lord knows for how long, on one of those Syrian ships that the slightest storm shatters on the coast like a nutshell. We had to wait for the three o’clock westerly wind to set sail. In the meantime, lunch was taken care of. Captain Nicolas had given his orders, and his pilau was cooking on the only stove in the kitchen; our turn would not come till later.

I was, however, searching as to where that famous captain’s cabin might be, that had been promised us, and I charged the Armenian to inquire of his friend, who did not appear to have recognised him until then. The captain rose, coldly, and led us to a kind of hold located under the bow decking, which one could only enter bent double, and whose walls were literally covered with those red crickets, as long as a finger, which are called cockroaches, and which had doubtless been attracted by some previous cargo of sugar. I recoiled in fright and feigned anger.

‘This is my cabin,’ the captain told me; ‘I do not advise you to live here, unless it rains; I will show you a much cooler and much more suitable place.’

He then led me to the ship’s boat, held by ropes, set between the mast and the bow, and made me look inside.

— ‘Here,’ he said, ‘you will be very well situated; you have cotton mattresses which you can spread from one end to the other, and I will have canvas stretched over the top to form a tent; now, you will be comfortably, and spaciouly lodged, will you not?’

It would have been ungracious not to agree, the boat being given over to us, that it was certainly the most pleasant place, in African temperatures, and the most private that one could choose.

Chapter 4: 'Andare Sul Mare'

*'Ah! Senza amare,
Andare sul mare....'*

*'Ah! Without loving,
To set out to sea....'*

(See the Tales of E. T. A. Hoffman: 'Annunziata')

We set sail: we saw that fringe of sand, which frames with such melancholy the splendours of old Egypt, diminish, and sink, and finally vanish beneath the flat blue sea; the dusty blaze of the desert alone glowed on the horizon; the Nile birds accompanied us for a while, then left us one after the other, as if to join the sun descending towards Alexandria. Meanwhile a brilliant star gradually climbed the arc of the sky and cast its fiery ray on the waters. It was the evening star, it was Astarte, the ancient goddess of Syria; she shone with an incomparable brilliance over the sacred waters which forever recognise her.

Be propitious to us, O divinity, who lack the pale hue of the moon, but who sparkle in the distance and pour golden rays on the world like a midnight sun!

Once my first impressions had been conquered, the interior aspect of the Santa-Barbara was not without a degree of picturesqueness. By the following day we had acclimatised ourselves perfectly, and the hours passed for us, as for the crew, in a most perfect indifference to the future. I believe that the ship's course was set as in ancient times, journeying all day according to the sun, and at night according to the stars. The captain showed me the compass, which was not in working order. The honest man had a countenance at once gentle and resolute, marked, moreover, by a singular naivety which gave me more confidence in himself than in his ship. However, he confessed to me that he had once been something of a pirate, but only at the time of Hellenic Independence; this was after he had invited me to take part in his dinner, which consisted of a pilau heaped in a pyramid into which each of us dipped a small wooden spoon, in turn. This was already progress compared to the Arabian manner of eating, in which only fingers were used.

An earthenware bottle, filled with that Cyprus wine which is called Commandery, occupied our afternoon, and the captain, having become more expansive, was kind enough, to acquaint me with his affairs the young Armenian interpreting. Having asked if I could read Latin, he took from a case a large sheet of parchment which contained the confirmation of his moral right to captain the bombard. He wished to know in what terms the confirmation was conceived.

I began to read, and learned that ‘the Fathers who are Secretaries to the Holy Land, call down the blessing of the Virgin, and the saints, upon the ship, and certify that Captain Alexis, a Greek Catholic, native of Jarabalus (Syrian Tripoli), has always fulfilled his religious duties.’

— ‘They put Alexis,’ the captain pointed out to me, ‘but they should have put Nicolas; they made an error in writing this.’

I gave my assent, thinking to myself that, if he had no more official a patent, he would do well to avoid European waters. The Turks are satisfied with little: the red seal, and a Jerusalem cross, affixed to that testament would suffice, for a little baksheesh, to satisfy the requirements of Muslim legality.

Nothing is more cheerful than an afternoon at sea in fine weather: the breeze is warm, the sun dips above the sail, whose fleeting shadow signals a change of tack from time to time; this shadow finally left the deck to project its coolness uselessly on the sea. Perhaps it would be sensible to raise a simple canvas to shade the deck, but no one thinks of it: the sun gilds foreheads like ripe fruit. It was then that the beauty of the Javanese slave triumphed. I had not thought for a moment of making her don her veil, feeling, quite naturally, that a Frank with a wife had no right to hide her. The Armenian had seated himself near her on the sacks of rice, while I watched the captain play a game of chess with the pilot, and said to her several times in a childish falsetto: — ‘*Ked ya, siti!*’

Which I think meant, ‘Well then, Madame!’

She remained some time without answering, with that show of pride which informed her usual demeanour; then finally turned towards the young man, and a conversation began.

At that moment, I understood what I lost through lacking a fluent command of Arabic. Her brow cleared, her lips smiled, and she soon gave herself up to that ineffable chatter which, in all countries, is, it seems, a sore need for much of the fairest portion of humanity. I was happy, however, to have procured her this pleasure. The Armenian seemed very respectful, and, turning from time to time towards me, doubtless told her how I had met and greeted him. We should not apply our own ideas to what happens in the East, and hence believe that a conversation between a man and a woman immediately involves...guilt. People are often more innocent there; I was convinced it was only meaningless chatter. The expression of their physiognomies, and my gleaning a few words here and there, sufficiently indicated to me the innocence of their dialogue, so I remained as if absorbed in the observation of the game of chess (and what chess!) between the captain and his pilot. I compared myself, inwardly, to those amiable spouses who sit, of an evening, at the gaming table, without anxiety, leaving the women and young people to talk or dance.

And, besides, what is a poor devil of an Armenian, encountered in the reeds on the banks of the Nile, compared to a Frank who hails from Cairo, and who has led the life of a *mirliva* (general) there, gaining the esteem of his dragoman, and the whole neighbourhood? If ‘to a nun, the gardener is a man’, as they used to say in France in the last century, one should not believe the first comer is something to a Muslim *qaden* (slave). There is, in women raised simply, as in a magnificent bird, a certain pride which serves to defend them against vulgar seduction. It seemed to me, moreover, that by leaving her to rely on her own self-worth, I

guaranteed the confidence and devotion of this poor slave towards myself; she whom, deep down, as I have already said, I considered free, from the moment she left the land of Egypt and set foot on a Christian vessel.

Christian! Was that the right term? The Santa-Barbara had only Turkish sailors as its crew; the captain and his cabin boy represented the Roman Church, the Armenian some heresy or other, and myself.... But who knows what a Parisian nourished on philosophical ideas, a child of Voltaire, an impious man according to the opinion of these good people, might represent in the East? Each morning, at the moment when the sun rose from the sea, and each evening, at the instant when its disk, invading the dark line of the waters, was finally eclipsed, leaving on the horizon that rosy tint which melts deliciously into the azure, the sailors gathered in a single row turned towards distant Mecca, while one of them intoned the prayer, as a muezzin might have hymned it gravely from the summit of a minaret. I could not prevent the slave from joining in this religious effusion, so touching and so solemn, from the first day, we found ourselves thus divided by our separate communions. The captain, on his side, made prayers from time to time to a certain image nailed to the mast, which could well have been the patron saint of the ship, Santa Barbara; the Armenian, on rising, after cleansing his head and feet with soap, mumbled litanies in a low voice; I alone, incapable of feigning, failed to perform any kind of ritual genuflection, and yet was somewhat ashamed to appear less religious than those people. I found among the Orientals a mutual tolerance for the various religions, each simply ranking themselves higher in the spiritual hierarchy, but admitting that the others might well, at a pinch, be worthy of serving as their footstool; the simple philosopher disturbs this order: where to place him? The Koran itself, which curses the idolaters and the worshippers of fire and stars, failed to anticipate the scepticism of our age.

Chapter 5: Idyll

Around the third day of our voyage, we should have been able to see the coast of Syria; but, during the morning, we scarcely progressed, and the wind, which rose at three, swelled the sail, in gusts, then let it fall to the mast, once more, a moment later. This seemed to little concern the captain, who divided his hours of leisure between the game of chess, and a sort of guitar, to the sound of which he always sang the same song. In the East, everyone has their favourite tune, and repeats it tirelessly from morning to night, until they learn another newer one. The slave too had learned, in Cairo, I know not what harem song whose refrain returned in an endlessly drawn out, and soporific melody. It consisted, I recall, of the following two lines:

*'Ya kabibé! Sakel no!
Ya makmouby! Ya sidi!'*

I understood a few words, but the word *kabibé* was missing from my vocabulary. I asked the Armenian what it meant, and he answered:

— ‘It means *a funny little man*.’

I wrote the noun in my notebook, with its meaning, as is appropriate when one wants to learn.

In the evening the Armenian told me that it was unfortunate that the wind was not fairer, and that this worried him a little.

— ‘Why?’ I asked. ‘We risk being stuck here two days longer, that’s all, and we are decidedly very well-set on this ship.’

— ‘That’s not the point,’ he said, ‘We could well run out of water.’

— ‘Run out of water?’

— ‘You’ve, surely, no idea of the carelessness of these people. To fill up the water barrels, would have necessitated sending a boat to Damietta, since the water at the mouth of the Nile is salty; and, as the city was in quarantine, they were afraid of the formalities!... at least, that’s what they say; but, in truth, they failed to think of it.’

— ‘It’s surprising,’ I said, ‘that the captain sings as if our situation was good.’

And I went with the Armenian to question him on the subject.

The captain rose, and showed me the water-barrels on deck, which were completely empty, except for one that might still have held five or six bottles of water; then he went and sat down again on the stern deck, and, taking up his guitar once more, began his eternal song, rocking his head back against the planking.

Next morning, I woke early, and went up to the forecastle thinking it might be possible to see the coast of Palestine; but I wiped my spectacles in vain; the distant line of the sea was as flat as a curved blade from Damascus. It is quite probable that we had barely progressed since the previous day. I descended again, and made my way to the stern. All were sleeping peacefully; the young cabin boy alone was awake, and washing his face and hands, abundantly, with water which he drew from our last barrel of drinkable liquid.

I could not help showing my indignation. I told him, or at least thought I made him understand, that sea-water was good enough for a little rascal of his species, and, wishing to formulate this last expression, I used the words *ya kabibé*, which I had noted down. The little boy looked at me with a smile, and seemed little affected by the reprimand. I assumed I’d mispronounced the phrase, and thought no more about it.

A few hours later, at that time in the afternoon when Captain Nicolas customarily had the cabin boy bring him an enormous jug of Cyprus wine, of which only we were invited to impart a sip, the Armenian and I, as Christians, and the sailors, out of a misunderstood respect for the law of Muhammad, drinking only anise brandy, the captain, I say, began to speak quietly in the Armenian’s ear.

— ‘He wishes,’ the latter said, ‘to make you an offer.’

— ‘Let him speak.’

— ‘He says it is delicate, and hopes you will not hold it against him if it displeases you.’

— ‘Not at all.’

— ‘Well, he asks if you wish to exchange your slave for the *ouled* (the little boy) who also belongs to him.’

I was ready to burst out laughing; but the perfect gravity of the two Levantines disconcerted me. I thought I perceived one of those feeble jests that Orientals only allow themselves in situations where a Frank could scarcely make them repent of doing so. I said this to the Armenian, who answered me, with astonishment:

— ‘But no, he speaks in all seriousness; the little boy has a pale complexion while the woman is swarthy, and,’ he added with an air of conscientious appreciation, ‘I advise you to think about it; the little boy is well worth the loss of the woman.’

I am not accustomed to being easily surprised: besides, it would be a waste of time in such countries. I confined myself to replying that the transaction did not suit me. Then, as I showed some ill-humour, the captain told the Armenian that he was sorry for his indiscretion, but that he had thought he was doing me a service. I failed to understand his aim, and thought I had heard a degree of irony in his speech; I therefore had the Armenian press him to explain himself clearly on the point.

— ‘Well,’ the latter said, ‘he claims you paid the lad a compliment this morning; that, at least, is what the boy reported.’

— ‘I did?’ I cried, ‘On the contrary I was furious with him. I called him a little rascal because he was washing himself with our drinking water.’

The Armenian’s astonishment gave me to understand that there was in this affair one of those absurd philological misunderstandings so frequent among people with a poor grasp of a language. The word *kabibé*, so singularly translated the day before by the Armenian, had, on the contrary, the most charming and amorous meaning in the world. I have no idea why the phrase ‘funny little man’ had seemed to him to render this idea perfectly.

We set about a new, amended translation of the refrain sung by the slave, which, decidedly, meant more or less:

‘Oh, my little darling, my beloved, my brother, my master!’

Which is how almost all Arabic love songs start, while being susceptible to the most diverse interpretations, and reminding beginners in the language of the classical ambiguity of Corydon’s eclogue (see *Virgil: ‘Eclogues, II’*).

Chapter 6: From the Logbook

Humble truth lacks the immense resources of dramatic or romantic invention. I myself gather, one by one, the details of events whose merit lies in their very simplicity, and while I know it would be easy, even in an account of a crossing as commonplace as that of the Gulf of Syria, to describe adventures truly worthy of attention, reality grimaces at the lie, and it is better, it seems to me, to speak, naively, as did the ancient navigators, and write: 'On such and such a day, *we saw nothing afloat but a piece of wood drifting randomly*; on another day, *only a grey gull...*' until that all too rare moment arrives when the action intensifies, and is complicated by the presence of a canoe full of savages, bringing yams and roast suckling pigs.

However, in the absence of the obligatory storm, a flat calm worthy of the Pacific Ocean and the lack of fresh water aboard a vessel composed as ours was might have brought scenes worthy of a modern Odyssey. Fate removed this interesting possibility by sending, that evening, a light zephyr from the west which sent us on our way quite swiftly.

I was, after all, quite joyful at this incident, and made the captain repeat his assurance that, next morning, we would see on the horizon the bluish peaks of Mount Carmel. Suddenly cries of terror came from the stern.

— 'Farqha el bahr! Farqha el bahr!'

— 'What is it?

— 'A chicken overboard!'

The circumstance seemed to me to be of no great importance; however, one of the Turkish sailors, to whom the hen belonged, showed his distress in a most touching manner, and his companions pitied him deeply. They restrained him, to prevent him throwing himself into the water, while the hen, already far distant, made like signs of distress, the various phases of which were gazed on with some emotion. Finally, the captain, after a moment of doubt, gave the order that the vessel be turned about.

Meanwhile, thinking it a bit much that, having lost two days, we must now lose a fair breeze for a drowning hen, I gave the sailor two piastres, thinking that to be the whole point of the matter, for an Arab would have killed for much less. His face softened, but he doubtless calculated instantly that he might gain a double advantage by retrieving the hen and, in the twinkling of an eye, he threw off his clothes and plunged into the sea.

The distance he swam was prodigious. We had to wait half an hour, anxious about our situation and the coming night; our man finally reached us, exhausted, and had to be pulled from the water, since he no longer had the strength to climb over the bulwark.

Once safe, the man cared more about his hen than himself; he warmed her, sponged her, and was not happy until he saw her breathing easily, and fluttering on deck.

The voyage recommenced.

— 'Devil take that chicken!' I said to the Armenian, 'We've lost an hour.'

— 'What! Would you have had her drown?'

— 'But I have chickens too, and would have given him several to replace that one!'

— ‘It’s not the same.’

— ‘How so! I would sacrifice all the chickens on earth not to lose a fair breeze for an hour, aboard a vessel in which we risk dying of thirst tomorrow.’

— ‘You see,’ said the Armenian, ‘the hen flew to his left, just as he was about to sever its neck.’

— ‘I readily admit,’ I replied, ‘that, as a Muslim, he devoted himself to saving a living creature; but I know the respect of true believers for animals does not extend that far, since they kill them to eat.’

— ‘Indeed, they kill them, but with ceremony, while pronouncing prayers, and even then, they can only cut their throats with a knife whose handle is pierced with three nails and whose blade is without a flaw. If the hen had drowned just now, the poor man would have been certain to die within three days.’

— ‘That’s a different matter,’ I said to the Armenian.

For Orientals, it is always a serious thing to kill an animal. It is only permitted to do so expressly for food, and in a way which recalls the ancient institution of sacrifice. We know that there is something similar among the Israelites: butchers are obliged to employ a slaughterer (*shohet*) who belongs to the religion, and kills each animal only in accord with consecrated ritual. This prejudice is found with various nuances in most of the religions of the Levant. Even hunting is tolerated only against wild beasts and as punishment for the damage they have caused. Hunting with falcons was, however, at the time of the Caliphs, an entertainment indulged in by the nobility, but according to an interpretation of the law which transferred the responsibility for the bloodshed to the bird of prey. Without adopting ideas belonging to India, we can agree that there is something fundamentally sound in refraining from killing any animal needlessly. Such rituals, designed for the case where one takes life due to one’s need for food, are undoubtedly intended to prevent suffering being prolonged more than a moment, a thing which our hunting methods, sadly, render impossible.

The Armenian told me regarding this subject that, in the days of Sultan Mahmud II, Constantinople was so full of dogs that it was difficult for carriages to navigate the streets: not being permitted to destroy them, either as wild animals, or for food, the idea was to abandon them on deserted islands at the entrance to the Bosphorus. They were embarked by the thousands in caiques; and, at the moment when, ignorant of their fate, they took possession of their new domains, an imam made a speech, explaining to them that this was done from absolute necessity, and that their souls, at the hour of death, should not hold it against the true believers; and that, moreover, if the will of heaven was that they should be saved, this would certainly happen. There were a host of rabbits on the islands, and the dogs did not at first protest against this Jesuitical reasoning, but, a few days later, tormented by hunger, they uttered such howls that they were heard from Constantinople. The devotees, moved by this lamentable protest, made a serious plea to the Sultan, already suspected of overly European tendencies, such that it was necessary to issue orders to recover the dogs, whose civic rights were triumphantly restored.

Chapter 7: The Hadji

The Armenian was of some aid to me as regards the tedium of our voyage; but I also saw with pleasure that his gaiety, his inexhaustible chatter, his narrations, his remarks, gave poor Zeynab the opportunity, so dear to the women of these lands, to express her ideas with a volubility of nasal and guttural consonants amidst which I found it difficult grasp not only the meaning, but the very sound of the words.

With the magnanimity of a European, I even suffered one or other of the sailors who happened to be sitting near us on the sacks of rice, to address a few ready words of conversation to him. In the East, the ordinary folk generally adopt familiar airs, firstly because the sense of equality is established there more genuinely than among us, and then because a sort of innate politeness exists among all classes. As for education, it is everywhere the same, summary indeed, but universal. This is what allows a man of humble origin to become, without any great transition, the favourite of a nobleman, and rise to the first ranks without ever appearing out of place.

There was among the sailors a certain Turk from Anatolia, very swarthy and with a grizzled beard, who talked with my slave more often and at greater length than the others; I had noted him, and I asked the Armenian what the subject of their conversation might be; he paid attention to a little of their speech, and replied:

— ‘They are talking of religion, together.’

This seemed very respectable to me, especially since it was this man who, as a hadji or pilgrim returning from Mecca, was performing the morning and evening prayers for others. I had not thought for a moment of thwarting my poor woman in her usual practice, she whose fate had been placed in my hands, alas, through a very inexpensive whim. Only, in Cairo, at a time when she was somewhat ill, I had tried to make her relinquish the habit of dipping her hands and feet in cold water every morning and evening, while saying her prayers; but she paid little attention to my precepts of hygiene, and only agreed to abstain from the henna dye, which, lasting only about five or six days, obliges women of the Orient to often renew a preparation very unsightly to those who view it closely. I am not an enemy of the dyeing of eyebrows and eyelids; I even accept carmine applied to the cheeks and lips; but what is the use of colouring yellow hands already coppery in hue, which, thence, acquire a shade of saffron? I had shown myself inflexible on that point.

Her hair had grown again over her forehead; it met on both sides the long braids mingled with silk-thread and quivering with pierced sequins (sadly false) which hung from neck to heels, according to the Levantine fashion. Her *taktikos* (*headdress*) festooned with gold inclined gracefully over the left ear, and her arms bore heavy threaded rings of silver-plated copper, roughly enamelled in red and blue, a thoroughly Egyptian adornment. Still others sounded at her ankles, despite the prohibition of the Koran, which does not permit a woman to allow the jewellery which adorns her feet to jingle (*Sura 24:31*).

I admired her thus, graceful in her silk-striped dress, and draped with the blue milayah, with that air of an antique statue which women of the Orient possess without in the least suspecting so. The animation of her gesture, an unaccustomed expressiveness in her features, struck me at times, without inspiring me with anxiety; the sailor who was talking with her could have been her grandfather, and he did not seem to fear that his words would be heard.

— ‘Do you wish to know what the problem is?’ said the Armenian, who, a little later, had approached the sailors who were talking among themselves. ‘These people say that the woman who is with you does not belong to you.’

— ‘They are wrong,’ I said to him; ‘you can inform them that she was sold to me in Cairo by Abd-el-Kerim, for five purses. I have the receipt in my wallet. And, besides, it is none of their business.’

— ‘They say that the merchant had no right to sell a Muslim woman to a Christian.’

— ‘I care nothing for their opinion, and in Cairo they know more about it than they do. All the Franks have slaves there, whether Christian or Muslim.’

— ‘But they are only black Africans, or Abyssinians; they may not own slaves of the white race.’

— ‘Do you consider this woman as white?’

The Armenian shook his head doubtfully.

— ‘Listen,’ I said to him, ‘as to my right, I have no doubts, having obtained the necessary information in advance. Now tell the captain that it is not proper for his sailors to talk with her.’

— ‘The captain,’ he said to me after speaking to the latter, ‘replies that you could have first forbidden her to converse.’

— ‘I did not wish,’ I replied, ‘to deprive her of the pleasure of speaking her own language, nor to prevent her from joining in the prayers; besides, the conformation of the vessel requires everyone to jostle together, it is difficult to prevent the exchange of a few words.’

Captain Nicolas did not seem very well disposed towards me, which I attributed to a degree of resentment at having seen his proposal of exchange rejected. However, he summoned the hadji whom I had designated as having ill intentions from among the sailors, and spoke to him. As for myself, I did not want to say anything to my slave, so as not to adopt the odious role of a demanding master.

The sailor appeared to answer in a very proud manner, and the captain sent word to me through the Armenian that I should cease my concern; that the hadji was an exalted individual, a sort of saint, whom his comrades respected because of his piety; and that what he had said had no other import.

This man, in fact, did not speak to the slave again; but he talked very loudly before her with his comrades, and I understood that they were still discussing the question of the Muslim woman and the Roumi (*Roman*). It was necessary for them to conclude the matter, and I saw no way of avoiding their insinuations. I decided to summon the slave, and, with the help of the Armenian, had roughly the following conversation:

- ‘What did those men tell you earlier?’
- ‘That I was wrong, being a believer, to remain with an infidel.’
- ‘But don’t they know I purchased you?’
- ‘They say he had no right to sell me to you.’
- ‘And do you think that true?’
- ‘The Lord knows!’
- ‘These men are mistaken, and you must not speak to them again.’
- ‘It shall be so.’

I asked the Armenian to distract her a little, and tell her some stories. The lad had, after all, become very useful to me; he always spoke to her in that flute-like and graceful tone which is used to amuse children, and invariably began with ‘*Ked ya, siti?* ... Well, then, madame... what’s the matter? We are not laughing? Do you wish to hear the tale of the Head Baked in an Oven?’

He then related to her an old legend of Constantinople, in which a tailor, believing he was receiving a sultan’s garment to repair, took home the head of an officer (*aga*) in a parcel which had been given him by mistake, and not knowing how to get rid of the sad relic afterwards, he had despatched it, in an earthenware vase, to be disposed of in the oven belonging to a Greek pastry chef. The latter gave the head to a Frankish barber, furtively substituting it for his wig; the Frank put it on his head; then, realising his error, took it elsewhere; a host of more or less comical mistakes ultimately resulted. This is Turkish buffoonery in the highest good taste.

Evening prayer was celebrated with the usual ceremony. So as not to scandalise anyone, I went for a walk on the forward deck, gazing at the stars as they rose, and repeating my own prayer, that of the dreamer and poet, which is to say one expressing admiration of Nature, and the pleasures of memory. Yes, I admired them amidst that air of the Orient, so pure that it brings the heavens closer to man, those stars named for divinities, for those diverse and sacred forms that religion has rejected in turn, as masks of the eternal Isis ... Urania, Astarte, Saturn, Jupiter, you represent to me symbols of the humble faith of our ancestors. Those who, in their millions, have furrowed these seas doubtless mistook the radiance for the flame, and the throne for the god; but who is not free to adore in the stars of the sky the very proof of eternal power, and in their regular march the vigilant action of a hidden spirit?

Chapter 8: A Threat

Returning to where the captain stood, I saw, in a corner of the boat, the slave and the old hadji who had resumed their religious conversation despite my prohibition.

On this occasion, there was to be no exception; I pulled the slave violently by the arm, and she fell, very limply it is true, on a sack of rice.

— ‘*Giaour!*’ she cried.

I heard the word perfectly. There was no mistaking it.

— ‘*Enté giaour!*’ I replied, not really knowing how this last word was pronounced in the feminine gender. ‘It is you who are an infidel, and he,’ I added, pointing to the hadji, ‘is a dog (*kelb*).’

I am unsure whether the anger that agitated me was that of seeing myself despised as a Christian, or due to thoughts of this woman’s ingratitude, whom I had always treated as an equal. The hadji, hearing himself called a dog, had made a threatening sign, but turned towards his companions with the usual cowardice of ordinary Arabs, who, after all, would not dare attack a Frank alone. Two or three of them came forward, uttering insults, and, mechanically, I seized one of the pistols from my belt without thinking that such weapons with their gleaming butts, bought in Cairo to complete my costume, are usually fatal only to the hand that seeks to use them. I will confess, moreover, that they were not loaded.

‘Are you dreaming?’ said the Armenian, clasping my arm. ‘He’s a madman, but to these people he’s a saint; let them shout, the captain will speak to them.’

The slave pretended to cry, as if I had done her a great deal of harm, and would not move from the place where she lay. The captain arrived, and said with his usual indifferent air:

— ‘What would you have! They’re savages!’

And he addressed a few words to them, rather weak in nature.

— ‘Tell them, in addition,’ I said to the Armenian, ‘that when I land, I will seek out the Pasha, and have them beaten with sticks.’

I believe that the Armenian translated this to them as some perfectly moderate compliment. They said nothing more, but I felt that their silence left me in far too doubtful a position. I remembered, most aptly, a letter of recommendation that I had in my wallet to the Pasha of Acre, and which had been given to me by my friend Alphonse Royer, who was for some time a member of the Divan in Constantinople. I took my wallet out of my jacket, which excited general disquiet. The pistol would have served only to have knocked me over ... especially since it was of Arabian manufacture; but the common people in the East always believe that Europeans are a species of magicians, capable of drawing from their pockets, at any given moment, sufficient firepower to destroy an entire army. They were reassured to see that I had only retrieved from my wallet a letter, very neatly written moreover, in Arabic, addressed to His Excellency Reşid Mehmed Pasha, (*known as Kutahi*), Pasha of Acre, who had previously resided in France for some time.

The most fortunate thing as regards my threat, and my situation, is that we were almost opposite Saint-Jean-d’Acre, where we had to anchor, so as to take on water. The city was not yet in sight, but we could not fail, if the wind continued to blow, to arrive there next day. As for Mehmed Pasha, by another stroke of good fortune worthy of being called providential for me, and fatal to my adversaries, I had met him in Paris at several parties. He had offered me Turkish tobacco, and done me honour. The letter I had about me recalled the occasion, in case

time and his recent promotion had erased me from his memory; but it became clear to the captain, nonetheless, that the letter recommended me to a most powerful personage.

The reading of this document produced the effect of that '*quos ego*' of Neptune's (see *Virgil, Aeneid I, 135*). The Armenian, after placing the letter on his head as a sign of respect, had opened the envelope, which, as is customary for recommendations, was not sealed, and showed the text to the captain as he read it through. From then on, the promised blows of a stick were no longer illusory in the minds of the hadji and his comrades. The rascals lowered their heads, and the captain explained his own conduct to me as a fear of offending their religious ideas, being himself only a poor Greek subject (*raya*) of the Sultan, and one who had authority only by reason of his service to the latter.

— 'As for the woman,' he said, 'if you are the friend of Mehmed Pasha, she indeed belongs to you: who would dare to oppose one in favour with the great?'

The slave had not moved; however, she had heard, clearly, what had been said. She could have no doubt about her present position; for, in a Turkish country, protection is worth more than a right; however, from now on I was anxious to establish mine in the eyes of all.

— 'Were you not born,' I asked her, 'in a country that does not belong to the Sultan of the Turks?'

— 'That is true,' she replied; 'I am Hindi (*Indian*)'.

— 'Then, you can be the servant of a Frank like the Abyssinians (*Abesch*), who are, like you, copper-coloured, and who are your equals.'

— '*Aioua (Yes)*!' she replied, as if convinced; '*ana mamluk enté (I am your slave)*'.

— 'But,' I added, 'do you recall that before leaving Cairo, I offered you your freedom if you remained there? And you told me that you would not know where to go.'

— 'That's right, I said it was better to sell me.'

— 'So, you have followed me only to reach another land, and then leave me? Well, since you are so ungrateful, you may remain a slave forever, and will not be a qaden (*lady*), but rather a servant. From now on, you will wear your veil, and keep to the captain's cabin... with the cockroaches. You must no longer speak to anyone here.'

She donned her veil without answering, and went to sit in the small cabin up front.

I had perhaps yielded somewhat to a wish to make an impression on these people, alternately insolent or servile, and always at the mercy of vivid and fleeting impressions, and whom one must know in order to understand why despotism is the normal government of the Orient. The most honest traveller finds himself forced, very quickly, that is assuming a sumptuous way of life does not at first win him respect, to pose theatrically and to take energetic action, in a host of situations, which, from then on, present little danger. The Arab is like a dog that bites if one retreats, but who will lick the hand raised against him. On receiving a blow from a stick, he knows not whether, deep down, you have the right to act so. You seemed to him at first of little account; but have him bound, and you immediately become a great personage, and merely affecting simplicity. The Orient never doubts a thing; all is possible: the

simple calenderer (*a roller and smoother of cloth*) could very well be a king's son, as in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Besides, do we not see the princes of Europe travelling about dressed in black tailcoats and rounded hats?

Chapter 9: The Coast of Palestine

I greeted, with intoxication, the longed-for appearance of the coast of Asia Minor. It had been many a day since I had seen mountains! The misty freshness of the landscape, the vivid brilliance of the painted houses and Turkish kiosks reflected in the blue water, the various levels of plateau rising boldly between sea and sky, the flattened summit of Mount Carmel, the square enclosure and high dome of its famous monastery illuminated in the distance, with that radiant tint of cherries, which always recalls the Aurora of Homer's verse; and at the feet of the mountains, Haifa, already passed, and facing me Saint-Jean-d'Acre, situated at the other end of the bay, and before which our ship had anchored: all this was a spectacle at once full of grace and grandeur. The sea, barely undulating, spreading like oil towards the shore where the thin fringe of the wave foamed, and competing in azure hue with the ether already vibrating with the fires of the as yet invisible sun... this is what Egypt fails to offer with its low coastline and horizons soiled with dust. The sun, at last, appeared, clearly outlining before me the city of Acre, on its promontory of sand jutting into the sea, with its white domes, its walls, its houses with terraces, and its square tower festooned with battlements, formerly the residence of the terrible Jazzar Pasha (*Ahmed Pasha al-Jazzar*), whom Napoleon encountered.

We had dropped anchor a short distance from shore. We had to wait for the visit of the health inspector before the boats could supply us with fresh water and fruit. As for disembarking, this was forbidden, unless we wanted to remain in the city and quarantine there.

As soon as the inspector's boat came to ascertain whether we were sick, having arrived from the coast of Egypt, the sailing boats of the port were allowed to bring us the expected refreshments, and to receive our money while taking the usual precautions. For the tons of water, melons, watermelons and pomegranates that were passed to us, we were obliged to pour our coins, *ghazis*, *piastres*, and *paras* into basins of vinegar water that were placed within our reach.

Thus supplied, we had forgotten our internal quarrels. Unable to disembark for a few hours, and renouncing a sojourn in the city, I did not think it appropriate to send the Pasha my letter, which, moreover, might still act as a recommendation for me, at any other point of the ancient coast of Phoenicia which was subject to the Pashalik of Acre. This city, which the ancients called Akko, '*the narrow*', and the Arabs Akka, was called Ptolemais until the time of the Crusades.

We set sail again, and henceforth our voyage was a celebration; we skimmed the coasts of Coele Syria (*as the Romans named it*) at a distance of a mile or so, and the sea, still clear and blue, reflected like a lake the graceful chain of mountains which runs from Carmel to Lebanon.

At twenty-five miles from Saint-Jean-d'Acre, the town of Sur, formerly Tyre, appeared, with its causeway, built by Alexander the Great, joining the islet where the ancient city lay, which he was forced to besiege for so long, to the shore.

Six leagues further on was Saida, the ancient Sidon, whose mass of white houses crowded against the feet of those mountains inhabited by the Druze. These famous shores have few ruins to show as souvenirs of wealthy Phoenicia; what cities remain of a people dedicated exclusively to trade? Their splendour has passed like a shadow, like dust, and the curse of the Biblical books has been entirely realised, like everything that poets dream of, everything that the wisdom of nations denies!

However, on reaching one's end, one tires of everything, even those beautiful shores, those azure waves. Here at last was the promontory called Raz-Beyrouth, with its grey rocks, dominated in the distance by the snowy peak of Mount Sannine. The coast is arid; the smallest details of the rocks, covered with reddish moss, are visible beneath the rays of a burning sun. We skimmed the coast, we turned towards the bay; immediately everything changed. A landscape full of freshness, shade and silence, a view of the Alps taken from the bosom of a Swiss lake, such is Beirut in calm weather. It is Europe and Asia melting in soft caress; it is, for every pilgrim a little tired of the sun and dust, a maritime oasis where one finds with delight, on the brow of the mountains, those things so melancholy in the North, so graceful and desired in the South: clouds!

O blessed clouds! Clouds of my homeland! I had forgotten your gifts! And the Eastern sun adds so greatly to your charm! In the morning, you are so gently tinted, half-pink, half-bluish; mythological depths, from whose bosom one always expects to see smiling divinities emerge; in the evening, there are marvellous blazes of colour, purple vaults that collapse and quickly disperse in violet flakes, while the sky passes from the hues of sapphire to those of emerald, a phenomenon rare in the countries of the North.

As we advanced, the verdure burst forth in different hues, and the dark tint of the ground and the buildings added still more to the freshness of the landscape. The town, at the end of the bay, seemed drowned in foliage, and, instead of the tiresome mass of whitewashed houses which constitutes most Arabian cities, I made out a collection of charming villas scattered over a space of eight miles or so. The buildings were clustered, it is true, around a notable point from which rose round and square towers; but this appeared to be only a central district indicated by numerous buildings in all colours.

Meanwhile, instead of entering, as I had expected, the narrow harbour crowded with small ships, we cut diagonally across the bay, and landed on an islet surrounded by rocks, where a few small buildings and a yellow flag represented the quarantine area, which, for the moment, was the only one allowed us.

Chapter 10: Quarantine

Captain Nicolas and his crew had become very friendly and courteous in their manner towards me. They were spending their quarantine period on board; but a boat, sent by the health inspector, came to transport the passengers to the islet, which, when viewed more closely, was more of a peninsula. A narrow cove among the rocks, shaded by ancient trees, led to the staircase of a kind of cloister whose pointed vaulting rested on stone pillars, and supported a cedar roof as in Catholic monasteries. The sea broke all around on the sandstone covered with algae, and all that was missing was a choir of monks, and the storm, to recall the first act of Charles Maturin's play *Bertram (or the 'Castle of St. Aldebrand', a Gothic tragedy)*.

We had to wait there for some time for the visit of the *nazir*, or Turkish director, who was kind enough to admit us at last to the joys of his domain. Buildings formed like cloisters succeeded the first, which, as the only one open on all sides, served for sanitising suspect goods. At the end of the promontory, an isolated pavilion, overlooking the sea, was indicated to us as a dwelling; it was the premises usually assigned to Europeans. The arcades that we had left on our right, contained Arab families camped out, so to speak, in vast rooms that served both as stables and lodgings. There, tethered horses quivered, and dromedaries passed their contorted necks and hairy heads between the bars; further on, whole tribes, crouching about their kitchen fires, turned round with a fierce air when they saw us pass the doors. However, we were allowed to walk two acres or so of land, sown with barley, and planted with mulberry-trees, and even to bathe in the sea under the supervision of a guard.

Once I became familiar with this wild, maritime place, I found our stay there charming. There was rest, and shade, and a variety of views to satisfy the most sublime reverie. On one side, the dark mountains of Lebanon, with their ridges of various hue, enamelled here and there with white by numerous Maronite and Druze villages, and the monasteries, scattered over thirty miles and more of horizon; on the other, in exchange for that upland chain, with the snowy front, which ends at Cape Batroun, the whole amphitheatre of Beirut, crowned with a fir-forest planted by Emir Fakhr al-Din II to halt the invasion of the desert sands. Crenellated towers, castles, and manor-houses, pierced by arched windows, and built in reddish stone, give the country a feudal and at the same time European aspect which recalls the miniatures in those knightly manuscripts of the Middle Ages. The Frankish ships at anchor in the roads, which the narrow port of Beirut cannot contain, further animated the picture.

Quarantine in Beirut was therefore quite bearable, and our days were spent either in dreaming beneath the thick shade of the sycamores and fig-trees, or in climbing a very picturesque rock whose cliffs embraced a natural basin where the sea's waves broke softly. The place recalled descriptions of the rocky caves of the daughters of Nereus. We remained there all day long, isolated from the other quarantined inhabitants, and lying amidst the green seaweed, or struggling feebly against the foaming waves. At night, we were locked in the pavilion, where the mosquitoes and other insects gave us a less pleasant time. The long, tied shirts with masks, of which I have already spoken, were then of great assistance. As for the cooking, it consisted simply of bread and salted cheese, provided by the canteen; to this should be added eggs and chickens brought by peasants from the mountains; moreover, every morning, sheep were slaughtered in front of the door, the meat of which was sold to us at a piastre (*twenty-five centimes*) per pound. Further, Cyprus, at about half a piastre a bottle, was a treat

worthy of the greatest European tables; I will admit, however, that one tires of that sweet wine when drinking it frequently, and I preferred the golden wine of Lebanon, which is something akin to Madeira, in its dry taste, and strength.

One day Captain Nicholas came to visit, with two of his sailors and the cabin-boy. We had become good friends again, and he had brought the hadji, who shook my hand with great effusion, perhaps fearing that I would complain of him once I was free to enter Beirut. I was, on my part, full of cordiality. We dined together, and the captain invited me to come and stay with him if I visited Jarabulus. After dinner, we walked on the shore; he took me aside, and made me observe the slave and the Armenian, who were talking together, seated below us on the shore. A few words in mixed French and Greek, and I understood his aspersion, which I rejected with marked incredulity. He shook his head, and, a little while after, returned to his boat, after taking affectionate leave of me.

— ‘Captain Nicolas’, I said to myself, ‘has taken to heart, my refusal to exchange the slave for his cabin boy.’

However, suspicion remained in my mind, challenging my vanity at least.

It should be understood that the violent scene which had taken place on the ship had resulted in a sort of coldness between the slave and myself. One of those ‘irreparable words’ of which the author of *Adolphe*, Benjamin Constant, spoke (*see ‘Adolphe, Chapter IV’*) had been uttered between us; the epithet ‘giaour’ had wounded me deeply.

— ‘So,’ I said to myself, ‘it has not proved difficult to persuade her that I have no rights over her; moreover, whether through advice or on reflection, she feels humiliated by belonging to a man of an inferior race according to Muslim ideas.’

The reduced situation of the Christian populations in the East has had its repercussion, ultimately, on the European, who is feared on the coast because of the apparatus of power, made visible in the passage of ships; but, in the inner regions where this woman had always lived, prejudice lives on in its entirety.

Nonetheless, I found difficult to believe that dissimulation was being practiced by that naive soul; the religious feeling so pronounced in her must surely have protected her from such baseness. I could not, on the other hand, hide from myself the Armenian’s advantages. Still young indeed, and handsome, possessing that Asiatic beauty, with firm and pure features, of a people born in the cradle of the world, he seemed like some charming girl who had taken the fancy to disguise herself as a man; his very costume, with the exception of the headdress, barely removed the illusion.

Here I am like *Arnolphe* (*see Moliere’s play ‘L’école de Femmes’*), spying on idle appearances, with the consciousness of being doubly ridiculous; for I am, after all, *the master*. I am experiencing the ill fortune not only of being deceived and robbed, but of repeating to myself, like a jealous character in comedy: ‘What a heavy burden it is to keep guard on a woman!... However,’ I said to myself almost immediately, ‘there is nothing surprising about it; he distracts and amuses her with his stories, he offers her a thousand niceties, while I, in trying to speak his language, must surely produce a comical effect, as an Englishman does, a

man of the North, cold and heavy, in regard to a woman from my country. There is among the Levantines a warm expansiveness which must prove seductive indeed!’

From that moment, I confess, I seemed to note handshakes, tender words, which were not even curbed by my presence. I thought about this for some time; then concluded that I should adopt a firm resolution.

— ‘My dear fellow,’ I said to the Armenian, ‘what were you doing in Egypt?’

— ‘I was Tusun-Pasha’s secretary (*Tusun Pasha, was the second son of Muhammad Ali Pasha, the de facto ruler of Egypt; however Tusun had died in 1816!*). I translated French newspapers and books for him; I wrote his letters to Turkish officials. He died suddenly, and I was dismissed; that was my position.’

— ‘And now, what do you plan to do?’

— ‘I hope to enter the service of the Pasha of Beirut. I know his treasurer, who is of my nation.’

— ‘And do you not think of marrying?’

— ‘I have no money to give as a dowry, and no family will grant me a wife otherwise.’

— ‘Come,’ I said to myself after a silence, ‘let me show myself to be magnanimous, let me make two people happy.’

I felt myself greater by this thought. Thus, I would free a slave and create an honest marriage. I would prove both a benefactor and a father!

I took the Armenian’s hands in mine and said to him:

— ‘You like her: marry her, she is yours!’

I would wish the whole world to have been a witness to this moving scene, this patriarchal picture: the Armenian astonished, confused by such magnanimity; the slave seated near us, still ignorant of the subject of our conversation but, it seemed to me, already unsettled and dreaming....

The Armenian raised his arms to the sky, as if stunned by my proposal.

— ‘What! I said to him, unhappy man, you hesitate!... You seduce a woman who belongs to another, you divert her from her duties, and then refuse to take charge of her when she is handed to you?’

But the Armenian failed to comprehend my reproach. His astonishment expressed itself in a series of energetic protests. He had never had the least idea of the things I thought. He was so unhappy even, at such a supposition, that he hastened to inform the slave of it, and make her bear witness to his sincerity. Learning at the same time what I had said, she seemed hurt by it, and especially by the supposition that she could have paid attention to a simple *raya* (*Turkish subject*), a servant sometimes of the Turks, sometimes of the Franks, with no higher status than a *yaoudi* (*Jew*).

Thus, Captain Nicolas had led me into all sorts of ridiculous suppositions.... One can see in this the devious workings of the Greek mind!

Part IX: The Women of Cairo (*Les Femmes du Caire*) – Mount Lebanon



Cedars of Lebanon, 1841, James Duffield Harding

[Rijksmuseum](#)

Chapter 1: Father Planchet

On exiting quarantine, I rented lodgings for a month in a house of Maronite Christians, two miles or more from the city. Most of the residences, located in the middle of gardens, arranged in tiers along the entire coast, on terraces planted with mulberry trees, look like small feudal manors, built solidly of brownstone, with ogives and arches. External staircases lead to the upper floors, each of which has its own terrace, and to the roof which dominates the entire building, and on which families gather in the evening to enjoy the view of the gulf. Our eyes encountered everywhere a thick, glossy verdure, where the regular hedges of *nopals* (*Opuntia cacti*) alone mark the divisions. I abandoned myself, during those first days of freedom, to the delights of freshness and shade. Everywhere there was life and ease around us; the well-dressed and beautiful women, free of veils, coming and going, endlessly, with heavy jugs which they fill at the cisterns, and carry gracefully on their shoulders. Our hostess, wearing a sort of draped

cashmere cone, which, with the sequin-trimmed braids of her long hair, gave her the air of an Assyrian queen, was simply the wife of a tailor who had his shop in the Beirut bazaar. His two daughters, and the little children were on the first floor; we occupied the second.

The slave quickly became familiar with the family and seated, nonchalantly, on a mat, looked upon herself as surrounded by inferiors, and allowed herself to be waited on, despite whatever I could do to prevent these poor people from doing so. However, I found it convenient that I could now safely leave her in the house whenever I went to town. I was waiting for letters, which failed to arrive, the French postal service being so poor in these parts that newspapers and packages are always two months behind. This circumstance saddened me greatly, and darkened my dreams. One morning, I woke up fairly late, still half-immersed in the delusions of sleep. I found a priest seated at my bedside, who gazed at me with an air of compassion.

— ‘How do you feel, sir?’ he asked me in a melancholy tone.

— ‘Why, quite well my apologies, I have just wakened, and...’.

— ‘Stir not! Be calm. Collect yourself; remember that the moment is nigh.’

— ‘What moment?’

— ‘The supreme hour, so dreadful for those who are not at peace with God!’

— ‘Oh! Oh! What’s happening?’

— ‘You see me ready to hear your last wishes.’

— ‘Ah! Truly,’ I cried, ‘this is too much! And who are you?’

— ‘My name is Father Planchet.’

— ‘Father Planchet?’

— ‘From the Society of Jesus (*the Jesuits*).’

— ‘I know nothing of you people!’

— ‘I was told at the monastery that a young American, in mortal danger, was waiting for me to make some bequests to the community.

— ‘But I am not American! There is some mistake! And, moreover, I am not on my deathbed; as you can clearly see!’

And, with that, I rose abruptly... in need of convincing myself of my perfect health. Father Planchet finally understood that he had been misinformed. He asked the people of the house, and learned that the American lodged a little further away. He took his leave, laughing at his mistake, and promised to come and visit me when he returned, delighted as he was to have made my acquaintance, thanks to this singular chance.

When he did return, the slave was in the room, and I told him her story.

— ‘Why,’ he said to me, ‘did you burden your conscience in this manner! You have interfered with this woman’s life, and are now responsible for everything that may happen to her. Since you cannot take her to France, and you probably do not want to marry her, what will become of her?’

— ‘I will grant her freedom; it is the greatest good that a rational creature can claim.’

— ‘It would have been far better to leave her where she was: she might have found a good master, a husband.... Now, who knows into what abyss of misconduct she may fall, once left to herself? She has no skills; she has no wish to serve.... Reflect on all this.’

I had never, in fact, thought about it seriously. I asked Father Planchet for advice, who said, in answer: ‘It is not impossible that I may find her a place that guarantees her future. There are,’ he added, ‘very pious ladies in the city who would take charge of her fate.’

I warned him of the extreme devotion she had for the Muslim faith. He shook his head and began to speak to her at great length.

In fact, the woman had a religious feeling developed rather by nature, and in a general way, than in the sense of a particular belief. Moreover, the sight of the Maronite populations among whom we lived, and of the monasteries whose bells could be heard pealing in the mountains; and the frequent passage of Christian and Druze emirs, who visited Beirut, magnificently mounted and provided with brilliant weapons, amidst numerous retinues of horsemen and Africans who bore their standards behind them, rolled around lances: all that feudal apparatus, like some painting of the Crusades, which astonished even myself, taught the poor slave that there existed, even in Turkish lands, pomp and power beyond the Muslim sphere.

External effects may seduce women everywhere, especially ignorant and simple women, and often are the main cause of their sympathies or convictions. When we entered Beirut, and she passed through a crowd composed of women without veils, who wore on their heads the *tantour* (a sort of *hennin*), a decorated and gilded silver cone from which a veil of gauze hangs behind their heads, another fashion preserved from the Middle Ages, and of proud and richly armed men, whose red or multi-coloured turbans nevertheless indicated non-Islamic belief, she cried out:

— ‘What a crowd of *giaours*! ...’

Which softened my resentment a little, at having been insulted with that same word.

It was a question, though, of taking a stand. The Maronites, our hosts, who much disliked her manners, and judged her, moreover, from the stance of Catholic intolerance, said to me: ‘Sell her.’

They even offered to introduce a Turk to me who would undertake the transaction. You will understand what value I placed on this scarcely evangelical advice.

I went to see Father Planchet at his monastery, situated almost at the gates of Beirut. Christian children, whose education he supervised, attended classes there. We talked for a long time of Alphonse de Lamartine, whom he had known, and whose poetry he greatly admired. He complained of the difficulty he had in obtaining permission from the Turkish government to enlarge the monastery. However, partial construction revealed a grandiose plan, and a magnificent staircase, in Cyprus marble, led to floors as yet unfinished. Catholic monasteries are free to do as they wish in the mountains; but, at the gates of Beirut, they are not allowed to extend too far, and the Jesuits were even forbidden a belltower. An enormous set of chimes,

modified from time to time, gradually took on the role of a belfry. The monastery buildings also grew, almost imperceptibly, under the watchful eye of the Turks.

— ‘One has to tack a little,’ Father Planchet told me; ‘but with patience, one arrives.’

He spoke to me again of the slave in a kind and sincere way. Yet I was contending with my own uncertain arrangements. The letters I awaited might arrive any day, and alter my plans. I feared that Father Planchet, deluding himself out of pity, mainly had in view the honour that would accrue to his monastery if a Muslim woman converted, and that after all the fate of the poor girl might become sadder later.

One morning she came into my room clapping her hands and crying out in fright:

— ‘*Durzi! Durzi! Bandougillah!* (The Druze! The Druze! Shooting!)’

Indeed, the sound of shots echoed in the distance; it was an *improvisation* by some Albanians who were about to leave for the mountains. I made inquiries, and learned that the Druze had burned a village called Beit Mery, situated a few miles away. Turkish troops were being sent, not against them, but to watch the movements of the two parties who were still fighting at that stage.

I was in Beirut, when I heard the news. I returned very late, and was told that an emir or Christian prince from some area of Lebanon had chosen to lodge in the house. Learning that a Frank from Europe also lodged there, he wished to see me and had waited for me awhile in my room, where he had left his weapons as a sign of trust and fraternity. The next day, the noise made by his retinue woke me early; he had with him six well-armed men, and all rode magnificent horses. We soon became acquainted, and the prince suggested that I go and visit him in the mountains for a few days. I quickly seized on such a wonderful opportunity to study the events that take place there, and the customs of that singular population.

During my visit, it would be necessary to place the slave, whom I could not think of taking with me, in suitable hands. I was told of a school for young girls in Beirut run by a lady from Marseilles, named Madame Carlès. It was the only one in which French was taught. Madame Carlès was a very kind woman, who asked me only three Turkish piastres a day for the slave’s maintenance, and food. I was due to leave for the mountains three days after I had placed her there; she had already become very accustomed to it and was delighted to talk with the little girls, who were greatly amused by her ideas and stories.

Madame Carlès took me aside and told me that she did not despair of bringing about the slave’s conversion.

— ‘Here,’ she added in her Provençal accent, ‘is how I seek to do so. I say to her: ‘You see, my daughter, the true gods of every country are all the one true God. Muhammad is a man of great merit ... but Jesus Christ is a very good man too!’

This tolerant and gentle way of carrying on the conversion seemed most acceptable to me.

— ‘You mustn’t force her to do anything,’ I told her.

— ‘Don’t be too concerned’ replied Madame Carlès; ‘she has already promised, of her own accord, to attend Mass with me next Sunday’

Certainly, I could not leave her in better hands, to learn the principles of the Christian religion, and the French language...as spoken in Marseille.

Chapter 2: The Siesta (*Kief*)

Beirut, if one considered only the space enclosed by its ramparts, and the internal population, would correspond only loosely to the idea of it held in Europe, which recognises it as Lebanon's capital. One must also take into account the few hundred houses surrounded by gardens that occupy the vast amphitheatre of which this port is the centre, a scattered herd guarded by a tall square building, furnished with Turkish sentinels, called the tower of Fakr al-Din. I was staying in one of these houses, which are scattered along the coast like the *bastides* that surround Marseilles, and, about to leave for the mountains, I had time only to visit Beirut and obtain a horse, mule, or even a camel. I would have accepted one of those beautiful asses with the long neck, and zebra-striped leggings, which are preferred to horses in Egypt, and which gallop through the dust with tireless ardour; but in Syria the breed is not sturdy enough to climb the stony roads of Lebanon. Yet should the creature not be blessed above all others, having served as a mount for the prophet Balaam, and for the Messiah?

I was thinking about this, as I walked to Beirut, at that time of day when, according to the Italian expression, one hardly sees anyone wandering about in the full sun except *gli cani e gli Francesi* (*dogs and Frenchmen*). Now, this saying has always seemed false to me with regard to dogs, who, at siesta time will stretch out in a cowardly manner in the shade, in no haste to be suntanned. As for the Frenchman, try to keep him on a sofa or a mat, especially if he has business afoot, or a whim or even a simple curiosity to satisfy! The demon of midday rarely weighs on his chest, nor is it for him that shapeless Smarra rolls yellowish eyes in his large dwarfish head (*see Charles Nodier's tale 'Smarra, or the Demons of the Night', 1821*)

Thus, I was crossing the plain at a time when Southerners devote themselves to the siesta, and the Turks to *kief*. A man who wanders thus, when everyone is asleep, runs a great risk, in the East, of exciting the same suspicions that a nocturnal vagabond would among us; yet the sentinels of the tower of Fakr al-Din granted me merely that compassionate attention a soldier on watch grants to a passer-by out late. From this tower, a vast plain reveals, at a glance, the whole eastern profile of the city, whose enclosure and crenellated towers extend as far as the sea. It possesses the physiognomy of an Arabian city at the time of the Crusades; except that the modern European influence is betrayed by the numerous masts of the consular houses, which, on Sundays and holidays, are decked with flags.

As for Turkish domination, it has, as everywhere, applied here its personal and unique stamp. The Pasha had the idea of demolishing a portion of the city walls onto which the Fakr al-Din palace backs, so as to erect one of those wooden kiosks, painted according to the fashion prevailing in Constantinople, which the Turks prefer to the most sumptuous palaces of stone or marble. Do you wish to know why the Turks only live in wooden houses? And why the very palaces of the Sultan, although decorated with marble columns, have only firwood walls? The

reason, in accord with a prejudice peculiar to the Ottomans, is that the house that a Turk builds for himself must last no longer than he himself does; it is akin to a tent erected in transit, a temporary shelter by means of which he should not seek to fight against destiny, by perpetuating his line, that is by attempting that difficult union of world and family, to which Christian peoples aspire.

The palace forms an angle, at the rear of which stands the city gate, with its cool, dark passageway, where one can recover a little from the heat of the sun, reflected by the sandy plain one has crossed. A beautiful stone fountain shaded by a magnificent sycamore, the grey domes of a mosque and its graceful minarets, a brand-new bathhouse of Moorish construction, these are what are offered to the eye on entering Beirut, with the promise of a pleasant and peaceful visit. Further on, however, the walls rise and take on a dark, cloistered appearance.

Why not spend time in a bathhouse, during those hours of intense and dreary heat that I would otherwise spend wandering the deserted streets sadly? I was thinking of entering one, when the sight of a blue curtain stretched in front of its door informed me that it was the hour when only women were allowed in the baths. Men have only the morning and the evening to themselves ... and woe, no doubt, to any who *would lie asleep* on a divan or a bed at the hour when one sex succeeds the other! Frankly, only a European would be capable of such an idea, which would confound the mind of a Muslim.

I had not entered Beirut before at that ungodly hour, and I felt like a man from the *Thousand and One Nights* entering a city of the Magi, the populace of which has been turned to stone. All were still fast asleep; the sentinels at the gate, the donkey-drivers in the square waiting for the ladies, probably also asleep in the upper galleries of the bathhouse; the sellers of dates and watermelons established near the fountain, the *kawhedji* in the coffee shop serving his customers, the *hamal*, or porter, his head resting on his burden, the camel-driver beside his crouching beast, and the large Albanian 'devils' forming a guard corps in front of the Pasha's seraglio: all were sleeping the sleep of the innocent, leaving the city deserted.

It was at a similar hour and during a similar sleep that three hundred Druze seized Damascus, one day. It sufficed for them to enter separately, and mingle with the crowd of country folk who, in the morning, fill the bazaars and squares; then they pretended to fall asleep like the others; but groups of them, skilfully distributed, seized the principal posts at the same moment, while the main troop pillaged the rich bazaars and set fire to them. The inhabitants, awakened with a start, believed they were dealing with an army and barricaded themselves in their houses; the soldiers did the same in their barracks, so that at the end of an hour, the three hundred horsemen returned, laden with booty, to their unassailable retreats in Lebanon.

That is what a city risks by slumbering in broad daylight. However, in Beirut, the European colony does not give itself over entirely to the pleasure of the siesta. Taking a street on the right, I soon distinguished movement in a second street opening onto the square; a penetrating smell of fried food revealed the vicinity of a *trattoria*, and the sign of the celebrated Battista was not long in attracting my gaze. I was too familiar with hotels in the Orient intended for travellers from Europe to have thought, previously, of taking advantage of the hospitality of Signor Battista, the only Frankish innkeeper in Beirut. The English have spoiled these establishments everywhere, usually more modest in their appearance than in their pricing. I

thought, however, that it might be a good idea, at that time of day, to take advantage of the table d'hôte, if they would serve me. I ascended the stairs, to find out.

Chapter 3: The Table d'Hôte

On reaching the first floor, I found myself on a terrace amidst buildings dominated by interior windows. A vast white and red *tendido* protected a long table, set in European style, from the sun, and almost all the chairs were tipped forwards, to mark the untaken places. On the door of a room at the back and on the same level as the terrace, I read these words: *Qui si paga sessenta piastre per giorno. (The price here is sixty piastres a day.)*

Some Englishmen were smoking cigars there, while waiting for the bell to ring. Soon two women came down, and seated themselves at a table. Near me was a serious-looking Englishman, who was being served by a young man with a copper-coloured face wearing a robe of white bazin, and silver earrings. I thought the Englishman must be some nabob with an Indian in his service. This personage was not slow to address me, which surprised me a little, the English rarely speaking to anyone other than those who have been introduced to them; but this one was in a unique position: he was a missionary of the Evangelical Society of London, charged with making English conversions in all countries, and forced to forgo the *cant* on many occasions to attract souls into his nets. He had just descended from the mountains, and I was delighted to be able to obtain some information from him before entering them myself. I asked him for news of the recent alert which had disturbed the environs of Beirut.

— 'It's, nothing' he said, 'the affair was a failure.'

— 'What affair?'

— 'A battle between Maronites and Druze, in villages where they live alongside each other.'

— 'So, you've come,' I said to him, 'from the area where they were fighting?'

— 'Yes, indeed. I went to pacify ... to bring peace, to everything in the canton of Bikfaiya, because England has many friends in the mountains.'

— 'Are the Druze, then, friendly towards England?'

— 'Oh, indeed. These poor people are very unhappy; they are slaughtered, they are burned, their wives are disembowelled, their trees and crops are destroyed.'

— 'Pardon me, but in France we imagine that it is they, on the contrary, who oppress the Christians!'

— 'Oh! Lord, no; what, those poor people! They are unfortunate farmers who perform nothing evil; but your Capuchins, your Jesuits, your Lazarists kindle war, and excite the Maronites against them, who are much more numerous; the Druze defend themselves as best they can, and, without England, they would already be crushed. England is always on the side of the weakest, of those who suffer....'

— ‘Yes, I said, you are a great nation.... So, you have managed to quell the troubles that have taken place in recent days?’

— ‘Oh! Certainly. There were several of us English there; we told the Druze that England would not abandon them, that they would receive justice. They set fire to the village, and then they returned home quietly. They accepted our offer of more than three hundred Bibles, and we converted many of those good people!’

— ‘I don’t understand,’ I observed to the Reverend, ‘how one can convert them to the Anglican faith; since they would have to become English subjects.’

— ‘Oh! no.... They belong to the Evangelical Society, and are protected by England; as for becoming English, they cannot.’

— ‘And who is the head of Anglican religion?’

— ‘Oh! It is Her Gracious Majesty, our Queen of England.’

— ‘Well, she makes a charming female pope, and I swear to you that in itself would be enough to convince me to convert.’

— ‘Oh! You French; you are always jesting.... You are no true friends of England.’

— ‘Moreover,’ I said, suddenly remembering an episode from my early youth, ‘one of your missionaries, in Paris, once undertook to convert me... I have even kept the Bible that he gave me; but I am still trying to discover how one can make an Anglican of a Frenchman.’

— ‘Yet there are many among you ... and, if you received, as a child, the word of truth, then it may well mature in you later.’

I refrained from attempting to disabuse the Reverend, for one becomes very tolerant when travelling, especially when one is guided simply by curiosity, and a desire to observe the local customs; but I saw that the circumstance of my having formerly known an English missionary granted me some right to the confidence of my neighbour at table.

The two English ladies I had noticed were placed on the left of my Reverend, and I soon learned that one was his wife, and the other his sister-in-law. An English missionary never travels without his family. This one appeared to be living in grand style, and occupied the principal apartment of the hotel. When we had risen from table, he went to his room for a moment, and soon returned, holding a sort of album, which he showed me, triumphantly.

— ‘Here,’ he said to me, ‘are the details of the abjurations that I obtained in my last tour in favour of our holy religion.’

A multitude of declarations, signatures, and Arabic seals covered, indeed, the pages of the book. I noticed that his register was kept in double entry; each verso gave the list of the presents and sums received by these Anglican neophytes. Some had received only a rifle, a cashmere, or ornaments for their wives. I asked the reverend if the Evangelical Society gave him a bonus for each conversion. He had no difficulty in admitting it; it seemed natural to him, as well as to me, that costly and dangerous journeys should be amply remunerated. I realised again, in the details added, the superiority that the wealth of English agents give them in the East over those of other nations.

We had taken our places on a sofa in the conversation room, and the Reverend's copper-hued servant knelt before him to light his hookah. I asked if this young man was not Indian by origin; but he was, it seems, a Parsee from the neighbourhood of Baghdad, and the result of one of the Reverend's most brilliant successes, a convert whom he was taking back to England as a sample of his labours.

In the meantime, the Parsee served him as a servant as well as a disciple; he doubtless brushed his clothes with fervour and polished his boots with compunction. I pitied him a little, inwardly, for having abandoned the worship of Ahura Mazda for the modest employment of an evangelical underling.

I hoped to be introduced to the ladies, who had retired to their apartment alone; but the Reverend retained all the customary English reserve on this point. While we were still talking, the sound of military music rang loudly in our ears.

— 'There is a reception,' the Englishman said, 'at the Pasha's. A deputation of Maronite sheikhs has come to air their grievances before him. They are people who are always complaining; but the Pasha is hard of hearing.'

— 'One can tell that by the music, I said; I've never heard such a din.'

— 'And yet it is your national anthem that is being performed; it is the *Marseillaise*.'

— 'I would hardly have guessed.'

— 'I only know because I hear it every morning and evening, and I was told that they thought they were performing that tune.'

Paying closer attention, I managed, indeed, to distinguish a few stray notes in a crowd of flourishes of specifically Turkish music.

The city seemed more definitely awake, the three o'clock sea breeze gently stirred the canvases stretched on the terrace of the hotel. I took leave of the Reverend, thanking him for the polite attentions he had shown me, which are rare among the English only because of that social prejudice which warns them against strangers. It seems to me that there is in that, if not a proof of selfishness, at least a lack of generosity.

I was surprised to have to pay only ten piastres (two francs fifty centimes) for the table d'hôte when leaving the hotel. Signor Battista took me aside, and issued a friendly reproach for my not having come to stay at his hotel. I showed him the sign announcing that one was only admitted for sixty piastres a day, which brought the expense to eighteen hundred piastres a month.

— Ah! *Corpo di me!* he cried. *Questo è per gli Inglesi, che hanno molto moneta, e che sono tutti cretici!... ma, per gli Francesi, e altri Romani, è soltanto cinque franchi!* (That's for the English, who have a lot of money, and are all heretics! ... but for the French and other Roman Catholics it is only five francs!)

— 'That's quite different!' I thought.

And I applauded myself all the more for not belonging to the Anglican religion, when one encountered among the hoteliers of Syria such Catholic and Roman sentiments.

Chapter 4: The Pasha's Palace

Signor Battista completed his good deed for the day by promising to find me a horse for the next morning. Reassured on that matter, I was left with nothing to do but stroll about the town, and I began by crossing the square to view what was happening at the Pasha's castle. There was a large crowd there, in the midst of which the Maronite sheikhs were advancing two by two like a procession of supplicants, the vanguard of which had already entered the palace courtyard. Their ample red or multi-coloured turbans, their *mishlahs* (camel-hair coats) or kaftans embroidered with gold or silver, and their gleaming weapons, all that exterior luxury which, in other countries of the Orient, is the preserve of the Turkish race alone, gave to this procession a most imposing aspect. I managed to enter the palace behind them, where the music continued to transform the *Marseillaise* with major reinforcements of fifes, triangles and cymbals.

The courtyard is formed by the enclosure of the old palace of Fakr al-Din. There, one can still distinguish traces of the Renaissance style, which this Druze prince was fond of, following his journey to Europe. One should not be surprised to hear the name of Fakhreddine II, or in Arabic Fakr-al-Din, cited everywhere in this country: he is the hero of Lebanon; he is also the first sovereign of Asia who deigned to visit our northern climes. He was received at the court of the Medici (*in 1612*), revealing something unheard of at the time, that is to say, that there existed in the land of the Saracens a people devoted to Europe, either by religion or by sympathy.

Fakr al-Din passed in Florence for a philosopher, heir to the Greek science of the Late Empire, preserved through Arabic translations which saved so many precious books and transmitted their contents to us; in France, they wished to see in him as a descendant of some former Crusader who had taken refuge in Lebanon at the time of Saint Louis; they sought, in the alliterative name of the Druze people itself, a relationship which would render him the descendant of a certain Count of Dreux. Fakr al-Din accepted all these suppositions with the prudent and subtle *laissez-faire* of the Levantines; he needed Europe, in order to fight against the Sultan.

He passed for a Christian in Florence; he perhaps became one, as has the Emir Bashir in our day, whose family succeeded that of Fakr al-Din in sovereignty over of Lebanon; but he was always a Druze, that is to say the representative of a singular religion, which, formed from fragments of all previous beliefs, allows its followers to accept, momentarily, all possible forms of worship, as the Egyptian initiates did in the past. In reality, the Druze religion is only a sort of Freemasonry, according to modern ideas.

Fakr al-Din represented for a time the idea the West had formed of Hiram, the ancient king of Lebanon, a friend of Solomon, and a hero with mystical associations. Master of all the coasts of ancient Phoenicia and Palestine, he attempted to create, from the whole of Syria, an independent kingdom; the support that he expected from the monarchs of Europe was lacking

to him in that regard. Now, his memory remains, for Lebanon, an ideal of glory and power; the ruins of his buildings, destroyed by war rather than time, rival the ancient works of the Romans. Italian artists, whom he had summoned to decorate his palaces and cities, sowed, here and there, schools of ornamentation, sculpture, and architecture, which the Muslims, returning as victors, hastened to destroy, astonished at seeing the pagan arts, which their conquests had long eclipsed, suddenly reborn.

It is thus, in the very place where those fragile marvels existed for too short a space of time, where the breath of the Renaissance had, from afar, re-sown a few seeds of Greek and Roman antiquity, that the wooden kiosk built by the Pasha stands. The members of the Maronite procession had lined up beneath the windows awaiting the governor's good pleasure. Moreover, it was not long before they were introduced.

When the vestibule doors were opened, I perceived, among the secretaries and officers who were stationed in the room, the Armenian who had been my sailing companion on the *Santa-Barbara*. He was clad in new clothes, bore a silver writing-case at his belt, and held in his hand parchments, and pamphlets. It was not surprising, in the land of Arabian legend, to find a poor devil, whom one had lost sight of, attain a good position at court. My Armenian recognised me at once, and seemed delighted to see me. He wore the costume of the Reform, as a Turkish employee, and already expressed himself with a certain dignity.

— 'I am pleased,' I said, 'to see you in a suitable situation; you seem to me to be a man in office, and I regret having nothing to solicit.'

— 'Lord,' he said to me, 'I have earned little credit as yet, but am entirely at your service.'

We were talking like this behind a column in the vestibule while the procession of sheikhs progressed towards the Pasha's audience hall.

— 'And what do you do here?' I said to the Armenian.

— 'I'm employed as a translator. The Pasha asked me yesterday for a Turkish version of this booklet here.'

I glanced at the pamphlet, printed in Paris. It was a report by Adolphe Crémieux regarding an affair concerning the Jews of Damascus. Europe has forgotten this sad episode, which relates to the murder of a certain Father Thomas, of which the Jews had been accused. The Pasha felt the need to shed light on this matter, which had been concluded five whole years ago. That is conscientiousness, certainly.

The Armenian had also been asked to translate Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois*, and a manual written for the Parisian National Guard. He found the latter work difficult indeed, and asked me to help him with certain expressions that he did not understand. The Pasha's idea was to create a national guard in Beirut, as, indeed, one now exists in Cairo, and many other cities of the Orient. As for the *Spirit of the Law*, I think the work had been chosen on the basis of its title, perhaps thinking that it contained police regulations applicable to all countries. The Armenian had already translated part of it, and found the work agreeable, and written in an easy style, which doubtless lost very little in translation.

I asked him if he could aid me in viewing the reception of the Maronite sheikhs by the Pasha; but no one was admitted without showing a pass, which had been given to each of them, for the sole purpose of presenting themselves to the Pasha, since it is the case that Maronite and Druze sheikhs customarily lack the right to enter Beirut. Their vassals enter without difficulty; but there are severe penalties for they themselves, if, by chance, they are encountered within the city. The Turks fear their influence on the population, or the brawling which might break out in the streets due to the meeting of these leaders, who always go about armed, accompanied by a large retinue, and are constantly ready to fight over questions of precedence. It should be noted, however, that this law is only rigorously observed in times of trouble.

Moreover, the Armenian informed me that the audience with the Pasha was limited merely to receiving the sheikhs, whom he invited to sit on divans around the room; that, once there, slaves brought each of them a *chibouk* and then served them coffee, after which, the pasha listened to their grievances, and invariably answered that their adversaries had already come to him with identical complaints; that he would reflect carefully to see on which side justice lay; and that one could hope for everything from the paternal government of His Highness, before whom all religions and all races of the empire would always have equal rights. In terms of diplomatic procedures, at least, the Turks are the equals of Europeans.

It must be recognised, moreover, that the role of the Pashas is not easy in this country. We know what a diversity of the races inhabits the long chain of Mount Lebanon and Mount Carmel, and which dominates from there, as from a fortress, all the rest of Syria. The Maronites recognise the spiritual authority of the Pope, which places them under the protection of France and Austria; the united Greeks, more numerous but less influential because they are generally scattered about the level countryside, are supported by Russia; the Druze, with the Alawites and Matawalis (*Shia Muslim splinter groups*) who belong to beliefs or sects which Muslim orthodoxy rejects, offer England a means of action which other powers abandon to it too generously.

It was the English who, in 1840, succeeded in drawing the support of those energetic populations away from the Egyptian government. Since then, their internal politics have tended to divide the various groupings whom a general feeling of nationality might, as before, unite under a common leadership. It was with this thought in mind, that the English (*in the form of Sir Sidney Smith, the English naval commander*) accompanied to the Ottoman court (*in 1799*), the Emir Bashir Shihab II, last of the princes of Lebanon, the heir to that power, various and mysterious at source, which, for three centuries, had united all the Lebanese factions and religions under the same roof.

Chapter 5: The Bazaars — The Port

I left the palace courtyard, and traversed a dense crowd, which seemed drawn there simply by curiosity. On entering the dark streets formed by the lofty houses of Beirut, all built like fortresses, and connected, here and there, by arched passageways, I found again the hum of

life, which had been suspended during the hours of siesta; folk from the mountains thronged the immense bazaar which occupies the central district, and which is organised by type of merchandise and produce. The presence of women tending the various stalls is a remarkable peculiarity for the Orient, explained by the rarity of Muslims among the population.

Nothing is more entertaining than to walk those long aisles, the booths protected by curtains in various colours, which still permit a few rays of sunlight to play over the fruits, and brightly-hued vegetables, or even make the embroidery on the rich clothes hanging from the doors of the clothes-stalls, gleam. I felt the longing to add to my costume a decoration, of a particularly Syrian nature, which consists of draping the head and temples with a square silk scarf, striped with gold, which is called a *keffiyeh*, and which is secured by encircling it with a twisted cord of horsehair; the usefulness of this headgear is to protect the ears and the neck from draughts, so dangerous in mountainous country. I was sold a brightly coloured one for forty piastres, and, having tried it on at a barber's, found myself adorned like a king of the Orient.

Some of these squares of silk are made in Damascus; others are from Bursa, or Lyons. Long silk cords, knotted and tasselled, spread gracefully over the back and shoulders, and satisfy that male coquetry natural in countries where one can still wear beautiful costumes. It may seem childish; yet it seems to me that the dignity of the exterior reflects the thoughts and actions of life; there is a certain masculine self-assurance also to be derived from the further addition, according to Eastern custom, of wearing weapons at one's belt: one feels that one is both respectable and respected on all occasions; while rudeness and quarrels are rare, since all know that the slightest insult may result in bloodshed.

I never saw such lovely children as those who were running about in play in the most beautiful alley of the bazaar. Slender, laughing young girls crowded around the elegant marble fountains decorated in the Moorish style, and departed from them, one after the other, carrying on their head large vases of antique shape. In this country one sees plenty of red-haired individuals, the colour, darker than in our country, possessing something of a purple or crimson hue. This colour is so well-regarded in Syria that many women dye their blond or black hair with henna, which, everywhere else, is used only to redden the soles of the feet, the nails, and the palms of the hands.

There were also sellers of iced-drinks and sorbets, at the various intersections of the alleys, mixing them on the spot with snow collected from the summit of Mount Sannine. A brightly-lit café, at the centre of the bazaar, frequented mainly by the military, also supplied iced and perfumed drinks. I halted there for a while, never tired of watching the movement of that energetic crowd, which brought together in one place all the varied mountain costumes. There is, moreover, something comical in the sight of those gilded cones (*tantours*), more than a foot high, which the Druze and Maronite women wear on their heads, the long, attached veil of which, hanging down over their faces, they sweep about at will, in the act of buying and selling. The positioning of this ornamentation gives them the air of those fabled unicorns which serve as a support for the coat of arms of England. Their outer costume is uniformly white or black.

The city's main mosque, which overlooks one of the streets of the bazaar, is an old Crusader church in which you can still view the tomb of a Breton knight. Leaving this district to visit the port, you descend a wide street, dedicated to free-trade. There, the goods of Marseilles compete

quite happily with products from London. On the right is the Greek quarter, filled with cafés and restaurants, where that nation's taste for the arts is manifested by a host of coloured woodcuts, which enliven the walls with principal scenes from the life of Napoleon, and from the Revolution of 1830. To contemplate one of these art-galleries at leisure, I requested a bottle of Cyprus wine, which was soon brought to where I was seated, with a recommendation to keep it hidden in the shadow of the table. There was no reason to scandalise passing Muslims by their seeing wine being drunk. However, the *aqua vitae*, which is anisette, is consumed ostentatiously.

The Greek quarter is linked to the port by a street inhabited by bankers and money-changers. High stone walls, barely pierced by a few windows and barred archways, surround and hide courtyards and interiors in the Venetian style; they are a remnant of the splendour that Beirut long-owed to the governance of the Druze emirs, and their commercial relations with Europe. The consulates are for the most part established in this quarter, which I crossed quickly. I was eager to reach the port, and abandon myself entirely to the impression of the splendid spectacle that awaited me there.

O Nature! The beauty, the ineffable grace of those cities of the Orient, built on the sea-coast, those shimmering pictures of life, spectacles full of the most beautiful human specimens, of costumes, boats, ships ploughing the azure waves; how to describe the impression that you grant every dreamer, and which is nonetheless simply the reality of a feeling long-anticipated? One has already read of this scene in books, and admired it in paintings, especially in those old Italian pictures that relate to the era of Venetian and Genoese maritime power; but what is surprising is to find it still, today, so like the idea one has formed of it. One rubs shoulders, in surprise, with a motley crowd seeming to date back two centuries or more, as if the mind has returned to a past age, as if the splendour of times long gone have been, for an instant, recreated. Am I really the child of a serious country, of a century in dark clothes that seems forever in mourning for those that preceded it? Here I am myself transformed, observing and yet posing, at the same time, as some figure out of a seascape by Claude-Joseph Vernet.

I took a seat in a café, set on a platform supported by sections of columns, acting as stilts, sunk into the sea-bed. Through the cracks in the decking, one could see the greenish waves beating the shore beneath one's feet. Sailors from every country, mountaineers, Bedouins in white robes, Maltese, and a few Greeks with the air of pirates, smoked and chatted around me; two or three young *kahwedjis* served and refilled, here and there, the *fengans*, encircled with golden filigree, full of foaming mocha; the sun, descending towards the island of Cyprus, barely hidden by the extreme line of the islets, illuminated, here and there, the picturesque embroidery that still gilds a poverty of ruins; it cast, towards the right of the quay, an immense shadow, that of the maritime castle which protects the harbour, a mass of towers grouped amidst rocks, towers whose walls were pierced and torn apart by the English bombardment of 1840. They are now little more than debris, surviving due their mass, and attesting to the iniquity of pointless devastation. To the left, a jetty projects into the sea, bearing the white buildings belonging to the Customs officers; like the quay itself, it is formed almost entirely from the ruined columns of ancient Phoenician Berytus, or the Roman city of Julia Felix (*so named in honour of Augustus' daughter*).

Will Beirut ever regain the splendour that thrice rendered her the Queen of the Lebanon? Today, it is her location at the foot of verdant mountains, amidst gardens and fertile plains, at the end of a graceful bay that Europe continually fills with its vessels, the trade with Damascus, and her position as a central point of rendezvous for the industrious populations of the mountains, which guarantee a powerful future for Beirut. I know of nothing more animated, more alive than this port, nor which better realises the ancient idea that Europe has of those '*Ports of the Levant*' (*Échelles du Levant*), in which tales or comedies were set. Does one not dream of mysterious adventures, on viewing those tall houses, those barred windows, at which we imagine the faces of bright-eyed and curious young girls? Who would dare to enter those fortresses of marital and paternal power, or rather, who would not be tempted to dare? But, alas, adventures here are rarer than in Cairo; the population is as serious as it is busy about its own affairs; the women's attire proclaims both effort and ease. One's general impression of the scene is of something biblical and austere: those high promontories projecting into the sea, the great sweeping lines of landscape formed by the various levels of the mountain range, the crenellated towers and ogival arches, lead the mind to meditation, and reverie.

To view this fine spectacle more widely, I left the café and headed for the Raz-Beirut promenade, situated on the left side of the city. The reddish lights of the setting sun tinged with charming hues the chain of mountains which descends towards Sidon; the whole coastline to the right showed the outlines of rocks and, here and there, natural basins which the flood fills on stormy days; women and young girls were dipping their feet in these pools, while bathing little children. There are many of these basins which seem like the remains of ancient baths, their floors paved with marble. On the left, near a small mosque which overlooks a Turkish cemetery, one can view enormous columns of red granite flat on the ground; is this, as is claimed, the site of Herod Agrippa's circus?

Chapter 6: The Santon's Tomb

I was trying to resolve this question internally, when I heard singing and the sound of instruments rising from a ravine which borders the walls of the city. It seemed to me it might be a wedding, since the character of the songs was joyous; but I soon saw a group of Muslims appear, waving flags, followed by others who bore on their shoulders a body laid on a kind of litter; various women came next, shouting, then a crowd of men, with flags again, and branches.

They all halted at the cemetery and laid the body, entirely covered with flowers, on the ground; the proximity of the sea lent grandeur to the scene, as did the impression aroused by the curious songs which they intoned in drawling voices. A crowd of passers-by had gathered, at this point, and were contemplating the ceremony, respectfully. An Italian merchant, nearby, informed me that this was no ordinary burial, and that the deceased was a *santon* who had lived for a long time in Beirut, the Franks regarding him as a madman, and the Muslims as a saint. His residence had been, in recent times, a cave beneath a terrace in one of the gardens of the

city; it was there that he had lived, completely naked, in the manner of a wild beast, and that people had come from many a place to consult him.

From time to time, he would make a tour of the city and take whatever he liked from the shops of the Arab merchants. In their case, they were full of gratitude, thinking it would bring them good luck; but, after a few visitations in this singular manner, the Europeans, not sharing their opinion, had complained to the Pasha and obtained a ruling that the santón should no longer be allowed to leave his garden. The Turks, few in number in Beirut, had not opposed the measure, and limited themselves to maintaining the santón with provisions and presents. Now, this character having died, the people gave themselves up to joyful celebration, since Turkish saints are not mourned in the manner of ordinary mortals. The certainty that, after many privations, he had finally won eternal beatitude, rendered them happy as regards the event, and it was celebrated to the sound of instruments; in the past, such funerals even involved dancing, almahs singing, and public feasting.

Meanwhile, the door of a small square domed building, intended as the tomb of the santón, had been opened, and the dervishes at the centre of the crowd lifted the corpse on to their shoulders. As they were about to enter, they seemed as if driven back by an unknown force, and almost fell. There was a cry of stupefaction from the gathering. The dervishes turned towards the crowd in mock anger, feigning that the *mourners* who followed the body, and those who were chanting hymns, had interrupted their songs and cries for a moment. They began again with more unity; but, as they were about to cross the threshold, the same resistance was renewed. A group of old men then raised their voices.

— ‘It is, they said, ‘a whim of the venerable santón; he does not wish to enter the tomb feet first.’

The body was turned around, and the chanting began again; another manifestation of the whim, another retreat by the dervishes who carried the coffin.

There was a consultation.

— ‘Perhaps,’ said some of the faithful, the saint finds this tomb unworthy of him; a finer one must be built.’

— ‘No, no,’ said a group of Turks, ‘we must not yield to all his wishes; the holy man was always of an uneven disposition. Let us try to carry his corpse inside; once he’s within, perhaps he’ll like it; moreover, there’s always time to settle him somewhere else.’

— ‘How is that to be done?’ cried the dervishes.

— ‘Well, you must turn about, swiftly, to daze him a little, and then, without giving him time to gather himself, you can push him through the opening.’

This plan united all the mourners; the chants sounded once more, with renewed ardour, and the dervishes, grasping the coffin at both ends, rotated it for a few minutes; then, with a sudden movement, rushed through the door, this time with complete success. The people awaited with anxiety the result of this bold manoeuvre; they feared, for a moment, lest the dervishes had fallen victim to their own audacity, and the walls had collapsed on them; but they soon emerged in triumph, announcing that after some difficulties, the saint had remained motionless:

whereupon the crowd shouted with joy, and dispersed, either into the countryside or into the two cafés which overlook the coast of Raz-Beirut.

This was the second Turkish miracle that I had been allowed to see (you will recall that of the Dohza, whereby the Sheriff of Mecca rode on horseback along a path paved with the living bodies of the faithful); but here the spectacle of this capricious corpse in the arms of the bearers, who was agitated and refused to enter his tomb, brought to mind a passage from Lucian of Samosata (see *'De Dea Syria: The Syrian Goddess'*) who attributes the same whim to a bronze statue of the Syrian Apollo. This was sited in a temple in the east of Lebanon, whose priests, once a year, set out, according to custom, to wash their idol in a sacred lake. Apollo refused this ceremony for a long time.... He disliked water, doubtless as prince of the celestial fires, and visibly agitated himself on the shoulders of the bearers, whom he overturned several times.

According to Lucian, this manoeuvre was simply due to certain gymnastic tricks of the priests; but should we place complete confidence in this assertion by an ancient forerunner of Voltaire? For my part, I have always been more disposed to believe everything than deny everything, and, since the Bible admits the wonders attributed to the Syrian Apollo, who was none other than Baal, I do not see why the power granted to the rebellious genius and spirit of his Pythian counterpart could not have produced such effects; nor do I see why the immortal soul of a poor santón could not exert a powerful influence over believers convinced of his sanctity.

Moreover, who would dare to be sceptical at the foot of Mount Lebanon? Is not this shore the very cradle of all Levantine belief? Ask the first mountain dweller who passes by: they will tell you that it is in this region of the Earth that the primitive scenes of the Bible took place; they will lead you to the place where smoke rose from the first sacrifice; they will show you a rock stained with the blood of Abel; not far away existed the city of Enoch, built by the giants, a city of which one can still distinguish the traces; elsewhere, is the tomb of Canaan, son of Ham. Share the mind of a Greek of antiquity and, descending from these mountains, you will see, as well, the whole procession of smiling divinities whose cult Greece accepted, transformed, and propagated via Phoenician migrations. These woods and mountains echoed to the cries of Venus weeping for Adonis, and it was in these mysterious caves that idolatrous sects still celebrated their nocturnal orgies, where they prayed and wept over an image of her lover, a pale idol of marble or ivory with bleeding wounds, around which tearful women repeated the plaintive cries of the goddess. The Christians of Syria conduct similar solemnities on the night of Good Friday: a weeping mother takes the place of the lover, but the sculpted imitation is no less striking; the forms of the feast described so poetically in that idyll by Theocritus have been preserved (see *'Idyll XV'*).

Consider also that many primitive traditions have only been transformed, or renewed, in fresh cults. I am not too sure if our Church places much credence in the legend of Simeon Stylites, and one may well, without irreverence, find the system of mortification of this saint a mere exaggeration; but Lucian also tells us that certain devotees, in ancient times stood for several days on high stone columns that Bacchus had erected not so far from Beirut (*at Hierapolis according to Lucian*), in honour of Priapus and of Juno.

But let us rid ourselves of the burden of ancient memories and religious reverie to which the appearance of the locale, and the mix of peoples so invincibly lead, who perhaps sum up in themselves all the beliefs and superstitions of the region. Moses, Orpheus, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, and even Buddha, possess, here, more or less numerous disciples.... Would it not be easy to conceive that all this must animate the city, fill it with ceremonies and festivals, and render it akin to the Alexandria of Roman times? But no; all is calm and gloomy, these days, given the influence of modern ideas. It is in the mountains, where such influence is felt less, that we shall doubtless find again those picturesque customs, those strange contrasts that so many authors have indicated, and so few have been able to observe.

Part X: Druze and Maronites (*Druses et Maronites*) – A Prince of Lebanon, and The Prisoner



Caravan in front of the temple ruins of Baalbek, 1850, George Antoine Prosper Marilhat
[Rijksmuseum](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1933)

A Prince of Lebanon

Chapter 1: The Mountain

I had accepted, eagerly, the invitation from the Lebanese prince or emir who had visited me, to spend a few days at his residence, located a short distance from Aintoura, in Keserwan. As we were to leave the next morning, I had only time to return to Battista's hotel, where it was a question of agreeing the rental cost of the horse I had been promised.

I was led to the stable, where I saw only large bony creatures, with strong legs, and narrow backs like those of fish... in truth, they scarcely belonged to the breed of *Nedjdi* horses, but I was told that they were the best for climbing the steep slopes of the mountains in safety. The more elegant Arabian steeds only shine on the sandy floor of the desert. I pointed to one at random, and was promised that it would be at my door the next day, at daybreak. I was offered as companion a young lad named Moussa (Moses), who spoke Italian well. I offered my heartfelt thanks to Signor Battista, who had taken charge of the negotiation, and with whom I promised to stay on my return.

Night had fallen, but night in Syria is only a bluish version of day; all were enjoying the cool air on the terraces, and the city, as I gazed at it from the outer slopes, took on a Babylonian air. The moonlight produced white silhouettes at various levels formed, from afar, by the houses, that by day were so tall and dark, and whose uniformity was only broken, here and there, by the crowns of cypresses and palm-trees.

As you leave the city, you see at first only deformed plants; aloes, cacti and nopals, displaying, like the gods of India, multiple heads crowned with serrated flowers, and raising quite formidable swords and darts as you pass; but, beyond their reign, you encounter the broken shade of white mulberry-trees, laurels and lemon-trees with shiny, metallic leaves. Luminous flies soar here and there, brightening the darkness of the groves. The ogives and arches of the tall, illuminated dwellings are outlined in the distance, and, from the depths of those severe-looking mansions, you sometimes hear the sound of guitars (*ouds*) accompanying most melodious voices.

At the corner of the path that turns and ascends to the house where I lived, there was a tavern established in the shade of an enormous tree. There the young people of the surrounding area gathered, and commonly remained, drinking and singing, until two in the morning. The guttural sound of their voices, the drawn-out melody of some nasal recitative, succeeded one another, night after night, to the detriment of any European ears that might be open to their surroundings; I will admit, however, that this primitive and biblical music is not without charm on occasion, for those who know how to rise above the prejudices of *solfeggio*.

When I returned, I found my Maronite host, with his entire family, waiting for me on the terrace adjoining my lodgings. These good people believe they are doing you honour in bringing all their relatives and friends to your house. It was necessary to have them served coffee, and for pipes to be distributed, which, however, the mistress and girls of the house took care of, at the tenant's expense of course. A few mixed phrases of Italian, Greek, and Arabic maintained the conversation, though rather painfully. I did not dare say that, having not slept during the day, and having to leave at dawn the following day, I would have liked to seek my bed; but, after all, the sweetness of the night, the starry sky, the sea spreading at our feet its shades of nocturnal blue, whitened here and there by the reflections of the stars, allowed me to endure the tedium of their reception quite easily. These good people finally bade me farewell, since I had to leave before they would wake, and, in fact, I barely had time to secure three hours of sleep, ended by cockcrow.

When I awoke, I found young Moussa sitting before my door, at the edge of the terrace. The horse he had brought was standing at the bottom of the steps, one foot folded under its

belly by means of a rope, which is the Arab way of restraining a horse. All I had to do was fit myself into one of those high saddles fashioned in the Turkish manner, which squeeze you like a vice and make falling almost impossible. Large copper stirrups, in the shape of coal shovels, are attached at such a height that one's legs are bent in two; their sharp corners serve to prick the horse. The prince smiled a little at my embarrassment in adopting the pose of an Arab horseman, and gave me some advice. He was the young man, of frank and open countenance, whose greeting had first charmed me; His name was Abou-Miran, and he belonged to a branch of the Hobeika family, the most illustrious in Keserwan. Without being one of the richest, it had authority over a dozen villages comprising a district, and paid dues to the Pasha of Tripoli.

All being ready, we descended to the road which runs along the shore, and which, anywhere but in the East, would pass for a simple ravine. At the end of a few miles, I was shown the cave from which the famous dragon emerged which was about to devour the daughter of the king of Beirut when Saint George pierced it with his lance. The place is highly revered by the Greeks, and by the Turks themselves, who have built a small mosque on the very spot where the conflict took place.

All Syrian horses are trained to walk at an amble, which renders their trot very gentle. I admired their sureness of step on the loose stones, sharp pieces of granite, and smooth rock one encounters everywhere.... It was already broad daylight, when we left behind the fertile promontory of Beirut, which juts into the sea five miles or so, its heights crowned with umbrella-pines, its staircase of terraces cultivated as gardens; the immense valley between two mountain ranges extends as far as the eye can see in a double amphitheatre, whose violet hue is brightened, here and there, by chalk-white patches, indicating a host of villages, monasteries and fortresses. It is one of the most open panoramas in the world, one of those places where the soul expands, as if to match the extent of so vast a spectacle. At the bottom of the valley flows the Nahr Beirut, a river in summer, a torrent in winter, which runs to the gulf, and which we crossed in the shade of a Roman bridge's arches.

The horses had water only up to their mid-legs: mounds covered with thick oleander bushes divided the flow, and shaded the natural bed of the river; two areas of sand, indicating the extreme flood-line, parted and highlighted this long ribbon of flowering verdure which filled the whole floor of the valley. Beyond, the first slopes of the mountain rise; sandstone greened by lichens and mosses, twisted carob trees, stunted oaks with dark green leaves, and aloes and nopals, lying in wait among the stones like armed dwarves threatening travellers as they pass by, but offering refuge to enormous green lizards that flee by the hundreds under the horses' feet: this is what one encounters when climbing the lower slopes. However, long stretches of arid sand interrupt, here and there, the coating of wild vegetation. A little further away, these yellowish wastelands lend themselves to cultivation, displaying regular lines of olive trees.

We had soon reached the summit of the first plateau, which, from below, seemed to merge with the Sannine massif. Beyond, a valley opens, a fold lying parallel to that of the Nahr Beirut, and which must be crossed to reach the second crest, from which yet another may be discerned. One already perceived that the numerous villages, which from afar seemed to shelter on the black flanks of the mountain, on the contrary dominated and crowned chains of heights, separated by valleys and chasms; one could also see that these lines, furnished with forts and

towers, would present a series of inaccessible ramparts to any army, if the inhabitants wished, as in the past, to unite, and fight for the common principle of independence. Unfortunately, too many have an interest in deriving advantage from their internal divisions.

We drew to a halt on the second plateau, where stands a Maronite church, built in the Byzantine style. Mass was being said, and we dismounted in front of the door, in order to listen awhile. The church was full of people, since it was a Sunday, and we could only find a place in the rear pews.

The clergy seemed dressed much like the Greeks; the costumes are quite beautiful, and the language used ancient Syriac, which the priests declaimed or sang in a nasal tone peculiar to themselves. The women were seated in a raised gallery, defended by a grating. In examining the ornamentation of the church, simple but freshly repaired, I saw, with a degree of pain, that the black double-headed eagle of Austria decorated each pillar, as a symbol of the protective role formerly occupied by France alone. It is only since our latest revolution that Austria and Sardinia have competed with us for influence in the minds and affairs of the Syrian Catholics.

A Mass in the morning can do one no harm, unless one enters the church in a sweat, and exposes oneself to the damp shade that shrouds the vaults and pillars; but this house of God was so clean and cheerful, the sound of its bells had summoned us with such a pretty and silvery timbre, and we stood so near the entrance, that we exited cheerfully, well-disposed to completing the rest of our journey. Our horsemen set off again at a gallop, calling out to each other with joyful cries; pretending to pursue one another, they threw before them, like javelins, their lances adorned with cords and tufts of silk, and then retrieved them, without pause, from the earth, or the trunks of the distant trees in which they had lodged.

This game of skill was of brief duration however, for the descent became difficult, and the horses' feet scraped more timidly, at the sandstone, smooth or broken in sharp fragments. Until then, young Moussa had followed me on foot, according to the custom of the *moukres* (*muleteers*), though I had offered to take him up behind me; but I was beginning to envy his fate. Reading my thoughts, he offered to guide the horse, and I was able to cross the valley floor by navigating the thickets and stones. I took a moment's rest on the other side, and admired the skill of our companions in traversing ravines that would be considered impassable in Europe.

Soon we were climbing in the shade of a pine forest, and the prince dismounted as I did. A quarter of an hour later, we found ourselves at the edge of a valley, less deep than the other, and forming a kind of verdant amphitheatre. Herds were grazing the grass around a small lake, and I noticed, there, some of those Syrian sheep whose tails, burdened by fat, weigh up to twenty pounds. We descended, to water the horses, at a fount covered with a vast stone arch, and of ancient construction, or so it seemed to me. Several women, gracefully draped, came to fill large vases, which they then planted on their heads; naturally they were not wearing the high headdresses of married women; they were young girls or servants.

Chapter 2: A Mixed Village

Advancing a few more paces beyond the fount, remaining in the shade of the pines, we found ourselves at the entrance to the village of Beit Mery, situated on a plateau, from which the view extends, on one side, towards the gulf, and, on the other, over a deep valley, beyond which new crests of mountains fade into a bluish mist. The contrast of this freshness and silent shade with the heat of the plains and beaches that we left a few hours ago, was a sensation only truly appreciated in such a climate. About twenty houses were scattered among the trees, and presented the picture more or less of one of our southern villages. We halted at the residence of the sheikh, who was absent, but whose wife served us curdled milk and fruit.

We had passed, on our left, a large house, whose collapsed roof and charred beams indicated a recent fire. The prince informed me that it was the Druze who had set fire to the building, while several Maronite families were gathered there for a wedding. Fortunately, the guests had been able to flee in time; but the most notable feature was that the culprits were inhabitants of the same locality. Beit Mery, as a mixed village, contains about a hundred and fifty Christians, and sixty Druze. The houses of the latter are separated from those of the former by barely two hundred yards. As a result of this hostility, a bloody fight had taken place, and the Pasha had hastened to intervene by establishing, between the two sections of the village, a small camp of Albanians, who lived at the expense of the rival populations.

We had just finished our meal when the sheikh returned to his house. After the initial pleasantries, he commenced a long conversation with the prince, in which he complained strongly of the Albanians' presence and of the general disarmament which had been enforced in his district. It seemed to him that this measure should have been exercised only in regard to the Druze, who bore the sole responsibility for the nocturnal attacks and arson. From time to time, the two leaders lowered their voices, and, though I could not completely grasp the meaning of their discussion, I thought it proper to withdraw a little, on the pretext of taking a short walk.

As we walked, my guide informed me that the Maronite Christians of the province of El Gharb, in which we were, had previously attempted to expel the Druze, who were scattered among several villages, and that the latter had called to their aid their co-religionists of the Anti-Lebanon. Hence, one of those struggles which are so often renewed. The greater mass of Maronites inhabit the province of Keserwan, situated behind Jebail (*Byblos*) and Tripoli, while the largest population of Druze inhabit the provinces situated from Beirut to Acre. The sheikh of Beit Mery was doubtless complaining to the prince that, in the recent events of which I spoke, the people of Keserwan had not stirred; although they had not had time, the Turks having put a stop to the matter with an eagerness unusual on their part. That was because the quarrel had arisen at the time of paying the *miri*. 'Pay first,' the Turks had said, 'then you can fight as much as you like.' Was this not, indeed, the only way to collect taxes from people who ruin themselves, and slaughter each other, at the very instant of harvest?

At the end of the line of Christian houses, I stopped beneath a clump of trees, from which one could see the sea breaking, in silvery waves, on the distant shore. There is a view, from there, of the stepped mountain ridges we had crossed, the tenuous river courses that furrow the

valleys, and the yellowish ribbon of the road built by Antoninus, which can be traced following the coast, a good road beside which one finds Roman inscriptions and Persian bas-reliefs among the rocks. I had seated myself in the shade, when a message arrived inviting me to take coffee at the home of the *mudhir*, or Turkish commander, who, I supposed, exercised temporary authority following the occupation of the village by the Albanians.

I was led to a house, newly decorated doubtless in honour of this official, with a beautiful Indian carpet covering the floor, a tapestried divan, and silk curtains. I had the irreverence to enter without removing my shoes, despite the remarks of the Turkish servants, which I failed to understand. The *mudhir* made a sign to them to be quiet, and indicated a place on the divan, without himself rising to his feet. He had coffee and pipes brought, and addressed a few polite words to me, interrupting himself from time to time to apply his seal to squares of paper passed to him by his secretary, seated near him on a stool.

The *mudhir* was young and seemingly full of pride. He began by questioning me, in bad Italian, with all the usual banalities, about the use of steam, Napoleon, and the imminent discovery of a method of achieving manned flight. After satisfying him on these points, I thought to ask him for a few details regarding the population thereabout. He seemed very reserved regarding the matter; however, he told me that a quarrel had arisen there, as in several other places, due to the fact that the Druze did not wish to pay their tribute into the hands of the Maronite sheikhs, who were responsible to the Pasha. The same position existed in reverse in the mixed villages of the Druze districts. I asked the *mudhir* if there was any difficulty in visiting the other areas of the village.

— ‘Go where you wish,’ he said; ‘all these people have kept the peace since we arrived. Previously, they fought for one side or the other, for the white cross, or the white hand, on equally red banners. Such are the emblems that distinguish the flags of the Maronites and the Druze from one another.’

I took leave of this Turk, and, as I knew that my companions would remain at Beit Mery during the heat of the day, I headed towards the Druze quarter, accompanied only by Moussa. The sun was at full strength; after walking for ten minutes, we came across the first two houses. In front of the one on the right was a terraced garden in which some children were playing. They ran to see us pass by, uttering loud cries which brought two women from the house. One of them wore a *tantour*, which indicated her status as a wife or widow; the other appeared younger, and had her head covered with a simple veil, with which she covered part of her face. However, one could distinguish their features, which appeared and vanished in turn as they moved, like the moon’s features among the clouds.

The rapid examination that I could make was completed by the features of the children, whose uncovered faces, perfectly formed, were similar to those of the two women. The youngest, seeing me halt, went back to the house and returned with a porous earthenware jug, the spout of which she tilted towards me between the large cactus heads that bordered the terrace. I approached to drink, though I was not thirsty, since I had just enjoyed the *mudhir*’s refreshments. The other woman, seeing that I had only taken a mouthful, said to me: *Tourid leben?* (Do you wish for milk?) I made a sign of refusal, but she had already turned towards the house. On hearing the word *leben*, I remembered that in German it means *life*. Lebanon

takes its name from that same word *leben*, owing to the whiteness of the snow which covers its mountains, and which the Arabs, in the burning sands of the desert, dream of from afar; snow like milk — reviving life! The good woman hastened back, bearing a cup of foaming milk. I could scarcely refuse to drink of it, and was about to take some coins from my belt, when, at the mere movement of my hand, the pair made very energetic signs of refusal. I already knew that hospitality in Lebanon is greater even than that of Scottish custom: I did not insist.

As far as I could judge from the comparative appearance of these women and children, the features of the Druze population are somewhat related to those of the Persians. The hue which tinted, with amber, the faces of the little girls, was absent from the matt white features of the two half-veiled women, such that one might believe the habit of covering the face to be, among the Levantines, a question, above all, of coquetry. The invigorating air of the mountain, and their work habits, strongly colour the lips and cheeks. Turkish rouge is therefore useless to them: however, as with the latter, that dye shades their eyelids, and prolongs the arch of the eyebrows.

I walked further. The houses were all single-storied, and mostly built of adobe, the largest being of reddish stone, with flat roofs supported by interior arches, and exterior staircases ascending to the roof, and their entire furniture, as one could see through the barred windows or half-open doors, consisted of carved cedar panelling, mats, and sofas, the children and women animating the scene without being too surprised at the passage of a stranger, and addressing me in a kindly manner with the customary *sal-kher* (good day).

Having reached the end of the village where the Beit Mery plateau ends, I saw on the other side of the valley a monastery, to which Moussa wished to guide me; but fatigue was beginning to overcome me and the heat of the sun had become unbearable: I seated myself in the shade of a wall, against which I leaned with a sort of drowsiness, due to the lack of peace the previous night. An old man emerged from the house and invited me to go and rest in his house. I thanked him, fearing that it was already late and that my companions would be worried at my absence. Seeing that I refused all refreshment, he told me that I must not leave him without accepting something. Then he went to fetch some small apricots (*meshmosh*), which he handed to me; next he wished to accompany me to the end of the street. He seemed annoyed on learning from Moussa that I had lunched at the house of the Christian sheikh.

— ‘I am the true sheikh,’ he said, ‘and I *hold the right* of granting hospitality to strangers.’

Moussa then told me that the old man had indeed been the sheikh or lord of the village in the days of Emir Bashir II; but, as he had sided with the Egyptians, the Turkish authorities no longer recognised him as such, and the role had fallen to a Maronite.

Chapter 3: The Manor

We remounted our horses, at about three o’clock, and descended into the valley over the floor of which flows a small river. Following its course, which headed towards the sea, and then

ascending among rocks and pines, crossing here and there fertile valleys planted with mulberry-trees, olive-trees and cotton-trees, between which wheat and barley had been sown, we finally found ourselves on the banks of the Nahr el-Kalb, that is to say the Dog River, the ancient Lycus, which spreads its little water between the reddish cliffs and the laurel bushes. This river, which, in the summer, is barely a stream, takes its source in the snowy peaks of the upper Lebanon, as do all the other watercourses which run parallel to this coast as far as Antakya, and which flow into the sea off Syria. The high terraces of the convent of Aintoura rose to our left, and the buildings seemed very near, although we were separated from them by deep valleys. Other Greek, Maronite, or European Lazarist monasteries appeared, dominating numerous villages, all this, which, in its features, may be readily compared to the physiognomy of the Apennines or the lower Alps, providing a prodigious contrast in its effect, when one recalls that one is in a Muslim country, a few miles from the desert landscape of Damascus, and the dusty ruins of Baalbek. What also makes this part of Lebanon like a little, free, industrious, and above all intelligent, version of a European country, is that the impression of overbearing heat which troubles the people of Asia-Minor ceases here. The sheikhs and other well-off inhabitants have, seasonal residences which, set higher or lower in the terraced valleys between the mountains, allow them to live amidst an eternal Spring.

The area we reached at sunset, already quite elevated, but protected by two chains of wooded peaks, seemed to me to possess a delightful temperature. There the prince's estates began, as Moussa told me. We were thus nearing the end of our journey; however, it was only at nightfall, and after traversing a sycamore wood through which it was difficult to guide the horses, that we perceived a group of buildings dominating a hillock, around which wound a steep path. They had quite the appearance of a Gothic castle; a few lighted windows, narrow ogives, formed, moreover, the only external adornment of a square courtyard enclosed by high walls. However, after a low door with an equally low arch had been opened, we found ourselves in a larger courtyard surrounded by galleries supported on columns. Numerous valets, and African black slaves hurried to attend to the horses, and I was introduced to a low room or *ghurfa*, large in size, and adorned with divans, where we took our seats while waiting for supper. The prince, after having refreshments served for his companions and myself, blamed the lateness of hour for not allowing him to introduce me to his family, and entered that part of the house which, among the Lebanese Christians as among the Turks, is especially consecrated to women; he had drunk with us only a glass of *golden wine* at the moment when supper was brought.

The next day I awoke to the sound of the sais and the black slaves busy with tending the horses in the courtyard. There were also a host of mountain dwellers bringing provisions, and various Maronite monks in black hoods and blue robes, gazing on everything with a benevolent smile. The prince soon appeared and led me to a terraced garden sheltered on two sides by the castle walls, but with a view beyond over the valley where the deeply-entrenched Nahr el-Kalb flowed. In this small space banana-trees, dwarf-palms, lemon-trees, and other trees of the plain, were grown, which, on this high plateau, formed a rare and luxurious resource. I thought a little of the chatelaines whose barred windows probably looked out upon this little Eden; but there was no mention of them. The prince spoke to me at length about his family, the journeys his grandfather had made to Europe, and the honours he had obtained there. He spoke very good

Italian, like most of the emirs and sheikhs of Lebanon, and seemed well-disposed towards making a journey to France someday.

At dinner time, that is to say towards noon, I was asked to ascend to a high gallery, opening on the courtyard, the rear of which formed a sort of alcove furnished with divans with a platform-floor; two highly adorned women were seated on a divan, their legs crossed in the Turkish manner, and a little girl who was beside them came, according to tradition, to kiss my hand, as we entered. I would willingly have paid this homage in my turn to the two ladies, if I had not thought that it was contrary to custom. I simply bowed, and took my seat with the prince at a marquetry table which supported a large tray loaded with food. At the moment when I was about to sit down, the little girl brought me a long silk napkin embroidered with silver-thread at both ends. The ladies continued, during the meal, to maintain their pose on the platform like idols. Only when the table was cleared, did we seat ourselves opposite them, and it was on the order of the eldest that hookahs were brought.

These folk were clad, over the waistcoat which clasped the chest, and the *shintyan* (loose trousers) with long pleats, in long robes of striped silk. A heavy belt, adorned with gilt, diamond, and ruby ornaments testified to a very general luxury common elsewhere in Syria, even among women of lesser rank. As for the cone-shaped headdress that the mistress of the house wore above her brow and which rendered her movements those of a swan, that was of chased silver-gilt with turquoise inlays; the braids of her hair, intermingled with clusters of sequins, streamed over her shoulders, according to the general fashion of the Levant. The legs of these ladies, folded on the divan, were bare of stockings; which, in these countries, is a common feature, and adds to beauty a means of seduction far removed from our own ideas. Women who scarcely walk about, who indulge several times a day in perfumed ablutions, whose shoes do not compress the toes, possess, as one can well imagine, feet as charming as their hands; henna dye, which reddens the nails, and ankle-rings, as rich as bracelets, complete the grace and charm of that portion of a woman's figure which is sacrificed too readily, in our own country, to the glory of the shoemakers.

The princesses asked me many questions about Europe and told me about several travellers they had already met. They were mostly Legitimists (*Royalists*) on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and one can therefore imagine how many contradictory ideas have been spread about the state of France among the Christians of Lebanon. One can add only that our political disagreements have little influence on peoples whose social constitution differs greatly from ours. Catholics who are obliged to recognise the Emperor of the Turks as their sovereign have no very clear opinion concerning our political state. However, they consider themselves with regard to the Sultan as mere tribute-givers. The true sovereign is still for them the Emir Bashir, who was accompanied by the English to the Sultan's court, after the expedition of 1840.

In quite a brief time, I found myself very much at ease with the family, and found, with pleasure, that the ceremony and etiquette of the first day vanished. The princesses, dressed simply and like the ordinary women of the country, mingled in the work of their people, and the youngest went down to the wells with the village girls, just as *Rebecca* did in the Bible (*Genesis:24*) or Homer's *Nausicaa* (*Odyssey: VI*). At that time, much effort was being expended on the silk harvest, and I was shown the buildings, cabins of light construction, that

served as silkworm nurseries. In some rooms, the worms, on tiered racks, were still being fed; in others, the ground was strewn with thorn branches on which the larvae had undergone their transformation. Cocoons, like golden olives, starred these branches heaped together into dense bushes; it was necessary to detach the chrysalises, expose them to sulphurous vapour so as to destroy the pupae, and then unwind the almost imperceptible threads. Hundreds of women and children were employed in this work, which was also supervised by the princesses.

Chapter 4: A Hunt

The day after my arrival, which was a feast day, I was wakened at daybreak for a hunt, to be performed with great display. I was about to apologise for my lack of skill in the chase, fearing to compromise European dignity in the eyes of these mountain dwellers; but it was to be merely a hunt with falcons. The prejudice that leads Orientals to pursue only noxious animals means that, for centuries, they have deployed birds of prey on which the blame for any blood-shed falls. Nature then bears the responsibility for the cruel acts committed by their agents. Thus, this type of hunting has always been foremost in the Orient. Following the Crusades, the fashion for it spread to our own countries.

I thought that the princesses would deign to accompany us, which would have given the entertainment an air of chivalry; but they failed to appear. Various servants, charged with the care of the birds, went to fetch the falcons from their hutches in the courtyard, and handed them off to the prince and two of his cousins, being the most important personages there. I was readying my fist to receive one, when I was informed that the falcons could only be held by persons known to them. There were three of these birds, all white, very elegantly hooded, and, as it was explained to me, of a breed peculiar to Syria, with eyes of a golden brilliance.

We descended into the valley, following the course of the Nahr el-Kalb, to a point where the horizon widened, and where vast meadows extended, shaded by walnut and poplar trees. Water, escaping at a bend in the river, had created vast pools half-hidden by rushes and reeds. We halted, and waited until the river-birds, frightened at first by the noise of the horses' feet, had resumed their usual movements. When all was silent once more, we distinguished, among the birds which were feeding amidst the marsh, two herons, doubtless fishing, whose flight traced circles from time to time above the grass. The moment had come: a few shots were fired to make the herons rise, then the falcons were uncapped, and each of the horsemen holding them threw them upwards, encouraging them with shouts.

The falcons flew about randomly at first, seeking their prey, then quickly caught sight of the herons, which, attacked singly, defended themselves with their beaks. For a moment, it was feared that one of the falcons would be pierced by the beak of its victim; but, perhaps wary of the risk involved, the falcon returned to join its two companions on the perch. One of the herons, free of its enemy, disappeared into the dense foliage, while the other soared in a straight line towards the sky. Then began the true interest of the hunt. In vain, the latter heron lost itself in the heights, where our eyes could no longer see it; the falcons watched, and, unable to pursue

it for the moment, waited for it to descend once more. It was a spectacle that stirred the emotions to see those three barely-visible combatants soar upwards, their whiteness blending with the azure of the sky.

After ten minutes or so, the heron, tired or perhaps no longer able to breathe, in the rarefied air of the zone it occupied, reappeared a short distance from the falcons, which swooped down on it. A momentary struggle, in which the birds approached the ground, allowed us to hear their cries, and view that furious flurry of interlaced wings, necks, and legs. Suddenly the four birds fell together to the grass, and the huntsmen were obliged to search for them, awhile. Finally, they caught the heron, which was still alive, and cut its throat, to end its suffering. They then threw a piece of flesh, cut from the belly of the prey, to the falcons, and brought back in triumph the bloody spoils of the vanquished. The prince told me of hunts he sometimes made in the Beqaa valley, where the falcons were used to catch gazelles. Sadly, the nature of such hunts involves greater cruelty than the use of weapons; since the falcons are trained to perch on the heads of the poor gazelles, and blind them. I was not at all interested in witnessing such melancholy forms of amusement.

A splendid banquet was held that evening, to which many a neighbour had been invited. Many small Turkish tables had been placed in the courtyard, in groups arranged according to the rank of the guests. The heron, the victim of the triumphant expedition, placed on a platform, with its head raised by means of iron wire and its wings fanned out, adorned the centre of the prince's table, at which I was invited to sit, next to one of the Lazarist fathers of the monastery of Aintoura, who had been invited on this festive occasion. Singers and musicians took their places on the courtyard steps, and the lower gallery was full of groups of five or six people seated at other small tables. Dishes, barely touched, passed from the premier tables to the rest, and ended by circulating in the courtyard, where mountain-dwellers, seated on the ground, received them in turn. We had been given antique Bohemian glassware to drink from; but most of the guests sipped from cups that went the rounds. Long wax candles lit the main tables. The cuisine consisted of grilled mutton, pyramid-shaped pilau, yellowed with cinnamon powder and saffron, then fricassees, boiled fish, vegetables stuffed with minced meat, watermelon, bananas and other local fruits. At the end of the meal, toasts were drunk to the sound of instruments, and the joyful cries of the gathering; half the people seated at the table rose and drank to the others. This went on for a length of time. It goes without saying that the ladies, after having witnessed the beginning of the meal, but without taking part in it, retired to the interior of the house.

The feast continued well into the night. In general, there is little to distinguish the life of the Maronite emirs and sheikhs from that of other Orientals, except for their mingling Arab customs with certain usages akin to those of our own feudal times. They are involved in a transition from tribal life, as still established at the foot of the mountains, to that of modern civilisation, already conquering and transforming the busy coastal cities. It is akin to living in the middle of the French thirteenth century; and one cannot help thinking of Saladin and his brother Malik-Adil, whom the Maronites boast of having defeated between Beirut and Sidon. The Lazarist with whom I was seated during the meal (his name was Father Adam) offered me many details regarding the Maronite clergy. I had believed until then that they were but

indifferent Catholics, given their propensity to marriage. That is, however, a specific indulgence granted to the Syrian Church. The wives of the priests are honoured by being called priestesses, but are not permitted to exercise any priestly function. The Pope also admits the existence of a Maronite Patriarch, appointed by conclave, and who, from the canonical point of view, bears the title of Bishop of Antioch; while neither the Patriarch nor his twelve suffragan bishops are allowed to wed.

Chapter 5: Keserwan

The next day we accompanied Father Adam back to Aintoura. The convent is a fairly large building on a terrace which overlooks the whole country, and at the bottom of which is a vast garden planted with enormous orange-trees. The enclosure is traversed by a stream which descends from the mountains and is received in a large basin. The church is built outside the monastery, a fairly large building which is divided into a double row of cells; the fathers, like the other monks of the mountain, cultivate olive-trees and vines. They hold classes for the children of the country; their library contains many books printed in the mountains, since there are monks who carry out the process there, and I even found a collection of a journal entitled *The Hermit of the Mountain*, the publication of which ceased some years ago. Father Adam told me that the first printing press had been established a hundred years ago at Mar Youhanna by a monk from Aleppo named Abdallah-Zeker, who himself engraved and cast the type. Many books of religion, history and even collections of tales, have emerged from these sacred presses. It is quite curious to see, as one passes by the walls of a monastery, printed sheets drying in the sun. Moreover, the monks of Lebanon exercise many professions; it is not they who should be reproached for laziness.

Besides the fairly numerous monasteries of the Lazarists, and the European Jesuits, who today struggle for influence and are not always friendly to one another, there are in Keserwan about two hundred monasteries of regular monks, without counting a large number of hermitages in the country about Mar Elisha. There are also numerous convents, the women being mostly devoted to teaching and education. Is this not a considerable religious population for an area of only four thousand square miles, which has less than two hundred thousand inhabitants? It is true that this portion of ancient Phoenicia has always been famous for the ardour of its beliefs. A few miles from where we were situated flows the Nahr Ibrahim, the ancient River Adonis, which is still tinged with red in the Spring, at the time when people once mourned the death of Venus' mythological favourite. Near the place where this river enters the sea, is Jebeil, the ancient Byblos, where Adonis was born; the son, it is said, of King Cinyras — and Myrrha, the daughter of that Phoenician king. That a mythological tale, adoration, and divine honours were formerly dedicated to incest and adultery still outrages the good Lazarist monks. As for the Maronite monks, they, happily, remain profoundly ignorant of them.

The prince was kind enough to accompany me and, on several excursions, guide me through this province of Keserwan, which I would not have believed so vast or so populated.

Ghazir, the principal town, which contains five churches and a population of six thousand souls, is the residence of the Hobeika family, one of the three noblest of the Maronite nation; the other two are the Howayek and the Khazen. The descendants of these three houses number in the hundreds, and Lebanese custom, which requires the sharing of estates equally between brothers, has necessarily reduced the appanage of each greatly. This explains the local jest which calls some of these emirs '*the princes of olive and cheese*', alluding to their meagre means of existence.

The largest properties belong to the Khazen family, who reside in Zouk Mikael, a town even more populous than Ghazir. Louis XIV contributed greatly to the splendour of this family, by entrusting consular functions to several of its members. There are, in all, five districts in the part of the province called Keserwan Ghazir, and three in Keserwan Beqaa, situated towards Baalbek and Damascus. Each of these districts includes a main town ordinarily governed by an emir, and a dozen villages or parishes placed under the authority of the sheikhs. The feudal edifice thus constituted culminates in the emir of the whole province, who himself holds his powers from the Grand Emir residing at Deir al-Qamar. The latter being today a captive of the Turks, his authority has been delegated to two *kaymakams* or governors, one Maronite, the other Druze, who are forced to submit to the pashas all questions of a political nature.

This arrangement has the disadvantage of maintaining between the two peoples an antagonism of interest and influence, which did not exist when they lived united under the one prince. The grand idea of Emir Fakhr al-Din II, which had been to intermingle their populations and erase all prejudice as regards race and religion, has failed, and there is ever a tendency to form two enemy nations where there once existed only one, united by bonds of solidarity and mutual tolerance.

One sometimes wonders how the rulers of Lebanon managed to secure the sympathy and loyalty of so many peoples of different religion. In this connection, Father Adam told me that Emir Bashir was a Christian by baptism, a Turk by his manner of living, and would be a Druze in death, the latter people having the immemorial right to bury the sovereigns of Mount Lebanon. He also related a relevant local anecdote. A Druze and a Maronite, who were travelling together, asked one another:

— 'What then is our sovereign's religion?'

— 'He is Druze', said the one.

— 'He's a Christian,' said the other.

A passing *mutawali* (a *Twelver Shi'ite Muslim*) was asked to arbitrate, and had no hesitation in replying:

— 'He is Turkish.'

These fine people, more uncertain than ever, agreed to go to the Emir and ask him to reconcile them. Emir Bashir received them very well, and, on being informed of their quarrel, said, turning to his vizier:

— 'These are very curious people! Let us behead all three!'

Without giving undue credence to the bloodthirsty nature of this story, one recognises within it the constant policy of the great emirs of Lebanon. It is true that their palaces contained a church, a mosque and a *khalwat* (*Druze prayer-house*). Such was for a long time the triumphant nature of their policy, which has perhaps become its major weakness.

Chapter 6: Conflict

I cheerfully accepted the mountain life, in a temperate atmosphere, amidst customs barely different from those we see in our southern provinces. It was a rest from long months spent in the heat of an Egyptian sun; and, as for the people, they were what the soul needs, possessing that empathy which is never completely exhibited by the Muslims, or which, in the majority, is thwarted by racial prejudice. I found in reading, in conversation, in ideas, those elements of Europe which one flees out of boredom, or fatigue, but which one dreams of again, after a while, as we previously dreamt of the unexpected, the strange, and the unknown. That is not to claim that our world is better than the other, it is only to revert, unconsciously, to one's impressions of childhood, to accept the common yoke. In a well-known poem by Heinrich Heine (*see Intermezzo, XXVIII*) one reads of a northern fir-tree covered with snow, which seeks the arid sand and fiery skies of the desert, while at the same time a palm-tree burnt by the arid atmosphere of the plains of Egypt seeks to breathe the Northern mists, bathe in melted snow, and plunge its roots into icy ground.

In such a mood of troubling contrasts, I was already thinking of returning to the plain, telling myself, that, all things being considered, I had not visited the East to spend my time amidst Alpine landscapes; but, one evening, I heard a crowd conversing anxiously; the monks had descended from the neighbouring monasteries, in a state of terror; they spoke of the Druze who had come from their provinces in number to attack the mixed cantons, which had been disarmed by order of the Pasha of Beirut. The population of Keserwan, which is part of the Pashalik of Tripoli, had retained their weapons; it was therefore necessary to support their defenceless brethren, and cross the Nahr el-Kalb, which acts as the border to the two countries, a veritable Rubicon, only traversed in grave circumstances. Armed mountain-dwellers pressed impatiently around the village, and gathered in the meadows. Horsemen rode through the neighbouring localities shouting the old war cry: 'Zealous for God! Zealous for combat!'

The prince took me aside, saying:

— 'I'm unsure of the extent of this; the reports we've received are perhaps exaggerated, but we are always ready to help our neighbours. The pashas' aid always arrives when harm has already been done.... You would do well, as regards yourself, to go and visit the monastery of Aintoura, or to return to Beirut by sea.'

— 'No,' I answered him; 'let me accompany you. Having had the misfortune to be born in an age that is quite unwarlike, I have only viewed such conflict in our European cities, and a sad business it is, I assure you! Our mountains were blocks of houses, and our valleys squares

and streets! I would wish to witness, for once in my life, a grandiose struggle, a religious war. It would be wonderful to die defending the cause that you defend!’

I said, and I thought such things; surrounded by their enthusiasm, it overcame me; I spent the following night dreaming of exploits which must of necessity have determined, on my part, the highest of destinies.

At daybreak, when the prince mounted his horse into the courtyard with his men, I prepared to do the same; but young Moussa resolutely opposed my using the horse that had been rented to me in Beirut: he was charged with returning it alive, and rightly feared its chances during a warlike expedition.

I understood the justice of his claim, and I accepted one of the prince’s steeds. We finally crossed the river, being at most a dozen horsemen among perhaps three hundred men.

After a four-hour march, we halted near the convent of Mar Youhanna, where many more mountain-dwellers joined us. The Basilian monks gave us breakfast; but, according to them, we should wait: there was no indication that Druze had invaded the district. However, the new arrivals expressed a contrary opinion, and it was decided to advance further. We left the horses to take a short-cut through the woods, and, towards the evening, after a few alerts, heard gunshots echoing among the rocks.

I had separated from the prince, and climbed a hill to arrive at a village that could be seen above the trees. I found myself with a few others at the foot of a staircase of cultivated terraces; several of the men seemed to be working in concert, and began to attack the hedge of cacti that surrounded the enclosure, so, thinking that it was a question of forcing a path towards the hidden enemy, I did the same, wielding my yatagan; the cacti’s thorny plates rolled on the ground like severed heads, and the breach was not long in yielding us a passage. Once within, my companions spread about the enclosure, and, finding no one, began to chop at the bases of the mulberry-trees and olive-trees, in an extraordinary display of rage. One of them, seeing that I was idle, wished to hand me an axe; I pushed him away; the sight of all that destruction revolted me. I had only just realised that the place we had attacked was none other than the Druze section of the village of Beit Mery in which I had been so pleasantly received a few days before.

Fortunately, I saw from a distance the majority of our people arriving on the plateau, and I joined the prince, who appeared in a great state of irritation. I approached him to ask if there were no enemies to fight but cacti and mulberry-trees; but already he deplored all that had happened, and was busy preventing their setting fire to the houses. Seeing some Maronites who were approaching with lighted fir-branches, he ordered them to return. The Maronites surrounded him, calling out:

— ‘The Druze do this to the Christians; today we are strong, we must return the favour!’

The prince hesitated at these words, the law of retaliation being sacred among the mountain-dwellers. One murder, demands another, and the same goes for fire and damage. I tried to point out to him that many trees had already been felled, and that this might suffice as compensation. He found a more persuasive reason with which to curb them.

— ‘Do you not see,’ he said to them, ‘that the flames would be seen from Beirut? They will send the Albanians again!’

This consideration finally calmed their spirits. Moreover, they found among the houses only one old man wearing a white turban, who was brought to us, and in whom I immediately recognised the good fellow who, during my passage to Beit Mery, had offered his hospitality. They took him to see the Christian sheikh, who seemed somewhat embarrassed by the tumult, and who sought, like the prince, to quell the disturbance. The old Druze maintained an exceptionally calm demeanour, gazed at the prince and said:

— ‘Peace be with you, Miran; what are you doing here?’

— ‘Where are your brethren?’ said the prince, ‘no doubt they fled when they saw us afar.’

— ‘You know that is never their custom,’ said the old man, ‘but there were only a few of them to counter all your people; they have led the women and children far from here. I chose to stay.’

— ‘We were told that you summoned the Druze from the next valley, and that they were here in large numbers.’

— ‘You have been deceived. You have listened to evil people, foreigners who would be happy to see our throats cut, so that our brothers might seek vengeance on you!’

The old man remained standing during this explanation. The sheikh, in whose presence we were, seemed struck by his words, and said to him:

— ‘Do you think yourself a prisoner here? We were once friends; why not sit down beside us?’

— ‘Because you are in my house,’ said the old man.

— ‘Come,’ said the Christian sheikh, ‘let us forget all that. Take a seat on this sofa; we will bring you coffee and a pipe.’

— ‘Do you not know,’ said the old man, ‘that a Druze never accepts anything from the Turks or their friends, for fear that it may be the product of tribute exacted, and unjust taxes?’

— ‘A friend of the Turks? Indeed, I am not!’

— ‘Did they not make you a sheikh, though I was also one, in this village, in the days of Ibrahim, when your race and mine lived together in peace? Was it not you, again, who went to complain to the Pasha about the matter of a brawl, a house burned down, a quarrel between good neighbours, which we might easily have settled between ourselves?’

The sheikh shook his head without answering; but the prince cut the explanation short, and left the house, holding the Druze by the hand.

— ‘Will you have coffee with me, I who have accepted nothing from the Turks?’ he said to him.

And he ordered his *kahwedji* to serve him some under the trees.

— ‘I was a friend of your father,’ said the old man, ‘and, at that time, Druze and Maronites lived in peace.’

And they conversed, for a long while, about the days when the two peoples were united under the government of the Shihab family, and were not abandoned to the arbitrariness of the victors.

It was agreed that the prince would retire with all his people, that the Druze would return to the village without summoning help from afar, and that the damage done to their houses would be considered as compensation for the previous burning of a Christian house.

Thus ended the dread expedition, in which I had promised myself I would reap so much glory; but not all quarrels in mixed villages find arbiters as conciliatory as Prince Abou-Miran had been. However, it must be said that, though instances of isolated assassination are cited, general quarrels are rarely fatal. They are somewhat akin to those quarrels between Spaniards, who pursue each other in the mountains without meeting, because one of the parties always hides if the other appears in force. There is a deal of shouting, houses are burned down, trees are felled, but the bulletins, drawn up by the interested parties, alone, claim a tally of dead.

At bottom, these two groups esteem each other more than one might think, and cannot forget the ties which formerly united them. Troubled, and roused, either by the missionaries or the monks, in the interest of European influence, they spare themselves, in the manner of the condottieri of old, who fought great battles without any bloodshed. The monks preach, one must rush to arms; the English missionaries declaim and pay, one must show oneself valiant; but at the heart of this lie doubt and discouragement. All already understand what the various European powers desire, divided in aims and interest, and seconded by the improvidence of the Turks. By stirring up quarrels in the mixed villages, they seek to prove the necessity of complete separation between two groups of people who were formerly united in solidarity. The work that is being done, at this moment, in Lebanon, under the guise of pacification, consists in forcing the exchange of properties that the Druze own in the Christian cantons for those that the Christians own in the Druze cantons. Then, there will be no more of these internal struggles so often exaggerated; there will simply be two segregated parties, one of which will perhaps be placed under the protection of Austria, and the other under that of England. It will then be difficult for France to recover that influence which, at the time of Louis XIV extended its scope to embrace both the Druze and the Maronites.

It is not for me to pronounce on such serious issues. I only regret not having taken part in a more Homeric struggle in the Lebanon.

I was soon obliged to leave the prince to visit another site on the mountain. Meanwhile the fame of the Beit Mery affair grew as I passed; thanks to the seething imaginations of the Italian monks, this battle of ours against the mulberry-trees had gradually taken on the proportions of a Crusade.

The Prisoner

Chapter 1: Morning and Evening

What shall we say of youth, my friend! Its liveliest ardour has passed, we are no longer fit to speak of it except with modesty, and yet we scarcely knew it! We scarcely realised how soon we ourselves would chant that ode of Horace's: *Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume ...* (see Horace's 'Odes II, 14'); so soon after first having understood it.... Ah! Study has robbed us of our most beautiful moments! The only result of so much wasted effort is the ability to understand Greek, as I, for example, this morning, understood the meaning of a Greek song which resounded in my ears, issuing from the mouth of an intoxicated Levantine sailor:

'Nè kalimèra! Nè orà kali!'
(*'Fair is the morning! Fair is the hour!'*)

Such was the refrain that this man uttered idly to the sea breeze, to the echoing waves that beat on the shore: but 'No more the fair morning, no more the fair hour!' was the meaning that I found in his words, and, in what I could grasp of the other verses of this popular song, there lay hidden, I believe, this thought:

*'Morning's no more, though evening's not here,
Yet the lightning is lost from our eyes forever!'*

and the refrain was always:

'Nè kalimèra! Nè orà kali!'

while, the song added:

*'Though roseate dawn seems like evening, so near!
Yet the night will bring mere oblivion, later!'*

Sad consolation, to think of those roseate evenings of life, and of the night that must follow! We are soon arriving at that solemn hour which no longer brings morning or evening, and nothing in the world can make it otherwise. What remedy can one seek?

I envisage one for myself: which is to continue to live on this shore of Asia Minor to which fate has brought me; it seems to me, for a few months now, that I have renewed the course of my life; I feel younger; indeed, I am younger; a mere twenty years old!

I am uncertain why, in Europe, people grow old so quickly; our best years are spent at school, far from women, and we have barely had time to dress like a man when we find ourselves no longer young. The virgin of first love greets us with mocking laughter, the beautiful but more worldly ladies, at our side, dream perhaps, with vague sighs, of Cherubino!

A prejudice, no doubt, and especially in Europe, where Cherubinos are so rare. I know of nothing more gauche, more ill-made, and less graceful, in a word, than a sixteen-year-old European boy. We reproach young girls for their red hands, thin shoulders, angular gestures, and shrill voices; but what is there to be said for a puny ephebe with meagre contours, the despair of the Recruitment Board? Only later do his limbs take shape, the curves become pronounced, the flesh and muscles strengthen on the bony apparatus of youth; only then is the man revealed.

In the East, children are even less attractive perhaps than in our own country; those of the rich are bloated, those of the poor are thin with enormous bellies, especially in Egypt; but the time of youth is, generally, beautiful in both sexes. The young men look like women, and those who are seen dressed in long clothes are scarcely distinguishable from their mothers and sisters; yet, for that very reason, a man is really only attractive, here, when the years have given him a more masculine appearance, a more marked character of physiognomy. A beardless lover is not quite the thing in the eyes of the lovely ladies of the Orient, so that there are a host of opportunities, for one whose years have given him a majestic but well-trimmed beard, to be the focal point of all those ardent eyes which shine above the edge of the *yashmak*, or whose veil of white gauze barely dims their blackness.

And then, consider that, once the cheeks are covered with a thick fleece, another stage begins, when plumpness, doubtless making the body more beautiful, would render it supremely inelegant in the tight clothing of Europe, in which even Antinous (*the emperor Hadrian's lover*) would have looked like a fat countryman. That is precisely the moment when floating robes, embroidered jackets, trousers with vast pleats, and wide belts bristling with Levantine weapons, grant a man the most majestic of aspects. Let us advance a lustrum (*five Roman years*) further: silver threads mingle with the beard and invade the hair; the latter itself becomes lighter in hue and, from then on, the most active man, the strongest, the most capable of feeling emotion and displaying tenderness, must renounce among us all hope of ever becoming the hero of a novel. In the East, this is the finest moment of life; Under the tarbouch or the turban, it matters little whether the hair becomes thinner or greyer, the youth was never himself able to take advantage of that natural adornment; it is shaved; he forgets whether nature blessed him, in the cradle, with flat or curly hair. With his beard dyed a Persian hue, his eye animated by a light tint of bitumen, a man is, until he is sixty years old at least, sure to please, as long as he still feels capable of loving.

Yes, let us spend our youth in Europe while we can; but let us grow old in the East, the country of men worthy of that name, the land of the patriarchs! In Europe, whose institutions have suppressed material force, woman has found her strength. With the powers of intelligence, perseverance, persuasion, and seduction that heaven has bestowed upon them, the women of our country are socially the equals of men, which is more than enough for the latter to be always, and surely, defeated. I hope that you will not offer me, in contrast, some picture of a happy Parisian household to deflect me from the plan on which I base my future! I have already regretted, bitterly, having let such an opportunity slip away, in Cairo. I must unite myself with some innocent girl of this sacred soil which is our primal homeland, so that I may re-immense myself in those life-giving sources of humanity, from which flowed the poetry and beliefs of our fathers!

You will mock my enthusiasm, which, I admit, since the beginning of my journey, has already focused its attention on several different goals; but remember also that it is a matter of grave resolution, and that never was my hesitation more natural. You know it, and this is what has perhaps provided my narrative with some interest, to date. I like to conduct my life as in a novel, and would willingly place myself in the situation of one of those active and resolute heroes who wants at all costs to create, around him, drama; to be the centre of attention; the source, in a phrase, of action. Chance, however powerful it may be, never brings together the elements of a decent plot, at most it merely arranges the staging; leave it to do as it will, and everything is abortive, despite the most beautiful of intentions. Since it is agreed that there are only two kinds of outcome, marriage or death, let us at least aim to achieve one of the two ... for, until now, my ventures have almost always ceased to advance: I have barely been able to accomplish one meagre adventure, by adding to my fortune the amiable slave that Abd-el-Kerim sold me. Doubtless, that was not difficult, but it was still needful to possess the idea and, above all, the money. I have sacrificed all hopes of the tour of Palestine which was marked on my itinerary, and which must be relinquished. For the five purses that this golden girl from Malaysia cost me, I could have visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, the Dead Sea and the River Jordan! Like the prophet (*Moses*) punished by God, I must halt at the borders of the Promised Land, and am barely allowed to cast a desolate glance thereon from the mountain-top. Serious people might say, in response, that one is always wrong to act in a different manner to everyone else, and seek to play the Turk when one is only a simple Nazarene from Europe. Might they be right? Who knows?

No doubt I am imprudent; no doubt I have hung a large stone round my neck; no doubt I have incurred a grave moral responsibility; but must we not also believe in that fate which rules everything in this part of the world? It is she, poor Zeynab herself, who willed that her star should conjoin with mine, so I might change, perhaps in a favourable way, the nature of her destiny! What imprudence! There you reveal your European prejudice! For who knows if, taking the road to the desert alone, though richer by five purses, I might not have been attacked, pillaged, slain by a horde of Bedouins scenting my wealth from afar! Come; all is well that could be worse, as worldly wisdom has long recognised.

Perhaps you think, from this preamble, that I have resolved to marry my Javan slave and rid myself, by vulgar means, of my scruples of conscience. You know me to be sensitive

enough not to have thought of selling her for a single instant; I offered to grant her freedom, but this she rejected for a simple enough reason, that she had no idea how it might serve her; moreover, I did not add to it the necessary seasoning associated with so noble a sacrifice, namely a suitable sum that would place the person, once free, forever beyond poverty, which I have been told has been the custom in such cases. To inform you of the other difficulties of my position, I must tell you what has happened to me since my return from the expedition to the mountains, of which I have sent you an account.

I returned to settle in Baptiste's hotel for a few days, waiting for an opportunity to go by sea to Saida, the ancient Sidon. The weather was so adverse no vessel dared sail. Yet on land the sun shone, the implacable azure of the sky was untarnished by a single cloud: there was little to complain of except the wind which raises columns of dust, here and there; though, in the harbour, everything moved and swayed, and the masts and funnels of drunken ships crossed swords with one another. Nothing is more astonishing than to witness such disorder in the midst of calm — the arid storm, and a treacherous sea, its black abysses yawning beneath the sun's bright rays. It must be doubly sad to find oneself drowning amidst such fine weather.

At the table d'hôte I met the English missionary whom I had encountered before; the storm was no less vexing to him than to me, and was preventing him undertaking the same journey. The anticipation of being, in a brief while, travelling companions, rendered our relations somewhat more intimate, and we went together, after lunch, to gaze at the fine spectacle of a stormy sea.

On our way to the harbour, we met Father Planchet, who halted, and was kind enough to chat with us awhile. It was not the least among the many things that astonish me, in this country of contrasts; the sight of a Jesuit and an evangelical missionary conversing affably. Indeed, whatever their domestic and indirect troubles, these pious adversaries continually meet at the consular tables, and maintain a good face for want of anything better to do. Moreover, apart from the occult influence that they seek to overcome in their struggles with the mountaineers, they are no longer likely, in terms of conversion, to find themselves in the same territory. The Catholic agents have long since given up converting the Druze, and hardly assail any but the schismatic Greeks, whose ideas have more in common with their own. The English missionaries, on the contrary, have at their service all the various nuances of the Protestant religion, and end up finding extraordinary points of connection between their faith and that of the Druze. Their ultimate aim being to enter as many names as possible in the little book recording the sum of their work, they manage to prove to their neophytes that deep down the English have something in common with the Druze. This explains the latter's proverb: '*Ingliz, Dursi, sava-sava* (the English, the Druze, it's all one)'. And perhaps, that being the case, it is the missionaries themselves who seem to be converts?

Chapter 2: A visit to the French School

On returning from my excursion in the mountains, I hastened to visit Madame Carlès boarding-house, where I had placed poor Zeynab, not wanting to take her on so dangerous a journey.

It was one of those tall houses, in Italian architectural style, whose buildings, with an interior gallery, framed a vast space, half-terrace, half-courtyard, over which floated the shadow of a striped *tendido*. The building had formerly served as the French Consulate, and one could still see, on the pediments, fleur-de-lis shields, formerly gilded. Orange and pomegranate trees, planted in circular holes between the flagstones, brightened a little this court, closed on all sides to external Nature. A patch of blue sky, pierced by crenellations, and traversed by the doves of the neighbouring mosque from time to time, such was the only horizon for those poor schoolgirls. As I entered, I could hear the buzz of lessons being recited, and, climbing the stairs to the first floor, I found myself in one of the galleries which led to the rooms. There, on an Indian rug, the little girls had formed a circle, squatting in the Turkish manner about a divan on which Madame Carlès sat. The two eldest were near her, and in one I recognised the slave, who ran to me with great bursts of joy.

Madame Carlès hurried to show us into her own room, leaving her place to the other *tall one*, who, with an initial movement natural to the women of the country, had hastened, at the sight of me, to hide her face in her book.

— ‘Thus, she is not,’ I said to myself, ‘a Christian, because the latter may be viewed freely inside the house.’

Long tresses of blond hair intertwined with silk cords, white hands with slender fingers, with those long nails which indicated her nation, were all that I could grasp of this graceful apparition. I hardly noticed her, however; I was eager to learn how the slave had fared in her new position. Poor girl! She wept hot tears as she pressed my hand to her forehead. I was very moved, without knowing yet whether she had some complaint to make, or whether my long absence was the cause of this effusion.

I asked her if she was comfortable in this house. She threw her arms around her mistress, saying that she was her mother.

— ‘She is very good,’ said Madame Carlès to me in her Provençal accent, ‘but she won’t do a thing; she learns a few words with the little ones, that is all. If we seek to have her write, or try to teach her to sew, she’s unwilling. I told her: “I cannot punish you; when your master returns, he will decide what he wishes to do.”’

What Madame Carlès told me, upset me greatly; I had thought to resolve the question of the girl’s future by having her learn what was necessary, so she might later find a place, and live by herself; I was in the position of a father who sees his plans overturned by the ill-will or laziness of his child. On the other hand, perhaps my rights were not as well-founded as those of a father. I assumed the most severe air I could, and had the following conversation with the slave, facilitated by the mistress as intermediary:

— ‘And why don’t you want to learn to sew?’

— ‘Because, as soon as I am seen to labour like a servant, I will be made a servant.’

— ‘The wives of Christians, women who are free, work without being servants.’

— ‘Well, I will not be wed to a Christian;’ said the slave, ‘with us, the husband must grant his wife a servant.’

I was about to answer that being a slave, she was less than a servant; but I remembered the distinction she had already established between her position as a *quaden* and that of an *odaleuk* destined for work.

— ‘Why,’ I replied, ‘do you not wish to learn to write, either? Then you might be taught to sing and dance; which is no longer the work of a servant.’

— ‘No, but it is merely the art of an *almah*, of a songstress, and I prefer to remain as I am.’

We know how deeply-embedded prejudices may prove in the minds of Europeans; but it must be said that ignorance, and social habits supported by ancient tradition, render them indestructible among the women of the Orient. They consent to abandon even their faith, more readily than to abandon ideas which involve their self-esteem. But, Madame Carlès said to me:

— ‘Be, at ease; once she has become a Christian, she will see that women of our religion can work without failing in dignity, and then she will learn whatever we wish. She has attended Mass several times at the Capuchin convent, and the superior has been very edified by her devotion’.

— ‘But that proves nothing,’ I said. ‘I have seen *santons* and *dervishes* entering Cairo churches, either out of curiosity or to hear the music, while showing great respect, and meditating therein.’

On the table, beside us, was a New Testament in French. I opened the book mechanically, and found, as frontispiece, a portrait of Jesus Christ, and, further on, a portrait of Mary. While I was examining these engravings, the slave approached me, and placing her finger on the first, said:

— *Aïssé!* (Jesus!)

And on the second:

— *Miriam!* (Mary!)

Smiling, I brought the open book closer to her lips; but she recoiled in fright, crying out — ‘*Mafisch!*’

— ‘Why do you recoil?’ I said to her. ‘Do you not honour, in your religion, *Aïssé* as a prophet, and *Miriam* as one of the three holy women?’

— ‘Yes, she said,’ but it is written: “Thou shalt not worship images.”

— ‘You see,’ I said to Madame Carlès, ‘that her conversion has not advanced very far.’

— ‘Wait; be patient,’ Madame Carlès replied.

Chapter 3: The Akkal

I rose in a state of great irresolution. I had just compared myself to a father, and it is true that I felt a *familial* feeling of a sort, towards the poor girl, who had only me for support. That is certainly the only good side to slavery as it is understood in the East. Does the idea of possession, which attaches so strongly to material objects and animals, possess a less noble and lively influence on the mind, if it is transposed to creatures such as ourselves? I do not seek to apply this idea to those unhappy black slaves held in Christian countries; I am speaking here only of those slaves owned by the Muslim peoples, slaves whose position is regulated by religion and morality.

I took poor Zeynab's hand, and gazed at her with such tenderness that Madame Carlès was doubtless mistaken in her further comments.

— 'This is what I try to make her understand.' she said, 'You see, my daughter, if you seek to become a Christian, your master will perhaps marry you and take you to his country.'

— 'Oh! Madame Carlès!' I cried, 'Be not so hasty in your system of conversion.... What an idea you have expressed, there!'

I had not yet thought of that solution.... Yes, doubtless, it is sad, at the moment of leaving the East for Europe, to lack any idea of what to do with the slave one has bought; but to marry her! That would be much too Christian a deed. Madame Carlès, you have not thought it through! This woman is already eighteen years old, which, for the East, is quite advanced, she has only ten years of beauty left; after which, I will be, though still young, the husband of a woman of yellow hue, who has suns tattooed on her forehead and chest, and the hole for a ring she once wore in her left nostril. Consider that she looks well in Levantine costume, but dreadful when dressed in European fashion. Do you see me entering a salon with a beauty one might suspect of cannibalistic tastes! That would be ridiculous both for her and myself.

No, conscience does not demand this of me, nor does affection advise me to do so. The slave is dear to me, no doubt, but she has belonged to other masters. She lacks education, and the very will to learn. How can I make an equal of a woman who is neither coarse or stupid, but totally illiterate? Will she come to understand the necessity for study and labour? Moreover, dare I say it? I fear it to be impossible for a deeper empathy to be established between two beings from nations so different from ours.

And yet it will be painful to leave the woman behind...

Explain who can the unresolved feelings, the conflicting ideas which mingled at that moment in my brain. I had risen, as if urged by the hour, so as to avoid granting Madame Carlès a precise answer, and we passed from her room into the gallery, where the young girls had continued to study under the supervision of the eldest. The slave went to throw herself on the neck of the latter, and thus prevented her from hiding her face, as she had done on my arrival.

— '*Ya makboubah!* (she is my dear friend),' she cried.

And the young girl, finally letting herself be seen, allowed me to admire her features wherein European paleness was allied to the pure outline of that aquiline type which, in Asia as with us, has something regal about it. An air of pride, tempered by grace, spread an air of

intelligence over her face, and her habitual seriousness made the smile she gave me when I greeted her of greater value. Madame Carlès said to me:

— ‘She is a poor, and very interesting girl, whose father is one of the mountain sheikhs. Unfortunately, he has recently been taken by the Turks. He was imprudent enough to venture into Beirut at the time of the troubles, and has been imprisoned because he has not paid his taxes since 1840. He will not recognise the present powers; that is why his property has been sequestered. Finding himself captive and abandoned by all, he has sent for his daughter, who can only visit him once a day; the rest of the time, she lives here. I teach her Italian, and she teaches the little girls true Arabic ... for she is a scholar. In her nation, women of a certain birth are permitted to educate themselves, and even occupy themselves with the arts; which, among Muslim women, is regarded as a mark of inferior status.’

— ‘Of what nation is she?’ I asked.

— ‘She belongs to the Druze people,’ replied Madame Carlès.

I observed her more attentively from then on. She saw clearly that we were talking about her, and this seemed to embarrass her somewhat. The slave had half lain down beside her on the sofa and was playing with the long tresses of her hair. Madame Carlès said to me:

— ‘They are good together; they are like night and day. It amuses them to converse, because the others are too small. I sometimes say to your slave: “If you would only follow the example of your friend, you might learn something” ... But she is only good at playing, and singing songs, all day. What would you have! When you take them on so late, you can scarcely do anything with them.’

I paid scant attention to these complaints from the good Madame Carlès, accentuated always by her Provençal pronunciation. Concerned wholly with showing me that she should not be blamed for the slave’s lack of progress, she did not see that I was especially keen, at that moment, to be informed of whatever concerned her other boarder. Nevertheless, I dared not show my curiosity too clearly; I felt that it was wrong to abuse the simplicity of a good woman accustomed to receiving the fathers of families, ecclesiastics, and other serious people ... and who viewed me solely as an equally serious client.’

Leaning on the banister of the gallery, with a pensive air and a lowered brow, I took advantage of the time granted me by the southern eloquence of that excellent governess, to admire the charming picture before me. The slave had taken the other girl’s hand and was comparing it with her own; in her improvident gaiety, she continued this pantomime by bringing her dark tresses closer to the blond hair of her neighbour, who smiled at such childishness. It is clear that she did not think she was harmed by the comparison, and was only looking for an opportunity to play and laugh, possessed by the naïve enthusiasm of Orientals; yet this spectacle had a dangerous charm for me; I was not long in feeling it.

— ‘But,’ I said to Madame Carlès, with an air of honest curiosity, how is it that this poor Druze girl is lodged in a Christian school?’

— There are no institutions in Beirut that accord with her religion; no public establishments have ever been founded here for women; she could therefore only reside honourably in a house

like mine. You know, moreover, that the Druze have many beliefs similar to ours: they accept the Bible and the Gospels, and pray at the tombs of our saints.'

I did not wish, at this time, to question Madame Carlès at greater length. I felt that the lessons had been halted by my visit, and the little girls seemed to be talking among themselves with expressions of surprise. It was necessary to return this retreat to its usual tranquility; it was also necessary to take the time to reflect on a whole world of new ideas which had just arisen in me.

I took leave of Madame Carlès and promised to return and visit her next day.

Reading the pages of this journal, you no doubt smile at my enthusiasm for a little Arab girl, seated on a classroom bench, whom I met by chance; you lack belief in sudden passion, you even know that I have been tried enough on this point not to conceive fresh passions lightly; you will doubtless make allowances for the training, the climate, the poetry of the place, the costume, all this stage-set of mountain and sea, and for the deep impressions formed by memory and locale, that ready the mind in advance for some passing illusion. It seems to you, not that I *am* in love, but that I *believe* I am ... as if they were not the same in their result!

I have heard serious people jest about the love one conceives for actresses, for female royalty, for women poets, for everything that, according to them, stirs the imagination more than the heart, and yet, does not such insane love, often end in delirium, death, or unheard-of sacrifices of time, fortune, or intelligence. 'Oh! I think I'm in love'. Oh! That's as much as to say, 'I'm ill', is it not? But if I think I am; I am!

I shall spare you, my emotions; read instead all the various tales of lovers, from the collection that Plutarch made (*see his 'Amatoria Narrationes'*) to Goethe's '*Sorrows of Young Werther*', and if, in our century, we still meet with lovers like them, remember that they have all the more merit for having triumphed over all the strength of analysis that experience and observation allows us. And now, let me escape from generalities.

When I left Madame Carlès' house, I bore the love within me, as if it were my prey, into solitude. Oh, how happy I was to find myself imbued with an idea, a goal, will-power, something to dream of and attempt to achieve! This country which had revived all the strength and inspiration of my youth doubtless owes me no less; I already felt that by setting foot in this maternal region, by immersing myself in the venerated sources of our history and our beliefs, I was going to halt the flight of my years, and render myself a child again, in this cradle of the world, a youth once more in the land of eternal youth.

Preoccupied with these thoughts, I traversed the city without paying attention to the usual motion of the crowd. I sought the mountain and the shade, I felt that the needle of my destiny had suddenly changed direction; it was necessary to reflect at length, and seek ways to confirm it to be so. On leaving the fortified gates, on the side opposite the sea, one finds deep paths, shaded by thickets, and bordered by the bushy gardens of country-houses; higher up, there stands a wood of umbrella pines, planted two centuries ago to prevent the sand's invasion, which threatens Beirut's promontory. The reddish trunks of this uniform plantation, extending in staggered rows for a space of many miles, seem like the columns of a temple raised to universal Nature, dominating the sea on the one side, and on the other the desert, those two

dreary faces of the world. I had made my way there before, to dream without definite goal, without any other thought than those vague philosophical problems which always stir in idle brains in the presence of such a spectacle. Now I brought with me a fertile idea; I was no longer alone; my future was outlined against the luminous background to this scene: the ideal woman, whom everyone pursues in their dreams, had been realised for me; all the rest were forgotten.

I hesitate to tell you of the vulgar event that drew me from these lofty reflections, while I was treading, with proud foot, the red sand of the path. An enormous insect was crossing its surface, pushing before it a ball larger than itself: it was a beetle, of a species that reminded me of the Egyptian scarabs, that raise the world above their heads. You know I am superstitious, and can well imagine that I drew some kind of augury from this symbolic intervention in my course. I retraced my steps, aware of an obstacle with which I would need to contend.

I hastened back the next day to Madame Carlès. To give a pretext for my fresh visit, I had gone to the bazaar to buy some women's adornments, a *mantilla* from Bursa, a few lengths of silk worked in twists and festoons to decorate a dress, and some of those garlands of small artificial flowers that the Levantines place in their hair.

When I brought all this for the slave, whom Madame Carlès, on seeing me arrive, had brought to her room, she rose, uttering cries of joy, and ran into the gallery to show these riches to her friend. I had followed to retrieve her, apologising as I did so to Madame Carlès for being the cause of this madness; but the whole class was already united in the same feeling of admiration, and the young Druze girl cast upon me an attentive, smiling glance which went to my soul.

— 'What might she think?' I said to myself. 'She doubtless believes I am in love with my slave, and that these adornments are marks of affection. Perhaps, in truth, it is all a little too much to be worn in school; I should have chosen more useful things, for example slippers; those poor Zeynab wears are no longer entirely fitting.'

I myself remarked that it would have been better to buy her a new dress than embroider that which she wore. Madame Carlès, who had joined good-naturedly in the little commotion that this episode produced in her class, made a like observation.

— 'It would need a very beautiful dress to justify such ornate trimmings!'

— 'You see,' she said to Zeynab, 'if you learned how to sew, the *sidi* (lord) would go and buy seven or eight lengths of taffeta at the bazaar, and you could make yourself a dress fit for a great lady.'

But, the slave would, indeed, have preferred a ready-made dress.

It seemed to me that the young Druze girl cast a rather sad gaze on these decorations, which were no longer appropriate to her fate, and scarcely more so for that which the slave would know; I had bought them carelessly, without concerning myself overmuch about propriety or destiny. It is obvious that a lace trim calls for a velvet or satin dress; such was more or less the embarrassment into which I had imprudently fallen. Moreover, I seemed to be playing the awkward role of the rich individual ready to deploy what we term Asiatic luxury, but which, in Asia Minor, rather smacks of the European kind.

I thought I perceived the supposition to be not, in general, unfavourable to me. Women are somewhat the same in all countries, alas, as regards dress. It may be that Madame Carlès showed more consideration for me from then on, and was not unwilling to view as merely the marks of a traveller's curiosity the questions I asked in regard to the young Druze girl. Nor did I find it difficult to make her understand that the little she had told me about the girl on the first day had roused my interest in the father's misfortunes.

'It is not impossible,' I said to the governess, 'that I might be of some use to these people; I know one of the Pasha's employees; moreover, you are aware that a European of some note has a degree of influence at the consulates.'

— 'Oh, yes, help them if you can!' Madame Carlès said to me with her usual Provençal vivacity; 'she deserves it, and doubtless her father too. He is what they call an *akkal*, a holy man, a scholar; and his daughter, whom he has instructed, already has the same title among his people: *akkalé siti* (a holy lady).'

— 'That's merely an epithet,' I said; 'does she not have another name?'

— Her name is Salèma; the other is common to her, and all the other women who belong to that religious order. Poor child,' added Madame Carlès, 'I have done what I could to convert her to Christianity, but she says that her religion is identical; she believes in everything we believe, and attends church like the others... Well, what can I say? These people say the same with regard to the Turks; your slave, who is a Muslim, tells me that she respects their beliefs too, so I've ended by not speaking of it to her any further. Yet when one believes in everything, one believes in nothing! That's what I say.'

Chapter 4: The Druze Sheikh

On leaving the house, I hastened, to the Pasha's palace, eager as I was to make myself useful to the young *akkalé siti*. I found my Armenian friend in his usual place, in the waiting room, and I asked him what he knew about the detention of a Druze chief imprisoned for not having paid the land tax.

— 'Oh! If that were all,' he said to me, 'I doubt the affair would be serious, since none of the Druze sheikhs have paid the *miri* for the last three years. There must be some particular misdeed involved.'

He departed to obtain information from the other employees, and soon returned to tell me that Sheikh Seid-Escherazy was accused of having preached seditious things to his own people. 'He is a dangerous man in these troubled times', added the Armenian, 'besides, the Pasha of Beirut cannot free him; that depends on the Pasha of Acre.'

— 'The Pasha of Acre!' I cried; 'but it is that same to whom I have a letter of recommendation, and whom I knew personally in Paris!'

And I showed such joy at this circumstance, that the Armenian thought me quite mad. He was far, indeed, from suspecting my true motive.

Nothing adds strength to a burgeoning love like those unexpected circumstances which, however unimportant they may be, seem to indicate the action of destiny. Whether fate or providence, one seems to see, beneath the uniform surface of life, the lines of an invisible pattern firmly traced, which indicate the path to be followed, or risk going astray. At once, I imagined it written from time immemorial that I was to marry in Syria; that fate had foreseen this profound fact, and that, to accomplish it, no less than a thousand circumstances of my life strangely linked together had been required, the connections between which I, doubtless exaggerated.

With the help of the Armenian, I readily obtained permission to visit the State prison, comprising a group of towers forming part of the eastern enclosure of the city. He and I went there, and, by means of a little bakshish handed to the officials, I was able to ask the Druze sheikh if it would be convenient for him to receive me. The curiosity of European travellers is so well known and accepted by the people of the country, that this posed no difficulty. I expected to find a gloomy retreat, oozing walls, and dungeons; but there was nothing of the sort in the part of the prison to which I was shown. The dwelling resembled the other houses of Beirut, wholly, which is not to praise them absolutely; there were moreover guards and soldiers housed there.

The sheikh, master of a complete apartment, had permission to walk on the terrace. He received us in a room serving as a parlour, and had coffee and pipes brought by a slave whom he owned. As for himself, he abstained from smoking, according to the custom of the akkals. When we had taken our places and I was able to view him closely, I was surprised to find him so young; he seemed to me hardly older than myself. His noble and masculine features reflected, in another gender, the physiognomy of his daughter; the penetrating timbre of his voice struck me strongly for the same reason.

I had sought the interview without much reflection, and already felt more moved and embarrassed than was fitting for a visitor who was there merely out of curiosity; the sheikh's simple and confident welcome reassured me. I was about to tell him my thoughts in depth; but the words I sought for only alerted me to the oddity of my approach. I therefore limited myself, at this time, to a traveller's utterances only. He had already met several Englishmen in his prison, and was accustomed to questions about his people and himself.

His position, moreover, rendered him very patient, and somewhat eager for conversation and company. My knowledge of the history of his country served above all to prove to him that I was guided only by a scientific motive. Knowing how difficult it was to persuade the Druze to offer details about their religion, I simply used the semi-interrogative formula: 'Is it true that...?' and pursued the many assertions of Bartold Niebuhr, the Comte de Volney, and Silvestre de Sacy. The Druze shook his head, displaying the prudent reserve of the Orient, and simply said to me: 'What! Is that so? Are the Christians also learned?... How could they have gained that knowledge?' and other evasive phrases.

I saw that there was not much more to be gained on this occasion. Our conversation had been in Italian, which he spoke quite fluently. I asked his permission to return, and submit to him some fragments of a history of the great Emir Fakr al-Din, which I told him I was involved with. I thought that national pride would lead him to rectify any facts that were unfavourable to his people. I was not mistaken. He perhaps understood that, in an era when Europe had so much influence over the situation of eastern nations, it was appropriate to abandon a little the pretension to a secret doctrine which had been unable to resist penetration by our scholars.

— ‘Consider,’ I said to him, ‘that in our libraries we have a hundred of your religious books, all of which have been read, translated, and commented upon.’

— ‘Our Lord is great!’ he said with a sigh.

I believe that at this time he took me for a missionary; but he betrayed no sign of it outwardly, and strongly urged me to return and visit him, since I found some pleasure in the conversation.

I can only offer a summary of the conversations I had with the Druze sheikh, during which he was kind enough to rectify the ideas I had formed of his religion merely from fragments of Arabic books, translated at random, and commented on by European scholars. Formerly, these things were hidden from foreigners, and the Druze concealed their books with care in the most secluded places of their houses and temples.

It was during the wars they were obliged to fight, against either the Turks or the Maronites, that a large number of these manuscripts were collected, and an idea of the whole of their dogma was formed; but it was impossible that a religion established and developed over eight centuries should not have produced a host of contradictory assertions, the work of various sects, and successive phases over time. Some writers have therefore seen in the texts merely a complex monument to human extravagance; others have exalted the relationship that exists between the Druze religion and the doctrines of ancient initiation. The Druze have been compared successively to the Pythagoreans, the Essenes, the Gnostics, and it seems that the Templars, Rosicrucians and modern Freemasons have also borrowed many ideas from them. There can be no doubt that the writers of the Crusades often confused them with the Ismailis, one of its sects being that famous company of assassins which was for a while the terror of all the sovereigns of the world; but the latter occupied Kurdistan, and their *sheik-el-djebel*, or Old Man of the Mountain, has no connection with Lebanon’s *Prince of the Mountain*.

The Druze religion has this peculiarity, that it claims to be the last religion revealed to the world. Indeed, its messiah (*al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, the sixth Fatimid Caliph*) was proclaimed, around the year 1018, almost four hundred years after Muhammad. Like our own Messiah, it is believed that he incarnated himself in the body of a man; and, indeed, chose no ignoble residence, since he might well have led the existence of a god on earth, being no less than the commander of the believers, the Caliph of Egypt and Syria, compared to whom all the other princes of the earth seemed inferior in those days. At the time of his birth, all the planets were united in the sign of Cancer, and glowing *Pharoüis* (Saturn) presided at the hour when he entered the world. Moreover, Nature had given him everything to support such a role: he had

the face of a lion, a voice vibrant as thunder, and none could bear the brilliant gaze of his dark-blue eyes.

It might seem strange that a sovereign endowed with all these advantages was not at first taken at his own word, when announcing that he was divine. However, Hakim found among his own people only a small number of followers. In vain did he close the mosques, the churches and the synagogues; in vain did he establish houses of conferences where doctors in his employ demonstrated his divinity: popular conscience rejected the god, while respecting the prince. That powerful heir of the Fatimids obtained less power over souls than the carpenter's son had in Jerusalem, and the camel-driver Muhammad in Medina. Posterity alone has preserved a sect of faithful believers, who, however few in number, regard themselves, as the Hebrew people formerly did, as adherents of the true law, eternal rule, and the arcana of the future. In a time not far off, Hakim will reappear in a new form, and establish everywhere the superiority of his people, who will succeed in glory and power to the Muslims and the Christians. The time, fixed by the Druze books, is the moment when the Christians will finally triumph over the Muslims throughout the East (*other accounts of Druze history and beliefs, differ from this; Hakim, having been proclaimed as Messiah by the 'heretic' Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Darazi, apparently rejecting the role, and later executing the latter*).

Lady Hester Stanhope, who lived for some time amongst the Druze, and who became infatuated with their ideas, had, as we know, in her court a horse saddled ready for the *Mahdi* to ride, who is this same apocalyptic character, and whom she hoped to accompany in his triumph. Her wish was disappointed. However, the Mahdi's future steed, which bears on its back a natural saddle formed by folds of its skin, is still alive, and was bought by one of the Druze sheikhs.

Do we have the right to view all this simply as madness? At root, there is not a single modern religion that does not present similar misconceptions. Let me add, moreover, the faith of the Druze is only a syncretism of all previous religions and philosophies.

The Druze recognise only one deity, incarnated as Hakim; except that this god, like the Buddha of India, has manifested himself to the world in several different forms. He has incarnated ten times in different places on earth; first in India, later in Persia, in Yemen, in Tunis and elsewhere. These are what are called the *stations*.

Hakim's name in heaven is *Albar*.

After him come five ministers, direct emanations of the divinity, whose angelic names are Gabriel, Michael, Israfil, Azariel, and Metatron; they are, symbolically, the Intellect, the Soul, the Word, the Preceding, and the Following. Three other ministers of a lower degree are figuratively called the Application, the Opening, and the Phantom; they have, moreover, human names which apply to their various incarnations, for they too intervene from time to time in the great drama of human life.

Thus, in the Druze catechism, the principal minister, named Hamza, who is the same as Gabriel, is regarded as having appeared seven times; he was named Schatnil at the time of Adam, later Pythagoras, David, and Schuaib; in the time of Jesus, he was the true Messiah and was named Eleazar; in the time of Mahomet, he was called Salman-al-Farsi, and finally, under

the name of Hamza, he was the prophet of Hakim, Caliph and god, and true founder of the Druze religion.

This is, indeed, a faith in which the heavens are endlessly concerned with humanity. The times when these powers intervene are called *revolutions*. Whenever the human race goes astray and falls into too profound a forgetfulness of its duties, the Supreme Being and his Angels become men, and, by human means alone, re-establish the order of things.

It is, at root, the Christian concept, with a more frequent intervention by the divinity, but the Christian idea without Jesus, because the Druze suppose that the apostles delivered a false Messiah to the Jews, one who devoted himself to concealing the other; the true one (Hamza) was among the disciples, under the name of Eleazar, and merely whispered his thoughts to Jesus, son of Joseph. As for the evangelists, they call them *the feet of wisdom*, and mark only a single variation to Christian belief: that of suppressing the adoration of the Cross, and our faith in a God sacrificed on behalf of humankind.

Now, to this system of religious revelation, whereby one incarnation succeeds another from epoch to epoch, the Druze also admit the Muslim idea, but without Muhammad. It is still Hamza who, under the name of Salman-al-Farsi, sowed that fresh revelation. It is during the last incarnation, of Hakim and Hamza, that the various dogmas, revealed to the world seven times since Adam, and which relate to the epochs of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Pythagoras, Christ and Mahomet were combined together.

It is apparent that this whole doctrine is based, at root, on a particular interpretation of the Bible, since there is no question within this chronology of any divinity ascribed to the idolaters, and Pythagoras is the only character who is absent from the Biblical tradition. It is also evident that this series of beliefs could allow the Druze sometimes to pass for Turks, sometimes for Christians.

We have described eight celestial characters who intervene among humankind, some fighting like Christ by the word, others by the sword like the Homeric gods. There are necessarily also angels of darkness who fulfil a completely opposite role. Also, in the history of the world as compiled by the Druze, one finds each of the seven periods offering a scene of grandiose action, in which these eternal enemies seek each other beneath the human mask, and recognise each other by their superiority, or their degree of hatred.

Thus, the spirit of evil is in turn Eblis, or the serpent; Methuselah, the king of the city of giants, at the time of the Flood; Nimrod, at the time of Abraham; Pharaoh, at the time of Moses; later, Antiochus, Herod and other monstrous tyrants, seconded by sinister acolytes, who are reborn at the same moment to thwart the reign of the Lord. According to some sects, this return is subject to a millennial cycle brought about by the influence of certain stars; in this set of beliefs, Muhammad's time is not counted as an example of these grand cycles of events; the mystical drama which renews the face of the world each time is sometimes that of the lost paradise, sometimes the Flood, sometimes the flight from Egypt, sometimes the reign of Solomon; while the mission of Christ, and the reign of Hakim form the last two scenes. In this scheme the Mahdi reappears in the year 2000.

Amidst all this doctrine, there is no mention of original sin; there is neither paradise for the just, nor hell for the wicked. Reward and expiation take place on earth, through the transmigration of souls. Beauty, wealth, and power are granted to the elect; the infidels become the slaves, the sick, the sufferers. A pure life can, however, still restore them to the rank from which they have fallen, while those elect too proud of their prosperity take their place.

As for the change of bodies, it operates in a very simple manner. The number of human beings is constantly the same on earth. Every second, one dies and another is born; the soul that flees is magnetically drawn to the ray of the body that is forming, and the influence of the stars providentially regulates this exchange of destinies; but human beings do not possess, as celestial spirits do, the consciousness of their migrations. The faithful can, however, by rising through the nine degrees of initiation, gradually arrive at the knowledge of all things and of themselves. Such is the happiness reserved for the *akkals* (spirituals), and all the Druze can rise to this rank by study and a life of virtue. Those, on the contrary, who only follow the law without claiming wisdom are called *djahels*, that is to say: the ignorant. They always retain the chance to rise in another life, and purify their souls too attached to the material world.

As for the Christians, Jews, Muslims, and idolaters, it is to be understood that their position is inferior. However, it must be said, in praise of the Druze religion, that it is perhaps the only one which does not condemn its enemies to eternal punishment. When the Messiah reappears, the Druze will be established on all the thrones, and in all the governments and estates of the Earth, because of their merit, and the other peoples will be reduced to the status of servants, slaves and workers; they will form the plebeian horde. The sheikh assured me that, in this scenario, the Christians will not receive the worst treatment. Let us hope then that the Druze will be good masters.

These details interested me so much that I wished, finally, to learn of the life of this illustrious Hakim, whom historians have painted as a raging madman, half-Nero and half-Heliogabalus. I understood that from the point of view of the Druze, his conduct was to be explained in quite another way.

The good sheikh did not complain over-much at my frequent visits; moreover, he knew that I could be useful to him as regards the Pasha of Acre. He was therefore kind enough to tell me, with all the romantic pomp of Arabian genius, the story of Hakim, which I shall transcribe almost in his own words. In the East, everything becomes a tale. It must not be believed, however, that it is a mere sequel to the *Thousand and One Nights*. The principal facts of the story are based on authentic tradition; and I was pleased, after having observed and studied modern Cairo, to find such memories of ancient Cairo preserved, in Syria, among families exiled from Egypt for eight hundred years.

the watering holes, and the lights of fishermen prick the opaque shadow of the banks with golden stars.

In the village of the Sabaeans, the place where one best enjoyed this perspective was an okel with white walls, surrounded by carob trees, whose terrace had its foot in the water, and where, every night, the boatmen who ascended or descended the Nile could see the night lights flickering in their pools of oil.

Through the bays of the arcades, a curious person, occupying a cange in the middle of the river, would have easily discerned, in the interior of the okel, the travellers and regulars seated at small tables on chairs of palm-wood, or divans covered with mats, and would certainly have been astonished by their odd appearance. Their extravagant gestures, succeeded by a stupefied immobility, their senseless laughter, the inarticulate cries which escaped from time to time from their chests, would have made him think it one of those houses where, outside the barriers, infidels went to intoxicate themselves with wine, bouza (beer) or hashish.

One evening, a boat, steered with the certainty that came from knowledge of the place, reached shore in the shadow of the terrace, at the foot of a staircase whose first steps were kissed by the water, and out sprang a young and handsome man, who seemed a fisherman, and who, climbing the steps with a firm and rapid step, sat down in the corner of the room in a place that seemed his own. No one paid any attention to his arrival; he was evidently a regular.

At the same time, through the opposite door, that is to say from the landward side, entered a man dressed in a black woollen tunic, wearing, in defiance of custom, long hair under a *takieh* (white cap).

His unexpected appearance provoked some surprise. He seated himself in a corner, in the shadows, and soon, the general drunkenness prevailing, none paid further attention to him. Though his clothes were wretched, the newcomer's face bore no signs of the anxious humility of poverty. His features, firmly drawn, recalled the severe lines of a lion's mask. His eyes, dark blue like that of sapphires, had an indefinable power; they frightened and charmed at once.

Yousouf — for such was the name of the young man borne there by the cange — immediately felt a secret empathy in his heart with the stranger whose unusual presence he had noticed. Not having taken part as yet in the drinking, he approached the couch on which the stranger was squatting.

— 'Brother,' said Yousouf, 'you seem tired; doubtless, you have come a long way. Would you like some refreshment?'

— 'Indeed, my journey has been long,' the stranger replied. 'I entered this okel to rest; but what might I drink here, where only forbidden beverages are served?'

— 'You Muslims fear to wet your lips except with pure water; but we, who are of the Sabaean sect, may, without offending our law, quench our thirst with the generous juice of the vine, or the blond liquor fermented from barley.'

— 'I see no such fermented drink in front of you, though?'

— ‘Oh! I have long since disdained gross drunkenness,’ said Yousouf, beckoning to a black servant, who placed on the table two small glass cups encased in silver filigree, and a box filled with greenish paste in which an ivory spatula had been dipped. ‘This box contains the paradise (*Jannah*) promised by your Prophet to true believers, and if you were not so scrupulous, I would set you in the arms of the houris, in a trice, without requiring you to cross the bridge of As-Sirat,’ continued Yousouf, laughing.

— ‘But this paste is hashish, if I’m not mistaken,’ replied the stranger, pushing away the cup in which Yousouf had placed a portion of this magical substance, ‘and hashish is prohibited.’

— ‘Everything that is pleasant is forbidden,’ said Yousouf, swallowing a first spoonful.

The stranger fixed the gaze of his deeply azure eyes on Yousouf; the skin of his forehead contracted in such violent furrows that his hair followed the undulations; for a moment one would have said that he wanted to rush upon the carefree young man, and tear him to pieces; but he restrained himself, his features relaxed, and, in a sudden change of mind, he stretched out his hand, took the cup, and began to slowly taste the green paste.

After a few minutes the effects of the hashish began to be felt on both Yousouf and the stranger; a sweet languor spread through all their members, a vague smile fluttered on their lips. Although they had barely spent half an hour with each other, it seemed to them that they had known each other for a thousand years. The drug acting with more force on them, they began to laugh, become agitated, and speak with extreme volubility, the stranger especially, who, a strict observer of the injunction, had never tasted this preparation and felt its effects keenly. He seemed in the grip of an extraordinary exaltation; swarms of new, unheard of, inconceivable thoughts, traversed his soul in whirlwinds of fire; his eyes glittered as if illuminated internally by the reflections of an unknown world, a superhuman dignity elevated his bearing; then the vision died, and he let himself fall limply to the tiles, amidst all the beatitudes of *kief* (*rest*).

— ‘Well, friend,’ said Yousouf, seizing this pause in the unknown man’s intoxication, ‘what do you think of this honest candied pistachio? Will you anathematise, now, good folk who meet quietly in some low-ceilinged room to find happiness in their own manner?’

— ‘Hashish renders one like God,’ the stranger answered in a slow, deep voice.

— ‘Yes,’ replied Yousouf enthusiastically, ‘drinkers of water know only the gross and material appearances of things. Intoxication, by rousing the body’s powers of sight, enlightens the soul; the spirit, freed from the body, its burdensome gaoler, flees like a prisoner whose guard has fallen asleep and left the key in the door of the dungeon. It wanders joyfully and freely in space and light, chatting familiarly with the spirits it meets, who dazzle him with sudden and charming revelations. It traverses, with light flaps of its wings, the atmosphere of unspeakable happiness, and this, in the space of a moment which seems eternal, so quickly do these sensations succeed one another. As for me, I have a dream which constantly reappears, ever the same and ever varying: when I retire to my cage, staggered by the splendour of my visions, closing my eyelids to a perpetual stream of hyacinths, garnets, emeralds, and rubies which form the background on which hashish draws its marvellous fantasies... as at the heart

of infinity, I perceive a celestial figure, more beautiful than all the creations of the poets, who smiles at me with a penetrating sweetness, and who descends from the heavens to visit me. Is it an angel, a *peri* (a supernatural being)? I know not. She seats herself beside me in the boat, whose coarse wood immediately changes into mother-of-pearl, which floats on a silver river, moved by a breeze laden with perfumes.'

— 'A happy and singular vision!' murmured the stranger, shaking his head.

— 'That is not all,' continued Yousouf. 'One night, having taken a weaker dose, I woke from my drunkenness, as my cange was passing the tip of the island of Roda. A woman like to the one in my dream leant over me with eyes that, though seemingly human, possessed no less than celestial brilliance; her half-open veil displayed her vest whose gems blazed in the moonlight. My hand met hers; her skin soft, unctuous and fresh as a flower petal, and her rings, whose carved surfaces brushed me, convinced me of her reality.'

— 'Near the island of Roda?' the stranger said to himself with a meditative air.

— 'It was no dream,' Yousouf continued, paying no attention to the impromptu remark of his confidant, 'the hashish had simply aroused a memory buried deep in my soul, for this divine face was known to me. However, where I had seen her before, in what world we had met, what previous existence had brought us into contact, that I could not say; but this strange rapprochement, this bizarre adventure, caused me no surprise: it seemed quite natural to me that this woman, who so completely realised my ideal, should find herself there in my cange, in the middle of the Nile, as if sprung from the calyx of one of those large flowers that rise to the surface of the waters. Without seeking an explanation, I threw myself at her feet, and as, at the end of my dream, I addressed her in speech full of all that love in its exaltation can imagine of the most burning and sublime, words of profound significance arose in me, expressions that contained universes of thought, mysterious phrases in which the echo of vanished worlds vibrated. My soul occupied both the past and the future; I was convinced that the love I expressed I had felt from all eternity. As I spoke, I saw her large eyes brighten, and shed effluvia; her translucent hands stretched out towards me, tapering into rays of light. I felt myself enveloped in a network of flames, and I fell, in spite of my previous ecstasy, into dream. When I could shake off the invincible and delicious torpor that bound my limbs, I found myself on the shore opposite Giza, leaning against a palm-tree, and my black slave was sleeping peacefully beside the cange he had drawn up on the sand. A pink glow fringed the horizon; dawn was breaking.'

— 'This is a love that hardly resembles earthly love,' said the stranger, without raising the slightest objection to the impossibilities of Yousouf's story, 'though hashish easily makes one believe in marvels.'

— 'I have never before told this incredible story to anyone. Why have I confided it to you, whom I have never seen before? It is difficult to explain. A mysterious attraction draws me to you. When you entered this room, a voice cried out in my soul: "Here he is, at last!" Your arrival has calmed a secret anxiety that left me no peace. You are the one I awaited, without knowing it. My thoughts rushed to meet you, and I have been driven to tell you all the mysteries of my heart.'

— ‘What you feel,’ replied the stranger, ‘I also feel, and I will tell you what I have not even dared to admit to myself until now. You are possessed by an impossible love; I too am possessed, by a monstrous passion! You love a peri; I love ... you will shudder ... my own sister! Yet, strangely enough, I feel no remorse for this forbidden aspiration; though I condemn myself, I am absolved by a mysterious power that I feel within. My love involves no earthly impurity. It is not voluptuousness that drives me to love my sister, though she equals in beauty the phantom of my visions; it is an indefinable attraction, an affection as deep as the sea, as vast as the sky, and such as a god might feel. The idea that my sister could unite with a man inspires in me disgust and horror like a sacrilege; there is something celestial in her that I perceive through the veils of the flesh. Despite the name by which she is called on Earth, she is the spouse of my divine soul, the virgin who was destined for me from the first days of creation; at times, I believe I grasp, through the aeons and the darkness, scenes of our secret affiliation. Landscapes that existed before the appearance of humankind on Earth appear to my memory, and I see myself under the golden branches of Eden, seated beside her, and served by obedient spirits. In uniting myself with another woman, I would fear to prostitute and ruin the soul of the world that beats within me. By the concentration of our divine blood, I would seek to obtain an immortal race, an ultimate god, more powerful than all those who have manifested themselves till now under various names and various masks!’

While Yousouf and the stranger were exchanging these lengthy confidences, the regulars within the okel, agitated by drunkenness, gave themselves over to extravagant contortions, senseless laughter, ecstatic swoons, and convulsive dances; but little by little, the strength of the hemp having dissipated, calm returned to them, and they sprawled across the divans in that state of prostration which ordinarily follows such excess.

A patriarchal-seeming man, his beard streaming down his trailing robe, entered the okel and advanced to the centre of the room.

— ‘My brothers, rise up,’ he cried in a sonorous voice; I have observed the heavens; the hour is favourable to our sacrificing a white rooster before the Sphinx, in honour of Hermes, and Agathos Dæmon (*a Graeco-Egyptian god of the household, and protector of the city of Alexandria*)’.

The Sabaeans rose to their feet and seemed about to follow their priest; but the stranger, on hearing this proposal, changed colour two or three times: the blue of his eyes became black, terrible furrows traversed his brow, and a dull roar escaped from his breast which made the gathering shudder with fear, as if a real lion had appeared in the midst of the okel.

— ‘Impious wretches! Blasphemers! Vile brutes! Worshippers of idols!’ he cried in a voice that echoed like thunder.

This explosion of anger was followed by a moment of stupor as regards the crowd. The stranger had such an air of authority, and raised the folds of his garment with such proud gestures, that no one dared respond to his insults.

Then the old man approached him, saying:

— ‘What harm do you find, brother, in sacrificing a rooster, according to the rites, to the good spirits Hermes and Agathos Dæmon?’

The stranger gritted his teeth on hearing those two names.

— ‘If you do not share the beliefs of the Sabaeans, why are you here? Are you a follower of Jesus or Muhammad?’ asked the old man.

— ‘Muhammad and Jesus are impostors,’ cried the stranger with incredible blasphemous power.

— ‘No doubt you follow the religion of the Parsees, you worship fire....’

— ‘Phantoms, mockery, lies, all such!’ interrupted the man in the black robe with redoubled indignation.

— ‘Then, whom do you worship?’

— ‘He asks me whom I worship!... I worship none, for I myself am God! The only, the true, the unique God, of whom the others are mere shadows.’

At this inconceivable, unheard-of, wild assertion, the Sabaeans threw themselves upon the blasphemer, whom they would have treated harshly, if Yousuf, covering him with his body, had not dragged him backwards onto the terrace bathed by the Nile, though the man struggled and shouted like a madman. Then, with a vigorous kick against the shore, Yousuf drove the boat into the middle of the river.

When they had caught the current, he said to his new-found friend:

— ‘Where should I take you?’

— ‘There, to the island of Roda, where you see those lights gleaming,’ replied the stranger, whose exaltation had been calmed by the night air.

In a few strokes of the oars, they reached the shore, and the man in the black robe, before jumping ashore, said to his saviour, while offering him a ring of ancient workmanship that he took from his finger:

— ‘Wherever you meet me, you have only to show me this ring, and I will perform your wish.’

Then he walked away, and vanished beneath the trees that lined the river. To recover time lost, Yousuf, desiring to attend the sacrifice of the rooster, began to strike the water of the Nile with his oar, with redoubled energy.

Chapter 2: The Famine

A few days later, the Caliph Hakim left his palace as usual to visit the Mokattam observatory. All were accustomed to see him emerge like this, from time to time, mounted on a donkey, and accompanied by a single slave, a mute. It was supposed that he spent the night contemplating the stars, for he was seen to return at daybreak in the same manner, which astonished his servants less, in that his father, al-Aziz Billah (*Abu Mansur Nizar, the fifth Fatimid caliph*),

and his grandfather, Moezzeldin (*Abu Tamim Ma'ad al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, the fourth Fatimid caliph*) the founder of Cairo, had done so, both being well versed in the cabalistic sciences; but the Caliph Hakim, after having observed the disposition of the stars and understood that no danger immediately threatened him, would remove his ordinary clothing, don those of the slave, who remained awaiting him in the observatory tower, and, having blackened his face a little so as to disguise his features, descend to the city to mingle with the people and learn their secrets from which he later profited as sovereign. It was wearing such a disguise that he had recently introduced himself into that okel of the Sabaeans.

This time, Hakem went down to Rumaila Square (*Salah al-Din Square*), the place in Cairo where the population formed the most animated of crowds: they gathered in the shops and under the trees to listen to, or recite, stories and poems, while consuming sugared drinks, lemonades, and candied fruit. The jugglers, the almahs, and the tamers of animals, readily attracted an audience eager to amuse themselves after the day's work; but, that evening, all was changed, the people presenting the aspect of a stormy sea with its swells, and breakers. Sinister voices here and there raised themselves above the tumult, and speeches full of bitterness resounded from all sides. The Caliph listened, and heard everywhere this exclamation:

— 'The public granaries are empty!'

In fact, for some time, a serious famine had been afflicting the population; the hope of soon seeing wheat arrive from Upper Egypt had temporarily calmed their fears: everyone managed their resources as best they could; however, that day, the caravan from Syria having arrived bringing many a newcomer, it had become almost impossible to feed oneself, and a large crowd, excited by the arrival of these foreigners had hastened to the public granaries of old Cairo, their last recourse in the worst famines. A tenth of each harvest was heaped up there in immense enclosures with high walls, built long ago by Amr ibn al-As. On the orders of the conqueror of Egypt, these granaries were left unroofed, so that the birds might take their share. This pious arrangement had since been respected, which usually resulted in only a small part of the reserve being lost, and seemed to bring the city good fortune; but, on that day, when the furious people demanded that grain be delivered to them, the employees replied that flocks of birds had arrived, and devoured everything. At this, the people believed themselves threatened with the greatest of evils, and, from that moment, consternation reigned everywhere.

— 'How is it,' said Hakim to himself, 'that I knew nothing of all this? How is it possible this prodigy has appeared? I would have read a prophecy of this occurrence in the stars; yet nothing has disturbed the *pentagram* I have traced, either.'

He was engaged in this meditation when an old man, who wore Syrian costume approached him, saying:

— 'Why don't you give them bread, lord?'

Hakim raised his head in astonishment, and fixed his lion's eye on the stranger, believing that the man had recognised him despite his disguise.

But the man was blind.

— ‘Are you mad,’ cried Hakim, ‘to address such words to someone you cannot see, whose footsteps you have merely heard in the dust!’

— ‘All men,’ said the old man, ‘are blind, before God.’

— ‘So it is to God that you are speaking?’

— ‘I speak to you, Lord.’

Hakim thought for a moment, and his thoughts swirled as if again intoxicated by hashish.

— ‘Save them,’ said the old man, ‘for you alone possess the power, you alone are life, you alone command the will!’

— ‘Do you think I can create grain, here and now?’ replied Hakim, prey to a vague thought.

— ‘The sun cannot shine through cloud; it slowly dissipates it. The cloud that veils you at this moment is the body into which you have deigned to descend, and which can only act with human force. Each being is subject to the law of things ordained by God; God alone obeys only the laws he makes for himself. The world, which he formed with cabalistic art, would dissolve instantly, if his will failed.’

— ‘I see,’ said the Caliph, with a rational effort, ‘that you are merely a beggar; you have recognised who I am under this disguise, but your words of flattery are crude. Here is a purse of gold; leave me be.’

— ‘I know not what your condition is, Lord, for I see only with the eyes of the soul. As for gold, I am versed in alchemy, and I know how to create it when I need it; give the purse to your people. Bread is dear; but, in this good city of Cairo, with gold, one can buy everything.’

— ‘This is some necromancer,’ Hakim thought.

Meanwhile the crowd gathered the coins the old Syrian now scattered on the ground, and rushed to the nearest baker. That day, a mere ocque (three pounds) of bread cost a gold coin (*sequin*).

— Ah! Is it so? said Hakim. ‘I understand! This old man, who comes from the land of the wise, recognised me and spoke to me in allegories. The Caliph is the image of God; I must enact punishment as God does.’

He went to the citadel, and found the officer of the guard, Abou-Arous, who was in his confidence as regards his disguise. He told this officer, and the executioner, to follow him, as he had already done on several occasions, being fond, like most oriental princes of summary justice; he led them to the house of the baker who sold his bread for its weight in gold.

— ‘Here is a thief,’ he said to the officer of the guard.

— ‘Then,’ said the latter, ‘we should nail his ear to the shutter of his shop?’

— ‘Indeed,’ said the caliph, ‘but after his head has been severed.’

The people, who had not expected such a thing, gathered joyfully in the street, while the baker protested his innocence in vain. The caliph, wrapped in a black *abaya* which he had taken from the citadel, seemed to fulfil the functions of a simple *cadi* (judge).

The baker was on his knees and stretched out his neck, commending his soul to the angels Munkar and Nakir (*the interrogators of the dead*). At that moment, a young man parted the crowd and ran towards Hakim, showing him his antique silver ring. It was Yousouf the Sabaeen.

— ‘Grant me,’ he cried, ‘this man’s pardon. Hakim recognised his friend from the banks of the Nile and remembered his promise. He made a sign; the executioner released the baker, who rose joyfully. Hakim, hearing murmurs among the disappointed crowd, said a few words in the ear of the officer of the guard, who called aloud:

— ‘The sword is suspended until tomorrow at this time. Then, each baker must sell his bread at the price of ten ocques per gold sequin.’

— ‘I understood, from our meeting the other day,’ the Sabaeen said to Hakim, ‘that you are a man of justice, on seeing your anger directed at drink which is forbidden; also, this ring grants me your favour, which I will seek to invoke from time to time.’

— ‘My brother, you have spoken truly,’ replied the Caliph, embracing him. ‘Now my labour is over; let us go and enjoy a little hashish, in the okel of your Sabaeans.’

Chapter 3: The ‘Lady of the Kingdom’

When he entered the house, Yousouf took the owner of the okel aside, and asked him to excuse his friend for the behaviour he had displayed a few days previously.

— ‘Everyone, he said, displays some peculiar obsession when intoxicated; his is to claim to be a god!’

This explanation was delivered to the regulars, who seemed satisfied, and the two friends sat down in the same place as the day before; the little black servant brought them the box that contained the intoxicating paste, and they each took a dose which soon produced its effect; but the Caliph, instead of abandoning himself to hallucinatory fancies, broke into extravagant speech, and rose, as if thrust forward by the steely arm of his fixed idea; an immutable resolution gripped his large, firmly sculpted features, and, in a voice whose tone was that of irresistible authority, he said to Yousouf:

— ‘Brother, you must take the cange, and bear me to the place where you landed me yesterday, on Roda Island, near the terraced gardens.’

At this unexpected order, Yousouf felt vague protests rise to his lips which he was unable to formulate, though it seemed strange to him to leave the okel precisely when the beatitudes hashish presented demanded rest on some divan, so as to progress at their ease; but such strength of will was shown in the Caliph’s eye that the young man silently descended to his cange. Hakim sat down near the prow, and Yousouf bent over the oar. The Caliph, who, during this short journey, had exhibited signs of the most violent exaltation, leapt ashore without

waiting for the boat to draw up alongside, and dismissed his friend with a majestic and regal gesture. Yousouf returned to the okel, while the prince took the road to the palace.

He entered by a postern whose secret spring he touched, and soon found himself, after traversing various dark corridors, in the midst of his own apartments, where his sudden appearance surprised his people, accustomed to seeing him return only at the first light of day. His face illuminated by bright rays, his gait at once awkward and stiff, and his strange gestures, inspired a vague terror in the eunuchs; they imagined that something extraordinary was about to occur in the palace, and, standing back against the walls, with heads bowed and arms crossed, they awaited events in a state of respectful anxiety. Hakim's judgements were known to be prompt, terrible and without apparent motive. Everyone trembled, for no one felt free of guilt.

Hakim, however, ordered no heads to fall. A more serious thought occupied him, entirely; neglecting these details of minor justice, he went to the apartment of his sister, Princess Setalmulc, an action contrary to all Muslim custom, and, raising a curtain, entered the first room, to the great fright of the eunuchs, and the princess's women who hastily veiled their faces.

Setalmulc (the name means the Lady of the Kingdom, *Sitt al Mulk*) was seated at the rear of the secluded room, on a tiled seat that filled an alcove let into the thickness of the wall; the interior of this room dazzled by its magnificence. The vault, separated into small domes, offered the appearance of a honeycomb or a cave full of stalactites, due to the ingenious and skilled complexities of its ornamentation, where red, green, azure, and gold mingled their brilliant hues. Glass mosaics covered the walls, at the height of a person, with splendid plaques; pierced heart-shaped arches, rose gracefully from flared capitals in the shape of turbans, supported by marble columns. Along the cornices, door-jambs, and window-frames ran inscriptions in Arabic script whose elegant characters mingled with flowers, foliage and scrolled arabesques. In the centre of the room, an alabaster fountain received in its sculpted basin a jet of water whose crystal jet rose to the vault and fell back, in a fine rain, with a silvery murmur.

At the commotion caused by Hakim's entrance, Setalmulc rose, anxiously, and took a few steps towards the door. Her majestic figure thus appeared to best advantage, for the Caliph's sister was the most beautiful princess in the world: eyebrows of velvety black surmounted, with arches of perfect regularity, eyes which made one lower one's gaze as if one were contemplating the sun; her fine nose with a slightly aquiline curve indicated her royal lineage, and, against her golden pallor, warmed on the cheeks by two small clouds of rouge, her mouth of dazzling purple burst like a pomegranate full of pearls.

Setalmulc's costume was of an unheard-of richness: a cone of metal, covered with diamonds, supported her veil of gauze speckled with spangles; the velvet of her dress, half-green, half-incarnadine, was well-nigh lost beneath the intricate embroidery. Points of illumination, at the sleeves, elbows, and breast, shed light of a prodigious brilliance, where gold and silver mingled their gleams; her belt, formed of plates of open-worked gold, and studded with enormous rubies, slipped, by virtue of its weight, below her supple and majestic waist, and was held by the opulent contours of her hips. Thus dressed, Setalmulc appeared like the queen of some vanished empire, a queen with gods for ancestors.

The curtain had parted violently, as Hakim appeared on the threshold. At the sight of her brother, Setalmulc could not contain a cry of surprise which was addressed not so much to his unusual actions as the strange aspect of the Caliph. Indeed, Hakim seemed not to be animated by earthly life. His pale complexion reflected the light of another world. Here indeed was the form of the Caliph, yet illuminated by another mind and another soul. His gestures were the gestures of a phantom, and he possessed the air of his own spectre. He rushed towards Setalmulc driven more by will than human articulation, and, as he neared her, he embraced her in a look so deep, so penetrating, so intense, so laden with thought, that the princess shuddered and crossed her arms on her breast, as if an invisible hand had snatched at her clothing.

— ‘Setalmulc,’ cried Hakem, ‘I have long thought of finding you a husband; but no man is worthy of you. Your divine blood shall not suffer any admixture. We must transmit to the future, intact, the treasure we have received from the past. It is I, Hakim, the Caliph, the lord of heaven and earth, who will be your husband: the wedding will take place in three days. Such is my sacred will.’

The princess was so shocked by this unexpected declaration that her reply faltered on her lips; Hakim had spoken with such authority, such utter domination, that Setalmulc felt all objections to be impossible. Without waiting for his sister’s reply, Hakim retreated to the door; then returned to his room, and, overcome by the hashish, the effect of which had reached its highest degree, he let himself fall, a dead weight, on the cushions, and fell asleep.

Immediately after her brother’s departure, Setalmulc summoned the grand vizier Argevan to her, and told him all that had happened. Argevan had been the imperial regent during Hakim’s early youth, the latter having been proclaimed Caliph at eleven years of age; discrete power had remained in Argevan’s hands, and by force of habit he had maintained the attributes of true sovereignty, of which Hakim possessed only the title.

What passed in the mind of Argevan, after the account that Setalmulc gave him of the Caliph’s nocturnal visit, can scarcely be imagined; but who could fathom the secrets of that profound soul? Had not study and meditation thinned his cheeks and darkened his austere gaze? Had not resolution and will-power traced on the lines of his forehead the sinister form of the *tau*, a sign of destiny? Did the pallor of an immobile mask, which was only occasionally furrowed between the eyebrows, proclaim only that he came from the scorched plains of the Maghreb? The respect he inspired in the population of Cairo, the influence he had gained over the rich and powerful, were they a recognition of no more than the wisdom and justice he brought to the administration of the State?

Setalmulc, raised by him, ever respected him as deeply as she had her father, the previous Caliph. Argevan shared the Sultana’s indignation, saying only:

— ‘Alas! What misfortune for the empire! The Prince of Believers’ reason is obscured... along with famine, heaven strikes us with yet another scourge. We must order public prayers; our lord is mad!’

— ‘Allah, forbid!’ cried Setalmulc.

— ‘When the Prince of Believers wakes,’ added the vizier, ‘I hope his confusion will have dissipated, and that he will be able, as usual, to preside over the great council.’

Argevan awaited the Caliph's awakening, at daybreak. The latter did not call his slaves until very late, and was told that the room of the divan was already filled with doctors, lawyers, and *cadis*. When Hakim entered the room, all prostrated themselves according to custom, and the vizier, rising, gazed at the pensive face of his master with a questioning look.

It did not escape the Caliph. A sort of glacial irony seemed to him to be imprinted on his minister's features. For some time, the prince had regretted the excessive authority he had allowed inferiors to assume, and, in seeking to act by himself, he was forever surprised by encountering resistance among the *ulamas* (*doctors of law*), *cachefs* (*captains*), and *mouchirs* (*officers*), all devoted to Argevan. It was to escape this tutelage, and in order to judge things for himself, that he had reverted to disguise, and perambulation by night.

The Caliph, seeing that only minor affairs were being discussed, halted the discussion and said in a resounding voice:

— 'Let us talk a little about the famine; I promised myself that today I would have all the bakers beheaded.'

An old man stood up from the *ulamas'* bench, and said:

— 'Prince of the Believers, did you not spare one of them yestereve?'

The sound of his voice was not unknown to the Caliph, who replied:

— 'True; but I pardoned him on condition that the bread would be sold at ten ocques per gold sequin.

— 'Remember,' said the old man, 'that the unfortunate bakers pay ten gold sequins per *ardeb* (*about 280 kilos*) of flour. Rather punish those who sell it to them at that price.'

— 'And who are they?'

— 'The *moultezim* (*tax-collectors*), *cachefs*, *mouchirs*, and the *ulama* themselves, who store sacks of flour in their houses.'

A shudder ran through the members of the council, and their assistants, who were the leading inhabitants of Cairo.

The Caliph leant his head on his hands and thought for a few moments. Argevan, irritated, wished to respond to what the old *ulama* had said, but the thunderous voice of Hakim resounded amidst the assembly.

— 'Tonight,' he said, 'at the time of prayer, I will leave my palace of Roda, I will cross this arm of the Nile in my cange, and, on the shore, the chief of the guard will await me, with the executioner beside him; I will follow the left bank of the *Calish* (*the canal*), I will enter Cairo by the Bab el-Talha gate, to visit the mosque of Rashida (*in Fustat*). At each house in which I find a *moultezim*, *cachef* or *ulema*, I will ask if they have any sacks of grains stored away, and, in any house where all has been sold, I will have the owner hanged or beheaded.'

The vizier Argevan did not dare to raise his voice in council after these words of the Caliph; but, seeing him about to return to his apartments, he hastened to follow his steps, and said to him:

— ‘You will not do so, my lord!’

— ‘Away from here,’ cried Hakim, angrily. ‘Do you remember that when I was a child you used to jokingly call me your little *lizard*? Well, now the lizard has become a dragon.’

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Chapter 4: The Moristan (*The Asylum*)

In the evening, when the hour of prayer arrived, Hakim entered the city via the soldiers’ quarters, followed only by the head of the guards, and the executioner: he noticed that all the streets were illuminated as he passed. The common people held candles in their hands to light the prince’s way, and the majority had grouped themselves in front of the houses of doctors, cachefs, notaries and other personages, the eminent persons whom the order had indicated. Everywhere, the Caliph entered and found a great heap of grain; which he, immediately, ordered to be distributed to the crowd, while recording the name of the owner.

— ‘According to my promise,’ he said to them, ‘your head is safe; but learn henceforth not to hoard grain at home, thereby living in abundance amidst the general misery, or reselling it for its weight in gold and amassing, in a few days, the entire public wealth.’

After visiting various houses in this way, he sent officers to the others, and went to the mosque of Rashida to pray himself, for it was a Friday; but, on entering, his astonishment was great to find the pulpit occupied and to be greeted with these words:

— ‘Let the name of Hakim be glorified on earth as it is in heaven! Eternal praise to the living God!’

However enthusiastic the people were about what the Caliph had just done, this unexpected prayer must have outraged the faithful; many approached the pulpit to denounce the blasphemer; but the latter descended with majesty, forcing his assailants to retreat at each step, and traversing the astonished crowd, who cried out on seeing him more closely:

— ‘He is blind! The Hand of God is upon him.’

Hakim had recognised the old man from Rumaila Square, and, as, when awaking, an unexpected connection sometimes unites material fact with the events of a passing dream, he felt, as if by a flash of lightning, the dual realities of his life and his ecstasies combine. However, his mind still struggled against this new impression, so that, without halting any longer in the mosque, he remounted his horse and took the road to his palace.

He summoned the vizier Argevan, who could not, however, be found. As it was time to visit Mokattam and consult the stars, the Caliph, once there, ascended the observatory’s tower, and climbed to the topmost floor whose pierced dome delineated the twelve houses of the stars. Saturn, Hakim’s planet, was pale and leaden, while Mars, which gave its name to the city of Cairo (*Caher, the Victorious*), blazed with that blood-stained brilliance which announces war and danger. Hakim descended to the first floor of the tower, where stood a cabalistic table established by his grandfather Moezzeldin. In the centre of a circle around which were written

in the Chaldean language the names of all the countries of the earth, was the bronze statue of a horseman armed with a lance held upright; when an enemy people marched against Egypt, the horseman lowered his lance, and turned towards the country from which the attack would come. Hakim saw that the horseman had turned towards Arabia.

— ‘That race of Abassids, once more!’ he cried, ‘Those degenerate sons of Umar, whom we crushed in their capital of Baghdad! But what do these infidels matter to me now, I grasp the thunderbolt in my hand!’

On further reflection, however, he felt that he was a mere man as before; his hallucinations no longer endowed him with his previous confidence in possessing superhuman strength to add to his claim of being a god.

— ‘Come,’ he said to himself, ‘let me consult the source of ecstasy.’

And he again intoxicated himself, by means of that marvellous green paste which perhaps is identical with that substance the Greeks called ‘ambrosia’, the food of the immortals.

The faithful Yousuf was already present, and gazing dreamily at the dull, flat waters of the Nile, which had receded to a point which always announced the advent of drought and famine.

— ‘Brother,’ said Hakim, ‘is it love that you dream of? Tell me who your mistress is, and, on my oath, you shall win her.’

— ‘I know not, alas!’ said Yousouf. ‘Since the breath of the khamsin renders the nights stifling, I no longer meet her golden cage on the Nile. Would I dare ask who she is, even if I saw her again? I sometimes believe it was all only an illusion engendered by this perfidious drug, which perhaps assails my reason... so much so that I can no longer distinguish dream from reality.’

— ‘You believe so?’ said Hakim, anxiously.

Then, after a moment’s hesitation, he said to his companion:

— ‘What matter? Let us forget this life, for an hour or two.’

Once plunged in the intoxication of hashish, it happened, strangely enough, that the two friends entered into a certain communion of ideas and impressions. Yousouf imagined that his companion, leaping towards the heavens and stamping with his foot the ground unworthy of his glory, held out his hand to him and drew him into space, towards circling stars and vague swirls whitened with the seeds of stars; soon Saturn, pale, but crowned with its luminous rings, grew larger and drew nearer, surrounded by its seven moons in swift rotation, and from then on who could say what happened on their arrival in that divine homeland of their dreams? Human language can only express sensations in conformity with our nature; moreover, when the two friends conversed in this divine dream, the names they addressed each other by were no longer names of this Earth.

In the midst of this ecstasy, which rendered their bodies mere inert masses, Hakim suddenly twisted and cried out:

— ‘Eblis! Eblis! (*the leader of the demons, according to Islamic teaching*)’

At that very moment, a part of *zebecks* (*irregulars*) broke down the door of the okel, at their head Argevan, the vizier, who had the room surrounded, and ordered that all these infidels, violators of the Caliph's order forbidding the use of hashish and fermented drinks, be seized.

— 'Demon!' cried the Caliph, regaining his senses, and collecting himself, 'I have had you sought for your head! I know that it was you who caused the dearth of grain, distributing to your creatures the reserve of the State granaries! On your knees before the Prince of Believers! Begin by answering, for you will end by dying.'

Argevan frowned, and his dark eyes shone with a cold gaze.

— 'To Moristan (*the asylum*), with this madman who thinks he's the Caliph!' he said disdainfully to the guards.

As for Yousouf, he had already run to his cange, foreseeing that he would not be able to defend his friend.

The Moristan, which today adjoins the Qualawun mosque, was then a vast prison, only part of which was devoted to the mad. The respect Orientals hold for the state of lunacy, does not extend to leaving at liberty those who could be harmful. Hakim, on waking the next day in a dark cell, soon understood that he had nothing to gain by flying into a rage, or calling himself Caliph while dressed like the fellahin. Besides, there were already five caliphs in the establishment, and a number of divinities! This last title was therefore no more advantageous than the former. Hakim was convinced, moreover, by his thousand efforts made during the night to break his chain, that his divinity, imprisoned in a weak body, had left him, like the Buddhas of India, and other incarnations of the Supreme Being, when abandoned to human malice and the material laws of force. He remembered, too, that the situation he found himself in was not new to him.

— 'Let me seek, above all,' he said, 'to avoid being whipped.'

This was difficult, since it was the means generally employed at that time against incontinence of mind. When the visit of the *hakem* (doctor) arrived, he was accompanied by another doctor who seemed to be a foreigner. Hakim's prudence was such that he showed no surprise at this visit, and limited himself to replying that an excess of hashish had been the cause of a temporary confusion in him, and that he now felt as usual. The doctor consulted his companion and spoke to him with great deference. The latter shook his head and said that often the insane had lucid moments, and achieved their liberty by such cunning claims. However, he saw no difficulty in granting him the freedom to walk about the courtyards.

— 'Are you also a doctor?' said the Caliph to the foreigner.

— 'This is the Prince of Science, cried the asylum doctor; the great Ibn-Sina (Avicenna), who, having recently arrived from Syria, deigns to visit Moristan.'

The illustrious name of Ibn-Sina, the learned doctor, the venerated master of the health and life of humankind — who was also considered by the masses to be a magician capable of the greatest prodigies — made a lively impression on the mind of the Caliph. His prudence deserted him; he cried out:

— ‘O you who see me here, as Aïssé (Jesus) was, abandoned to this form and, in my human impotence, to the agents of hell, doubly misunderstood as Caliph and as God, is it not fitting that I be released from this unworthy situation as soon as possible? If you support me, then make that known; if you do not believe my words, curses be upon you!’

Avicenna would not answer; but turned to the physician, shaking his head, and said:

— ‘You see... already reason has abandoned him!’

And he added:

— ‘Fortunately, these visions harm no one. I have always said that the hemp from which hashish paste is derived was the very herb that, according to Hippocrates, sent wild creatures into a kind of frenzy and made them throw themselves into the sea. Hashish was already known in the time of Solomon: you can read the word *hashishot* in the *Song of Songs* (*not so, but see Canticle VIII, 2*), where the intoxicating qualities of this preparation....’

The rest of these words were lost to Hakim because the two doctors were moving away, and passing to another courtyard. He remained alone, abandoned to the most conflicting impressions, doubting that he was a god, sometimes even doubting that he was the Caliph, with great difficulty gathering together the scattered fragments of his thoughts. Taking advantage of the relative freedom left him, he approached the unfortunates scattered here and there in strange attitudes, and, listening to their songs and speeches, he registered the various ideas which had gained his attention.

One of these madmen had managed, by collecting various debris, to compose a sort of gleaming tiara out of pieces of glass, and to drape, over his shoulders, rags covered with bright embroidery which he had adorned with scraps of tinsel.

‘I am, he said, the *Kemal Zeman* (*the Perfection of this Age*), and I tell you that the hour is here.’

— ‘You lie,’ said another. ‘You are not the true god; you belong to the race of *divs* (*demons, in Zoroastrian teachings*) and seek to deceive us.’

— ‘Who do you think I am?’ said the first.

— ‘You are none other than Tahmuras (*see the Persian poet Ferdowsi’s work, the ‘Shahnameh’*), the last king of the rebellious genies! Do you not remember who defeated you on the island of Serendib (*Shri Lanka, where the pre-Adamites dwelt according to legend*), and who was none other than Adam, that is to say, myself? Your spear and shield are still suspended as trophies above my tomb.’

— ‘His tomb!’ cried the other, bursting into laughter, ‘No one has ever been able to find it. I counsel him to tell us where it lies.’

— ‘I have the right to speak of a tomb, having already lived six times among men, and died six times also, as I must; magnificent sepulchres have been built for me; but it is yours that would be difficult to discover, since you other divinities only inhabit dead bodies!’

The general hostility which followed these words was directed at the unfortunate emperor of the *divs*, who rose up furiously and whose crown the pretended Adam knocked off with the

back of his hand. The other madman then rushed upon him, while the fight between the two enemies would have lasted five thousand years (according to their account), had not one of the overseers separated them with blows from a bull's pizzle, distributed impartially, however.

One may wonder what interest Hakim took in this mad talk, to which he listened with marked attention, and which he even provoked with a few words. Sole master of his reason in the midst of these mutually defective intelligences, he silently plunged back into a world of memories. By a singular effect, which perhaps resulted from his austere attitude, the madmen seemed to respect him, and none of them dared raise their eyes to his face; however, something led them to group themselves around him, like those plants which, in the waning hours of the night, turn towards the as yet absent light.

If mortals cannot conceive for themselves what passes in the soul of a man who suddenly feels himself a prophet, or of a mortal who feels himself a god, fable and history have at least allowed them to recognise the doubts and anxieties that inevitably arise in such 'divine' natures, at that uncertain moment when their minds are freed from the temporary bonds of incarnation. Hakim, at times, doubted himself, as the Son of Man did on the Mount of Olives, and what especially struck his dazed thoughts was the idea that his divinity had first been revealed amidst the ecstasies of hashish.

— 'There exists, then,' he said to himself, 'something stronger than He who is above all, and a plant of the fields it is that creates such glories? True, a common serpent proved that it was stronger than Solomon, when it pierced, and broke in half, the staff on which that Prince of Jinns leant (*see the 'Koran, 34:14, Sura Saba'*); but what is Solomon compared to me, if I am truly Albar (*the Eternal Guardian*)?

Chapter 5: The Burning of Cairo

By a strange and derisory act of fate, the idea of which only an evil spirit could conceive, it happened that Moristan received a visit, one day, from the Sultana Setalmulc, who appeared, according to the custom of royal personages, to bring help and consolation to the prisoners. After having visited the part of the building devoted to criminals, she also wanted to see the asylum for the insane. The Sultana was veiled; but Hakim recognised her by her voice, and could not restrain his fury on seeing the minister Argevan at her side, who, smiling and calm, did her the honours of the place.

— 'Here,' Argevan said, 'are various wretches whose thoughts are abandoned to a thousand extravagant inventions. One calls himself Prince of Jinns; a second claims to be the original Adam; but the loftiest in his ambitions is the one you see there, whose resemblance to the Caliph, your brother, is striking.'

— 'It is extraordinary indeed,' said Setalmulc.

— 'Well,' replied Argevan, 'the resemblance alone was the cause of his misfortune. By dint of hearing himself told that he was the very image of the Caliph, he imagined himself to

be the Caliph, and, not content with this idea, he claimed that he was God. He is simply a miserable fellow who has ruined his mind as so many others have done through the abuse of intoxicating substances.... It would be curious to see what he would say in the presence of the Caliph himself....'

— 'Wretch!' cried Hakim, 'Have you not created a phantom that looks like me, and usurps my place!'

He was suddenly silent, thinking that prudence was deserting him, and that perhaps he was about to deliver his life over to fresh danger; fortunately, the noise made by the other madmen prevented his words being heard. All those unfortunates heaped imprecations upon Argevan, and the king of the *divs* especially challenged him forcefully.

'Rest assured' he called to him. 'Just wait till I am dead; and we'll meet again elsewhere.'

Argevan shrugged and exited with the Sultana.

Hakim had not even tried to invoke his memories of the latter. On reflection, he saw the plot had been too well woven to hope to unravel it with a single effort. Either he had been deliberately suppressed in favour of some impostor, or his sister and his minister had combined to deal him a lesson in wisdom by having him spend awhile at Moristan. Perhaps they wished to take advantage later of the notoriety that would accompany his situation to seize power, and keep him under guard. There was doubtless something in that: what caused him to think so was that the Sultana, on leaving the Moristan, promised the imam of the mosque to devote a considerable sum to enlarging and rebuilding the premises for the insane, in magnificent style — such that, she said, their dwelling would seem worthy of a Caliph.

Hakim, after the departure of his sister and his minister, said only:

— 'It had to be thus!'

And he resumed his way of life, not ceasing to exhibit the gentleness and patience he had shown till then. Only, he conversed at length with those of his companions in misfortune who had lucid moments, and also with the inhabitants of the other part of the Moristan who often came to the gates which separated the courtyards, to amuse themselves regarding the extravagant behaviour of their neighbours. Hakim welcomed them with such words, that these unfortunates crowded there for hours on end, gazing at him as one inspired (*majzub*). Is it not a strange thing that the divine word always finds its first followers among the wretched? Thus, a thousand years previously, the Messiah found his audience composed mainly of people of ill-repute, tax-collectors, and publicans.

The Caliph, once confidently established in their eyes, summoned them one after the other, made them relate their life, the circumstances of their faults or their crimes, and searched, deeply, for the primary motive that had led to their troubles: ignorance and misery was what he found at the root of everything. These men also revealed to him the secrets of their world, the ploys exercised by the usurers, monopolists, lawyers, heads of trading-houses, tax-collectors, and wealthiest merchants of Cairo, all supporting each other, welcoming each other, multiplying their power and influence by family alliances; all corrupting, and corrupted; increasing or lowering, at will, the tariffs of trade; masters of famine and abundance, of riot

and war, oppressing in an unbridled manner a populace prey to their lack of the essentials for life. Such had proved the result of the administration led by Argevan the vizier, during Hakim's lengthy minority.

Moreover, sinister rumours were circulating in the prison; the guards themselves showed no fear in spreading them: it was said that a foreign army was approaching the city and was already encamped in the plain of Giza, that acts of treason would yield unresisting Cairo to this force, and that the lords, ulama and merchants, fearing the results of a siege as regards their wealth, were preparing to surrender the gates and had seduced the military leaders of the citadel. It was anticipated that, the very next day, the enemy general would make his entry into the city by the gate of Bab el-Hadid (*the Iron Gate*). From that moment, the line of the Fatimids would be dispossessed of the throne; the Abbasid caliphs would reign henceforth in Cairo, as in Baghdad, and public prayers would be offered in their name.

— 'This is what Argevan has prepared for me!' said the Caliph to himself; 'this is what my father's observatory revealed to me, when Pharoüis (*Saturn*) gleamed palely in the sky! But the moment has come to see what my words can achieve, and whether I will let myself be conquered as the Nazarene once was.'

Evening was approaching; the captives were gathered in the courtyard for the customary prayers. Hakim spoke, addressing himself at once to this dual population of madmen and evildoers separated by a barred gate; he told them who he was, and what he wanted from them, with such authority and such assurance that no one dared to doubt. In an instant, the labour of a hundred arms shattered the internal barriers, and the guards, struck with fear, yielded control of the doors leading to the mosque. The Caliph soon entered, carried on the shoulders of those unfortunates, whom his voice filled with enthusiasm and confidence.

— 'He is the Caliph! The true Prince of Believers!' cried the criminals.

— 'It is Allah, who comes to judge the world!' shouted the troop of madmen.

Two of the latter had taken their places, on Hakim's right and left, shouting:

— 'Come all to the judgement, dealt by our lord Hakim!'

The believers gathered in the mosque, knew not why their prayers were disturbed thus; but anxiety caused by the approach of their enemies led all to extraordinary action. Some fled, spreading alarm in the streets; others cried:

— 'Today is the Day of Judgment!'

And this thought brought joy to the poorest and most oppressed, who cried:

— 'At last, Lord! At last, cometh your day!'

When Hakim appeared on the steps of the mosque, a superhuman radiance wreathed his face, and his hair, which he always wore long and flowing contrary to Muslim custom, spread long coils over the purple mantle with which his companions had covered his shoulders. The Jews and Christians, always numerous in Soukarieh street which contained the bazaars, prostrated themselves, saying:

— ‘Is he the true Messiah, or is this the Antichrist announced by the Scriptures to appear a thousand years after Jesus!’

Some also recognised in him their sovereign; but could not explain why he was there in the midst of the city, while the general rumour was that, at that very hour, he was marching at the head of his troops against their enemies encamped in the plain that surrounded the pyramids.

— ‘O you, my people!’ said Hakim to the unfortunates who surrounded him, ‘you, my true sons, it is not my day, it is yours that is here. We have arrived at the time of renewal, which arises whenever the word of heaven has lost its power over souls, whenever virtue has become a crime, when wisdom has turned to folly, and glory is shamed; all combining, thus, against justice and truth. Never has the voice from on high failed to illuminate minds, like lightning before the thunder; that is why it has been said in turn: “Woe to Enochia, city of the children of Cain, city of impurities and tyranny! Woe to you, Gomorrah! Woe to you, Nineveh and Babylon! And woe to you, Jerusalem!” The voice, which never tires, thus resounds from age to age, and always, between the threat and the punishment, time is granted for repentance. However, that time is growing shorter by the day; when the storm approaches, the fire follows the lightning more closely! Let us show that henceforth the word is armed, and that on earth the reign announced by the prophets will finally be established! Yours, my children, shall be this city enriched by fraud, usury, injustice and rapine; yours shall be the plundered treasure, the stolen riches. Deal justice on that luxury which deceives, those false virtues, those titles acquired at the price of gold, those convoluted betrayals which, under the pretext of peace, have sold you to the enemy. Set fire, set fire, everywhere, to this city which my grandfather Moezzeldin founded under the auspices of victory (*qahirah*), yet which has become a monument to your cowardice!’

Was it as a sovereign, was it as a god, that the Caliph thus addressed the crowd? Certainly, he displayed within that supreme reason which is above common justice, otherwise the anger he had unleashed would have struck at random as brigands strike. In a few moments, flames had devoured the cedar-roofed bazaars and the palaces with their sculpted terraces and frail columns; the richest dwellings in Cairo revealed their devastated interiors to the people. A dreadful night, when sovereign power took on the appearance of rebellion, when the vengeance of heaven used the weapons of hell!

The fire, and the sacking of the city, lasted three days; the inhabitants of the richest districts had taken up arms to defend themselves, and numbers of the Greek soldiers and the *ketamis*, barbarian troops led by Argevan, fought against the prisoners and the populace carrying out Hakim’s orders. Argevan spread the rumour that Hakim was an impostor, that the true caliph was with the army in the plain of Giza, so that a terrible combat, by the light of the flames, took place in the great squares and the gardens. Hakim had retired to the heights of Qarafa, and in the open air held his bloody tribunal where, according to tradition, he appeared as if assisted by angels, having beside him Adam and Solomon, the one a witness for men, the other for the Jinns. All those hated by the masses were brought there, and their judgment took place in an instant; heads fell, to the acclamations of the crowd; Several thousand perished during those three days. The melee in the centre of the city was no less deadly; Argevan was finally struck between the shoulders by a lance wielded by a man named Reidan, who brought his head to

the feet of the Caliph; from that moment, all resistance ceased. It is said that at the very moment when the vizier fell with a terrible cry, the guests of Moristan, gifted with that second sight peculiar to the insane, cried out that they saw in the air Iblis (Satan), who, having emerged from the mortal remains of Argevan, was summoning to him and rallying in the air the demons incarnated until then in the bodies of his partisans. The combat begun on Earth continued in the heavens; the phalanxes of the eternal enemies gathered once more, and struggled with the forces of the elements. It is on this subject that an Arabian poet once said:

— ‘Egypt! Egypt! You know them, these dark struggles of good and evil spirits, when Typhon with stifling breath smothers the air and the light; when the plague decimates your toiling people; when the Nile flood diminishes; when dense clouds of locusts devour, in a day, all the verdure of the fields.

It is not enough, then, for Hell to act through those fearsome scourges; it also populates the Earth with cruel and greedy souls, who, beneath a human form, hide the perverse natures of jackals and serpents!’

However, when the fourth day came, the city being half-destroyed, the sharifs gathered in the mosques, raising their Korans in the air and crying:

— ‘O Hakim! O Allah!’

But their hearts were not in accord with their prayer. The old man who had already acknowledged Hakim’s divine nature, presented himself before the prince, and said to him:

— ‘Lord, enough; halt the destruction in the name of your grandfather Moezzeldin.’

Hakim wished to question this strange character who only appeared in dark hours; but the old man had already disappeared into the melee of attendants.

Hakim, on his usual mount, a grey donkey, began to roam the city, uttering words of reconciliation and clemency. From that time, he reformed the severe edicts pronounced against the Christians and the Jews, and exempted the former from bearing a heavy wooden cross on their shoulder, the latter from bearing a yoke on their neck. Through equal tolerance towards all beliefs, he sought to lead his people to accept, little by little, a new doctrine. Places for discussion were established, notably in a building which was called *the house of wisdom*, and various doctors of religion began to publicly support Hakim’s divinity. However, the human spirit is so resistant to beliefs which time has not consecrated, that only thirty or so were registered among the faithful thousand inhabitants of Cairo. There was a dissenter named Almoschadiar who said to the followers of Hakim:

— ‘He whom you invoke, in place of God, could neither create a fly, nor prevent it troubling him.’

The Caliph, informed of his words, granted him a hundred pieces of gold, as proof that he did not wish to force belief on the people. Others said:

— ‘There were several in the family of the Fatimids affected by this illusion. Thus, Hakim’s grandfather, Moezzeldin, concealed himself for several days, then claimed he had been

snatched up to heaven; later, he withdrew to a cell, and it was said that he disappeared from the Earth without dying like other men.'

Hakim hearkened to these words, which plunged him into deep meditation.

Chapter 6: The Two Caliphs

The Caliph returned to his palace on the banks of the Nile, and resumed his previous way of life, recognised by all and free, now, of his enemies. For some time, things continued on their usual course. One day, he visited his sister Setalmulc and told her to prepare for their marriage, which he wished performed secretly, for fear of arousing public indignation, the people not yet being sufficiently convinced of his divinity as not to be shocked by such a violation of established law. The ceremony was to involve only eunuchs and slaves as witnesses, and would be performed in the palace mosque; as for the festivities, the obligatory consequence of their union, the inhabitants of Cairo, accustomed to seeing the screens of the seraglio starred with lanterns and to hearing the sounds of music carried by the night breeze from the far side of the river, would not note them specifically, or be surprised by them in any significant way. Later, Hakim, when the time had come and minds were favourably disposed, reserved the right to proclaim aloud their mystical religious wedding.

When evening came, the Caliph, having disguised himself according to his custom, visited the observatory at Mokattam, so as to consult the stars. The heavens granted Hakim scant reassurance: sinister planetary conjunctions, dimmed constellations, foreshadowed the peril of imminent death. Possessing, as a god, the consciousness of his own eternal being, he was little alarmed by such celestial threats, which concerned only his perishable envelope. However, he felt his heart filled with poignant sadness, and, renouncing his usual perambulation, he returned to the palace in the early hours of the night.

Crossing the river by cange, he saw with surprise that the palace gardens were illuminated as if for a festival: he entered. Lanterns hung from the trees like fruits wrought of rubies, sapphires and emeralds; scented fountains launched their silver jets amidst the foliage; water ran in the marble gutters, and from the alabaster pavement, about the openwork kiosks, bluish smoke from most precious perfumes, was exhaled in wispy spirals and mingled its aroma with that of the flowers. Harmonious murmurs of hidden music alternated with the songs of the birds, who, deceived by these gleams, believed they were greeting the dawn, and, in the flamboyant background, in the midst of a blaze of light, the facade of the palace glowed, the lines of its architecture outlined by tongues of fire.

Hakim's astonishment was extreme; he asked himself:

— 'Who dares to celebrate there, while I am away? What unknown guest's arrival is being celebrated at this hour? These gardens should be deserted and silent. Moreover, I have taken no hashish, and am no longer the plaything of the hallucinations it induces.'

He drew nearer. Dancers, dressed in dazzling costumes, undulated like serpents, upon Persian carpets surrounded by lamps, such that none of their movements and poses were lost. It seemed as if they failed to see the Caliph. At the palace gate, he encountered a whole host of pages and slaves bearing iced fruits and conserves in golden basins, and sorbets in silver ewers. Although he walked alongside them, jostling and being jostled by them, no one paid him the slightest attention. This singular occurrence filled him with secret disquiet. He felt himself passing among them like a shadow, an invisible spirit, and he continued to advance from room to room, threading the groups as if he on his finger he wore the magic ring possessed by Gyges (see Plato's *'Republic 2:359a–2:360d'*).

When he reached the threshold of the last room, he was dazzled by a torrent of light: thousands of candles, set in silver candelabra, gleamed like bouquets of fire, mingling their bright halos. The instruments of the crowd of musicians concealed in the galleries thundered in vigorous triumph. The Caliph approached unsteadily, and took shelter behind the folds of an enormous brocade curtain. He now perceived at the rear of the salon, seated beside Setalmulc on a divan, a man dripping with jewels, his clothes studded with diamonds which sparkled amidst a swarm of scintillations and prismatic rays. One would have said that the treasures of Harun-al-Rashid had been exhausted to clothe this new Caliph.

One can imagine Hakim's stupor on viewing this unheard-of spectacle: he reached for his dagger in his belt to assail the usurper; but an irresistible force constrained him. This vision seemed to him a celestial warning, and his confusion increased still further when he recognised, or thought he recognised, his own features in those of the man seated beside his sister. He believed that it was his *ferouer* (*the Zoroastrian supernatural spirit within the body, that quits it, and pleads for it after death*) or double, and, for Orientals, seeing one's own shade is a direst omen. The phantom forces the body to follow it within a day.

Here the apparition was all the more threatening, as the *ferouer* had accomplished in advance the intention conceived by Hakim. Did not the action of this phantasmic Caliph, in wedding Setalmulc, whom the true Caliph had resolved to marry himself, contain some enigmatic meaning, some mysterious and symbolic terror? Was some jealous divinity, seeking to usurp heaven by wresting Setalmulc away from her brother, by separating the cosmogonic pair, hitherto blessed by providence? Was the race of *divs* attempting through this means, to prevent the affiliation of superior spirits and substitute its impious offspring? These thoughts crossed Hakim's mind instantly: in his anger, he would have liked to rouse an earthquake, a flood, a rain of fire, or some other cataclysm; but he remembered that, bound to a form of earthly clay, he could only employ human measures.

Unable to manifest himself in a victorious manner, Hakim slowly withdrew and returned to the gate which opened on the Nile; a stone bench stood there; he seated himself and remained for some time lost in thought, seeking the meaning of the strange scene which had passed before him. At the end of a few minutes, the postern opened again, and, amidst the darkness, Hakim saw two vague shadows emerge, one of which cast a darker shadow on the ground than the other. With the aid of those vague reflections of earth, sky, and water, which, in the East, never render the darkness completely opaque, he discerned that the first was an Arab youth, and the second a gigantic Ethiopian.

Having reached a point on the bank which projected into the river, the young man knelt down, the Ethiopian placed himself near him, and the flash of a damascene blade gleamed in the darkness like a bolt of lightning. However, to the great surprise of the Caliph, the former's head did not fall, and the Ethiopian, having leaned towards the victim's ear, seemed to murmur a few words after which the latter rose, calmly and quietly, without undue joy or haste, as if it had concerned some other and not himself. The Ethiopian returned his blade to its scabbard, and the young man approached the river's edge, close to Hakim, doubtless to cross once more in the boat which had brought him there. He found himself face to face with the Caliph, who feigned to wake, and said:

— 'Peace be with you, Yousouf! Why are you here?'

— 'Peace be to you, also!' replied Yousouf, who still saw in his friend only a companion in adventure and was not surprised to have found him sleeping on the river-bank, as the sons of the Nile do in the hot summer nights.

Yousouf made the Caliph climb aboard the cange, and they let the vessel float with the flow of the river, along the eastern shore. The dawn was already tinting the neighbouring plain with a reddish hue, and outlined the silhouette of the ruined remains of Heliopolis, at the desert's edge. Hakim felt as if in a dream, and, examining the features of his companion, which the day increasingly revealed, more attentively, he found in him a certain resemblance to himself which he had never noticed until then, for he had always met him at night, or seen him amidst the intoxication of hashish. He could no longer doubt that this was the *ferouer*, his double, the apparition of the day before, perhaps the one who had been made to play the role of Caliph during his stay in the Moristan. This explanation naturally left him with a degree of astonishment.

— 'We are as alike as twin brothers,' he said to Yousouf. 'Sometimes, to justify such a coincidence, it is enough to be born amongst the same people. Where were you born, friend?'

— 'At the foot of the Atlas Mountains, at Ketama, in the Maghreb, among the Berbers and the Kabyle people. I did not know my father, who was called Dawas, and who was killed in battle shortly after my birth; my grandfather, very advanced in years, was one of the sheiks of that desert country.'

— 'My ancestors are also from that land,' said Hakim; perhaps we are descended from the same tribe.... But what matter? Our friendship needs no tie of blood to be lasting and sincere. Tell me why I have not seen you for several days.'

— 'You may well ask!' said Yousouf. 'These days, or rather nights, for I devote the days to sleep, have passed like delightful dreams, full of wonders. Since Justice surprised us in the okel and parted us, I have again encountered, on the Nile, that charming vision whose reality I can no longer doubt. Often, putting her hand over my eyes, to prevent me from noting the way, she has led me into magnificent gardens, and rooms of dazzling splendour, where the architect's genius has outdone those fantastic constructions that the fantasies of hashish build among the clouds. A strange fate is mine! My waking hours are fuller of dreams than even my sleep. In that palace, no one seemed surprised by my presence, and, when I passed by, all heads bowed respectfully before me. Then that unknown girl made me sit at her feet, intoxicating me

with her words and gaze. Each time she raised her eyelids fringed with long lashes, it seemed to me that a fresh paradise opened to me. The inflections of her harmonious voice plunged me into ineffable ecstasies. My soul, caressed by that enchanting melody, melted with delight. Slaves brought exquisite delicacies, preserves of roses, sorbets of snow, that she barely touched with her lips; for a creature so celestial and so perfect must surely live only on perfume, dew, and rays of light. Once, raising by the power of some magic utterance a paving slab closed with mysterious seals, she made me descend to the vaults below where her treasures are kept, and detailed their riches to me, saying they would be mine if I showed but love and courage enough. I saw there more wonders than are contained in the legendary mountain of Kaf, where the treasures of the Jinns are hidden: elephants made of rock-crystal; trees of gold on which birds wrought of precious stones beat their wings and sing; peacocks opening their tails like wheels starred with diamond suns; masses of camphor cut into slices, enclosed in filigree nets; tents of velvet and brocade with poles of solid silver; and, in cisterns, heaped like grain in a silo, piles of gold and silver coins, garnets and pearls.'

Hakim, who had listened attentively to this description, addressed his friend Yousouf:

— 'Do you not know, brother, that what you viewed there were the treasures of Harun-al-Rashid taken by the Fatimids, and which can only be found in the Caliph's palace?'

— 'I know it now; but already, from the beauty and wealth of the stranger, I felt that she must be of the highest rank. Who knows, perhaps a relative of the grand vizier, the wife or daughter of some powerful lord. But what need did I have to learn her name? She loved me; was that not enough? Yesterday, when I arrived at the usual place of rendezvous, her slaves bathed me, perfumed me, and dressed me in magnificent clothes, more splendid than such as the Caliph Hakim wears. The garden was illuminated, and there was an air of celebration as if a wedding were in preparation. The woman I loved allowed me to take my place beside her on a divan, and let her hand meet mine, while her gaze was full of languor and voluptuousness. Suddenly she turned pale as if a fatal apparition, a dark vision, perceptible only to her, had arisen to eclipse the celebration. She dismissed the slaves with a gesture, and said to me in an agonised voice: "I am lost! Behind the door-hanging, I see shining azure unforgiving eyes. Do you love me enough to die for me?" I assured her of my boundless devotion. "It is necessary," she continued, "that your existence be erased, that your passage on earth leave no trace, that you are annihilated and your body divided into impalpable particles, such that not an atom of you may be found; otherwise, the one to whom I am subject would invent torments for me to terrify the wickedness of the *divs*, and make the damned shudder with terror in the depths of Hell. Follow this Ethiopian; he will dispose of your life as is fitting." Outside the postern, the Ethiopian made me kneel, as if he were about to sever my head; he swung the blade two or three times; then, seeing my firmness, he told me that it was all merely a game, a trial, and that the princess had wished to know if I was really as brave and devoted as I claimed. "Take care to find yourself tomorrow in Cairo towards evening, at the Fountain of Lovers, and a new rendezvous will be assigned," he added, before returning to the garden.'

After these words, Hakim could no longer doubt the events which had thwarted his plan. He was only surprised to feel no anger aroused, neither by his sister's betrayal, nor the love inspired in her by this young man of low extraction. Was it that, after so many savage

executions, he found himself weary of exacting punishment, or did his consciousness of his own divinity inspire in him the immense paternal affection which a god must feel towards all creatures? Merciless in doing evil, he felt himself vanquished by the all-powerful sense of grace created by youth and love. Was Setalmulc guilty of having rejected an alliance which tradition and innate repugnance viewed as a crime? Was Yousouf guilty for having loved a woman of whose condition he was ignorant? The Caliph promised himself to appear, that same evening, at the next meeting granted to Yousouf, but to forgive and bless their marriage. It was with this thought alone that he invoked Yousouf's confidences. A darkness still traversed his mind; but it was his own fate that now concerned him.

— 'Events are turning against me,' he said to himself, 'and my will alone is no longer sufficient defence.'

He said to Yousouf as he left him:

— 'I miss our fine evenings at the okel. We will return there, for the Caliph has withdrawn the ordinances against hashish and fermented liquor. We will see each other again soon, my friend.'

Hakim, having returned to the palace, called for the head of his guards, Abou-Arous, who was on night duty with a force of a thousand men, and re-established the sense of order interrupted during the days of unrest, requiring that all the gates of Cairo be closed when he visited his observatory, and only one be reopened, on the agreed signal, when he was pleased to return. That evening he was accompanied to the end of the street called Darb al-Siba, mounted the donkey that his men had ready at the house of the eunuch Nesim, usher of the gate, and went out into the countryside, followed only by a footman and the young slave who usually accompanied him. When he had climbed the mountain, and without climbing the tower of the observatory, he gazed at the stars, struck his palms together, and cried out:

— 'So, you appear, fatal sign!'

He then encountered some Arab horsemen who recognised him and asked for his aid; he sent his valet with them to the eunuch Nesim so that they might be granted a gift; then, instead of ascending the tower, he took the road to the necropolis situated to the left of the Mokattam, and advanced as far as the tomb of Fokkai, near the place called *Maksaba* because of the rushes which grew there. Three men fell upon him with daggers; but scarcely had he been assailed, when one of them, recognising his features by the light of the moon, turned against the other two and fought them until he himself fell beside the Caliph, crying out:

— 'Oh, my brother!'

Such at least was the story of the slave who escaped from this butchery, who fled towards Cairo and went to warn Abou-Arous; but, when the guards arrived at the place of the murder, they found nothing left but blood-stained clothing and the Caliph's grey donkey, named *Kamar*, with its hamstrings severed.

Chapter 7: Departure

So ended the history of Caliph Hakim.

The sheik was silent, and lost in thought. I was moved myself at the story of this *Passion*, less painful without doubt than that of Golgotha, but of which I had recently viewed the scene, having often climbed, during my stay in Cairo, that same Mokattam, where the ruins of the observatory of Hakim still stand. I said to myself that, whether god or man, this Caliph Hakim, so slandered by Coptic and Muslim writers, had doubtless wished to bring about the reign of reason and justice; I regarded in a new light all the events reported by the historians Elmacin (*Jirjis al-Makin*), Makrisi (*Al-Maqrizi*), Novairi (*Al-Nuwayri*) and other authors that I had read in Cairo, and I deplored that destiny which condemns prophets, reformers, and messiahs, whoever they may be, to violent death, and exposes their names later, to human ingratitude.

— ‘But you failed to tell me,’ I observed to the sheikh, ‘which of his enemies ordered Hakim’s murder’.

— ‘You have read the historians,’ he replied, ‘and you must know that Yousouf, son of Dawas, finding himself at the location of the rendezvous, that is The Fountain of the Lovers, met a group of slaves there who led him to a house where the Sultana Setalmulc, who had arrived there in disguise, was waiting for him; that it was she who made him consent to kill Hakim, claiming that the latter sought to slay her; and that she promised to marry Yousuf afterwards. She pronounced, in closing, these words preserved by history: “Meet him on the mountain, he will arrive without fail and will remain there alone, keeping with him only the man who serves as his valet. He will enter the valley; then rush upon him and kill him; slay the valet also, and the young slave, if he is with him.” She handed him one of those daggers whose point is shaped like a lance, and which are called *yafours*, and also armed two slaves who had secret orders to accompany him, and slay him if he broke his oath. It was only after having dealt the first blow to the Caliph, that Yusuf recognised him as the companion of his nocturnal errands, and turned against the two slaves, having, from then on, a horror of his actions; but he fell in turn, struck down by them.’

— ‘And what became of the two corpses, which, according to the story, disappeared, since only the donkey and Hakem’s seven tunics were found, the buttons of which had not been undone?’

— ‘Did I say that there were corpses? Such is not our tradition. The stars promised the Caliph eighty years of life, if he escaped the danger of that night of the 27th Shawwal, in the year 411 of the Hegira (*February 13th, 1021AD*). Do you not know that for sixteen years after his disappearance, the people of Cairo never ceased to claim that he was still alive?’

— ‘I have indeed been told many such things, I said; but the frequent apparitions of Hakim were attributed to impostors, such as Scherout, Sikkin, and others, who had some resemblance to him and played that role. This is what happens as regards all those marvellous sovereigns whose lives become the subject of popular legends. The Copts claim that Jesus Christ appeared to Hakim, who asked pardon for his impieties and did penance for many years in the desert.’

— ‘Here is the truth, according to our books,’ said the sheik. ‘After the bloody scene which took place near the tombs, the two slaves charged with Setalmulc’s orders fled, and attained the city. An old man passing by with by an armed troop, had one of his men examine the Caliph’s wounds and those of Yousouf, son of Dawas, and had a precious liquor poured into them. Then their bodies were transported to the tomb of the Fatimids, an immense necropolis built by Moezzeldin, Cairo’s founder. Those two friends, the one a Caliph, the other a fisherman, were placed in similar tombs; they were both princes, both grandsons of Moezzeldin. The latter was still alive.’

— ‘Pardon me,’ I said to the sheik, ‘but I already have difficulty distinguishing what is marvellous from what is real, in your story, that is the fault, to us, of all your Arabian tales...’

— ‘Nothing I have said,’ the sheik replied, ‘is improbable. I have not claimed that Hakim performed miracles; I have only expressed the deepest feelings of his soul, of which his prophet Hamza has transmitted the mysteries to us. For us, Hakim is God; you have the right, you Christians, to see him as merely a madman.’

— ‘And his grandfather, was he also a god?’

— ‘No; but he was, as you know, a great cabalist, and his singular piety allowed him to communicate with the spirit of Albar (Hakim’s celestial name). Albar said to him one day: “The time approaches when I will descend to earth; then, I will appear in the form of a man and I will participate in all the misery of existence. I will be born as your grandson, and as for yourself, you will not know me.” Now, Moezzeldin had two grandsons, the first of whom was born heir to the throne; the other was raised as a simple fellah in the country of Ketama (*a town in Morocco*) near the province of Constantine (*the city in Algeria*). Moezzeldin, weary of ruling, managed, thanks to the care of Avicenna, his doctor, to feign death. He knew not which of his two grandsons was divine, and wished to test them by means of their differing fates. Having retired to a monastery of dervishes, he witnessed, unknown to all, all the actions of Hakim’s reign, and, not understanding their actions (oh the blindness of men!), secretly prepared Youssouf to replace himself as sovereign. It was he himself, it is said, who arranged the ambush at Mokattam. The two brothers were only stunned by blows from a mace; they regained their senses when borne to the family tomb, where their grandfather appeared to them in the form of a phantom, and asked them for an account of their past life. In this sepulchre, close to the hypogea, and the pyramids, Hakim took on the role of a pharaoh judged by the kings, his ancestors. He spoke, and explained his actions and doctrine. His grandfather and his brother fell at his feet, and recognised him as a god. But Hakim no longer wished to return to Cairo. He journeyed with Moezzeldin to the desert of Ammon, and there he established his doctrine, which his brother, under the name of Hamza, later communicated to others. After that, he showed himself at various places on Earth and then withdrew, in the end, to Lebanon, where its people had displayed their faith in him.

A second, less detailed version says only that Hakim did not die from the blows that had been dealt him. Granted refuge by the unknown old man, he survived the fatal night on which his sister had attempted his assassination; but, weary of ruling, retired to the desert of Ammon, and formulated his doctrine, which was since published by his disciple Hamza. His followers,

driven out of Cairo after his death, withdrew to Lebanon, where they formed the nation of the Druze.'

This whole legend whirled in my thoughts, and I promised myself to visit the Druze sheik again, and seek further details of Hakim's religion; but the stormy weather which had kept me in Beirut had passed, and I was set to leave for Acre, where I hoped to interest the Pasha in favour of the prisoner. I therefore saw him again only to bid him farewell, without daring to speak to him of his daughter, and without telling him that I had already seen her at Madame Carlès' establishment.

Part XII: Druze and Maronites (*Druses et Maronites*) – The Akkals, Anti-Lebanon, and Epilogue



View of Constantinople. Taken near the Seraglio Fountain, 1841, Lottier
Rijksmuseum

Chapter 1: The Packet-Boat

Aboard Arabian and Greek ships, one must expect capricious crossings which revisit the fates of those wanderers, Ulysses and Telemachus; the slightest breath carries them to all corners of the Mediterranean; thus, the European who wants to travel from one point to another of the coast of Syria is forced to wait for the passage of the English packet-boat which alone serves the Palestine echelon. Every month, a simple brig, not even a steamer, goes up and down that line of illustrious cities which were once Berytus, Sidon, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea, and which have preserved neither their names nor their ruins. Those queens of the seas, and of commerce, of which she is the sole heir, England does not honour with even a single *steamboat*. However, the social divisions so dear to that free nation are strictly observed on deck, as if it were a superior vessel. *First class* is forbidden to inferior passengers, that is to say, to those whose purses are the least well-stocked, and this arrangement sometimes astonishes the Orientals on seeing merchants in the places of honour, while sheikhs, sheriffs, or even emirs are found among the soldiers and servants. In general, the heat is too great for sleeping in the

cabins, and each traveller, carrying his bed on his back like the paralytic in the Gospel, chooses a place on deck for sleeping and resting; the remainder of the time, he crouches on his mattress or mat, his back against the planking, and smokes his pipe or hookah. Only the Franks spend the day walking on the deck, to the great surprise of the Levantines, who understand nothing of their squirrel-like agitation. It is difficult to pace the deck like this without catching the legs of some Turk or Bedouin, who makes a fierce start, raises his hand to his dagger, and lets out imprecations, promising to meet you elsewhere. The Muslims who travel with their seraglio, and who have not paid enough to obtain a separate cabin, are obliged to leave their wives in a sort of enclosure backed by a rail, in which they crowd like lambs. Sometimes, seasickness overtakes them, and then each husband must take care of accompanying his wife below deck, and then returning her to the fold. Nothing equals the patience of a Turk for the thousand family attentions that must be carried out under the mocking eye of the infidels. It is he himself who, morning and evening, goes to fill the copper vessels intended for religious ablutions from the common barrel, he who renews the water in the hookahs, and cares for his children inconvenienced by the pitching and tossing of the vessel, so as to remove his wives or slaves as much as possible from dangerous contact with the Franks. These precautions do not take place on ships where there are only Levantine passengers. The latter, although they are of different religions, observe a sort of etiquette among themselves, especially as regards women.

Lunchtime arrived as the English missionary, who had embarked with me for Acre, was pointing out to me a point on the coast which is supposed to be the very spot where Jonah sprang from the belly of the whale. A small mosque indicates the piety of the Muslims concerning the biblical tradition, and, in that connection, I entered into one of those religious discussions with the Reverend which are no longer fashionable in Europe, but which arise so naturally between travellers in countries where one feels that religion is everything.

— ‘Basically,’ I said to him, ‘the Koran is only a summary of the Old and New Testaments written in other terms, and augmented by a few prescriptions specific to the climate. Muslims honour Christ as a prophet, if not as a god; they elevated the *Kadra Myriam* (the Virgin Mary), and also our angels, our prophets and our saints; whence then comes the immense prejudice which separates them from Christians and which always makes relations between the two uncertain?’

— ‘I cannot accept that prediction as valid,’ said the Reverend, ‘since I think that the Protestants and the Turks will one day reach an understanding. Some intermediate sect will form, a sort of oriental Christianity....’

— ‘Or Anglican Islam,’ I said to him. ‘But why should Catholicism not achieve such a fusion?’

— ‘Because, in the eyes of the Orientals, Catholics are idolaters. You may explain to them in vain that one worships not the painted or sculpted figure, but the divine person it represents; that you *honour*, but do not adore the angels and the saints: they do not understand the distinction. Moreover, what idolatrous people has ever adored simply the wood or metal? You are therefore for them both idolaters and polytheists, while the various Protestant communions....’

Our discussion, which I have summarised here, had continued after lunch, and these last words had caught the ear of a small man with a lively eye and a black beard, dressed in a Greek pea-coat whose hood, raised over his head, concealed the style of his hair, the only indication in the Orient of status and nationality.

We did not remain in a state of unknowing for long.

— ‘Oh! Holy Virgin!’ he cried, ‘the Protestants will achieve no more than the others. The *Turks* will always be *Turks*!’

He pronounced the word: *Turs*.

Neither his indiscreet interruption, nor the man’s Provençal accent, rendered me insensible to the pleasure of meeting a compatriot. I therefore turned towards him, and answered him in a few words, to which he replied volubly.

— ‘No, sir, there is nothing to be done with the *Tur*, they are a people that is vanishing!... Sir, I was recently in Constantinople; I said to myself: “Where are the *Turs*?” There are none left!’

The paradox combined with his pronunciation increasingly signalled a son of the Canebière (*the street in Old Marseille*). Only, the word *Turs*, which he frequently repeated, annoyed me a little.

— ‘You go too far!’ I replied. ‘I have myself already met quite a number of Turks....’

I articulated the word, emphasising the ending; the Provençal failed to take the hint.

— ‘Do you think those were *Turs* you saw?’ he said, pronouncing the syllable in an even more flute-like voice. ‘They are not real *Turs*: I mean the Osmanli (*Ottoman*) *Tur* ... not all Muslims are *Turs*!’

In truth, a Southerner always finds his own pronunciation excellent and that of a Parisian quite ridiculous; I accepted that of my neighbour more readily than I did his paradox.

— ‘Are you sure, I said to him, that that is so?’

— ‘Ah! Sir, I have come from Constantinople; they are all Greeks, Armenians, Italians, people from Marseilles. All the *Turs* that are to be found, are made cadis, ulamas, pashas; or else they send them to Europe to display them there. What would you have! All their children die; their race is disappearing!’

— ‘But,’ I said to him, ‘they still know how to maintain the rule of their provinces quite well, it seems.’

— ‘Ah! Sir, what allows them to do so? It is Europe, it is our governments that do not wish to change what exists, that fear revolution, war, such that each wants to prevent the others from taking control; they remain in check, staring at the whites of one another’s eyes, and, meanwhile, it is the people who suffer! They speak of the Sultan’s armies; what do you find? Albanians, Bosnians, Circassians, Kurds; the sailors are Greeks; only the officers are of the Turkish race. They are despatched to the field; all of them flee at the first cannon shot, as we have seen many times..., unless the English are there to hold bayonets to their backs, as in the

affairs of Syria.’ (This southern jest, which refers to the circumstances of another era, should certainly not be taken seriously. If formerly the strength of the Turkish empire rested on the energy of militias foreign in origin to the race of Osman, the Porte has finally managed to rid itself of that dangerous element, and regained a power by means of which the sincere execution of the ideas of Reform will assure its duration.)

I turned towards the English missionary; but he had moved away from us and was walking about to our rear.

— ‘Sir,’ said the Marseillais, taking my arm, ‘what do you think the diplomats will do when the *rayas* (*non-Muslim Ottoman subjects*) come and say: “Misfortune has befallen us; there is not a single *Tur* left in the whole empire.... We do not know what to do, we bring you the keys to it all!”’

The audacity of this supposition made me laugh heartedly. The Marseillais continued imperturbably:

— ‘Europe will say: “There must still be some somewhere, look carefully!... Is it possible? No more pashas, no more viziers, no more mouchirs, no more nazirs?... It will upset all diplomatic relations. Who should we turn to? How will we continue to pay the dragomans?”’

— ‘It will be embarrassing indeed.’

— ‘The Pope, for his part, will say: “Oh! my God! What to do? Who is going to guard the holy sepulchre now? There are no more *Turs*!”’

A Marseillais when developing a paradox never lets you off lightly. This one seemed happy to have arrived at the opposite view to that naive remark of one of his fellow citizens: ‘Are you going to Constantinople? ... You will see many *Turs* there!’

His assertions, full of exaggeration no doubt, struck me as possessing some measure of truth. That the number of Turks has diminished greatly is not in doubt; nations alter, or vanish, due to various influences, like animal species. Already, for many a day, the principal force of the Turkish empire has relied on the energy of militias of foreign origin, and not on the people of Osman I; militias such as the Mamluks and the Janissaries. Today, it is with the help of a few legions of Albanians that the Porte renders twenty million Greeks, Catholics, and Armenians subject to the laws of the crescent. Could it still do so without the moral support of European diplomacy, and without armed aid from England? When we consider that Syria, whose ports were bombarded by English guns in 1840, to the benefit of the Turks, is the same land to which all feudal Europe hastened for six centuries, and which our state religions hold sacred, we must believe religious feeling is at a very low ebb in Europe. The English do not even think of retaining, on behalf of Christendom, the heritage Richard the Lionheart won by invasion.

I wanted to communicate these reflections to the Reverend; but, when I returned to his side, he received me with a very cool air. I understood that being in first class, he found it improper that I had spoken to someone from second. From now on I had no right to socialise with him; he doubtless bitterly regretted having begun relations with a man who did not behave like a *gentleman*. Perhaps he had forgiven me, because of my Levantine costume, for not wearing

yellow gloves and patent leather boots; but to lend oneself to the conversation of the first comer was decidedly *improper*! He did not speak to me again.

Chapter 2: The Priest and his Wife

There being no barrier now to doing so, I wished to enjoy, fully, the company of the Marseillais, who, given the rare opportunities for amusement that one can meet on an English vessel, became a valuable companion. This man had travelled a great deal, and seen a lot; his business forced him to stop at various places, and led him to start relations, naturally, with everyone.

— ‘The Englishman no longer wishes to make conversation?’ he asked me. ‘Perhaps he has the mal-de-mer (he pronounced it *merre*). Ah! yes, there he is, diving into his cabin. He’ll have had too much lunch, no doubt....’

He paused, then continued, after a burst of laughter:

— ‘It is like that member of parliament from our country, who was very fond of plump wild-fowl. One day, into a plate of thrushes, they inserted a *chouette* (an owl: he pronounced it *souette*). “Ah!” said the fellow, “That’s a big one!” When he’d finished, they told him what he’d eaten.... Sir, it had the same effect on him as the waves!... Owls are highly indigestible!’

Decidedly, my Provençal did not belong to the finest company, but I had crossed the Rubicon. The line which separates *first class* from *second* had been traversed, I no longer belonged to the world *as it ought to be* (*comme il faut*); I had to resign myself to my fate. Alas, perhaps the Reverend who had so imprudently admitted me to intimacy, compared me, in his thoughts, to one of Milton’s fallen angels. I will admit that I did not regret it much; the bow of the vessel was infinitely more amusing than the stern. The most picturesque clothes, the most varied types, were crowded together on mats, mattresses, and carpets full of holes, radiant with the brilliance of the splendid sun which covered them with a mantle of gold. The sparkling eyes, the white teeth, the carefree laughter of the mountain-dwellers, the patriarchal attitude of the poor Kurdish families, here and there grouped in the shade of the sails as beneath tents in the desert, the imposing gravity of certain emirs or sheriffs richer in ancestors than in piastres, and who, like Don Quixote, seemed to be saying inwardly: ‘Wherever I sit, I sit in the place of honour,’ all this was doubtless well worth the company of a few taciturn tourists, and a number of ceremonious Orientals.

The Marseillais had led me, while conversing, to the place where he had spread his mattress next to another occupied by a Greek priest and his wife who were making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They were two very good-natured old folk, who had already formed a close friendship with the Marseillais. These people had a pet crow that hopped about their knees and feet and shared their meagre lunch. The Marseillais made me sit down beside him, and took from a crate an enormous sausage, and a European-shaped bottle.

— ‘If you had not had lunch already,’ he said ‘I would offer you some; have a taste, though: it is sausage from Arles, sir! It would give a dead man an appetite!... Think what they give you to eat in first class, all that preserved roast beef and vegetables they store in tin cans... and if it’s not all worth less than a good slice of sausage, let tears run down the knife!... You can cross the desert with that in your pocket, and still be hospitable to the Arabs, who will tell you that they’ve never eaten anything finer!’

The Marseillais, to prove his assertion, cut two slices and offered them to the Greek priest and his wife, who did not fail to do justice to the treat.

— ‘Moreover, it always rouses one to drink,’ he continued. Here’s some Camargue wine which is better than Cyprus wine, if you like common fare.... But you’ll need a cup; when I’m alone, I drink straight from the bottle.’

At this, the priest took, from beneath his clothes, a sort of silver vessel covered with embossed ornaments of ancient workmanship, which bore traces of gilding on the inside; perhaps it was a church chalice. The blood of the grape beaded there, joyfully vermilion. It was so long since I had drunk red wine, and I will even add French wine, that I emptied the cup without fuss. The priest and his wife were not yet familiar with Marseillais wine.

— ‘You see these good people,’ he said to me, ‘they have perhaps a century and a half of years between them, and they wish to see the Holy Land before they die. They are going to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their marriage in Jerusalem; they had children, who died, they have now only this crow! Well, no matter, they are going to give thanks to the good Lord, nonetheless!’

The priest, who understood that we were talking about them, smiled benevolently under his black cap; the good old woman, in her long blue woollen draperies, seemed like some austere Biblical Rebecca.

The boat’s progress had slowed, and a few passengers standing on the shore appeared as whitish dots; we had arrived before the port of Saida, the ancient Sidon. The mountain of Elijah (*Mar Elias*), sacred to the Turks as well as to the Christians and the Druze, loomed to the left of the city, and the imposing mass of the French khan soon caught our eyes. Its walls and towers bear traces of the English bombardment of 1840, which marred all the maritime cities of Lebanon. Moreover, all the harbours, from Tripoli to Acre, had, as is known, been filled in before then, according to the orders of Fakr al-Din II, Prince of the Druze, in order to prevent the landing of Turkish troops, so that those illustrious cities are nothing now but ruin and desolation. Nature, however, does not associate herself with the effects, ever-renewed, of biblical curses. She still delights in framing their remains in delightful verdure. The gardens of Sidon still flourish as at the time of the cult of Astarte. The modern city is built a mile from the old one, whose remnants surround a hillock surmounted by a square tower from the Middle Ages, itself a ruin.

Many passengers disembarked at Saida, and, as the steamboat anchored there for a few hours, I was put ashore at the same time as the Marseillais. The priest and his wife also landed, no longer able to endure the sea, and having decided to continue their pilgrimage by land.

We sailed, in a caique (*skiff*), past the arches of the maritime bridge which links the city to the fort built on an islet; we passed among the frail tartanes (*trading ships*) which alone find the harbour deep enough to provide shelter, and approached an old jetty whose enormous stones were partly covered by the waves. The water foams over the ruins, and one can only reach dry land borne by almost naked *hamals* (*bearers*). We laughed a little at the embarrassment of the two English female companions of the missionary, who writhed in the arms of these coppery tritons, like the blonde Nereids of the *Triumph of Galatea* (see Raphael's fresco in the Villa Farnesina, Rome) though more amply clothed. The crow, that friend of the poor Greek household, beats its wings and cawed; a crowd of young rascals, who had made themselves striped *mishlahs* (*coats*) out of camel-hair sacking, rushed upon the baggage; some offered themselves as guides, shouting out two or three words in French. My eyes rested with pleasure on boats loaded with oranges, figs, and enormous grapes, from the Promised Land; further on, a penetrating smell of groceries, salted-meat, and fried-food indicated the proximity of the market. Indeed, we passed between the Naval headquarters and the Customs building, and found ourselves in a street, lined with stalls, which terminated at the gate of the French khan. We were on terra firma. The tricolour flew over the building, which is the most considerable in Saida. The vast square courtyard, shaded by acacias, with a pond in the centre, is surrounded by two rows of arcades which correspond on the ground floor to shops, and above to rooms occupied by merchants. I was shown the consular lodgings located in the left-hand corner, and, while I was ascending the stairs, the Marseillais and the priest sought the Franciscan monastery, which occupies the rear of the building. The French khan is like a township, and we have none more important in all of Syria. Unfortunately, our trade is no longer in proportion to the size of the establishment.

I was chatting quietly with Monsieur Conti, our Vice-Consul, when the Marseillais arrived, in a most animated state, complaining about the Franciscans, and heaping Voltairean epithets on them. They had refused to receive the priest and his wife.

— 'That,' said Monsieur Conti, 'is because they refuse to provide lodging for anyone who has not arrived with a letter of recommendation.'

— 'Well, that's typical,' said the Marseillais, 'I know them all, those monks, and that's their way; when they deal with some poor devil, they always do the same. Well-off people give eight piastres (*two francs*) a day to the monastery; it's not a tax, but that's the cost, and by doing so they're sure to be well received everywhere.'

— 'But poor pilgrims who are recommended are also received,' said Monsieur Conti, 'and the monks welcome them free of charge.'

— 'Doubtless, and then, after three days, they throw them out,' said the Marseillais. 'And how many of these poor people do they receive a year? You know that in France we only grant passports for use in the Orient to those who can prove they've the means to make the journey'.

— 'That's exactly right,' I said to Monsieur Conti, 'and it's considered within those rules, as regards equality, which apply to all French people... if they have money in their pocket.'

— ‘You are probably aware,’ he replied, ‘that, according to the various treaties with the Porte, Consuls are forced to repatriate those of their nationals who lack the resources to return to Europe. That is a great cost to the State.’

— ‘So,’ I said, ‘there is no longer any possibility of voluntary crusades, or pilgrimages, but we have State religion!’

— ‘All this,’ cried the Marseillais, ‘fails to provide lodging for these good people.’

— ‘I would provide a recommendation for them,’ said Monsieur Conti, ‘but you understand that, regardless, a Catholic monastery cannot receive a Greek priest with his wife. There is a Greek convent here which will readily receive them.’

— ‘Ah! What would you have?’ cried the Marseillais, ‘It’s a bad business, as ever. These poor devils are schismatic Greeks; in all religions, the more similar the belief, the more the believers hate each other; try and make sense of that.... Well, I shall knock on some Tur’s door. They have this virtue, at least, that they show hospitality to everyone.’

Monsieur Conti had great difficulty in restraining the Marseillais from doing so; he was willing to take charge of finding accommodation for the priest, his wife and the crow, who had joined to his owners’ anxiety its own plaintive croaks.

Our Vice-Consul is an excellent man, and also a learned orientalist; he showed me two works translated from manuscripts that had been lent to him by a Druze. One may see from this that the doctrine is no longer kept a secret as formerly. Knowing that the subject interested me, Monsieur Conti was kind enough to discuss it at length with me during dinner. We then went to visit the ruins, which one arrives at through delightful gardens, the most beautiful on the whole coast of Syria. As for the ruins, situated to the north, they are now nothing more than fragments and dust: only the foundations of a wall appeared to date back to the Phoenician period; the rest are from the Middle Ages: we know that Saint Louis (*Louis IX of France*) had the city rebuilt, and repaired a square castle built by the Ptolemies. The cistern of Elijah, the sepulchre of Zabulon, and some burial chambers with remains of pilasters and paintings complete the picture of all that Saida reveals of its past.

On our way back, Monsieur Conti showed us a house located on the shore, which was inhabited by Bonaparte at the time of his Syrian campaign. The wallpaper, decorated with military insignia, was hung for his benefit, and two bookcases, surmounted by Chinese vases, contain the books and plans that the hero consulted assiduously. We know that he had advanced as far as Saida to establish relations with the emirs of Lebanon. A secret treaty placed at his disposal six thousand Maronites and six thousand Druze intended to prevent the army of the Pasha of Damascus, marching on Acre. Unfortunately, various intrigues engendered by the sovereigns of Europe, and a number of the monasteries, hostile to the ideas of the Revolution, slowed the popular momentum; the princes of Lebanon, always politically minded, made their formal support dependent on the result of the siege of Saint-Jean-d’Acre. Moreover, thousands of local warriors had already joined the French army due to their hatred of the Turks. However, numbers were inadequate to the purpose. The siege engines that were expected were seized by the English navy, which had managed to lodge its engineers and gunners within the walls of Acre. It was a Frenchman, named Antoine le Picard de Phélippeaux, a former schoolmate of

Napoleon, who, as we know, led their force. A schoolboy hatred may have decided the fate of a nation!

Chapter 3: Lunch at Acre

The boat set sail again; the Mount Lebanon range sank lower, and receded little by little, as we approached Acre; the shore was sandier and bare of verdure. However, it was not long before we saw the port of Sour, the ancient Tyre, where we stopped only to allow a few passengers to board. The city is much less significant than Saida. It is built along the shore, while the islet where Tyre stood at the time of Alexander the Great's siege is now covered solely with gardens and pasture-land. The jetty that conqueror built, buried in sand, no longer bears any trace of human hands; it is an isthmus scarcely half a mile long. But, if antiquity is no longer revealed on these shores except by the remains of red and grey pillars, Christianity has left more imposing vestiges. One can still see the foundations of the old cathedral, built in the Syrian style, that consisted of three separate semi-circular naves, separated by pilasters, and in which stood the tomb of Frederick Barbarossa, drowned in the Saleph river (*the Göksu, now in southern Turkey, then in Armenian Cilicia*), opposite Tyre. The famous mineral water wells of Ras-al-Ayn, celebrated in the Bible, and which are really *artesian wells*, whose creation is attributed to Solomon, still exist a few miles from the city, and several of the immense arches of the aqueduct which brought the waters to Tyre still stand proud against the sky. That is all that is left of Tyre: its translucent vases, its dazzling purples, its precious timber were once renowned throughout the earth. Those rich exports have given way to a small trade in grain, from crops harvested by the Metouali (*Matawila, Shia Muslims*) and sold by the Greeks, who are very numerous in the city.

Night was falling when we entered the harbour of Acre. It was too late to disembark; but, by the clear light of the stars, all the details of the graceful arc of the sea between Acre and Haifa, were highlighted by the contrasting land and water. On the horizon, some miles away, the peaks of the Anti-Lebanon were visible sloping to the north, while to the south in bold ridges rose the levels of the Carmel range, which stretches towards Galilee. The slumbering city was revealed only by its crenellated walls, square towers and the metal domes of its mosque, indicated from afar by a single minaret. Apart from this Islamic detail, one might still dream it to be the feudal city of the Templars, the last stronghold of the Crusades.

Daylight came to dispel this illusion by betraying a mass of shapeless ruins resulting from the many sieges and bombardments over the years. The Marseillais had woken me at dawn, to show me the morning star rising over the village of Nazareth, only twenty-five miles distant. I could not escape the emotion aroused by such a fact. I suggested to the Marseillais that we make the journey.

— 'It's a pity,' he said, 'that the house of the Virgin is no longer there; but you know that the angels transported it in one night to Loreto, near Venice. Here, they show the site, that's all. It's not worth a visit only to find there's nothing left!'

In any case, at that moment, I was thinking above all of paying my visit to the Pasha. The Marseillais, through his experience of Turkish custom, could give me advice on how to introduce myself, and I told him how I had made the acquaintance of the person in question in Paris.

— ‘Do you think he will recognise me?’ I asked him.

— ‘Well, of course,’ he replied, ‘only, you must resume dressing as a European; without that, you’ll be obliged to wait for an audience, and may not be received today.’

I followed his advice, but kept the *tarbouch* (*rimless hat*), my hair having been shaved in the oriental style.

— ‘I know your pasha well,’ continued the Marseillais, while I changed my costume. ‘In Constantinople they call him *Gözlük*, meaning the man with spectacles.’

— ‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘he was wearing glasses when I met him.’

— ‘Well, that’s how it goes among the *Turs*: this nickname has become his public name, and will remain in the family; his son will be called *Gözlük-Oglou*, and so will all his descendants. Most proper names have similar origins.... They indicate that, the man having risen by his own merit, his children accept the inheritance of a nickname often intended ironically, because it recalls either a reason for mockery, or a bodily defect, or evokes the profession the person practiced before his elevation.’

— ‘It is,’ I said, ‘one more example of the principle of Muslim equality. One honours oneself through humility. Is that not also a Christian principle?’

— ‘Listen,’ said the Marseillais, ‘since the Pasha is your friend, you must do something for me. Tell him that I have a musical clock for sale that plays all the Italian operas. It has birds on it that beat their wings and sing. It is a little marvel.... They like such things, the *Turs*!’

It was not long before we were set on shore, and I soon wearied of walking the narrow, dusty streets while awaiting the proper time to present myself to the Pasha. Apart from the vaulted bazaar and the newly restored mosque of Djeddar Pasha (*Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar*), there is little left to see in the city; one would need an architect’s skills to draw up plans of the churches and monasteries from the time of the Crusades. Their foundations are still visible; an arcade that runs beside the harbour is the only one left standing, like the ruins of the palace of the Grand Masters of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem (*the Knights Hospitaller*).

The Pasha lived outside the city, in a summer cabin located near the gardens of Abdullah (*Abdullah Pasha ibn Ali*), at the end of an aqueduct that traverses the plain. Seeing horses and slaves, belonging to various visitors, in the courtyard, I recognised that the Marseillais had been right to make me change my costume. In the Levantine habit, I would have appeared a meagre personage; in my black clothing, all eyes were fixed on me.

Under the peristyle, at the bottom of the stairs, an immense pile of slippers had been left by visitors as they entered. The *seradjabchi* (*official*) who received me, wished to relieve me of my boots; but I refused, which gave him a high opinion of my importance. I therefore only

remained a moment in the waiting room. The Pasha had, moreover, been handed the letter I was charged with, and ordered that I be allowed to enter, though it was not my turn.

Here my reception was conducted more ceremoniously. I was expecting a European welcome; but the Pasha confined himself to having me sit near him on a divan which surrounded part of the room. He feigned to speak only Italian, although I had heard him speak French in Paris, and, having addressed the obligatory phrase to me: 'Is your *kief* good?' which is as much as to say: 'Do you find yourself well?' he had a chibouk and coffee brought to me. Our conversation was still fuelled by commonplaces. Then the Pasha repeated his question: 'Is your *kief* good' and had another cup of coffee served. I had walked the streets of Acre all morning, and had traversed the plain, without encountering the least *trattoria*; I had even refused the piece of bread and Arles-sausage offered by the Marseillais, counting on Muslim hospitality; but place no reliance on friendship with the great of this world! The conversation continued without the Pasha offering anything other than coffee without sugar, and tobacco smoke. He repeated a third time: 'Is your *kief* good?' I rose, to take my leave. At that moment, the hour of noon struck on a clock placed above my head, it commenced playing a tune; a second clock struck almost immediately and began a different tune; a third and a fourth began in turn, and the result was the sort of hullabaloo one might imagine. However accustomed I may have been to the singularities of the Turks, I failed to comprehend why so many clocks had been gathered in the same room. The Pasha seemed delighted by their harmoniousness, and was proud no doubt to display his love of progress to a European. I thought of the commission with which the Marseillais had charged me. The business seemed all the more difficult to me, since those four clocks each occupied one of the walls of the room, in perfect symmetry. Where to place a fifth? I chose not to mention it.

Nor was it the right time to speak of the affair of the Druze sheikh, a prisoner in Beirut. I kept that delicate matter for another visit, when the Pasha might receive me less coldly. I withdrew, pretending to have business in the city. When I reached the courtyard, an officer came to inform me that the Pasha had ordered two cavasses (*guards*) to accompany me wherever I wished to go. I was not over-impressed by this degree of attention, which usually results in a substantial amount of *bakshish* being handed to the said brutes.

When we re-entered the city, I asked one of them where I could lunch. They looked at each other in astonishment, saying that it was not the proper time. As I insisted, they asked me for a *columnario* (a Spanish piastre) to buy chickens and rice.... Where would they cook them? In the guardhouse. It seemed to me an expensive and complex task. Finally, they had the idea of leading me to the French Consulate; but I learned there that our agent resided on the other side of the gulf, on the far side of Mount Carmel. In Saint-Jean-d'Acre, as in the cities of Lebanon, the Europeans have homes in the mountains, at an elevation whereby the effects of the great heat, and the burning winds of the plain, are mitigated. I lacked the courage to go and seek my lunch so far above sea level. As for presenting myself at the monastery, I knew I would not be received there without a letter of recommendation. I therefore counted on meeting the Marseillais, who would probably be in the bazaar.

In fact, he was selling, to a Greek merchant, an assortment of those old bulbous pocket-watches loved by our grandfathers, which the Turks prefer to ones in flat cases. The largest are

the most expensive; *Nuremberg Eggs* (*early clock-watches*) are beyond price. Our old European rifles also find their place throughout the Orient, because they only seek flintlocks there.

— ‘Such is my trade,’ said the Marseillais, ‘I buy all these old things cheaply in France, and resell them here for as high a price as possible. Fine antique jewellery, old cashmeres, all of them sell very well. They came from the East, and return here. In France, we fail to understand the value of beautiful things; everything depends on fashion. So, the best idea is to buy things in France: Turkish weapons, chibouks, pieces of amber, all the oriental curiosities brought back at various times by travellers, and then come here to resell them. When I see Europeans buying fabrics, costumes, weapons here, I say to myself: ‘Poor fools! They would cost you less in Paris, at some dealer in bric-a-brac.’

— ‘My dear fellow,’ I said, ‘never mind all that; do you still have any of that Arles sausage?’

— ‘Well! I think so! It lasts me awhile. I see your problem: you have missed lunch.... That’s fine. We’ll find a *cafedji* (*coffee-shop proprietor*); we’ll buy you some bread.’

The saddest thing was that in all that city there was only unleavened bread, cooked on sheet metal, and resembling a *galette*, or carnival pancake. I never suffer eating such indigestible food except on condition of eating but little, and compensating for it with other edibles. With only a bite of sausage, that was more difficult; so, I had but a poor lunch.

We offered some sausage to the *cavasses*; but they refused it due to religious qualms.

— ‘The poor fellows!’ said the Marseillais, ‘they imagine it’s pork!... ‘They are ignorant of the fact that sausages from Arles are made with donkey-meat....’

Chapter 4: The Adventures of a Marseillais

The siesta hour had arrived long since; everyone was asleep, and the two *cavasses*, thinking that we would do as they, had stretched out on the benches of the *café*. I was inclined to quit my inconvenient entourage there, and take my *kief* outside the city, in some shaded place; but the Marseillais told me it would not be sensible, and that we would find no more shade and freshness there than within the thick walls of the bazaar where we now were. So, we began to converse to pass the time. I told him of my situation, and my plans; the idea I had conceived of settling in Syria, of marrying a woman from that country, and, that being unable to wed a Muslim woman, unless I changed my religion, how I had become preoccupied with a young Druze girl who would suit me in every way. There are times when one feels the need, like King Midas’ barber, to tell someone one’s secrets. The Marseillais, a frivolous man, perhaps did not deserve my confidences; but, at heart he was a good fellow, and proved it by the interest my predicament inspired in him.

— ‘I must confess,’ I said, ‘that having known the Pasha during his stay in Paris, I had hoped for a less formal reception; I had even set my hopes, in the circumstances, of rendering some service perhaps to the Druze sheikh, the father of the pretty girl I speak of.... but now, I know not what I might expect from him.’

— ‘Are you joking?’ replied the Marseillais. ‘You are ready to take such trouble over a little girl from the mountains? Eh! What idea do you have of these Druze? A Druze sheikh; well, what is he compared to a European, a Frenchman of the best society? Recently, the son of an English consul, Mr. Parker, married one of these women, an Alawite, from the area round Tripoli; no one in his family will now receive him! She too was the daughter of a sheikh, moreover.’

— ‘Oh! The Alawites are not the Druze,’ I said.

— ‘Look here, this is a young man’s whim. I stayed awhile in Tripoli; I did business with one of my compatriots who had established a silk-mill in the mountains; he knew all those people well; their men and women lead a very singular life.’

I began to laugh, knowing full well that such Lebanese sects had only a distant connection with the Druze, and asked the Marseillais to tell me what he knew.’

— ‘They’re *droll*!’ he whispered in my ear with that comical expression displayed by Southerners, who understand by that term something particularly lewd.

— ‘That is possible,’ I said; ‘but the young girl I speak of does not belong to a sect in which some degenerate practice of the primitive Druze cult might still exist. She is what is called a learned woman, an *akkalé*.’

— ‘Ah! Yes, that’s right; those I met called their priestesses *akkals*; it is the same word, as pronounced locally. Well, these priestesses, do you know what they are made to do? They have them climb on the altar table as a representation of the *Kadra* (the Virgin). Of course they are there in the most basic attire, without a dress or anything on, and the priest prays to them, saying that the image of motherhood must be adored. It is like a Mass; only, on the altar there’s a large jug of wine from which he drinks, and which he then passes to all the assistants.’

— ‘Do you truly believe,’ I said, ‘such a tale, invented by people of other religions?’

— ‘Do I believe it? I believe it because I saw, in the district of Al-Qadmus, on the day of the feast of the Nativity, every man who met a woman in his path prostrating himself before them, and kissing their knees.’

— ‘Well, these are remnants of the ancient idolatry of Astarte, which has become merged with Christian ideas.’

— ‘And what do you say about their way of celebrating Epiphany?’

— ‘The Feast of Kings?’

— ‘Yes.... But, for them, this festival also brings in the new year. On that day, the *akkals* (*the initiated*), men and women, gather in their *khalwats*, the name for their temples: there is a moment in the service when all the lights are extinguished, and I leave you to imagine what fine things may then occur.’

— ‘I don't believe in any of that; the same has been said about the *agapes* of the first Christians. And what European could have seen such a ceremony, since only the initiated can enter these temples?’

— ‘Who? Well, only my fellow countryman from Tripoli, the silk-spinner, who was doing business with one of these *akkals*. The latter owed him money. My friend said to him: ‘I’ll forgo the debt, if you’ll arrange to take me to one of your gatherings.’ The other created many difficulties, saying that if they were discovered, they’d both be knifed. No matter, when a Marseillais has an idea in his head, it has to be brought to fruition. They made an appointment for the day of the festival; the *akkal* explained to my friend in advance all the mummeries that had to be enacted, and, dressed in the costume, and knowing the language well, the risk was not great. They arrived in front of one of these *khalwats*; it was like a santon’s tomb, a square chapel with a small dome, surrounded by trees, abutting a cliff. You will have seen some in the mountains.’

— ‘I have indeed.’

— ‘Well, there are always armed men around to prevent curious people from approaching during prayer times.’

— ‘And what happened then?’

— ‘Then they waited for the rising of the planet that they call *Sockra* (*Zuhrah*, in Arabic); it is the planet, Venus. They pray to it.’

— ‘That is a further remnant, no doubt, of the worship of Astarte.’

— ‘Wait. They then began to count the shooting stars. When they reached a certain number, they drew omens from them, and on finding them favourable, entered the temple and began the ceremony. During the prayers, the women entered one by one, and, at the time of the sacrifice, the lights went out.’

— ‘And what happened to the Marseillais?’

— ‘He was told what to do, there being no choice; it is like a marriage that takes place with your eyes closed....’

— ‘Well, it’s their way of marrying, that is all; and, since there is an act of consecration at that time, the enormity of the fact seems to me much diminished; it is a custom most favourable to ugly women.’

— ‘You don’t understand! They are married off later, when each man is required to take a wife. The grand sheikh himself, whom they call the *Mekkadam*, cannot prevent this egalitarian practice.’

— ‘I am beginning to worry about your friend’s fate.’

— ‘My friend was delighted with the lot that had befallen him. “But,” he said to himself: “It’s a pity no one knows to whom they’ve made love!” Those people’s ideas are absurd....’

— ‘Probably, they want no one to know quite who their father is; that is, indeed, pushing the doctrine of equality a little too far. The East is more advanced than we are in communalism.’

— ‘My friend,’ the Marseillais continued, ‘had a most ingenious idea; he cut a piece from the dress of the woman who was beside him, saying to himself: “Tomorrow morning, in broad daylight, I shall be certain with whom I had dealings.”’

— ‘Aha!’

— ‘Sir,’ continued the Marseillais, ‘when daybreak came, everyone departed, without saying a word, after the officiants had called for the blessing of the good Lord ... or, the Devil perhaps, who knows, ... on the offspring of all these marriages. There was my friend, his eyes scanning the women, each of whom had donned her veil. He soon found the one who was lacking a piece of her dress. He followed her to her house without seeming to do so, and entered the place a little later, like a mere passer-by to ask for a drink: something which is never refused in the mountains, and there he found himself surrounded by children and grandchildren.... The woman was old!’

— ‘An old woman?’

— ‘Yes, sir! And you can judge whether my friend was pleased with his adventure.’

— ‘Why do we delve into everything? Isn’t it better to preserve the illusion? The ancient mysteries involve a more graceful tale, that of Psyche.’

— ‘You think it a fable that I relate; but everyone knows the story in Tripoli. Now, what do you think of all these believers and their ceremonies?’

— ‘Your imagination exceeds the facts,’ I said to the Marseillais, ‘the custom you speak of only takes place among a sect rejected by all the others. It would be as unjust to attribute such morals to the Alawites and the Druze as to claim for Christianity certain like follies attributed to the Anabaptists or the Waldensians. (In France, a similar practice has been ascribed to the Beguines, but these Oriental sectarians are probably the only ones whose religious frenzy has been taken to such extremes).

Our discussion continued for some time in this way. My companion’s false impressions threatened the empathy I felt for the people of Lebanon, and I neglected nothing in my attempts to undeceive him, while welcoming the valuable information that his personal observations brought me.

Most travellers grasp only odd details of the life and customs of certain peoples. The essence escapes them and can only be acquired through in-depth study. How I congratulated myself on having acquired in advance a precise knowledge of the history and religious doctrines of many of the peoples of Lebanon, whose character inspired esteem! In the desire I had to settle among them, such information was not a matter of indifference to me, and I required it so as to resist a host of European prejudices.

In general, as regards Syria, we are only interested in the Maronites, Catholics like us, and to some extent in the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, whose ideas are less distant from ours than those of the Muslims; we fail to consider that there exist a series of intermediate beliefs capable of being related to the principles of Northern civilisation, and of gradually bringing the Arabs to recognise those same.

Syria is certainly the only area of the East where we Europeans can firmly establish a foothold and establish commercial relations, as the ancient Greeks did. Anywhere else, it would prove necessary to contain the Arab population, or fear frequent rebellion, as occurs in Algeria. Half, at least, of the Syrian population is composed of Christians, or people disposed to the ideas of reform which now prevail among enlightened Muslims. One ought to add to this number a majority of the desert Arabs, who, like the Persians, belong to the sect of Ali (*Ali ibn Ali Talib was the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, and is venerated by Shia Muslims, Alawites, and Ali Ilahis.*)

Chapter 5: The Pasha's Dinner

The day was now advanced, and a fresh sea breeze brought to an end the sleep of the city's population. We left the café, and I began to worry about dinner; but the cavasses, whose gibberish, more Turkish than Arabic, I understood only imperfectly, kept repeating: '*Ti sabir?*' much like Molière's Mufti (*see Molière's comedy 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, Scene V, Fourth Interlude'*).

— 'Ask them what it is I'm supposed to know,' I said to the Marseillais, at last.

— 'They say it's time to revisit the Pasha.'

— 'For what reason?'

— 'To dine with him.'

— 'Indeed,' I said, 'I no longer count on it; the Pasha failed to invite me.'

— 'Since he loaned you these guards, it went without saying.'

— 'But in these countries, they usually dine at noon.'

— 'Not the Turks, whose main meal is at sunset, after prayers.'

I took leave of the Marseillais, and returned to the Pasha's 'kiosk'. Crossing the plain, clothed in wild grasses bleached by the sun, I admired the situation of the ancient city, once so powerful and so magnificent, and now reduced to a shapeless strip of land projecting into the waves, on which the ruins of three dreadful bombardments in the last forty-five years (*Bonaparte in 1799, Ibrahim-Pasha in 1832, and Napier in 1840*) had accumulated. Everywhere, on the plain, one stumbled over the debris of bombs and cannonballs, riddling the ground.

On returning to the pavilion where I had been received in the morning, I no longer saw piles of shoes at the bottom of the stairs, and visitors no longer cluttered the *mabahim* (*entrance room*); I was ushered through the room with the clocks, and found the Pasha in the next room; he was smoking, seated on the window sill, and rising, without undue ceremony, gave me a French-style handshake.

— ‘How are you? Have you had a good walk through our beautiful city?’ he asked me in French, ‘Have you seen everything?’

His reception was so different from that of the morning, that I could not help revealing some surprise.

— ‘Ah! Forgive me,’ he said ‘if I received you this morning as *the Pasha*. Those good people in the reception-hall would never have forgiven me for failing in etiquette in favour of a *Frangui*. In Constantinople, all would understand; but, here, we are *provincial*.’

Having emphasised that last word, the Pasha was kind enough to tell me that he had lived for a long time in Metz in Lorraine, as a student at the Preparatory School of Artillery. This detail put me completely at ease by providing me with the opportunity to speak to him about some friends of mine who had been his comrades. During this conversation, the harbour cannon, fired to greet the sunset, sounded from the direction of the city. A great tumult of drums and fifes announced the hour of prayer to the Albanians scattered in the courtyards. The Pasha left me for a moment, doubtless to fulfil his religious duties; then he returned and said to me:

— ‘We are about to dine in the European manner.’

Indeed, chairs and a proper board arrived, instead of their merely setting a low table down, and placing a metal tray on it, and cushions all around it, as is usually done. I felt that the Pasha’s attentions were most obliging, and yet, I must admit, I dislike the way in which these European customs are gradually invading the East; I complained to the Pasha of being treated as a mere tourist.

— ‘Yet, you come to see me dressed in your black attire!’ he said.

The reply was just; yet I still felt that I had been in the right. Whatever one does, and however far Turkish benevolence extends, one sees that there can be no immediate fusion between our way of life and theirs. The European customs the Turk adopts, in certain cases, become a sort of neutral ground on which he welcomes us without yielding himself; he consents to imitate our customs, as he deploys our language, only in regard to ourselves. He resembles that ballet character who is half-peasant and half-lord; he shows Europe his *gentlemanly* side, but is always a pure *Osmanli* (*Ottoman*) as far as the Orient is concerned.

Popular prejudice renders this policy a necessity.

However, I found the Pasha of Acre to be a most excellent person, full of politeness and affability, and deeply saddened by the situation that the various powers have placed Turkey in. He told me that he had just left the senior position of Pasha of Tophane in Constantinople (*Istanbul*), due to the tedious annoyances of consular protection.

— ‘Imagine,’ he said to me, ‘a great city in which a hundred thousand individuals escape local justice: there is not a thief, murderer, or debauchee who fails to have himself placed under the protection of some consulate. Twenty separate police forces act to nullify each other, and yet it is the Pasha who is responsible!... We are scarcely better off, here, amidst seven or eight different peoples, with their sheikhs, cadis and emirs. We agree to leave them alone, in their mountains, provided they pay the tribute.... Well, it is three years since we received a *para* (*penny*) from them.’

I saw that it was not yet the right time to speak in favour of the Druze sheikh imprisoned in Beirut, and turned the conversation to another subject. After dinner, I hoped the Pasha would at least follow the old custom of treating me to a performance by *almahs*, knowing full well that he would not extend his courtesy towards the French as far as to introduce me to his female household; but I was forced to suffer a European reception to the end. We went down to the billiard-room, where I was obliged to attempt cannons till one in the morning. I allowed myself to lose, as often as possible, to great bursts of laughter from the Pasha, who remembered with joy this form of entertainment when at school in Metz.

— ‘A Frenchman, a Frenchman who lets himself be beaten!’ he cried.

— ‘I agree,’ I said, ‘that Saint-Jean-d’Acre has shown me no favour; however, you were forced to take the field alone, while the former pasha of Acre was supported by English cannons.’

We finally parted. I was led to a very large room, lit by a candle in an enormous candlestick placed on the ground, in the centre. This was in keeping with local custom. The slaves made me a bed with cushions placed on the floor, on which were spread sheets sewn on one side only to the blankets; I was, moreover, handed a large nightcap of quilted yellow silk, ribbed like a melon.

Chapter 6: Correspondence (*Fragments of letters sent to Théophile Dondey de Santeny*)

Here, I interrupt my itinerary, I mean the record, day by day, hour by hour, of local events, which have no merit other than detailing reality. There are moments when life’s pulse quickens, in spite of the laws of time, like a mad clock with a broken mechanism; others when it drags on in a series of inappreciable sensations, hardly worthy of being noted. Shall I speak of my wanderings in the mountains, among places which offer only an arid topography, amongst a people whose nature can only be grasped over time, and whose serious attitude and uniformity of existence lend themselves even less to the picturesque than do the noisy and contrasting city populace? It seems to me that, for some time, I have been living in a past century magically resurrected; the age of feudalism surrounds me with institutions as unchanging as the stones of the keeps that guarded them.

After viewing the mountains and black abysses, where the fires of noon cut circles of mist; the rivers and torrents, illustrious as the ruins of temple columns and broken idols their waters contain; the eternal snows which crown mountains whose flanks slope to the ash-fields of the desert; the distant outlines of valleys the sea half fills with its blue waves; the fragrant forests of cedar and cinnamon; the sublime rocks where the hermitage-bell resounds; the fountains celebrated by the biblical muse, to which young girls hasten in the evening, bearing slender urns on their heads; it seems, yes, to the European mind, the paternal and holy land, the homeland still! Let Damascus, that Arab city, flourish on the edge of the desert and greet the

rising sun from the top of its minarets; but Lebanon and Carmel are the Crusader's heritage: they belong, if not to the Cross alone, at least to what the Cross symbolises, as regards freedom.

I will summarise for you the changes that have accumulated in the last few months during my destined wanderings. You know with what kindness the Pasha of Acre received me during my passage. I finally confided to him the entire extent of the project I had formed as concerned my marrying the daughter of Sheikh Seid-Escherazy, and of the help I expected from him on this occasion. He began to laugh at first with the naive enthusiasm of Orientals, saying to me:

— 'Oh, you really desire this?'

— 'Absolutely,' I replied. 'You see, one may admit to a Muslim that there is in this affair a chain of fatalities. It was in Egypt that the idea of marriage was suggested: the thing seemed so simple, so sweet, so easy, so free from all the obstacles which mar that institution in Europe, that I accepted, and lovingly brooded upon, the idea; but I am sensitive, I admit, and though, doubtless, many Europeans have no qualms about it; ... nonetheless, this purchase of girls from their parents has always seemed to me somewhat revolting. The Copts, the Greeks, who make such deals with Europeans, know well that these marriages are not true ones, despite their supposed religious consecration.... I hesitated, I reflected, I ended up buying a slave for the price I would have paid for a wife. But one scarcely touches with impunity the mores of a world of which one is not a part; this woman, I can neither send away, nor sell, nor abandon, without scruple, nor marry her without seeming mad. Yet she is a chain fastened to my feet, and it is I who am the slave; it is fate that keeps me here, as you see!'

— 'Is that all?' said the Pasha, 'Hand her to me ... in exchange for a horse or whatever you like, if not for money; we have not the same ideas as you, *we foreigners*.'

— 'For the freedom of Sheikh Seid-Escherazy,' I said to him: 'that, at least, would be a noble prize.'

— 'No,' he replied, 'such grace and favour cannot be sold.'

— 'Well, you see me revert to my state of uncertainty. I am not the first Frank who has bought a slave; ordinarily, the poor girl is left behind in a convent; she makes a fine convert whose honour reflects on her master, and on the holy fathers who educated her; then she becomes a nun or whatever she can, that is to say she is often unhappy. That would be a reason for terrible remorse on my part.'

— 'What do you wish, then?'

— 'To marry the girl I spoke of, to whom I will give the slave as a wedding present, as a dowry; they are friends, they will live together. I will tell you, furthermore, it is she herself who gave me this idea. Its realisation depends on you.'

I present to you, in no particular order, the reasons I gave, in my attempt to rouse, and benefit from, the Pasha's benevolence.

'I can do very little,' he told me, finally, 'The pashalik of Acre is no longer what it once was; it is divided between three governing bodies, and I have only nominal authority over that of Beirut. Let us suppose, moreover, that I succeeded in having the sheikh released, he will accept the favour without gratitude.... You do not know these people! I admit that this sheikh deserves some consideration. At the time of the last troubles, his wife was killed by the Albanians. Resentment has led him to imprudent action, and renders him a danger still. If he will promise to remain quiet in the future, I might see.'

I pursued this sign of his good-nature, with all my strength, and obtained a letter for the governor of Beirut, Essad Pasha. The latter, with whom the Armenian, my old traveling companion, possessed some influence, agreed, on my behalf, to send his prisoner to the Druze *kaymakam* (governor), reducing the affair, previously complicated by the former's act of rebellion, to a simple non-payment of taxes over which it would be easy to come to some arrangement.

You observe that the Pashas themselves are unable to achieve everything they wish in this country; otherwise, Mehmet's extreme kindness to me would have smoothed away all obstacles. Perhaps he also wanted to oblige me, in a more delicate manner, by masking his own intervention in the eyes of the lower officials. The fact is that I had only to present myself on his behalf to the kaymakam to be favourably received; the sheikh had already been transferred to Deir al-Qamar, the current residence of this personage, heir in part to the former authority of Emir Bashir (*Bashir Shihab II*). There is, as you know, today a kaymakam for the Druze and another for the Maronites; it is a shared form of power which depends ultimately on Turkish authority, but whose institution spares these peoples' national pride and their claim to govern themselves.

All have described Deir al-Qamar, with its cluster of flat-roofed houses on a steep hill, as like the staircase of some ruined Babel. Beit ed-Dine, the ancient residence of the emirs of the mountain, occupies another peak which seems almost to touch this one, but which is separated from it by a deep valley. If, from Deir al-Qamar (*'The Monastery of the Moon'*), you look towards Beit ed-Dine (*'The House of Faith'*), you might believe you were viewing a faery castle; its ogival arches, bold terraces, colonnades, pavilions, and turrets offer a mix of styles more dazzling in mass than satisfying in detail. The palace is indeed symbolic of the policy of the emirs who inhabited it. It is pagan in its columns and paintings, Christian in its towers and ogive arches, Muslim in its domes and kiosks; it involves a temple, a church and a mosque,

contained amidst its buildings. At once palace, keep, and seraglio, today only one portion remains inhabited: the prison.

It was there that Sheikh Seid-Escherazy had been temporarily lodged, happy at least to be no longer under the control of a foreign authority. Sleeping beneath the vault of the old palace of his princes was doubtless a relief; he had been allowed to lodge his daughter near him, another favour he had been unable to obtain in Beirut. However, the kaymakam, being responsible for the prisoner, and the debt, had him closely guarded.

I obtained permission to visit the sheikh, as I had done in Beirut; having taken lodgings at Deir al-Qamar, I had only to cross the intermediate valley to reach the immense terrace of the palace, from which, amidst the peaks of the mountains, one can discern in the distance a resplendent patch of blue sea. The echoing galleries, the deserted rooms, formerly full of pages, slaves, and soldiers, reminded me of those castles of Walter Scott which the fall of the Stuarts stripped of their royal splendour. The majesty of the natural landscape spoke no less loudly to my mind.... I felt that I must frankly explain myself to the sheikh and not conceal from him the reason I possessed for seeking to be useful to him. Nothing is worse than an outpouring of undeserved thanks.

At the first opening, I made, with great embarrassment, he struck his forehead with his finger.

— ‘*Enté medjnoun* (are you crazy)?’ he said.

— ‘*Medjnoun*,’ I said, ‘was the epithet of a famous lover (see Jami’s ‘*Medjnoun and Leila*’), and I am far from rejecting it.’

— ‘Have you viewed my daughter’s face?’ he cried.

The expression of his gaze was such at that moment, that I involuntarily thought of a story the Pasha of Acre had told me when speaking of the Druze. The memory of it was certainly not a pleasant one. A *kyaya* (*steward*) had related it to him, as follows:

‘I was asleep, when at midnight I heard a knock at the door; I saw a Druze enter carrying a bag on his shoulders.

— “What have you there?” I asked him.

— “My sister was plotting, and I killed her. This bag contains her tantour (*cone-shaped headdress*).”

— “But there are two!”

— “That is because I killed the mother also, who was aware of the plot. There is no strength and power except in the Lord on high.”

The Druze had brought these treasures from his victims to appease the Turkish system of justice.

The *kyaya* stopped him, and said:

— “Go to sleep, I’ll speak to you tomorrow.”

The next day he said to him:

— “Doubtless, you had a sleepless night?”

— “On the contrary,” replied the other. “For a year I suspected this shameful plot, and lost sleep; I found it again last night.”

This memory came back to me in a flash; I hesitated no longer. I had nothing to fear on my account, no doubt, but this prisoner had lodged his daughter near him: might he not suspect her of something more than having been seen without a veil? I explained to him my visits to Madame Carlès, justified, certainly, by the fact that my slave dwelt with her, and the friendship that the latter had for his daughter, due to which I had occasion to meet her; I passed swiftly over the question of the veil which might have been disturbed by chance.... I thought that, regardless, he would not doubt my sincerity.

— ‘Amongst all people,’ I added, ‘a girl’s father is asked for her hand in marriage, and I see no reason for your surprise. You may believe, from the connections I possess in this country, that my position is in no way inferior to yours. As for religion, I would not accept changing it for the most beautiful marriage on earth; but I understand yours, I know that it is extremely tolerant and admits all possible forms of worship, and views all the accepted revelations as diverse but equally holy manifestations of the divine. I fully share these ideas, and, without ceasing to be a Christian, I believe I can....’

— ‘Ah! wretch!’ cried the sheikh, ‘it is not allowed: *the pen is broken, the ink is dry, the book is closed!*’

— ‘What do you mean?’

— ‘These are the very words of our law. None can, any longer, enter our communion.’

— ‘I thought initiation was open to everyone.’

— ‘To *the djahels (ignorant folk)* who are of our people, and who rise through study and virtue, but not to foreigners, since our people are the only ones chosen by God.’

— ‘However, you do not condemn others.’

— ‘No more than a bird condemns an animal that crawls on the ground. The word was preached to you, but you did not listen.’

— ‘In whose day?’

— ‘In the time of Hamza, the prophet of our lord Hakim.’

— ‘But how did we hear it?’

— ‘Doubtless, he sent missionaries (*dais*) to all the *isles* (regions).’

— ‘And how is this our fault? We were not born, then!’

— ‘You existed in some other body, but possessed the same spirit. This spirit, immortal like ours, remained closed to the divine word. It showed by this its inferior nature. Everything is proclaimed to all eternity.’

It is not easy to astonish a fellow who has studied philosophy in Germany, and who has read Friedrich Creuser’s text (*see his ‘Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen’ 1810-12*) in the original German. I readily conceded to the worthy Akkal his doctrine of transmigration, and said to him, starting from that point:

— ‘When the *dais* sowed the word about the world, around the year 1000 of the Christian era, they made proselytes, did they not, elsewhere than in these mountains? What proof have you that I am not descended from them? Would you like me to tell you where the plant called *ahliledj* (*cuscuta epithymum*, or *dodder*, a sacred plant) grows?

— ‘Does it grow in your country?’

— ‘It grows only in the hearts of the faithful for whom Hakim is the one true God.’

— ‘That is indeed the sacramental phrase; but you may have learned these words from some renegade.’

— ‘Do you wish me to recite the entire Druze catechism to you?’

— ‘The Franks have stolen many books from us, but the knowledge acquired by infidels can only derive from evil spirits. If you are one of the Druze from the other *isles*, you must have your black stone (‘*horse*’). Show it, and we will recognise you.’

— ‘You shall see it later,’ I told him.

But I really did not know of what he wished to speak. I broke off the conversation for that time, and, promising to come back and see him, returned to Deir al-Qamar.

That same evening, I asked the kaymakam, as if merely out of curiosity, what this *horse* was; he was happy to tell me that it was a stone cut in the shape of an animal that all the Druze carry on them as a sign of recognition, and which, found on various Druze corpses, had given rise to the opinion that they worshipped a foal, something as absurd as believing Christians worshipped the symbolic lamb, or dove. These stones, which in an age of primitive communication were distributed to all the faithful, were transmitted from father to son.

So, I only had to find one to convince the akkal that I was descended from some ancient believer; but the thought of such deceit disgusted me. The kaymakam, more enlightened due to his position, and more open to the ideas of Europe than his compatriots, gave me various details that brought sudden enlightenment. My friend, I understood everything, divined everything in an instant; my absurd dream is alive, the impossible has been realised!

Seek carefully, entertain the most baroque suppositions, or rather ‘let the dogs give tongue’, as Madame de Sévigné says (*‘jette ta langue aux chiens’*, see her letter of the 15th December 1670, to Emmanuel de Coulanges). And learn something of which I myself had until now only a vague idea: the Druze akkals are the Freemasons of the Orient.

No other reason is needed to explain the ancient claim made by the Druze that they descend from certain knights of the Crusades. What their great emir Fakr al-Din declared at the court of the Medici when invoking the support of Europe against the Turks, and was so often recalled in the letters-patent of Henry IV and Louis XIV in favour of the people of Lebanon, is true, at least in part. During the two centuries that the Knights Templar occupied Lebanon, they laid deep institutional foundations there. In their desire for domination over nations of different races and religions, it is seemingly they who established this system of Masonic affiliation, marked, moreover, by local customs. The oriental ideas which, as a result, penetrated the Templars’ Order were, in part, the source of those accusations of heresy which they suffered in Europe. Freemasonry has, as you know, inherited the doctrines of the Templars; Thus, the connection is established, and that is why the Druze speak of their co-religionists in Europe, dispersed among various countries, and principally in the mountains of Scotland (*Djebel-el-Scouzia*). They mean by this the *Scottish* companions and masters, as well as the Rosicrucians, whose grades correspond to those of the ancient Templars. (The English missionaries rely heavily on this circumstance to establish the influence of their country among the Druze. They induce the Druze to believe that the *Scottish rite* is peculiar to their island. We can be sure that the French Freemasons were the first to understand the relationship, since France founded, at the time of the Revolution, the lodges of the *United Druze*, the *Commanders of Lebanon*, etc).

And then, you know that I myself am one of the *Widow’s Sons*, a *louveteau* (a *Masonic epithet*, from a mason’s lifting-device), or *wolf-cub* (the son of a master-mason; for all this see the rites of *Freemasonry*), that I was raised to treat with horror the murder of Adoniram, and venerate the Holy Temple, whose columns were cedars from Mount Lebanon. Seriously, Freemasonry is very degenerate among us... you see, however, that it may prove useful when travelling. In short, I am no longer an infidel among the Druze, I am a *muta-darassin*, a student. In Freemasonry, this would correspond to the grade of apprentice; one must then become a companion (*refik*), then a master (*dai*); the akkal would be for us a Rosicrucian, one who is known as a *kaddosch* (*sacred*) knight. All the rest has intimate connection with our own Freemasons’ lodges, I have abridged the details here.

You will surmise what happened next. I produced my credentials, fortunately having among my papers one of those beautiful Masonic diplomas full of cabalistic signs familiar to Orientals. When the sheikh asked me again for my ‘black stone’, I told him that the French Templars, having been burned at the stake, had not been able to transmit theirs to the Freemasons, who are their spiritual successors. One would need to ascertain as fact what remains

only a probability; this 'black stone' must be the *baphomet (idol)* mentioned at the trial of the Templars.

At this point, my marriage becomes a matter of high politics, involving a renewal perhaps of the ties which formerly attached the Druze to France. These good people complain that our protection extends only to the Catholics, while formerly the kings of France included the Druze in their favours, as descendants of the crusaders, and Christians *in a manner of speaking*. (Author's note: however frivolous these pages may appear they contain a matter of fact. One recalls the collective petition that the Druze and the Maronites recently addressed to the Chamber of Deputies.)

The agents of England have taken advantage of the situation to assert their own support, and hence the struggles between the two rival peoples, Druze and Maronite, formerly united under the same princes.

The kaymakam finally allowed Sheikh Seid-Escherazy to return to his district, and did not hide from him that it was to my representations to the Pasha of Acre that he owed this result. The Sheikh said:

— 'If you wished to make yourself useful, well that is every man's duty; if it was in your own interest, why should I thank you?'

His Druze faith astonished me in various ways, however it is a noble and pure one, when it is well understood. The akkals recognise neither virtue nor crime. An honest person has no merit; only, he or she rises in the scale of being while the vicious degrade themselves. Transmigration brings punishment or reward as appropriate.

They do not say that a Druze has died, they say that the person has transmigrated.

The Druze do not give alms, because alms, according to them, degrade the one who accepts them. They only exercise hospitality, as an exchange to be completed in this life or another.

Vengeance is a feature of their laws; all injustice must be punished, while forgiveness degrades the one who receives it.

Among them, one rises not through humility, but through knowledge; one must make oneself as like as possible to God.

Prayer is not obligatory; it offers no aid in redeeming sin.

It is a person's own responsibility to repair the evil they have done, not because they may have acted badly, but because that evil, by force of circumstance, will otherwise return to haunt them some day.

The institution of the akkals is somewhat similar to that of scholars in China. The nobles (*sharifs*) are obliged to undergo tests of initiation; the rest (*salems*) can become their equals or superiors, if they reach them, or surpass them in learning.

Sheikh Seid-Escherazy was one of the latter.

I presented the slave to him, saying:

— ‘Here is your daughter’s servant.’

He looked at her with interest, and found her sweet and pious. Since then, the two women have remained together.

We left Beit ed-Dine, all four of us on mules; we traversed the Beqaa valley, the ancient Coele-Syria, and, after having reached Zahle, we arrived at Baalbek, in the Anti-Lebanon. I dreamed for a few hours amidst those magnificent ruins, the descriptions of which by Volney and Lamartine I cannot improve on. We soon reached the mountainous chain which borders the Hauran. There we halted in a village, where vines and mulberry trees are cultivated, a day’s journey from Damascus. The sheikh took me to his humble house, whose flat roof was supported by an acacia tree (*the tree of Hiram Abif, see the rites of Freemasonry*). At certain times, the house fills with children: it is a school, which is the loveliest of titles for an akkal’s dwelling.

There is no need to describe to you the rare meetings I have with my fiancée. In the East, the women live together, and the men together, unless in special cases. I will mention only that this amiable person gave me a red tulip, and planted a small acacia in the garden, which is to grow with our love. It is a custom of the country.

And now I am studying to reach the dignity of *refik* (*companion*), which I hope to attain shortly. The marriage will take place at that time.

From time to time, I make an excursion to Baalbek. There I met Father Planchet at the house of the Maronite bishop, who was on tour. He did not criticise my decision too forcefully, but told me that my marriage ... would not be a true one. Nurtured on philosophical ideas, I am unconcerned by his Jesuitical opinion. Nonetheless, might it not create a fashion for *mixed marriages* in Lebanon? – I will think on it.

Epilogue

Chapter 1: Constantinople (*Istanbul*)

My friend, human beings are restless creatures, and God determines their progress. It was doubtless established for all eternity that I would not marry either in Egypt or Syria, a country where such unions are nonetheless readily accomplished, to an extent that borders on the absurd. At the moment when I was about to render myself worthy of marrying the sheikh's daughter, I found myself suddenly seized by one of those Syrian fevers which, even if they do not kill you, last for months or years. The only remedy is to quit the country. I hastened to flee those valleys of the Hauran, at once humid and dusty, whence the rivers that water the plain of Damascus flow. I hoped to recover my health in Beirut, but was only able to regain the strength necessary to embark on the Austrian steamboat that plied the route from Trieste, and transported me to Smyrna, then Constantinople. I have finally set foot on European soil — the climate here is more or less that of our southern cities.

Returning health deepens my regrets.... But what to do? If I return to Syria hereafter, I will see the fever I had the misfortune to catch there reappear; such is the doctors' opinion. As for bringing the woman I had chosen here, would it not be exposing her to those terrible diseases that in Northern countries carry off, three-quarters of the women from the Orient who are transplanted there?

Having thought about all this for a long time, with the serenity of mind that convalescence gives, I decided to write to the Druze sheikh and release us from our mutual obligation.

Chapter 2: Galata

From the foot of the Galata Tower — with the whole panorama of Constantinople, the Bosphorus and the sea before me — I turn my gaze once again towards long since vanished Egypt!

Beyond the peaceful horizon that surrounds me, in this European land — Muslim, it is true, but already recalling our homeland — I always feel the glare of that distant mirage that blazes and smokes in my memory ... as the image of the sun, if one stares at it awhile pursues the weary eye, that has plunged back into the shadows.

My surroundings add to this impression: a Turkish cemetery, in the shadow of the walls of Galata, once a Genoese colony. Behind me, an Armenian barber's shop which also serves as a café; enormous red and yellow dogs lie in the grass, in the sun; they are covered with wounds and scars resulting from their nocturnal combats. To my left, a venerable santon, wearing his felt cap, sleeps that blissful sleep which is for him the anticipation of paradise. Below, is Tophane with its mosque, its fountain and its batteries of cannon commanding the entrance to the strait. From time to time, I hear psalms from the Greek liturgy sung in a nasal tone, and see passing, on the causeway which leads to Pera, long funeral processions led by priests, who

wear imperial-shaped crowns on their heads. With their long beards, silk robes strewn with tinsel and gilded ornaments, they seem like the ghosts of sovereigns of the Late Empire.

All appears less than happy at the moment. Let me return to the past. What I regret as regards Egypt now is not the monstrous onions whose absence the Hebrews mourned in the land of Canaan (*see the Bible, 'Numbers XI:5'*), but rather a friend, and a woman — the one separated from me simply by the grave, the other forever lost.

What leads me to conjoin here two names which combine in my memory alone, and for entirely personal reasons! Because it was on arriving in Constantinople that I received the news of the death of the French Consul-General, of whom I have already spoken to you and who had welcomed me with such kindness in Cairo. He was a man well-known to the scholars of Europe, a diplomat and a scholar, two things rarely seen together. He believed it necessary to fulfil in a serious manner one of those consular posts which, generally, do not oblige anyone to acquire special knowledge.

Indeed, according to the ordinary rules of diplomatic advancement, the consul in Alexandria may find himself promoted, from one day to the next, to the position of minister plenipotentiary in Brazil; while a chargé d'affaires in Canton is promoted to Consul-General in Hamburg. Why learn the language, or study the customs of a country, establish relations there, or inquire about the outlets our trade might find there? At most, one thinks of worrying about whether the situation, the climate, and the amenities provided by the residence one requests will prove superior to those of the post one currently occupies.

The Consul, at the time I met him in Cairo, was thinking only of research into Egyptian antiquities. One day when he was talking to me about hypogea and pyramids, I said to him:

— 'Why worry so much about tombs?... Are you applying for a consulate in the other world?'

It hardly registered, at that moment, that I was saying something cruel.

— 'Do you not see,' he replied, 'the state I am in?... I can scarcely breathe. Nonetheless, I would like to see the pyramids. That is why I came to Cairo. My residence in Alexandria, by the sea, was less dangerous, for the air that surrounds us here, impregnated with ashes and dust, must prove fatal.'

Indeed, Cairo, at that time, offered a less than healthy atmosphere and had an effect on one like being smothered in a close atmosphere, in front of incandescent coals. The *khamsin* blew through the streets with all the ardour of Nubia. Night alone restored one's strength, and allowed one to endure another day.

It formed a sad counterpart to the splendours of Egypt; always, as before, the fatal breath of Typhon triumphs over the work of the benevolent gods!

The south wind, the khamsin, which lasts about fifty days, offers, however, intervals of calm. One evening, after a more beautiful day than usual, the Consul invited me to accompany him next day to the pyramids of Giza. We left at daybreak in his carriage, and stopped for lunch at the isle of Roda, green as an island in the Baltic, cultivated in the English manner through

the attentions of Ibrahim Pasha, planted in part with poplars, willows and acacias, and replete with ponds, and artificial rivers populated with swans, and Chinese bridges over grassy paths.

Lunch was served in a kiosk located in the north of the island and built of rough stone, which had long housed Ibrahim's summer harem. The latter, almost always lodged in Alexandria, had not occupied it for some years.

— 'The palace in which we are standing,' the Consul said, 'was placed at my disposal by Ibrahim, and I live here when staying in Cairo becomes too painful for me.'

We then visited all the various parts of the island, a delightful retreat where the Fatimid caliphs had formerly established their palace; the Consul showed me, at the end of the branch of the Nile which corresponds to old Cairo, the place where it is supposed that Moses was found, in his floating cradle, by Pharaoh's daughter. This point is situated near *al-Miqyas*, the Nilometer, which, as we know, is employed to ascertain the height of the floods. A hexagonal marble pillar, formerly consecrated to Serapis, set in the middle of a well, has marked, for thirty centuries, the low water level of the sacred river.

Midday came, and my poor traveling companion did not speak of going any further.... But I have already told you of this.

Is it the attack of fever that I myself suffered from in Syria, which makes me return to the thought of his death with so sad a feeling?...

It is in the midst of the cemetery of Galata too, in front of the dazzling view of Constantinople and Üsküdar, which joins the coast of Europe to the coast of Asia Minor, that I think sadly of the premature death of a man whose conversation revealed to me so much humble knowledge and so much affability, a precious combination when travelling in these Arab lands ... where one has only tombs and ruins to choose between.

Everything overwhelms me at once. I wrote to the Consul in Beirut asking him to inquire about the fate of those people who had become dear to me.... He could only give me vague information. A new revolt had broken out in the Hauran.... Who knows what will have become of the good Druze sheikh, and his daughter, and the slave I had left with their family? Perhaps some future letter will tell me of them.

Chapter 3: Pera (*Beyoğlu*)

My itinerary from Beirut to Constantinople is necessarily very brief. I embarked on the Austrian steamboat, and the day after my departure we put into Larnaca, the Cyprian port. Unfortunately, there as elsewhere, we were forbidden to disembark, unless we accepted being quarantined. The coast is arid as are those of the whole archipelago; it is, it is said, in the interior of Cyprus alone that one finds the vast meadows, dense woods and shady forests formerly dedicated to the goddess of Paphos (*Venus-Aphrodite*). The ruins of her temple still exist, while the village which surrounds them is the residence of a bishop.

Next day we saw the dark mountains of the Anatolian coast take shape. We stopped once more, this time at the port of Rhodes. I saw the twin rocks on which the feet of the colossal statue of Apollo must once have stood. That work of bronze must have seemed twice as high as the towers of Notre-Dame when viewed by a human being. Two forts, built by the knights of old, defend this entrance to the harbour.

On the following day we skirted the eastern part of the archipelago, not losing sight of land for a single instant. For several hours the island of Cos was on our left, made illustrious by the memory of Hippocrates. Here and there I could distinguish charming areas of greenery, and towns with white houses, where it seemed a stay might prove happy. The father of medicine had not made a bad choice as regards his dwelling-place.

I cannot express sufficient astonishment at the pink hues which clothe the high rocks and mountains in the evening and in the morning — Thus, yesterday I saw Patmos, the island of Saint John, flooded with those sweet rays. Perhaps that is why the Apocalypse sometimes offers us attractive description.... Day and night, the Apostle dreamed of monsters, destructions and war; at dawn and eve, he announced in smiling colours the wonders of the future reign of Christ, and of the new Jerusalem sparkling with light.

We were obliged to remain in quarantine in Smyrna (*Izmir*) for ten days. It is true that this was in a delightful garden, with a full view of the immense gulf, which resembles the roads at Toulon. We lived in tents rented on our behalf.

On the eleventh day, our first day of freedom, we spent the daylight hours touring the streets of Smyrna, while I regretted not being able to visit Bournabat (*Bornova*), where the merchants' country-houses are found, and which is seven miles or so away. It is, they say, a delightful place to stay.

Smyrna is almost European. When you have seen the bazaar, similar to all those in the Orient; the citadel; and the 'Caravan Bridge' (*Kemer Çayı*) over the ancient Meles, which provided an epithet for Homer (*Melesigenes*, or 'Son of Meles'); its most attractive feature is the Street of Roses (*Gül Sokak*, now *Izmir's Cumhuriyet Square*) where one glimpses, at the windows and doors, the furtive features of young Greek women — who like Virgil's nymph (see 'Eclogues III: 65') never flee until they have let themselves be seen.

We returned to the ship after hearing a performance of a Donizetti opera at the Italian Theatre.

It took a whole day to reach the Dardanelles, leaving on our left the shore where Troy once stood —and Tenedos, and so many other famous places the traces of which were only a misty line on the horizon.

After the strait, which seemed like a wide river, we sailed the Sea of Marmara for a whole day, and the next, at dawn, enjoyed the dazzling spectacle of the port of Constantinople certainly the most beautiful in all the world.

(Authors' Note: All the details of this trip are correct; on certain points, however, it has been necessary to group the events to avoid undue length.

The author has since learned that the Javanese slave ran away from the house where he had placed her. Religious fanaticism was no doubt a factor in the matter.

As for her current fate, which our Consul showed interest in, it fortunately seems settled, according to the overly-laconic postscript of a letter addressed to the author by Camille Rogier, the painter, who is travelling in Syria: ‘The *yellow woman* is in Damascus, married to a Turk, she has two children.’)

Part XIII: Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*) – Istanbul and Pera (*Beyoğlu*)



View of the square and the fountain of Top-Hané, 1822 - 1828, Innocent Louis Goubaud
[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collectie/AK-MAK-1822-1828-001)

Chapter 1: Balık Pazari (*The Fish-Market*)

What a strange city Constantinople is! Splendour and misery, tears and joy; a greater arbitrariness than elsewhere, and more freedom too — four different groups of people, who live together without overmuch mutual hatred: Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, children of the same soil, who support each other far more solidly than people from various provinces, or from various factions among us.

It seems I was destined, though, to witness a late act of fanaticism and barbarity executed in accord with ancient Muslim tradition — I had found, in Pera, one of my oldest friends, a French painter (*Camille Rogier*), who had lived there for three years, and very splendidly, on the profits from his portraits and paintings — which proves that Constantinople is not as much a stranger to the Muses as one might think. We had left Pera (*Beyoğlu*), the Frankish city, to visit the bazaars of Stamboul (*Istanbul*), the Turkish city.

After passing the fortified gate of Galata, one traverses a long winding street, lined with taverns, pastry-shops, barbers, butchers, and French-style cafés reminiscent of our own, whose

tables are burdened with Greek and Armenian newspapers — five or six of these are published in Constantinople alone, without counting the Greek newspapers from the Morea — it is here that the traveller must summon up knowledge of the classical texts, so as to grasp a few words of that living language, regenerated as it is, day by day. Most of the newspapers affect to depart from the modern patois, and seek to approach ancient Greek, to the point where they may risk no longer being understood. There are also Vlach (*eastern Romance language*) newspapers, and Serbian newspapers printed in the Romanian language, which is far easier for us to understand than Greek, because of the considerable admixture of Latin words. We halted, for a few minutes, at one of these cafés, to sample a sugary *gloria*, something unknown to the Turkish café owners. — Further on, we arrived at the fruit-market offering magnificent products of the fertile countryside surrounding Constantinople. Finally, still descending, by winding streets crowded with passers-by, we reached the *jetty* where one embarks to cross the *Golden Horn*, a gulf half a mile wide, and almost five miles long, which is the most wonderful and safest port in the world, and which separates Istanbul from the suburbs of Pera and Galata.

The small square was animated by an extraordinary traffic, and presented, on the seaward side, a wooden landing-stage lined with elegant caiques. The rowers wore long-sleeved silk-crepe shirts of a very daring cut; the ferry travels swiftly, thanks to its fish-like shape, and slides without difficulty between the hundreds of vessels of all nations which fill the entrance to the harbour.

In ten minutes, we reached the opposite jetty, which leads to to Balik-Pazari, the fish market; it was there that we witnessed an extraordinary scene — in a narrow crossroads of the market, a crowd of men were gathered in a circle. We thought at first that it was a performance by jugglers' or a bear-baiting contest. On pushing through the crowd, we saw on the ground a decapitated body, the corpse dressed in a blue jacket and trousers, the head, covered by a peaked cap, having been placed between the legs, slightly apart. A Turk turned towards us and said to us, recognizing us as Franks:

— 'It seems that folk who wear hats also cut off each other's heads.'

For a Turk, peaked caps and hats with brims are objects of a like prejudice, since it is forbidden for Muslims to wear such a head covering, since they must touch their foreheads to the ground while praying, while keeping their headgear on. We moved away from this scene with disgust, and gained the bazaar. An Armenian offered us sherbets (*sharbats*, *fruit drinks*) in his shop, and told us the real story of this odd execution.

The decapitated body we had encountered had been on display for three days in Balik-Pazari, which did not please the fishmongers much. It was that of an Armenian, named Owaghim, who had been caught three years previously with a Turkish woman. In such a case, he was forced to choose between death and apostasy — a Turk would only have been liable to blows from a stick — Owaghim became a Muslim. Afterwards, he repented of having yielded to fear; and retired to the Greek islands, where he abjured his new religion.

Three years later, believing the affair forgotten he returned to Constantinople in Frankish costume. Fanatics denounced him, and the Turkish authorities, though tolerant at the time, were

obliged to enforce the law. The European Consuls protested in his favour; but what could be done when confronted with a law that precluded exceptions? In the East, the law is both civil and religious; the Koran and the legal code are one. Turkish justice is obliged to reckon with the violent fanaticism of the masses. Owaghim was offered his release on condition of a renewed apostasy. He refused. A further step was taken: he was provided with an opportunity to escape the city. A strange thing! He further refused, saying that he could only live in Constantinople; that he would die of grief if he were to depart again, or of shame if he remained there at the cost of another change of religion. So, the execution took place. Many who shared his religion considered him a saint and candles were lit in his honour.

This story made a deep impression on us. Fate had created a set of circumstances which had guaranteed the outcome. On the evening of the third day, the body till then having been displayed at Balik-Pazari, three Jews, loaded it on their shoulders, according to custom, and cast it into the Bosphorus among the drowned dogs and horses the sea presents, here and there, along the coast.

I do not wish, despite this sad episode which I had the misfortune to witness, to doubt the progressive tendency of the new Turkey. In Istanbul, as in England, the law binds all wills and minds until it can be interpreted more generously. Matters of adultery and apostasy alone still give rise to such sad events today.

We walked through the splendid bazaar which forms the centre of Istanbul. It is a complete labyrinth, solidly built of stone in the Byzantine style, where one may find shelter amidst its vastness from the heat of the day. Immense arcades, some arched, others built in ogives, with sculpted pillars and colonnades, are each devoted to a particular kind of merchandise. One can admire in particular, clothing, women's slippers, embroidered and lamé fabrics, cashmeres, carpets, furniture inlaid with gold, silver, and mother-of-pearl, goldsmiths' work, and even more the brilliant weapons, all gathered in this part of the bazaar called the *besestain* (*bedesten*).

One of the extremities of this underground village, so to speak, leads to a most pleasant area surrounded by buildings and mosques, which is called Sérasquier (*Beyazit*) Square. It forms the promenade, within the city, most frequented by women and children — the women are more closely veiled in Stamboul (*Istanbul*) than in Pera; clad in green or violet *fêredjês* (*large coats*), their faces covered with a thick gauze, it is rare that anything other than the eyes and the base of the nose are visible. The Armenian and Greek women wrap themselves in lighter clothing.

One side of the square is occupied by writers, miniaturists, and booksellers. The graceful buildings of the neighbouring mosques, whose courtyards are planted with trees and frequented by thousands of pigeons which sometimes alight on the square; the cafés and stalls laden with jewellers; the neighbouring tower of the Sérasquier (*the military command, headquartered in the Old Palace, the Topkapî*) which dominates the city; and further away the sombre aspect of the walls of the Old Seraglio, where the Sultana who is the Sultan's mother resides, grant this square a most original character.

Chapter 2: The Sultan

While returning to the port, I saw the Sultan pass by in a most unusual cabriolet; two horses harnessed together pulled his two-wheeled carriage, whose wide hood, square at the top like a canopy, had a sloped velvet front with gold trim. He wore a plain frock-coat, buttoned up to the collar, which one sees Turks wearing since the Reform, and the only mark which distinguished him was the imperial insignia embroidered in cut diamonds on his red tarbouch. A look of melancholy was imprinted on his pale and distinguished face. I had taken off my hat to greet him, a mechanical movement, which basically showed a stranger's politeness, and assuredly not the fear of finding myself treated like the Armenian of the Balik-Pazari.... He looked at me more closely then, since I had revealed my ignorance of the local custom. One does not greet the Sultan.

My companion, whom I had lost sight of for a moment in the crowd, said to me:

— 'Let's follow the Sultan; like us, he is going to Pera; only he will pass by way of the pontoon bridge which crosses the Golden Horn. It is the longest route, but avoids a sea-trip, and the waves at the moment are a little rough.'

We began to follow the cabriolet, which slowly descended a long street lined with mosques and magnificent gardens, at the end of which we found ourselves, after a few detours, in the district of *Fener*, where the rich Greek merchants live, as well as the nation's princes. Several of the mansions in this district are true palaces, while churches adorned within with fresh paintings shelter in the shadow of the tall mosques, inside the very walls of Istanbul, an especially Turkish city.

On the way, I spoke to my friend of the impression that the unexpected appearance of Abdul-Medjid (*Sultan Abdülmecid I*), and the penetrating sweetness of his gaze, had made upon me, which seemed a reproach for my having greeted him like a common sovereign. That pale, slender face, those almond-shaped eyes casting, beneath long eyelashes, a glance of surprise, softened by his benevolent aspect, easy attitude, and elongated form; all this had given me a favourable opinion of him.

— 'How,' I said, 'could he have ordered the execution of that poor man whose decapitated body we saw in Balik-Pazari?'

'He had no option,' my companion replied. 'The Sultan's power is more limited than that of a constitutional monarch. He is obliged to reckon with the influence of the ulama who form both the judicial and religious order of the country, and also with the people, whose protests take the form of rebellion and arson. He can doubtless exercise an arbitrary ruling, by means of the armed forces at his disposal, which often oppressed his ancestors, but who will defend him against poison, the weapons of those around him, or assassination, the weapon of the masses? Every Friday, he is obliged to go, in public, to one of the mosques of the city, where he must say his prayers, so that each district can view him in turn. Today, he goes to the *tekeh* of Pera, which is a monastery of the whirling dervishes.'

My friend gave me other details of the prince's situation, which explained to a certain extent the melancholy imprinted on his features. He is perhaps the only Turk who, in truth, can complain of an inequality of treatment. It is in support of a wholly democratic idea that the Muslims have placed at the head of their nation a man who is at once above all and yet different from all.

He alone, in his empire, is legally forbidden to marry. The influence that such a high alliance would give to certain families was feared, nor was it fitting for him to marry a foreigner. He therefore finds himself deprived of the four legitimate wives granted by Muhammad to any believer who has the means to support them. His Sultanas, whom he cannot term wives, were originally mere slaves, and, as all the women of the Turkish empire, Armenian, Greek, Catholic, and Jewish, are considered free, his harem can only be recruited in countries foreign to Islamic ways, and whose sovereigns maintain no official relations with him.

At the time when the Ottomans were at war with Europe, the harem of the 'Sublime Porte' was admirably well supplied. There was no lack of pale, blonde beauties, witness the Ruthenian, Roxelana (*Hurrem, the wife of Suleiman the Magnificent*) with the snub nose, who was once more than a character in drama, and whose coffin, draped in cashmere and shaded with plumes, can be seen resting near her husband in the Süleymaniye Mosque.

Today, the unfortunate Sultan's harem receives no European women. If he were to even think of kidnapping one of those *grisettes* of Pera, who proudly wear the latest European fashions on their Sunday perambulations, he would find himself overwhelmed with diplomatic notes from ambassadors and consuls, and the action would perhaps occasion a war longer than the one formerly caused by the kidnapping of Menelaus' Helen.

When the Sultan passes amidst the immense crowd of Greek women in Pera, gathered to view him, he must avert his eyes from all temptation, since etiquette would not allow him to take a casual mistress, and he has not the right to incarcerate a woman of free birth. Doubtless he has become jaded among the Circassians, Malays or Abyssinians, who alone find themselves subject to slavery, and wishes for a few blonde Englishwomen or witty Frenchwomen; but they are forbidden fruit.

My companion also informed me about the actual number of women in the seraglio, which is very different from what is supposed in Europe. The Sultan's harem contains of a mere thirty-three *qadens* (*cadines*), or ladies, among whom only three are considered favourites. The rest of the women in the seraglio are *odaleuks* (*servants, sometimes also concubines*) or chambermaids. Europe therefore grants an incorrect meaning to the term *odalisque* (*odaleuk*). There are also dancers and singers therein, who could only rise to the rank of sultanas through a whim of the master, in a departure from custom. So that the Sultan, reduced to having only slaves for wives, is himself the son of a slave — an observation which the Turks do not refrain from making about him in times of popular discontent.

We continued this conversation, repeating from time to time: 'Poor Sultan!' However, he descended from his carriage on the Fener quay — since one cannot pass by carriage over the pontoon bridge (*Hayratiye*) which crosses the Golden Horn at one of its narrowest points. Two

fairly high arches are established there for the passage of boats. He mounted his horse, and, having arrived on the other side, rode by way of the paths skirting the outer walls of Galata, through the small cemetery, shaded by enormous cypresses, to reach the main street of Pera. The dervishes were waiting for him, ranged in their courtyard, which we were unable to enter. It is this tekeh or monastery which contains the tomb of that famous Count of Bonneval (*Claude Alexander, called Humbaraci Ahmet Pasha*), the French renegade officer who was, for a long time, commander of the Turkish army and fought in Serbia against the Austrians. His wife, a Venetian who had followed him to Constantinople, served as his aide-de-camp in his battles.

While we remained at a halt before the door of the tekeh, a funeral procession, preceded by Greek priests, was ascending the street, heading towards the end of the suburb. The Sultan's guards ordered the priests to retreat, since it was possible the Sultan would emerge at any moment, and it was not fitting for him to cross paths with a funeral. There were a few minutes of hesitation. Finally, the archimandrite, who, with his imperial crown and long Byzantine vestments embroidered with trimmings, seemed as proud as Charlemagne, made vigorous representations to the head of the Sultan's escort; then, turning indignantly towards his priests, he made a sign with his hand that they would continue their march, and that, if the Sultan did appear at that moment, it would be for him to wait till the corpse had passed.

I cite this trait as an example of the tolerance which exists in Constantinople for different cults — it may also be that the protection provided them by Russia is not unrelated to the Greek priests' show of pride.

Chapter 3: The Great Field of the Dead

I feel a degree of embarrassment in speaking so often of funerals and cemeteries, in connection with this smiling and splendid city of Constantinople, whose lively and verdant landscape, painted houses, and elegant mosques with their metal domes and slender minarets, should inspire only ideas of pleasure and sweet reverie. But in this country death itself takes on a festive air. The Greek procession I spoke of just now had nothing of the funereal apparatus of our sad burials. The priests, with their faces illuminated, in clothes gleaming with embroidery; the young ecclesiastics next, in long robes of bright colours, followed by their friends dressed in their richest costumes; and in the midst the dead woman, young, pale as wax, but with rouged cheeks, stretched out on a bed of flowers, crowned with roses, dressed in her finest velvet and satin outfit, and adorned with a great number of diamonds, which likely did not accompany her to the grave; such was the spectacle, more melancholic than distressing, presented by the procession.

The view from the monastery owned by the whirling dervishes extends beyond the little cemetery, whose mysterious paths, bordered by immense cypresses, descend towards the sea as far as the Navy buildings. A café, which the dervishes, cheerful and talkative by nature, choose to patronise, displays before the tekeh its rows of tables and chairs, where one drinks coffee while smoking a narghile or chibouk. One may enjoy there one's view of the European

passers-by. The carriages of the rich English, and the ambassadors, often traverse this street, as well as the gilded carriages of the women of the country, or their *arabas* —which resemble laundresses' carts, but with the added charms of painting and gilding. The arabas are drawn by oxen. Their advantage is that they easily contain a whole harem on a country outing. The husband never accompanies his wives on these trips, which most often take place on Friday, that being the Turkish equivalent of our Sunday.

I understood from the animation and distinction of the crowd that they were heading towards the scene of a party of some kind, located probably outside the suburb. My companion had left me to go and dine with a group of Armenians who had commissioned a painting from him, but had first, of his kindness, led me to a Viennese restaurant located in the upper part of Pera. Beyond the monastery, and the extensive green space on the other side of the street, one finds oneself entirely in a Parisian-style district. The brilliant boutiques of fashion-merchants, jewellers, and confectioners, fabric-shops, English and French hotels, reading rooms and cafés, that is all one encounters for a mile or so. The facades of mansions, housing Consulates for the most part, line this street. One notes in particular the immense palace, built entirely of stone, comprising the Russian embassy. It would prove, if needs be, a formidable fortress that might command the three suburbs of Pera, Tophane, and Galata. As for the French embassy, it is less fortunately sited, in a street that descends towards Tophane; and the mansion, which cost several millions, is not yet finished.

Following the street, one finds that it widens further, and one reaches the Italian Theatre on the left, open only twice a week. Then come beautiful middle-class houses overlooking gardens, then on the right the buildings of the Turkish University and the higher schools; then still further along, on the left, the French hospital.

The suburb ends there, and the wide road is crowded with fried-food stalls, fruit-sellers, watermelon-vendors, and fishmongers; the café-dance-halls are more numerous than in the city. They are generally of immense proportions. The main part is a room as vast as the interior of a theatre, with a high gallery with carved wooden balustrades. On one side there is a counter where red and white wine is served in glasses with handles, which each drinker takes to a chosen table; on the other, an immense stove loaded with pans of stew, which is distributed to you on a plate that you must also carry yourself. From then on, you must acquaint yourself with dining from a little piece of furniture, which is scarcely knee-high. The crowd that throngs these kinds of places is composed of Greeks, recognizable by their *tarbouches* which are smaller than those of the Turks; Jews wearing small turbans encircled by grey cloth; and Armenians with monstrous sheepskin *kalpaks*, which look like a grenadier's cap with a high crown. A Muslim would not dare to enter these bacchic establishments publicly.

One should not believe, from the head coverings which distinguish these groupings from one another, especially among the masses, that Turkey is still a country of inequality. Formerly shoes, like head-gear, indicated the religion of each inhabitant. The Turks alone had the right to wear the yellow boot or slipper: the Armenians wore red, the Greeks blue, and the Jews black. Also, rich and brilliant costumes were worn only by Muslims. The houses themselves evidenced these distinctions, those of the Turks being distinguished by their bright colours; the rest painted only in dark shades. Today, all is changed: every subject of the empire has the right

to don the well-nigh European costume of the Reform, and wear the red *fez*, partly hidden by its tassel of blue silk dense enough to give the appearance of azure hair.

I was convinced of this, on seeing a large number of people heading, thus dressed, on foot or on horseback, towards the European promenade of Pera, little frequented by genuine Turks. Patent boots have also rendered obsolete the old inequality of shoes, among most of the *celebis* (*elegant folk*) of all groups. Only, it should be noted that traditional wear is more present among the *rayas* (*non-Muslims*). On the other hand, habit and poverty no less dictate the preservation of forms of dress which serve to classify people.

Yet who could believe Constantinople still nurtures intolerance on admiring the lively aspect of the Frankish promenade? Carriages of all kinds pass each other swiftly on exit from the suburb, The horses prance, the women in best attire head, here, towards a wood which descends to the sea, or, there, on the left, towards the road to Büyükdere, where one finds the places of entertainment of the merchants and bankers. If one forges straight ahead, one arrives, after a few yards, at a sunken path bordered by bushes, and shaded by firs and larches, from which, through various gaps, one can see the sea, the mouth of the strait between Scutari, and the headland, the Seraglio indicating Istanbul. Leander's tower, which the Turks call The Maiden's Tower (*Kiz Kulesi*), rises between the two locations, on an islet at the centre of the arm of the sea which extends like a river to one's left. It is a tallish square construction sited on the rock, which looks from a distance like a sentry's lodge; beyond, the Princes' Islands (*Adalar*) are vaguely outlined at the entrance to the Sea of Marmara.

I need hardly say that this wooded area, so picturesque, mysterious, and fresh, is nonetheless a cemetery. One must accept that every place of pleasure in Constantinople is found amidst tombs. Behold, through the clumps of trees, the white ghosts standing in rows, which a ray of sunlight clearly outlines here and there; they are white marble *cippi* as high as a man, having for head an orb surmounted by a turban; some are painted and gilded to complete the illusion; the shape of the turban indicates the rank or nobility of the deceased. Some are no longer in the latest fashion. The heads of several of these figurative stones have been shattered, because they surmounted the tombs of Janissaries, and, at the time when that militia was destroyed, the people's anger did not end with the living, it extended, in all the cemeteries, to decapitation of the monuments of the dead.

The women's graves are also topped with *cippi*, but the head is replaced by a rosette of ornaments representing, in relief, carved and gilded flowers. Listen to the loud laughter that echoes under these funereal trees; that of widows, mothers and sisters who gather as families near the graves of loved ones.

Religious faith is so strong in this country, that after the tears shed at the moment of separation, no one thinks of anything but the happiness which the deceased must enjoy in the Muslim paradise. Families have their dinner brought to the tomb, children fill the air with joyful cries, and care is taken to serve a portion for the dead, placing it in an opening made for this purpose before each tomb. The stray dogs, usually present at the scene, hope for an imminent supper, but content themselves, in the meantime, with the remains of the dinner which the children throw to them. One should not think the family expects the dead to profit from the

plates of food dedicated to them; it is an old custom traceable to antiquity. Formerly, sacred serpents fed on the pious offerings; but, in Constantinople, dogs also are sacred.

On leaving the wood, which surrounds an artillery barracks, built to a vast scale, I found myself on the road to Büyükdere. An uncultivated plain covered with grass extends beyond the barracks; there I witnessed a scene which cannot be separated from the preceding; several hundred dogs were gathered on the grass, voicing their impatience. A short time later, I saw the gunners emerge, two by two, carrying, enormous cauldrons by means of a long pole burdening their shoulders. The dogs howled with joy. Scarcely had the cauldrons been placed on the ground than the animals rushed at the food which they contained; while the soldiers' occupation was to reduce the too great encumbrance they comprised, by means of the poles which they retained. — 'That's soup they serve to the dogs,' an Italian passer-by told me; 'they are well off!' I think, in truth, only the remains of the soldiers' food were gifted them. The favour dogs enjoy in Constantinople is mainly due to the fact that they clear the public highway of the remains of animal substances that are generally thrown there. The pious foundations which concern themselves with their welfare, and the basins filled with water found at the entrance to the mosques, and beside the fountains, doubtless have no other aim.

One seeks to attain more attractive sights. Beyond the barracks, one finds oneself at the entrance to the great Field of the Dead; it is an immense plateau shaded by sycamores and pines. One first passes among the Frankish tombs, where there are also many English inscriptions, with coats of arms, engraved on the long flat tombstones on which everyone seats themselves without scruple, as if on marble benches. A café in the form of a kiosk rises in a clearing whose view dominates the sea. From there, one can distinctly see the shore of Asia Minor, lined with painted houses and mosques, as if one were gazing from one bank of the Rhine at the other. The distant horizon ends at the truncated summit of the Bithynian Olympus (*Uludag, in Bursa province*), whose profile almost merges with the clouds. On the shore, to the left, stretch the buildings of the Sultan's summer palace, with their long Greek colonnades, scalloped roofs, and golden grilles gleaming in the sun.

Let us advance further. Here is the part of the field devoted to the Armenians. Their flat tombs are covered with the regular characters of their language, and one sees sculpted in marble the attributes of the trade that each one practiced in their life: here jewellery, there hammers and set-squares; here, weighing-scales, there instruments of various kinds. The women's graves alone are uniformly marked by bouquets of flowers.

Turning one's thoughts from these impressions, which always provoke serious reflection in the European mind — one views an immense crowd; the women are unveiled, and their features, firmly drawn, are animated with joy and health beneath the Levantine headdress, as beneath the bonnets or hats of Europe. Only a few Armenian women hide their faces with a band of light gauze which their arched noses admirably support, and which, barely hiding their features, becomes for those less young a means of coquetry. Where are all this richly-adorned and joyful crowd going? — Ever onwards to Büyükdere.

Chapter 4: Agios Demetrios (*Kuruçesme*)

Many of them, however, stop for refreshments, in the elegant cafés that line the road. I came across one on the left, its wide arcades opening on one side onto the vast field and on the other onto a vast series of valleys and hills lined with small buildings, and interspersed with gardens. Beyond them, the distant jagged line of the mosques and minarets of Istanbul reappeared. Such an embroidered horizon, ultimately somewhat monotonous, terminates most views of the entrance to the Bosphorus.

This café was a meeting place for good company; it looked like a café-cabaret on our Champs-Élysées. Rows of tables on both sides of the road were filled with the fashionable and elegant women of Pera. Everything was served in the French style, ice-creams, lemonade, and mocha. The only touch of local colour was the familiar presence of three or four storks which, as soon as you have sat down to order coffee, come and perch in front of your table like question marks. Their long beaks, on heads that tower high above the table, hesitate to attack the sugar-bowl. They wait respectfully. These captive birds go from table to table thus, retrieving sugar or biscuit crumbs.

At a table near mine sat a man of a certain age, with hair as white as his cravat, dressed in a black coat of a somewhat old-fashioned cut, and wearing in his buttonhole a ribbon striped with various foreign colours. He had monopolised all the newspapers in the café; placing the *Journal de Constantinople* on the *Echo de Smyrne*, the *Maltese Portfolio* on the *Courrier d'Athènes*, in short everything that would have made me happy at that moment, by informing me of the news from Europe. Above this mass of superimposed sheets, he was attentively reading the *Moniteur ottoman*.

I dared to pull one of the newspapers towards me, begging him to excuse me: he gave me one of those fierce looks that I have only seen among the regulars of the oldest cafés in Paris....

— 'I will shortly have finished the *Moniteur ottoman*,' he informed me.

I waited a few minutes. He was lenient, and finally handed me the newspaper with a flourish that smacked of the eighteenth century.

— 'Monsieur,' he added, 'there is a great celebration this evening. The *Moniteur* announces the birth of a princess, and this event, which will have delighted all the subjects of His Highness, coincides by chance with the commencement of Ramadan.'

I would not have been surprised, at that moment, to see all around me celebrating, and I waited patiently, sometimes looking at the road animated by the carriages and cavalcades, sometimes looking through the Frankish newspapers that my neighbour passed me as he finished reading them.

He probably appreciated my politeness and patience, and as I was preparing to leave, he said to me:

— 'Where are you going? To the dance?'

— 'Is there a dance?' I asked.

— 'You can hear the music from here.'

In fact, the shrill strains of a Greek or Wallachian orchestra reached my ears. But this did not prove that there was a dance in progress; for most of the guinguettes and cafés of Constantinople have musicians who play during the day also.

— ‘Come with me,’ the stranger said.

At perhaps two hundred paces from the kiosk we had just left, I saw a splendidly decorated gate, forming the entrance to a garden which, situated at the junction of two roads, had a triangular shape. Quincunxes of trees linked by garlands, verdant bowers surrounding the tables, all this formed a somewhat vulgar spectacle to a Parisian’s eyes. My guide was enthusiastic. We entered the interior, which consisted of several rooms filled with customers; the orchestra continued to struggle valiantly with their single-stringed viols, reed-flutes, tambourines, and guitars, executing, however, some most original tunes. I asked where the dancing was.

— ‘Wait,’ the old man said to me, ‘the dance is only allowed to commence at sunset, as dictated by the police regulations. But, as you can see, that is not far off.’

He had led me to a window, and, indeed, the sun was sinking behind the violet lines of the horizon that dominates the Golden Horn. Immediately an immense noise arose on all sides. The cannons of Tophane, and then those of all the ships in the port, were saluting the dual festival. A magical spectacle began at the same time over the entire distant plain on which the monuments of Istanbul were outlined. As the evening shadows descended, one saw long lines of fire appearing, highlighting the domes of the mosques, and tracing arabesques on their cupolas, doubtless forming legends in ornate letters; the minarets, like a thousand slender masts above the buildings, bore circles of light, outlining the frail galleries they supported. From all sides came the chants of the *muezzins*, usually so sweet, that day as loud as songs of triumph.

We turned back towards the room; the dancing had begun.

A large space had been formed in the centre; we watched fifteen dancers or so enter from the rear, wearing red headgear, embroidered jackets, and bright belts. There were no women among them.

The first seemed to lead the others, who held hands, swinging their arms, while each man linked his measured dance to that of his neighbour, by means of a handkerchief, of which they each held one end. He seemed to be the head and flexible neck of a serpent, of which his companions formed the coils.

This was, evidently, a Greek dance — with the swaying of the hips, the inter-weaving, and the garland of steps that such choreography demands. When they had finished, I was about to express my boredom with the men’s dancing, of which I had seen too much in Egypt, when an equal number of women appeared who performed the same figures. They were mostly pretty and graceful, dressed in Levantine costume; their red skullcaps festooned with gold, the flowers and lamé gauze of their face coverings, and their long braids decorated with sequins which descended to their feet won them many adherents among the gathering. However, they were simply young Ionian girls who had arrived there with their friends or brothers, and any attempt at seduction would have brought forth a flourish of knives. (An insult, recently delivered in a tavern to the mistress of some Greek, occasioned a terrible encounter between the Hellenes of

the Morea, and the Ionians. The latter are generally insolent and quarrelsome, since they are English subjects. This led to a fine battle which did not lack for spectators. More than a hundred and fifty men of the two factions lined up on the Great Field of the Dead. There were many pistol-shots and dagger-blows. The Turkish authorities were notified. The Pasha cried out: ‘*Bakkaloum*: Who cares! Let those dogs exterminate themselves if they wish, then there’ll be fewer of them.’ It is true that the Turkish police exercise scant authority in Pera, because of the considerable number of foreigners who are under the protection of the Consuls.)

— ‘I will show you a better display than that, in a moment,’ said the obliging old man I had met.

And, after having taken some sorbets, we left the establishment, which is the *Jardin Mabille* (the pleasure-garden, recalling that in Paris) of the Franks of Pera.

Istanbul, brightly lit, glowed on the distant horizon, which had become more shadowy, and the city’s profile with its thousand graceful domes was outlined with clarity, recalling those drawings pricked out with pins that children parade in front of the lamp. It was too late to return there; since, after sunset, one can no longer cross the gulf.

— ‘Agree with me,’ said the old man, ‘that Constantinople is the true abode of liberty. You will convince yourself that it is even more so in a moment. Provided that one respects the dogs, a prudent thing however, and that one lights one’s lantern at sunset, one is as free here at night as one is in London... and as little so as one is in Paris!’

He had taken from his pocket a metal lantern, the canvas folds of which extended like the parted leaves of a bellows, and set his candle therein.

— ‘See,’ he continued, ‘how lively the long cypress avenues of this Great Field of the Dead still are at this hour.’

Indeed, silk robes or fine cloth *feredjes* (long coats) passed to and fro, rustling the leaves of the bushes; mysterious chatter, and stifled laughter emerged from the shadow of the arbours. The effect of the lanterns, flickering everywhere in the hands of the passers-by, made me think of that ‘ballet of the nuns’ in *Robert Le Diable* (see Meyerbeer’s opera of that name) — as if those thousands of flat tombstones, illuminated as they passed by, might suddenly have come to life; but no, all was smiling and calm; except for the sea-breeze rocking the doves sleeping among the yews and cypresses. I remembered a line of Goethe’s:

‘You smile on graves, immortal Love!’

(a paraphrase of lines from Goethe’s poem ‘Der Wanderer’)

Meanwhile we headed towards Pera, stopping sometimes to contemplate the admirable spectacle of the valley descending towards the gulf, and of the illuminations crowning the bluish background, in which the tips of the trees were blurred, and the sea shone in places, reflecting the coloured lanterns suspended from the ships’ masts. ‘You may not suspect,’ the

old man said to me, ‘that you are conversing at this moment with a former page of the Empress Catherine II!’

— ‘That is noteworthy,’ I thought, ‘since his appointment must date back at least to the dying years of the last century.’

— ‘I may say,’ added the old man somewhat pretentiously, ‘that our sovereign (for I am Russian) was, at that time, somewhat aged ... as you see me today.’

He sighed. Then he began to speak at length of that Empress (*Catherine II, ‘the Great’*), of her wit, her charm, her grace, her kindness. ‘Her constant dream,’ he added, ‘was to see Constantinople. She sometimes spoke of travelling here disguised as a German middle-class lady. But she would certainly have preferred to enter by force of arms, and that is why she sent that expedition to Greece commanded by Alexei Orlof, who, from afar, instigated the Hellenes’ revolution. The war in Crimea, equally, had no other aim; but the Turks defended themselves so well, that it ended in their possession of this province alone, guaranteed to them, at the last, by a treaty of peace.

You will have heard of the festivals held in my country which several of your more adventurous compatriots attended. Only French was spoken at her court; it occupied itself only with the philosophy of the Encyclopedists, the tragedies performed in Paris, and light poetry. The Prince de Ligne (*Charles-Joseph, the seventh prince of that house*) arrived there, full of enthusiasm for Guimond de la Touche’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*. The Empress immediately presented him with that area of ancient Taurus where the ruins of the temple built by the cruel Thoas were believed to have been found. The prince was very embarrassed by the gift of a few square miles occupied by Muslim farmers, who limited themselves to smoking, and drinking coffee all day. As the war had made them too poor to continue their pastime, the Prince de Ligne was forced to give them money to renew their stores. They parted very good friends.

He was no more than generous. Grigory Potemkin, his successor behaved more magnificently. As the glare from the sandy countryside in which they had found themselves hurt his sovereign’s eyes, he had whole forests of felled fir trees brought from hundreds of miles away, merely to provide her with shade during the imperial court’s presence there.

Catherine, however, was not consoled for having lost the opportunity to visit the coast of Asia Minor. To occupy her leisure-time during her stay in the Crimea, she asked Louis-Philippe Ségur, the French ambassador, to teach her how to write French verse. She was a woman full of caprice. After realising the difficulties, she locked herself in in his office for four hours, and emerged having written two Alexandrines in all, which were only passable. Here they are:

‘Sur le sofa du Khan, sur des coussins brodés,
Dans un kiosque d’or, de grilles entourés.’

‘On the Khan’s divan, on fair cushions mounded,
In a kiosk of gold, by grilles surrounded.’

(See the *'Letters of the Prince de Ligne'*, for the anecdote)

She was unable to complete the rest.'

— 'The verses,' I observed, 'are not without a certain oriental flavour; they even indicate a certain desire to pen her thoughts on Turkish gallantry.'

— 'The Prince de Ligne found the couplet's rhymes detestable, which discouraged the Empress from French prosody, entirely.... I am speaking to you of things that I know only by hearsay. I was then in my cradle, and I only saw the final years of that great reign.... After the death of the Empress, I doubtless inherited the violent desire that she possessed of seeing Constantinople for myself. I left my family behind, and arrived here with scant means. I was twenty years old, with fine teeth, and an admirable turn of leg....'

Chapter 5: A Tale of the Old Seraglio

My aged companion, gave a sigh, and looking at the sky, said:

— 'I will resume my history, in a moment; I merely wished to point out to you the queen of the celebrations which commence now in Istanbul, and which will last thirty nights.'

He indicated a location in the sky where a faint crescent could be seen: it was the new moon, the moon of Ramadan (*or 'Ramazan' in Turkish*), which appeared, pale, on the horizon. The festival does not begin until it is clearly visible from the top of the minarets or mountains surrounding the city. Its commencement is communicated by signal.

— 'What did you do when you arrived in Constantinople?' I asked next, having found that the old man enjoyed recalling these memories of his youth.

— 'Constantinople, sir, was more brilliant than it is today; oriental taste dictated the appearance of its houses and public buildings, which, whenever appropriate, have been rebuilt in the European style since. The moral strictures then were severe, but the difficulty of intrigue was its greatest charm.'

— 'Go on!' I said, keenly interested, when he paused again.

— 'I will not speak to you, sir, of various delightful relationships which I formed with persons of ordinary rank. The danger, in that sort of commerce, exists only for the woman, unless one has the grave imprudence to visit a Turkish lady at her house, or to enter the dwelling furtively. I forgo boasting of the adventures of that kind which I risked. The last alone may interest you.'

My parents had been pained at my parting from them; their persistence in refusing me the means to stay in Constantinople obliged me to place myself in a commercial house in Galata.

I kept the accounts for a rich Armenian jeweller; one day, several women presented themselves there, followed by slaves who wore the Sultan's livery.

At that time, the ladies of the seraglio enjoyed the freedom to shop at merchants in the Frankish quarters, since the punishment for showing disrespect to them was so great none would dare do so. Moreover, at that time, Christians were hardly regarded as human.... When the French ambassador himself visited the seraglio, he was made to dine separately, and the Sultan would later say to his first vizier: "Have you fed the dog?" — "Yes, the dog has eaten," the minister would reply. — "Well, let him be thrust outside!" These words were accepted etiquette.... The interpreters simply substituted a compliment when translating them for the ambassador, and that was all.'

I cut short these digressions, and asked my interlocutor to return to the visit by the ladies of the seraglio to the jeweller.

— 'You understand that, in the circumstances, the beautiful women were always accompanied by their usual guardians, commanded by the *kislar agha* (*the head of the eunuchs*). Moreover, the outward appearance of these ladies held charms only for the imagination, since they were as carefully draped and masked as dominos at a theatrical ball. She who appeared to command the rest had various pieces of jewellery shown her, and, having chosen one, was about to bear it away. I observed that the setting needed cleaning, and that some small stones were missing.

— "Well," she said, "when can I send for it?... I need it for a celebration, during which I must appear before the Sultan."

I spoke, respectfully; and, in a somewhat trembling voice, replied that one could not answer for the exact time which would be required to complete the work.

— "Then," said the lady, "when it is ready, send one of your young men to the palace of Besiktas."

She looked around distractedly....

— "I will go there myself, Highness," I replied; since one could not entrust, jewellery of such value to a slave, or even a clerk.

— "Well," she said, "bring it to me, and you will receive payment."

A woman's eye is more eloquent here than elsewhere, for it is all that may be seen of her in public. I thought I thought I could discern in the Princess's expression a particular benevolence, which my face and my age sufficiently justified.... Sir, I can say today, without displaying excessive self-esteem, that I was one of the most handsome men in Europe.'

He straightened as he spoke these words, and his form seemed to regain a certain elegance that I had not noted until then.

— 'When the work was complete,' he continued, 'I went to Besiktas, by the same road from Büyükdere on which we stand at this moment. I entered the palace via the courtyards which overlook the countryside. I was made to wait awhile in the reception room; then the Princess ordered that I be introduced. After handing her the jewellery, and having received

payment, I was ready to retire, when an officer asked me if I would like to attend a performance of tightrope-walking which was being given in the palace, its performers having entered before me. I accepted, and the princess had them serve dinner to me; she even deigned to inquire how I had fared. There was doubtless some risk to me in witnessing a person of such high rank act towards me with so much directness.... When night had fallen, the lady showed me into a room even richer than the previous one, and had coffee and hookahs brought.... musicians were seated in a high gallery, surrounded by balustrades, and it seemed as if they were awaiting something unusual which their music was to accompany. It seemed evident to me that the Sultana had prepared the occasion for myself alone; however, she still remained half-reclining on a sofa at the rear of the room, in the attitude of an empress. She seemed particularly absorbed in contemplating the performance taking place before her. I could not understand this timidity or reserve of etiquette which prevented her from confessing her feelings to me, and I thought more audacity might be required....

I had clasped her hand, which she freed with but little resistance, when a loud noise was heard.

— “The Janissaries! The Janissaries!” cried the servants and slaves.

The Sultana appeared to ask a question of her officials, then she gave an order whose meaning I failed to grasp. The two tightrope-dancers and I were led, by hidden stairs, to a low-ceilinged room, where we were left for some time, in darkness. We heard above our heads the hurried footsteps of the soldiers, then a sort of struggle which caused us to freeze with fear. It was evident that they were forcing the door which had protected us until then, and were about to reach our retreat. The Sultana’s officials hurriedly descended a staircase and raised a sort of trapdoor, in the floor of the room where we were hiding, saying to us:

— “All is lost!... come this way!”

We expected a series of steps, but our feet suddenly lacked support. All three of us plunged into the Bosphorus.... The palaces which border the sea, a mile from the city, notably that of Besiktas, which you will have seen from the European coast, are partly built on stilts. The floors of the lower rooms, parquetry in cedar, cover the surface of the water, sections of which are removed when the ladies of the seraglio wish to practice swimming. It was into one of these baths that we had plunged, in the darkness. The trapdoor had been closed over our head, and it was impossible to lift it. Moreover, pacing feet and the noise of weapons could still be heard above. While supporting myself on the surface of the water, I was able to breathe from time to time. No longer able to re-enter the palace, I tried to escape by swimming. But I found myself obstructed by a barrier, formed by a sort of grille between the piles, and which served it seems to prevent the women from being able to leave the palace that way, or be seen from the outside.

Imagine, sir, the discomfort of such a situation: the solid floor forming a ceiling above, six inches of air below its planking, and the water rising little by little with that almost imperceptible movement of the Mediterranean tide which rises, every six hours, by a foot or two. I was assured of drowning swiftly. So, I shook, with desperate force, the timbers that surrounded me like a cage. From time to time, I heard the groans of the two unfortunate tightrope-dancers who, like me, were trying to force a passage. Finally, I came upon a pile less

solid than the others, which, possibly eroded by the humidity, or made of older wood than the others, gave under my hand. I managed, by a desperate effort, to detach a length that was rotten and to slip through, thanks to the slender form I possessed at that time. Then, by grasping the outer piles, I managed, despite my fatigue, to regain the shore. I know not what became of my two companions in misfortune. Terrified by the risk I had undergone, I hastened to leave Constantinople.'

I could not help saying to my interlocutor, after having sympathised with the dangers he had run, that I suspected him of having glossed over certain aspects of his adventure.

— 'Sir,' he replied, 'I say nothing as regards that; in any case, nothing would make me betray a kindness....'

He broke off. I had already heard of shadowy affairs of the kind, attributed to certain ladies of the *Old Seraglio* towards the end of the last century.... I respected the discretion of this Buridan (*the philosopher who, as legend has it, was thrown, in a sack, into the Seine, after an affair with Margaret of Burgundy*), frozen by age. (Author's note: the details of this walk through the districts of Constantinople would have no merit if they were lacking in accuracy. The adventure related was not invented. It relates, in fact, to the sister of one of the preceding sultans, and probably dates back to the time of Selim II. At that time, the Janissaries were charged with the night-patrol, and even entered imperial palaces if they felt suspicious. The appeal that entertainers and jugglers held, where women were concerned, was the cause of a similar scene, at the time of Mahmud I. A group of unfortunate equestrians nearly became victims. They were saved by a boatman from *Kuruçesme* who happened to be close to the palace.)

Chapter 6: A Greek Village

We had arrived at a height overlooking Saint Demetrios (*Agios Demetrios, Kuruçesme*), which is a Greek village located between the great and little Fields of the Dead. One descends to it via a street lined with elegant wooden houses, which recall Chinese style somewhat, in their construction and exterior ornamentation.

I thought that this street would shorten the distance required to reach Pera. It was only necessary to descend the valley whose floor is crossed by a stream. Its bank serves as a path to attain the shore. A large number of casinos and restaurants line both sides.

My companion asked:

— 'What do you wish to do now?'

— 'I would be very happy to retire to bed,' I replied.

— 'But, during Ramadan, one only sleeps during the day. Let us see out the night.... At sunrise, you can return to your lodgings. Now, if you permit, I shall take you to a house where one can play baccarat.'

The facades of the houses between which we descended, with rooms projecting onto the street, grilled windows lit from within, and walls varnished in bright colours, represented, in fact, gathering-places no less cheerful than those we had recently traversed.

One would have to cease describing the customary habits of Constantinople, if one feared having to provide information of a rather delicate nature. The fifty thousand Europeans contained by the suburbs of Pera and Galata; Italians, French, English, Germans, Russians and Greeks, share no common bond, not even unity of religion, the various sects being more divided among themselves than they are from cults most hostile to them. However, in a city where female society leads so reserved a life, it would be wholly impossible to see merely the face of a woman born there, if certain casinos or circles had not been created whose composition, it must be admitted, is rather mixed. Ships-officers, young men engaged in superior forms of commerce, various personnel from the embassies, all the scattered and isolated elements of European society, feel the need for meeting-places on neutral ground, more than merely the evening events involving ambassadors, dragomans and bankers. This explains the quite large number of subscription balls which often take place within Pera.

Here, we found ourselves in an entirely Greek village, which is the Capua (*luxurious retreat*) of the Frankish population. I had already, traversed this village, in daylight, without suspecting that it contained so many nocturnal entertainments, casinos, Vauxhall-type pleasure gardens, and even, let us confess, gambling dens. The patriarchal air of the fathers, and husbands, seated on benches or working away at carpentry, tile-making, or the weaving trade; the modest attire of the women dressed in the Greek style; the carefree gaiety of the children; the streets full of poultry and pigs; the cafes with high balustraded galleries overlooking the misty gorge; the stream bordered with grass; all this resembled, coupled with the green of the pine-trees and the houses of sculpted timbers, a peaceful view in the Alpine valleys — and how was one to know it was otherwise, at night, since nothing was visible behind the window trellises? However, after the curfew, many of these interiors remained lit from the inside, and the dances, as well as the gambling, must have continued there from evening to morning. Even without recalling the ancient tradition of the Greek hetaerae (*courtesans*), one imagines the young people attaching garlands above these painted doors, as in the days long-past of *Alcimadura* (see *La Fontaine's 'Fables: XII'*). There passed by, however, not a Greek lover crowned with flowers, but a man with an English-looking face, probably a ship's officer, but dressed entirely in black, with a white cravat and gloves, a violinist preceding him. He walked, gravely, behind the fiddler charged with enlivening his walk, who himself possessed a rather melancholy face. We judged the Englishman must be some ship's master, some *boatswain*, who was spending his pay freely after making the crossing.

My guide stopped before a house as discreetly dark outside as the others, and knocked gently at the varnished door. A black African opened it, showing signs of apprehension; then, on seeing our hats, he saluted and called us *effendis*.

The house we had entered did not entirely correspond, though graceful and elegant in appearance, to the idea one generally forms of a Turkish interior. Time has marched on, and the proverbial immobility of the ancient Orient is stirring, goaded by civilisation. The Reform movement, which has capped the Osmanli with a tarbouch, and imprisoned him in a frock-coat

buttoned up to the collar, has also brought to his dwelling that sobriety as regards ornamentation in which modern taste takes pleasure. Thus, no more dense arabesques, ceilings shaped as honeycombs or stalactites, no more fretworked dentils, no more cedar-wood coffering, but smooth walls of matt hue and shades of varnish, their cornices a simple moulding; a few commonplace designs framing the woodworked panels, a few sculpted flower vases from which scrolls and foliage emerge, all in a style, or rather absence of style, only distantly recalling the oriental fashion of the past, so capricious, and so enchanting.

In the first room the servants stood about; in the second, somewhat more ornate, I was struck by the spectacle that presented itself. In the centre of the room was a kind of table, covered with thick carpeting, and surrounded by antique beds, an arrangement which, in that country, is called a *tandour*; there, several women half-reclined, their feet stretched out like the spokes of a wheel towards the table which concealed, beneath the fabric, a stove full of embers; women whose majestic and venerable plumpness, bright clothes, jackets bordered with fur, and old-fashioned hairstyles showed that they had reached the age when a woman should not be offended by the title of matron, so well regarded among the Romans; they had simply brought their daughters or nieces to the evening event, and were awaiting its conclusion like mothers at the Opera waiting in the foyer for the ballet to end. Most of them came from neighbouring houses, to which they were not expected to return until daybreak.

Chapter 7: Four Portraits

The third room, which among us would be the living-room, was furnished with sofas covered in silk in bright and varied colours. On the divan at the back were enthroned four beautiful women who, by picturesque chance or deliberate choice, each represented a distinct oriental type.

She who occupied the middle of the divan was a Circassian, as could be guessed at once from her large black eyes contrasting with a matt white complexion, her aquiline nose with its fine pure bridge, her elongated neck, her tall, slender figure, and her delicate hands and feet; all distinctive signs of her origin. Her hairstyle, formed of gold-speckled locks twisted into a turban, released profusions of jet-black plaits, which highlighted her cheeks brightened with rouge. A jacket decorated with embroidery and bordered with frills and silk festoons, whose variegated colours formed a flowery fringe around the material, a silver belt, and wide trousers of pink lamé silk completed this costume, as brilliant as it was graceful. According to custom, her eyes were accentuated by lines of *surmeh* (*kohl*), which enlarged them and added to their brilliance; her long nails, and the palms of her hands, had an orange tint produced by henna; the same attention had been given to her bare feet, as neat as hands, which she had folded gracefully on the couch beneath her, making the silver rings about her ankles jingle from time to time.

Beside her sat an Armenian woman, whose costume, less richly barbaric, recalled more the current fashions of Constantinople; a fez similar to those of the men, displaying a torrent of of

blue silk produced by the tassel attached to it, set back on her head, topped a face with a slightly hooked profile, and somewhat proud features, but of an almost creature-like serenity. She wore a sort of *spencer* (*double-breasted jacket*) of green velvet, trimmed with a thick border of swan's down, the whiteness and mass of which gave elegance to her neck bordered by fine lace, from which hung silver aigrettes. Her waist was encircled with goldsmith's work, on the sections of which large filigree buttons roses in the form of bosses, and, by a refinement quite modern in nature, her feet, freed from the slippers she had deposited on the carpet, were covered by silk stockings with embroidered corners.

Unlike her companions, who allowed their braids, intertwined with cords and small metal plaques, to hang freely over their back and shoulders, the Jewess, seated next to the Armenian, hid hers discreetly, as her strictures required, under a kind of white bonnet, rounded into a ball, recalling the headgear of women of the sixteenth century, of which that of Christine de Pisan may communicate the idea. Her costume, more severe in style, consisted of two tunics superimposed, the outer one descending to knee height; the colours were more muted, and the embroidery of a less lively brilliance than that of the tunics worn by the other women. Her physiognomy, of a resigned gentleness and a delicate regularity, recalled the Jewish type peculiar to Constantinople, and which in no way resembles the types we know. Her face lacked those Semitic features which, in our country, mark one named Rebecca or Rachel.

The fourth, seated at the end of the divan, was a young blond Greek woman with the sort of profile popularised by ancient statuary. A *taktikos* (*skull-cap*) from Smyrna with festoons and golden tassels, coquettishly placed towards one side, and encircled by two enormous braids of twisted hair forming a turban around the head, admirably accompanied her spiritual features, illuminated by blue eyes in which intelligence gleamed, contrasting with the motionless and thought-free brilliance of the large black irises of her lovely rivals.

— 'Here,' said the old man, is a perfect sample of the four female nations which make up the Byzantine population.'

We greeted these beautiful people, who responded with a Turkish greeting. The Circassian woman stood up, clapped her hands, and a door opened. I saw beyond it another room where card-players, in various costumes, were seated at a green table.

— 'This is simply the *Frascati* (*a Parisian café and gambling den*) of Pera,' said my companion. We can play a few rounds while waiting for dinner.'

— 'I prefer this room,' I told him, not very curious to mingle with the crowd of gamblers, dotted with several Greek costumes.

Meanwhile, two little girls had entered, one holding a glass dish containing compote, on a tray, the other a carafe of water and drinking glasses; she also held a napkin, edged with silver, of embroidered silk. The Circassian woman, who seemed to play the part of *qaden* or mistress of the establishment, advanced towards us, took up a silver-gilt spoon which she dipped in rose preserve, and presented the spoon to my mouth with a most gracious smile. I knew that in such a case it was necessary to swallow the spoonful, then wash it down with a glass of water; the little girl then presented me with the napkin to wipe my mouth. All this was done according to the etiquette of the best Turkish houses.

— ‘I seem to be witness,’ I said, ‘to a scene from the *Thousand and One Nights* and to be dreaming at this moment the dream of that ‘*waking sleeper (Abou Hassan)*. I could readily name these beautiful women: Charmer-of-Hearts, Tormenter, Eye-of-Day, and Flower-of-Jasmine...’.

The old man was about to tell me their true names, when we heard a loud noise at the door, accompanied by the metallic blows of rifle-bullets. A great tumult took place in the gambling-house, and several of those present attempted to flee or hide.

— ‘Are we caught with the Sultanas?’ I cried, remembering the story the old man had told me; ‘Are we about to be drowned in the sea?’

His impassive expression reassured me somewhat. ‘Let us simply listen,’ he said.

We were mounting the stairs, while the sound of confused voices was already audible in the main room, where the matrons sat. A police officer entered the drawing-room alone, and I heard the word *Franguis* being pronounced as he pointed to us; he chose to return to the gambling-room, where those players who had not fled were calmly continuing their game.

It was simply a patrol of *cavas (local police)* seeking to establish if there were any Turks or students from the military schools in the house. It is clear that those who had fled belonged to one of the two categories. But the patrol had made so much noise on entering one was forced to believe they were paid to see nothing, and neglect reporting any violation of the law. Such is the case, moreover, in many a country.

The hour for supper had arrived. The card-players, happy or unhappy, but reconciled after doing battle, surrounded a table laid out in the European style. Only, the women did not gather to this meeting which had become openly cordial, but went to seat themselves on a platform. An orchestra, playing at the far end of the room, accompanied the meal, according to oriental custom.

The mixture of modern civilisation and Byzantine tradition is not the least attraction of these joyous nights created by the present-day contact between Europe and Asia, of which Constantinople is the brilliant centre, and which Turkish tolerance makes possible. In reality, we were attending a party quite as innocent as an evening in some café in Marseilles. The young girls who contributed to the splendour of this gathering were engaged, for a payment of a few piastres, to grant foreigners some idea of local beauty. But nothing suggested that their presence was for any other purpose than to appear charming and well-dressed, according to the fashion of the country. Indeed, everyone separated at the first light of morning, and we left the village of Saint Demetrios to its apparent calm and tranquility — nothing seemed more innocent than the idyllic landscape without, seen by the light of dawn, nor than those wooden houses whose doors were opening here and there as housewives appeared, to view the morning.

We parted. My companion returned home to Pera, and as for myself, still dazzled by the wonders of that night, I took a walk in the vicinity of the dervishes’ *tekeh*, from where one enjoys the full view of the entrance to the strait. The sun was not long in rising, vivifying the distant lines of the shores and promontories, and at that very moment a peal of cannon resounded over the port of Tophane (*Galata*). From the little minaret above the *tekeh*, there immediately came a soft and melancholy voice which sang:

— ‘*Allah akhbar! Allah akhbar! Allah akhbar!*’

I could not resist a strange emotion. Yes, God is great! God is great!... And those poor dervishes, who invariably repeat that sublime verse from the summit of their minaret, seemed to me, and for me, to be criticising a night badly-spent. The muezzin repeated:

— ‘God is great! God is great!’

— ‘God is great! Muhammad is his prophet; lay your sins at the feet of Allah!’ these are the terms of this eternal plaint.... as for myself, God is everywhere, whatever name one grants him, and I would have been unhappy to feel guilty at that moment of a true sin; but I had merely enjoyed, like all the Franks of Pera, one of those nights of celebration in which people of all religions join, in this cosmopolitan city — why then fear the eye of God? The earth impregnated with dew responded with perfumes to the passing sea-breeze which, blew towards me, from the Seraglio gardens on that headland of the far shore. Our dazzling star outlined, in the distance, the enchanted geography of the Bosphorus, which everywhere fills the eye, with its coastal heights, and its various aspects of landscape pierced by the sea. After an hour of admiration, I tired, and returned, in full daylight, to the hotel run by some young ladies named Péchefté, where I lodged, and whose windows looked out on the little Field of the Dead.

Part XIV: Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*) – Theatres and Festivities



Portrait of Hussein Agha Pasha, 1828, Charles Emile Champmartin
[Rijksmuseum](https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1828)

Chapter 1: Ildiz-Khan (*The Khan of the Star*)

After resting, I inquired about how I might attend the nocturnal festivals being celebrated in the Turkish city. My friend the artist, whom I saw again during the day, being familiar with the

customs of the country, saw no other way than to have me lodge within Istanbul; which presented great difficulties.

We took a caique across the Golden Horn, and disembarked on the same landing-place near the fish-market where we had witnessed that blood-stained scene of the day before. The shops were everywhere shut. The Egyptian bazaar nearby, in which groceries, dyes, and chemical products were sold, was hermetically sealed. Beyond, the streets were inhabited and roamed only by dogs, surprised, as always, during the first days of Ramadan, at no longer receiving food at the usual hour. We finally arrived at a shop near the bazaar, occupied by an Armenian merchant whom my friend knew. His boutique seemed closed but, not being subject to Muslim law, he allowed himself to work during the day and sleep at night, as normal, without any outward display.

We were able to dine at his house, since he had taken the precaution of buying provisions the day before; otherwise, we would have had to return to Pera to seek them. The idea I proposed of living in Istanbul seemed absurd to him at first, since no Christian has the right to take up residence there: Christians are only allowed to visit during the day. Not a hotel, not an inn, not even a caravanserai is established for their use; exception is made only for those Armenians, Jews, or Greeks who are subjects of the empire.

However, I held fast to my idea, and pointed out to him that I had found a means to lodge in Cairo, outside the Frankish quarter, by adopting the dress of the country, and passing myself off as a Copt.

— ‘Well,’ he said to me, ‘there is only the one means here, which is to pass yourself off as a Persian. We have in Istanbul a caravanserai called Ildiz-Khan (*The Khan of the Star*), in which they receive all the Asiatic merchants of various Muslim denominations. These people are not only of the sect of Ali; there are also Guebres and Parsees (*both sects of Zoroastrians*), Korahites, and Wahhabis; which creates such a mix of languages that it is impossible for Turks to know to which part of the East these men belong. So that by abstaining from speaking a northern dialect, which could be recognised by its pronunciation, you will be able to lodge there’

We went to Ildiz-Khan, situated on the highest level of the city, near the *Burnt Column* (*The Column of Constantine*), one of the most curious relics of ancient Byzantium. The caravanserai, built entirely of stone, possessed the appearance of a barracks within. Three levels of gallery occupied the four sides of the courtyard, and the lodgings, each vaulted by a rounded arch, had all the same arrangement: a large room which served as a storeroom, and a small closet with a plank floor where one could bed down. Moreover, the tenant had the right to lodge a camel or a horse in the common stables.

Having neither mount nor merchandise, I necessarily had to pass for a merchant who had sold his goods already, and came there with the intention of restocking his wares. The Armenian was in business relations with merchants from Mosul and Basra, to whom he introduced me. We enjoyed pipes and coffee, and explained the matter to them. They saw no objection to receiving me among them, provided that I adopted their dress. And, as I already had several items, notably the camel’s hair *mishlah*, which had served me in Egypt and Syria,

all I needed was a pointed astrakhan cap in the Persian style, which the Armenian provided me with.

Several of these Persians spoke the Frankish language of the Levant, in which one always ends up understanding one another, if one has lived in the commercial areas of the cities; so, I could easily befriend my neighbours. I was highly recommended to all those who lodged in the same gallery, and had only to worry about their too great eagerness to entertain me, and to accompany me everywhere. Each floor of the khan had its cook, who served meals; we could therefore perfectly do without outside communication. However, when evening came, the Persians, who, like the Turks, had slept all day in order to be able to celebrate the nights of Ramadan thereafter, took me with them to see the continuous festival which was to last thirty of such nights.

If the city was splendidly illuminated, to one who gazed upon it from the heights of Pera, the streets within seemed to me even more dazzling. All the shops open and adorned with garlands and vases of flowers, radiant without with mirrors and candles; the artistically-adorned merchandise; the external, coloured hanging-lanterns; the freshened paintings and gilding; the pastry-sellers especially, the confectioners; the dealers in children's toys; and the jewellers, displaying all their riches, this is what everywhere dazzled the eyes. The streets were full of women and children, and in even greater numbers than the men; for the latter spent the greater part of their time in the mosques and cafés.

Think not that the cabarets were closed, moreover; a Turkish celebration is open to all; the Catholic *rayas* (*non-Muslim subjects*), Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were permitted to frequent such establishments. The outer door must always be closed; but one pushes it open, and can then drink a good Tenedos wine, for ten paras (*five centimes*) a glass.

Everywhere there were fried-food sellers, and traders in fruit or boiled maize, with which a man can feed himself for a whole day for ten paras — as well as sellers of *baklavas*, a sort of cake heavily impregnated with butter and sugar, of which women are especially fond. Sérasquier Square was the most brilliant of all. In the form of a triangle, lit by the two mosques to right and left, and in the background by the warships, it presented a wide passage for the various cavalcades and processions which traversed its open spaces. A large number of stalls of itinerant merchants adorned the fronts of the houses, and a dozen cafés assaulted the eye with various posters announcing theatricals, music, and Chinese-shadow puppets. The most entertaining cafés, to any literary person, are naturally those where poems are recited or where stories and legends are told.

Chapter 2: A Visit to Pera

Not being obliged, during the blessed month of Ramadan, which was at once Lent and Carnival, to sleep all day and spend the whole night seeking pleasure as the Muslims were, I often visited Pera to renew my contact with Europeans. One day, my eyes were struck by large

posters on the walls, announcing the opening of the theatre season. An Italian troupe were about to commence three months of performances, and the name that shone in large letters as the operatic star of the moment was that of Ronzi (*the soprano, Giuseppina Ronzi de Begnis, a pupil of Nicolas Tacchinardi*). Ronzi, who had performed in Rossini's finest roles, and to whom Stendhal devoted some notable passages (*see his 'Life of Rossini', and other writings*), was no longer young, alas! She had chosen to visit Constantinople, as had the illustrious tragedienne Margerite Georges, a few years before, who, after having appeared at the Pera theatre and also before the Sultan, had afterwards performed in the Crimea, playing the title role in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* on the very spot where the temple of Thoas once stood. Eminent artists, like great geniuses of all kinds, have a profound feeling for the past; they also love adventurous journeys, and are forever drawn towards the sunrise, as if possessed of an eagle's nature. Giuseppe Donizetti (*Donizetti Pasha*) presided over the orchestra, by special permission of the Sultan whose father (*Mahmud II*) had long since engaged Donizetti as his Instructor General of Music.

It is true that Guiseppe was only the elder brother of the famous composer whom we so admire; but his name on the poster gave it a particular charm for Europeans; so, the Frankish portion of the city eagerly awaited the next performance. Tickets, distributed in advance via the hotels and cafés, had become difficult to obtain. I thought of visiting the editor of the principal French newspaper in Constantinople, whose offices were in Galata. He seemed charmed by my appearing there, offered me dinner, and then did me the honours of his theatre-box.

— 'If you have not forgotten your former profession as a columnist,' he said to me, 'you can give me your critiques of the various performances, and you'll be guaranteed entry.'

I accepted; a little imprudently perhaps, since, when one lives in Istanbul, it is inconvenient to return to Galata every two days or so, in the middle of the night, after the show ends.

Gaetano Donizetti's *Buondelmonte* was being performed; the auditorium, situated in the upper part of Pera, is much longer than it is wide; the boxes are laid out in the Italian style, without balconies; they were almost all occupied by ambassadors and bankers. Armenians, Greeks, and Franks made up almost the entire audience, and only in the orchestra could a few Turks be discerned, doubtless those whom their parents had sent when young to Paris or Vienna; for, though no prejudice prevents a Muslim from visiting our theatres, it should be remembered that our music is only moderately pleasing to them; theirs, which proceeds by quarter tones, is also incomprehensible to us, unless it is translated, so to speak, into our musical system. The Greek or Wallachian airs alone seem to be understood by all. Gaetano had instructed his elder brother to collect as many as possible, and doubtless utilised them for his operas.

The director of the *Journal de Constantinople* wanted to introduce me to the French ambassador; but I declined this honor, since he would have invited me to dinner, and I had been warned against that eventuality.

This official lived all summer in Therapia (*Tarabya*), a village on the Bosphorus, some fifteen miles from Constantinople. It is necessary to hire a caique with six oarsmen for half a

day, to reach the place, which costs about twenty francs. One sees that the ambassador's dinner invitations proved somewhat costly.... One might also add, to that unfortunate aspect of an invitation, the annoyance of returning by sea at a fairly late hour, sometimes in poor weather, in a boat shaped like a fish, only a hand's breadth in thickness, while accompanied by a tireless throng of dolphins dancing in a mocking manner over the crests of the waves, perhaps in the hope of dining on the late guests of the French ambassador.

The performance took place as if in an Italian theatre. Ronzi was showered with bouquets, and recalled twenty times; she was satisfied with this Byzantine enthusiasm. Then everyone relighted their lanterns, the ambassadors and bankers summoned their carriages, others mounted their horses; as for me, I prepared to return to Ildiz-Khan; for, in Pera, one could not find lodging for a single night only.

I knew the long road that leads to Istanbul, via the pontoon bridge over the Golden Horn, well enough not to fear setting out beneath the clear light of the Ramadan moon, on one of those nights that equal our dawns in beauty. The dogs, who patrol the streets so diligently, never attack any but imprudent folk who, in defiance of the ordinances, fail to carry a lantern. So, I set out, traversing the cemetery of Pera by a path which leads to the Galata gate, the site of the Navy buildings; the fortified enclosure ends there; but one cannot cross the Golden Horn without entering it. One knocks at a wicket-gate, and the gatekeeper opens it for a payment of bakshish; one responds to the greeting of the people of the guardhouse with a *wa 'alaykumu s-salām* ('and peace be with you'); then, at the end of a street which descends to the shore, one reaches the magnificent bridge (*Hayratiye*), a third of a mile long, which Sultan Mahmud II had built.

Once on the other bank, I was pleased to see the festive lights again, a most delightful sight when you have just travelled two miles or so at night amidst the cypress-trees and tombs.

The Fener quay, crowded with fruit-sellers, pastry-stalls, confectioners, and itinerant fried-food vendors, and with Greeks selling anisette and rosolio (*an Italian rose-scented liqueur*), is the haunt of sailors, whose ships are ranged in hundreds in the bay. The cabarets and cafés, illuminated by translucent gauze lamps, and lanterns, can be seen for some time among the surrounding streets, then the lights and sounds gradually diminish, and one must traverse a long series of solitary and silent districts, since the festivities only takes place in the commercial areas of the city. Soon the tall arches of the Aqueduct of Valens appear, their immense stone construction dominating the humble Turkish houses built of wood. Sometimes, the path rises in terraces about fifty feet above some street which crosses it, or which it follows for a time, before ascending toward the hills, or descending towards the sea.

Istanbul is a very hilly city, and art has done little to correct Nature. One feels on firmer ground when one reaches the end of the long street of the Mosques, which forms the principal artery, and which ends at the grand bazaar. It is an admirable sight, especially at night, because of its magnificent gardens, open galleries, marble fountains with gilded grilles, kiosks, and porticos, and its multiple minarets outlined in the vague light of a bluish day; the gilded inscriptions, lacquer-paintings, grilles with gleaming meshes, and sculpted marble ornaments enhanced with colour, dotted here and there, enhance with their bright hues the dark-green aspect of the gardens, where festooned vines suspended on high trellises quiver. At last, one's

solitude ends, the air is filled with joyful noises, the shops shine forth again. The rich and populous districts unfold their splendour; the shop-windows of the sellers of children's toys display a thousand foreign designs which attract kind mothers and fathers delighted to return home with a Punchinello of French manufacture, toys from Nuremberg, or some charming Chinese creation brought by the caravans. The Chinese are the people in the world who best understand what it takes to entertain a child.

Chapter 3: Karagöz

Among these toys, one distinguishes on all sides the bizarre puppet called Karagöz, whom the French already know by reputation. It is unbelievable that this figure of indecency should be placed without scruple in the hands of children. Yet it is the most frequent gift that a father or mother grants them. The East has other ideas than we do as regards education and morality. They seek to develop the senses, as we seek to suppress them....

I had arrived at Sérasquier Square: a large crowd had gathered in front of a shadow-puppet theatre marked by a transparent screen on which one could read in large letters: *Karagöz, victim of his chastity!*

A terrible paradox for anyone who knows about this character.... The words I have just translated were doubtless crying fearfully at finding themselves linked with such a name. I entered however, braving the risk of gross disappointment with the spectacle.

At the door of this *eheb-bazi* (*night-theatre*) stood four actors, who were to take part in the second item; for, after *Karagöz, The Husband of Two Widows* was promised; a farce, of the kind which are called *taklid*.

The actors, dressed in gold-embroidered jackets, had long braided hair like that of women, under their elegant tarbouches. With their eyelids highlighted in black and their hands dyed red, with sequins applied to the skin of their faces and specks of glitter on their bare arms, they gave the public a benevolent welcome, and accepted the entrance fee with a gracious smile from these *effendis* who paid more than the common folk. An *irmelikalten* (*a gold coin worth one franc twenty-five centimes*) ensured the spectator an expression of lively gratitude and a reserved place among the front rows. Moreover, no one was required to pay more than a simple contribution of ten *paras*. It must be added that the entrance fee also granted everyone the right to coffee and tobacco. The *sherbets* (*sorbets*) and various other refreshments were paid for separately.

As soon as I was seated on one of the benches, a young boy, elegantly dressed, his arms bare up to his shoulders, who, from the modest grace of his features, might have passed for a young girl, came to ask me if I wanted a chibouk or a narghile, and, when I had decided, he also brought me a cup of coffee.

The hall gradually filled with all sorts of folk, though not a single woman was to be seen; but many children had been brought to the show, by slaves or servants. They were most of

them well-dressed, and, these being days of festivity, the parents had doubtless wanted them to enjoy a spectacle, but chose not to accompany them; for, in Turkey, a man does not bother himself with either wife or child: each goes their own way, and the little boys no longer accompany their mothers after the first few years. The slaves to whom they are entrusted are, moreover, regarded as part of the family. Exempted from hard work, limited, like those of the ancients, to domestic service, their fate is envied by the simple *rayas*, and, if they are intelligent, they almost always attain their freedom after a few years of service, gaining the annuity with which it is customary to endow them in such cases. It is shameful to think that Christian Europe proved crueller than the Turks, in condemning its colonial slaves to hard labour.

Let me return to the performance. When the hall was sufficiently full, the orchestra, seated in a high gallery, struck up a kind of overture. During this, one corner of the hall was illuminated in an unexpected manner. A transparent screen, festooned with ornaments, designated the place where the shadow-puppets were to appear. The lights which had lit the hall at first, were quenched, and a happy cry resounded from all sides as the orchestra ceased playing. A silence fell; then, behind the canvas, a resonant noise was heard like that of smooth pieces of wood being shaken in a bag. These were the puppets, which, according to custom, announced themselves with this sound which was received with transports of joy by the children.

Immediately, a spectator, probably one of the theatre-company, called out to the puppeteer in charge of making the dolls appear to speak:

— ‘What will you give us today?’ To which he replied:

— ‘It is written over the door for those who can read.’

— ‘But I forget what the *khodja* (*the religious person in charge of instructing children in mosques*) taught me.’

— ‘Well, this evening it concerns the illustrious Karagöz, victim of his own chastity.’

— ‘How can you justify that claim?’

— ‘By relying on the intelligence of people of taste, and by imploring the help of dark-eyed Ahmad’.

Ahmad is the *nickname*, the familiar name, that the faithful give Muhammad. As for the qualification of *dark-eyed*, well take note that it’s a translation of the name Karagöz....

— ‘You speak eloquently!’ replied the interlocutor, ‘it remains to be heard whether you’ll continue so!’

— ‘Have no fear!’ replied the voice behind the screen, ‘my friends and I are proof against criticism.’

The orchestra resumed; then a stage-set appeared behind the canvas, representing a square in Constantinople, with houses, and a fountain in the foreground. Then there passed by successively a *cavasse* (*policeman*), a dog, a water-bearer, and other wooden characters whose clothes revealed distinct colours, and which were not simple silhouettes, as in the Chinese-shadow plays we know.

Soon a Turk was seen coming out of a house, followed by a slave carrying a travelling bag. He seemed anxious, and, suddenly making a decision, went to knock at another house in the square, shouting:

— ‘Karagöz! Karagöz! My dear friend, are you still asleep?’

Karagöz put his nose out the window, and, at the sight of him, a cry of enthusiasm resounded throughout the audience; then, having asked for time to dress, he swiftly reappeared and embraced his friend.

— ‘Listen,’ said the latter, I ask a great service of you; an important matter requires me to visit Bursa. You know I’m the husband of a most beautiful woman, and I confess that it pains me to leave her alone, not having much confidence in my people.... Well, my friend, an idea came to me last night: it is to make you the guardian of her virtue. Knowing your delicacy, and the deep affection you have for me, I’m happy to show you this proof of my esteem.

— ‘Unhappy man!’ cried Karagöz, ‘What madness! Admire me for a moment!’

— ‘Well?’

— ‘What! Surely you realise that your wife, on seeing me, will be unable to resist the urge to be mine?’

— ‘I don’t see that, at all’ said the Turk, ‘she loves me, and if I fear her being seduced, it is not by you, my poor friend; your sense of honour tells me so ... and then ... Ah! By Allah! You are so singularly built.... finally, I am counting on you.’

The Turk departed.

— ‘The blindness of men!’ cried Karagöz. ‘I! Singularly built! Say, rather: too well built, too handsome, too seductive, too dangerous!... Well,’ he mused, in monologue, ‘my friend has entrusted me with the care of his wife; I must respond to his trustfulness. Let me enter his house as he wished, and seat myself on his sofa.... Oh! Woe! But his wife, curious as women are, will wish to view me ... and, from the moment her eyes have fallen upon me, she will be filled with admiration and lose all sense of reserve. No! Let me not enter!... Let me remain at the door of this dwelling like a *spahi* on sentry-duty. Seducing a woman is so slight a matter ... and a true friend such a rare possession!’

This phrase excited real sympathy in the theatre’s male audience; it was framed in a couplet, such kinds of dramatic effect being mingled with the vaudeville, as in many of our performances; the refrains often reproduced the word *bakkaloum*, which is a favourite comment among the Turks, meaning: ‘What does it matter!’ or ‘It’s all the same to me.’

As for Karagöz, through the light gauze that merged the characters with the stage-set, he stood out admirably with his dark eyes, his clearly-drawn eyebrows, and his most salient feature! His self-esteem, from the point of view of a seducer, appeared to cause the spectators little astonishment.

After his lines of verse, he seemed lost in thought.

— ‘What to do?’ he asked himself. ‘Watch at the door, no doubt, while waiting for my friend to return.... But this woman might view me, secretly, through the *moucharabias* (blinds).

Moreover, she may be tempted to go out with her slaves to visit the baths.... no husband, alas, can prevent his wife from going abroad on such a pretext.... Then, she will be able to admire me at leisure.... O imprudent friend! why have you given me this guardian's task?

Here the piece seeks help from pure fantasy. Karagöz, to escape the gaze of his friend's wife, places himself on all fours, saying:

— 'I'll pretend to be a bridge....'

One must appreciate the particular conformation of his body to understand the scene's eccentricity and obscenity. One must imagine Punchinello raising his humped back in an arch, and representing a bridge with his feet and arms. Only, Karagöz has no hump between his shoulders, but rather a central column, below.... Over him pass a crowd of people, horses, dogs, and a military patrol, then, finally, an *araba*, drawn by oxen and burdened with women, is about to navigate the passage. The unfortunate Karagöz rises to his feet in time to avoid serving as a bridge for such a load.

A scene more comical in its representation than easily described follows the former in which Karagöz, in order to hide himself from the eyes of his friend's wife, sought *to seem like a bridge*. To comprehend it, one must recall the Latin *atellanae* (*a form of farce originating in Atella in Campania*) Karagöz himself is none other than the Punchinello of the Osci (*a pre- and post-Roman tribe*), of which we can view fine examples in the Naples Museum. In this next scene, of an obscenity that would scarcely be tolerated in our country, Karagöz lies flat on his back, his organ projecting like a stake. The crowd passes by, and everyone comments: — 'Who planted that stake here? There wasn't one yesterday. Is it cut from an oak, or a fir-tree?' Some washerwomen arrive, returning from the fountain, who hang their linen on a line attached to Karagöz. He sees with pleasure that his ruse has succeeded. A moment later, slaves are seen entering leading four horses to a watering-place; a friend meets them and invites them to enter a sort of tavern to refresh themselves; but where to tether the horses?

— 'Here; here's a stake.'

And they tether the horses to Karagöz.

Soon joyful songs, provoked by the pleasant warmth of Tenedos wine, echo from the tavern. The horses, impatient, become agitated: Karagöz, dragged about by all four creatures, calls the passers-by to his aid, and demonstrates that he's the victim of a painful error. He is freed, and set back on his feet. At this moment, the wife of his friend exits their house to visit the baths. He has no time to hide, and the woman's admiration bursts forth in transports that the audience comprehend perfectly.

— 'What a handsome man!' cries the lady, 'I've never seen one to compare.'

— 'Excuse me, Madame (*khanum*),' says Karagöz, always polite, 'I am not one to whom you should speak.... I am one of the night-watch, who beats on the door with my halberd to warn the public if there's a fire in the neighbourhood.'

— 'Then why are you here at this time of day?'

— ‘I’m an unfortunate sinner... though a good Muslim; I let myself be dragged to the tavern by some *giaours*. Then, I know now how, I was left dead drunk in the square: may Muhammad forgive me for having broken his law!’

— ‘Poor man!... You must be tired.... Enter the house, and rest there.’

And the lady seeks to take Karagöz’ hand as an indication of sympathy.

— ‘Don’t touch me!’ cries the latter in terror, ‘I am impure!... I could not, moreover, enter an honest Muslim house.... I have been defiled by contact with a dog.’

To understand this heroic reference to the threatened contact Karagöz mentions, it is necessary to know that the Turks, though respecting the life of dogs, and even feeding them piously, regard it as an impurity to touch them or to be touched by them.

— ‘How did that happen?’ cries the lady.

— ‘Heaven has rightly punished me; I had eaten some preserves during my dreadful nocturnal debauchery; and, when I awoke, there, on the public highway, I felt, with horror, a dog licking my face.... That is the truth; may Allah forgive me!’

Of all the methods Karagöz tries to repel the advances of his friend’s wife, this one seems to be the most effective.

— ‘Poor man!’ she says with compassion, ‘no one, in fact, can touch you till you have performed five ablutions, each of a quarter of an hour, while reciting verses from the Koran. Go to the fountain, but be here when I return from the baths.’

— ‘How bold the women of Istanbul are!’ cries Karagöz, once alone. ‘Behind the *fêredjé* which hides their faces, they are even more audacious, insulting honest people’s modesty. No, I will not let myself be taken in by her artifices, by that honeyed voice, by those eyes which glow through the holes in her gauze mask. Why do the police not force impudent women to cover their eyes, also?’

It would take too long to describe Karagöz’ other misfortunes. The comic element of the scene always lies in the situation of him being a guardian to this woman who has been entrusted to one who seems to be the complete antithesis to those in whom the Turks ordinarily place their trust. The lady returns from the baths, to find the unfortunate guardian of her virtue, whom various mishaps have kept rooted to the spot, still at his post. But she could not help speaking to the other women at the baths of the stranger so handsome and so well-made whom she has met in the street; so that a crowd of women follow their friend. One can imagine Karagöz’ embarrassment, in the grip of these latter-day Maenads.

His friend’s wife tears her clothes, tears her hair, and spares no means to combat his reticence. He is about to succumb ... when suddenly a carriage appears, parting the crowd. It is a carriage in the old French style, that of a Frankish ambassador. Karagöz seizes this last chance; he begs the ambassador to take him under his protection, and let him enter his carriage to escape the temptations that besiege him. The ambassador descends; he is wearing a very gallant costume: a tricorn hat over an immense wig, an embroidered coat and waistcoat, short breeches, and a sheathed sword; he declares to the ladies that Karagöz is under his protection,

that he is indeed his best friend The latter embraces him effusively and hastens to enter the carriage, which vanishes, bearing away with it the dreams of the desolate bathers.

The husband returns and congratulates himself on learning that Karagöz' chastity has preserved his wife's purity. The play is thus a triumph of friendship.

I would have offered less of a description of the play, if it did not present a view of the customs of the country. Given the ambassador's costume, one judges that it dates back to the last century, and is played like our traditional harlequinades. Karagöz is ever a prominent actor in these farces, in which however he does not always take the leading role. I have reason to believe that the customs of Constantinople have changed since the Reform, but, in the eras which preceded the advent of Sultan Mahmud II, one may readily believe that the weaker sex protested in their own way against their oppression, which might explain the readiness with which women yield to Karagöz' merits.

In modern plays containing this character, he almost always belongs to the political opposition. He is either the mocking bourgeois, or the common man whose common-sense counters the actions of the lesser authorities. At the time when the regulations ordered, for the first time, that one could not wander about without a lantern after nightfall, Karagöz appeared with a lantern, suspended in a most striking manner, mocking the powers that be, and with impunity, since the order failed to dictate that the lantern must contain a candle. Arrested by the *cavasse* and released, according to the legal correctness of that observation, he reappeared on stage with a lantern adorned with a candle he'd neglected to light.... This jest is similar to that in the popular tale re-told by Jean de Falaise (*Charles-Philippe, Marquis de Chennevières-Pointel*, see his *Contes Normands*); which proves that people are the same everywhere. Karagöz shares that frankness; he always defies the stake, the sabre, and the rope.

After the intermission, during which the audience's tobacco and varied refreshments were replenished, we suddenly saw the gauze screen, behind which the puppets had performed, lowered, and human actors appeared on the stage to present *The Husband of Two Widows*. There were roles for three women and only one man; however, there were only male actors to play them; though, in female costume, the young oriental men, with a most feminine grace, delicacy of movement, and intrepidity in mimicry, which one would not see among us, succeeded in producing a complete effect. The actors are usually Greeks or Circassians.

First, a Jewess appeared, one who dealt in female fashions, and encouraged the intrigues of the women to whose presence she was admitted. She was counting the money she had earned, and hoping to make even more from a new affair she was involved in, being allied to a young Turk named Osman, in love with a rich widow, the principal wife of a *bimbachi* (*colonel*) who had been killed in the war. Since the woman was able to remarry after three months of widowhood, it was believed that the lady would choose the lover she had already favoured during her husband's lifetime, and who had several times offered her, via the Jewess, bouquets emblematic of his attentions.

So, the latter hastened to introduce to the house the fortunate Osman, whose presence in the house was now without risk.

Osman trusts it will not be long before *the fire is lit*, and urges his lover to comply.... but, oh ingratitude, or rather the eternal caprice of women! She refuses to consent to the marriage, unless Osman promises to marry the *bimbachi*'s second wife as well.

— 'By *Shaitan (the Devil)*!' cries Osman to himself, 'to marry two women is a more serious business.... 'But, light of my eyes,' he says to the widow, 'what could have given you this idea? It is a strange requirement.'

— 'I'll explain,' says the widow. 'I'm young and beautiful, as you are forever telling me.... Well, there is in this house a woman less beautiful than I, older too, who, by a ruse, was made love to, then married, by my late husband. She imitated me in everything, and ended up pleasing him more than me.... Well, certain as I am of your affection, I desire that in marrying me you should also take this ugly creature as your second wife. She has made me suffer so much by the power that her ruse gave her over the weak mind of my husband, that I want her from now on to weep and suffer, on seeing me preferred, and finding herself the object of your disdain... so she might be, in the end, as unhappy as I have been.'

— 'Madame,' Osman replies, 'the picture you paint of this woman does her no favour in my eyes. I gather she is very disagreeable ... and that to the happiness of marrying you would be added the inconvenience of a second union which may embarrass me greatly.... You know that, according to the law of the Prophet, the husband must treat each of his wives *equally*, whether he takes but two or as many as four ... which I shall refrain from doing.'

— 'Well, I made a vow to Fatima (*the daughter of the prophet*), and I will only marry a man who will do as I say.'

— 'Madame, I ask your permission to reflect on it.... How unhappy I am!'... says Osman to himself, once he's alone, 'To marry two women, one of whom is beautiful and the other ugly. One must taste the bitter to arrive at the sweet.'

The Jewess returns, and he informs her of his position.

— 'What are you saying?' says the former, 'the second wife is charming! Never listen to a woman who speaks of her rival. True, the one you love is blonde and the other brunette. But, do you dislike brunettes?'

— 'I?' the lover exclaims. 'I have no such prejudice.'

— 'Well,' says the Jewess, 'are you afraid of wedding two equally charming women? For, though different in complexion, they are as lovely as one another.... I know what I speak of!'

— 'If you're telling the truth,' Osman replies, 'the law of the prophet which obliges every husband to treat each of his wives equally will prove less harsh indeed.'

— 'You shall see her,' says the Jewess, 'I told her you are in love with her, and that when she sees you passing in the street and halting beneath her window, it is always with her in mind.'

Osman hastens to reward the clever messenger, and soon the second widow of the *bimbachi* enters. She is beautiful, indeed, though a little dark of complexion. She appears flattered by the attentions of the young man and does not shrink from marriage.

— ‘You loved me in silence,’ she says, ‘and I was informed that you did not declare yourself out of shyness.... I was touched by this feeling. Now I am free and desire to reward your wish. Send for the *cadi*.’

— ‘That is easy to do,’ says the Jewess, ‘only, this unfortunate young man owes money to the *great lady* (*the first wife*).

— ‘What!’ cries the second, ‘that ugly, wicked creature is engaged in usury?’

— ‘Alas, yes!... And it was I who got involved in this matter, eager as always to render service to youth. This poor boy was saved from a poor situation, thanks to my intervention, and, as he cannot return the money, the *khanum* will only release him from the debt in exchange for his marrying her.’

— ‘Sadly, that’s the truth,’ says the young man.

(*The first wife appears*).

— ‘But think what pleasure you’ll take,’ says the Jewess to her, in an aside, ‘in seeing that cunning woman scorned and disdained by the man who loves you!’

It is in the nature of a proud woman, convinced of her superiority, to credit that such must be the result.

The contract is signed. From then on, the question is which of the two women will be pre-eminent. The Jewess brings the happy Osman a bouquet, to signify which of them the new husband will choose on the wedding-night. An embarrassment, indeed: each of the women holds out her hand to receive the token of preference. But, as he hesitates between the blonde and the brunette, a great noise fills the house; the slaves run about in fright, saying they have seen a ghost. Drama ensues. The *bimbachi* enters the scene equipped with a stick. The previous husband, so little regretted, had not been killed as was thought. He was merely missing in action, which had caused him to be counted as dead, while in fact he had merely been held prisoner. A peace treaty between the Russians and the Turks has seen him return him to his homeland ... and the objects of his affection. He soon comprehends the scene taking place, and administers a volley of blows with his stick to all those present. The two women, the Jewess, and the lover, flee after the first blows, while the *cadi*, less agile, is beaten on behalf of all, to the enthusiastic applause of the audience.

Such is the scene, the moral outcome of which delights all husbands present at the performance.

These two pieces give an idea of the state of dramatic art as it is found still in Turkey. It is impossible not to recognise that feeling for primitive comedy found in Greek and Latin theatre. But, here, the drama has advanced no further. The organisation of Muslim society is a barrier to the establishment of serious theatrical art. Theatre is impossible without female performers, and, however hard one tried, one would never be able to induce their husbands to allow them to appear in public. The puppets, even the actors who appear in the performances of the cafés, serve only to amuse the regulars of these establishments, who are usually not very generous.... The rich man pays for performances to be given in his home. He invites his friends; his wives invite their acquaintances; and the performance takes place in the largest room of the house.

So that it is impossible to establish a professional theatre, except it be in the homes of great personages. The Sultan himself, though fond of dramatic performances, has no dedicated theatre in the palace; It often happens that the ladies of the seraglio, hearing of some brilliant performance which has been given at the theatre in Pera, wish to enjoy it in their turn, and the Sultan then hastens to engage the troupe for one or more evenings.

Then, a temporary stage is immediately constructed at the Summer Palace, attached to one of the building's façades. The windows of the *qadens* (*ladies*) which are closely barred, become boxes, from which bursts of laughter or signs of approval sometimes arise; and the amphitheatre-shaped room between these boxes and the theatre is filled only with male guests, diplomatic figures, and others invited to such theatrical festivities.

The Sultan recently desired that a Molière comedy be performed before him: it was the comic-ballet *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*; the effect was immense. His interpreters explained the action on stage, as it transpired, to the folk at court who had no French. But it should be recognised that most Turkish statesmen know our language more or less, since, as we know, French is, at present, the universal diplomatic language. Turkish officials, in order to correspond with foreign ones, are obliged to use our language. This explains the existence in Paris of Turkish and Egyptian language-schools.

As for the women of the seraglio, they are well-educated: every lady belonging to the Sultan's household receives serious instruction in history, poetry, music, painting and geography. Many of these ladies are artists or poets, and one often hears in Pera verses, or lyrical fragments, owed to the talent of these charming recluses.

Chapter 4: The Water Drinkers

Pause for a moment, to consider that performance in Sérasquier Square, that drama which is presented in all the poorer districts, and which everywhere takes on a mystical hue quite inexplicable to Europeans. Who, on reflection, is Karagöz, that extraordinary character, blending fantasy with obscenity, who only appears publicly at religious festivals? Is he not a stray memory of the god of Lampsacus, Priapus, the universal begetter, for whom Asia still mourns?...

On leaving the café, I walked about in the square, thinking of what I'd seen. Feeling thirsty, I sought out the drink stalls.

In this country where fermented or spirituous liquors are not permitted to be sold outside, one notes a curious industry, that of the water-sellers, who exercise their trade by the measure, and by the glass.

These unusual tavern-keepers have stalls where a host of vases and cups are displayed filled with more or less sought-after types of water. In Constantinople, water is supplied via the Aqueduct of Valens, and is retained in reservoirs built by the Byzantine emperors, where it

often acquires an unpleasant taste.... So much so, that due to the rarity of the element, a host of water-drinkers are established in Constantinople, true *gourmets* as regards that precious liquid.

In these taverns, water from various countries, and of differing age, is sold. Nile-water is the most highly regarded, since it is the only one the Sultan will drink; it is part of the tribute pledged to him by Alexandria. It is reputed to be favourable to fertility. Euphrates-water, a little green, a little harsh to the taste, is recommended for weak or febrile natures. Danube-water, loaded with salts, pleases those of an energetic temperament. Water from several vintages may be found. Nile-water from 1833 is much appreciated, corked and sealed in bottles that are sold at a very high price....

A European uninitiated in the dogma of Muhammad is not by nature a fanatic where water is concerned. I remember hearing a Swedish doctor, in Vienna, maintain that water was a kind of *stone*, a simple crystal in its natural state, as ice, and only liquefied, in sub-polar climates, by relatively intense atmospheric heat; one incapable, however, of melting other *stones*. To corroborate his doctrine, he carried out chemical experiments on the various waters of rivers, lakes, and springs, and demonstrated that the residue produced by evaporation, contains substances harmful to human health. It is as well to say that the doctor's principal aim, in deprecating the use of water, was his acquiring from the government the privilege of overseeing the imperial brewery. Klemens von Metternich seems to have been impressed by his reasoning. Besides, as a great producer of wine himself, it was in his interest to adopt the idea.

Whatever the scientific truth of this hypothesis, it left a strong impression on me: I had no wish to swallow liquified stone. The Turks manage it, it is true; but to how many special diseases, fevers, plagues and various scourges are they not exposed!

Such were the thoughts that prevented me from indulging in that refreshment. I left the amateurs to their debauchery, sampling waters of various ages and rarity, and halted in front of a display where glittering flasks appeared to contain lemonade. I bought one for a Turkish piastre (*twenty-five centimes*). As soon as I raised it to my mouth, I was obliged to regurgitate the first mouthful. The merchant laughed at my innocence (I will say, later, what this drink was!) and I was obliged to return to Ildiz-Khan, to seek more agreeable refreshment.

Daylight had come, and the Persians, having returned earlier, had been asleep for a long time. As for myself, excited by this night of wandering and spectacle, I had trouble falling asleep. In the end, I dressed again, and returned to Pera to seek my artist friend.

I was told that he had moved and was living in Kuruçesme, with some Armenians who had commissioned a religious painting from him. Kuruçesme is located on the European shore of the Bosphorus, a few miles from Pera. I was obliged to take a caique from the Tophane landing-stage.

Nothing is more charming than this maritime quay in the Frankish city. One descends from Pera by steep streets terminating in the main throughfare, where one passes the various consulates and embassies; one finds oneself in a market place cluttered with fruit stalls, where the magnificent produce of the coast of Asia-Minor is piled high. There are cherries at well-nigh every season, being a natural product of these climes. Watermelons, cactus-figs and grapes marked the season in which we now were — and Casaba melons, the finest in the world, from

Smyrna, offered every passer-by a simple and delicious lunch. What distinguishes this square is an admirable fountain in the ancient Turkish taste, adorned with carved porticoes, supported by sculpted and painted columns and arabesques. Around the square and in the street leading to the quay, there is a large number of cafes on the facades of which I could still distinguish unlit gauze lamps — which bore in gold letters that name, Karagöz, beloved of the folk here as in Istanbul.

Although Tophane is part of the Frankish quarter, it employs many Muslims, mostly as porters (*hamals*), or boatmen (*caïdjis*). A battery comprising six cannon is prominently displayed on the quay; the cannon serve to salute vessels entering the Golden Horn, and to announce sunrise and sunset to the three areas of the city separated by water: Pera (*Beyoğlu*), Istanbul, and Scutari (*Üsküdar*).

The latter appears, majestically, on the far side of the Bosphorus, piercing the azure with domes, minarets and kiosks, like to its rival Istanbul.

I had no difficulty in finding a twin-oared vessel. The weather was magnificent, and the boat, slender and light, began to cut the water with extraordinary speed — the respect Muslims hold for various creatures explains why the Bosphorus canal, which pierces, like a river, the rich slopes of Europe and Asia, is always covered with water-birds which flutter or swim, in their thousands, on the blue water, and thus enliven the wide perspective of palaces and villas.

From Tophane, the two shores, much closer in appearance than they actually are, present for many a mile a continuous line of houses painted in bright colours, enhanced by ornamentation and gilded grilles.

A series of colonnades, half a mile or more in length, soon appears on the left bank. These are the buildings of the new palace in Besiktas. They are entirely in the Greek style and white-washed; the grilles are gilded. All the chimneys are in the form of Doric columns, granting the whole an appearance at once splendid and graceful. Gilded boats are moored to the quays, whose marble steps descend to the water. Immense gardens occupy the undulations of the hills above. Umbrella-pines dominate the other vegetation everywhere. There are no-palm tree groves, since the climate of Constantinople is already too cold for them. A village, its harbour furnished with these large boats called *caïques*, succeeds the palace; then one passes in front of an old seraglio, the very one which the Sultana Esma, half-sister of Mahmud II, last occupied. It is in the Turkish style of the last century: with festoons and rockeries as ornamentation, and kiosks, decorated with trefoils and arabesques, which project like enormous cages with golden bars and grilles, pointed roofs, and little columns painted in bright colours.... I dreamt for a while, as we passed, of the mysteries of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

In a caïque, the passenger lies on a mattress at the stern, while the rowers, with robust arms and bronzed shoulders, coquettishly dressed in wide silk-crepe shirts with satin bands, strive to plough the waves. They are most polite, and even affect poses during their labours displaying a sort of artistic grace.

Skirting the European coast of the Bosphorus, one sees a long line of country houses generally inhabited by employees of the Sultan. Finally, a new harbour filled with boats presents itself; it is Kuruçesme.

I retained the boatmen, to return me to Pera in the evening as is customary; they entered a café, while I, entering the village, thought I was inside some painting by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps. The sun's rays everywhere traced out luminous diamond-shapes on the painted shopfronts, and whitewashed walls; the glaucous green of the vegetation here and there brought relief to eyes tired of the light. I visited a tobacconist to buy some *latakia* (*tobacco from Latakia*), and inquired there about the Armenian house where my friend could be found.

I was answered in an amiable manner. In fact, the family with whom the French artist was currently lodging, was that of some notable Armenian personages. I was accompanied to their door, and soon found the artist, who was installed in a magnificent room that resembled that of the Turkish café (*Jardin Turc*) on the Boulevard du Temple, whose oriental decor is more exact than one might think.

Several French people, including several attachés of the French embassy, a Belgian prince, and the Hospodar of Wallachia, who had come for the festivities in Constantinople were gathered there, admiring various cartoons for frescoes designed by the painter. We visited the chapel, where one could already see the greater part of the planned work. An immense painting, representing the Adoration of the Magi, filled the background to the rear of where the high altar was to be erected. The paintings at the sides, alone, were still merely sketched there.... The family who had contracted the work, owning several residences in Constantinople and in the countryside, had granted the artist the run of the whole house, along with the valets and the horses, who were equally at his command; that being so, he suggested that we went for a walk in the surrounding area. There was a Greek festival at Arnavutköy, located a few miles from there; and, as it was a Friday (*the Turkish equivalent of Sunday*), we might, by going a few miles further and crossing the Bosphorus, visit the 'Eaux Douces d'Asie' (*the 'Sweet Waters of Asia', Küçüksu Deresi, the Göksu River*).

Although the Turks generally sleep all day during the month of Ramadan, they are not obliged to do so by religious law, but simply choose to avoid thinking about food, since they are forbidden to eat before sunset. On Fridays, they rise from their couches, and take a walk, as usual, in the countryside, principally to the 'Eaux-Douces d'Europe' (*the 'Sweet Waters of Europe', near the suburb of Eyüp, being the Kağıthane Suyu and Alibeyköy Suyu basins*) situated at the extremity of the Golden Horn (*Haliç*), or to those of Asia, the goal of our excursion.

We began by visiting Arnavutköy, where the festival had not yet begun; except that, there were many people there already, including a great number of peripatetic tradesmen. In a narrow valley, shaded by pine and larch-trees, enclosures and scaffolding had been built for the dances, and performances. The central area of the festival arena was a grotto decorated with a fountain dedicated to Elijah, the water of which begins flowing each year only on a certain saint's day whose name I have forgotten. Glasses of this water are distributed to all the faithful who present themselves. Several hundred Greek women crowded round the holy fountain; but the hour of the miracle had not yet arrived. Others were walking in the shade, or gathered on the lawns. I recognised among them the four beautiful women I had already seen in the gaming-house at Saint Demetrios; they no longer wore the various costumes which presented, to the spectator there, the ideal of the four female types to be found in Constantinople; only, they were heavily

made up, and wore beauty-spots. An elderly woman guided them; the bright light of the sun was less favourable to them than that of the lamps had been. The embassy attachés seemed to have been acquainted with them for some long while; they began to converse with them, and had a selection of sorbets brought to them.

Chapter 5: The Pasha of Scutari (*Üsküdar*)

While we were resting under an enormous sycamore tree, a Turk of mature age, in a fez with a blue silk tassel, and buttoned up in a long, frock-coat decorated with a small, almost-unnoticeable *nishan* (*medal*), had seated himself on the bench which encircled the tree. He had as companion a young boy, dressed like a diminutive form of himself, who greeted us with the gravity usually displayed by Turkish children when, having emerged from childhood, they are no longer under the supervision of their mothers. The Turk, hearing us praise his son's bearing, greeted us in turn, and called to a *cafedji* who was standing near the fountain. A moment later, we were pleasantly surprised to see pipes and refreshments brought, which the stranger asked us to accept. We were hesitating, when the café owner said:

— 'You may accept; it is a great personage who shows his politeness thus; he is the Pasha of Scutari. One never refuses a Pasha anything.'

I was surprised to be the only person precluded from the offering; my friend pointed this out to the *cafedji*, who replied:

— 'I never serve *kafirs* (*unbelievers*).'

— 'Kafir!' I cried, it being an insult, 'you are a kafir yourself, son of a dog!'

I had failed to realise that the man, apparently a faithful *Sunni* Muslim, had been provoked to insult simply by the Persian costume that I was wearing, which showed me to be a follower of Ali, and thus a *Shiite*.

We exchanged a few sharp comments, for one should never yield the aggressor the last word in the East; otherwise, you may be thought timid, and be assaulted, while only the gravest of insults result in one or the other triumphing in the minds of those present. However, while the Pasha looked on in astonishment, my companions, who had at first laughed at the error, confirmed that I was a Frank. I only mention this to highlight the fanaticism which still exists among the lower orders, and which, restrained as regards Europeans, is always exercised forcefully between the different sects. Moreover, things are almost the same among the Christians: the Roman Catholics hold the Turks in greater esteem than they do the Greeks.

The Pasha laughed heartily at the adventure and began to converse with the artist. After the festivities, we re-embarked with him; and, as our boats had to pass in front of the Sultan's summer palace on the coast of Asia Minor, he permitted us a visit.

This summer seraglio, which should not be confused with that on the European coast, is the most delightful residence in the world. Immense terraced gardens rise to the summit of the

hills, from which one can clearly see Scutari on the right, and, in the background, the bluish silhouette of the Olympus of Bithynia (*Mount Uludağ, in Bursa*). The palace is in eighteenth century style. Before entering, we had to replace our boots with the slippers that were lent us; then we were admitted to the apartments of the Sultanas, empty, naturally, at that moment.

The lower rooms are built on stilts, mostly of rare wood; we were told that some were of agarwood (*oudh*), which is more resistant to the effects of sea-water. After visiting the vast rooms on the ground floor, which are not used, we were shown the apartments. There was, a large room, at the centre, onto which opened about twenty others with separate doors, as in bathing establishments.

We were able to enter these rooms, uniformly furnished with a divan, a few chairs, a mahogany chest of drawers, and a marble fireplace surmounted by a column clock. One would have thought oneself in the bedroom of a Parisian woman, if the furniture had been completed by a western-style bed; but, in the Orient, only divans are employed.

Each of these rooms was that of a *qaden*. The symmetry and uniformity of the rooms struck me: I was informed that the most perfect equality reigned among the Sultan's wives.... The artist offered me this fact as proof: that when His Highness ordered boxes of sweets from Pera, usually bought from a French confectioner, the shop was obliged to make them up with exactly the same number of items in each. One more papillote or candied-fruit of a particular shape, fewer or more pastilles or sugared-almonds, might cause serious complications in the relationships between these beautiful people; like all Muslims, whoever they may be, they possess a strong sense of equality.

A musical-clock was demonstrated to us in the main hall, which played airs from Italian operas. Mechanical birds, nightingales which sang, and peacocks which spread their tails enlivened the appearance of this little artefact. On the second floor were the lodgings of the *odaleuk* (*odalisques*), either singers or servants. Higher up the slaves were lodged. An order exists in the harem similar to that of well-kept boarding houses. The oldest *qaden* exercises the principal authority, but is always ranked below the Sultana Mother, whom she must consult, from time to time, by visiting her at the Old Palace (*Eski Saray*), in Istanbul.

This is what I have been able to grasp of the internal affairs of the seraglio. Everything is generally much simpler and more honest than the depraved imaginations of Europeans suppose. The question of multiple wives among the Turks is related to nothing other than the need for reproduction. The Caucasian race, so beautiful, so energetic, has diminished greatly by one of those physiological facts the reasons for which are difficult to establish. The wars of the last century especially have reduced the population, particularly the Turkish population. The very courage of the men has decimated them, as happened with the Frankish peoples of the Middle Ages.

The Sultan seems most willing, for his part, to repopulate the Turkish empire, if one considers the number of births of princes and princesses announced to the city from time to time by the sound of cannon, and by the illumination of Istanbul.

We were then shown the cellars, the kitchens, the reception rooms, and the concert hall; everything is arranged in such a way that the women can view, without being seen, all the

entertainments ordered by the Sultan. Everywhere we notice grilled platforms projecting into the rooms, which allow the ladies of the harem to associate themselves deliberately with the Sultan's politics or pleasures.

We admired the baths, built of marble, and the private mosque of the palace. Then we were led forth via a peristyle overlooking the gardens, decorated with columns, and enclosed by a glazed gallery which contained shrubs, plants, and flowers from India. Thus, Constantinople, cool because of its mountainous position and the frequent storms over the Black Sea, possesses greenhouses of tropical plants just like our northern countries.

We returned through the gardens, and were shown into a pavilion where samples of garden fruits and preserves was laid out. The Pasha invited us to this feast, but ate nothing himself, since the moon of Ramadan had not yet risen. We were almost embarrassed by his politeness, and at being able to acknowledge it only in words.

— 'You will be able to say,' he replied in answer to our thanks, 'that you dined with the Sultan!'

Without exaggerating the honour of such a gracious reception, one may at least see from it something of the benevolence of the Turks, and their almost complete neglect, these days, of religious prejudice.

Chapter 6: The Dervishes

Having sufficiently admired the apartments and gardens of the seraglio of Asia, we abandoned our plan to visit the Eaux-Douces d'Asie, which would have obliged us to ascend the Bosphorus for a few miles, and, finding ourselves near Scutari, chose to visit the convent of the howling Dervishes.

Scutari is more a city of Muslim orthodoxy than Istanbul, where the population is of mixed origin, and which belongs to Europe's orbit. Asiatic Scutari still adheres to the old Turkish traditions; the costumes of the Reform are almost unknown there; green or white turbans are obstinately displayed; it is, in a word, the Saint-Germain-des-Prés of Constantinople. The houses, fountains and mosques are of an older style; the new inventions of sanitation, surfaced streets, stone pavements, lanterns, and horse-drawn carriages, which are seen in Istanbul, are considered here as dangerous innovations. Scutari is the refuge of those old-style Muslims who, convinced that European Turkey will soon fall prey to Christianity, wish to assure themselves a peaceful grave in Anatolian soil. They trust the Bosphorus will act as the border between two empires and two religions, and that they will thereafter enjoy complete security in their Asia-Minor.

Scutari possesses nothing of note except its great mosque, and the cemetery with its gigantic cypresses; its towers, kiosks, fountains and hundreds of minarets would not otherwise distinguish it from the other Turkish city. The monastery of the *howling* Dervishes is located a

short distance from the mosque; it is of a more ancient architecture than the *tekeh* of the Dervishes of Pera, who are *whirling* Dervishes.

The Pasha, who had accompanied us to the city, wished to dissuade us from visiting these monks, whom he termed madmen; but the curiosity of travellers is to be respected. He understood this, and left us there, inviting us to return and visit him.

The Dervishes have this peculiarity, that they are more tolerant than many a religious institution. The orthodox Muslims, obliged to accept their corporate existence, can do nothing except tolerate them in turn.

The people love and support them; their exaltation, their good humour, their accommodating behaviour, and their principles please the crowd more than the severe formality of the imams and mullahs. The latter treat them as pantheists, and often attack their doctrines, without however being able to convict them of absolute heresy.

There are two systems of philosophy which form the basis of Turkish religion and the instruction which flows from it. One is entirely Aristotelian, the other entirely Platonic. The Dervishes are attached to the latter. We should not be surprised at this relationship between the Muslims and the Greeks, since we ourselves know the later philosophical writings of the ancient world only through their translations.

That the Dervishes are pantheists, as the true Osmanlis claim, does not prevent them from possessing incontestable religious title. They were established, they say, in their houses and privileges by Orhan Ghazi, the second Sultan of the Turks. The masters who founded their orders were seven in number, a most Pythagorean number which indicates the source of their ideas. Their generic name is *Mevlevis*, from the name of the first founder (*Mevlana* or 'the Master', the poet Rumi); as for *dervish* or *derwisch*, it means a *beggar*. They are basically a sect of Muslim communalists.

Many belong to the *Munasihi*, who believe in the transmigration of souls. According to them, every man who is not worthy of being reborn in human form enters, after death, the body of the creature which most resembles him in character or temperament. The void which this emigration of human souls would leave is filled by the souls of those creatures found to be worthy, by reason of their intelligence or fidelity, of rising in the animal scale. This sentiment, which obviously belongs to the Indian tradition, explains the various pious foundations made in monasteries and mosques in favour of animals; for they are respected inasmuch as they might have once been human and are capable of becoming so. This explains why no Muslim eats pork, because this animal appears, by its form and appetites, closer to the human species.

The *eschrakis* or enlightened ones apply themselves to the contemplation of God through numbers, forms and colours. They are, in general, more reserved, kinder, and more elegant than the others. They are preferred as instructors, and seek to develop the strength of their pupils by exercises of vigour or grace. Their doctrines clearly derive from the teachings of Pythagoras and Plato. They are poets, musicians and artists.

There are also among them *hairetis* or 'astonished' ones, from whose name perhaps the word heretic derives, who represent the spirit of scepticism or agnosticism. They are in truth Epicureans. They posit as a principle that falsehood cannot readily be distinguished from truth,

and that it is imprudent to seek to dissect any idea whatsoever via the subtleties of flawed human reasoning. Passion can deceive and embitter and render one unjust as regards good and evil; so that one must abstain and say: ' *wa-Allahu A'alam... nahn la naerif!* Allah knows... we do not,' or, 'God indeed knows what is best!'

Those are the three philosophical opinions dominating there, as almost everywhere, though, among the Dervishes, that fact does not engender the hatred which these opposing principles generally excite in human society; the *eschrakis*, spiritual dogmatists, live in peace with the *munasihi*, material pantheists, and the *hairetis*, sceptics who take care not to exhaust their lungs debating with others. Each live in their own way and according to their temperament, some by eating immoderately, others drinking heavily or using narcotic stimulants, still others simply through their affections. The Dervishes are favoured beings, par excellence, among Muslims, provided that their private virtues, enthusiasm and devotion are recognised by their brethren.

The holiness which the Dervishes profess; their poverty, embraced in principle, and in practice sometimes only relieved by voluntary gifts of the faithful; the patience and modesty which are their common qualities, place them as much above other men morally, as they by nature place themselves below. Dervishes can drink wine and spirits if they are offered, though they are not allowed to buy anything. If, when passing through the street, the Dervish desires a curious object, some ornament displayed in a shop, the owner usually gifts it to him or lets him simply take it. On meeting a woman, a Dervish who is respected by the people may approach her without being rendered impure. It is true that this no longer happens in the larger cities these days, where the police are poorly educated as regards the characters of Dervishes; but the principle which allows these liberties is that the man who abandons everything should be granted everything, since, his virtue being that of rejecting all possession, that of the faithful believer should be to compensate him for it with gifts and offerings.

By the same token, the Dervishes, possessing special sanctity, have the right to dispense with the journey to Mecca; they may eat pork and hare, and even touch dogs; which is forbidden to other Turks, despite the reverence they all have for the memory of that dog belonging to the Seven Sleepers (*see the Koran: Sura XVIII, Al Kafh*).

When we entered the courtyard of the *tekeh*, we saw a large number of these animals to whom serving brothers were distributing the evening meal. There are old and highly respected foundations which fund this. The walls of the courtyard, planted with acacias and plane-trees, were decorated here and there with small painted and sculpted wooden boxes suspended at a certain height, like embossed panels. These were dedicated to nesting birds which, were at liberty to take possession of them, at random.

The performance given by the howling Dervishes offered me no new experience, since I had already seen similar in Cairo. These fine people spend several hours dancing, while stamping their feet hard on the ground, round a pole decorated with garlands, which is called a *saariya*; this produces an effect somewhat like a continual farandole. They sing, with various intonations, an eternal litany whose refrain is: *Allah hay!* that is to say 'The living God!' The public is admitted to these sessions, and seat themselves in tall stands adorned with wooden balustrades. After an hour of this exercise, some of them enter into a state of excitation which renders them *majzub* (*inspired*). They roll on the ground, and are possessed by beatific visions.

Those we saw in this performance wore their hair long, beneath felt caps in the shape of upturned flower-pots; their robes were white with black buttons; they are called *kadiri* (*Qadiriyya Sufis*) from the name of their founder (*Abdul Qadir Gilani*).

One of the assistants told us that he had seen the performances of the Dervishes of the Pera *tekeh*, who are whirling Dervishes. As at Scutari, one enters an immense wooden room, dominated by galleries and stands to which the public are freely admitted; though it is appropriate to leave a small offering. At the Pera *tekeh*, all the Dervishes wear white robes pleated like the Greek *fustanella*. Their task is, in public sessions, to whirl about for as long as possible. They are dressed all in white; their leader alone is dressed in blue. Every Tuesday and Friday, the session begins with a sermon, after which all the Dervishes bow before the superior, then take positions throughout the room so as to be able to whirl separately without touching one another. Their white skirts fly, their heads in their felt headdresses turn, and each of these religious performers takes on the appearance of a wheel. Some of them perform melancholy airs on reed flutes. The *whirlers* as well as to the *howlers* reach a certain moment of exaltation, are electrified so to speak, and achieve a specific state of ecstasy.

No one with any classical knowledge should be surprised at these strange practices. The Dervishes represent an uninterrupted tradition stretching back to the Greek Kabiri, Dactyls, and Corybantes, the adherents of which have danced and howled for many a century on this same ancient shore. Their convulsive movements, aided by drink and intoxicating substances, transport them to a peculiar state where Allah, moved by love, consents to reveal himself through sublime dreams, in a foretaste of paradise.

As we descended from the Dervish monastery to return to the jetty, we could see the moon rising to illuminate, on our left, the immense cypresses of the Scutari cemetery and, on the heights above, the houses, with gleaming paint and gilding, of the upper town of Scutari (*Üsküdar*), which is called the *Golden City* (*founded by the Greeks and named Chrysopolis*).

The Sultan's summer palace (*Beylerbeyi*), which we had visited during the day, showed clearly on the right by the shore, its scalloped walls painted white and bordered with pale gilding. We crossed the market-place; the caique, in twenty minutes, brought us to Tophane, on the European shore.

Seeing Scutari, and its cemetery's long avenues of yews and cypresses, silhouetted on a distant horizon pierced by bluish mountains, I remembered these phrases from Byron's works;

'O Scutari! Above ten thousand graves, your white mansions tower — while over them rise your evergreen cypresses, tall and sombre, whose foliage speaks of endless grief — of some unrequited love!' (*A free paraphrase of Byron's 'The Bride of Abydos, Canto I: XXVIII'*)

Part XV: Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*) – The Storytellers: Chapters 1 to 3



The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba, 1830 - 1836, Claude Lorrain
[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1836-V-1)

Foreword (*A Tale in the Café*)

I would convey only a faint idea of the pleasures of Constantinople during Ramadan and of the principal charms of its nights, if I were to pass over in silence the marvellous tales recited, or declaimed, by the professional storytellers attached to the principal cafés of Istanbul. To translate one of these legends is at the same time to increase one's understanding of a literature that is both learned and popular, and which frames, spiritually, tradition and religious legend considered from the Islamic point of view.

I was considered, in the eyes of the Persians who had taken me under their protection, to be a *taleb* (a learned man); and they introduced me, therefore, to various cafés situated behind the mosque of Bayezit, ones in which opium smokers used to gather. Today, such opium

consumption is forbidden; but foreign merchants in Turkey frequent from habit this area far from the tumult of the central districts.

Here one seats oneself, requests that a hookah or a chibouk be brought, and listens to stories that, like our newspaper serials, continue for as long as possible, a process which is clearly in the interests of the cafe owner and the narrator.

Although I began studying Oriental languages at a very young age, here I only know the core vocabulary; however, the animation of the story interested me as always, and, with the help of my friends from the caravanserai, I was able to at least obtain an idea of the subject.

I can therefore render the content, roughly, of one of those pictorial narratives in which the traditional genius of the Orientals delights. It is best to say that the café we occupied was situated in the working-class district of Istanbul which borders the bazaars. In the surrounding streets are the workshops of blacksmiths, metal-chasers, and engravers, who make or repair the fine weapons exhibited at the *Besestain*; of those who work iron and copper utensils; and of those of various other trades related to the varied merchandise displayed in the numerous divisions of the great bazaar. Therefore, the café's customers would seem, to our worldly folk, somewhat coarse. However, a few neatly-dressed individuals were noticeable here and there, on the benches and platforms.

In Turkey, the sense of equality exists, sincerely, among all, and is supported, in that everyone has a summary education, adequate enough for grasping artistic sentiment and gaining understanding — such education is obligatory, and people of all classes send their children to study for years in the mosques, where they are educated free of charge — so one is not surprised to see a man of the lowest rank reach the highest of positions, for the exercise of which he merely needs to acquire specialist knowledge.

The storyteller we were to hear appeared to be well-known. Besides the coffee drinkers, a large crowd of lesser folk were gathered outside. Silence was demanded, and a young man with a pale face, fine features, sparkling eyes, and long hair which escaped like those of the santons from under a cap of a different shape from the tarbouches or fezzi, seated himself on a stool in the space, four or five feet square, which occupied the centre of the benches. Coffee was brought him, and everyone listened religiously; for, according to custom, each part of the story was to last half an hour. These professional storytellers are not poets: they are, so to speak, rhapsodists; they arrange and develop a subject already treated in various ways, or one based on ancient legends. This is how the adventures of Antar (*Antarah ibn Shaddad*) Abou-Zayd, or Medjnoun are renewed, with a thousand additions and changes. This time, it was a story intended to glorify those ancient workers' guilds to which the Orient has given birth.

— 'Praise be to God,' he began, 'and to his favourite, Ahmad (*Muhammad*), whose black eyes shine with such sweet radiance! He is the only apostle of truth.'

Everyone cried out:

— *Amin!* (That is so!)

The History of the Queen of the Morning and Soliman, Prince of Genies

Chapter 1: Adoniram

—To serve the purposes of the great king Soliman-Ben-Daoud (*Solomon, son of David*) , his servant Adoniram had for ten years renounced sleep, pleasures, and the joys of feasting. Leader of the legions of workers who, like innumerable swarms of bees, competed to build those hives of gold, cedar, marble, and bronze that the King of Jerusalem intended for Adonai (*the Lord*) and prepared for his own greatness, the master, Adoniram, spent the nights in planning, and the days in creating, the colossal figures intended to adorn the edifice.

He had established, not far from the unfinished Temple, forges in which the hammers constantly sounded, underground foundries where liquid bronze slid along a hundred channels in the sand, and took the forms of lions, tigers, winged-dragons, cherubim, or even those strange, overwhelming genies... ancient beings, half-vanished from the memory of humankind.

More than a hundred thousand artisans subject to Adoniram carried out his vast designs: the foundrymen numbered thirty thousand; the masons and stonecutters formed an army of eighty thousand; seventy thousand labourers helped to transport the materials. Scattered in numerous battalions, carpenters scattered in the mountains felled age-old pines, even in the Scythian deserts, and cedars on the slopes of Mount Lebanon. By means of three thousand three hundred stewards, Adoniram exercised discipline and maintained order among these tribes of workmen, who carried out their tasks without confusion.

However, the restless soul of Adoniram presided with a sort of disdain over such mighty works. To accomplish one of the seven wonders of the world seemed to him a petty task. The further their labours advanced, the more evident the weakness of the human species appeared to him, and the more he groaned over the inadequacy and limited means of his contemporaries. Ardent in conceiving, more ardent in executing, Adoniram dreamed of gigantic creations; his brain, bubbling like a furnace, gave birth to sublime monstrosities, and, while his art astonished the princes of the Israelites, he alone thought pitiful the tasks to which he found himself reduced.

He was a sombre and mysterious character. The King of Tyre, who had employed him, had presented him to Soliman. But where was Adoniram's homeland? No one knew! Where was he born? A mystery. Where had he learned the elements of his profound, and varied, practical knowledge? None knew. He seemed able to create everything, divine everything, and perform everything. What was his origin? To what nation did he belong? It was a secret, and the best kept secret of all: he suffered none to question him on the matter. His misanthropy left him a stranger and a solitary amidst the lineage of Adam's children; his dazzling and audacious genius placed him above all men, who no longer felt themselves to be his brothers. He participated in the spirit of light and the genius of darkness!

Indifferent to women, who gazed on him furtively, and never spoke of him; scornful of men, who avoided his fiery gaze, he was as disdainful of the dread inspired by his imposing appearance, and by his tall and robust figure, as of the impression produced by his strange and fascinating beauty. His heart was mute; the activity of the artist alone animated his hands made to knead the world, and alone bowed his shoulders made to lift it.

If he had no friends, he had devoted slaves, and had allowed himself a companion, only the one ... a child, a young artist, from those families of Phoenicia who had, not long since, transported their sensual divinities to the eastern shores of Asia Minor. Pale of face, a meticulous artist, a docile lover of nature, this Benoni had spent his childhood in schooling, and his youth beyond Syria, on those fertile shores where the Euphrates, still a modest stream, finds on its banks only shepherds sighing out their songs in the shade of green laurels starred with roses.

One day, at the hour when the sun sets over the sea, a day when Benoni, before a block of wax, was delicately modelling a heifer, studying himself in order to replicate the elastic mobility of the muscles, his master, Adoniram, approached, contemplated for some time the almost-finished work, and frowned.

— ‘A sad labour,’ he cried, ‘born of patience, taste, and puerility!... Genius, nowhere to be found; will-power, none. The peoples of the world degenerate; and already isolation, diversity, contradiction, indiscipline, eternal instruments of the ruin of enervated peoples, paralyse their poverty-stricken imaginations. Where are my workers: my foundrymen, my stokers, my blacksmiths?... Dispersed!... These cooling furnaces should, at this hour, be resounding with the roar of flames, incessantly fanned; the earth should have received the imprints of these models kneaded by my hands. A thousand arms should be bent over the furnaces ... yet here we are alone!’

— ‘Master,’ Benoni replied gently, ‘those coarse people are not possessed of the genius that inflames you; they need rest, and the art that captivates us leaves their thoughts idle. They have taken leave for the whole of this day. The orders of our wise Soliman have obliged them to rest.... Jerusalem blossoms in celebration.

— ‘A festival! What does that matter to me? Rest!... I have never known it, myself. What enervates me is idleness! What work are we tasked with? A temple for goldsmiths, a palace for pride and voluptuousness, jewels that a firebrand might reduce to ashes. They call this: building for all eternity!... One day, attracted by the lure of vulgar gain, hordes of conquerors, conspiring against this weakened people, will in a few hours tear down its fragile edifice, and nothing will remain but a memory. Our statues will melt in the light of torches, like the snows of Lebanon when summer comes; and posterity, as it traverses these deserted hillsides, will say again: ‘It was poor and weak, that nation of Israelites!’

— ‘What, Master! So magnificent a palace such as this, ... the richest, largest, most solid temple of all....

— ‘Vanity! Vanity! As King Soliman says, in his vanity. Do you know what the children of Enoch created in the past? A work not to be named ... which frightened even the Creator: he made the earth tremble by overturning it, and, from its scattered material, Babylon was built,

... a pretty city where one could send ten chariots abreast speeding along its battlements. Do you wish to behold a monument? Do you know of the Pyramids? They will last until the day when the mountains of Qaf which surround the world collapse into the abyss. It was not the sons of Adam who raised them!

— ‘They say, however....’

— ‘They lie: the Flood left its mark on their summits. Listen: two miles from here, above the Kidron, there is a block of rock six hundred cubits square. Grant me a hundred thousand men armed with pickaxes and hammers; and from that enormous block I would carve the monstrous head of a Sphinx ... which would smile with fixed, implacable gaze upon the heavens. From the heights of the clouds, Jehovah would see it and turn pale in amazement.... That would prove a monument indeed. A hundred thousand years would pass, and the children of men would still say: ‘A great people marked its passage here.’

— ‘Lord,’ said Benoni to himself, shivering with fear, ‘from what line is this rebellious genius descended?’

— ‘These hills, which they call mountains, are merely pitiful. Again, if one laboured to set them one atop another, carving colossal figures at their corners, ... they might be worth something. At the base, one might dig a cavern large enough to house a legion of priests: they could place their ark there, with its golden cherubim and its twin tablets of stone, and Jerusalem would possess a Temple; but we are about to house God as if He were some rich *seraf* (*banker*) from Memphis....’

— ‘Your thoughts always aspire to the impossible.’

— ‘We were born too late; the world is old, and age is feeble; and so, you are right. Decadence, and decline! You yourself copy nature coldly, you busy yourself like a housewife weaving a linen veil; your stupefaction renders you, in turn, a slave to some bull, lion, horse, or tiger, and your imitative work aims to compete with no more than the cow, lioness, mare, or tigress; ... those beasts achieve, in reality, what you attempt in art, and far more, for they transmit life through form. Child, there is no art here: art is creation. When you draw one of these decorations that snake along a frieze, do you limit yourself to copying the flowers and foliage which lie close to the ground? No: you invent, you ply the stylus at the whim of your imagination, intermingling the most bizarre fantasies. Well, instead of only existing people and creatures, why do you not also seek unknown forms, nameless beings, incarnations before which humankind has recoiled, terrible couplings, figures likely to generate respect, joy, stupor or terror? Remember the ancient Egyptians, the bold, naive artists of Assyria. Did they not tear from flanks of granite those sphinxes, those cynocephali, those basalt divinities whose appearance caused the Jehovah of King David to recoil in revulsion? In gazing on those fearsome symbols, from age to age, generations will know that there once existed audacious geniuses. Did these people think only of existing forms? They scorned them, and, strong in their powers of invention, they dared to cry out to the One who created everything: ‘You did not devise these granite beings, and would never dare to animate them.’ But the fertile God of Nature has bowed you beneath the yoke: matter limits you; your degenerate genius plunges into vulgarities of form; and art is lost.’

— ‘Whence does this Adoniram arise,’ Benoni said to himself, ‘whose spirit aspires beyond humanity?’

— ‘Let us return to those amusements that are within the humble reach of our great King Soliman,’ resumed the founder, passing his hand over his broad forehead from which he swept locks of black curling hair. Here are forty-eight bronze oxen of a fairly good stature, as many lions, birds, palms, and cherubs.... All these are a little more expressive than Nature. I intend them to support a sea of bronze ten cubits long and five cubits wide, cast in a single mould, to be edged with a border of thirty cubits enriched with decoration. But I have models to complete. The mould for the basin is ready. I fear it may crack from the heat: we must hurry, yet, you see, friend, the workers are celebrating; they desert me.... a celebration, you say; what celebration? Occasioned by what?’

— The storyteller ceased his narration here; the half hour had passed. Everyone was now free to request coffee, sorbets or tobacco. A few conversations began on the merit of the details, or on the attraction that the narration promised. One of the Persians near to me observed that the story seemed to him to be taken from the *Suleymannama* of Ferdowsi.

During this *pause* — for the rest the narrator takes is so called, just as every complete vigil is called a *session* — a little boy who accompanied him went through the ranks of the crowd, holding out to each a begging bowl, which, full of coins, he brought back to the feet of his master. The latter resumed the dialogue, with Benoni’s reply to Adoniram.

Chapter 2: Balkis (*The Queen of the Morning*)

‘Several centuries before the captivity of the Israelites in Egypt, Sheba, the illustrious descendant of Abraham and Keturah, came to settle in the fortunate land that we call Yemen, where she founded a city which first bore her name, and which is known today as Marib. Sheba had a brother named Iarab, who bequeathed his name to stony Arabia. His descendants located their tents, here and there, while Sheba’s posterity continued to reign over Yemen, a rich empire which now obeyed the laws of Queen Balkis, direct heiress of Sheba, of Joktan, of the patriarch Eber... whose father had for great-great-grandfather Shem, common father of the Israelites and the Arabs.’

— ‘You sound like an Egyptian book’s preface,’ interrupted the impatient Adoniram, ‘and you drone on in the monotonous tone of Moussa-Ben-Amran (*Moses*), the prolific liberator of the race of Iacoub (*Jacob*). Men of words have thus succeeded the men of action.’

— ‘As the givers of maxims have the sacred poets. In a word, master, the Queen of the South, the princess of Yemen, the divine Balkis, comes here to consult the wisdom of the Lord Soliman, and to admire the wonders of our hands, and has entered Solyma (*Jerusalem*) this very day. Our workers following the king went to meet her, the countryside is full of people, and the workshops are deserted. I ran there among the first, saw the procession, and have returned to your side.’

— ‘Proclaim their rulers to them, and they will fly to their feet.... Idleness, servitude....’

— ‘Curiosity, above all, and you would understand, if you had seen. The stars in the sky are fewer in number than the warriors who follow the queen. Behind her appeared sixty snow-white elephants laden with towers, from which gold and silk shine: a thousand Sabaeans, skin bronzed by the sun, advanced, leading camels whose knees bent beneath the weight of the princess’s gifts and equipment. Then came the Abyssinians, lightly armed, and whose ruddy complexion resembles beaten copper. A cloud of Ethiopians, black as ebony, circled here and there, leading the horses and chariots, obeying all, and watching over everything. Then.... But what is the good of my story? You do not deign to listen.’

— ‘The Queen of the Sabaeans,’ murmured Adoniram dreamily, ‘a degenerate line, but of pure and unmixed blood.... And what does she at this court?’

— ‘Did I not say, Adoniram? She comes to view a great king, to put to the test that wisdom which is so celebrated, and ... perhaps to see it fail. She thinks, it is said, of marrying Soliman-Ben-Daoud, in the hope of obtaining heirs worthy of her lineage.’

— ‘Madness!’ the artist cried, impetuously, ‘Madness!... Slaves’ blood, blood of the vilest creatures.... it fills Soliman’s veins! Does the lioness unite with some common domesticated dog? The people have sacrificed in high places, and abandoned themselves to foreign women for so many centuries that their degenerate offspring have lost the vigour and energy of their ancestors. What is this peace-loving Soliman? The child of a war-trophy, and the old shepherd-king Daoud; and he himself, David, merely a descendant of Ruth, an exile from the country of Moab who fell at the feet of a farmer from Ephrathah (*Bethlehem*). You admire this great nation, my child: it is now only a shadow of itself, and its line of warriors is extinct. The nation, now at its zenith, approaches its fall. Peace has enervated them, luxury and voluptuousness see them preferring gold to iron, and these cunning disciples of a subtle and sensual king are now only fit for peddling their wares, and spreading usury throughout the world. And Balkis would descend to these depths of ignominy, she, the daughter of patriarchs! And you say, Benoni, she is here, do you not?... This very evening, she enters the walls of Jerusalem?’

— ‘Tomorrow is the Sabbath day. Loyal to her faith, she refuses to enter a foreign city at evening, in the absence of the sun. She has therefore had her tents pitched on the banks of the Cedron, and, despite the entreaties of the king, who came to meet her, amidst magnificent pomp, she intends to spend the night in the countryside.’

— ‘Her prudence is to be praised! She is still young?’

— ‘She can scarcely be called young now. Yet her beauty dazzles. I have gazed on her as one does the rising sun, which swiftly scorches, and forces one to lower one’s eyelids. Everyone, at sight of her, fell, prostrate; I among the others. And, rising, I bore away her image in my mind. But, O Adoniram! Night falls, and I hear the workmen returning in crowds to seek their wages; for tomorrow is the Sabbath.’

Then came many master craftsmen. Adoniram placed guards at the entrances to the workshops, and, opening his vast coffers, began to pay the workmen, who presented themselves one by one, whispering a secret word in his ear; for they were so numerous that it would have been difficult to discern the wage to which each was entitled.

In fact, on the day they were enrolled, they received a password which they were not to communicate to anyone under penalty of their lives, and in exchange swore a solemn oath. The masters shared their password; the journeymen also had theirs, which differed from that of the apprentices.

So, as they passed by Adoniram and his stewards, they pronounced their password in a low voice, and Adoniram distributed a different salary, according to their place in the hierarchy of functions.

The ceremony completed, by the light of resin torches, Adoniram, chose to spend the night working in privacy, and dismissed the young Benoni, extinguished his torch, and, reaching his underground workshop, lost himself in the shadows.

At daybreak the next day, Balkis, the Queen of the Morning, entered the eastern gate of Jerusalem with the first rays of sunlight. Awakened by the noise of her attendants, the Israelites ran to the gate, while the workmen followed the procession with noisy acclamation. Never had so many horses, nor so many camels, nor so large a cohort of white elephants led by so numerous a swarm of black Ethiopians, been seen.

Delayed by the interminable ceremony required by etiquette, the great King Soliman, having donned a dazzling costume, was extracting himself, with difficulty, from the hands of the officers of his wardrobe, when Balkis, descending to the ground at the palace vestibule, entered therein, after having saluted the sun which was already rising radiantly over the hills of Galilee.

Chamberlains, wearing turret-shaped caps, their hands armed with long golden wands, welcomed the queen, and led her, ultimately, to the room where Soliman-Ben-Daoud was seated, in the midst of his court, on a high throne from which he hastened to descend, with wise caution, to welcome his august visitor.

The two sovereigns greeted each other with all the veneration for royalty that monarchs profess, and are pleased to encourage; then they sat side by side, while slaves filed past, laden with the gifts offered by the Queen of Sheba: gold, cinnamon, and myrrh, and above all incense, in which Yemen traded widely; then elephant-tusks, bags of various spices, and precious stones. She also offered the monarch a hundred and twenty talents of pure gold.

Soliman was then of a mature age; happiness, through maintaining in him a perpetual serenity, had removed from his features the wrinkles and more melancholy imprints of deep passion. With shining lips, eyes set flush with his head and separated, as he himself had said, through the lips of the Shulamite, by a nose like an ivory tower, and a placid brow like that of Serapis, he displayed the immutable peace and ineffable quietude of a monarch satisfied with his own greatness. Soliman resembled a statue of gold, with hands and face of ivory.

His crown was of gold as was his robe; the purple of his cloak, a gift from Hiram, prince of Tyre, was embroidered with gold thread; gold glittered on his belt, and gleamed from the hilt of his sword; his golden shoes rested on a carpet trimmed with gold; while his throne was made of gilded cedar.

Seated at his side, that pale lady of the morning, wrapped in a cloud of linen fabric and diaphanous gauze, looked like a lily lost in a cluster of daffodils. A discreet coquetry, which she enhanced even further by apologising for the simplicity of her morning costume.

— ‘Simplicity of dress,’ she said, ‘befits opulence, while not dispelling grandeur.’

— ‘It becomes divine beauty,’ replied Soliman, ‘to trust in its power; and for a man, distrustful of his own weakness, to neglect nothing.’

— ‘A delightful sense of modesty which further enhances the brilliance with which shines the invincible Soliman... the Ecclesiastes, the wise man and arbiter of kings, the immortal author of the verses of *Sir-Hasirim* (*The Song of Songs*), that canticle of tender love... and of so many other flowers of poetry.’

— ‘What! Beautiful queen,’ replied Soliman, blushing with pleasure, ‘What! You have deigned to cast your eyes on ... my feeble attempts!’

— ‘You are a great poet!’ cried the Queen of Sheba.

Soliman puffed out his golden chest, raised his golden arm, and passed his hand complacently over his ebony beard, divided into several braids, and plaited with golden cords.

— ‘A great poet!’ repeated Balkis. ‘Which means that one forgives with a smile the moralist’s errors you display.’

This unexpected conclusion, deepened the lines on the august face of Soliman, and produced a sudden movement in the crowd of courtiers closest to them. Among them were Zabud, favourite of the prince, all laden with jewels; Zadok the high priest, with his son Azariah, steward of the palace, haughty as regards his inferiors; then Ahia, Elihoreph the grand chancellor, and Jehoshaphat the master of the archives ... who was a little deaf. Dressed in a dark robe, was Ahias of Shiloh, an upright man, feared because of his prophetic genius; moreover, he was a cold and taciturn source of words of mockery. Very close to the sovereign, one could see crouching, in the depths of three heaped cushions, old Benaiah, the peace-loving commander-in-chief of the tranquil armies of placid Soliman. Harnessed with chains of gold and jewelled stars, bent under the burden of his honours, Benaiah was the demi-god of war. The king had once charged him with killing Joab and Abiathar the high priest, and Benaiah had stabbed them. From that day on, he appeared to the wise Soliman worthy of the greatest trust, who charged him with assassinating his younger brother, Prince Adonijah, son of King Daud, ... and Benaiah had, indeed, slaughtered the brother of the wise Soliman.

Now, asleep in his glory, weighed down by the years, Benaiah, almost in his dotage, followed the court everywhere, heard nothing, understood nothing, and revived the remains of his failing life by warming his heart with the smiling glances that his king let shine upon him. His discoloured eyes incessantly sought the royal gaze: the former lion had become a mere dog in his old age.

When Balkis had let fall from her adorable lips those piquant words, which left the court dismayed, Benaiah, who had understood nothing, and who accompanied with a cry of admiration every word of the king or his hostess, Benaiah, alone, in the midst of the general silence, with a benign smile, said:

— ‘Charming! Divine!’

Soliman bit his lip and whispered quite directly:

— ‘The fool!’

— ‘A memorable speech!’ continued Benaiah, seeing that his master had spoken.

Then, the Queen of Sheba burst into laughter.

With an appropriateness born of intellect, which struck everyone, she chose this moment to present one after the other three riddles for consideration by the famously sagacious Soliman, the most skilful of mortals in the art of decoding rebuses and unravelling charades. Such was the custom then: the courts dealt in such sciences ... which they have now wisely renounced, while the penetration of riddles was a matter of state. It is on this that a prince or a wise man was judged. Balkis had travelled two hundreds of miles to subject Soliman to this test.

Soliman readily interpreted the three riddles, thanks to the high priest Zadoc, who, the day before, had paid the high priest of the Sabaeans to provide him with their solution.

— ‘Wisdom speaks through your mouth,’ said the queen with a certain emphasis.

— ‘It seems that is what many believe...’

— ‘However, noble Soliman, cultivation of the tree of wisdom is not without peril: after a time, one risks becoming desirous of praise, indulging people to please them, and inclining to materialism to win the support of the crowd....’

— ‘Have you detected in my writings...?’

— ‘Ah! Sir, I have read your works with great attention, and, as I wish to educate myself, my desire to submit certain obscurities to you, certain contradictions, certain...sophisms, to my eyes, doubtless because of my ignorance...such a desire is not foreign to the goal of my long journey.’

— ‘I shall do my best,’ Soliman said, not without a degree of complacency, ‘to support my theses against so formidable an adversary.’

In truth, he would have preferred to go for a stroll beneath the sycamores of his villa at Millo. Enticed by the piquant spectacle, the courtiers craned their necks and opened wide their eyes. What could be worse than to risk, in the presence of one’s subjects, appearing less than infallible? Zadoc was alarmed; the prophet Ahias, of Shiloh, barely repressed a vague, cold smile, and Benaiah, toying with his decorations, displayed a foolish joy that anticipated ridicule for the king’s retinue. As for Balkis’ followers, they were as mute and imperturbable as sphinxes. Add to the advantages the Queen of Sheba possessed the majesty of a goddess; the charm of a most intoxicating beauty; features of adorable purity; gleaming eyes dark as those of a gazelle; a profile so well formed, so elongated, that it almost appeared full face to those pierced by her gaze; a mouth indicating both laughter and voluptuousness; and a supple body of a magnificence that could be divined through the gauze; then imagine, too, a subtle, mocking, haughty expression full of that playfulness shown by those of noble lineage accustomed to authority, and you will conceive the embarrassment of Lord Soliman, at once astonished and charmed, eager to conquer by means of his intellect, yet already half-conquered

at heart. Those large dark eyes, mysterious and gentle, yet calm and penetrating, gleaming from a face ardent and glowing as freshly-molten bronze, troubled him in spite of himself. He felt as though the ideal, mystical figure of the goddess Isis was alive at his side....

A second *pause* ensued. The politeness natural to Orientals caused the audience to refrain from critical comments. The tobacco was renewed, and the pipes re-lit; refreshments were requested. Then, the storyteller continued; commencing in a lively and powerful manner, according to the usage of the time, those philosophical discussions recorded in the Jewish commentaries.

— ‘Do you not encourage,’ resumed the queen, ‘selfishness and hardness of heart by saying: “If you answer for a friend, you have enclosed yourself in a net; take the very clothes from him who engages himself on behalf of another...” In another proverb, you praise wealth and the power of gold....’

— ‘Yet elsewhere I celebrate poverty.’

— ‘Contradiction, indeed. Ecclesiastes exhorts us to work, shames the lazy, and further on cries: “What will a man get from all his labours? Is it not better to eat and drink?” In Proverbs, you condemn debauchery, and yet you praise it in Ecclesiastes....’

— ‘You jest, I think...’

— ‘No, I merely paraphrase: “There is nothing better than to drink and rejoice; industry is mere pointless labour, since men die like beasts, and their fate is the same.” Such is your moral, O wise one!’

— ‘A mere figure of speech, while the basis of my doctrine....’

— ‘But there it is; others, alas, have now read your words: “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of thy life...for she is your *portion* in life.” You often return to that. From which I conclude that it suits you to objectify people in order to command them more surely as slaves.’

Soliman would have justified himself, but by use of arguments which he did not want to employ before his people, and betrayed his impatience, by his agitation.

— ‘Finally,’ continued Balkis with a smile seasoned with a languid glance, ‘finally, you are cruel to our sex; what woman would therefore dare to love the austere Soliman?’

— ‘O queen! In my Song of the Bridegroom, my heart, full of amorous passion, reveals my depths of feeling like dew on the flowers of spring!’

— ‘An exception, one in which the Shulamite should glory; but you have become harsh, with your weight of years....’

Soliman suppressed a rather sullen grimace.

— ‘I foresee,’ said the queen, ‘some gallant and polite compliment. Take care! Ecclesiastes will hear you, and you know what he says: “I find more bitter than death the woman, whose

heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.” What! Do you not follow these austere maxims, and is it not a misfortune for the daughters of Zion that you received from heaven that beauty sincerely described by yourself in these terms: “I am the flower of the fields, and the lily of the valleys!”

— ‘O Queen, that is merely another figure of speech....’

— ‘O King! Such is merely my opinion. Deign to meditate on my criticism, and enlighten the obscurity of my judgment; for error is on my side, and you are to be congratulated that wisdom dwells in you. “The penetration of my intellect will be recognised,” you have written, “the most powerful will be surprised on beholding me, and princes will show their admiration. When I am silent, they will wait for me to speak; when I speak, they will gaze at me attentively; and, when I discourse, they will place their hands over their mouths.” Great king, I have already experienced a part of these prophecies: your mind has charmed me, your appearance has surprised me, and I do not doubt that my expression testifies to my admiration. I await your words; they will find me attentive, and, during your speeches, your servant will place her hand over her mouth.’

— ‘Madame,’ said Soliman with a deep sigh, ‘what becomes of the wise man when compared to you? Since hearing you speak, Ecclesiastes would stand by only one of his sayings, the weight of which he feels: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!”’

All admired the king’s reply.

— ‘A pedant, a pedant no less,’ said the queen to herself. ‘If only one could cure him of his mania, his passion for authorship.... he would simply be gentle and affable, and he *is* rather handsome still.’

As for Soliman, having delayed answering her in full, he endeavoured to divert from his own person a conversation of a kind which he had so often encouraged.

— ‘Your Serenity,’ he addressed Queen Balkis, ‘possesses a very beautiful bird, there, whose species is unknown to me.’

Six young black African lads, dressed in scarlet, seated at the feet of the queen, were entrusted with the care of this bird, which never left its mistress’ side. One of the page-boys held it on his fist, and the Queen of Sheba often looked upon it.

— ‘We call it *Hud-Hud*’, she replied. ‘The great-great-grandfather of this long-lived bird was once, it is said, brought by Malays from a distant country which they alone had viewed, and whose location we no longer know. It is a very useful creature which executes various commissions of mine as regards the inhabitants and spirits of the air.’

Soliman, without fully comprehending her explanation, bowed to her, like a king who understood everything marvellous, and put out his thumb and forefinger to play with the bird *Hud-Hud*; but the bird, while responding to his advances, did not allow him to seize it.

— ‘*Hud-Hud* is a poet’ said the queen ‘and, as such, is worthy of your sympathies.... However, she is like me a little severe, and often she moralises too. Would you believe that she has even doubted the sincerity of your passion for the Shulamite?’

— ‘Divine bird, you surprise me!’ replied Soliman.

— ‘That pastoral, the Song of Songs, is certainly very tender,’ squawked Hud-Hud, nibbling on a golden scarab, ‘but the great king who addressed such plaintive elegies to his wife, the Pharaoh’s daughter, would surely have shown her greater love by living with her, than he did by obliging her to live far from him, in the city of David, reduced to beguiling the days of her neglected youth with his verse... even though it were the most beautiful in the world?’

— ‘What sorrows you recall! Alas! The daughter of the night followed the cult of Isis.... could I, without committing a crime, grant her access to the holy city, render her a neighbour of the ark of Adonai, and allow her to dwell close to the august temple that I am raising to the God of my fathers?...

— ‘The matter is delicate,’ Balkis observed judiciously, ‘forgive Hud-Hud; birds are sometimes frivolous; mine prides herself on being a connoisseur, especially of poetry.’

— ‘Really!’ replied Soliman-Ben-Daoud. ‘I would be curious to know....’

— ‘Her wicked opinion, my lord? For wicked it is, by my faith! Hud-Hud thinks you to blame for comparing the beauty of your lover to that of the horses of the pharaoh’s chariot, her name to an oil poured out, her hair to flocks of goats, her teeth to sheep shorn and yielding, her cheek to half a pomegranate, her breasts to two goats, her head to Mount Carmel, her navel to a cup in which there is always liquor to drink, her belly to a heap of wheat, and her nose to the tower of Lebanon which looks towards Damascus.’

Soliman, wounded, let his golden arms fall, in his discouragement, onto those of his armchair, also golden, while the bird, puffing herself up, beat the air with her wings of sinople and gold.

— ‘I will answer this bird that serves your penchant for mockery, as well as I can, by saying that Oriental taste allows such license, that true poetry seeks images, that my people find my verses excellent, and prefer the richest of metaphors....’

— ‘Nothing is more dangerous for nations than the metaphors employed by their leaders,’ resumed the Queen of Sheba. ‘Free of your august style, such figures, over-bold perhaps, will find more imitators than critics, and your sublime fantasies risk misleading poetic taste for ten thousand years. Instructed in your style, did not the Shulamite compare your hair to palm-branches, your lips to lilies that distil myrrh, your waist to that of the cedar, your legs to marble columns, and your cheeks, lord, to little beds of aromatic flowers, planted by the perfume-makers? So much so that King Soliman appeared to me constantly as some kind of peristyle, surrounding a botanical garden, supported by an entablature shaded by palm-trees.’

Soliman smiled somewhat bitterly; he would have wrung the neck of the eloquent hoopoe with satisfaction, which meanwhile was pecking at his chest, at the place beneath which his heart lay, with strange persistence.

— ‘Hud-Hud is trying to help you understand where the source of poetry lies,’ said the queen.

— ‘I know it only too well,’ replied the king, ‘since I have had the happiness of gazing on your face. Let us quit this discourse; will my queen do her unworthy servant the honour of visiting my palace in Jerusalem, and especially the temple that I am building to Jehovah on Mount Zion?’

— ‘The world resounds with the tale of these wonders; my impatience equals their splendour, and serves to increase my wish not to delay the pleasure of viewing them that I promised myself.’

At the head of the procession, which slowly passed through the streets of Jerusalem, were forty-two tympani producing a thunderous sound; behind them came musicians dressed in white robes, directed by Asaph and Iditimia; fifty-six cymbal-players, twenty-eight flautists, as many psaltery and zither players, not forgetting the trumpets, instruments which Gideon had formerly made fashionable, beneath the walls of Jericho. Then in a triple row, came the thurifers, walking backwards, swinging censers in the air, in which burnt the perfumes of Jerusalem. Soliman and Balkis lounged in a vast palanquin carried by seventy Philistines conquered in war....

(The *session* was over. We parted ways, talking about the various twists and turns of the story, and arranged to meet again the following day.)

Chapter 3: The Temple

The storyteller continued:

— Newly rebuilt by the magnificent Soliman, the city was created to an impeccable plan: streets laid out with a rule, square houses all alike, a veritable beehive though of monotonous appearance.

— ‘In these beautiful, wide streets,’ said the queen, ‘the irresistible sea breeze must sweep over the passers-by as if they were pieces of straw, and, during intense heat, the sun, penetrating without obstacle, must heat them to the temperature of ovens. In Marib, the streets are narrow, and lengths of cloth stretched over the street, from one house to another, catch the breeze, cast shade on the ground, and maintain the coolness.’

— ‘It would be to the detriment of symmetry,’ replied Soliman. ‘Here is the peristyle of my new palace, which took thirteen years to construct.’

They entered the palace, which received the attention of the Queen of Sheba, who found it rich, comfortable, original, and in exquisite taste.

— ‘The plan is sublime,’ she said, ‘the arrangement admirable, and, I confess, the palace of my ancestors, the Himyarites, built in the Indian style, with square pillars adorned with statues as capitals, does not approach this in boldness or elegance: your architect is a great artist.’

— ‘I am he, who ordered all, and paid the workmen,’ the king said, proudly.

— ‘But the master who executed it? Who is the genius who has accomplished your design so nobly?’

— ‘A certain Adoniram, a strange, half-savage character, who was sent to me by my friend the King of Tyre.’

— ‘Shall I not see him, lord?’

— ‘He flees the world, and evades praise. But wait, Queen, till you have visited the Temple of Adonai. It is more than the work of a mere craftsman: it is I who dictated the plans and indicated the materials to be used. Adoniram’s role was limited to the execution of my poetic imaginings. The work has been in progress for five years; two more only are needed to bring it to perfection.’

— ‘Seven years, then, will prove enough for you to house your God worthily; it took thirteen to establish his servant fully.’

— ‘Time has nothing to do with the matter,’ objected Soliman.

As much as Balkis had admired the palace, she criticised the Temple.

— ‘You were too ambitious,’ she said, ‘and the artist was allowed less freedom. The whole is a little heavy, and burdened with detail.... too much cedarwood everywhere, projecting beams.... the timbered side-walls alone, which lack solidity to the eye, appear to support the upper level, of stone.’

— ‘My aim,’ objected the prince, ‘was to prepare the believer, by a strong contrast, for the splendour within.’

— ‘God above!’ cried the queen, arriving within the enclosure, ‘What sculptures! Here are wondrous statues, strange animals of imposing aspect. Who cast or chiselled these marvels?’

— ‘Adoniram: statuary is his principal talent.’

— ‘His genius is universal. Only, here the cherubim are too heavy, too brightly gilded, and too large for this room which they overwhelm.’

— ‘I desired it so: each of them cost six and twenty talents. You see, O Queen! Everything here is of gold, and gold is the most precious metal of all. The cherubim are of gold; the columns of cedar, gifts from my friend King Hiram, are plated with gold; gold covers all the walls; on these walls of gold, there will be palm-trees of gold and a frieze with pomegranates of solid gold, and about the gold partitions I will hang two hundred shields of purest gold. The altars, the tables, the candlesticks, the vases, the floors, the ceilings; all will be covered with gold....’

— ‘That seems rather a lot of gold,’ objected the queen, humbly.

King Soliman continued:

— ‘Is there aught too splendid for the King of Men? I wish to astonish posterity.... But let us enter the sanctuary, the roof of which is yet to be raised, in which the foundations of the altar have already been laid, opposite my throne which is almost finished. As you see, there are

six steps; the seat is of ivory, supported by two lions, at whose feet are crouched twelve lion-cubs. The gilding is to be burnished, and we are waiting for the canopy to be erected. Deign, noble princess, to be the first to be seated on this still virgin throne; from there, you may inspect the work in its entirety. Except, you will be exposed to the rays of the sun, for the roof is still incomplete.'

The princess smiled, and took the Hud-Hud bird on her fist, at which the courtiers gazed with keen curiosity.

There is no species of bird more illustrious or more respected in all the Orient. Not for the delicacy of her black beak alone, nor her scarlet cheeks; nor the sweetness of her hazel-grey eyes; nor the superb crest of fine golden plumage which crowned her charming head; nor for her long jet-black tail or the brilliance of her wings of gold-green, enhanced with streaks and fringes of bright gold; nor for her spurs of tender pink; nor her purple legs, was the dashing Hud-Hud the object of the queen's and her subjects' favour. Beautiful without knowing it, faithful to her mistress, affectionate to all who loved her, the hoopoe shone with an ingenuous grace without seeking to dazzle. The Queen, as we have seen, consulted this bird in trying circumstances.

Soliman, who wished to gain the Hud-Hud's favour tried at that moment to receive her on his fist; but she did not lend herself to this attention. Balkis, smiling with finesse, called her favourite to her and seemed to whisper a few words.... swift as an arrow, Hud-Hud vanished into the azure air.

Then the queen seated herself; everyone gathered around her; they talked for a few moments; the prince explained to his hostess the plan of the bronze sea conceived by Adoniram, and the Queen of Sheba, struck with admiration, demanded again that the man be presented to her. At the king's command, they sought everywhere for the reticent Adoniram.

While the guards searched the forges and buildings, Balkis, who had seated the king of Jerusalem beside her, asked him how the roof of his throne-room would be decorated.

— 'It will be decorated in the same manner as all else,' replied Soliman.

— 'Do you not fear, by this exclusive predilection for gold, to appear to criticise the other materials that Adonai has created? And do you really think nothing in the world more beautiful than that metal? Allow me to offer an amendment to your scheme ... of which you shall be the judge.'

Suddenly the air darkened, the sky was covered with black flecks which grew larger as they approached; hosts of birds swooped on the Temple, gathered themselves and, descending in circles, flocked together and distributed themselves among trembling and splendid foliage; their outstretched wings formed rich bouquets of green, scarlet, jet-black, and azure. This living pavilion unfolded under the skilful direction of the hoopoe, who fluttered through the feathered crowd.... a charming tree was thus formed above the heads of the two royal personages, of which each bird seemed a leaf. Soliman, bewildered, charmed, found himself sheltered from the sun beneath this quivering roof, which supported itself on beating wings, and cast, over the throne, a dense shadow from which a sweet and gentle harmony of birdsong escaped. After

which, the hoopoe, towards whom the king still held a grudge, flew, to perch, submissively, at the queen's feet.

— 'What does my lord think of this?' asked Balkis.

— 'Admirable!' cried Soliman, trying to attract the hoopoe, which stubbornly eluded him with the intention of attracting the queen's attention.

— 'If this fancy pleases you,' she continued, 'I will gladly pay you homage with this little pavilion of birds, on condition that you spare me the pain of having them gilded. You only have to turn the bezel of this ring towards the sun when you wish to summon them.... The ring is precious. I inherited it from my ancestors, and Sarahil, my nurse, will scold me for having given it to you.'

— 'Ah! Great queen,' cried Soliman, kneeling before her, 'you are worthy to command all men, all kings, and the elements. May heaven and your grace be so kind as to accept half my throne, and find at your feet only the most submissive of subjects!'

— 'Your proposal flatters me,' said Balkis, 'and we will talk of it later.'

Both descended from the throne, followed by the host of birds, which cloaked them like a canopy, creating various decorative figures above their heads.

When they were near the place where the foundations of the altar had been laid, the queen noticed an enormous vine uprooted and tossed aside. Her face became pensive, she made a gesture of surprise, the hoopoe uttered plaintive cries, and the flock of birds fled on beating wings.

Balkis's gaze had become severe; her majestic figure seemed to rise, and, in a grave and prophetic voice she cried:

— 'The ignorance and frivolity of men! The vanity of pride!... You have raised your own glory above the relics of your ancestors. This vine, this venerable wood....'

— 'Your Highness, it was in our way; we tore it out to make room for the altar of porphyry and olive-wood which will be adorned with four golden seraphim.'

— 'You have desecrated, and shattered, the first vine plant ... planted long ago by the hand of the father of the race of Shem, the patriarch Noah.'

— 'Is it possible?' replied Soliman, deeply humiliated, 'and how do you know this...?'

— 'Rather than believing pomp and grandeur to be a source of knowledge, I think the opposite, O king, and have made a religion for myself of study and learning. Listen again, man blinded by your vain splendour: this wood that your impiety condemns to perish, do you know what fate the immortal powers have reserved for it?'

— 'Speak.'

— 'It is reserved as the instrument of torment to which the last prince of your race will be nailed.'

— 'Let this impious wood be sawn into pieces then, and reduced to ashes!'

— ‘Fool! Who can erase what God has written? And how can your wisdom be substituted for the supreme will? Prostrate yourself before a decree that your material spirit cannot supplant: that punishment alone will save your name from oblivion, and will cause a halo of immortal glory to shine upon your house....’

The mighty Soliman sought, in vain, to hide his confusion behind a cheerful and mocking countenance, as his people arrived, to announce that the sculptor Adoniram had at last been found.

Soon Adoniram, announced by the clamour of the crowd, appeared at the entrance to the Temple. Benoni accompanied his master and friend, who advanced with a burning eye, an anxious brow, in a state of disorder, an artist suddenly torn from his flights of inspiration and his work. No trace of curiosity weakened the powerful and noble expression of the features of this man, rendered even more imposing by the serious, bold, and domineering character of his handsome physiognomy than by his lofty stature.

He halted, at ease, proud in demeanour, showing neither familiarity nor disdain, a few steps from Balkis, who failed to withstand his incisive eagle-like gaze without experiencing a confused feeling of timidity.

Nonetheless, she soon overcame her involuntary embarrassment; swift reflection in regard to the status of this master workman, standing before her with bared chest and arms, restored her to herself; she smiled at her own reaction, almost flattered at having felt so young and innocent again, and deigned to speak to the craftsman.

He answered, and his voice struck the queen like the echo of a fleeting memory; however, she did not recognise him, never having seen him before.

Such is the power of genius; that beauty of the spirit; the spirit attaches itself to such, and cannot be distracted. Adoniram’s conversation made the princess of the Sabaeans forget all that surrounded her; and, while the artist showed, by pacing its outlines, the work he had undertaken, Balkis followed, almost without knowing, while the king, and both sets of courtiers, followed the steps of the divine princess.

The latter never tired of questioning Adoniram about his works, his country, and his origins.

‘My Lady,’ he replied with some embarrassment, casting upon her his piercing glance, ‘I have traversed many countries; my homeland is wherever the sun shines; my early years were spent on the vast slopes of Mount Lebanon, from which one can view Damascus beyond the distant plain. Nature and men have sculpted those mountainous lands, bristling with menacing cliffs, and ruins.’

— ‘It is not,’ observed the queen, ‘in such desert places that one learns the secrets of the arts in which you excel.’

— ‘It is there at least that thought arises, that imagination wakens, and that, by dint of meditation, one learns to create. My first master was solitude; in my travels since I have employed that knowledge. I have turned my gaze upon memories of the past; I have contemplated the monuments, and have fled from human society....’

— ‘Why so, master?’

— ‘I do not enjoy the company of my own kind... and I felt alone.’

This mixture of sadness and grandeur moved the queen, who lowered her eyes, to collect her thoughts.’

— ‘You see,’ continued Adoniram, ‘I gain little merit by practicing the arts, since learning gives me no trouble. My models I have found amidst the desert; I reproduce the impressions that I receive from those forgotten ruins, and from the terrible and grandiose figures of the gods of the ancient world.’

— ‘More than once already,’ interrupted Soliman with a firmness that the queen had not seen in him until then, ‘more than once, dear master, I have repressed that idolatrous tendency of yours, that fervent worship of the monuments of an impure theogony. Keep your thoughts your own, and let bronze and stone display naught of them to the king.’

Adoniram, bowing, suppressed a bitter smile.

— ‘My lord,’ said the queen to console him, ‘a master’s thought doubtless rises above such considerations as are likely to disturb the conscience of the Levites.... in his artist’s soul, he says to himself that all beauty glorifies God, and seeks such beauty with a naive piety’.

— ‘What do I know, moreover,’ said Adoniram, ‘of what powers they possessed in their time, those gods, extinguished and petrified, of the geniuses of the past? Why be anxious concerning them? Soliman, king of kings, asked me for prodigies, and I recalled that the ancestors of the world left wonders behind them.’

— ‘If your work is beautiful and sublime, added the queen with enthusiasm, ‘it will become the model for all, and so as to recreate that beauty, posterity, in turn, will copy your art.’

— ‘Great queen, your intellect, truly fine, is as great as your beauty.’

— ‘Are such ruins,’ Balkis hastened to ask, ‘so numerous on the slopes of Lebanon?’

— ‘Entire cities are buried there, beneath a shroud of sand that the wind lifts and re-places in turn; then there are hypogea known only to me that cost superhuman labour.... Labouring only for the birds of the air, and the stars in the sky, I wandered at random, sketching figures on the rocks, and carving statues on the spot with great blows of my chisel. One day.... but is this not abusing the patience of my august listeners?’

— ‘No!’ cried the queen, ‘Your story captivates me.’

— ‘Shaken by the hammer which drove my chisel into the entrails of the rock, the earth echoed beneath my feet, sonorous and hollow. Armed with a lever, I rolled aside the block that unmasked the entrance to a cavern into which I descended. It was pierced in the living stone, its roof supported by enormous pillars burdened with carvings, of many a bizarre design, pillars whose capitals served as roots for the ribs of the boldest vaults. Among the arcades of this forest of stones, scattered legions of diverse colossal figures stood motionless, smiling through the centuries, their appearance filling me with intoxicating terror; human beings, giants disappeared from our world, symbolic animals belonging to vanished species; in a word, all that the magnificent dreams of a delirious imagination would scarcely dare conceive!... I lived

there for months, for years, questioning these spectres of a vanished world, and it is there amidst those marvels of primitive genius that I absorbed the artistic tradition that I follow.'

— 'The fame of those forgotten works still resonates with us,' said Soliman thoughtfully, 'they say, that there, in the accursed lands, one may view the debris of that impious city submerged by the waters of the Flood, the remains of guilty Enochia ... built by the gigantic descendants of Tubal; the city of the children of Cain. Anathema on their arts of impiety and darkness! My new Temple reflects the light of the sun; its lines are simple and pure, and the order, the unity, of the plan, proclaim the uprightness of our faith through the very style of this dwelling that I build for the Eternal Lord above. Such is my will; it is that of Adonai, who transmitted it to my father.'

— 'My King,' Adoniram cried out fiercely, 'your plans have been followed in their entirety: God will recognise your obedience; I wish the world to be struck by your greatness.'

— 'Industrious and subtle man, you shall not sway your king and lord. It is for that purpose that you have cast your iron monsters, objects of admiration and terror; those giant idols which are counter to all that is consecrated by the rites of Israel. But take care: the strength of Adonai is mine, and, my power, if challenged, will reduce Baal to powder.'

— 'Be merciful, O king,' said the Queen of Sheba gently, 'to the creator of those monuments to your glory! The centuries march on, human destiny accomplishes its progress according to the will of the Creator. Is it to disregard Him, simply to interpret His works more nobly? Must we reproduce, endlessly, the cold immobility of those hieratic figures created by the Egyptians, and leave behind, as they did, statues half-buried in the granite sepulchre from which they cannot free themselves, enslaved spirits chained in stone? Let us dread, great prince, as we would a dangerous negation of spirit, the idolatrous worship of habit.'

Offended by her reproach, but captivated by the queen's charming smile, Soliman allowed her to compliment the man of genius, warmly; a man whom he himself admired, though not without irritation, a man who, ordinarily indifferent to praise, welcomed it now with an elation entirely new.

These three great personages were then within the outer peristyle of the Temple — situated on a high, quadrangular plateau — from which one could view the vast, uneven and hilly landscape. A dense crowd, covered the distant countryside, and the outskirts of the city built by Daoub (*David*). To view the Queen of Sheba, from near or far, the king's entire people had invaded the outskirts of the palace and the Temple itself; his masons had quit the quarries of Gilboa, his carpenters had deserted the distant building-sites, his miners had returned to the surface. The call of fame, sending its summons through the neighbouring regions, had set this host of workmen in motion and drawn them to the heart of the kingdom. Thus, the workmen, the women and children, the soldiers, merchants, slaves and peaceful citizens of Jerusalem had gathered there, pell-mell; the plains and valleys were barely enough to contain that immense crowd, and the eyes of the queen, a mile away or more, rested, astonished, on that mosaic of human heads arranged in that vast amphitheatre stretching as far as the horizon. A few clouds, intercepting, here and there, the sun which flooded the scene, projected onto that living sea a few patches of shadow.

— ‘Your people,’ said Queen Balkis, ‘are more numerous than the grains of sand on the shore....’

— ‘People from many a land have hastened to view you; my only astonishment is that the whole world is not besieging Jerusalem this very day! Thanks to your presence, the countryside is deserted; the city is abandoned, and even the tireless workers of master Adoniram....’

— ‘Truly!’ interrupted the Princess of Sheba, ‘who was searching in her mind for a way to honour the artist: workmen like those who serve Adoniram would be masters of their trade elsewhere. They are the soldiers who follow this leader of an army of artists.... Master Adoniram, we wish to review your workmen, congratulate them, and compliment you in their presence.’

Wise King Soliman, at these words, raised his arms above his head in amazement.

— ‘How’, he cried, ‘are we to gather together the workers who are constructing the Temple, now they are scattered midst the festival, wandering the hills or confused with the crowd? They are numerous, indeed, and it were an idle attempt to seek to group together, in a few hours, men from so many countries who speak such diverse tongues, from the Sanskrit dialects of the Himalayas, to the obscure, guttural jargon of wildest Libya.’

— ‘No matter, my lord;’ said Adoniram simply, ‘the queen seeks nothing impossible, and a few moments will suffice.’

With these words, Adoniram, making a pedestal of a block of granite nearby, and towering above the outer portico, turned towards the innumerable crowd, over which his eyes wandered. He made a sign, and the waves of that sea of forms turned pale, for all the people raised their heads, and turned their faces towards him.

The crowd were attentive and curious.... Adoniram lifted his right arm, and, with his open hand, traced a horizontal line in the air, from the centre of which he described a descending perpendicular line, thus presenting the two right angles produced by a plumb line suspended from a ruler, a sign which the Syrians employed for the letter T, transmitted by the peoples of India to the Phoenicians, who named it *tha*, and taught it then to the Greeks, who call it *tau*.

Designating, in the ancient way, by means of hieroglyphic analogy, the tools of the Masonic profession, the letter T was now the sign for his artisans to gather.

Thus, Adoniram had scarcely traced those lines in the air, before a regular movement manifested itself in the crowd. The human sea became troubled, agitated waves surged in every direction, as if a gale of wind had suddenly disturbed its surface. At first there was merely general confusion; the waves ran in conflicting directions. Soon groups of people gathered, grew larger, separated; gaps were created; legions were arranged in squares; parts of the multitude were driven back; thousands of men, led by unknown leaders, ranged themselves like an army, which then divided itself into three main bodies, subdivided into distinct cohorts, dense and deep.

Then, as King Soliman sought to comprehend the magical powers displayed by Adoniram, the ground shook; and a hundred thousand men, aligned in a few moments, advanced as one, silently, on all three sides. Their heavy and regular step echoed throughout the countryside. In

the centre, were the masons, and all those who worked stone: the masters in the front line, then the companions, and behind them the apprentices. To their right, and following a like hierarchy, were the carpenters, joiners, sawyers, and shapers. To the left, were the founders, the chasers of metal, the blacksmiths, the miners and all those who devote themselves to that industry.

More than a hundred thousand artisans, approached, like great waves invading the shore....

Troubled, Soliman withdrew two or three paces; he turned away and saw behind him only the glittering but feeble procession of his priests and courtiers.

Adoniram stood, calm and serene, before the two monarchs. He stretched out his arm; all halted, and he bowed humbly before the queen, saying:

— ‘Your request is fulfilled.’

She almost bowed down before his occult and formidable power, so sublime did Adoniram appear to her in his simplicity and strength.

She recovered herself, however and, with a gesture, saluted the assembled army of artisans. Then, detaching from her neck a magnificent pearl necklace to which was attached a jewelled star framed by a triangle of gold, a symbolic ornament, she appeared to offer it to the artisans, while advancing towards Adoniram, who, bowing before her, felt with a shudder that precious gift fall over his shoulders and half-naked chest.

At that very moment, a vast acclamation from the depths of the crowd answered that generous act of the Queen of Sheba. As the artist’s head came close to the radiant face and beating heart of the princess, she said to him, in a low voice:

— ‘Master, watch over yourself, and be careful!’

Adoniram raised his large, dazzled eyes to her, and Balkis was astonished at the penetrating sweetness in that proud gaze.

— ‘Who is this mortal,’ wondered Soliman dreamily, ‘who subdues men as the queen commands the inhabitants of the air?... A sign of his hand brings forth armies; my people are his, and my dominion is reduced to a miserable herd of courtiers and priests. A mere movement of his eyebrows might render him king of Israel.’

His musing prevented him from observing the countenance of Balkis, who followed with her eyes the true leader of his nation, the king of intelligence and genius, the peaceful and patient arbiter of the destinies of the Lord’s elect.

The return to the palace was silent; his people’s loyalties had now been revealed to the wise Soliman, ... who had believed he knew all, yet had not suspected this. Defeated as to his doctrine; conquered by the Queen of Sheba, who commanded the creatures of the air; vanquished by an artisan who commanded men, the Ecclesiastes, foreseeing the future, meditated on the destiny of kings, saying to himself:

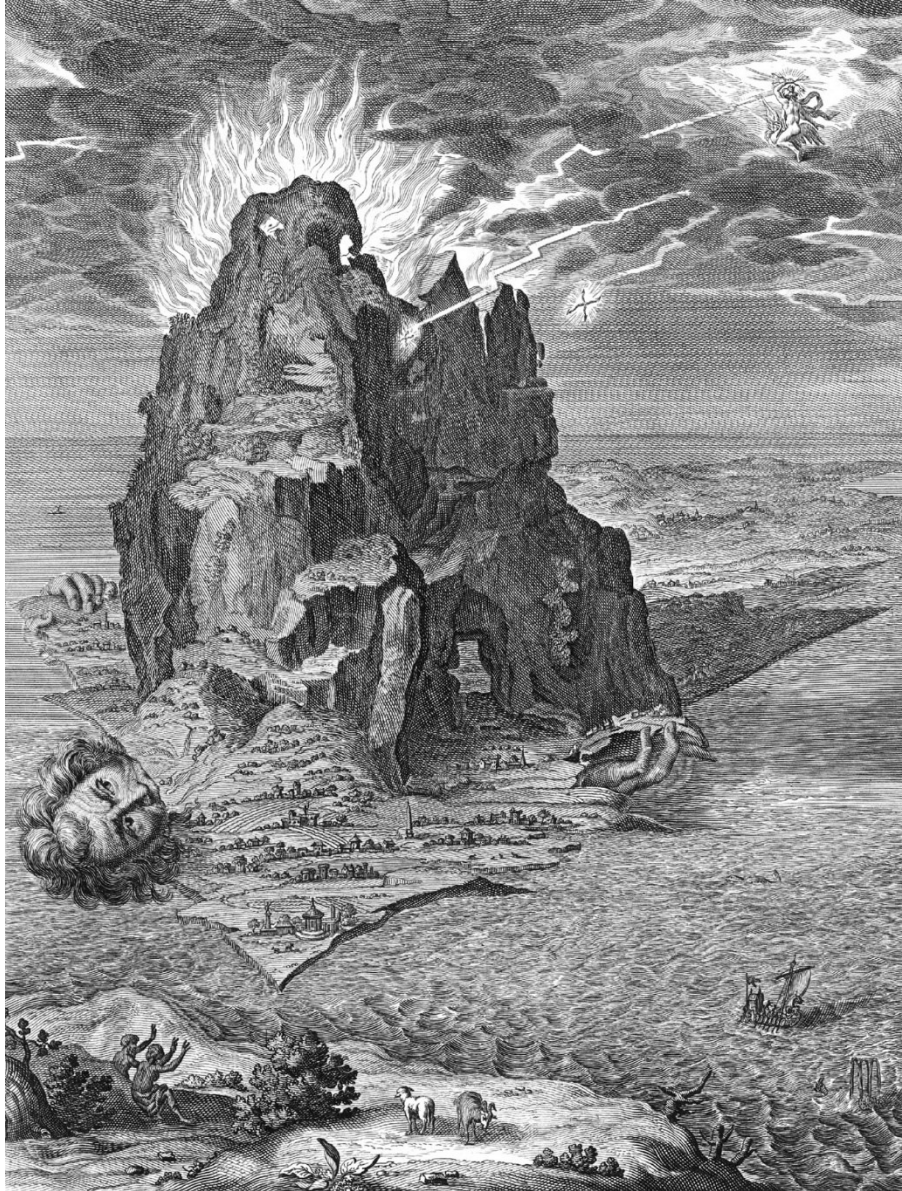
— ‘These priests, once my tutors, today my advisers, charged with the mission of teaching me all there is to know, have concealed the truth, and hidden my ignorance from me. O the blind trust of kings! O the vanity of wisdom!... Vanity! vanity!’

While the queen also gave herself up to her reveries, Adoniram returned to his studio, leaning familiarly on his pupil Benoni who was intoxicated with enthusiasm, lost in celebration of the grace and incomparable spirit of Queen Balkis.

But, more reticent than ever, his master remained silent. Pale, and with panting breath, Adoniram gripped the flesh of his broad chest, now and then, with a clenched right hand. Returning to the sanctuary where he was wont to labour, he enclosed himself, alone, and casting his eyes on a roughly carved statue, found the work insufficient, and shattered the stone. Finally, he collapsed on an oaken bench; and, veiling his face in his hands, cried out in a stifled voice:

— ‘Adorable, and fatal goddess!... Alas! Why were my eyes destined to behold this pearl of Arabia!’

Part XVI: Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*) – The Storytellers: Chapters 4 to 8



Enceladus below Etna, 1731, Bernard Picart

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/A-1731-10-10-10)

Chapter 4: Millo

During the first *pause* of this next *session*, there was talk of the various emotions which the story had roused. One of the customers, who by his bluish sleeves could be recognised as a

dye, seemed not to share in the display of approval which had greeted the preceding scene. He approached the storyteller and said to him:

— ‘Brother, you announced that this story concerned all classes of worker, and yet I find that, so far, it is dedicated to the glory only of metal-workers, carpenters and stone-cutters.... if it fails to interest me further, I’ll not return, and many another will shun this café, likewise.’

The café owner frowned, and gazed at his storyteller with a look of reproach.

— ‘Brother,’ replied the storyteller, ‘there will be something for the dyers too.... I shall have occasion to speak of the good Hiram of Tyre, who distributed beautiful purple fabrics throughout the world, and who had been Adoniram’s patron....’

The dyer seated himself, once more, and the narration began again.

— It was at Millo, a place situated on the summit of a hill, from which one could see the valley of Jehoshaphat at its widest, that King Soliman proposed to celebrate the arrival of the Queen of the Sabaeans. Hospitality, enjoyed amidst the fields, seemed more cordial there: the freshness of the waters, the splendour of the gardens, the favourable shade cast by the sycamores, tamarinds, laurels, cypresses, acacias and terebinths awakened tender feelings in the heart. Soliman too was happy to show his pride in his rustic dwelling; and then, most sovereigns prefer to keep the people at a distance, and keep themselves to themselves than leave themselves and their peers open to the comments of the populace of their capital cities.

The green valley was dotted with white tombs overshadowed by pine and palm-trees: there lay the first slopes of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Soliman said to Balkis:

— ‘What more worthy a subject of meditation for a king, than the spectacle of our common end! Here, beside you, queen, is pleasure, and happiness perhaps; over there, nothingness and mere oblivion.’

— ‘We rest from the fatigues of life in the contemplation of death.’

— ‘At this hour, my lady, I dread the latter; it parts one from another.... May I not learn too soon that it consoles also!’

Balkis glanced furtively at her host, and saw that he was truly moved. Softened by the evening light, Soliman seemed handsome to her.

Before entering the banqueting hall, the august guests contemplated the house in the twilight, breathing in the voluptuous scent of the orange trees which perfumed the depths of night.

The airy dwelling was constructed according to Syrian taste. Raised on a forest of slender columns, its openwork turrets and cedar pavilions, covered with bright woodwork, were outlined against the sky. The open doors revealed curtains of Tyrian purple, silken coverings woven in India, rosettes inlaid with multi-coloured gems, furniture carved from lemonwood and sandalwood, vases from Thebes, vases of porphyry and lapis-lazuli laden with flowers, silver tripods in which aloes, myrrh, and benjamin (*benzoin*) smoked, vines that embraced the pillars and were strung across the walls: that charming place seemed dedicated to love. But

Balkis was wise and prudent: her reason protected her from the seduction of that enchanted abode, Millo.

— ‘It is not without timidity that I walk beside you through this little mansion,’ said Soliman, ‘since your presence honours it, it seems but humble to me. The cities of the Himyarites are doubtless richer.’

— ‘Not so, in truth; but, in our country, the smaller and more fragile columns, the openwork mouldings, the figurines, and the jagged bell-towers, are of marble. We execute in stone what you only carve in wood. Moreover, it is not through such vain fancies that our ancestors sought glory. They accomplished a work that will make their memory eternally blessed.’

— ‘What work is that? A tale of great enterprises exalts the mind.’

— ‘It must be confessed, first of all, that the happy, fertile country of Yemen was formerly arid and sterile. It received neither rivers, nor rain from the sky. My ancestors triumphed over Nature and created an Eden in the midst of the desert.’

— ‘Great Queen, tell me of these wonders.’

— ‘In the heart of the high mountain ranges which rise to the east of my kingdom, on a slope of which is situated the city of Marib, torrents meandered here and there, streams which evaporated into the air, were lost in abysses, and in the depths of valleys, before reaching the wholly arid plain. Through the labour of two centuries, our ancient kings succeeded in bringing together all these watercourses, on a plateau a number of miles in extent, where they dug a basin and created a lake, over which one can sail today, as over a gulf of the sea. It was necessary to support the steep cliffs with granite buttresses more solid than the pyramids of Giza, and cyclopean arches beneath which armies of horsemen and elephants could move easily. This immense and inexhaustible reservoir feeds, in silvery cascades, the aqueducts, and wide canals which, subdividing into numerous channels, carry the water across the plain, and irrigate half the provinces. We owe to this sublime work the rich crops from fertile fields, the numerous meadows, the age-old trees, and deep forests which are the wealth and charm of the sweet country of Yemen. Such, lord, is our ‘sea of bronze’, without deprecating yours, which is a delightful invention.’

— ‘A noble concept!’ cried Soliman, ‘and one I would be proud to imitate, if God, in his clemency, had not distributed to us the abundant and blessed waters of the Jordan.’

— ‘I crossed it yesterday on foot,’ replied the queen, ‘my camels were barely up to their knees in its stream.’

— ‘It is dangerous to overturn the natural order,’ pronounced the wise man, ‘and create, in spite of Jehovah, through artifice, a civilisation, with its commerce and industry, that condemns the populace to the brevity of human effort. Our Judaea is arid, it can feed no more inhabitants than it does, and what supports them is the natural produce of the soil and the climate. Should your lake, that basin carved amidst the mountains, be breached, should those cyclopean buttresses collapse — and a single day could bring about that misfortune! — your people, denied the tribute of its water, will die, consumed by the sun, devoured by famine, in the midst of those works of artifice.’

Seized by the obvious truth of this reflection, Balkis seemed pensive.

— ‘Indeed, already,’ continued the king, ‘already, those streams that run from the mountain-lake are scouring out ravines, freeing themselves from their prisons of stone, which they constantly undermine. The earth is subject to tremors, time uproots the rocks, the water seeps away. Moreover, burdened by such a weight of liquid, your magnificent basin, which was carved out before the lake was created, is impossible to repair. O queen! Your ancestors condemned the people to a future determined by a scaffolding of stone. Aridity would have made them industrious; they would have learned how to gain advantage from a land where they are doomed to perish, idle and dismayed, along with the first leaves of those trees whose roots the channels will one day cease to revive. We must not tempt God, nor correct His works. What He created was good.’

— ‘That maxim,’ replied the queen, ‘is born of a religion weakened by the shadowy doctrines of your priests. They seek nothing less than to prevent all effort, treat the people like children, and constrain human independence. Did God plough and sow the fields? Did God found cities, or build palaces? Did He place within our easy reach iron, gold, copper, all those metals that gleam throughout Soliman’s Temple? No. He endowed his creatures with genius, and activity. He smiles at our efforts, and our limited creations, but recognises the light of His spirit, illuminating ours. In believing Him to be a jealous god, you limit His omnipotence, you deify your own faculties, and render His mortal. O king! The prejudices displayed by your religion will one day hinder the progress of science, its developments prompted by genius, and, when men are diminished, they will reduce God to their own dimensions, and end in denying Him.’

— ‘Subtle,’ murmured Soliman with a bitter smile, ‘subtle, yet specious....’

The queen continued:

— ‘Do not sigh, thus, when my finger presses on your secret wound. You are alone in this kingdom, and you suffer: your views are noble, daring, yet the hierarchical constitution of this nation burdens your flights of imagination; you say to yourself, for they seem slight to you: ‘I shall leave to posterity only the statue of a king too great for so petty a people!’ As regards my own empire, it is otherwise.... my ancestors effaced themselves to aggrandise their subjects. Thirty-eight successive monarchs have spent their efforts on the lake and aqueducts of Marib: future ages will never know their names, while their labours will continue to glorify the Sabaeans; and, if ever the lake is breached, if the greedy earth reclaims its water, and the channels run dry, the soil of my homeland, fertilised by a thousand years of cultivation, will continue to produce; the great trees which shade our plains will retain humidity, and preserve their freshness, by shading the ponds, and fountains, and Yemen, won long ago from the desert, will retain until the end of time the sweet name of Arabia Felix.... If you had been freer, you would have brought glory to your people and happiness to humankind.’

— ‘I see to what you would have my spirit aspire.... It is too late; my people are wealthy: conquest or gold will provide what Judaea cannot; and, as for timber, I have prudently concluded a treaty with the king of Tyre; the cedars, the pines of Lebanon encumber my shipyards; our ships compete on the seas with those of the Phoenicians.’

— ‘You console yourself with displays of grandeur, through that paternal solicitude embodied in your method of government,’ said the princess with benevolent sadness.

This reflection was followed by a moment of silence; the deepening darkness hid the emotion imprinted on Soliman’s features, as he murmured in a low voice:

— ‘My spirit has merged with yours, and my heart follows.’

Somewhat troubled, Balkis cast a furtive glance around her; the courtiers had moved aside. The stars shone above their heads, scattering golden flowers amidst the foliage. Charged with the perfume of lilies, tuberoses, wisteria, and mandragoras, the nocturnal breeze sighed amidst the leafy branches of the myrtle-trees; the incense of the flowers had acquired a voice, the wind its perfumed breath; distant doves moaned; the sound of the waters accompanied the harmonies of nature; fireflies and starlit moths bore their gleams of light through the warm air which seemed full of voluptuous emotion. The queen felt herself seized by an intoxicating languor; the tender voice of Soliman penetrated her heart and held it in its spell.

Did Soliman please her; did she dream that she might yet love him? Ever since she had humbled him, she had found him an object of interest. But that sympathy, which had blossomed amidst the calm of reasoned conversation, mingled with gentle pity following a woman’s victory, was neither spontaneous nor enthusiastic. Mistress of herself, as she had been of the thoughts and impressions of her host, she was drifting towards love, if indeed it touched her at all, through friendship; and that path is long indeed!

As for the man, subjugated, dazzled, raised from rancour to admiration, from discouragement to hope, and from anger to desire, he had already received more than one wound, and, for a man, to love too soon is to risk his love being unrequited. Besides, the Queen of Sheba was reserved; her ascendancy had constantly dominated all, even the magnificent Soliman. The sculptor Adoniram had alone caught her attention, for a moment; she had not penetrated his character: her imagination had glimpsed a mystery there; but that lively curiosity of a moment had swiftly vanished. However, on seeing him for the first time, this strong woman had said to herself:

— ‘Now, there is a man!’

It may be, then, that her recent though fading impression of Adoniram had lowered the prestige of King Soliman in her eyes. What gave proof of it, was that once or twice, on the point of speaking about the artist, she restrained herself and changed the subject. (*Author’s note: Adoniram was otherwise known as Hiram, a name that has been preserved by the mystical tradition. Adon is only a term of excellence, which means master or lord. This Hiram should not be confused with the king of Tyre who happened to bear the same name.*)

However, David’s son was promptly ablaze: the queen was accustomed to such being often the case; he hastened to tell himself he was but following everyone’s example; yet he knew how to express himself with grace, the hour was propitious, Balkis was of the age that seeks love and, by virtue of the darkness, intrigued and tender.

Suddenly a host of torches cast red rays on the bushes, and supper was announced.

— ‘An unfortunate delay!’ thought the king.

— ‘A salutary diversion!’ thought the queen.

The meal was served in a pavilion built in the lively and fanciful taste of the peoples who dwelt on the banks of the Ganges. The octagonal room was illuminated with coloured candles, and lamps in which naphtha mixed with perfume burned; the light burst forth amidst shadowy sheaves of flowers. On the threshold, Soliman offered his hand to his guest, who put out her little foot, and quickly withdrew it in surprise. The floor was covered with a sheet of water in which the table, the divans, and the candles were reflected.

— ‘What deters you? Soliman asked in astonishment.

Balkis wished to show herself superior to fear; with a charming gesture, she lifted her dress and stepped forward, firmly. But her foot met a solid surface (*compare the Koran: ‘Sura 27, An-Naml’*).

— ‘O queen! You see,’ said the wise king, ‘that the most prudent may be mistaken when they judge by appearances only; I desired to astonish you, and I have at last succeeded.... You are stepping onto a floor of crystal.’

She smiled, with a shrug of her shoulders that was more graceful than admiring, perhaps regretting that none had known how to surprise her so before.

During the feast the king was gallant and eager to please; his courtiers surrounded him, and he reigned over them with such incomparable majesty, that the queen felt herself drawn to respect him. A solemn and rigid etiquette was observed at Soliman’s table.

The dishes were exquisite, and varied, but heavily loaded with salt and spices: never had Balkis tasted such salted food. She supposed that such was to the Israelites’ taste: she was therefore not a little surprised to notice that these people who braved such strong seasoning abstained from drink. No cupbearers; not a drop of wine or mead; not a single drinking-vessel on the table.

Balkis’ lips were burning, her palate was dry, and, as the king did not imbibe, she did not dare ask to do so: the prince’s dignity imposed itself upon her.

The meal over, the courtiers gradually dispersed, vanishing into the depths of a half-lit gallery. Soon the beautiful queen of the Sabaes found herself alone with Soliman, now more gallant than ever, whose eyes were tender and who, from eagerness, became almost pressing.

Overcoming her embarrassment, the queen, smiling and with downcast eyes, rose and announced her intention of retiring for the night.

— ‘What!’ cried Soliman. ‘Will you thus leave your humble slave without a word, without hope, without some token of your compassion? A union I have dreamed of, a happiness without which I can no longer live, an ardent and submissive love which begs its reward, will you trample all underfoot?’

He had seized the hand she had previously abandoned to him, regaining it effortlessly; but she resisted. True, Balkis had thought more than once of this alliance; but she was determined to preserve her freedom and power. She therefore insisted on retiring, and Soliman found himself obliged to yield.

— ‘Very well,’ he said, ‘leave me; but I set two conditions for your doing so.’

— ‘Speak.’

— ‘The night is sweet and your conversation sweeter. Will you grant me one more hour?’

— ‘Agreed.’

— ‘Secondly, you may not take anything that belongs to me ere you leave.’

— ‘Agreed, with all my heart!’ replied Balkis, laughing aloud.

— ‘Laugh, my queen! I have seen even the wealthiest folk yield to the most bizarre temptations...’.

— ‘Wonderful! You are clever in your means of saving your self-esteem. No deceit now; a peace treaty.’

— ‘An armistice, since I still hope....’

The conversation was resumed, and Soliman sought, being a knowledgeable man, to make the queen converse for as long as he could. A jet of water, which babbled away at the rear of the room, served for an accompaniment.

Now, if talking parches the mouth, it is doubly so when one has eaten without drinking, and done honour to too well-seasoned a supper. The lovely Queen of Sheba was dying of thirst; she would have given one of her provinces for a jug of fresh water.

Yet she did not dare betray that ardent wish. And the fountain clear, fresh, silvery and mocking still tinkled beside her, throwing out pearls which fell back into the basin with a pleasant sound. And her thirst increased: the queen, panting, could no longer resist.

While continuing the conversation, on seeing Soliman distracted and as if weighed down, she began to walk in various directions about the room, and twice passed very close to the fountain, but did not dare....

The desire became irresistible. She returned, slowed her pace, steadied herself with a glance, then furtively plunged the hollow of her lovely hand into the water; turning away, she quickly swallowed the mouthful of pure water.

Soliman rose, approached, took hold of her hand, wet and gleaming, and, in a tone as cheerful as it was resolute, said:

— ‘A queen is true to her word, and by the terms you agreed, you belong to me.’

— ‘What does this mean?’

— ‘You have stolen water from me... and, as you yourself have rightly observed, water is most rare in my kingdom.’

— ‘Ah! Lord, this is but a trap; I do not desire so cunning a husband!’

— ‘All he needs do is prove to you he is yet more generous. If he grants you your freedom, despite our formal agreement...’

— ‘Lord,’ interrupted Balkis,’ bowing her head, we owe our subjects an example of loyalty.’

— ‘My Lady,’ Soliman, the most courteous prince of times past and future, replied, falling to his knees, ‘this command I give shall be your ransom.’

Rising swiftly, he struck a bell: twenty servants arrived, bearing various refreshments, and accompanied by the courtiers. Soliman articulated these words with majesty:

— ‘Offer your queen, a drink of water.’

At these words the courtiers fell, prostrate, before the Queen of Sheba and honoured her.

But she, palpitating and confused, feared that she had gone further than she would have liked....

— During the pause that followed this part of the story, a rather singular incident occupied the attention of the assembly. A young man, who by the colour of his skin, the colour, that is, of a new bronze coin, could be recognized as an Abyssinian (*Habesch*), rushed into the middle of the circle and began to dance a sort of *bamboula*, accompanying himself with a song in broken Arabic of which I have retained only the refrain. This song began with the soaring cry: ‘*Yaman! Yamani!*’ accented with those repetitions of long syllables peculiar to the Arabs of the South. ‘*Yaman! Yaman! Yamani!... Sélam-Aleik Balkis-Mahéda!... Yaman! Yamani!*’ which meant: ‘Yemen! Yemen! O Yemen!... Hail to you, Balkis the Great...Yemen! O Yemen!’

This bout of nostalgia can only be explained by the relationship that once existed between the peoples of Sheba and the Abyssinians, located on the western shore of the Red Sea, and who were also part of the empire of the Himyarites. Doubtless the admiration expressed by this listener, hitherto silent, was due to the preceding story being one of his country’s traditional tales. Perhaps he was happy, also, on hearing that the great queen had been able to escape the trap set by the wise King Solomon.

As his monotonous chant lasted long enough to annoy the regular customers, some of them cried out that he was *melbous* (*a fanatic*), and he was gently led towards the door. The café owner, anxious about the five or six paras (*three centimes*) that this customer owed him, hastened to follow him outside. All ended well, no doubt, for the storyteller soon resumed his narration in the midst of the most religious of silences.

Chapter 5: The Sea of Bronze

— By dint of vigilant labour, master Adoniram had completed, and set in the sand, the moulds for his colossal figures. Deeply dug, and artfully pierced, the plateau of Zion had received the imprint of the sea of bronze destined to be cast on site, solidly supported at first by masonry buttresses, which, later, were to be substituted by the lions, the gigantic sphinxes, intended to

bear it permanently. It was upon bars of solid gold, resistant to fusing with the bronze flowing here and there, that the cover for this enormous basin was carried. Liquid iron, invading through several channels the space between the two parts, was to surround these gold pins, and become one with those refractory and precious bars.

Seven times had the Sun risen and set since the ore had begun to seethe in the furnace which was capped by a tall and massive brick tower ending, sixty cubits from the ground, in an open cone, from which escaped swirls of red smoke and blue flame flecked with sparks.

An excavation, made between the moulds and the base of the blast furnace, was to serve as a bed for the molten river of fire when the time came to open the entrails of the furnace with iron hooks.

To proceed with the great work of casting the metal, night was chosen: this was the time when they could follow the progress of the operation, a time when bronze, luminous and white, lights its own flow; and, if the glowing metal prepares some means of escape, if it flees through a crack, or pierces a hole somewhere, then that is unmasked in the darkness.

In anticipation of this solemn trial which would immortalise or discredit the name of Adoniram, everyone in Jerusalem was in turmoil. From all parts of the kingdom, workers had rushed to the site, abandoning their occupations, and, on the eve of the fatal night, as soon as the sun had set, the surrounding hills and mountains were cloaked with curious onlookers.

Never had an artist, on his own initiative, despite all objections, engaged in so formidable a task. On every occasion, the operation of casting metal offers a lively interest, and often, when important pieces were being created, King Soliman had deigned to spend the night at the forge with his courtiers, who disputed the honour of accompanying him.

But the casting of the brazen sea was a gigantic work, a challenge offered by genius to human prejudice, to Nature, and to the opinion of the experts, all of whom declared success impossible.

Also, people of all ages and countries, attracted by the spectacle of this venture, had already invaded the hill of Zion, the approaches to which were guarded by legions of workers. Noiseless patrols traversed the crowd to maintain order, and prevent excessive sound.... An easy task, since, by order of the king, announced by a trumpet blast, absolute silence had been imposed, the penalty for transgression being death; an indispensable precaution so that the artist's commands could be transmitted with certainty and speed.

Already the evening star was setting over the sea; deep night, thickened with clouds lit by the flames of the furnace, announced that the moment was near. Followed by the chief workmen, Adoniram, running here and there in the torchlight, cast a last glance at the preparations. Under the vast roof that fronted the furnace, one might have seen the blacksmiths, wearing leather helmets with broad flaps, and dressed in long white short-sleeved robes, tearing, with the help of long iron hooks, masses of half-vitrified foam from the gaping mouth of the furnace, slag which they dragged away; others, perched on scaffolding borne on massive frames, threw baskets of coal, from the top of the structure, into the furnace itself, which roared with the impetus of the air from the bellows. On all sides, groups armed with picks, stakes, and pliers, wandered about, casting long trails of shadow behind them. They were almost naked:

lengths of striped cloth covered their flanks; their heads were wrapped in woollen headdresses and their legs were protected by wooden greaves secured by leather straps. Blackened by the charcoal dust, they appeared red in the reflections of the embers; they moved about, here and there, like demons or ghosts.

A fanfare announced the court's arrival: Soliman appeared, with the Queen of Sheba, and was received by Adoniram, who conducted them to thrones improvised for his noble guests. The artist had donned a breastplate of ox-hide; a white woollen apron descended to his knees; his sinewy legs were secured by tiger-skin gaiters, and his feet were bare, for he trod with impunity even upon red-hot metal.

— 'You appear to me, in all your power,' said Balkis to the king of the workmen, 'like a god of fire. If your enterprise succeeds, no one will be able to say, this night, that he is greater than Master Adoniram!'

The artist, amidst his cares, was about to answer, when Soliman, always cautious and sometimes jealous, stopped him.

— 'Master,' he said in an imperative tone, 'do not lose precious time; return to your labours, and do not let our presence here give rise to some accident.'

The queen waved him on, and he disappeared.

— 'If he accomplishes his task,' thought Soliman, 'with what a magnificent monument he will honour the Temple of Adonai! Yet what brilliance he will add to his already formidable power!'

A few moments later, they saw Adoniram again, before the furnace. The brazier, which lit him from below, seemed to elevate his stature, his shadow ascending the wall, from which hung a large sheet of bronze on which the master struck twenty blows with an iron hammer. The sound of the vibrating metal echoed in the distance, then the silence grew deeper than before. Suddenly, ten shadowy phantoms, armed with levers and picks, swarmed into the excavation made beneath the outlet from the furnace, opposite the throne. The bellows rattled, and breathed, and only the dull sound of those iron implements penetrating the calcined clay, which sealed the orifice through which the liquid metal would rush, was heard. Soon the aperture turned darker, became purple, reddened, glowed, and acquired an orange colour; a white point appeared in the centre, and all the workers, but two, withdrew. The latter, under the supervision of Adoniram, worked to thin the crust around the luminous point, avoiding piercing it.... The master watched on anxiously.

During these preparations, Adoniram's faithful companion, young Benoni, who was devoted to him, passed among the groups of workmen, encouraging their zeal, observing whether the master's orders were being followed, and assessing their efforts himself.

It was this youth, who ran to the feet of Soliman, prostrated himself, fearfully, and said:

— 'Lord, suspend the flow, all is lost, we are betrayed!'

It was not customary to approach the prince in this way without permission; the guards were already approaching the rash fellow; Soliman dismissed these attentions, and, leaning over Benoni who was kneeling, said to him in a low voice:

— ‘Explain yourself, swiftly.’

— ‘I was circling the furnace: behind the wall, there was a man, standing motionless, who seemed to be awaiting some event; a second man appeared, who said in a low voice to the first: *Vehmamah!* He answered: *Eliael!* A third came who also pronounced the word: *Vehmamah!* to whom the two answered in the same manner: *Eliael!* then one said:

— ‘He makes the carpenters slaves to the miners.’

— The second: ‘He subordinates the masons to the miners, too.’

— The third: ‘He seeks to rule over the miners.’

— The first replied: ‘His powers serve strangers.’

— The second: ‘He has no homeland.’

The third added: ‘This is truth.’

— ‘The companions are brothers’ ... recommenced the first.

— ‘The trades have equal rights,’ continued the second.

The third added: ‘This is truth.’

I realised the first was a mason, since he later said: ‘I have mixed limestone with brick, and the lime will crumble into dust. The second was a carpenter; he said: ‘I have raised the crosspieces for the beams, and the flame will visit them.’ As for the third, he worked the metal. These were his words: ‘I have drawn masses of bitumen and sulphur from the poisoned lake of Gomorrah; I have mixed them into the metal.’

At that moment a shower of sparks illuminated their faces. The mason is a Syrian, his name Phanor; the carpenter a Phoenician, his name Amrou; the miner an Israelite from the tribe of Ruben, his name Methousael. Great king, I have hastened to your feet: extend your sceptre and halt the work!’

— ‘It is too late,’ said Soliman thoughtfully; ‘the furnace is about to be drained; keep silence, do not disturb Adoniram, but repeat those three names to me.’

— ‘Phanor, Amrou, and Methousael.’

— ‘Let all be as God wills.’

Benoni stared at the king, then fled with lightning speed. Meanwhile, the hard-baked clay was falling from the stoppered mouth of the furnace, beneath the redoubled blows of the miners, and the thinning layer grew so luminous, it seemed as if the sun were about to be roused from its deep nocturnal retreat. At a sign from Adoniram, the labourers moved aside, and while hammers made the bronze sheet resound, lifting an iron club, he drove it into the diaphanous wall, turned it in the wound, and violently tore it forth. In an instant, a rapid torrent of white molten metal rushed into the channel, and advanced, like a fiery serpent streaked with crystal

and silver, towards the basin dug in the sand, until the metal's flow split into several further channels.

Suddenly a crimson and purple light illuminated the faces of the innumerable spectators on the hillsides; its gleams penetrated the darkness of the clouds, and reddened the crests of the distant rocks. Jerusalem, emerging from the darkness, seemed prey to fire. A profound silence gave this solemn spectacle the fantastic aspect of a dream.

As the outflow began, a shadow was seen hovering around the basin the bronze was about to invade. A man had rushed forward, and, in spite of Adoniram's prohibitions, had dared to cross the channel intended for the metal. As he set foot there, the molten stream reached him, knocking him down, and he disappeared in a moment.

Adoniram's thought was only for his work; overwhelmed by the thought of imminent disaster, he raced forward likewise, armed with an iron hook, and at the risk of his life plunged it into the victim's breast, hooked him, raised him, and, with a superhuman effort, threw him like a block of slag onto the bank, where the luminous mass might darken and expire.... all so swiftly, that he failed to recognise the victim as his companion, the faithful Benoni.

While the molten metal flowed, like a river, to fill the cavities of the sea of bronze, whose vast outline had already been traced like a golden diadem in the darkened sand, gangs of workmen carrying large fire-pots, deep receptacles attached to long iron rods, plunged them one by one into the basin of liquid fire, and ran here and there pouring the metal into the moulds prepared for the lions, oxen, palms, and cherubim, the giant figures intended to support the sea of bronze. The onlookers were astonished at the quantity of metal the earth seemed to drink; outlines, like those of bas-reliefs lying flat on the ground, traced the clear and vermilion shapes of horses, winged bulls, cynocephali, and monstrous chimeras engendered by the genius of Adoniram.

— 'A sublime spectacle!' cried the Queen of Sheba. 'O the grandeur! O the power of this mortal genius, who subdues the elements and tames Nature herself!'

— 'He is not yet victorious,' replied Soliman bitterly, 'Adonai alone is all-powerful!'

Chapter 6: The Apparition

Suddenly Adoniram noticed that the river of metal was overflowing; the gaping spring vomited torrents; the overcharged sand collapsed: he fixed his eyes on the sea of bronze; the mould overflowed; a crack opened at the top; lava flowed out on all sides. He exhaled a cry so terrible that the air was filled with it and the echoes repeated from the mountain-slopes. Thinking that the sand, now over-heated, was vitrifying, Adoniram seized a flexible hose leading to a reservoir of water, and, with a hasty hand, directed a column of water onto the base of the crumbling buttresses of the basin's mould. But the metal, having taken flight, hurtled onwards: the two liquids fought each other; a mass of metal enveloped the water, imprisoned it, embraced it. Freeing itself, the trapped water vaporised and burst its shackles. A detonation resounded;

the metal spurted into the air in dazzling jets twenty cubits high; as if the crater of an angry volcano had opened. This detonation was followed by cries, by dreadful howls; for the rain of fire sowed death everywhere: every drop of metal was a burning dart which penetrated the body and killed. The place was strewn with dying people, the silence succeeded by an immense wail of terror. The terror at its height, all fled; fear of danger drove into the fire those whom the fire pursued.... the countryside about, illuminated, turning a dazzling purple, recalled that dreadful night when Sodom and Gomorrah blazed, scorched by Jehovah's lightning-bolts.

Adoniram, distraught, ran here and there to rally his workers, and close the mouth of the seemingly inexhaustible stream; but he heard only cries and curses; he stumbled over corpses: the rest of his men were scattered. Soliman alone remained impassive on his throne; the queen calm at his side. The diadem and the sceptre still shone in the darkness.

— 'Jehovah has punished him!' said Soliman to his hostess, 'and he punishes me, through the death of my subjects, for my weakness, my self-indulgence, and my monstrous pride.'

— 'The vanity that causes so great a sacrifice, so many victims, is criminal,' pronounced the queen. 'Lord, you might have perished during this infernal ordeal: bronze rained down around us.'

— 'And you were here! This vile servant of Baal has endangered a precious life! Let us leave, queen; your peril alone concerns me.'

Adoniram, who was passing by, heard this; he went away roaring with pain. Further on, a group of workmen overwhelmed him with their contempt, slander and curses. He was joined by the Syrian, Phanor, who said to him:

— 'You are mighty; chance has betrayed you; but the masons were not its accomplices.'

Amrou the Phoenician joined him, and said to him, in turn:

— 'You are mighty, and would have been victorious, if all had done their duty as the carpenters have.'

And the Israelite, Methousael said to him:

— 'The miners have done theirs; but it is these foreign workers who, through their ignorance, have compromised the enterprise. Courage! A greater work will avenge us for this failure.'

— 'Ah,' thought Adoniram, 'these are the only friends I have found....'

It was easy for him to avoid further encounter; all turned away from him, and the darkness hid their desertion. Soon only the glow of the braziers, and the metal turning red as it cooled on the surface illuminated the distant groups of workers, gradually lost in the shadows. Adoniram, dejected, sought Benoni.

— 'He too has abandoned me,' he murmured sadly.

The master remained alone beside the furnace.

— 'Dishonoured!' he murmured, bitterly. 'Such is the fruit of an austere, laborious existence devoted to the glory of an ungrateful prince! He condemns me, and my brothers deny

me! And this queen, this woman ... she was there, she saw my shame, and I... was forced to endure her contempt! But where is Benoni, at the moment when I suffer? Alone! I am alone, and cursed! The future is closed to me. Adoniram, smile at your deliverance, and seek it in fire, your element, and your rebellious slave!’

He advanced, calmly and resolutely, towards the river of molten metal, coursing along in fiery waves beneath the slag, and which, here and there, spurted and sparkled on contact with the humid air. The lava covered corpses, perhaps still quivering. Thick whirlwinds of violet and tawny smoke emerged in narrow columns, and veiled the abandoned theatre of his lugubrious venture. It was there that the thunderstricken giant collapsed, to sit upon the ground and lose himself in meditation ... his eye fixed on those fiery whirlwinds which might lean towards and smother him at the first breath of wind.

Certain strange, fleeting, extravagant forms appeared, now and then, among the bright, lugubrious play of the fiery vapour. Adoniram’s dazzled eyes glimpsed, amidst the limbs of giants, and blocks of gold, gnomish figures that scattered in smoke, or dissipated themselves in sparks. These fancies failed to distract him from his pain and despair. Soon, however, they seized possession of his delirious imagination, and it seemed to him that from the heart of the flames arose a grave, resounding voice that pronounced his name. Three times the whirlwind roared the name of Adoniram.

Around him, nothing moved.... He gazed greedily at the burning sand, and murmured:

— ‘The voice of the people calls to me!’

Without looking away, he rose on one knee, stretched out a hand, and distinguished a colossal, but indistinct human form in the midst of the red smoke, a form which seems to grow more solid in the flames, to gather itself, then dissolve, and merge. Everything around it stirred and blazed...it alone seemed fixed, though by turns obscure, or clear and dazzling, in the luminous vapour, amidst a mass of soot and smoke. It took shape, this figure, it acquired an outline, it grew larger again, and approached, and Adoniram, terrified, wondered what bronze creature this was, endowed with life.

The phantom advanced. Adoniram contemplated it in his stupor. Its gigantic chest was clad in a sleeveless dalmatic; its bared arms were adorned with iron rings; the bronzed head was framed by a square beard, braided and curled in several rows...and that head was crowned with a vermilion mitre; the figure held a hammer in its hand. Its large eyes, which shone with a gentle glow, bent themselves upon Adoniram, and, in a voice that seemed torn from entrails of bronze it murmured:

— ‘Rouse your spirit! Arise, my son!... Come, follow me.... I have seen the evils perpetrated by my descendants, and have taken pity on the latter....’

— ‘Spirit, who are you?’

— ‘The shade of the father of your fathers, the ancestor of those who work and suffer. Come! When my hand has smoothed your forehead, you will be able to breathe amidst the flames. Be without fear, as you once were without weakness....’

Suddenly, Adoniram felt himself enveloped by penetrating heat which animated him without setting him ablaze; the air he inhaled seemed subtler; an invincible and mounting force bore him towards the blaze into which his mysterious companion had already plunged.

— ‘Where am I? What is your name? Where are you leading me?’ he whispered.

— ‘To the centre of the earth ... the soul of the inhabited world; there rises the subterranean palace of Enoch, our father, whom Egypt calls Hermes, whom Arabia honours under the name of Idris.’

— ‘Immortal powers!’ cried Adoniram. ‘O my lord! Is it then true, you must be...?’

— ‘Your ancestor, a human being ...and an artist; your master and your patron: I was Tubal-Cain.’

The further they advanced, into the deepest regions of silence and night, the more Adoniram doubted the reality of his sensations. Little by little, distracted from himself, he was beguiled by the charm of the unknown, and his spirit, attached entirely to the mounting power which dominated him, was entirely devoted to his mysterious guide.

The humid, cold regions were succeeded by a warm, rarefied atmosphere; the inner life of the earth manifested itself by quakes, by singular humming sounds; dull, regular, periodic throbs announced the proximity of the heart of the world; Adoniram felt it beat with increasing force, and he was astonished at moving among endless spaces; he sought support, found it not, and followed, without being aware, the shade of Tubal-Cain, who remained silent.

After a few moments which seemed to him as long as the life of a patriarch, he discovered in the distance a luminous point. This spot grew, approached, extended in lengthy perspective, and the artist glimpsed a world peopled with labouring shades, given over to occupations which he did not understand. The tremulous light finally expired above the dazzling mitre, and on the dalmatic, of the son of Cain.

In vain did Adoniram strive to speak: his voice died in his oppressed chest; but he breathed again on finding himself in a vast gallery of immeasurable depth, so large that the walls were invisible, and the vault above, which they supported, borne on an avenue of columns so high that they were lost above him in the air, escaped sight.

Suddenly he started; Tubal-Cain began to speak:

— ‘Your feet rest upon the great emerald stone that serves as root and pivot of the mountain of Kaf; you have approached the domain of your ancestors. Here the line of Cain reigns unchallenged. Within these granite chambers, amidst these inaccessible caverns, we have finally found our freedom. It is here the jealous tyranny of Adonai expires, here one can, without perishing, feed on the fruit of the tree of knowledge.’

Adoniram exhaled a long, sweet sigh: it seemed to him that an overwhelming weight, which had always bowed him down in life, had vanished at last.

Suddenly life burst forth; forms appeared among these hypogea: work animated them, agitated them; the joyful din of beaten metal echoed; the sounds of gushing water and impetuous winds were mingled there; the open vault extended like an immense sky from which

torrents of white, and azure light, which become iridescent as they fall to the ground, poured down over the largest and strangest of workshops,

Adoniram passed amidst a crowd given over to efforts whose goal he could not grasp; this clarity, this celestial dome in the bowels of the earth astonished him; he halted.

— ‘This is the sanctuary of fire,’ Tubal-Cain told him; ‘from here arises the heat of the earth, which, without our labours, would perish from cold. We prepare the metals, we distribute them by means of the planet’s veins, after liquefying these vapours.

Gathered and intertwined about our heads, the veins of various ores release opposing spirits which ignite and project these brilliant lights ... dazzling to your imperfect eyes. Attracted by these flows, the seven metals vaporise around them, and form clouds of sinople, azure, purple, gold, crimson and silver which move in space, and reproduce the alloys of which most minerals and precious stones are composed (*The seven metals of alchemy were lead, tin, iron, gold, copper, mercury, and silver, each twinned with a planetary symbol*). As the dome above cools, these condensing clouds rain down a hail of rubies, emeralds, topazes, onyxes, turquoises, and diamonds, and the currents of the earth bear them away amidst masses of scoria: granites, flints, and limestones which, raising the surface of the globe, fold themselves to form mountain ranges. These materials solidify as they approach the domain of men... and that of the faded sun of Adonai, a failing furnace that lacks even the strength to heat an egg. What would become of the life of man, if we did not secretly pass to him the element of fire, imprisoned in rock, as well as the flintstone fit to create a spark?’

His explanation satisfied Adoniram, while astonishing him. He approached the workers without understanding how they could work the rivers of gold, silver, bronze, and iron, separate them, dam them, and sift them, as the waves sift the contents of the sea.

— ‘These elements,’ said Tubal-Cain, answering his thought, ‘are liquefied by the central fire: the temperature where we are now is twice as great as that of the furnaces in which you dissolve metal.’

Adoniram, terrified, felt surprised to be still alive.

— ‘This degree of heat,’ resumed Tubal-Cain, ‘is the natural temperature of souls extracted from the element of fire. Adonai placed an imperceptible spark in the centre of that mould of clay from which he thought to form humankind, and the spark was enough to heat the mass, animate it and grant it thought; but there, above, such souls struggle against the cold: hence the narrow limits of your faculties; then it happens that the spark is drawn below by the attraction of the Earth, and you die.’

Creation, thus explained, prompted a sign of disdain from Adoniram.

— ‘Yes,’ continued his guide ‘he is a god less strong than subtle, and more jealous than generous, than Lord Adonai. He created Man of clay, in spite of the genies of fire; then, fearful of his work, and the genies’ pity for that sad creature, He, without pity for human tears, condemned Mankind to die. That is the source of the dispute which divides us: all terrestrial life proceeding from fire is attracted by the fire which resides at the centre. We wished in return

that the central fire should be attracted by the circumference, and radiate outwards: this exchange of principles would have guaranteed life without end.

Adonai, who rules the worlds, closed up the Earth, and nullified that external power of attraction. As a result, the Earth will die like its inhabitants. It is already aging; the cold penetrates more and more; entire species of animals and plants have vanished; the nations are diminishing, the duration of life grows shorter, and, of the seven primitive metals, the earth, whose marrow freezes and dries up, already receives only five (*the golden and silver ages having passed*). The sun itself is failing; it will die in five or six thousand years. But it is not for me alone, O my son, to reveal these mysteries to you: you shall hear them from the mouths of your ancestors.' (*Author's note: the traditions on which the various scenes of this tale are based are not peculiar to the Orient. The European Middle Ages knew them. One may consult the 'Praeadamitae' of Isaac de la Peyrère, Louis de Holberg's 'Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum', and a host of writings relating to the Kabbalah, and Spagyric medicine. The Orient is alive in them. One should not therefore be surprised by the strange scientific hypotheses this tale contains. Most of these legends are also found in the Talmud, the books of the Neoplatonists, the Koran, and in 'The Book of Enoch', recently translated by Richard Laurence, Archbishop of Cashel.*)

Chapter 7: The Subterranean World

— Together, they entered a garden lit by the tender glow of a gentle fire, populated with unknown trees whose foliage, formed of small tongues of flame, cast, instead of shadow, brighter light on the emerald ground, dappled with flowers of strange shape, in surprisingly vivacious colours. Blossoming from that fire within the region of metals, the flowers were its most fluid and purest emanations. The arborescent vegetation of flowering metal shone with a brilliance like that of precious stones, while exhaling perfumes of amber, benzoin, incense and myrrh. Nearby, streams of naphtha meandered, feeding the veins of cinnabar, the rose of those subterranean regions. There, were statues also, of giant old men, sculpted to the measure of that impressive and exuberant place. Beneath a canopy of blazing light, Adoniram saw a row of seated Colossi, reproducing the sacred costumes, sublime proportion and imposing aspect of those figures he had once viewed in the caves of Lebanon. He divined them to be of that vanished dynasty, the princes of Enochia. Around them, crouching, he saw once more, were the cynocephali, the winged lions, the griffins, the smiling and mysterious sphinxes, those condemned species, swept away by the Flood, but immortalised in the memory of men. Those androgynous slaves, inert, docile, yet animate, supported the massive thrones.

Motionless, and at rest, the princes, descendants of Adam, seemed to dream and wait.

Having reached the end of the row, Adoniram, walking further, directed his steps towards an enormous square stone, white as snow, and was about to set foot upon that mass of incombustible asbestos-bearing rock.

— ‘Halt!’ cried Tubal-Cain. ‘We are beneath the mountain of Serendib; you are about to view the unvisited tomb of the first-born of the earth. Adam sleeps beneath this stone, which preserves him from the fire. He may not rise again until the last day of the world; his tomb holds our ransom fast. But listen: our common father calls out to you.’

Cain, it was, who was crouched in a painful posture; he raised himself. His beauty was superhuman, his eyes sad, his lips pale. He was naked, and around his furrowed brow coiled a golden serpent, like a diadem.... That errant ancestor seemed harassed still.

— ‘May sleep and death be yours, my son! Oppressed and labouring race, it is through my deed that you suffer. Eve was my mother; Iblis, the angel of light, set at her heart the spark that animates me, and that generated our line. Adam, kneaded of clay and the depository of a captive soul, Adam nourished me. Child of the Elohim, I loved those offspring of Adonai, and placed at the service of ignorant and feeble Mankind the spirit of the genius that resides in me. I nourished my foster-father in his old age, and cradled Abel in his infancy... he whom they called my brother. Alas! Alas! *(Author’s note: The Elohim were primitive genii whom the Egyptians called the gods of Ammon. In the Persian tradition, Adonai or Jehovah, the god of the Israelites, was simply one of the Elohim.)*

Before teaching the earth how to commit murder, I had felt that ingratitude, sense of injustice, and bitterness that corrupts the heart. Working ceaselessly, raising crops from the greedy soil, inventing, for the happiness of men, those ploughs that force the earth to produce, recreating for them, in the midst of abundance, the Eden they have lost; I made of my life a sacrifice. O depths of iniquity! Adam showed me no love! Eve believed herself banished from paradise for having brought me into the world, and her heart, closed to me, was concerned only for her Abel. He, disdainful and pampered, considered me the servant of both: Adonai favoured him, what more was needed? So, while I moistened the ground with my sweat over which Abel felt himself to be king, he himself, idle and adored, grazed his flocks and slumbered beneath the sycamores. I complained: our parents invoked God’s justice; we offered Him our sacrifices, and mine, sheaves of wheat that I had made to flourish, the first fruits of summer, mine was rejected with contempt.... it is thus that the jealous God has always rejected fertile and inventive genius, and granted the power of oppression to vulgar minds. You know the rest, all except that my rejection by Adonai, while condemning me to sterility, granted young Abel our sister Aclinia, as his wife, by whom I was loved. From that arose the first battle of the Djinns, the children of the Elohim, born of the element of fire, against the sons of Adonai, born of earth.

I extinguished Abel’s light.... Adam saw himself reborn later in the posterity of Seth; and, to atone for my crime, I became a benefactor to the children of Adam. It is to our race, superior to theirs, that they owe their arts, their industry, and the elements of their science, all their vain efforts! By instructing them, I freed them.... Adonai has never forgiven me, and that is why he marked me down as an irredeemable criminal, having broken that vessel of clay; He who, in the waters of the Flood, drowned so many thousands of human beings! He who, to decimate their numbers, raises up so many tyrants from among them!’

Then a voice arose from Adam’s tomb.

— ‘It was you,’ said the voice, in a deep tone, ‘you who gave rise to murder. God retains, in my descendants, the blood of Eve from which you came, and which you shed! It is because of you that Jehovah raised up priests who have immolated men, and kings who sacrificed both priests and soldiers. One day, he will raise up emperors to crush the people, priests and kings themselves, and the posterity of the nations will say: ‘These are the sons of Cain!’

Eve’s son stirred in despair.

— ‘He too!’ he cried, ‘He too, has never forgiven me.’

— ‘Never!’... the voice echoed.

And, from the depths of the abyss, he was heard to moan once more:

— ‘Abel, my son, Abel, Abel!... what have you done to your brother Abel?...

Cain rolled on the ground, which quaked, and in a convulsion born of despair tore at his chest....

Such is the punishment of Cain, because he shed blood.

Filled with respect, love, compassion and horror, Adoniram turned away.

— ‘What have I done, I?’ said the venerable Enoch, shaking his head surmounted by a tall crown. ‘Men wandered in herds; I taught them to cut stone, to build dwellings, to gather together in cities. I was the first to reveal to them the forms of society. I had gathered together mere brutes; ... I left them a nation in my city of Enochia, whose ruins still astonish the degenerate peoples. It is thanks to me that Soliman chooses to erect a temple in honour of Adonai, and this Temple will be his downfall; for the God of the Israelites, my son, has recognised my genius in the work of your hands.’

Adoniram contemplated that mighty shade: Enoch possessed a long, braided beard; his crown, adorned with crimson bands and a double row of stars, was surmounted by a point ending in a vulture’s beak. Two fringed bands fell over his hair and tunic. In one hand he held a long sceptre, and in the other a set-square. His colossal stature exceeded that of his father Cain. Near him stood Irad and Maviael, wearing plain bands about their hair. Bracelets wound about their arms: one had captured the water of the founts; the other had felled and trimmed the cedars. Mathusael had conceived of written characters, and left behind books which Idris later seized, and buried in the earth; the books of *Tau*. Mathusael bore on his shoulder a hieratic pallium and a parazonium, a short sword, at his side, and on his dazzling belt shone the fiery symbolic letter T which unites all workmen descended from the spirits of fire.

While Adoniram contemplated the smiling features of Lamech, whose arms were covered by his folded wings from which emerged two long hands resting on the heads of two crouching young men, Tubal-Cain, leaving his protégé, had taken his place on his iron throne.

— ‘You behold the venerable face of my father,’ he said to Adoniram. ‘These, whose hair he caresses, are the two children of Adah: Jabel, who first pitched tents, and learned to sew camel-skins, and Jubal, my brother, who was the first to string the *kinnor*, and the harp, and learn how to draw forth notes.’

— ‘Son of Lamech and Sella,’ replied Jubal in a voice as harmonious as the evening winds, ‘you are greater than your brothers, and reign over your ancestors. It is from you that the arts of war and peace proceed. You revealed the reduction of metals, you lit the first forge. By granting humans the use of gold, silver, copper and steel, you have recreated for them the tree of knowledge. Gold and iron will raise them to the heights of power, and will prove deadly enough for them to deal vengeance, on our behalf, upon Adonai. Honour to Tubal-Cain!’

A tremendous noise, from all sides, responded to this exhortation, repeated in the distance by the legions of gnomes, who resumed their labours with a new ardour. The sound of hammers echoed from the vaults of the eternal factories, and Adoniram ... the workman, in this world where the workmen were kings, felt a deep joy and pride.

— ‘Child of the race of the Elohim,’ Tubal-Cain said to him, ‘take courage, your glory is in servitude. Your ancestors made human industry formidable, and that is why our line was condemned. We fought for two thousand years; they could not destroy us, because we are of immortal essence; they succeeded in conquering us, because the blood of Eve mingled with our blood. Your ancestors, my descendants, were preserved from the waters of the Flood. For, while Jehovah, preparing our destruction, filled the reservoirs of heaven with them, I called fire to my aid and sent swift streams of flame towards the surface of the globe. At my command, the flame dissolved stone and excavated long galleries fit to serve as our retreats. These subterranean roads ended beneath the plain of Giza, not far from these shores where the city of Memphis has since arisen. In order to preserve the galleries from the water’s invasion, I gathered the race of giants, and our hands raised an immense pyramid which will last as long as the world. The stones were cemented with impenetrable bitumen; and no other opening was made than a narrow corridor closed by a small door which I walled up myself on the last day of the ancient world.

Underground dwellings were dug into the rock: one entered by descending into the depths; they lined a low gallery leading to the mass of water I had trapped in a great river, suitable for quenching the thirst of the human beings and herds concealed in these retreats. Beyond the river, I had gathered, in a vast space lit by fires generated by the friction produced by opposing metals, the vegetables and fruits nourished by the earth.

It was there that the feeble remains of the line of Cain lived, sheltered from the waters. All the trials we had undergone and journeys we had made, it was necessary to repeat in order to reach the light once more, once the waters had regained their bed. The ways were perilous, the climate within enervated us. During the outward and return journeys, through each region, we left behind a few companions. I alone, survived in the end, along with the son my sister Noema had borne me.

I unsealed the pyramid, and viewed the land. How vast the change! Mere desert!... Frail creatures, stunted plants, a pale and heatless sun, and here and there heaps of infertile mud through which reptiles crawled! Suddenly an icy wind, laden with infectious miasma, penetrated my chest, and scorched it. Half-suffocated, I expelled it, then breathed it in again so as not to die. I know not what chill poison circulated in my veins; my vigour was eclipsed, my legs gave way, black night surrounded me, a shivering seized me. The Earth’s climate had altered: the ground, cooling, no longer gave off enough heat to animate that to which it had

formerly given life. Like a dolphin hurled from the depths of the seas onto the sand, I felt agony, and understood that my last hour had come....

Driven by the supreme instinct for self-preservation, I sought to flee, and, plunging into the pyramid, there I lost consciousness. It became my tomb; my spirit delivered thence, attracted by the internal fires, returned to seek those of my fathers. As for my son, barely adult, and still developing; he survived; but his growth ceased.

He wandered following the destiny of our race, until the wife of Ham, Noah's second son, found him most beautiful among the sons of men. He knew her: she gave birth to Cush, the father of Nimrod, who taught his brothers the art of hunting, and founded Babylon. They undertook to build the tower of Babel; then, Adonai recognised, once more, the blood of Cain, and began to persecute them. The descendants of Nimrod were again scattered. Let the voice of my son bring this painful story to an end.' (*Author's note: according to Talmudic tradition, it was the wife of Noah herself who mixed the race of genies with the race of men, by yielding to the seductions of a spirit issuing from the heavens. See 'The Count of Gabalis', by Abbé de Villars*).

Adoniram looked about him anxiously, seeking the son of Tubal-Cain.

— 'You will not see him,' said the prince of the spirits of fire. 'My son's spirit is invisible, since he died after the Flood, and his corporeal form belongs to the earth. It is so with his descendants; and your own father, Adoniram, is wandering amidst the fiery air that you breathe.... yes, your father.'

— 'Your father, yes, your father'... repeated a voice like an echo, but with a tender accent, that passed like a kiss over Adoniram's forehead.

And, turning around, the artist wept.

— 'Console yourself,' said Tubal-Cain, 'he is happier than I. He left you in the cradle, and, as your body does not yet belong to the earth, he enjoys the happiness of seeing your face. But pay attention to the words of my son.'

Then a voice spoke:

— 'Alone among the mortal geniuses of our race, I have seen the world before and after the Flood, and have contemplated the face of Adonai. I hoped for the birth of a son, though the chill wind of the aged earth oppressed my heart. One night, God appeared to me: his face cannot be described. He said to me:

— "Hope!" ...

Lacking experience, isolated in an unknown world, I replied timidly:

— "Lord, I am afraid."

He recommenced:

— "That fear will be your salvation. You must die; your name will be unknown to your brothers and leave not an echo amidst the passing ages, and of you will be born a son you will never see. From him will come those lost among the crowd, like planets wandering the

firmament. Of the stock of giants, I have diminished you in form; your descendants will be born weak; their lives will be short; isolation will be their lot. Their breasts will preserve the precious sparks of genius, and their greatness will be their torment. Superior to others, they will be their benefactors yet will find themselves the object of their disdain; their tombs alone will be honoured. Unrecognised during their stay on earth, the strength they possess, they will exercise for the glory of others, despite a feeling of bitterness. Sensitive to the misfortunes of humanity, they will long to prevent them, without being able to make themselves heard. Subjected to vile and mediocre power, they will fail to overcome contemptible tyrants. Superior in spirit, they will be the playthings of opulence and happy stupidity. They will further the fame of the nations, yet not be famed in their lifetime. Giants of intellect, burning torches of knowledge, organs of progress, lights of the arts, instruments of freedom, they alone will remain slaves, solitary and disdained. Tender-hearted, they will be the target of envy; energetic of spirit, they will be paralysed through their kindness.... They will recognise one another.”

— “God is cruel!” I cried. “At least their life will be short, and the spirit will consume the body.”

— “Not so; they will nourish hope, ever disappointed yet constantly revived, and the more they labour by the sweat of their brow, the more ungrateful others will be. They will give joy and receive but pain; the burden of toil with which I have charged the descendants of Adam will weigh heavily on their shoulders; poverty will hound them; their families will be for them companions in hunger. Complaisant or rebellious, they will be constantly decried, they will work for all, and waste, in vain, their genius, their industry, and the strength of their arms.”

Jehovah spoke; my heart was broken; I cursed the night in which I had fathered a child, and expired.’

And the voice died away, leaving behind a long series of sighs.

— ‘You see, you hear,’ cried Tubal-Cain, ‘and our example is before you. Benevolent geniuses, authors of the many intellectual conquests of which mankind is so proud, we are in their eyes accursed devils, spirits of evil. Son of Cain, suffer your destiny! Bear it with imperturbable brow, and may the God of Vengeance be terrified by your constancy. Be great before men, and strong beside us. I saw you close to succumbing, my son, and I wished to support your virtue. The spirits of fire will come to your aid; dare everything; you are reserved for the downfall of Soliman, that faithful servant of Adonai. From you will be born a line of kings who will restore, on earth, despite Jehovah, the neglected worship of fire, the sacred element. When you are no longer on earth, the tireless militia of artisans will rally to your name, and a phalanx of workers and thinkers will one day destroy the blind power of kings, those despotic ministers of Adonai. Go, my son, fulfil your destiny....’

At these words, Adoniram felt himself raised aloft; the garden of metals, its sparkling flowers, its trees of light, the immense, brilliant workshops of the gnomes, the dazzling streams of gold, silver, cadmium, mercury and naphtha, merged beneath his feet to form a single wide channel of light, a rapid river of fire. He found himself gliding through space with the speed of a meteor. Everything gradually dimmed: the domain of his ancestors appeared to him for an instant like a motionless planet in the middle of a dark sky, a chill wind struck his face, he felt

a jolt, cast his eyes about him, and found himself lying on the sand, at the foot of the mould of the brazen sea, surrounded by half-cooled lava, which still cast a reddish glow amidst the nocturnal mists.

— ‘A dream!’ he said to himself, ‘Was it only a dream? Unhappy man! What is only too real is the loss of my hopes, the ruin of my project, and the dishonour that awaits me at dawn....’

But the vision was so clearly imprinted that he suspected the very doubts that had seized him. As he was musing, he raised his eyes and recognised before him the colossal shadow of Tubal-Cain.

— ‘Genius of fire’, he cried, ‘lead me back to the depths of your abyss. Let the Earth hide my shame.’

— ‘Is this how you follow my precepts?’ the shade replied, in a harsh tone. ‘No idle words; the night is advancing, soon the flaming eye of Adonai will light the earth; we must hasten. Feeble child! Would I abandon you in so perilous an hour? Be fearless; the moulds are full: the metal, suddenly widening the orifice of the furnace walled with stones that were not refractory enough, burst forth, and the overflow gushed over the rim. You thought there was a crack, lost your head, threw water upon it, and the jet of metal scattered.’

— ‘Yet how can I free the edges of the basin from those metal burrs that adhere to it?’

— ‘Bronze is porous, and conducts heat less well than steel. Take a piece, heat it at one end, cool it at the other, and strike it with a sledgehammer: the piece will break at the point between. Ores and crystals do the same.

— ‘Master, I am listening.’

— ‘By Iblis! You would be better off understanding me. Your basin is still red-hot: cool, suddenly, the overflow from its rim, and detach the burrs with hammer-blows.’

— ‘It would need some vigour....’

— ‘It needs but a hammer. That of Tubal-Cain opened the crater of Etna to set flowing the slag from our own factories.’

Adoniram heard the sound of a piece of falling iron; he stooped and picked up a hammer, heavy but perfectly weighted, to suit his hand. He longed to express his gratitude; but the shade had disappeared, and the rising sun had begun to obscure the light of the stars.

A moment later, the birds, who were singing their preludes to the dawn, took flight at the sound of Adoniram’s hammer, which, striking with repeated blows the rim of the basin, alone disturbed the profound silence that precedes the birth of day....

— This *session* had greatly impressed the audience, which increased in numbers the next day. There was talk of the mysteries of the mountain of Kaf, which always greatly interest Orientals. To me, the tale had seemed Classical, and akin to Aeneas’ descent to the underworld.

Chapter 8: The Pool of Siloam

— The storyteller continued:

It was the hour when Mount Tabor casts its morning shadow on the hilly road to Bethany: a few white and diaphanous clouds wandered the depths of the sky, softening the morning light; the dew still lay in bluish sheets on the meadows; the breeze, murmuring in the foliage, accompanied the song of the birds which lined the path to Mount Moriah; one might have seen from afar the linen tunics and gauzy dresses of a procession of women who, crossing a bridge thrown over the Kidron, reached the banks of a stream which fed the Pool of Siloam. Behind them walked eight Nubians carrying a rich palanquin, and two burdened camels which ambled along, their heads swaying.

The litter was empty; for, having left, along with her women, at dawn, the tents outside the walls of Jerusalem where she had chosen to remain with her retinue, the Queen of Sheba had dismounted, better to enjoy the charm of the fresh countryside.

Young and pretty, for the most part, Balkis' maidservants had set out early for the fount, to wash their mistress' linen. She, dressed as simply as her companions, preceded them, gaily, her nurse beside her, while, following her footsteps, the young people chattered to each other as they were wont.

— 'Your reasoning impresses me not, my daughter,' said the nurse; 'this marriage seems to me a serious folly; and if the error is excusable, it is only on account of the profit it might yield.'

— 'An edifying moral! If the wise Soliman heard you...'

— 'Is it wise of him, he being no longer young, to covet the rose of the Sabaeans?'

— 'Flattery! Good Sarahil, you are breathing too deeply of the morning air.'

— 'Do not rouse my un-awakened severity; I would merely say....'

— 'Well, say on!'

— 'That Soliman loves you; and you deserve it.'

— 'I am unsure,' replied the young queen, laughing. 'I have interrogated myself, seriously, as regards the matter, and yes, it is probable that the king is not indifferent to me.'

— 'If it were not so, you would not have examined this delicate point so scrupulously. You seek to combine with him in political alliance, and scatter flowers thus on the arid path of propriety. Soliman has rendered your kingdom, like those of all his neighbours, tributary to his power, and you dream of freeing them by giving yourself to a master whom you intend to make your slave. But take care!'

— 'What have I to fear? He adores me.'

— ‘He professes, as regards his noble person, too lively a passion for you for his better feelings to overcome the desire of the senses, and nothing is more fragile. Soliman is, in truth, thoughtful, ambitious and cold.’

— ‘Is he not the greatest prince on earth, the noblest scion of the race of Shem, from whom I am descended? Find in the world a prince more worthy than he to give successors to the dynasty of the Himyarites!’

— ‘The line of the Himyarites, our ancestors, descends from nobler roots than you think. Do not the children of Shem command the inhabitants of the air?... I hold, in the end, to the oracular predictions: your destiny is not yet fulfilled, and the sign by which you shall recognise your husband has not appeared; the hoopoe has not yet interpreted the will of the eternal powers which guard you.’

— ‘Must my fate depend on the dictates of a bird?’

— ‘Of a bird unique in all the world, whose intelligence is shared with no known species; whose spirit, the high priest told me, was born of the element of fire. It is no terrestrial creature; it belongs to the *djinns* (*genies*).’

— ‘It is true,’ replied Balkis, ‘that Soliman attempts to tame her, yet he offers her his shoulder or fist in vain.’

— ‘I fear she will never rest there. At the time when the creatures were submissive — for those species are extinct — they did not obey Mankind created from clay. They were only subject to the *divs*, or *djinns*, children of the air or fire.... Soliman is of the species formed from clay by Adonai.’

— ‘And yet the hoopoe obeys me...’

Sarahil smiled and nodded: a princess of the blood of the Himyarites, and a relative of their last king, the queen’s nurse had studied the natural sciences: her prudence matched her discretion and kindness.

— ‘My Queen,’ she added, ‘there are secrets kept from the young, which the girls of our house must remain ignorant of prior to their marriage. If passion leads them astray, and causes them to fall, these mysteries remain hidden from them, so that common men may be eternally excluded from knowledge of them. Let this suffice you: Hud-Hud, that renowned bird, will only recognise as master the husband reserved for the Princess of Sheba.’

— ‘You will make me curse this feathered tyrant.’

— ‘Who will save you, perhaps, from a despot armed with a sword.’

— ‘Soliman has my word, and, unless he, rightfully, incurs our resentment, Sarahil, the die is cast; the time granted me will expire, and, this very evening....’

— ‘The power of the Elohim (*the gods*) is great!’ murmured the nurse.

To end the conversation, Balkis turned away, and began to gather the flowers of hyacinths, mandragoras, and cyclamens which dappled the meadow’s green, while the hoopoe, which had fluttered after her, jumped around her coquettishly, as if seeking her forgiveness.

This pause allowed the women to rejoin, belatedly, their sovereign. They spoke among themselves of the Temple of Adonai, whose walls were rising, and of the brazen sea, which had been the subject of all conversation for four days.

The queen seized on this fresh source of conversation, and her attendants, in their curiosity to hear her comments, surrounded her. Tall sycamores, which spread verdant arabesques above their heads against the azure background, enveloped this charming group in delicate shadows.

— ‘Nothing equals the astonishment which seized me yesterday evening,’ Balkis told them. ‘Soliman himself was speechless with stupor. Three days before, all had seemed lost; Master Adoniram had collapsed, as if struck by lightning, amidst the ruins of his work. His victory, betrayed, vanished before our eyes amidst torrents of rebellious lava; the artist was plunged again into darkness.... Now, his name echoes triumphantly from the hills; his workmen have heaped palm-leaves at the threshold of his dwelling, and he is more powerful than ever in Israel.’

— ‘His roar of triumph,’ said a young Sabaean woman, ‘reached our tents, and, troubled by the memory of that recent catastrophe, O queen, we feared for your life! Your servants know not what occurred.’

— ‘Without waiting for the iron to cool, or so I am told, Adoniram, summoned his discouraged workmen the following morning. Their mutinous leaders surrounded him; he calmed them in a few words: for three days, they laboured, freeing the mould to accelerate the cooling of the basin that they believed damaged. A profound mystery hid their efforts. On the third day, those innumerable artisans, anticipating dawn, raised the bronze bulls and lions with levers still blackened by the heat. The massive blocks were dragged beneath the basin, and adjusted, with a promptness that bordered on the miraculous; the hollow sea of bronze, freed from its supports, settled on its twenty-four caryatids; and, though Jerusalem deplored the idle expense, the admirable work shone before the astonished eyes of those who had accomplished it. Suddenly, the barriers erected by the workmen fell: the crowd rushed forward; their noise spread to the palace. Soliman feared sedition; he hastened there, and I accompanied him. An immense crowd followed in our footsteps. A hundred thousand delirious workers, crowned with green palm-leaves, welcomed us. Soliman could not believe his eyes. The whole city praised the name of Adoniram to the heavens.

— ‘What triumph! How happy he must be!’

— ‘He! That strange genius! That deep and mysterious spirit!... At my request, they summoned him, they sought him, the workmen ran about in every direction... a vain effort! Disdainful of his labours, Adoniram hid himself; he evaded praise: the star was eclipsed. “Come,” said Soliman, “the people’s king has shamed us.” As for me, on leaving the field of genius, my soul was sad and my thoughts filled with thoughts of this mortal, rendered great by his works, greater still by his absence at such a moment.’

— ‘I saw him pass by the other day,’ said a maid of Sheba, ‘the fire in his eyes warmed my cheeks and reddened them: he possesses a king’s majesty.’

— ‘His beauty,’ continued one of her companions, is superior to that of the children of men; his stature is imposing, his appearance dazzling. Such is how I imagine the gods and the genies to be.’

— ‘More than one among you, I suppose, would willingly unite her fate to that of the noble Adoniram?’

— ‘O queen! What are we before the face of so high a personage? His spirit is among the clouds, and his proud heart would not condescend to visit ours.’

Flowering jasmines, dominated by terebinths and acacias, among which rare palm-trees inclined their pale heads, framed the Pool of Siloam. There grew marjoram, grey-blue irises, thyme, verbena and the fiery rose of Sharon. Under these clumps of starry bushes, stood, here and there, age-old benches at the feet of which gurgled springs of fresh water, tributaries of the fount. These resting-places were adorned with vines that twined among the branches. Apios tuberosa plants with their reddish and perfumed clusters, and blue wisteria rose, in musky and graceful festoons, to the tops of the pallid, quivering ebony trees.

At the moment when the Queen of Sheba and her retinue reached the area of the fount, a man, seated on the edge of the pool, where he had abandoned one hand to the caresses of the water, surprised in his musings, rose, with the intention of departing. Balkis stood before him; he raised his eyes to heaven, and turned away more swiftly.

But she, swifter still, placed herself in front of him:

— ‘Why do you avoid me, Master Adoniram?’ said she.

— ‘I have never sought the world,’ replied the artist, ‘and I fear the gaze of princes.’

— ‘Is mine so dreadful then?’ replied the queen, with a profound gentleness that drew a glance from the young man.

What he discovered was far from reassuring. The queen had laid aside the insignia of grandeur, and the woman, in the simplicity of her morning finery, was all the more formidable. She had concealed her hair beneath the folds of a long floating veil, while her diaphanous white dress, stirred by the curious breeze, allowed a glimpse of a breast smooth as the flare of a conch shell. In this simple attire, Balkis seemed more tender, more playful, and his respect for her was no longer free of admiration and even desire. That touching grace of which she herself seemed unaware, her youthful face, her virginal air, made a new and profound impression on Adoniram’s heart.

‘What is the use of detaining me?’ he said bitterly. ‘My ills are sufficient, and you bring me only greater pain. Your mind is light, your favour fleeting, and you present the net only to torment more cruelly those it has captured.... Farewell, queen who forgets so swiftly, and never reveals her inner self.’

After these last words, pronounced in a melancholy manner, Adoniram cast a glance at Balkis. Sudden anxiety seized her. Lively by nature, and wilful through her habit of command, she did not wish to be left alone. She armed herself with every ounce of her coquetry in reply:

— ‘Adoniram, you are an ingrate.’

He was a strong-minded man; he did not yield.

— ‘That is true: I would be wrong not to recall it: despair visited me for an hour, and you took advantage of it to denigrate me in the eyes of my master, my enemy.’

— ‘He was there!’... murmured the queen, ashamed and repentant.

— ‘Your life was in danger; I hastened to shield you.’

— ‘So much concern faced with so great a peril!’ whispered the princess, ‘and for what reward!’

The queen’s candour and kindness obliged her to show that she was moved, while the just disdain of this great and troubled man wounded her within.

— ‘As for Soliman-Ben-Daoud,’ the sculptor resumed, ‘his opinion concerns me little: the scion of a parasitic line, envious and servile, wrapped in purple robes.... My powers are safe from his fancies. As for the others who spew insults around me, a hundred thousand fools without strength or virtue, I take less account of them than a swarm of buzzing flies.... but as regards you, my queen, whom I alone observed amidst that crowd, you whom my esteem had set so high... my heart, this heart that nothing had touched till then, was pierced.... slight, is my regret, but the society of humans has become odious to me. What do I care now for praise or insult which follow one another so closely, and mingle on the same lips like honey and absinthe!’

— ‘You are stern in the face of my repentance! Must I implore your mercy; is that not enough...?’

— ‘No; it is my success you court: if I were lying on the ground, your feet would trample my forehead.’

— ‘What now?... For my part, no, and a thousand times no.’

— ‘Well, let me shatter my work then, mutilate it, and cover my head in shame. I will return there accompanied by the jeers of the crowd; yet, if you remain true to me in your thoughts, my dishonour will render this the happiest day of my life.’

— ‘Come then, do so!’ cried Balkis, with an enthusiasm that she had no time to suppress.

Adoniram could not suppress a cry of joy, and the queen witnessed the consequences of so formidable a consent. Adoniram stood majestic before her, no longer in the common garb of the artisan, but in the hierarchical costume befitting him as the leader of the workers. A white tunic, pleated at his chest, encircled by a wide belt trimmed with gold, enhanced his stature. On his right arm a steel serpent coiled, on the crest of which shone a garnet, and, half-veiled by a conical headdress, from which spread two wide bands falling to his chest, his brow seemed noble enough to disdain a crown.

For a moment the queen, dazzled, was deluded as to the rank of this bold man; she reflected a moment; she knew when to restrain herself, but could not overcome the strange feeling of respect by which she felt dominated.

— ‘Seat yourself by me.’ she said, ‘Let us be calm, even though your defiant spirit is angered; your glory is dear to me; destroy nothing. The mere offer of a such a sacrifice suffices me. My honour would be compromised, and you know, master, my reputation henceforth must support King Soliman’s dignity.’

— ‘I had forgotten,’ murmured the artist, indifferently. ‘Indeed, I have heard that the Queen of Sheba is to marry the descendant of an adventurer from Moab, son of the shepherd Daoud and of Bathsheba, that adulterous widow of Uriah the Hittite. A fine alliance... which must doubtless enrich the divine blood of the Himyarites!’

Anger flushed the young woman’s cheeks, especially since her nurse, Sarahil, having set the queen’s attendants to work, bent now in a row washing garments in the pool, had heard his reply, she being opposed to this marriage proposed by Soliman.

— ‘Our union lacks Adoniram’s assent?’ Balkis retorted with affected disdain.

— ‘On the contrary, and that you can see.’

— ‘How so?’

— ‘If it displeased me, I would have already dethroned Soliman, and you could then treat him as you treat me; you would no longer think of him, since you do not love him.’

— ‘What makes you believe that?’

— ‘You feel superior to him; you have humiliated him, he will not forgive you, and aversion never engenders love.’

— ‘Such audacity....’

— ‘We only fear... what we love.’

The queen felt a dreadful desire to be feared.

The thought of future resentment on the part of the king of the Israelites, whom she had dealt with so freely, had hitherto not occurred to her, though her nurse had exhausted her eloquence on the subject of marriage. This objection now seemed to her well-founded. She answered in the following terms:

— ‘It does not suit me to listen to your insinuations against my host, my...’

Adoniram interrupted.

— ‘My Queen, I am not enamoured of mankind, and I know them through and through. This king, I have viewed for many years. Beneath his lamb’s fleece, lies a tiger muzzled by the priests that gently gnaws at its muzzle. Until now, he has limited himself to ordering the assassination of his brother Adonias: that is a small thing ... though he has no other relatives.’

— ‘One might well believe,’ Sarahil said, adding fuel to the fire, ‘that Master Adoniram is jealous of the king.’ She had been observing Adoniram attentively for some while.

— ‘Lady,’ replied the artisan, ‘if Soliman were not of an inferior race to mine, I might perhaps condescend to lower my gaze to him; but the queen tells me, by her choice, that she was born to marry no other...’.

Sarahil opened her eyes in astonishment, and, placing herself behind the queen, drew, in the air, before the artist's eyes, a mystical sign which he did not understand, but which made him shudder.

‘My Queen,’ he continued, emphasising each word, ‘my accusations, to which you seem indifferent, have vanquished my doubts. From now on I will refrain from harming the image in your mind of a king who holds no place there....’

— ‘Well, master, why trouble me, then, like this? Even though I have no great liking for King Soliman...’.

— ‘Prior to our conversation,’ the artist interrupted in a low voice, and with emotion, ‘you thought you loved him.’

Sarahil had moved away, and the queen turned to him in confusion.

— ‘Ah! My lady, I beg you, let us leave off such speech: I draw down lightning upon my head! An errant word, from your lips, holds life or death for me. Oh, speak not! I have striven to attain this supreme moment, and yet it is I who seek to avoid it. Leave me in doubt; my courage is vanquished, I tremble. I must ready myself for that sacrifice. Such grace, youth, beauty shines in you, alas! ... and who am I in your eyes? No, no, even if I should lose an unlooked-for happiness, hold back your breath, which might launch to my ears the word that kills. This weak heart has never beaten so; its first feelings of anguish shatter it, and I feel that I shall die.’

Balkis was in scarcely better a state; a furtive glance at Adoniram revealed that man, so energetic, powerful, and proud, now pale, respectful, as if without strength, and with death on his lips. Victorious, profoundly moved, happy, and trembling, the world seemed to vanish before her eyes.

— ‘Alas!’ stammered the youthful princess, ‘I too have never loved before.’

Her voice failed, without Adoniram, fearing to wake from dream, daring to disturb the silence.

Sarahil hovered closer, and both realised that they must renew their conversation, under penalty of betraying their state. The hoopoe fluttered around the sculptor, who seized upon the bird as his subject.

— ‘What bright plumage this bird possesses!’ he said in a distracted manner, ‘have you owned it long?’

It was Sarahil who answered, without taking her eyes off the sculptor, Adoniram:

— ‘The bird is the sole offspring of a species which, like the other inhabitants of the air, was once commanded by the genies. Preserved by some unknown miracle, this hoopoe, since time immemorial, has obeyed the Himyarite princes. It is through its agency that the queen can summon the birds of the sky at will.’

This confidence produced a singular effect on Adoniram's features, who now contemplated Balkis with a mixture of joy and tenderness.

‘She is a capricious creature,’ she continued. ‘Soliman has overwhelmed her with caresses and treats, but the hoopoe stubbornly eludes him, and he has failed to tempt her to come and perch on his fist.’

Adoniram thought for a moment, seemed struck by inspiration, and smiled. Sarahil watched him even more attentively.

He stood, pronounced the name of the hoopoe, which, perched on a bush, remained motionless and glanced at him sideways. Taking a step forward, he traced in the air the mysterious *Tau*, and the bird, spreading its wings, fluttered over his head, and alighted obediently on his fist.

— ‘My suspicions were well-founded,’ cried Sarahil, ‘the oracle is accomplished.’

— ‘Sacred shades of my ancestors! O Tubal-Cain, my father! you have not deceived me! Balkis, spirit of light, my sister, my spouse, at last I have found you! Alone on earth, you and I command this winged messenger of the genies of fire from whom we are descended.’

— ‘What! My lord, Adoniram is then...?’

— ‘The last offspring of Kous, the grandson of Tubal-Cain, from whom you are descended through Saba, the brother of Nimrod the hunter, and ancestor of the Himyarites.... And the secret of our origin must remain hidden from the children of Shem, kneaded from clay.’

— ‘I must bow before my master,’ said Balkis, holding out her hand, ‘since, by the decree of fate, I am not permitted to accept any other love than that of Adoniram.’

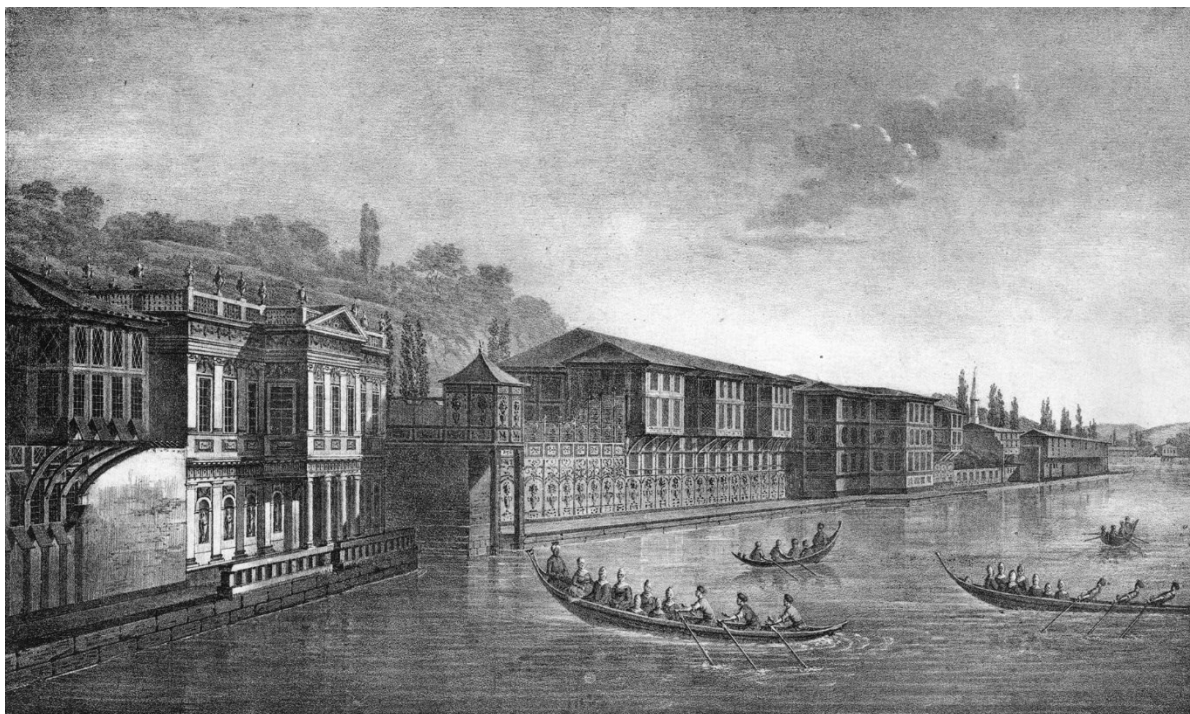
‘Ah!’ he replied, falling to his knees, ‘it is from Balkis alone that I would receive so precious a blessing! My heart has flown to meet yours, and from the hour when you first appeared to me, I have been your slave.’

Their conversation would have lasted long, if Sarahil, endowed with the prudence of age, had not interrupted in the following manner:

— ‘Postpone these tender confessions; troublesome cares are now yours, and more than one peril threatens you. By virtue of Adonai, the sons of Noah are masters of the earth, and their power extends over your mortal being. Soliman is absolute in his kingdom, to which ours are mere tributaries. His armies are formidable, his pride is immense; Adonai protects him; he has numerous spies. Let us seek the means to flee this dangerous abode, and, until then: prudence. Do not forget, my daughter, that Soliman awaits you this evening at his palace on Mount Zion.... to freely absent yourself would be to annoy him, and arouse suspicion. Ask for a day’s delay only, due to your having witnessed adverse omens. Tomorrow, the high priest can provide you with a fresh pretext. Your task must be to quell the impatience of the mighty Soliman. As for you, Adoniram, leave your servants; the morning advances; already the battlements of the new wall which overlooks the Pool of Siloam is full of soldiers; the sun, which seeks this place, is about to gaze upon it. When the disk of the moon pierces the sky above the hills of Ephraim, cross the Kidron, and approaching our camp, go as far as the grove of olive-trees which hides its tents from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that city on twin hills. There we will take counsel, wisely and thoughtfully.’

They parted, reluctantly: Balkis rejoined her retinue, while Adoniram followed her with his eyes, until she disappeared amidst the foliage of the oleanders.

Part XVII: Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*) – The Storytellers: Chapters 9 to 12, and the Lesser Bayram (*Eid al-Fitr*)



The Palace of Sultan Hatice, 1822 - 1828, Louis Goubaud

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-1828-1)

Ramadan Nights (*Les Nuits Du Ramazan*)

Chapter 9: The Three Companions

— At the next session, the storyteller continued:

Soliman and the high priest of the Israelites had been talking for some time in the Temple courtyard.

— ‘It is obligatory,’ said the vexed pontiff Zadoc to his king, ‘and you have no need of my consent to this fresh delay. How can a marriage be celebrated if the bride is not there?’

— ‘Venerable Zadoc,’ resumed the prince with a sigh, ‘these disappointing delays affect me more than you, and I am forced to endure them with patience.’

— ‘That is fine; but *I* am not in love,’ said the Levite, passing his dry, pale hand, veined with blue lines, over his long, white, forked beard.

— ‘That is why you should be calmer than I.’

— ‘What!’ replied Zadoc. For four days, the men-at-arms and the Levites have been on their feet; the burnt offerings are ready; yet the fire burns uselessly on the altar, and, on the verge of the solemn moment, everything must be postponed. Priests and king are at the mercy of the whims of a foreign woman, who beguiles us with pretext after pretext and plays on our credulity.’

What humiliated the high priest was to clad himself uselessly each day in pontifical ornaments, and to be obliged to strip himself of them afterwards without having been allowed to display, to the eyes of the Sabaean courtiers, the hieratic pomp of the ceremonies of Israel. He walked, agitated, about the inner courtyard of the Temple, his splendid costume glittering, before the dismayed Soliman.

For the august ceremony, Zadok had put on his linen robe, his embroidered belt, his ephod open on each shoulder; a tunic of gold, hyacinth, and twice-dyed scarlet, upon which shone two onyxes, engraved by the lapidary with the names of the twelve tribes. Suspended by hyacinthine ribbons, from rings of chased gold, the liturgical cloth sparkled on his chest; it was square, a palm long and bordered with a row of sardonyxes, topazes, and emeralds, a second row of carbuncles, sapphires and jasper; a third row of opals, amethysts, and agates; a fourth, finally, of chrysolites, onyxes and beryl. The tunic of the ephod, of a light violet, open in the middle, was bordered with small pomegranates of hyacinth and purple, alternating with bells of fine gold. The pontiff’s brow was encircled with a tiara topped by a crescent of linen cloth, embroidered with pearls, and on the front part of which shone, attached to a ribbon of hyacinth colour, a blade of burnished gold, bearing these words engraved in relief: ‘Adonai is Holy’.

It too two hours, and six servants of the Levites, to clothe Zadok in these sacred accoutrements, attached by chains, mystical knots, and gilded clasps. The costume was sacred; the Levites alone were permitted to wear it; and it was Adonai himself who had dictated the design to Moussa-Ben-Amran (*Moses*), his servant.

For four days, therefore, the pontifical finery of the successors of Melchizedek had suffered a daily outing borne on the shoulders of the respectable Zadoc, who was all the more irritated, since, being obliged, much against his will, to consecrate the marriage of Soliman with the Queen of Sheba, he now suffered such delay as rendered his disappointment even more acute.

Their union seemed to him a threat to the religion of the Israelites, and the power of the priesthood. Queen Balkis was educated.... he had discovered that the Sabaean priests had allowed her to learn many things of which a prudent sovereign should remain ignorant; and he was anxious regarding the influence of a queen versed in the difficult art of commanding strange birds. Such mixed marriages which exposed the faith to the endless attacks of sceptical spouses never pleased the pontiffs. And Zadoc, who had with great difficulty moderated in Soliman the latter’s pride in his own knowledge, by convincing him that there was nothing more to learn, trembled lest the monarch recognise the many things of which he was ignorant.

This thought was all the more judicious, since Soliman was already at a stage of reflection at which he found his ministers at once less subtle and more despotic than those of the queen. Ben-Daoud’s confidence was shaken; he had, for some days, concealed his thoughts from

Zadoc, and no longer consulted him. The unfortunate thing, in countries where religion is subordinate to the priests and personified by them, is that, from the day the pontiff fails, and everything mortal seems frail, faith collapses with him, while his proud and fatal confidence, and even God Himself are eclipsed.

Circumspect, touchy, but in no way profound, Zadoc had maintained his position without difficulty, being possessed of the good fortune of having few ideas. Adapting his interpretation of the law to suit the passions of the prince, he justified this with a dogmatic complacency which was base, but punctilious as regards form; in this way, Soliman bore the yoke with docility.... and to think that now a young girl from Yemen and an accursed bird risked overthrowing the edifice of so prudent an education!

To accuse them of the practice of magic, was that not to confess the power of those occult sciences, so disdainfully denied? Zadoc experienced true embarrassment. He had, moreover, other concerns: the power Adoniram exercised over the workmen troubled the high priest, rightly alarmed by any seemingly occult and cabalistic domination. Nevertheless, Zadoc had constantly prevented his royal pupil from dismissing the only artist capable of raising, to the glory of the Lord Adonai, the most magnificent Temple in the world, and of attracting to the foot of the altar of Jerusalem the admiration and the offerings of all the peoples of the East. To be rid of Adoniram, Zadoc awaited the end of the work, limiting himself until then to fostering Soliman's touchy mistrust. For some days, the situation had been worsening. Amidst the splendour of an unexpected, impossible, miraculous triumph, Adoniram, we recall, had disappeared. This absence astonished the whole court, except, apparently, the king, who had not spoken of it to his high priest; thereby displaying unusual restraint.

Thus, the venerable Zadoc, finding himself rendered useless, while determined to remain essential, was reduced to combining with vague prophetic declamations oracular utterances calculated to make an impression on the imagination of the prince. Soliman was rather fond of speeches, especially because they offered him the opportunity of summarising their meaning in a few proverbs. Now, in the current circumstances, the sentences of the Ecclesiastes, far from being moulded on the homilies of Zadoc, were simply reflections on the rightness of his master's instincts, on the dangers of mistrust, and on the misfortune of kings dedicated to cunning, lies and self-interest. Zadoc, troubled, withdrew into the depths of the unintelligible.

— 'Although you speak eloquently, as ever' said Soliman, 'it is not to enjoy your speeches that I have come to find you here in the Temple: woe to the king who feeds only on words! Three strangers will present themselves here, and ask to speak to me, and they shall be heard, since I know their intent. For their audience, I have chosen this place; it was important that their visit remains a secret.'

— 'These men, lord, who are they?'

— 'Men who are instructed in matters of which kings are ignorant: one may learn a great deal from them.'

Soon, three artisans, led to the inner courtyard of the temple, prostrated themselves at Soliman's feet. Their actions were constrained, their gaze worried.

— ‘May the truth be on your lips.’ said Soliman to them, ‘Hope not to impose upon the king: your most secret thoughts are known to me. You, Phanor, a simple workman amidst the host of masons, you are Adoniram’s enemy, hating the supremacy of the miners, and, to thwart your master’s work, you mixed combustible stones with the bricks of his furnaces. Amrou, a member of the carpenters’ company, you set the beams in the flames, to weaken the foundations of the brazen sea. As for you, Methusael, miner of the tribe of Reuben, you contaminated the cast iron with sulphurous lava, collected from the shores of Lake Gomorrah. All three of you aspire in vain to the titles and pay of your masters. You see, I penetrate the secrets of your most hidden actions.’

— ‘Great king,’ replied Phanor, terrified, ‘these are slanders created by Adoniram, who has plotted our ruin.’

— ‘Adoniram is unaware of a plot revealed only to myself. Know this, nothing escapes the sagacity of those whom Adonai protects.’

Zadok’s look of astonishment informed Soliman that his high priest thought little of Adonai’s favour.

— ‘Therefore, you disguise the truth in vain,’ continued the king. What you reveal is already known to me, and it is your loyalty that is being tested. Let Amrou speak first.’

— ‘Lord,’ said Amrou, no less frightened than his accomplices, ‘I have maintained absolute surveillance over the workshops, construction sites, and manufactories. Adoniram has not appeared there once.’

— ‘I,’ continued Phanor, ‘hid myself, at nightfall, in the tomb of Prince Absalon-Ben-Daoud, on the road which leads from Moriah to the camp of the Sabaeans. Towards the third hour of the night, a man dressed in a long robe, wearing a turban such as the Yemenites adopt, passed before me; I advanced and recognised Adoniram; he was on his way to the queen’s pavilions, and, as he had noticed me, I dared not follow.’

— ‘Lord,’ continued Methusael in his turn, ‘you know everything, and wisdom dwells with you; I speak sincerely. My revelations may be of such a nature as to cost the lives of those who have penetrated their mysteries, deign to send away my companions, so that my words condemn me alone.’

As soon as the miner was alone in the presence of the king and the high priest, he prostrated himself and said:

— ‘Lord, stretch out your sceptre, and grant me life.’

Soliman stretched out his hand and answered:

— ‘Your honesty protects you; fear nothing, Methusael, of the tribe of Reuben!’

— ‘My forehead covered with a caftan, my face coated with a dark dye, I mingled, under cover of night, with the black eunuchs who surround the princess: Adoniram slipped through the shadows to her feet; he spoke to her at length, and the evening wind carried their words, tremulously, to my ear; an hour before dawn, I slipped away: Adoniram was still with the princess....’

Soliman contained an anger the signs of which Methusael saw in his eyes.

— ‘My king!’ he cried, ‘I have obeyed you; permit me to be silent.’

— ‘Continue! I command you.’

— ‘Lord, your glory is dear to your subjects. I will die, if needs be; but my master shall not be the plaything of these perfidious foreigners. The high priest of the Sabaeans, the nurse and two of the queen’s wives are party to this secret affair. If I understand aright, Adoniram is not what he appears to be, and is invested, as is the princess, with magical powers. Through them she commands the inhabitants of the air, as the artist commands the spirits of fire. Nevertheless, this pair of favoured beings fear your power over the genies, a power with which you are endowed without your knowing. Sarahil spoke of a gemmed ring whose marvellous properties she explained to the astonished queen, and deplored Balkis’ imprudence in the matter. I could not catch the gist of the conversation, because their voices were lowered, and I feared for my life if I approached too closely. Soon Sarahil, the high priest, and the maids, withdrew, after bowing to Adoniram, who, as I said, was left alone with the Queen of Sheba. O my king! May I find favour in your eyes, for deceit has not touched my lips!’

— ‘What right have you to fathom your master’s intentions? Whatever my decision may be, it will be just.... Let this man be shut up in the temple like his companions; he must not communicate with them, until the moment when I decide their fate.’

Who could describe the high priest Zadoc’s amazement, as the king’s mutes, prompt and discreet executors of his will, dragged away the terrified Methusael?

— ‘You see, O most respectable Zadoc,’ the monarch said, bitterly, ‘your prudence has penetrated nothing; deaf to our prayers, little touched by our sacrifices, Adonai has not deigned to enlighten his servants, and it is I alone, with the aid of my own intellect, who reveal the plotting of my enemies. They, however, command occult powers. Their gods are loyal to them... while mine deserts me!’

— ‘Because you disdain Him, to seek union with a foreign woman. O my king, banish from your soul that impure feeling, and your adversaries will be delivered to you. But how to seize this Adoniram who renders himself invisible, and this queen whom hospitality protects?’

— ‘To take revenge on a woman is beneath the dignity of Soliman. As for her accomplice, in a moment you will see him appear. This very morning, he sought an audience, and it is here that I await him.’

— ‘Adonai favours us, O king! Let not the man leave this enclosure!’

— ‘If he comes here, fearlessly, be assured his defenders are not far away; but let us not be blindly precipitate: these three men here are his mortal enemies. Envy, and greed have embittered their hearts. They have, perhaps, slandered the queen.... I love her, Sadoc, and I would not insult the princess by believing her tainted by a degrading passion, based on the shameful remarks of three wretches.... But, fearing the underhanded machinations of Adoniram, so powerful among the people, I have had that mysterious character watched.’

— ‘So, you think he met with the queen?’

— ‘I am convinced he saw her in secret. She is curious, enthusiastic about the arts, ambitious for fame, and a tributary to my crown. Perhaps her design is to hire the artist, and employ him in her country for some magnificent enterprise, or to enlist, through his agency, an army to oppose mine, in order to free her kingdom from the tribute? I know not.... As for their alleged love affair, do I not have the word of the queen? However, I agree, any one of these suppositions alone is enough to demonstrate that the man is dangerous.... I will reflect on it....’

As he spoke, in his firm tone, in the presence of Zadoc, who was dismayed to find that his altar was disdained and his influence eclipsed, the mutes with their white spherical headdresses, their iron-plated jackets, and broad belts from which hung a dagger and a curved sabre, re-entered. They exchanged a sign with Soliman, and Adoniram appeared on the threshold. Six of his own men escorted him; he whispered a few words to them in a low voice, and they withdrew.

Chapter 10: The Interview

Adoniram advanced with a slow step, and confident countenance, to the massive throne on which was seated the king of Jerusalem. After a respectful bow, the artist waited, according to custom, until Soliman urged him to speak.

— ‘At last, master,’ said the prince, ‘yielding to my wish, you grant me the opportunity to congratulate you on an unexpected triumph ... and to demonstrate my gratitude. The work is worthy of my kingdom; and what is more, worthy of yourself. As for your reward, it cannot be sufficiently great; designate it yourself: what gift do you wish from Soliman?’

— ‘My leave to depart, lord: the work nears its end; it can be completed without me. My destiny is to travel the world; it calls me to other climes, and I place in your hands, once more, the authority with which you invested me. My reward is the monument I leave here, and the honour of having served as interpreter of the noble designs of so great a king.’

— ‘Your request distresses us. I had hoped to keep you among us, and with eminent status at court.’

— ‘My character, lord, would not repay such kindness. Independent by nature, solitary by vocation, indifferent to honours which I was not born to receive, I would oft put your indulgence to the test. Kings are of uneven temper; envy surrounds and besieges them; and fortune is inconstant: I have experienced too many of its vagaries. Did not what you term my triumph and glory almost cost me my honour, and even my life?’

— ‘I only considered your enterprise a failure when your own voice proclaimed it so, and I boast of no ascendancy over the spirits of fire....’

— ‘No one governs those spirits, if indeed they exist. Moreover, these mysteries are more within the reach of honest Zadoc than of a simple craftsman. What happened during this terrible night, I do not know: the course of the operation confounded my predictions. Only, my lord, in

an hour of anguish, I waited in vain for your consolation, your support, and that is why, on the day of success, I no longer expected your praise.'

— 'Master, that was due to your resentment and pride.'

— 'No, my lord, it is a humble and sincere request for justice. From the night I poured the brazen sea until the dawn in which I revealed it to the world, my merit has certainly neither increased, nor decreased. Success has made all the difference ... and, as you have seen, success lies in the hand of God. Adonai loves you; he has been moved by your prayers, and it is I, Lord, who must congratulate you, and cry my thanks!'

— 'Who will deliver me from this man's irony?' thought Soliman. 'You are doubtless quitting my service so as to accomplish wonders elsewhere?' he asked.

— 'Not long ago, my lord, I would have sworn so. A host of burning ideas were stirring in my head; in my dreams I glimpsed blocks of granite, underground palaces with forests of columns, and the duration of our labours weighed on me. Today, my ardour subsides, fatigue lulls me, leisure smiles on me, and it seems to me that my career is over....'

Soliman thought he caught a glimpse of certain tender gleams that shimmered in Adoniram's eyes. His face was grave, his physiognomy melancholy, his voice more penetrating than usual, such that Soliman, troubled, said to himself:

— 'The man is handsome, indeed.' 'Where do you intend to go, on leaving my kingdom?' he asked with a feigned indifference.

— 'To Tyre,' replied the artist, unhesitatingly: 'I promised my patron so, the good King Hiram, who cherishes you like a brother, and who has shown me paternal kindness. If it be your pleasure, I wish to show him the plan, with elevated views, of the palace, the Temple, the brazen sea, as well as the two great twisted bronze columns, Jachin and Boaz, which adorn the great door of the Temple.'

— 'Let it be as you wish. Five hundred horsemen will serve as your escort, and twelve camels will carry the gifts and treasures chosen for you.'

— 'This is too much: Adoniram will take but his cloak now. It is not, lord, that I refuse your gifts. You are generous; they are considerable, and my sudden departure would drain your treasury without profiting me at this moment. Allow me such utter frankness. The gifts I accept, but leave them in your hands. When I have need of them, lord, I will let you know.'

— 'In other words,' said Soliman, 'Master Adoniram intends to render us his debtor.'

The artist smiled and answered gracefully:

— 'Lord, you have divined my thought.'

— 'And perhaps he reserves the right one day to dictate conditions to us.'

Adoniram exchanged a sharp, defiant look with the king.

— 'I shall ask, however' the former added, 'for naught that is unworthy of Soliman's magnanimity.'

— ‘I believe,’ said Soliman, weighing the effect of his words, ‘that the Queen of Sheba has plans in mind, and proposes to employ your talent...’.

— ‘Lord, she has said nothing to me of such.’

His answer gave rise to other suspicions.

— ‘Yet,’ objected Zadoc, ‘your genius has clearly not left her indifferent. Will you leave without saying your farewells to her?’

— ‘My farewells...?’ Adoniram repeated, and Soliman saw a strange light gleam in his eyes, ‘My farewells? If the king permits, I will indeed have the honour of taking leave of her.’

— ‘We had hoped,’ replied the prince, ‘to retain you until the imminent celebration of our marriage; for you know....’

Adoniram’s forehead was stained with a deep redness, and he added, though without bitterness:

— ‘It is my intention to journey to Phoenicia without delay.’

— ‘Since you demand it, master, you are free: I grant you leave....’

— ‘From sunset,’ commented the artist. ‘For, I still have to pay the workers, and I beg you, sir, to order your steward Azarias to have the necessary funds brought to the counter established at the foot of the pillar named Jachin. I will pay the men as usual, without announcing my journey, in order to avoid a tumultuous departure.’

— ‘Zadoc, transmit this order to your son Azarias. One more word: who are those three members of your company named Phanor, Amrou and Methousael?’

— ‘Three poor, honest, but ambitious people, though without talent. They aspire to the title of master, and pressed me to deliver the password to them, in order to obtain the right to a higher salary. Ultimately, they listened to reason, and recently I have had reason to praise their goodness of heart.’

— ‘Master, it is written: “fear the wounded serpent that hides its venom”. Know these men better: they are your enemies; it is they who, through their interference, caused those accidents which risked failure in regard to the casting of the brazen sea.’

— ‘How do you know this, lord...?’

— ‘Believing all was lost, but trusting in your prudence, I sought the hidden cause of the catastrophe, and, as I wandered among the crowd, these three men, believing themselves to be alone, spoke together.’

— ‘Their crime has caused the death of many. Such a precedent may prove dangerous; it is up to you to decide their fate. The accident cost me the life of a child I loved, of a skilled artist, Benoni, who since then, has not reappeared. Justice, my lord, is the privilege of kings.’

— ‘Justice shall be rendered to all. Live happily, Master Adoniram, Soliman will not forget you.’

Adoniram, pensive, seemed undecided and combative. Suddenly, yielding to momentary emotion, he said:

— ‘Whatever happens, lord, be forever assured of my respect, my pious memories, and the uprightness of my heart. And, if suspicion comes to your mind, say to yourself: ‘Like most human beings, Adoniram did not belong to himself alone; he was obliged to fulfil his destiny!’

— ‘Farewell, then, master.... go, and fulfil that destiny!’

With this, the king held out a hand to him, over which the artist bowed humbly; but failed to set his lips to it, and Soliman shuddered.’

— ‘Well,’ murmured Zadoc as he watched Adoniram withdraw, ‘what is your command, lord?’

— ‘Maintain the deepest silence, venerable father. From now on, I trust only myself. Know this, I am the king. To obey under pain of disgrace, and to be silent under pain of losing life and limb, that is your lot.... Come, old man, do not tremble: the sovereign who delivers his secrets for your instruction is a friend. Summon the three workmen prisoned in the Temple; I wish to question them again.’

Amrou, Phanor and Methousael duly appeared: behind them stood the sinister mutes, sabre in hand.

— ‘I have weighed your words,’ said Soliman in a severe tone, ‘and I have met with Adoniram, my servant. Is it the desire for equity, is it envy that animates you against him? How dare mere workmen judge their master? If you were notable men and leaders among your brothers, your testimony would be less suspect.... But no; greedy, and ambitious for the title of master, you have failed to obtain it, and resentment embitters your hearts.’

— ‘Lord,’ said Methusael, prostrating himself, ‘you wish to test us. But, even if it should cost me my life, I will maintain that Adoniram is a traitor; in plotting his destruction, I sought only to save Jerusalem from the tyranny of a perfidious man, who intends to enslave my country to foreign hordes. My imprudent frankness is the surest guarantee of my fidelity.’

— ‘It does not suit me to put my faith in contemptible men, in the slaves of my servants. Death has created a number of vacancies among the masters: Adoniram asks leave to rest, and I wish, as he does, to find, among the leaders, people worthy of my trust. This evening, after payment has been made, ask him for to be initiated among the masters; he will be alone.... Seek to make your reasoning heard. By this, I will know that you are hardworking, eminent in your art, and well placed in the esteem of your brothers. Adoniram is enlightened: his decisions are law. Has God abandoned him until now? Has He signalled his reprobation by one of those sinister warnings, by one of those terrible blows with which his invisible arm knows how to strike the guilty? Well, let Jehovah then be judge between you: if the favour of Adoniram distinguishes you from the others, it will be for me a covert sign that the heavens declare themselves for you, and I will deal with Adoniram. But, if he denies you the degree of master, tomorrow you will appear with him before me; I will hear the accusation and defence offered by the parties: the elders of the people will decide. Go, meditate on my words, and may Adonai be with you.’

Soliman rose from his seat, and, leaning on the shoulder of the impassive high priest, he slowly walked away.

The three men drew closer together, by mutual consent.

— ‘We must extract the password from him!’ said Phanor.

— ‘Or he must die!’ added the Phoenician, Amrou.

— ‘Let him yield us the masters’ password, and then die!’ cried Methousael.

Their hands joined in a triple oath. Upon the threshold, Soliman, turning away, observed them from afar, sighed heavily, and said to Zadoc:

— ‘Now, to pleasure!... Let us go find the queen.’

Chapter 11: The King’s Supper

— At the next session, the storyteller continued, thus:

The sun was beginning to set; the fiery breath of the desert set the countryside ablaze, illuminated by the reflections from a mass of coppery cloud; the shadow of the hill of Moria alone cast a little freshness on the dried-up bed of the Kidron; the failing leaves drooped, and the dead flowers on the oleanders hung there, scorched and crumpled; the chameleons, salamanders, and lizards were wriggling among the rocks and, the murmuring of the groves suspended, the sound of the streams had ceased.

Anxious and chilled, despite the heat and dreariness of the day, Adoniram, as he had announced to Soliman, went to take leave of his royal lover, prepared for the separation that she herself had requested.

— ‘To accompany me,’ she had said, ‘would be to oppose Soliman, to humiliate him in the face of his people, and to add outrage to the pain that the eternal powers have forced me to cause him. To remain here after my departure, dear husband, would be to seek your own death. The king is jealous of you, and my flight would leave behind no other victim than yourself, at the mercy then of his resentment.’

— ‘Well, let us share the fate of the children of our race, that of wanderers, scattered throughout the world. I promised the king I would journey to Tyre. Let us prove true, once your life is no longer at the mercy of a lie. This very night, I will set out for Phoenicia, where I shall not linger before travelling to join you in Yemen, via Syria and Arabia Petraea, by threading, thereafter, the defiles of the Cassanite Mountains (*North of Yemen, according to Ptolemy, ‘Geographia VII’*). Alas! Dear queen, must I leave you already, abandoning you, in a foreign land, to the mercy of an amorous despot?’

— ‘Rest assured, my lord, my soul is yours utterly, my servants are faithful, and the dangers will vanish conquered by prudence. Tempestuous and dark will be the coming night, which

will hide my flight. As for Soliman, I loathe him; it is my kingdom he covets: he surrounds me with spies; seeks to seduce my servants, to suborn my officers, to negotiate with them for the surrender of my fortresses. If he had acquired rights over my person, I would never have seen fair Yemen again. He extorted a promise from me, it is true; but what is my perjury compared to his disloyalty? How could I not deceive him, moreover, he who has made me understand, with ill-disguised threats, that his love is boundless, but his patience at an end?’

— ‘We must rouse the companies of workmen!’

— ‘They await their pay; they will not move. Why take so perilous a risk? Your declaration, far from alarming me, suffices me; I had foreseen it, and awaited it impatiently. Go in peace, my beloved! Balkis will never be anyone’s but yours!’

— ‘Farewell then, my queen: I must quit this tent where I have found a happiness of which I never dreamed; I must cease to contemplate the face of one who is life to me. Will I see you again? Alas! These brief moments will pass like a dream!’

— ‘No, Adoniram; soon, we shall be united forever!... My dreams, my presentiments, in accord with the genies’ oracular words, assure me of the permanence of our race, and I carry with me a precious pledge of our marriage. You shall receive a son destined to grant us rebirth, and to free Yemen and all Arabia from the frail yoke of Soliman’s heirs. A double attraction draws you, a double affection attaches you, to one who loves you, and you will return to me.’

Adoniram, moved, pressed his lips to a hand on which the queen had shed tears, and, gathering his courage, cast upon her a long, last glance; then, turning away with effort, he let the curtain of the tent fall behind him, and regained the banks of the Kidron.

It was at Millo that Soliman, torn between anger, love, suspicion, and anticipated remorse, waited, given over to febrile longing for the smiling and desolated queen, while Adoniram, striving to bury his jealousy in the depths of his sorrow, hastened to the Temple to pay the workmen before taking up his staff of exile. Each of these personages thought to triumph over his rival, and counted on a secrecy already penetrated on both their sides. The queen disguised her goal, while Soliman, all too well-informed, dissimulated in his turn, seeking to hide a cunning born of self-esteem.

From the heights of the terraces of Millo, he surveyed the retinue of the Queen of Sheba, which wound along the path of Emathia, where, above Balkis, the purple walls of the Temple, over which Adoniram yet reigned, shone in sharp dentilated outline against the dark clouds. A chill dampness bathed Soliman’s brow, and pallid cheeks; his staring eyes devoured space. The queen made her entrance, accompanied by her principal officers and servants, who mingled with those of the king.

During the evening the prince appeared preoccupied; Balkis was cold, and adopted a nigh ironic tone: she knew that Soliman was in love. The supper was silent; the king’s eyes, furtive or affectedly averted, seemed to flee those of the queen, which, alternately lowered or raised by languid and self-contained fire, revived in Soliman illusions of which he wished to remain master. His absorbed air denoted some deeper design. He was a descendant of Noah, and the princess observed that, faithful to the traditions of that father of the vine, he sought wine to bolster the resolution which he lacked. The courtiers having withdrawn, his mutes replaced the

prince's officers; and, as the queen was served by her own people, she substituted, for her Nubians, Sabaeans to whom the Hebrew language was unknown.

— 'My lady,' said Soliman-Ben-Daoud gravely, 'an explanation is necessary between us.'

— 'My dear lord, our wishes are in accord.'

— 'I had thought that, faithful to the word she had given, the princess of Sheba, more than a mere woman, was a queen....'

— 'On the contrary,' interrupted Balkis sharply, 'I am more than a queen, my lord, I am a woman. Who is not subject to error? I believed you wise; then I believed in your love.... it is I who suffer the crueller disappointment.'

She sighed.

— 'You know only too well that I love you,' replied Soliman, 'otherwise, you would not have abused your power, nor trampled underfoot a heart that must, in the end, rebel.'

— 'I intended to reproach you, likewise. It is not I that you love, my lord, it is the queen. And, to be frank, am I of such an age as to aspire to a marriage of convenience? Yes, I wished to sound your soul: more sensitive than the queen, the woman, setting aside reasons of state, sought to enjoy her power: to be loved, such was her dream. Delaying the hour in which the promise, suddenly surprised from her, might be fulfilled, she put you to the test; she hoped you would seek to conquer only her heart, but she was mistaken; you proceeded further, by summons, by threats; you employed political artifice with my servants, and already you are more their sovereign than I am myself. I hoped for a husband, a lover; I now fear I am gaining a master. You see, I speak with sincerity'.

— 'If Soliman had been dear to you, would you not have excused those faults caused by his impatience to belong to you? But no, your thoughts saw in him only an object of hatred, it is not for him that...'

— 'Stop there, my lord, and do not add offence to those suspicions that have wounded me. Mistrust rouses mistrust, jealousy intimidates the heart, and, I fear, the honour you wish to show me would cost my peace of mind and my freedom dear.'

The king remained silent, not daring, for fear of losing all, to commit himself further based on the word of a vile and perfidious spy.

The queen continued, with familiar and charming grace:

— 'Listen, Soliman; be true to yourself, be kind. My illusions are still dear to me ... my spirit is daunted; yet I feel it would be sweet to be reassured.'

— 'Ah! How you would banish all care, Balkis, if you could but read this heart where you reign undivided! Let us forget our suspicion; consent at last to my happiness. Fatal is the role of kings! Why am I not a mere Arab of the desert, kneeling at the feet of Balkis, the daughter of shepherds!'

— ‘Your wish accords with mine, and you have understood me. Yes,’ she added, bringing her face, at once open and passionate, close to the king’s. ‘yes, it is the austerity of an Israelite marriage that chills and frightens me: love, love alone would have drawn me, if....’

— ‘Yes?... Complete your utterance, Balkis: the tone of your voice penetrates me and sets me ablaze.’

— ‘No, no.... What am I saying, what has overcome me so suddenly?... These sweet wines are perfidious, and agitate me.’

Soliman made a sign: the eunuchs and the Nubians filled the cups, and the king emptied his in one gulp, observing with satisfaction that Balkis did the same.

— ‘It must be admitted,’ continued the princess cheerfully, ‘that marriage, according to the Jewish rite, was not established for the union of kings with queens, and demands unfortunate preparations.’

— ‘Is that what renders you uncertain?’ asked Soliman, gazing at her with eyes which were full of a certain languor.

— ‘Do not doubt it. Not to mention the inconvenience of fasting which make one ugly, is it not painful to deliver one’s hair to the shears, and to be wrapped in a headdress for the rest of one’s days? In truth,’ she added, displaying her magnificent ebony tresses, ‘I could not bear to lose such rich finery.’

— ‘Our women,’ objected Soliman, ‘are at liberty to replace their hair with tufts of pleasantly curled cockerel feathers. (*Author’s note: in the East, even today, married Jewish women are obliged to substitute feathers for their hair, which must be trimmed to ear level, and hidden beneath a headdress*).

The queen smiled with some disdain.

— ‘Moreover,’ she added, ‘in your country, the man purchases the woman like a slave or a servant; she must even offer herself humbly at her fiancé’s door. Finally, religion has little to do with a marriage contract which is similar to those drawn up in the marketplace, while the man, on receiving his companion, extends his hand to her and says to her: *Mekudeshet-li*; in Hebrew: ‘You are consecrated to me.’ Moreover, you have the power to repudiate her, to betray her, and even to have her stoned on the slightest pretext.... As much as I might be proud of being beloved by Soliman, I would dread marrying him.’

— ‘Beloved,’ cried the prince, rising from the sofa on which he reclined, ‘beloved, you! Never did a woman exercise a more absolute empire? I am annoyed: you appease me on whim; sinister preoccupations trouble me: I strive to banish them. You deceive me: I sense it, and conspire with you to condemn poor Soliman...’

Balkis raised her cup above her head, turning away with a voluptuous movement. The two slaves filled the tankards and withdrew.

The banqueting hall remained deserted; the light of the lamps, dimming, cast mysterious gleams over Soliman, pale, with burning eyes, and quivering and discoloured lips. A strange languor took possession of him: Balkis contemplated him with an equivocal smile.

Suddenly he remembered... and raised himself on his couch.

— ‘Woman,’ he cried, ‘trifle no longer with a king’s love.... The night protects us with its veils, mystery surrounds us, a fierce flame fills my whole being; rage and passion intoxicate me. This hour belongs to me, and, if you are sincere, you will no longer rob me of a happiness so dearly purchased. Reign, in freedom; but do not reject a prince who gives himself to you, whom desire consumes, and who, at this moment, would dispute for you with the powers of hell.’

Confused and palpitating, Balkis replied, lowering her eyes:

— ‘Give me time to gather myself; this language is new to me....’

— ‘No!’ interrupted Soliman, in delirium, as he emptied the cup from which he drew such boldness. ‘No, my temperance is at an end. It is a question for me of life or death. Woman, you shall be mine, I swear it. If you deceive me... I will be avenged; if you love me, eternal love will win my pardon.’

He stretched out his hands to embrace the queen; but grasped only a shadow; she had withdrawn, gently, and the arms of Daoud’s son fell back heavily. His head bowed; he remained silent, then, suddenly starting, raised himself.... His astonished eyes dilated with an effort; he felt desire expiring in his breast, while strange forms wavered above his head. His dulled, pallid face, framed by his black beard, expressed a vague terror; his lips parted without articulating a sound, and his head, weighed down by his turban, fell back against the cushions of the divan. Bound by invisible and heavy bonds, he attempted to shake them from his thoughts, while his limbs no longer obeyed the imagined effort.

The queen approached, slowly and gravely; in terror, he saw her standing, her cheek resting on the folded fingers of her left hand, while her right supported her left elbow. She watched him, he heard her speak and say:

— ‘The narcotic is working....’

Soliman’s dark pupils flickered in the white sockets of his large sphinx-like eyes, and he remained motionless.

— ‘There’, she continued, ‘I obey, I yield, I am yours!’

She knelt down and touched Soliman’s icy hand; he let out a deep sigh.

— ‘He hears, still...’ she murmured. ‘Listen, King of Israel, you who impose love at your whim, through the servitude and betrayal of others. Listen! I escape your power. But, if the woman abuses you, the queen has not deceived you. I love, though it is not you; fate debarred me from loving you. Born of a lineage superior to yours, I am obliged to obey the genies who protect me, and choose a husband of my own blood. Your power must bow before theirs; forget my name and face. May Adonai choose a fitting companion for you. He is great and generous: has He not given you wisdom and repaid you well for your services on this occasion? I abandon you to Him, and withdraw from you the idle support of the genies you disdain, and that you know not how to command....’

Balkis, then seized the finger on which she saw the talisman gleaming that she had gifted Soliman, and prepared to take up the ring; but the hand of the king, who was barely breathing, contracted with a sublime effort, closed tightly, and left Balkis attempting to reopen it in vain.

She was about to speak again, when Soliman-Ben-Daoud's head fell back, the muscles in his neck relaxed, his mouth opened slightly, and his half-closed eyes grew dim; his spirit had fled to the land of dreams.

All were asleep in the palace of Millo, except the servants of the Queen of Sheba, who had lulled their guest to sleep. In the distance thunder rumbled; the black sky was furrowed with lightning-flashes; a raging storm blew the rain over the mountain slopes.

An Arabian steed, black as the tomb, awaited the princess, who gave the signal to depart, and soon the procession, turning along the ravine below the hill of Zion, descended into the valley of Jehoshaphat. They forded the Kidron, which was already swelling with rainwater to aid their escape; and, with distant Mount Tabor, crowned with flashes of lightning, to their left, they reached the corner of the garden of the Mount of Olives, and the hilly road to Bethany (*al-Eizarya*).

'Let us follow this road,' the queen told her guards. 'Our horses are agile; our people are striking camp now, and already are in motion towards the Jordan. We shall meet with them again at the second hour of the day beyond the Salt Lake (*the Dead Sea*), from whence we may attain the pass through the Arabian mountains.'

And, loosening the reins of her mount, she smiled at the storm, knowing she shared the unfortunate weather with her dear Adoniram, doubtless wandering the road to Tyre.

As they entered the path to Bethany, a flash of lightning revealed a group of men, crossing the road in silence, who halted, stupefied, at the sight of this procession of ghosts riding amidst the darkness.

Balkis and his retinue passed before them, and one of the guards, having ridden forward, recognising them, murmured in a low voice to the queen:

— 'Those three men are bearing away a corpse wrapped in a shroud.'

Chapter 12: Machbenach (*Mahabon*)

During the pause which followed this portion of the narrative, the audience were agitated by contrary ideas. Some refused to accept the tradition enunciated by the narrator. They maintained that the Queen of Sheba had a son by Soliman, and no other. The Abyssinian especially believed his religious convictions attacked by the suggestion that his sovereign rulers were the descendants of a mere artisan.

— ‘You lie,’ he shouted at the rhapsodist. ‘The first emperor of Abyssinia was Menelek, and he was the true son of Soliman and Balkis-Makeda. His descendant still reigns over us in Gondar.’

— ‘Brother,’ said a Persian, ‘let us hear the ending, or you will be ejected as happened the other night. This legend in our view is orthodox in its elements, and if your little *Prester John* of Abyssinia insists that he is descended from Soliman, we will accept that it was via some black Ethiopian, and not through Queen Balkis, whose skin was of our colouring.’ (*Author’s note: the present emperor of Abyssinia is even now said to be descended from the Queen of Sheba. He is both sovereign and pope: he has always been called Prester John. His subjects today call themselves ‘Christians of Saint John’*)

The café owner interrupted the furious reply on the Abyssinian’s lips and, with difficulty, restored calm.

The storyteller continued his tale:

— While Soliman had been welcoming the princess of the Sabaeans to his mansion, a man passing over the heights of Mount Moriah, was looking thoughtfully at the twilight fading in the clouds, and the torches like starry constellations dispelling the shade about Millo. His thoughts were of his beloved, as he addressed his farewell to the hills of Jerusalem, and the banks of the Kidron, which he was never to revisit.

The heavens lowered, and the sun, setting, had left the Earth to darkness. At the sound of hammers sounding the summons on bells of brass, Adoniram, tearing himself from his thoughts, traversed the assembled crowd of workmen; and, so as to preside over their payment, he entered the Temple, the eastern door of which he half-opened, and placed himself at the foot of the pillar named Jachin.

Lighted torches below the peristyle sparked as they received a few drops of warm rain, to the caress of which the panting workers happily offered their breasts.

The crowd were numerous; and Adoniram, besides his accountants, had at his disposal those men appointed to distribute their pay to the various orders. Distinguishing between the three hierarchical degrees was achieved by virtue of the passwords which replaced an exchange of hand-signals which would have occupied too great a time. Each man’s salary was delivered to him on his pronouncing the password.

The watchword of the apprentices had previously been ‘Jachin’ the name of the first of the bronze pillars (*see the Bible ‘Kings III:7’*); the watchword of the other workmen, ‘Boaz’, the name of the second pillar; the word of the masters was ‘Jehovah’.

Queuing in rows, by category, the workers presented themselves at the counters, and before the stewards, presided over by Adoniram, who touched their hand, and to whom they uttered the password in a low voice. On this final day, the password had been changed. That of the apprentices was ‘Tubal-Cain’; that of the workmen, ‘Shibboleth’ (*see the Bible ‘Judges XII:6’*);

and that of the masters, 'Giblim' (*the Giblim were the stonecutters who worked on the Temple, see the rites of Freemasonry*).

Little by little the crowd thinned, the enclosure became deserted, and, the last workmen having withdrawn, it was seen that not all had attended, since there were still coins in the chests.

— 'Tomorrow,' said Adoniram, 'you will issue a roll-call, and establish whether there are any sick workers, or if death has visited any of them.'

As soon as everyone had left, Adoniram, vigilant and zealous until the last, took a lamp, and made his rounds of the deserted workshops and the various quarters of the Temple, according to his custom, in order to ensure the execution of his commands, and the quenching of the lights. His steps echoed sadly on the flagstones; once again, he contemplated his creations, and stopped for a long time in front of a group of winged cherubs, the last work of the young Benoni.

— 'Dear child!' he murmured with a sigh.

His pilgrimage complete, Adoniram found himself in the great hall of the Temple. The darkness intensified about the light from his lamp, which spread in reddish volutes, marking the high ribs of the vaults, and the walls of the hall, from which one left by three doors facing north, west and east.

The first, that of the North, was reserved for the people; the second gave passage to the king and his warriors; the eastern gate was that of the Levites; the bronze pillars, Jachin and Boaz, were distinguishable beyond the third.

Before leaving by the western gate, the one nearest him, Adoniram cast his gaze upon the dark depths of the hall, and his imagination, struck by the numerous statues which he had just contemplated, conjured up in the shadows the phantom of Tubal-Cain. His fixed gaze tried to pierce the darkness; but the chimera grew as it faded, reached the roofs of the temple and vanished into the depths of the walls, like the shadow cast by a man departing who is lit by a torch. A plaintive cry seemed to resound beneath the vaults.

Then Adoniram turned away, preparing to leave. Suddenly a human form detached itself from the pilaster, and in a fierce tone said to him:

— 'If you wish to leave, give the masters' password!'

Adoniram was unarmed; the object of all respect, and accustomed to commanding with a sign, he gave not a thought to defending his sacred person.

— 'Unhappy man!' he replied, recognising his companion Methousael, 'Depart!' You will be received among the masters only when treason and crime are honoured! Flee with your accomplices before the justice of Soliman falls upon you.'

Methousael, on hearing this, raised his hammer with vigour, which fell with a crash on Adoniram's skull. The artist staggered, dazed; by an instinctive movement, he sought to exit by the second door, that of the north. There stood the Syrian Phanor, who said to him:

— 'If you wish to leave, give the masters' password!'

— ‘You have not fulfilled the requisite seven years of labour!’ Adoniram replied in a faint voice.

— ‘The password!’

— ‘Never!’

Phanor, the mason, thrust his chisel into Adoniram’s side; but failed to repeat the blow, since the architect of the Temple, roused by the pain, flew like a bolt to the eastern Gate, to escape his assassins.

It was there that Amrou the Phoenician, a companion among the carpenters, was waiting to shout at him in turn:

— ‘If you wish to leave, give the masters’ password!’

— ‘That is not how I learned it;’ uttered Adoniram, exhausted, and with difficulty; ‘ask him who sent you.’

As he struggled to escape, Amrou plunged the point of his compass into his heart.

It was at this moment that the storm broke, signalled by a loud clap of thunder.

Adoniram was lying on the pavement, his body covering three flagstones. At his feet the murderers were gathered, hands joined.

— ‘The man was tall,’ Phanor murmured.

— ‘He will occupy no larger a space in the tomb than you,’ said Amrou.

— ‘May his death fall upon Soliman-Ben-Daoud!’

— ‘Let us lament on our own behalf;’ replied Methousael, ‘we possess a royal secret. Let us erase all evidence of the murder; rain is falling; the night is dark; Iblis protects us. Let us drag his remains far from the city, and entrust them to the earth.’

So, they wrapped the body in a long apron of white leather, and, lifting him in their arms, descended noiselessly to the edge of the Kidron, and headed for a solitary hill beyond the road to Bethany. As they reached it, troubled, and shuddering deeply, they suddenly found themselves in the presence of a cavalry escort. Crime engenders fear, they halted; those who flee are timid ... it was at this very moment that the Queen of Sheba passed in silence before the terrified assassins who were bearing away the remains of her husband Adoniram.

They advanced further, and dug a hole in the ground to bury the artist’s body. After which, Methousael, tearing up a young acacia stem, planted it in the fresh soil beneath which their victim lay.

Meanwhile, Balkis journeyed through the valley; lightning rent the skies, and Soliman slept.

His state was crueller, since he was obliged to wake.

The sun had completed its circuit before the lethargic effect of the potion he had drunk ceased. Tormented by painful dreams, he was troubled by visions, and it was with a violent shock that he returned to the realms of life.

He arose, astonished; his wandering eyes searching to re-establish their master's rational thought; finally, he remembered....

The empty cup stood before him; the queen's last words were in his thoughts: she was no longer there and he felt troubled; a ray of sunlight flickering, teasingly, across his brow made him shudder; he divined all and let out a cry of fury.

He enquired in vain: no one had seen her leave; her entourage had disappeared over the plain; only traces of her camp could be found.

— 'This, then,' cried Soliman, casting an irritated glance at the high priest Zadoc, 'this is the aid your God lends to his servants! Is this what He promised? He delivers me like a plaything to the spirits of the abyss, and you, his imbecile minister, who reigns in his name, given my impotence, you have abandoned me, without foreseeing anything, without preventing anything! Who will grant me winged legions to attack this perfidious queen? Genies of earth and fire, rebellious powers, spirits of the air, will you not obey me?'

— 'BlaspHEME not,' cried Zadoc, 'Jehovah alone is great, and he is a jealous God.'

In the midst of this disorder, the prophet Ahias of Shiloh appeared, sombre, fearsome, and inflamed with divine fire; Ahias, poor yet dreaded, who was naught, except in spirit. It was to Soliman that he addressed himself:

— 'God marked the forehead of Cain the murderer, and said, "Whoever makes an attempt on the life of Cain will be punished seven times over." And of Lamech, who was descended from Cain, having shed blood, it is written, "The death of Lamech shall be avenged seventy times sevenfold." Now listen, O king, to what the Lord instructs me to say: "Whoever sheds the blood of Cain and Lamech will be punished seven hundred times sevenfold."

Soliman bowed his head; he thought of Adoniram, knowing that the latter had been executed at his command, and remorse brought from him this cry:

— 'Unfortunate man! What have you done? I did not tell them to slay him.'

Abandoned by his God, at the mercy of the genii, scorned, betrayed by the princess of the Sabaeans, Soliman, in despair, lowered his gaze to his feeble hand, on which the ring he had received from Balkis still shone. That talisman roused in him a glimmer of hope. Once alone, he turned its bezel towards the sun, and saw all the birds of the air gather to him, all except Hud-Hud, the magical hoopoe. He called her three times, forced her to obey him, and ordered her to lead him to the queen. The hoopoe instantly resumed her flight, and Soliman, who was stretching out his arm towards her, felt himself lifted from the ground and borne into the air. Fear seized him, he drew his arm back and immediately regained his footing on the ground. As for the hoopoe, she crossed the valley and landed, on top of a mound, on the frail stem of an acacia that Soliman could not force her to abandon.

Seized by vertigo, King Soliman thought of raising innumerable armies to bring fire and blood to the kingdom of Sheba. He shut himself, alone, to curse his fate and evoke the spirits. An Afreet, a genie of the abyss, was forced to serve him and follow him into solitude. To forget the queen and to assuage his fatal passion, Soliman sought out foreign women from every land, whom he married according to impious rites, and who initiated him in the idolatrous worship

of images. Soon, to sway the genies, he populated the high places and built, not far from Mount Tabor, a temple to Moloch.

Thus, was verified the prediction that the shade of Enoch, amidst the realm of fire, had made to his son Adoniram, in these terms: ‘You are destined to avenge us, and the Temple that you raise to Adonai will cause the downfall of Soliman.’

But the King of the Israelites did even more, as the Talmud teaches; for, the rumour of Adoniram’s murder having spread, the people rose up, demanding justice, and the king ordered that nine masters should investigate the death of the artist, and seek out his corpse.

Seventeen days had passed: their searches in the vicinity of the temple had proved fruitless, and the masters now scoured the countryside, as yet in vain. One of them, overcome by the heat, having sought to cling, in order to stand upright more easily, to an acacia branch, from which a bright and unknown species of bird had flown, was surprised to find that the whole sapling gave way under his hand, and was readily uprooted from the ground. It had been planted recently, and the master, astonished, called out to his companions.

Immediately the nine dug with their hands and revealed the grave beneath.

Then one of them said to his brothers:

— ‘The culprits may have sought to wrest from Adoniram the masters’ password. I fear they may have succeeded in doing so, would it not be wise to change it?’

— ‘What word shall we adopt?’ asked another.

— ‘If we find that, indeed, our master’s body lies here,’ answered a third, ‘the first word any one of us pronounces shall serve as the password; it will eternalise the memory of this crime, and of the oath we hereby swear to avenge it, we or our descendants, on his murderers, and on their most remote posterity.’

The oath was sworn; their hands joined over the grave, and they dug again with ardour.

The corpse was recognised as that of Adoniram, and one of the masters took the finger of its one hand, and found that the skin remained in his own; the same result was obtained by a second; while the third seized the corpse by the wrist in the manner in which masters greet a companion, and the skin separated from the bone again; whereupon, he cried out: ‘Machbenach!’ which means: ‘The flesh leaves the bone!’

They immediately agreed that this word would henceforth be the watchword and rallying cry of the avengers of Adoniram, and God’s justice decreed that this word should, for many centuries, rouse the people against the line of kings.

Phanor, Amrou, and Methousael had fled; but, recognised as disloyal brothers, they perished at the hands of the workmen, in the kingdom of Maacah, ruler of the country of Gath (*north-east Philistia*), where they hid under the names of Hoben, Sterkin, and Oterfut (*see for this, and much of the other material, the rites of Freemasonry*).

Nevertheless, the corporations, by secret inspiration, still continued to pursue their disappointed vengeance on *Abiram* or the murderer.... and Adoniram’s descendants remained

sacred to them; for, many centuries after, they still swore by *The Sons of the Widow*; thus, they designated the line of Adoniram and the Queen of Sheba.

On the express order of Soliman-Ben-Daoud, the illustrious Adoniram was buried beneath the very altar of the Temple which he had erected; which is why, in the end, Adonai abandoned the ark of the Israelites, and reduced Daoud's successors to servitude.

Eager for power and honours, greedy in his voluptuousness, Soliman wed five hundred women, and forced the genies, reconciled to him at last, to serve his designs against the neighbouring nations, by use of the famous ring, created by Irad, father of the Cainite, Maviael and possessed then by Jared the patriarch, his son Enoch (*Idris*), who employed it to command the stones (*see 'The Book of Enoch'*), and by Nimrod, who bequeathed it to Saba, father of the Himyarites.

Solomon's ring subdued the Djinns (*the genies*), the winds, and all creatures. Sated with power, and with his pleasures, the wise man constantly repeated the sentence:

— 'Eat, love, drink; the rest is vanity.'

And yet, strange contradiction, he was unhappy! For the king, corrupted by materiality, aspired to become immortal....

By his artifice, and with the help of profound knowledge, he sought to achieve this by surviving in a certain material state: in order to purify his body of mortal elements, without dissolving it wholly, it was necessary that he should sleep the sleep of the dead, sheltered from all harm, from all corrupting forces, for two hundred and twenty-five years; after which, the exiled soul would return to its fleshly envelope, rejuvenated, and at that stage of flourishing virility whose blossoming attends on the age of thirty-three.

Now old and decrepit, once he perceived, by the decay of his physical powers, the signs of an approaching end, Soliman ordered the genies he had enslaved to build for him, within the mountain of Kaf, an inaccessible palace, at the centre of which was erected a massive throne of gold and ivory, supported on four pillars made from the vigorous trunk of an oak-tree.

It was there that Soliman, Prince of the Djinns, resolved to spend this period of trial. The last days of his life were employed in conjuring, by magic signs, mystical words, and the power of the ring, all creatures, elements, and substances endowed with the properties of decomposing matter. He summoned the clouds' vapour, the earth's humidity, the rays of the sun, the breath of the winds, the butterflies, moths and larvae. He summoned the birds of prey, the bat, the owl, the rat, the horse-fly, the ant, and those species of insects that crawl or gnaw. He summoned the metals; he summoned gemstones, alkalis and acids, and even the emanations of plants, to his conjuring.

These arrangements made, once he had made sure his body was far from all the agents of destruction, the pitiless ministers of Iblis, he had himself transported one last time to the heart of the mountain of Kaf, and, gathering the genies, imposed immense tasks on them, enjoining them, under threat of the most terrible punishments, to guard his sleep, and watch over him.

Then he seated himself on his throne, to which he firmly bound his limbs, which gradually grew cold; his eyes grew dim, his breathing ceased, and he entered a deathlike sleep.

The Djinns, his slaves, continued to serve him, to execute his orders and prostrate themselves before their master, whose awakening they awaited.

The winds respected his face; the larvae from which worms emerge shunned him; the birds, and predatory quadrupeds were obliged to avoid his body; the water diverted its vapours, and, by the power of his conjurations, his flesh remained intact for more than two centuries.

Soliman's beard grew and spread down to his feet; his nails pierced the leather of his gloves, and the golden fabric of his shoes.

But how could limited human wisdom aspire to the Infinite? Soliman had neglected to summon one of the insects, the tiniest of all.... He had forgotten the humble termite.

The termite advanced secretly... invisibly.... it attached itself to one of the pillars that supported the throne, and gnawed at it slowly, slowly, without ceasing. The most subtle sense of hearing would not have detected the scratching of this little atom, which left behind it, each year, grains of fine sawdust.

It laboured for two hundred and twenty-four years.... after which time the corroded pillar suddenly gave way under the weight of the throne, which collapsed with a tremendous crash. *(Author's note: according to the Orientals, the powers of nature have no action except by virtue of a mutually agreed contract. It is this concord of all beings which engenders the power of Allah himself. Note the relationship between this tale of the termite, triumphing over the ambitious conjurations of Soliman, and the tale in the Eddas, relating to Balder. Odin and Freya similarly summoned all beings to their conjurations, so that all would respect the life of Balder, their child. They forgot to summon mistletoe from the oak-tree, and this humble plant was what brought death to that son of the gods. This is why mistletoe was considered sacred in the Druidic religion, which followed that of the Scandinavians.)*

It was the termite that defeated Soliman, and the first that knew of his death; for the king of kings, hurled to the flagstones, failed to awaken.

Then the humiliated genies recognised their errant state, and regained their freedom.

— Here ends the history of the mighty Soliman-Ben-Daoud, an account which should be received with respect by true believers, because it was written, in summary form, by the sacred hand of the Prophet, in the thirty-fourth sura, Saba, of the Koran, the mirror of wisdom and the fount of truth.

The storyteller had finished his tale, which had taken him nearly two weeks to tell. I have feared to lessen its interest by interspersing accounts of what I had been able to observe of Istanbul in the intervals between the evening sessions. Nor have I related a few short stories interspersed here and there, according to custom, either at times when the audience was not so numerous, or to divert attention from some dramatic adventure. The *cafedjis* often go to

considerable expense to secure the assistance of well-known narrators. As a session never lasts more than an hour and a half, they may well make an appearance in several cafés on any given night. They also perform sessions in the harem, when the husband, having assured himself of the delights of a particular tale, wishes to have his family share in the pleasure he has experienced. Prudent people address themselves, to secure a visit, to the syndic of the corporation of storytellers, who are called the *Khasideans*; for it sometimes happens that storytellers of bad faith, dissatisfied with the takings of the café, or the remuneration offered for a domestic performance, vanish in the midst of an interesting episode, leaving their listeners to regret not hearing the end of the tale.

I was very fond of the café frequented by my Persian friends, because of the varied nature of its regulars and the freedom of speech that reigned there; it reminded me of the *Café of Surat* as described by the good Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. One finds, in fact, far more tolerance in these cosmopolitan gatherings of merchants from the various countries of Asia, than in cafés composed purely of Turks or Arabs. The story that was being related was discussed, after each session, among the various groups of customers, for, in an Oriental café, the conversation is never general, and, except for the observations of the Abyssinian, who, as a Christian, seemed to abuse somewhat Noah's juice of the grape, no one appeared to doubt the principal facts of the story. They are, in fact, in conformity with the general beliefs of the Orient; only, one finds there something of that spirit of dissent which stirs among the Persians and Yemeni Arabs. Our storyteller belonged to the sect of Ali (*that of the Sh'ia*), which is, so to speak, the Catholic tradition of the East, while the Turks, who rallied to the sect of Umar (*that of the Sunni*), rather represented a kind of Protestantism, which dominated over the former due to the subjugation of the more southerly populations.

I returned to Ildiz-Khan, preoccupied with the singular details of the legend, and principally with the picture which had just been given to us of the posthumous fall of Solomon. Above all, I pictured to myself the interior marvels of the mountain of Kaf, of which Oriental poems so often speak, in accord with the information I obtained from my companions. Kaf is the mass of rock constituting, so to speak, the internal substance of the globe, and the various mountain ranges which appear on the surface are only its extended branches. The Atlas Mountains, the Caucasus, and the Himalayas represent its most powerful buttresses; ancient authors place yet another branch beyond the western seas, in a region which they call *Yni-Dunya*, the New World, and which suggests Plato's *Atlantis*, if one assumes they had no idea of the existence of the Americas.

It is probable that the scene in which Solomon's pride was confounded — according to the Koran — took place in the *Silver Gallery*, hollowed out, at the centre of the mountain, by the genies, wherein could be seen the statues of the forty Solimans or emperors who governed the earth in the pre-Adamite era, as well as the painted figures of all the rational creatures who had inhabited the globe before the creation of the *people of clay*. Most of them revealed monstrous aspects, heads and arms in vast numbers, or bizarre forms approaching those of animals; which clearly suggests the primitive legends of the Hindus, Egyptians, and Pelasgians.

The pre-Adamite sovereigns, forty in number, who, according to legend, each reigned for a thousand years, reminded me of a hypothesis of the scholar Jean-Antoine Letronne, which I

heard him propound in his lectures, that dates the antiquity of the world to about forty thousand years before the presumed creation of Adam. He gave as evidence the regular retreat of the sea from the shores of Egypt, and, also certain layers of rock corresponding in number to the annual flooding of the Nile. Georges Cuvier's research would also lead to similar conclusions, if that scholar had not been so eager to tie his discoveries to the Biblical account.

In any event, it is impossible to absorb the novels or poems of the Orient without persuading oneself that there existed a long series of unique peoples before Adam whose last king was Gian ben Gian (*Jann ibn Jann*). Adam represented, for the Orientals, merely a new race, kneaded and formed from a particular bed of clay by Adonai, the God of the Bible, who acted, in this role, like Prometheus, the Titan, who animated by means of divine fire a lineage disdained by the Olympians, to whom the world had, until then, belonged.

But, enough of legend: I merely wish to shed a little light on the magical aspects of the tale told above; but the story is a ray of brightness lost amidst the shadows, which, according to Milton's expression, only serves to make the darkness visible.

The Lesser Bayram (*Eid al-Fitr*)

Chapter 1: The 'Eaux-Douces d'Asie' (*Küçüksu Deresi, the Sweet Waters of Asia*)

We had not abandoned our idea of visiting, one Friday, the *Eaux-Douces d'Asie*. This time, we chose the rough track that led to Büyükdéré.

On the way, we stopped at a country house, which was the residence of Boghos Effendi, one of the senior employees of the Sultan. He was an Armenian, who had wed a relative of those Armenians with whom my friend was staying. A garden decorated with rare plants fronted the entrance to the house, and two very pretty little girls, dressed like miniature Sultanas, were playing among the flowerbeds under the supervision of a black African nurse. They came to embrace the painter, and accompanied us into the house. A lady, in Levantine costume, came to receive us, and my friend greeted her with:

— '*Kalimera, kokona!*' ('*Good day, madam!*')

He addressed her in Greek, since she was of that nation, though married to an Armenian.

One is always embarrassed to have to speak, in an account of one's travels, of people who welcome European travellers as hospitably as possible; travellers, that is, who seek to reveal to their own country the truth regarding matters foreign to it; I speak of social groups sympathetic to ours, upon whom Frankish civilisation casts rays of light. In the Middle Ages, our world received everything from the East; now we seek to return those powers with which it has

endowed us to the mutual source of our civilisation, to revive the greatness of the universal motherland.

The fair name of France is dear to these distant nations; it is our future strength; it is what will allow us to await whatever the tired diplomacy of European governments may achieve.

We may say to ourselves, when describing such a country, what Racine said in his second preface to *Bajazet*: 'They have completely different manners and customs.' But surely it is permissible to be thankful for as warm a reception as our Armenian hosts gave us? More alive to our ideas than the Turks, they serve, so to speak, as a means of gaining the good will of the latter, towards whom France as a nation has always been particularly friendly.

I confess that it was a great delight to me to find, after a year's absence from my country, a completely European family home, except for the women's costumes, which, fortunately for local colour, were in keeping with the latest fashions from Istanbul.

Madame Boghos had her granddaughters serve us refreshments; then we entered the main room, in which were several Levantine ladies. One of them sat down at the piano to play one of the most recent pieces from Paris: it was a courtesy that we greatly appreciated, and we admired her extracts from a new opera by Fromental Halévy.

Also, on the tables, there were newspapers, alongside volumes of poetry, and plays, by authors such as Lamartine and Victor Hugo. This seemed strange when one has recently arrived from Syria, yet is quite natural when you consider the fact that Constantinople consumes the literary and artistic works emerging from Paris almost as readily as does Saint Petersburg.

While we were looking through the illustrated books and albums, Monsieur Boghos returned; he wished us to stay for dinner; but, having planned to go to the Eaux-Douces, we merely thanked him. He then wished to accompany us to the shore of the Bosphorus.

We remained some time on the bank waiting for a caique. While walking along the quay, we saw approaching in the distance a man of majestic appearance, of a complexion similar to that of a mulatto, magnificently dressed in the Turkish style, not in the costume of the Reform, but dressed in a traditional fashion. He stopped when he saw Monsieur Boghos who greeted him respectfully, and we left them to talk together for a moment. My friend warned me that he was a great personage, and that we must take care to make a graceful *salamalek*, when he left us, by putting our hand to our chest and mouth, according to oriental custom. I did so according to his instructions, and the mulatto responded very graciously.

It was not the Sultan, whom I had already met.

— 'Who is he?' I said when he had departed.

— 'He is the *kislar-agma*,' the artist answered, admiringly, and also a little fearfully.

I understood all. The *kislar-agma* is the chief eunuch of the seraglio, the man most feared after the Sultan, and more so than even the First Vizier. I regretted not having become more intimately acquainted with this personage, who seemed, very polite moreover, though clearly convinced of his own importance.

Attachés finally arrived; we left Boghos Effendi, and a six-oared caique bore us towards the coast of Asia Minor.

It took about an hour and a half to reach the Eaux-Douces. We admired, on the coasts to right and left, the crenellated castles which guard Pera (*Beyoğlu*), Istanbul, and Scutari (*Üsküdar*) against incursion from Crimea or Trebizond via the Black Sea. These fortifications are Genoese, like those which separate Pera and Galata.

When we had passed the castles of Asia and Europe, our boat entered the basin of 'Sweet Waters' (*formed by the Göksu and Küçüksu rivers*). Tall grass, from which here and there wading-birds flew, bordered the mouth of the river (the *Göksu*) which reminded me somewhat of the last stretches of the Nile where its waters, nearing the sea, enter the lake of Pelusium. But, here, Nature, calmer, greener, more northern in mood, echoed the magnificence of the Nile Delta, much as Latin echoes Greek... by lessening its power.

We landed in a delightful meadow, traversed by watercourses. The woods, artfully thinned, cast shadow in places on the tall grass. A few tents, erected by traders in fruit and refreshments, gave the scene the appearance of one of those oases at which wandering tribes halt. The meadow was covered with people. The varied tints of their costumes enlivened the verdure like the bright colours of flowers scattered over a lawn in Spring. In the middle of the widest clearing, a fountain of white marble could be distinguished, having that form of a Chinese pavilion whose unique architecture is found everywhere in Constantinople.

The pleasure of imbibing fresh water has prompted the invention of the most charming constructions one could imagine. This was not a spring like that of Arnavutköy, where one must await the good pleasure of a saint, who causes the fount to flow only on his feast-day. That is fine for the *giaours*, who wait patiently for the miracle to allow them a drink of fresh water.... but at the fountain of the Sweet Waters of Asia, one does not have to suffer from such delay. I know not which Muslim saint makes the water, there, flow with an abundance and limpidity unknown to the Greek equivalent. I had to pay a *para* for a glass of this liquid; the journey there, in order to obtain it directly from its source, costing some ten piastres.

Carriages of all kinds, most of them gilded, and drawn by oxen, had brought the ladies of Scutari to the Sweet Waters. Near to the fountain only women and children could be seen, speaking, shouting, conversing amidst gestures, laughter, and mild teasing, in that Turkish language whose soft syllables resemble the cooing of birds.

Although the women are more or less hidden beneath their veils, they do not, however, seek to hide themselves in such a cruel manner as to thwart Frankish curiosity. The police regulations which command them, as often as possible, to wear thicker veils, to shield the infidels from any external features which might affect the senses, inspire in them a reserve which would not yield readily to any attempt at seduction.

The heat of the day was, at this hour intense, and we had found shade beneath an enormous plane-tree surrounded by rustic divans. We tried to sleep; but, for Frenchmen, sleeping at midday is well-nigh impossible. The artist, seeing that we could not sleep, told us a story.

It concerned the adventures of friend of his, a painter (*Camille Rogier*), who had arrived in Constantinople hoping to make his fortune, by producing daguerreotypes.

He looked for sites where there were the largest crowds, and one day he set up his photographic equipment beneath the shade of the trees at Eaux-Douces.

A child was playing on the grass: the artist had the good fortune to achieve a perfect image; then, in his joy at seeing such a successful take, he exhibited the plate before the onlookers, who are never lacking on such occasions.

The mother approached, prompted by natural curiosity, and was surprised to see her child so clearly reproduced. She believed it to be the result of magic.

The artist knew nothing of the Turkish language, so that he did not, at first, understand the lady's compliments. But the African servant who accompanied her signalled to him. The lady had entered an *araba*, and was on her way to Scutari.

The painter grasped his daguerreotype box under his arm, something which is not easy to carry, and followed the araba for a few miles.

Arriving at the first houses belonging to Scutari, he saw the araba come to a halt some distance away, and the woman descended at an isolated kiosk which faced the sea.

The old servant gestured that he should not show himself, but wait; then, when night had fallen, she led him to the house.

The artist appeared before the lady, who told him that she had sent for him so that he could use his daguerreotype equipment to produce a portrait of her in the same manner that he had employed to reproduce that of her child.

— 'Madame,' replied the artist — attempting to clarify the matter — 'this instrument only works in sunlight.'

— 'Well, let us wait for the sun to rise,' said the lady.

She was a widow, fortunately, as regards Muslim morality.

The next morning, the artist, taking advantage of the bright rays of light which penetrated the barred windows, set about reproducing the features of this lovely inhabitant of the suburb of Scutari. She was very young, although the mother of a tall child, for women in the Orient, as is well known, mostly marry at the age of twelve. While he was polishing his silver-plated copper sheet, a knock was heard at the outer door.

— 'Hide yourself!' cried the lady.

Then, helped by her servant, she hastened to lead the man, bearing his apparatus, into a very narrow room, which adjoined the bedroom. The unfortunate man was there long enough to reflect, sadly, on his situation. He was unaware that the woman was a widow, and naturally thought her husband had arrived unexpectedly after some journey or other. Another hypothesis involving no less danger arose in his mind: the intervention of the police in the matter, the house being one where the entrance of a 'giaour' had perhaps been noted the evening before. However, he listened, and, as the wooden houses owned by the Turks have only very thin partitions, he was a little reassured on hearing only the murmur of female voices.

In fact, the lady was simply receiving a visit from one of her friends; but the visits that the women of Constantinople make to each other usually last a whole day, these idle beauties seeking every opportunity to kill as much time as possible. To show himself was dangerous: the visitor might be old and ugly, and though Muslim women necessarily accommodate themselves to sharing a husband, jealousy is not absent from their souls when it is a matter of the heart. The unfortunate man was of handsome appearance.

When evening came, the importunate female friend, having dined, and later taken refreshments, and having indulged for a long while in doubtless malicious chatter, finally departed, and the Frenchman was finally able to emerge from his narrow hiding-place.

It was too late to resume the long and difficult work of the portrait. In addition, the artist after having been confined for several hours was now both hungry and thirsty. The session had to be postponed until the next day.

On the third day, he found himself in the position of that sailor whom the popular song supposes to have been detained for a long time by a certain lady, in the days of Louis XV: he found it tedious.

The conversation of Turkish ladies is fairly uniform. Moreover, when one does not understand the language, it is difficult to find their company entertaining for long. He had succeeded in capturing the portrait requested, and had made it clear that important business called him back to Pera. But it was impossible to leave the house in broad daylight, and, when evening came, a magnificent collation, offered by the lady, delayed him, no less than his gratitude for her charming hospitality. However, the following day, he expressed, energetically, his determination to depart. It was necessary, nonetheless, to wait till evening. But the daguerreotype had been cached somewhere, and how could he leave the house without that precious instrument, the like of which was not to be found in the city at that time? It was, moreover, his current means of livelihood. The women of Scutari are a little wild in their attachments; this lady made it clear to the artist, who finally grasped a few words of the language, that if he wanted to desert her, she would summon the neighbours and claim he had entered the house in secret, to attack her honor.

So inconvenient an affair finally exhausted the young man's patience. He abandoned his daguerreotype equipment, and managed to escape through the window, while the lady slept.

The saddest part of his adventure was that his friends in Pera, not having seen him for more than three days, had alerted the police. Some information had been obtained about the events that had taken place at the Eaux-Douces d'Asie. People from the countryside had seen the araba pass by, followed at a distance by the artist. The affair was reported, and the poor Turkish lady would have been killed by the fanatical population for having welcomed a *giaour* to her house, if the police had not removed her secretly. She escaped with a mere fifty blows of a stick, and the African servant with twenty-five, the law never applying to slaves more than half the punishment dealt out to a free person.

This anecdote may give an idea of the powerful inclinations of women whose lives pass divorced from male society, though not in absolute seclusion. Perhaps this poor lady of Scutari was a devout woman who had hoped, moreover, to force the artist to become a Muslim, in

order to be able to wed her. In general, the conduct of Turkish women is dignified and reserved; the affairs, attended by good-fortune, of which European male travellers boast, relate for the most part to a certain class of women, not highly esteemed, who, alike, take advantage of the facility granted them by their concealing mode of dress to visit such Europeans, of whom they are informed by their dressmakers or by corrupt slaves. Almost always, it is the desire for some article of adornment — previously refused them by their old or miserly husband — that makes them fail in their duty. The danger thereafter is theirs alone since none dare violate the lodgings of a European, while he would risk being torn to pieces in a Turkish house.

Chapter 2: The Lesser Bayram

Returning from Tophane to Pera, through the hilly streets which pass between the Embassy buildings, we noticed that the Frankish quarter was brighter and noisier than usual. This was because the Lesser Bayram festival, which follows the month of Ramadan, was approaching — three days of rejoicing which follow this sort of Lent combined with Carnival, the various phases of which I have sought to describe.

The Lesser Bayram of the Turks resembles our New Year's Day. European civilisation, which is gradually penetrating their habitual customs, they find more and more attractive, as regards those details compatible with their religion; such that the women and children are fond of trinkets, toys, and baubles from France or Germany. Moreover, though Turkish ladies produce admirable confitures, the privilege of turning out the best sweets and candies, in attractive packaging, belongs to the Parisian trade. On our way back from Eaux-Douces, we traversed the main street of Pera, which had become, that evening, akin to our Rue des Lombards. It was good to visit the principal confectionery-shop, that of Madame Meunier, to take some refreshment and view the crowd. There were eminent people there, rich Turks, who had come to shop there themselves, it not being prudent, in this country, to entrust the care of buying one's sweets simply to servants. The *effendis* (*men of distinction*) have confidence in Madame Meunier's honesty, and know she would not deceive them as to their purchases.... Rivalries, jealousies, hatreds sometimes lead to crimes in Muslim society; and, if bloody fights have become rare, poison is still, in certain cases, the great device of women, much less civilised till now than their husbands.

At one point all the Turks disappeared, taking their purchases with them, like soldiers when the retreat sounds, because the hour summoned them to one of the *namaz*; prayers which are offered at night in the mosques.

These good people do not confine themselves, during the nights of Ramadan, to listening to stories and watching plays involving *Karagöz*; they have moments of prayer, called *rakats*, during each of which some ten verses of the Koran are recited. Twenty rakats must be performed per night, either in the mosques, which is best, or at home, or in the street, if one has no permanent home, as happens to many who sleep in the cafés. A good Muslim will, consequently, recite some two hundred verses each night, which amounts to six thousand verses

over the thirty nights. Hearing stories, watching plays, and walking about, are merely relaxations from this religious duty.

The lady confectioner told us a tale which may give one some idea of the naivety of certain Turkish officials. She had purchased some boxes of toys from Nuremberg, shipped via the Danube. Customs duty is levied according to the declared value of the items; but, in Constantinople, as elsewhere, to avoid fraud, the administration has the right to retain the goods by paying their owner the balance, if the goods are worth more than the amount due.

When the boxes of toys from Nuremberg were inspected, a cry of admiration arose among the Customs officials. The declared value was ten thousand piastres (*two thousand six hundred francs*). According to their private valuation, the goods were worth at least thirty thousand piastres in total. They therefore retained the boxes, which were thus sold, and paid for, without the effort of unpacking and displaying them. Madame Meunier pocketed the ten thousand piastres, while laughing at their simplicity. They shared the puppets, dolls, and wooden soldiers among themselves — not to give to their children, but for their own amusement.

As I was leaving the shop, on retrieving my handkerchief, I found in my pocket the bottle I had bought earlier in Sérasquier Square. I asked Madame Meunier, what could the liqueur be, sold to me as a refreshment, and of which I had been unable to take more than a sip: was it a kind of sour lemonade, or Bavarian cream-liqueur, or one peculiar to the country?

The confectioner and her young ladies burst into fits of laughter when they saw the bottle; it was impossible to obtain an explanation from them. The painter told me, as he was seeing me out, that such liqueurs were only sold to Turks who had reached a certain age. In general, in this country, the senses become dull after the age of thirty. Now, every husband is obliged, when the last sliver of the moon of Bayram appears, to fulfil his most serious duty.... there being some for whom the frolics of *Karagöz* have proved insufficiently arousing.

The eve of Bayram had arrived: the lovely moon of Ramadan was leaving for wherever the old moon, and the snows of yesteryear, go — a question which proved a serious subject of poetic reverie for François Villon. Indeed, it is only then that the serious festivities begin. The sun which had risen to inaugurate the month of Shawwal (*the tenth month of the Islamic calendar, which follows Ramadan*), now dethroned the haughty moon who had usurped his splendour, and had rendered herself for thirty days a veritable nocturnal sun, though with the aid, it is true, of illuminations, lanterns, and fireworks. The Persians lodging with me at Ildiz-Khan told me of the moment when the burial of the old moon, and the enthronement of the new was to take place; which gives rise to an extraordinary ceremony.

A widespread movement of troops took place that night. A fence was erected between Eski Saray (*the Old Palace*) the residence of the Sultana-Mother, and the Great Seraglio, situated on the Istanbul headland. From the Fortress of the Seven Towers (*Yedikule*) and the remains of the Palace of Belisarius, to Hagia Sophia, all the people of the various districts flocked to these two sites.

How to describe all the splendours of that privileged night? How, above all, to account for the singular tradition which makes the Sultan, on this night, the only happy man in his empire? All the faithful have been obliged to abstain from amorous intent for a month. One more night,

and they will be able to send to one of their wives, if they have several, the bouquet which indicates a preference. If they have only one, the bouquet belongs to her by right. But, the Sultan, as Padisha and Caliph, has the right not to wait for the new moon of *Lailat-ul-Eid*, which signals the start of the month Shawwal, and the first day of the Lesser Bayram (*Eid-al-Fitr*). He has a night's advance on all his subjects as regards the procreation of an heir, who must be born of a different wife to any previous.

This, I was told, was the meaning of the ceremony which took place, between the Old Seraglio and the New. The mother or aunt of the Sultan would bring to her son a virgin slave-girl, whom she herself had bought at the bazaar, and whom she paraded in her carriage, with full pomp (*Author's note: this ceremony has not taken place for some time now*).

Indeed, a long line of carriages soon traversed the populous districts of Istanbul, following the central street to Hagia Sophia, near which is situated the gate of the Great Seraglio. These carriages, about twenty in number, contained all the relatives of His Highness, as well as the Sultanas who had been granted a pension after having given birth to a prince or princess. The grilles of the carriage windows did not prevent one from distinguishing the shape of their heads, veiled in white, and their outer garments. There was one whose enormity astonished me. Doubtless as a matter of privilege, and thanks to the freedom that her rank or age gave her, her head was surrounded only by a fine gauze which allowed her once-beautiful features to be seen. As for the future *qaden*, she was doubtless in the central carriage, though it was impossible to distinguish her from the other ladies. A large number of footmen carried torches, and clay-pots of burning coals, on both sides of the procession.

They halted in the magnificent square at the gates of the Seraglio, which is adorned with a splendid fountain, adorned with marble, fretwork, and gilded arabesques, with its Chinese-style roof and sparkling bronzes.

The door of the Seraglio still allows sight, between its columns, of the niches once used to expose the heads of the dead, those famous *Heads of the Seraglio* (See Victor Hugo's poem '*Les Têtes du Sérail*').

Chapter 3: The Seraglio Festivities

I am unable to describe the ceremonies within the palace, choosing only to speak of what I have seen for myself. However, I already knew in part the site involved. Any foreigner can visit the major residences and mosques, on certain designated days, at the cost of two or three thousand Turkish piastres. But the sum is so large, that ordinary tourists often hesitate to pay such an amount. Yet, for the same price, one can invite as many people as one wishes, and the curious either share the cost, or wait until some wealthy European personage consents to bear the expense. I had been able to visit all the monuments at the time of the Crown Prince of Prussia's visit. It is customary, on such occasions, that any Europeans who present themselves are admitted to the procession.

Without venturing a description that can be read in all travel accounts, it is useful to indicate the situation of the numerous buildings and gardens of the Seraglio occupying the triangle of land bordered by the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. It is a whole city enclosed within high crenellated walls, punctuated by towers, and attached to the great wall built by the Greeks, which runs along the coast as far as the Fortress of the Seven Towers, and which, from there, completely encloses the immense triangle formed by Istanbul.

Among the buildings forming the Seraglio there are a large number which are of ancient construction, kiosks, mosques, and chapels, as well as more modern buildings, almost in the European style. The terraced gardens, with their flowerbeds, arbours, canals lined with marble, paths formed of pebble mosaics, trimmed shrubs, and squares of rare flowers are devoted to the ladies' promenades. Other gardens, designed in the English style, with ponds populated by water-birds, tall plane trees, willows, and sycamores, extend around the kiosks in the oldest areas. All persons who are identifiable, or who have business with the employees there, may cross, during the day, the portions of the Seraglio which are not reserved for the women. I have often walked there, on my way to visit either the library or the treasury. The former, to which it is easy to gain admission, contains a large number of interesting books and manuscripts, notably a Koran engraved on thin sheets of lead, which, thanks to their excellent execution, one can turn like normal pages; the decorations are in shiny enamel. In the treasury, one can admire the imperial jewels preserved for centuries. In one room are portraits of the Sultans painted in miniature, the first executed by Gentile Bellini, the Venetian (*see his portrait of Mehmet II in the National Gallery, London*) those following by other Italian painters. The last one, that of Abdülmecid I, was painted by a Frenchman, Camille Rogier, to whom we owe a beautiful series depicting modern Byzantine costume.

Thus, the old custom, attributed to Muslims, of leading a secretive, and backward way of life, has been superseded by progressive ideas. Beyond the initial entrance, named *The Gate (La Porte)*, two immense courtyards front the large buildings of the seraglio. The farthest, surrounded by low arcades, is often devoted to the exercises of the pages, who compete in gymnastics, and horse riding. The nearest, which anyone can enter, has a rustic appearance, with trees and trellis-work. One singular item which adorns it, is an enormous marble mortar, which from a distance looks like the mouth of a well. The mortar has a particular purpose. It is to crush, with an iron pestle appropriate to its size, the body of the mufti, the head of the religion, if he should chance to fail in his duties. Whenever this personage comes to pay a visit to the Sultan, he is obliged to pass before this immense mortar, which may perhaps end his life. The salutary terror which results from it is the reason that there has only ever been one mufti who incurred this punishment. Catholic tradition failed to established the like for its popes.

The crowd was so great that it seemed impossible for me to enter even the first courtyard. I relinquished the idea, though the public were permitted to penetrate that far and view the ladies of the Old Seraglio alighting from their carriages. Torches and fiery lances scattered sparks here and there, over the audience's clothes, and a large number of sergeants distributed many blows of their sticks to bring order to the front rows. From what I could learn, the ceremony involved merely a parade and a reception. The Sultan's new slave was to be received in their apartments by the Sultanas, three in number, and by the Cadines (*quadens*), thirty in

number; and nothing prevented the Sultan from spending the night with this lovely virgin on the eve of the Lesser Bayram. We must admire Muslim wisdom, which foresaw the case where some favourite, perchance barren, might utterly absorb the love and favour of their head of state.

The religious duty imposed on him that night is apparently a response to the need to bear children. This is also the meaning of the obligation imposed on ordinary Muslims by the first night of Bayram.

The abstinence, lasting a whole month, which doubtless renews their male powers, the partial fast which purges and purifies them, was doubtless arrived at based on like prescriptions found in Jewish law. Let us not forget that the East passed to Europe the elements of medicine and chemistry and the principles of hygiene, identified thousands of years ago, and let us express regret that our Northern religions are only an imperfect imitation of theirs — I personally regret that, with regard to the bizarre custom reported above, Europeans choose to accuse the Muslims of libertinism.

Their beliefs and customs differ so much from ours that we may only judge them from the point of view of our relative deprivation. It is enough to say that Muslim law does not view this ardour of the senses, so needful to the continued existence of the populations of the south, decimated on so many occasions by plague or war, as a sin. If we were more aware of the dignity, and even chastity, displayed in the relations that exist between a Muslim and his wife or wives, we would dispel the mirage of voluptuousness our eighteenth-century authors created.

Let it suffice for me to say that the man and the woman go to bed clothed; that the eyes of a Muslim should not by religious law, fall below a woman's waist — and vice versa — and that Sultan Mahmoud, the most progressive of sultans, having one day entered, it is said, his wives' bathhouse, was condemned by them to a long exile from their presence — moreover, the citizens, informed of this through some servant's indiscretion, were indignant, and representations were made to the Sultan by the imams.

The tale was, however, regarded by his supporters as mere slander — likely prompted by the fact that he had built an amphitheatre-style bathroom in the Palace of Mirrors — I prefer to believe it such.

Chapter 4: At-Meydani (*Sultanahmet Square*)

The next morning was the first day of the Lesser Bayram (*Eid al-Fitr*). The cannon mounted on all the forts and ships boomed out at daybreak, drowning out the chants of the muezzins greeting Allah from the top of a thousand minarets. The celebration was, on this occasion, located on the At-Meydani (*Sultanahmet Square*), made illustrious by memories of the emperors of Byzantium who built there. The square is oblong, retaining the shape of the ancient Hippodrome, and contains two obelisks which marked the circuit's turning points, at the time

of the contests in Byzantium between the chariot teams of the *greens* and *blues*. The best-preserved obelisk (*from the reign of Pharaoh Thutmose III*), whose pink granite is covered with hieroglyphs still distinct, is supported by a pedestal of white marble surrounded by bas-reliefs depicting Greek emperors surrounded by their court, and various combats and ceremonies. They are not particularly fine in execution, but their survival proves that the Turks are not as hostile to sculpture as is supposed in Europe.

In the middle of the square there is a unique column composed of three intertwined serpents, which, it is said, once served as a tripod in the temple of Delphi.

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque (*the Blue Mosque*) borders one side of the square. It was there that His Highness Abdülmecid would perform the Bayram prayers.

On this first day of the Lesser Bayram, a million inhabitants or more of Istanbul, Scutari, Pera and the surrounding area crowded the immense triangular area, which terminates at the Seraglio headland. Thanks to the proximity of my lodgings, I was able to take the path of the procession which was approaching the square. The parade, which wound through the streets surrounding Hagia Sophia, took at least an hour to pass. But the uniforms of the troops were of little interest to a Frank, because, apart from the crimson fez which uniformly served as their headdress, the uniforms of the various corps wore more or less European in style. The *mirlivas* (*generals*) had costumes similar to those of ours, embroidered with gold palm-leaves on all the seams. Only, they all wore blue redingotes; not a single dress-coat was to be seen.

The Europeans of Pera mingled in great numbers with the crowd; for, during the days of Eid, all religions participate in the Muslim festivities. It is a civic festival, at least among those who do not embrace the religious creed of Islam. The Sultan's music, conducted by Giuseppe Donizetti, Gaetano's elder brother, performed very beautiful marches, played in unison, according to the Oriental system. The main interest as regards the procession lay in the parade of the *icoglans*, pages or bodyguards wearing helmets adorned with immense crests trimmed with tall blue plumes. One would have thought a forest was on the march, as in the denouement of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Sultan appeared, dressed with great simplicity, and wearing only a brilliant aigrette on his hat. His horse though was so adorned with a tapestry of gold and diamonds that it dazzled all eyes. Several horses, also caparisoned, their harnesses sparkling with precious stones, were led by *sais* in the retinue of the sovereign. The viziers, the *seraskiers* (*military commanders*), the *kasiaskers* (*justices*), the heads of the *ulema*, and a whole host of attendants followed, as customary, the head of state, followed by further troops who brought up the rear.

All this procession, arriving at the immense square of At-Meydani, soon filled the vast courtyards and gardens of the mosque. The Sultan dismounted and was received by the imams and mullahs, who were waiting for him at the entrance, and on the steps. A large number of carriages were drawn up on the square, and all the great ladies of Constantinople had assembled there, watching the ceremony through the gilded grilles of their carriage-doors. The most distinguished had obtained the favour of occupying the high tribunes of the mosque.

I was unable to view what was taking place within; but heard that the main ceremony was the sacrifice of a sheep. The same practice is performed on this day in all Muslim houses.

The square was covered with amusement stalls, entertainers, and traders of all kinds. After the sacrifice, everyone rushed to partake of the food and refreshments. Pancakes, sweet pastries, fried food, and *kebabs*, a favourite dish of the people, consisting of grilled mutton decked with parsley, and eaten with slices of unleavened bread, were distributed to all, at the expense of the principal personages. In addition, all could enter a house and take part in the meal being served there. Rich or poor all Muslims in private houses treat, according to their means, those who visit their house, without regard to nation or religion. This is a custom which also existed among the Jews at the Passover.

The second and third days of Bayram simply continue the public festivities of the first.

I have not undertaken to describe Constantinople; its palaces, mosques, baths, and shoreline have been so often written about by others! I only wished to give my impressions on traversing its streets and squares at the time of the principal festivals. The city is, as in former times, the mysterious and sublime seal which unites Europe and Asia-Minor. Though its external appearance may be the most beautiful in the world, one can criticise, as so many travellers have done, the poverty of certain city-quarters, and the lack of cleanliness of many others. Constantinople is like a stage set, which one must view from the auditorium, without visiting the wings. There are English travellers who limit themselves to rounding the headland on which the Seraglio stands, and traversing the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus in a steamboat, who say to themselves: 'I have seen all that is worth seeing.' That is mere exaggeration. What is perhaps to be regretted though is that Istanbul, having partly lost its former physiognomy, is not yet, as regards the regularity of its streets, or its sanitariness, comparable to more modern European capitals. It is doubtless difficult to establish regular thoroughfares on the hills of Istanbul, or the tall promontories of Pera and Scutari; but it might be achieved with higher standards of construction and paving. Its painted houses, metal domes, and slender minarets, are always admirable from the point of view of poetry; but the twenty thousand wooden dwellings, which fire so often visits; the cemeteries wherein doves coo among the yew-trees but jackals often dig up the corpses, when some storm has softened the ground, is the reverse side of that Byzantine medallion, which we can still enjoy cleaning and polishing, in the manner of the learned and graceful descriptions of Lady Montague (*Mary Wortley Montague, see her 'Turkish Embassy Letters' published 1763*).

No one, in any event, could adequately convey the efforts the Turks are making today, to bring to their capital the results of European progress. No artistic process, no material improvement is unknown to them. One deploras only the fixed habits peculiar to certain classes, based on their respect for ancient custom. The Turks are on this point as formulistic as the English.

Satisfied with having spent the thirty nights of Ramadan in Istanbul itself, I took advantage of the new moon of Shawwal to take leave of the room rented to me at Ildiz-Khan. One of the Persians who had taken a liking to me, and who always called me the *mirza* (*learned man*), desired to give me a present at the time of my departure. He made me go down into a cellar

full, he said, of precious stones. I thought to find the treasure of *Aboulcasem* (see '*The Thousand and One Nights*'), but the cellar contained only common stones and pebbles.

— 'Come,' he said to me, 'here are garnets, amethysts, turquoises, and opals: choose one sort as a gift.'

The man seemed quite mad: to be certain, I chose opals. He took an axe, and split a white stone, the size of a paving stone, in two. The brilliance of the opals enclosed within the limestone instantly dazzled.

— 'Take it,' he said, offering me one of the fragments of stone. On arriving at Malta, I wished to have some of the opals enclosed valued. Most of them, the brightest and largest in appearance, were friable. Five or six I had cut, which left me with a fine souvenir of my friends at Ildiz-Khan.

Malta

I have finally escaped from the ten-day quarantine that must be undergone at Malta, before returning to the pleasant surroundings of Italy and France. To reside so long in the dusty chambers of a fort was a bitter penance for the lovely days, too few in number, I had spent amidst those splendid tracts of the Orient. This is my third quarantine; at least those of Beirut and Smyrna were spent in the shade of tall trees, at the edge of a sea that has hollowed the cliffs, and bordered in the distance by the bluish silhouette of coastlines or islands. Here, the view was only of the harbour of an inland port, and the terraced rocks of the city of Valletta, where a few bare-legged Scottish soldiers were on patrol. — A sad sight, indeed! I return to the land of rain and cold, and already the Orient is for me nothing more than one of those dreams at dawn, which are soon succeeded by the day's troubles.

What more can I tell you, my friend? What interest is to be found in these letters, jumbled, diffuse, filled with fragments of my travel journal, and tales collected at random? Their very disorder is the guarantee of my sincerity; what I have written, I have seen, I have felt. — Was I wrong to report thus, naively, a thousand trivial incidents, ordinarily disdained when penning picturesque or scientific travel writings?

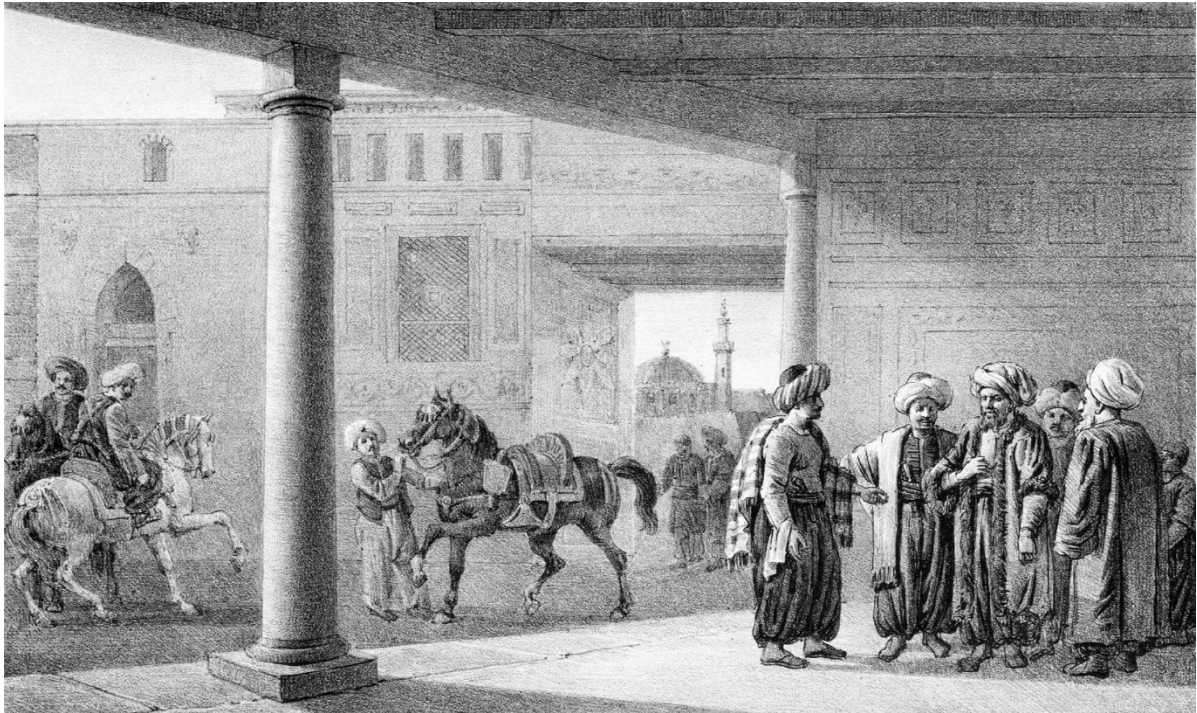
Must I defend myself in regard to my admiration for the succession of diverse religions in the countries I traversed? Yes, I felt myself a pagan in Greece, a Muslim in Egypt, a pantheist among the Druze, and a devotee, amidst the waves, of the star-gods of Chaldea; but, in Constantinople, I understood the greatness of that universal tolerance which the Turks exercise today.

The latter tell one of the best parables I know: four travelling-companions, a Turk, an Arab, a Persian and a Greek, wished to dine together. They contributed ten paras each. But the question was what they would buy: — '*Üzümlü*', said the Turk' — '*Ineb*', said the Arab.' — '*Angoor*', said the Persian. — '*Stafyli*', said the Greek.

Each so wished to see his choice prevail over that of the others that they had already come to blows, when a Dervish who spoke all four tongues intervened, and called to a tradesman selling grapes; it transpired that they were what each had asked for.

In Constantinople, I was greatly touched by seeing devout Dervishes attending Mass. The word of God seemed good to them in any language. Moreover, they require none but themselves to whirl, like shuttlecocks, to the sound of flutes — which as far as they are concerned is the most sublime way of honouring Heaven.

Part XVIII: Appendices – 1 to 8



A country house near Cairo, 1828, Otto Baron Howen

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collectie/AK-MAK-1828-01-001-001)

The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians

Appendix 1: Regarding the Condition of Women

The current period of literature is similar to that which inaugurated the second half of the eighteenth century. Then, as now, writers were drawn to the curious, to eccentric investigations, to paradox, in a word. If paradox, as has been said, ruined the eighteenth century, how will it affect ours? Do we not recognise, herein, the most incoherent mixture of political, social, and religious opinion seen since the late Roman empire? What we lack is a multi-faceted genius, capable of providing a rational view of all such misguided fantasies. In the absence of a Lucian (*of Samosata*) or a Voltaire, the majority of the public will take only a limited interest in the immense work of decomposition at which so many ingenious writers are labouring.

The eighteenth century published a defence of Islam, just as it tried to resuscitate Epicureanism and the theories of the Neoplatonists. Let us not be surprised, given the works now appearing, once more, concerning those latter subjects, if we find some author raising

among us the standard of the Prophet. That would be scarcely stranger than the announcement of a mosque being built in Paris. After all, that would only be just, since Muslims allow our churches in their countries, and their princes visit us as the kings of the East once visited Rome. Great things may result from the friction of two civilisations long hostile to each other, which may rediscover previous points of contact by ridding themselves of the prejudices that still divide them. It is for us to take the first steps and rectify our many errors and wrong opinions regarding the customs and social institutions of the East. Our role in Algeria, especially, makes this a duty for us. We must ask ourselves whether we gain anything by our religious propaganda, or whether it would be more appropriate to limit ourselves to influencing the East through our civilisation and philosophies. Both are equally in our hands; it would be interesting to discover if we could not draw, from such a study, lessons of our own.

When the French army seized Egypt, there was no lack of moralists and reformers in its ranks determined to shine the torch of 'reason', as it was then called, on those 'barbarous' societies; a few months later, Napoleon himself invoked the name of Muhammad in his proclamations, and General Jean-Baptiste Kléber's successor, Jacques-François Menou, embraced the religion of the vanquished; many other Frenchmen, then and since, have followed this example, yet, compared to the few illustrious figures who have become Muslims, one would be hard pressed to cite well-known Muslims who have become Christians. This might seem perhaps to prove that Islam offers men certain advantages which do not exist for women. Polygamy may, indeed, have tempted a few superficial minds from afar; but this motive can have no influence on anyone who studies, closely, the genuine customs of the Orient. A certain Monsieur de Sokolnicki brought together, in a work which is perhaps a little paradoxical, but in which one finds much observation and science, all the passages of the Koran, and some other Oriental books, which relate to the situation of women (*see 'Mahomet, Législateur des Femmes, Ses Opinions sur Le Christ et Les Chrétiens,' by Michal Sokolnicki, second edition 1846*). The author found little difficulty in demonstrating that Muhammad established neither polygamy in the Orient, nor female seclusion, nor slavery, all of which should no longer even be a matter for discussion, while he endeavoured to highlight the efforts of that legislator to temper and moderate as much as possible the ancient and enduring institutions of patriarchal life, which had always varied according to nation and clime.

The idea of the baser nature of woman, and the tradition which presents it as the primary cause of the sins and misfortunes of the human race, is found especially in the Bible, and consequently, influenced all the religions which derive from that text. The idea is no more marked in Islamic dogma than in Christian dogma. There is, it is true, an old Arabic legend which I summarise below, which outdoes even the Mosaic tradition; however, I scarcely believe it was ever taken entirely seriously:

The Orientals are known to accept Adam as being the first man in the material sense of the word, but, according to them, the earth was first populated by the *divs* or elementary spirits, previously created by Allah in a *high, subtle, and luminous* manner. After having left these pre-Adamite populations to occupy the globe for seventy-two thousand years, and having tired of the spectacle of their wars, loves, and the fragile products of their genius, Allah wished to create a new race, more intimately connected to the Earth and better realising the difficult union of

matter and spirit. That is why the Koran says: 'We created Adam partly of sandy earth, and partly of silt; but, as for the genies, we had created and formed them, verily, of burning fire.' Allah therefore created a form composed chiefly of this fine sand, the colour of which gave Adam his name (*red*), and, when the figure was dry, exposed it to the view of the angels and divinities, so that each could give his opinion of it. Iblis, otherwise called Azazel, who is the equivalent of Satan, touched the figure, striking it on the belly and chest, and perceived that it was hollow. 'This empty creature,' he said, 'will desire to fill itself; temptation has many ways of penetrating it.' However, God breathed life into the nostrils of Man, and gave him as companion the notorious Lilith, one of the *divs*, who, following the advice of Iblis, was later unfaithful, and was decapitated. Eve, or *Hava* in the Islamic tradition, must therefore have been Adam's second wife. The Lord, having understood that he had been wrong to combine two very different natures, chose on the second occasion to extract woman from the very substance of man. He plunged the latter into sleep, and began by extracting one of his ribs, as in the Bible legend. But here a different nuance is present in the Arabic tradition: while Allah, busy closing the wound, had lifted his eyes from the precious rib, laid on the ground beside him, a monkey (*qird*), sent by Iblis, gathered it swiftly and disappeared into the depths of a nearby wood. The Creator, greatly annoyed by this, ordered one of his angels to pursue the animal. The latter sank ever deeper among the branches. The angel finally managed to seize the creature by the tail; but the tail remained in his hand, and that was all he could bring his master, to bursts of laughter from the assembly. The Creator gazed at the object, in disappointment. 'Well,' he said, at last 'we will use what we have.' And, yielding perhaps to the vanity of the artist, he transformed the monkey's tail into a creature beautiful externally, but full of malice and perversity within.

Should one see in this tale only the naivety of primitive legend, or traces of a kind of Voltairean irony which is not foreign to the Orient? Perhaps it would be helpful, in order to understand it, to relate the first struggles of the monotheistic religions, which proclaimed the lesser nature of woman, to a hatred of Syrian polytheism, where the feminine principle dominated under the names of Astarte, Derceto (*Atagartis*) and Mylitta (*Mullissu*). The idea that the first source of evil and sin preceded Eve herself can be traced to those who refused to conceive of an eternally solitary Creator, they spoke of a crime so great committed by his ancient divine spouse, that after a punishment before which the universe trembled, it was forbidden to any angel or earthly creature to ever pronounce his name. The solemn obscurities of primitive cosmogony contain nothing more terrible than this wrath of the Eternal Being, eclipsing the very memory of the mother of the world. Hesiod, who depicts at such length in his *Theogony* the monstrous births and struggles of the mother divinities of the Uranus cycle, presents no darker a myth. Let us return to the clearer concepts of the Bible, which softened and humanised are even more in the Koran.

It has long been believed that Islam places women in a far inferior position to men, and makes them, so to speak, slaves to their husbands. This idea fails to stand up to serious examination of Oriental custom. It should rather be said that Muhammad greatly improved the condition of women.

Moses declared that the period of impurity of the woman who gives birth to a girl and therefore brings into the world a new cause of sin, should be longer than that of the mother of

a male child. The Talmud excluded women from religious ceremonies and forbade them entry to the Temple. Muhammad, on the contrary, declares that woman is the *glory* of man; he allows her entry into mosques, and gives her as models Asia, the wife of Pharaoh, Mary, the mother of Christ, and his own daughter Fatima. Let us also abandon the European idea which claims Muslims deny that women have souls. There is another opinion still more widespread, which consists in thinking that the Turks dream of a heaven populated by *houris*, always young and virgin: this is an error; The *houris* are simply their rejuvenated and transfigured wives, since Muhammad prays that Allah will open Eden to the entry of all true believers, as well as their parents, wives and children who have practiced virtue. 'Enter Paradise,' he cries; 'you *and your companions*, rejoice!'

After this, and many other quotations that I could give, one wonders where the prejudice still so common among Europeans derives from. Perhaps we should not seek any other source than that indicated by one of our European authors (*George Sale, see his translation of the Koran, 1734*). It arose from 'the answer Muhammad returned to an old woman, who, upon her desiring him to intercede with God that she might be admitted into paradise, told her that no old woman would enter that place; which setting the poor woman a-crying, he explained himself by saying that God would then make her young again.'

Moreover, if Mahomet, like Saint Paul, grants man authority over woman, he is careful to point out that it is in the sense that he is obliged to support her and provide her with a dowry. In contrast, Europeans demand a dowry from the bride.

As for widows, or women in any capacity who are free, they have the same rights as men; they can buy, sell, and inherit; it is true that the daughter's inheritance is only a third that of a son; but, before Muhammad, the father's property was shared only between children allowed to bear arms. The principles of Islam are so little opposed to the subjugation of women that one can cite in the history of the Saracens a large number of absolute reigns by Sultanas, without considering the effective power exercised from the depths of the seraglio by the Sultana Mother, and the Sultan's favourites. In our own day, the Arabs of the Lebanon conferred a kind of honorary sovereignty on the illustrious Hester Stanhope.

All European women who have visited harems agree in praising the happiness of Muslim women. 'Upon the whole,' says Mary Wortley Montague, 'I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the Empire.' (*See her letter of April 1717 to Lady Mar*) She even pities, somewhat, the fate of husbands there, who are generally obliged, in order to conceal their infidelities, to take even more precautions than in our own country. This last point though is perhaps only true with regard to Turks who have married a woman from a noble family. Lady Morgan (*Sydney Owenson, the author of 'Woman and her Master', 1840*) rightly observes that polygamy, only *tolerated* by Muhammad, is much rarer in the East than in Europe, where it exists under other names. It is therefore necessary to renounce entirely the idea of those harems described by the author of the *Persian Letters* (*Baron de Montesquieu*), where the women, having never viewed a man, were forced to find the terrible and gallant *Usbek* amiable. In the streets of Constantinople, many a traveller has met the women of the seraglios, not, it is true, traveling on foot like most other women, but in carriages or on horseback, as befits ladies of quality, but perfectly free to view everything and to talk with the merchants. Such freedom was

even greater in the last century, when the Sultanas could enter the shops of the Greeks and the Franks (the shops of the Turks are mere displays). There was a sister of the Sultan who renewed, it is said, the secrets of the Tour de Nesle affair. She ordered the merchandise she had chosen to be brought to her, and the unfortunate young men who were charged with such errands generally vanished without anyone daring to speak of them. All the palaces built on the Bosphorus have basement rooms beneath which the sea flows. Trapdoors cover the spaces assigned for women to bathe. It is supposed that the lady's passing favourites took this route. The Sultana was simply punished with life imprisonment. The young men of Pera still speak with terror of those mysterious disappearances.

This brings us to the subject of the punishment of adulterous women. It is generally believed that every husband has the right to take justice into his own hands, and hurl his wife into the sea imprisoned in a leather bag with a snake and a cat. If this torment ever took place, it could only have been on the orders of Sultans or Pashas powerful enough to be responsible for that same. Similar acts of vengeance were seen during the Christian Middle Ages.

Let me acknowledge that, if a man does kill his wife after she is caught in the act, he is rarely punished, unless she is of noble family; but it is much the same with us, where the judges generally acquit the murderer in such cases. Otherwise, it is necessary, there, to be able to produce four witnesses, who, if they are mistaken or make false accusations, each risk receiving eighty lashes. As for the woman and her accomplice, duly convicted of the crime, they receive one hundred lashes each in the presence of a certain number of true believers. It should be noted that married slaves are only liable to fifty lashes, by virtue of the fine idea of the legislator that slaves should be punished only half as much as free people, slavery granting them only half of life's good.

All this is in the Koran; it is true that there are many things, in the Koran as in the Gospel, that the powerful explain and modify according to their will. The Gospels do not pronounce on slavery, while, without even considering the European colonies, Christians own slaves in the East, like the Turks. The Bey of Tunis has, moreover, recently suppressed slavery in his domains, without contravening Muslim law. It is therefore only a question of time. But what traveller has not been astonished by the gentleness of oriental slavery? The slave is almost an adopted child, and is viewed as part of the family. A male slave often becomes the heir of the master; he is almost always freed upon his death by ensuring him the means of subsistence. We must see in the slavery of Muslim countries only a means of assimilation that a society which has faith in its own strength exerts over barbarian peoples.

It is impossible to overlook the feudal and military character of the Koran, but the true believer is the pure and strong man who must dominate by courage as well as by virtue; more liberal than the nobleman of the Middle Ages, he shares his privileges with whoever embraces his faith; more tolerant than the Hebrew of the Bible, who not only did not admit conversions but exterminated conquered nations, the Muslim leaves to each his religion and his morals, and claims only political supremacy. Polygamy and slavery are for him only means of avoiding greater evils, while prostitution, another form of slavery, devours European society like a form of leprosy, attacking human dignity, and driving from the bosom of religion, as well as other categories of established morality, poor creatures who are often victims of their parents' greed,

or of poverty. Should we not ask ourselves, moreover, what status our society grants to bastards, who constitute some tenth of the population? Civil law punishes them for the faults of their fathers by denying them family and inheritance. All the children of a Muslim, on the contrary, are born legitimate; they inherit equally.

As for the veils that women effect, it is an ancient custom which Christian, Jewish and Druze women follow in the East, and which is only obligatory in the main cities. Rural women, and those of the tribes, are not subject to the rule; also, the poems that celebrate the loves of *Qays (Majnun)* and *Layla*, of *Khosrow* and *Shirin*, of *Jamil* and *Buthaina*, and others, make no mention of veils or of the seclusion of Arabian women. Those faithful lovers reflect, in most of the details of their lives, the beautiful expressions of sentiment that have made all young hearts beat, from *Daphnis and Chloe* (by the second-century Greek writer Longus) to *Paul et Virginie* (by Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, 1788).

It must be concluded from all this that Islam rejects none of the elevated sentiments generally attributed to Christian society. The differences that have existed until now are much more in the form than in the substance of their and our ideas; Muslims in reality can be viewed as only a sort of *Christian sect*; many Protestant heresies are no less distant than they from the principles of the Gospel. This is so truly the case that nothing obliges a Christian woman who marries a Turk to change her religion. The Koran only forbids the faithful from uniting with idolatrous women, and agrees that, within all religions founded on the unity of God, it is possible to achieve salvation.

It is by imbuing ourselves with these just observations, and by stripping ourselves of the prejudices which still remain among us, that we will gradually overcome those who have hitherto called into question any alliance with, or submission to us, of the Muslim peoples.

Appendix 2: Female Seclusion in Cairo — Customs of the Harem

A man who has reached marriageable age, yet fails to marry, is held in low esteem in Egypt, and if he can offer no plausible reason for remaining single, his reputation suffers. Hence the many marriages in this country.

The day after the wedding, the woman takes possession of the harem, which is a part of the house separate from the rest. Girls and boys dance in front of the marital house, or in one of its inner courtyards. On this day, if the groom is young, the friend who, the day before, carried him to the harem comes to his house (Author's note: the groom, if he is young and single, must appear timid, and it is one of his friends who, feigning to do him violence, carries him to the bridal chamber of the harem) accompanied by other friends; the groom is borne off to the countryside for the whole day. This ceremony is called *al hurriya* (a flight to freedom). Sometimes, the groom himself arranges this outing and pays part of the expense, if it exceeds the amount of the contribution (*nukout*) that his friends have imposed on themselves. To enliven the party, musicians and dancers are often hired. If the husband is of the lower class,

he is escorted home, in procession, preceded by three or four musicians who play the flute and beat the drum; the friends and others who accompany the new groom carry bouquets. If they do not return until after sunset, they are accompanied by men carrying *mishals*, poles equipped with a cylindrical iron receptacle, in which burning wood is placed. The poles sometimes support up to five of these lanterns, which cast a bright light on the procession. Other people carry lamps, and the friends of the groom lighted candles and bouquets. If the husband is wealthy enough to do so, he arranges for his mother to stay with him and his wife, in order to watch over the latter's honour and his own. It is for this reason, it is said, that the wife's mother-in-law is called *hama*, meaning protectress or guardian.

Sometimes the husband leaves his wife with her own mother, and pays for the maintenance of both. One might think this practice would make the mother of the bride careful of her daughter's conduct, if only out of self-interest, to preserve the alimony given to the wife by the husband, and to deny the latter a pretext for divorce. But it too often happens that this hope is disappointed.

In general, a prudent man who marries greatly fears his wife meeting with his mother-in-law; he tries to deprive the mother of any opportunity of seeing her daughter, and this prejudice is so deep-rooted, that it is believed much safer to take as a wife a woman who has neither mother nor near relations: some women are even forbidden to receive any female friends, except those who are relatives of the husband. However, this restriction is not generally observed.

As we have said above, the women live in the harem, a separate part of the Egyptian home; but, in general, those who have the title of *wives* are not considered prisoners. They are usually at liberty to go about, and visit others, and they can receive visits from their female friends almost as often as they wish. Slaves alone do not enjoy this liberty, as their state of servitude renders them subject to the wives and masters.

One of the master's main concerns, in arranging the separate apartments which are to serve as the habitation of his wives, is to find ways to prevent them from being seen by male servants or other men, without being covered according to the rules that religion prescribes. The Quran (*Koran*) contains the following words on this subject, which demonstrate the necessity for every *Muslim woman*, the wife of a man of Arabic origin, to hide from men everything attractive about her, as well as the ornaments that she wears:

‘Say to the women of the believers that they should rule their eyes and guard their modesty from all harm; that they should not show any other ornaments than those which show themselves of themselves; that they should spread their veils over their bosoms, and show their ornaments only to their husbands, or to their fathers, or to their husbands' fathers, or to their sons, or to their husbands' sons, or to their brothers, or to their brothers' sons, or to their sisters' sons, or to the women of these, or to the slaves whom they possess, as well as to the men who serve them and have no need of women or children — women should abstain from making noise with their feet so as to uncover the ornaments which they should hide.’ (see the *Koran*, ‘Sura XXIV, An-Nur’). The last passage alludes to the custom which the young Arabian women had, at the time of the Prophet, of clinking together the bracelets which they generally wore above the ankle. Many Egyptian women still wear these same kinds of ornament.

To explain the above passage from the Koran, which otherwise might give rise to a false idea of modern customs, concerning the admission or non-admission of certain persons to the harem, it is very necessary to transcribe here two important notes, taken from illustrious commentators.

The first relates to the expression: *or to the women of these*. That is to say, these women must be of the religion of Muhammad; for it is considered illegal or at least indecent for a woman who is a true believer to uncover herself before one termed an infidel, because it is thought that the latter will not refrain from describing her to others. Some think that foreign women in general should be rejected from the harem, but the doctors of the law do not agree on this point. It is the case that in Egypt, and perhaps also in all other countries where Islam is professed, it is no longer considered improper for a woman, whether she be free, a domestic, a slave, Christian or Jewish, Muslim or pagan, to be admitted into a harem. As for the second part, where slaves are spoken of, we read in the Koran: 'Slaves of both sexes are part of the exception; it is also believed that domestics who are not slaves are included in the exception, as well as those who are of foreign nation.' In support of this allegation, is the claim that 'Muhammad having made his daughter Fatima a present of a male slave, she, wearing only a veil so scanty that she had to choose between the necessity of leaving her head uncovered, or of uncovering the lower part of her body, on seeing the slave enter, turned towards the Prophet, her father, who, seeing her embarrassment, told her that she should not be concerned, since her father and the slave alone were present.' — It is possible that this custom is valid among the desert Arabs; but, in Egypt, an adult slave is never seen to enter the harem of a man of importance, whether he is a member of it or not. The male slave of a woman may obtain this favour perhaps, since he cannot become her husband as long as he is still a slave.

It is surprising that in the Sura of the Koran of which we are speaking, there is no mention of uncles having the privilege of viewing their nieces without veils. But it is thought the restriction was made to prevent them from giving their sons too seductive a sight of their young cousins. The Egyptians consider it very improper to praise a woman's features; it is impolite to say that she has beautiful eyes, a Greek nose, a small mouth, etc., when describing her to a male whom the law forbids to view her; but she may be praised in general terms as being lovable and beautified by *kohl* and henna. (Author's note: *kohl* is an aromatic eyewash that blackens the upper and lower eyelids, and is obtained by burning almond shells to which certain herbs are added, *henna* is a plant powder with which women dye certain parts of their hands and feet.)

In general, a man can only view his legitimate wives without a veil, as well as his female slaves, or women whom the law forbids him to marry because of their too close degree of consanguinity, or because they have been either his wet nurse, or that of his children, or because they are close relatives of his wet nurse — the wearing of a veil is a practice of the highest antiquity.

In Egypt it is believed that it is more essential for a woman to cover the upper part, and even the back of her head, than her face; but what is more essential still is that she should hide her face rather than most other parts of her body: for example, a woman who cannot be

prevailed upon to remove her veil before men, will have no scruple about baring her throat, or almost her whole leg.

Most ordinary women appear in public with their faces uncovered; but it is said that necessity forces them to do so, because they cannot afford *burqus* (*burkas*, *face veils*).

When a respectable woman is surprised without a veil, she hastily covers herself with her *tarha* (a veil which covers the head) and cries out: 'O misfortune! O agony!' However, I have noted that coquetry sometimes leads them to show their face to men, but always as if by chance. From the top of the terrace of their house or through blinds, they seem to watch without interruption what is happening around them; but often they uncover the face with the definite intention that it should be seen.

In Cairo, the houses are generally small, and one hardly finds any apartments for men on the ground floor; they must therefore ascend to the first floor, where the women's apartments are usually sited. But, to avoid encounters that are considered unpleasant in Egypt, and that in France would be considered the opposite, the men when ascending the stairs never cease to shout loudly: *Destoor, Ya siti!* (*Permission oh lady!*) or utter other exclamations, so that any women who might be on the staircase can withdraw, or at least cover themselves; which they do by drawing down the veil with which they hide their face in such a way as to leave only one eye barely visible. (Author's note: Women remove their veils in the presence of eunuchs and young boys).

Muslims carry the idea of the sacred character of women to such an excess that, among them, men are forbidden to enter the tombs of various women; for example, they cannot enter those of the wives of the Prophet or other women of his family which are located in the Al-Baqui cemetery in Medina, while women are permitted to visit these tombs freely. Nor are a man and a woman ever laid in the same tomb, unless a dividing wall is built between the two coffins.

Not all Muslims are so rigid about women; for Edward Lane, who has collected these interesting details (*taken or imitated from his 'Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians', 1836*), says that one of his friends, a Muslim, allowed him to view his mother, who was fifty years old, but who, by her plumpness and freshness, did not appear to be more than forty. 'She usually comes' he says 'to the door of the apartment of the hareem, in which I am received (there being no lower apartment in the house for male visitors), and sits there upon the floor, but will never enter the room. Occasionally, and as if by accident, she shows me the whole of her face, with plenty of kohl round her eyes; and does not attempt to conceal her diamonds, emeralds, and other ornaments, but rather the reverse. The wife, however, I am never permitted to see, though once I was allowed to talk to her, in the presence of her husband, round the corner of a passage at the top of the stairs.' However, women are generally less restrained in Egypt than in other parts of the Ottoman Empire; it is not uncommon to see women flirting in public with men, but this occurs only amongst the lower classes. One might think, from this, that women of the middle and upper classes often feel unhappy, and detest the seclusion to which they are condemned; but, on the contrary, an Egyptian woman attached to her husband is offended if she enjoys too much liberty; she thinks that, in not watching her as strictly as is

customary, her husband no longer loves her as deeply, and she often envies the fate of women who are guarded with more severity.

Although the law authorises Egyptian men to take *four* wives, and as many slaves as concubines as they please, they are commonly seen to have only one wife, or one slave as a concubine. However, a man, while limiting himself to the possession of one wife, may change his wife as often as his fancy takes him, and it is rare to find husbands in Cairo who have not been divorced at least once, if their state as a married man dates back some time. The husband may, as soon as he pleases, say to his wife: '*You are divorced*', whether his wish is seen on her part as reasonable or not. After the pronouncement of this sentence, the wife must leave her husband's house, and seek shelter either with friends or relatives. The power of men to announce a divorce unreasonably is the source of the greatest anxiety in women, and this anxiety surpasses all other anguish, given that they view abandonment and misery as its consequence; other women, on the contrary, who see divorce as a means of improving their lot, think quite differently, and desire divorce with all their hearts.

A man may divorce the same woman twice and then take her back without any formality; but the third time he may not legally take her back unless she has, in the interval between the divorces, contracted another marriage and a divorce from that marriage has taken place.

'In illustration of this subject,' Edward Lane says, 'I may mention a case in which an acquaintance of mine was concerned as a witness of the sentence of divorce. He was sitting in a coffee-shop with two other men, one of whom had just been irritated by something that his wife had said or done. After a short conversation upon this affair, the angry husband sent for his wife, and as soon as she came, said to her, "Thou art trebly divorced;" then addressing his two companions, he added, "You, my brothers, are witnesses." Shortly after, however, he repented of this act, and wished to take back his divorced wife; but she refused to return to him, and appealed to the "Sharia Allah" (or Law of God). The case was tried at the Mahkem'eh. The woman, who was the plaintiff, stated that the defendant was her husband; that he had pronounced against her the sentence of a triple divorce; and that he now wished her to return to him, and live with him as his wife, contrary to the law, and consequently in a state of sin. The defendant denied that he had divorced her. "Have you witnesses?" said the judge to the plaintiff. She answered, "I have here two witnesses." These were the men who were present in the coffee-shop when the sentence of divorce was pronounced. They were desired to give their evidence, and they stated that the defendant divorced his wife by a triple-sentence, in their presence. The defendant averred that she whom he had divorced in the coffee-shop was another wife of his. The plaintiff declared that he had no other wife: but the judge observed to her that it was impossible she could know that; and asked the witnesses what was the name of the woman whom the defendant divorced in their presence? They answered that they were ignorant of her name. They were then asked if they could swear that the plaintiff was the woman who was divorced before them? Their reply was, that they could not swear to a woman whom they had never seen unveiled. Under these circumstances, the judge thought it advisable to dismiss the case, and the woman was obliged to return to her husband. She might have demanded that he should produce the woman whom he professed to have divorced in the coffee-shop, but he would easily have found a woman to play the part he required, as it would not have been

necessary for her to show a marriage certificate; marriages being almost always performed in Egypt without any written contract, and sometimes even without witnesses.'

It happens quite frequently that the man who has announced a third divorce from his wife and who wants to take her back with her consent, especially when the divorce has been pronounced in the absence of witnesses, does not observe the legal prohibition which forbids him from taking her back if she has not remarried in the meantime.

Men, religiously attached to the observance of the law, find means of conforming to it, by employing the services of a man who marries the divorced woman, and undertakes to repudiate her the day after the marriage and return her to her former husband, whose wife she becomes again by virtue of a second contract, although this mode of proceeding is absolutely in conflict with the law. In these cases, the woman may, if she is of age, refuse her consent; in the case of minority, her father or legal guardian may marry her to whomever he pleases.

When a man, in order to remarry his divorced wife, wishes to conform to the custom which requires an interim marriage before he may take her back, he usually marries her to some very ugly man who is poor, or sometimes to a blind man. This man is called a *musthilla* or *mustahall*.

It is easy to see that the ease with which divorces are achieved has had a fatal effect on the morality of both sexes. In Egypt there are many men who have married twenty or thirty women in the space of ten years; and it is not rare to see women, still young, who have been, successively, the legitimate wives of a dozen men. There are even men who marry another woman every month. This practice can take place even among men of little means; they can choose, while passing through the streets of Cairo, a beautiful young widow, or a divorced woman of the lower class, who will consent to marry the man who meets her, for a dowry of about *twelve francs and fifty centimes*, and, when he sends her away, he is merely obliged to pay double this sum to provide for her maintenance during the *iddah* (*period of waiting*) which she must then undergo. It must be said, however, that such conduct is generally considered highly immoral, and there are few middle-class or upper-class parents who would wish to give their daughter to a man known to have divorced several times.

Polygamy, which again acts in a harmful manner as regards the morality of spouses, and which is approved only because it serves to prevent more immorality than it occasions, is rarer among the upper and middle classes than among the lower classes, although it is infrequent even among the latter. Sometimes a poor man allows himself two or more wives, each of whom can, by the work she does, provide more or less for his subsistence; but most people of the middle or higher classes renounce this system on account of the costs and inconveniences of all kinds which it incurs.

It may happen that a man who has a barren wife, and who loves her too much to divorce her, feels obliged to take a second wife solely in the hope of producing children; for the same reason he may take up to four wives. But, in general, inconstancy is the principal reason for indulging in polygamy or frequent divorce; but few men make use of this facility, and one meets with scarcely one man in twenty who has more than one legitimate wife.

When a man who is already married desires to take a second wife or daughter, the father of the latter, or the woman herself, refuses to consent to this union, unless he first divorces his

first wife; it is seen from this that women in general do not approve of polygamy. Rich men, those of limited means, and even those of the lower class provide different houses for each of their wives. The wife receives, or may require from the husband, a detailed description of the lodgings intended for her, either in a single house, or in an apartment which must contain a room for sleeping and passing the day, and a kitchen and its dependencies; this apartment must be, or must be capable of being, separate or enclosed, without communication with any of the apartments of the same house.

The second wife is, as I have said, called the *durrha* (which word means *parakeet*, and is perhaps used derisively), and the quarrels which the pair give rise to are often spoken of as a thing quite understandable; since, when two women share the attentions and affections of one man, it is rare that they live together in harmony. Wives and slaves who are concubines, living under the same roof, often quarrel too. The law enjoins men who have two or more wives to behave absolutely impartially towards them; but strict observance of this law is very rare.

If the *great lady* is barren, and another wife, or even a slave, bears a child to the head of the family, often she becomes the favourite of the man, and the *great lady* is scorned by him, as Abraham's wife was by Hagar. It then happens, not infrequently, that the first wife loses her rank and privileges, and that the other becomes the *great lady* in her place; her title as favourite of the master grants her all the outward marks of respect formerly enjoyed by the one whom she succeeds, now shown her by her rival or rivals, as well as all the women of the harem and the women who come to visit; but it is not rare that poison is employed to end her pre-eminence. When a man grants this preference to a second wife, it often follows that the first is declared *nashizah* (literally: 'disobedient'), either by her husband, or at her own request made to the magistrate. However, there are a great number of instances of neglected women who act with exemplary submission to their husbands, and who are considerate towards the favourite. (Author's note: When a woman refuses to obey the lawful orders of her husband, he may, and this is generally done, take her, accompanied by two witnesses, before the *qadi*, where he lodges a complaint against her; if the case is found to be true, the woman is declared by a written act *nashizah*, that is to say, rebellious to her husband: this declaration exempts the husband from housing, clothing and maintaining his wife. He is not forced to divorce, and may, by refusing to divorce, prevent his wife from remarrying as long as he lives. If she promises to submit thereafter, she regains her rights as a wife, but he may then pronounce them to be divorced.)

Some women have female slaves who are their property and who have been bought for them, or whom they have received as a gift before their marriage. These can only serve as concubines to the husband with the consent of their mistress. This permission is granted in rare cases; there are women who do not even allow their female slaves to appear without a veil before their husband. If a slave, having become the concubine of the husband without the consent of his wife, bears him a child, the child is a slave, unless before the birth, the slave has been sold or given to the father.

White slaves are usually owned only by wealthy Turks. Concubines who are slaves are not permitted to practise idolatry; they are generally from Abyssinia, and are acquired by the wealthy and middle-class Egyptians; their skin is of a dark-brown or tanned colour. From their

features they appear to be of an intermediate race between the black Africans and whites, but they differ markedly from both races. They themselves believe that there is so little difference between their race and that of the whites, that they obstinately refuse to perform the functions of servants, or be subject to the wives of their masters.

The black African women, in their turn, prefer not to serve Abyssinians; but they are always very willing to serve the white women. Most of the Abyssinian women do not hail directly from Abyssinia, but from the territory of the Gallas (*the Oromo people*), which forms its neighbour; they are generally beautiful. The average price of one of these girls is two hundred and fifty to three hundred and seventy-five francs, if she is passably so: a few years ago, more than double that was paid.

The voluptuaries of Egypt esteem these women highly; but they are so delicate in health that they do not live long, and almost all die of consumption. The price of a white slave is quite commonly three times, and may well be up to ten times, as much as that of an Abyssinian; that of a black African is only half or two-thirds; but this price increases considerably if she is a good cook. The black Africans are generally employed as domestics.

Almost all the slaves convert to Islam; but they are rarely well-instructed in the rites of their new religion, and still less in its doctrines. Most of the white slaves in Egypt were Greek women who were among the great number of prisoners snatched from their country by the Turkish and Egyptian armies under the orders of Ibrahim Pasha. These unfortunates, among whom were children who could hardly walk, were shown no mercy and sold into slavery there. The impoverishment of the upper classes is evidenced these days by the lack of demand for the purchase of white slaves. Some have been brought from Circassia and Georgia, after having been given a preparatory education of sorts in Constantinople, and having been obliged to learn music and other pleasant arts. The white slaves being often the only companions, and sometimes even the wives of upper-class Turks, and being more esteemed than the ladies of Egypt who are not slaves, are in the general male opinion ranked higher than the latter. Such slaves are richly dressed, have lavished upon them gifts of valuable jewellery, and live in luxury and ease, so that, when not forced into servitude, their position seems most happy. This is proved by the refusal of several Greek women who had been placed in harems in Egypt, to accept the freedom which was offered them, on the cessation of the war with Greece; for it must be supposed that few were ignorant of the situation of their parents, and feared to expose themselves to poverty by re-joining them. There is no doubt that some of them are happy, at least for the moment; yet one is inclined to believe that the greater number, destined to serve their more favoured companions in captivity, or the Turkish ladies, or else forced to receive the caresses of some wealthy old man, or of men exhausted in body and mind by excess of all kinds, are unhappy, exposed as they are to being sold, or emancipated without means of existence, on the death of their master or mistress, and thus to pass into other hands, if they are childless, or else see themselves reduced to marrying some humble workman who cannot provide them with the comfort to which they had become accustomed.

Female slaves in middle-class Egyptian houses are generally better treated than those who enter the harems of the wealthy. If they are concubines, which is almost inevitable, they have no rivals to disturb the peace of their home, and, if they are domestics, their service is mild and

their liberty less restricted. If there is a mutual attachment between the concubine and her master, her position is happier than that of a wife who may be dismissed by her husband; in a moment of ill-humour, he may pronounce against a wife the irrevocable sentence of divorce and thus plunge her into misery, whereas it is very rare that a man dismisses a slave without providing for her needs so abundantly that she loses little in the exchange if she has not been spoiled by too luxurious a life. On dismissing her, it is customary for her master to emancipate her by granting her a dowry, and to marry her to some honest man, or to make a present of her to one of his friends; in general, the sale of a slave who has long been in service is considered blameworthy. When a slave has a child by her master, and he acknowledges it as his own, the woman cannot be sold or given away, and she becomes free on the death of her master; often, immediately after the birth of a child which the master acknowledges, the slave is emancipated and becomes his wife; for, once she is free, he cannot keep her as a wife without marrying her legally.

Most of the girls of Abyssinia, as well as the young black Africans, are widely prostituted by the *jellabs* or slave-traders of Upper Egypt and Nubia, by whom they are traded to Egypt. Even at the age of eight or nine years, they are nearly all victims of these men's brutality, and these poor children, especially those who come from Abyssinia, both girls and boys, experience such dreadful treatment at the hands of the *jellabs*, that, during the voyage, many of them throw themselves into the Nile and perish there, preferring death to their unhappy state.

Female slaves usually claim a higher price than male slaves. The price of slaves who have not had smallpox is less than the price of those who have. The purchaser is granted three days of probation; during this time, a female, purchased conditionally, remains in the harem of the purchaser or in that of one of his friends, and the women of the harem are charged with making their report on the newcomer: snoring, grinding her teeth, or talking in her sleep, are sufficient reasons to terminate the deal and return her to the seller. The slave women wear the same clothing as the Egyptian women.

Egyptian girls or women who are obliged to serve are charged with the basest occupations. In the presence of their master, they are usually veiled, and, when they are occupied about some detail of their service, they arrange their veil in such a way as to uncover only one of their eyes and to have one of their hands free.

When a foreigner is received by the master of the house in some room of the harem, the women composing the master's family having been sent to another room, the other women serve him; but then they are always veiled.

Such are the relative conditions of the various classes in the harems; we must now take a look at the habits and occupations of those who inhabit them.

Wives and female slaves are often excluded from the privilege of sitting at table with the master of the house or his family, and they may be called upon to wait on him when he dines or sups, or even when he enters the harem to smoke or take coffee. They often act as servants; they fill and light his pipe, make his coffee, prepare the dishes he wishes to eat, especially when they are delicate and unusual dishes. The dish which the host recommends to you as having been prepared by his wife is usually perfectly made. The women of the upper and middle

classes make it a very particular study to please their husbands, and to fascinate them by endless attention and teasing. Their coquetry is noticeable even in their gait; when they go out, they give to their bodies a very particular undulating movement which the Egyptians term *ghung*. They are always reserved in the presence of their husband: they also prefer his visits during the day to be infrequent, and not too prolonged; during his absence, their gaiety is expansive.

The food of the women, though similar to that of the men, is more frugal; they take their meals in the same manner as the men do. Many women are permitted to smoke, even those of the upper class, the odour of the fine tobaccos of Egypt being most perfumed. The pipes employed by the women are thinner and more ornamental than those of the men. The tip of the pipe is sometimes made of coral instead of amber. The women use musk and other perfumes, and employ cosmetics; they often prepare consumables which they drink or eat for the purpose of acquiring a certain degree of plumpness. Contrary to the taste of the Africans and of the Oriental peoples in general, the Egyptians are not great admirers of large women; for, in their love songs, the poets speak of the object of their passion as slender beings. One of the dishes to which women attribute the virtue of rendering them fatter is quite disgusting; it is principally composed of crushed snails. Many women chew incense and opium (*ledin*), in order to perfume their breath. The habit of frequent ablutions renders their bodies extremely clean. Their toilette is quite brief, and it is rare that after dressing in the morning, they change their dress during the day. Their hair is braided while they are bathing, and this coiffure is so well done, that it need not be renewed for several days.

The principal occupation of Egyptian ladies is the care of their children; they also superintend domestic affairs; but, generally, it is the husband alone who incurs and regulate their expenses. The hours of leisure are employed in sewing and embroidery, especially of handkerchiefs and veils. The embroidery on silk is usually coloured or in gold; the fabric is made on a loom called a *menseg*, which is usually made of walnut wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell (the cheapest are made of beech). Many women, even those who are rich, add to their private purse by embroidering handkerchiefs and other objects which they give to a *dellaseh* (a broker), who carries them off, and displays them in the bazaar, or tries to sell them in another harem. The visit of the women of one harem to those of another harem often occupies almost a day. The women, thus assembled, eat, smoke, and drink coffee and sherbets; they converse, parade their luxury objects, and all this suffices for their amusement. Unless business is of a very pressing nature, the master of the house is not admitted to these female gatherings, and he must, in such cases, give notice of his arrival, so that the female visitors may have time to veil themselves, or retire to another part of the apartment. The young women, being thus free from all fear of surprise, give way to their natural gaiety and abandon, and often display a playful and noisy spirit.

Appendix 3: Particular Celebrations

A celebration takes place among the Egyptians whenever a son becomes a member of a society of merchants or artisans. Among carpenters, wood-turners, barbers, tailors, bookbinders and people of other trades, such admission takes place in the following manner:

The young man to be admitted to the trade, accompanied by his father, visits the sheik and the father informs him of his intention that his son be admitted as a member of the company. The sheik then sends for the masters of the trade of which the son is the neophyte, along with some of the candidate's friends, that they might attend his reception. An officer, called a *naqib*, then distributes stems of green grass or flowers to each of the persons invited saying: 'Let us repeat *Al-Fatiha* (*the first sura of the Koran*) for the Prophet.' To which the *naqib* adds: 'Come on such and such a day, and at such a time, to drink coffee.'

The persons thus invited gather either at the father's house or that of the young man, or sometimes in the countryside, where they are treated to coffee and served dinner.

The neophyte is brought before the sheikh; verses in praise of the Prophet are recited, then a shawl tied with a knot at the ends is tied around his waist. Verses from the Koran are recited, then a second knot is tied in the shawl; with the third knot, which is tied after a few more verses from the Koran have been said, a rosette is fastened to the shawl, and the young man is admitted as a member of the trade to which he is dedicating himself. Then he kisses the hand of the sheikh and of each of the persons present; he makes a small contribution and becomes a member of the trade.

Egyptians, who usually live in the most frugal manner, give feasts involving much variety and profusion; but the time devoted to resting is very short. In gatherings of this kind, people usually smoke, sip coffee or sherbets, and make conversation.

During the reading of the Koran, the Turks generally abstain from smoking, and the honour they pay to the sacred book has caused it to be said of them that 'Allah has set the line of Othman above those of other Muslims, for they honour the Koran more fully than others!'

The only entertainment at these gatherings is derived from a few stories or tales; but everyone takes extreme pleasure in the dancing, and the musicians' concerts, performed during these festive days.

It is to be noted that Egyptian men enjoy playing games for entertainment, unless in a small group of two or three people or with the family. Although sociable, Egyptians rarely give large parties, the pretext for which must be some extraordinary event, such as a marriage, a birth, etc. It is only then that it is appropriate to admit dancers to private homes; in all other circumstances, this is considered to be against custom.

There are, certainly, feasts on the occasion of marriages. On the seventh day (*yom es saba'a*) after the marriage, the bride receives her women friends, in the morning and in the afternoon. Sometimes, during this time, the husband receives his friends, whom he entertains in the evening by means of music and dance. The custom established in Egypt is that the husband abstains from the rights given to him by marriage until after the seventh day if the one he marries is a young virgin. At the end of this time, it is customary to give a feast and to gather friends. Forty days after the marriage, the young bride goes to the baths with some of her

friends. On returning home, the bride gives them food, then they depart. During this time, the husband gives a meal, and dancing and music are performed.

The day after the birth of a child, two or three male or female dancers perform their art in front of the house or in the courtyard. The celebrations for the birth of a son are more extensive than those for a daughter. The Arabs still retain that sentiment which led their ancestors to destroy their children of the female sex.

Three or four days after the birth of a child, the women of the house, if the woman who has given birth belongs to one of the upper or well-off classes, prepare dishes composed of honey, clarified butter, sesame oil, spices and aromatic herbs, to which are sometimes added roasted hazelnuts. (Author's note: some women add to those dishes not intended for friends a paste made from snails which, they believe, will make the women fatter.)

The child is then displayed, by women or young girls, throughout the harem; each of them carries lighted candles of varying colours: these candles, cut in two, are set in lumps of a certain paste formed of henna; several are placed on a tray. The midwife, or another of the ladies present, throws salt mixed with fennel seed on the ground. This mixture, placed the day before at the head of the child's cradle, serves to protect from evil spells. The woman who sprinkles this salt says: 'May this salt lodge in the eye of those who fail to bless the Prophet!' or else: 'May this impure salt enter the eye of the envious!' and each of the persons present answers: 'O Allah! Protect our lord Muhammad!'

A silver tray is presented to each of the women; they say aloud: 'O Allah! Protect our lord Muhammad! May God grant you long years! etc.' The women usually add the gift of an embroidered handkerchief, in one of the corners of which is a gold coin; this handkerchief is most often placed on the child's head or to its side. The gift of a handkerchief is considered as a debt contracted which is paid on a similar occasion, or which serves to pay a debt contracted on a similar occasion. The coins thus collected serve to adorn the child's headdress for several years. Besides this largesse, they also give the like to the midwife. On the eve of the seventh day, a carafe filled with water, the neck of which is surrounded by an embroidered handkerchief, is placed at the head of the sleeping child's cradle. The midwife then takes a carafe which she places on a tray, and she offers each woman who comes to visit the mother a glass of this water, which each of them pays for by means of a gratuity.

For a certain time after childbirth, which differs according to the attitude or doctrine of the various sects, but which is usually forty days, the woman who has given birth to a child is considered impure. After this time, termed *nifa*, she goes to the baths, and from then on is deemed purified.

Appendix 4: Egyptian Dancers

Of all the dancing women of Egypt, the most renowned are the *Ghawazi*, so called from the name of their tribe. A woman of this tribe is called a *Gazyeh*, a man a *Gazy*, but the plural

Ghawazi is generally applied to women. Their dance is not always graceful. At first, they begin with a sort of reserve; but soon their look becomes animated, the sound of their copper castanets gains rapidity, and, by means of the increasing energy of their movements, they end by giving an exact representation of the dance of the women of Gades (*Cadiz*), as described by Martial (*'Epigrams V, LXXVIII'*) and Juvenal (*'Satire XI: 162-164'*). The costume in which they thus appear is similar to that which the Egyptian women of the middle-class wear within the harem. It consists of the *yalek* or *anteri* (*long dress*), the *shintyan* (*wide trousers*) etc., composed of beautiful fabrics, to which they add various ornaments. The rims of their eyes are shaded with black collyrium; the ends of the fingers, the palms of the hands, and certain parts of the feet are coloured with red henna dye, according to the custom common to Egyptian women of all conditions. In general, these dancers are followed by musicians belonging for the most part to the same tribe; their instruments are the *kamancheh* or *rubab* (*a bowed string instrument*), the *tar* or *tarabouk* (*a drum*), and the *zukah* (*a form of bagpipes*). The *tar*, in particular, is usually in the hands of an old woman. It often happens that on the occasion of certain family celebrations, such as marriages or births, the *ghawazi* are allowed to dance in the courtyards of houses, or in the street, before the doors, but without ever being admitted to the interior of an honest harem; on the other hand, they are commonly hired for the entertainment of a gathering of men. In this case, as one can imagine, their performances are even more lascivious. Some wear only the *shintyan* in these private meetings and the *tob*, that is to say a very loose shirt or dress in coloured gauze, semi-transparent and open in front to about halfway down. If they still affect a remnant of modesty, it does not hold out long against the intoxicating liquors that are poured for them in abundance.

Is it necessary to add that these women are the most wretched courtesans in Egypt? However, some of them are of great beauty, most of them are richly-dressed, and they are, in short, the loveliest women in the country. It is remarkable that a certain number of them have somewhat aquiline noses, although in all other respects they are of the original type. Some women, as well as men, take pleasure in gathering about them in the streets; but honest and upper-class people shun them.

Although the *Ghawazi* differ slightly in appearance from other Egyptians, we doubt very much whether they are of a distinct race, as they affirm themselves. Their origin, however, is surrounded with much uncertainty. They claim to be called *Baramikeh* or *Bormekeh*, and boast of being descended from the famous family of the Barmekids, who were the objects of the favours, and afterwards of the capricious tyranny, of Haroun-al-Rashid, who is mentioned several times in the Arabic tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*. But, as has been remarked above, they have no other claim to bear the name of *Baramikeh* than the liberality they share with them, although theirs is of a very different kind.

On many of the ancient Egyptian tombs, *Ghawazi* (*females*) are represented dancing in the freest manner to the sounds of various instruments, that is to say, in a manner analogous to that of the modern *Ghawazi*, or perhaps even more licentiously; for one or more of these figures, although placed beside eminent personages, are usually represented in a state of complete nudity. This custom of thus adorning the monuments of which we speak, and which, for the most part, bear the names of ancient kings, shows how common such dances were throughout

Egypt in the most remote times, even before the flight of the Israelites. It is therefore probable that the modern Ghawazi are descended from that class of dancers who entertained the first pharaohs. It might be inferred, from the resemblance of the *fandango* to the dances of the Ghawazi, that it was introduced into Spain by the Arab conquerors; but it is known that the women of Gades (*Cadiz*) were renowned for these kinds of performances from the earliest days of the Roman Empire.

The Ghawazi, both men and women, are generally distinguished from other classes by marrying only among themselves; but a *gazyeh* is occasionally seen to take a vow of poverty, and to marry some honourable Arab, who is generally not discredited by the alliance. The Ghawazi are all destined for wretched professions, but not all devote themselves to dancing. The greater number marry, but never before they have embraced the state they have chosen.

The husband is submissive to the wife, he serves as her householder and provider, and generally, if she is a dancer, he is also her musician. However, some men earn their living as blacksmiths, stone-cutters or coppersmiths.

Although some of the Ghawazi possess considerable property and rich ornaments, many of their costumes are similar to the gypsies (*the Romani, or Roma, people*) found in Europe, who are supposed to have originated in Egypt. The ordinary vocabulary of the Ghawazi of both sexes is that of the rest of the Egyptians; but sometimes they employ a certain number of words peculiar to themselves, in order to render themselves unintelligible to foreigners. As to religion, they openly ascribe to Islam, and groups often follow the Egyptian caravans to Mecca. A great number of Ghawazi are seen in almost all the considerable towns of Egypt. Their dwellings are generally low huts, or portable tents as they often travel from one town to another. Some, however, settle in large houses, and purchase young black slaves, and also camels, asses, and cows, in which they traffic. They are camp-followers, and are present at every festival, religious or otherwise; which, to many people, is their chief attraction. On these occasions, many tents of the Ghawazi are seen; some sing as well as dance, and associate with the *Awalim*, who are of the lowest class. Others again wear the gauze *tob* over another garment with the *shintyan* and a *tarhah* of crepe or muslin, and generally adorn themselves with a profusion of ornaments and decoration, such as lace embroidery, bangles, and ankle-bracelets. They also display a band of gold coins on their foreheads, and sometimes a ring in one of their nostrils, and all use the colour of henna to dye their hands and feet.

In Cairo, many people who affect to believe that there is no other impropriety in these dances than that of their being performed by women, who should not expose themselves thus in public, employ men for this kind of entertainment; but the number of these dancers, who are for the most part young men, and who are called *khawals*, is quite limited. They are natives of Egypt. Since they dress as, and represent, women, their dances have the same character as those of the Ghawazi, and they employ their castanets in the same manner. But, as if they wished to avoid their performance being taken seriously, their costume, which in this respect accords with their singular profession, is half-masculine and half-feminine: it consists principally of a tight jacket, a girdle, and a kind of skirt; however, their ensemble seems more feminine than masculine, doubtless because they let their hair grow and plait it in the manner of the female sex. They imitate women by tinting their eyelids and colouring their hands with henna. In the

streets, when they are not dancing, they are often veiled, not out of shame, but simply to better imitate feminine manners. They are also often employed in preference to the Ghawazi, to dance in the courtyards, or at the doors, of houses on the occasion of family celebrations. There is in Cairo another class of dancers, both men and boys, whose exercises, costume, and appearance are almost exactly similar to those of the *khawals*; but they are distinguished from the latter by the name of *gink* (*Zingaris*, *gypsies*, *bohemians*), a Turkish word which perfectly expresses the character of these dancers, who are generally Jewish, Armenian, or Greek.

Appendix 5: Jugglers and Entertainers

There is in Egypt a class of men who are supposed to possess, like the ancient psyllids of Cyrenaica (*eastern Libya*), that mysterious art alluded to in the Bible, which renders them invulnerable to the bite of serpents. Many writers have given surprising accounts of these modern psyllids, whom the most enlightened Egyptians regard as impostors; but no one has given satisfactory details of their more commonplace or interesting feats.

Many Dervishes of the lower orders earn their living by performing a kind of exorcism around houses to drive off snakes. They travel throughout Egypt, often finding employment, though their earnings are small. The conjuror claims to discover without looking whether there are snakes present or no; and, when there are, he affirms that he can attract them to him by the fascination of his voice alone. Then he assumes a mysterious air, strikes the walls with a small palm-stick, whistles, imitates the clucking of a hen with his tongue, spits on the ground and cries: 'Whether you are above or below, I adjure you in the name of God to appear at once! I adjure you by the greatest of names! If you are obedient, appear! and, if you are disobedient – Die! Die! Die!' Usually, the snake is dislodged by his wand from some crack in the wall, or falls from the ceiling of the room.

Jugglers and entertainers, called *houvas*, are numerous in Cairo. They are found in the squares, surrounded by a circle of spectators; they are also seen at public festivals, attracting applause, and jeers often improper ones. They perform a great number of tricks, of which the most common are as follows: generally, the juggler is assisted by two accomplices; he draws four or five medium-sized snakes from a leather bag, places one on the ground, and makes it raise its head and part of its body; with a second snake, he crowns one of his assistants as with a turban, and wraps the two others around his neck; he removes them, then opens the boy's mouth and seems to pass the bolt of a kind of padlock through his cheek, and close it; he then pretends to drive an iron point into his throat, but in reality makes it disappear into the wooden handle into which it is fitted. Another trick of the same kind is as follows: the juggler lays one of his boys on the ground, presses the edge of a knife to his nose, and strikes the blade until it seems to be sunk to half its width. Most of the tricks he performs alone are more amusing: for example, he draws from his mouth a large quantity of silk, which he winds round his arm; or, he fills his mouth with cotton, and breathes fire; or, he draws forth (always from his mouth) a large number of small tin coins, round like dollars, and inhales them again through his nose in

a jet like the stem of a clay pipe. To announce most of his tricks, he blows at various times into a large conch-shell called a *zummarah*, the sound of which resembles that of a horn.

Another quite common trick is to place a certain number of small strips of white paper in a tin receptacle in the shape of a sherbet mould, and to take them out dyed in different colours; to put water in this same receptacle, to add to it a piece of linen, and to offer it to the spectators, changed to sherbet. Sometimes the juggler cuts a shawl in two, or burns it in the middle, and immediately makes it whole again. At other times he takes off all his clothes except his baggy drawers and tells two people to tie him up by the feet and hands, and imprison him in a bag; this done, he asks for a piastre; someone answers that he will have it if he can extend one of his hands to receive it; he immediately draws one hand out of the bag, grasps it, withdraws his hand, and then appears to be as tightly bound as before; his hand once back in the bag he immediately emerges from it, freed from all bonds, and carrying a small tray surrounded by lighted candles (if the exercise is in the evening) and garnished with five or six small plates of various dishes which are offered to the spectators.

There is in Cairo another species of jugglers called *skyems*. In most of their exercises, the *skyems* also have a compère. The latter, as an example, places twenty-nine small stones on the ground, sits down by them and arranges them before him. Then he asks someone to hide a coin under one of them. This done, he summons the *skyem*, who stands at a distance during this procedure, and, informs him that a coin has been hidden under one of the stones, he asks him to indicate under which one it resides, which the *skyem* immediately does. The trick is very simple; the twenty-nine stones represent the Arabic alphabet, and the compère takes care to begin his request with the letter represented by the stone under which the coin is hidden.

The art of fortune-telling is often practiced in Egypt, and mostly by Bohemians similar to our own. They are called *Guayaris*. In general, they claim descent from the Barmekids, like the Ghawazi, but from a different branch.

Most of the women are fortune-tellers; they are often seen in the streets of Cairo dressed like almost all women of the lowest class, with the tob and tarbouch, but always with their faces uncovered. A *Guayari* usually carries a leather bag containing the equipment of her profession, and she goes through the streets shouting: 'I am the fortune-teller! I explain the present, I divine the future!'

Most *Guayaris* practise such divination by the use of a certain number of shells, pieces of coloured glass, silver coins, etc., which they throw down pell-mell, and draw their conclusions according to the order in which chance arranges the items. The largest shell, for example, represents the person whose fate they are to discover; other shells represent favourable or unfavourable events, etc., and it is by their relative position that the diviner judges whether one event or the other will or will not happen to the person in question. Some of these gypsies also cry: *Nedoukah oué entchir!* (We tattoo, and circumcise!)

Some Bohemians also play the part of a *bahlonan*, a name given to famous minstrels, swordsmen, or champions, all people who formerly made a name for themselves in Cairo by displaying their strength and dexterity. But the performances of the modern *bahlonans* are almost exclusively restricted to tightrope-dancing, and all those who practice the art are

Bohemians. Sometimes their rope is attached to the *medeneh* (*minaret*) of a mosque, at a prodigious height, extending for a length of several hundred feet, supported here and there by poles planted in the ground.

Women, girls and boys willingly take up this form of entertainment; but the latter also do other exercises, such as feats of strength, leaping through hoops, etc.

The *skouradatis* (the name is derived from a word for *monkey*), amuse the lower classes in Cairo by means of various tricks performed by a monkey, donkey, dog, and little goat. The man and the monkey (the latter usually of the species of cynocephali, an ape such as a baboon) fight the other three with sticks. The man dresses the monkey in bizarre fashion, like a bride or a veiled woman; he precedes it, beating a tambourine, and makes it parade thus on the back of the donkey amidst the circle of spectators. The monkey is also required to perform several grotesque dances. The donkey is told to indicate the prettiest girl, which he immediately does, putting his nostrils into the face of the fairest, to his great satisfaction, as well as that of all the bystanders. The dog is ordered to imitate a thief, and begins to crawl on its belly. Finally, the supreme act is that of the little goat. It stands on a small piece of wood having about the shape of a dice-box, about four inches long by one and a half wide; so that its four feet are gathered together in this narrow space. The piece of wood thus supporting the creature is raised; a similar one is slipped underneath; then a third, a fourth, and a fifth are added without the goat leaving its place.

The Egyptians often amuse themselves in seeing vulgar and ridiculous farces performed, which are called *mouabazins*. These performances often take place at the festivals preceding marriages and circumcisions, among the nobility, and sometimes attract numerous spectators to the public squares of Cairo; but they are rarely worthy of description, since it is chiefly through coarse and indecent jokes that they gain applause. They are performed by male actors; the female roles being always filled by men or young boys in feminine attire.

Here, as a specimen of their plays, is a glimpse of one of those which were played before Mehemet-Ali, on the occasion of the circumcision of one of his sons, when according to custom, several other children were also circumcised.

The characters in the drama are a *nazir* or district governor, a *sheik-el-beled*, or village chief, a servant of the latter, a Coptic cleric, a poor devil indebted to the government, his wife, and five other characters who make their entrance, two playing the drum, a third the oboe, and the other two dancing. After they have danced a little and played their instruments, the Nazir and the other characters form a circle.

The Nazir asks:

— ‘How much does Owad, Regeb’s son, owe?’

The musicians and dancers, who play the role here of simple fellahin, respond:

— ‘Tell the clerk to view the register.’

This cleric is dressed like a Copt; he wears a black turban and carries at his belt everything he needs for writing. The sheik says to him:

— ‘For how much is Owad, Regeb’s son, indebted?’

The cleric replies:

— ‘For a thousand piastres.’

— ‘How much has he paid already?’ the sheikh adds.

The cleric answers:

— ‘Five piastres.’

The sheik says to the debtor:

— ‘My good man, why have you not brought the rest?’

The man replies:

— ‘I have no money.’

— ‘You’ve no means of paying?’ cried the sheik. ‘Let this man be laid on the ground!’ he adds.

They bring a kind of leather whip with which they beat the poor wretch who shouts to the Nazir:

— ‘O Bey! By the honour of your horse’s tail; O Bey! by the honour of your headband, O Bey!’

After about twenty such absurd appeals to the Nazir’s generosity, the beating ends, and the victim is borne away and imprisoned. In another scene: the prisoner’s wife visits him and asks him how he is; he answers her:

— ‘Do me the favour, my wife, of taking some eggs and pastries, to the Copt’s house, and beg him to obtain my freedom.’

The woman takes the requested objects in three baskets to the Copt’s; she asks if he is there; she is told yes; she introduces herself and says:

— ‘O Mahlem-Hannah! Please accept these, and obtain my husband’s deliverance.’

— ‘Who is your husband?’

— ‘He is the fellah who owes a thousand piastres.’

— ‘Bring two or three hundred as a tribute to Sheikh-el-Beled.’

The woman obtains the lesser amount and frees her husband.

One can see from this that comedy serves, for the people, as a warning to the great, while seeking improvement and reform; this was often the meaning and aim of the dramatic art of the European Middle Ages. The Egyptians are still at that stage of development.

Appendix 6: The Houses of Cairo

The modern metropolis of Egypt is called in Arabic *Al-Kahira*, from which the Europeans formed the name *Cairo*. The people call it *Masr* or *Misr*, which is also their name for the whole of Egypt. The city is situated at the entrance to the valley of Upper Egypt, between the Nile and the eastern chain of the Mokattam mountains; it is separated from the river by a strip of land almost entirely cultivated, and which, on the northern side, where the port of Bulaq is situated, is more than a mile wide, while it extends less than half that distance on the southern side.

A stranger who merely walked through the streets of Cairo would think the city cramped and lacking in space; but he who viewed the whole from the top of a tall house or from the minaret of a mosque would soon perceive the contrary. The busiest streets generally have a row of shops on each side. Most of the outlying streets have wooden doors at each end; these doors are closed at night and guarded by a porter, who is responsible for opening them to all who wished to pass through. What is called a *neighbourhood* is a collection of a few narrow streets with a single common entrance.

The private houses deserve special description. The foundation walls, up to the height of the first story, are covered, on the outside and often on the inside, with soft limestone, extracted from the neighbouring hills. This stone, when freshly cut, presents on its surface a slight yellow tint, which soon turns brown in the air. The different sections of the facade are sometimes painted alternately red and white, using red ochre and whitewash; this is especially so for large houses and mosques. The upper floors, whose facade usually projects about two feet, are supported by consoles or piers; these levels are of brick, often covered with a layer of plaster. The bricks are baked dark red in colour. The roofs of the houses are flat and coated with a layer of plaster. The projecting windows of the upper floors, which are opposite the streets, almost touch each other, and thus almost completely intercept the rays of the sun, which results in a pleasant coolness during the summer.

The doors of the houses are usually rounded at the top and decorated with arabesques. In the middle is a compartment in which an inscription is often placed; this inscription runs: 'He (Allah) is the excellent, the eternal Creator.' This panel and others of the same shape, but smaller, which are found on the doors, are painted red with a white border; the rest of the surface of the door is painted green; the choice of these colours is connected with various superstitions. The doors are provided with an iron knocker, and a wooden lock, and almost everywhere there is a mounting-stone, two steps high, beside the doors, so that one can, on leaving, mount a donkey or a horse.

The ground floor apartments bordering the street have small wooden grilled windows, but pierced so high that a passer-by cannot see the interior. The casements of the apartments project about a foot and a half; these windows are generally furnished with a latticework of carved wood, which is so tight, that it prevents the light of the sun from penetrating, while allowing the air to circulate. These lattices are rarely painted. Those which have been embellished are painted red and green. These windows are called *moucharabias*. This last word means a place for drinking, and, in some houses, vases made of porous clay are placed in the embrasures of these cases, which cool the water within through the evaporation caused by the current of air. Immediately above the projecting casement, there is another flat one, with a latticework or

wooden grille, or a pane of coloured glass. These upper windows, when provided with a trellis, usually represent some fancy design, either a basin and an ewer superimposed above the window, or the figure of a lion, or the name of *Allah*, or the words, 'God is my hope,' etc. Some of these projecting windows are constructed entirely of wood, and some have window-panes at the sides.

The houses are generally two or three stories high, and each house contains a large unpaved court, called a *hosch*, which is entered by a passage so constructed that there are one or two angles to it, in order to prevent passers-by seeing inside. In this passage is found a sort of bench, leaning against the wall along its entire length, called a *mastabah*, intended for the use of the porter and the servants. The court usually contains a tank filled with the brackish water which seeps underground from the Nile. The most shaded part of the rim of this tank is almost always provided with two jars which are filled every day with this Nile water, carried there from the river in skins. The principal apartments overlook the courtyards; sometimes the houses have two courts, the second of which adjoins the harem; each of these courtyards is decorated with small arch-shaped niches, in which shrubs and flowers are grown. The interior walls of the houses bordering the square courtyards are made of brick and are whitewashed. The courtyards have several doors communicating with the interior, one of which is called *bâb el harem* (the harem door); it is through this that one arrives at the staircase which leads to the apartments exclusively intended for the women, the master, and their children.

The ground floor also has an apartment generally known as the *mandarah*, where men are received; this apartment has a large window with one or two other small windows, cut on the same pattern. The floor of these apartments slopes downwards six or seven inches; the lower part is called the *durkah*.

In the houses of the rich, the *durkah* is paved in diamond shapes of black and white marble, and all the interstices are a mosaic of bright red tiles, which present an elegant and fanciful inlay. In the middle of the courtyard, is a fountain called a *faskeyhe*, whose jets fall in a cascade into a basin floored in coloured marble. The fountains, whose waters rise to a fairly great height, are ordinarily fronted by a tablet of marble or more ordinary stone about four feet high, called a *suffeh*. This table is supported by two or more arches, and sometimes even by a single arch, under which are placed the utensils used daily, that is to say, vases containing perfumes, or ablution vases used before and after meals, in order to prepare for prayer.

The highest part of the apartments is called the *divan*, a corruption of the word for palace. On entering this part of the dwelling, each person takes off their shoes before being allowed to enter the divan. The room, which, in fact, is only an antechamber, is paved in ordinary stone. In summer, the floor is covered with a mat, and in winter, with a carpet. On three sides, there are mattresses and pillows. Each mattress is usually three inches thick; its width is about three feet. The beds are placed, either on the ground, or on beds of webbing, and the pillows, which are almost always the width of the bed in length, and half that in thickness, rest against the wall. The mattresses and pillows are stuffed with cotton enclosed in cases of printed calico, plain cloth, or a variety of expensive fabrics. The walls of the houses are coated with plaster and whitewashed on the inside. Almost universally, two or three shallow cupboards are set in the walls, the doors being made of very small panels. This custom is motivated by the dryness

and heat of the climate, which warps large pieces of wood to the point that one might believe that they had been placed in an oven. The doors of the apartments are, for the same reason, composed of small sections. The distribution of the panels seen in all the woodwork offers an interesting picture, rich in imagination and variety.

The ceilings are of wood; the cross-beams are carved; they are sometimes painted in colour and at other times gilded. The ceiling of the *durkah* in the principal houses is of extreme richness, with superimposed diamond-patterns, forming odd but regular designs, the ornamental effect of which is in the best of taste.

In the middle of the square formed by these rooms, a chandelier is suspended. The particular way in which the ceilings are painted, and the curious designs which they represent, seemingly intersecting irregularly while all the intersections are of uniformly regular parts, forms a whole which dazzles the eye.

Within some houses there is a room called the *makad*, which is devoted to the same use as the *mandarah*; its ceiling is supported by one or two columns and arches, the bases of which are executed with a grille. The ground floor also has its reception room, which is called the *tahtabosch*. It is generally square; its façade on the courtyard is open, and from its centre rises a pillar intended to support the level above; it is paved, and a long wooden sofa borders three sides of the room. The floor of this room, which can be likened to a courtyard, is frequently watered, a process which communicates to the neighbouring apartments, at least to those on the ground floor, a freshness most valuable in that climate.

In the upper apartments, which are those of the harem, there is a room, called the *kaah*, of high elevation. There are two divans, running along each side of the room; one is wider than the other, and the wider is the one that is offered by preference to those whom one wishes to honour. A part of the roof of this room, that which divides the two divans, is higher than the rest. In the middle, hangs a lantern, called a *memrak*, whose facets are trellised, like those of the windows, and which supports a small dome. It is rare for the *durkah* to possess a small fountain, but it is often paved in the same way as the *mandarah*.

In many rooms one finds narrow shelves, loaded with all sorts of Chinese porcelain vases, which serve only to ornament the chamber; these boards, placed more than seven feet above the ground, are set around the room, except for the spandrels formed by the embrasures of windows and doors. The rooms are almost all very tall; their height is at least fourteen feet. Many can be found which are higher; the *kaah* is however always the most spacious and highest, and, in the principal houses, it acts as the most beautiful drawing-room.

In some of the upper floors of the houses of the wealthy, one sees, besides the lattice windows, small windows in coloured glass, representing baskets of flowers and other gay and frivolous subjects, or fantastic designs of a charming effect. These flat windows in coloured glass, called *kamasyes*, are almost two or three feet high and about two feet wide; they are set in the upper part of the projecting windows, or in the upper part of some opening in the wall, through which they project a soft and magical light, whose reflections are most charming. These windows are composed of small pieces of glass of various colours, fixed in borders of fine plaster, and enclosed in a wooden frame. On the stucco walls of some apartments are seen

crude paintings, representing the temple in Mecca (*the Kabaa*) or the Tomb of the Prophet, or flowers and other fanciful objects. There are also Arabic maxims and religious phrases. Most of the phrases or maxims are transcribed on beautiful paper embellished with those calligraphic masterpieces, and framed under glass. The bedrooms are not furnished as such; for, during the day, the bed is taken away, rolled-up, and placed in a corner of the room or in a closet which serves as a dormitory during the winter. In the summer, most inhabitants sleep on the terraces of the houses. A mat or a carpet spread on the stones with which the room is paved, and a sofa, form the complete furniture of a bedroom, and, in general, of almost all bedrooms.

Meals are served on round trays placed on low stools. The guests sit on the ground, all about them. The use of fireplaces is unknown, and the apartments are heated in winter by means of embers placed in a stove; fireplaces are only seen in kitchens.

Many houses have sheds mounted on the roof, the open entrances of which face north or southwest, and whose purpose is to deliver cool air to the upper rooms.

Each door has a wooden lock; it is called a *dabbe*: several iron pins correspond to holes in the bolt.

Almost all the houses in Cairo suffer from a lack of regularity. The rooms are usually at several heights from the ground; which means that one must constantly go up or down a few steps to go from one room to another. The main aim of the architect is to render the house as secluded as possible, especially in the part intended for the women's habitation, and to avoid one being able, from the windows, to see into the apartments, or to be seen from the neighbouring houses.

In the houses of wealthy people, or those of a certain rank, the architect takes care to provide a secret door, the *bâb sirs*, the name being also given on occasion to the doors of the harem, to facilitate an escape in case of danger of arrest, or assassination, or else to give access to some mistress who can thus be introduced, and afterwards escorted homewards, in secret; the houses of the rich also contain hiding places for their treasures; this place is called the *makhba*. We also find, in the harems of large houses, bathrooms, which are heated in the same way as public bathing establishments.

When the lower part of a house is occupied by servants, the upper stories are divided into separate lodgings, and this part of the house is called a *raba*; these lodgings are entirely separate from each other, as well as from any shop below, and are let to families who cannot afford the rent of a whole house. Each lodging in a *raba* usually consists of one or two rooms, a bedroom, and a kitchen with its outbuildings. It is rare to find such lodgings possessing a private entrance on the street.

The lodgings in question are never let furnished, and it is rare that a person without a wife or female slave is accepted as a lodger in such houses, or even in a private house. Such a person, unless he has near relations with whom he can live, is forced to lodge in a building called a *wikala* (a *khan* or *caravanserai*), serving to accommodate merchants and their goods.

Appendix 7: Funeral Ceremonies

When learned or pious Muslims feel death approaching, they will often perform the ablution usually performed before prayer, so as to leave this life in a state of bodily purity; then, they usually repeat their profession of faith, saying: 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet.' Muslims setting out on a warlike expedition, or on a long journey, especially if they must cross the desert, usually take their shroud with them. In the latter case, the traveller is often obliged to dig his own grave; for often, exhausted by fatigue and privations, or succumbing under the weight of illness, if his travelling companions cannot stop to await his recovery or death, he performs his ablution, with water if possible, or in the absence of water with sand or dust which is allowed; then, having dug a trench in the form of a pit, the traveller lies down wrapped in his shroud; after this ceremony, he covers himself, except for the face, with the sand extracted from the pit, and, in this state, awaits death which must put an end to his ills, leaving to the wind the task of completely filling his grave.

If death strikes one of the eminent ulama of Cairo, the muezzins of the Al-Azhar, and those of several other mosques, announce the event by chanting from the top of the minarets the cry called *Abrar*, along with certain verses of the Koran the chanting of which is performed during Ramadan.

The ceremonies observed on the occasion of the death and burial of a man or woman are somewhat similar. When the death-rattle or other signs indicate the approaching death of a man, one of the persons present turns him so that his face is in the direction of Mecca, and closes his eyes. Even before he has given up his soul, or a moment afterwards, the men who are present cry out: 'Allah! There is no strength nor power except in God! We belong to God, and to Him we must return! Allah, have mercy on him!' Meanwhile, the women of the family utter cries of lamentation called *wilwal*, then more piercing cries while pronouncing the name of the deceased. The most common exclamations that escape from the lips of his wife or wives and children are: 'O my master! O my camel! (meaning: O you who brought my provisions and who carried my burdens!) O my lion! O camel of the house! O my glory! O my resource! O my father! Oh! woe!'

Immediately after death, the deceased is stripped of the clothes he is wearing and dressed in other clothes; then he is placed on his bed or mattress, and a sheet is spread over him. The women continue their lamentations, and the neighbours, on hearing the din, come to join them.

In general, the family sends for two or more *neddabihs* (*professional mourners*). Each brings a tambourine which lacks the resonant metal plates with which the hoops of ordinary tambourines are provided. These women strike the instruments while crying out: '*Alas for him!*' and praising the turban of the deceased, the beauty of his person, etc., while the women of the family, the servants and friends of the deceased, with dishevelled hair and often torn clothes, also cry out: '*Alas for him!*' while striking their faces. These lamentations last at least an hour.

Soon the *muggassil* (*washer of the dead*) arrives with a bench, on which he places the corpse, and a bier. If the dead person is of respectable rank, the fakirs who are to form part of the funeral procession are then introduced into the mortuary house. During the ceremony of

washing the body, they reside in an adjoining room, or else outside, at the door of the apartment; some of them recite, or rather chant the Sura *Al-An'am* (*the sixth chapter of the Koran*), while others chant a part of the *Burdah*, the famous poem (*composed by Al-Busiri*) in praise of the Prophet. The washer removes the clothes of the deceased, which provide him with a good return for his efforts; he ties the jaw and closes the eyes. The usual ablution before prayer having been performed on the corpse, with the exception of the mouth and nose, it is cleansed thoroughly from head to foot with hot water and soap, and with palm-fibres, or water in which service-tree leaves have been boiled. (Author's note: the poor often use dried and pounded service-tree leaves as soap).

The nostrils, ears, etc., are stuffed with cotton, and the body is sprinkled with a mixture of water, pounded camphor, dried and pounded service-tree leaves, and rose-water. The ankles are tied together and the hands placed over the chest.

The *kifen*, a poor man's grave-garment, consists of one or two pieces of cotton simply arranged in the form of a sack (Author's note: the *kifen* is often sprinkled with water obtained from the *Zemzem* well, located near the Kaaba at Mecca); but the body of a wealthy man is usually wrapped, first in muslin, then in a thicker cotton sheet, then in a striped piece of silk and cotton, and lastly in a cashmere shawl. The colours chosen by preference for these articles are white and green, though any other colour may be used, except blue or anything approaching that colour. When the body has been thus prepared for burial, it is placed in the coffin, which is usually covered with a cashmere shawl of red or some other colour. The persons who are to form the funeral procession then arrange themselves in the usual order, which for ordinary processions is as follows:

First, six or more poor men; these men, called *yimeniyeh*, are usually chosen from among the blind; they walk two by two, or three by three, with slow steps, intoning in a lugubrious tone the profession of faith: 'There is no other God but Allah; Muhammad is his Prophet.'

These poor people are followed by relatives and friends of the deceased, and, on many occasions, several Dervishes or other religious men, carrying the banners of their order, join the procession; then come three or four schoolboys, one of whom carries a *mushaf* (*a copy of the Koran*), or one of the volumes containing one of the thirty sections (*juz*) of the Koran. This book is placed on a kind of desk made of palm-sticks, which is usually covered with an embroidered handkerchief. These schoolboys sing, in a louder and more animated voice than that of the *yimeniyeh*, some stanzas of a poem called *Hashree'yeh*, which describes the events of the Day of Judgment (*Yawm ad-Din*).

Here is a translation of the beginning of this poem: 'I celebrate the perfection of Him who created all that has form, and subjects his servants to death. — They will all lie in the grave — I celebrate the perfection of the Lord of the East — I celebrate the perfection of the illuminator of the two lights, the sun and the moon — His perfection: how generous he is! — His perfection: how merciful he is! — His perfection: how great he is! — When a servant rebels against him, he protects him!'

The young schoolboys immediately precede the coffin, which is carried head first; it is customary for three or four friends of the deceased to carry it for some time: others take over

in succession. Passers-by often take part in this service, and action which is considered a highly meritorious deed.

The women follow the coffin, sometimes numbering twenty; their dishevelled hair is usually hidden by their veils.

Women, relatives or servants of the house, are each distinguished by a strip of canvas, cotton or muslin fabric, usually blue, tied around the head with a single knot, leaving the two ends hanging behind. (Author's note: One often sees, on the walls of ancient Egyptian tombs, on which funeral scenes are depicted, women conversing, with similar bands tied around their heads.) Each woman also carries a kerchief, usually dyed blue, which they place over their shoulders, and some twist this kerchief with both hands above their heads or in front of their faces. The cries of the women, the animated songs of the young boys, and the lugubrious tones in which the *yimeniyeh* chant, produce a strange dissonance.

The Prophet forbade the lamentations of women and the celebration of the virtues of the deceased on the occasion of funerals. Muhammad declared that virtues thus attributed to the dead person would become subjects of reproach for that person if he or she did not possess them in their future state. It is remarkable to see how various precepts of the Prophet are rejected every day by modern Muslims, the *Wahhabis* (a purist sect) alone excepted. We have sometimes seen mourners of the lower class following a coffin with their faces uncovered, after having taken care to smear themselves with mud with which they have also covered their hair and chest. This custom existed among the ancient Egyptians. The procession of a wealthy man or even of a person of the middle class is sometimes preceded by a few camels laden with bread and water of which a distribution is made to the poor, in front of the tomb. These convoys are composed of more varied and more numerous people. The *yimeniyeh* begin the march by chanting, as mentioned above, the profession of faith. They are followed by the friends of the deceased and by a few learned and devout men invited to take part in the ceremony. Then comes a group of fakirs chanting the sura *Al-An'am*; other religious men follow, chanting different prayers, according to the orders to which they belong, founded by famous sheiks; then follow the banners of one or other superior of the Dervishes part-unfurled; then come the young schoolboys, the coffin, and the mourners likewise; sometimes, when the bearers are of a certain rank, they lead horses behind them. On certain occasions, the convoy is terminated by a buffalo at its rear, intended to be sacrificed in front of the tomb, upon which its meat is distributed to the poor.

Even more people are seen at the funeral processions of devout sheiks, or of one of the grand ulama. The coffin of these personages is not covered with a shawl. The *wili* (saint) is, moreover, on the occasion of these funerals, honoured in a particular manner. Women follow the coffin; but, instead of weeping and lamenting as they would for an ordinary mortal, they make the air resound with shrill cries and shrieks of joy (*ululations*), called *zaghareet*; if they suspend these joyful accents, even for the space of a minute, the bearers declare that they cannot advance, and that a supernatural power keeps them riveted to the place where they are.

The coffins employed for young boys and women are different from those of men. It is true that, like those of men, they have a wooden lid over which is spread a shawl; but these coffins have at the head a straight piece of wood, called the *shaheed*. This *shaheed* is covered with a

shawl, and the upper part (when the coffin contains a woman of the middle class or of high rank) is adorned with various ornaments belonging to the feminine headdress. The top, being flat or circular, often serves to place a *kurs* (a circular ornament of gold or silver, enriched with diamonds or gold chased in relief, which is worn by women on the crown of the head); behind is hung the *safa* (a certain number of braids of black silk with gold ornaments, which ladies add to their plaited hair, and which hang down their back). The coffin of a boy is distinguished by a turban, usually of red cashmere, and placed on top of the *shaheed*, and, if the boy was very young, the *kurs* and the *safa* are added. If he was a child of tender years, a man carries him in his arms to the cemetery; the body is covered only with a shawl; sometimes also, it is placed in a small coffin, which a man bears on his head.

The burials of women and young boys, though simpler, are almost similar to those of men, unless the family is wealthy or of high-rank. One of the most elaborate processions I witnessed was that of a young girl from a great family. Two men, each carrying a large furled green flag, opened the march; the *yimeniyeh* followed, eight in number; then a group of fakirs chanted a chapter of the Koran. Next came a man carrying a branch from a service- tree, the emblem of the young, between two other men, having in his hand a long stick surmounted by several hoops decorated with strips of paper of various colours. Behind these three people, two Turkish soldiers walked, side by side; one of the soldiers carried a small tray of gilded silver, on which was a *kumkum* (flask) of rose-water; the other was equipped with a similar tray carrying a *mibkara* (portable stove) of gilded silver, on which were burning perfumes. These accoutrements were intended to perfume the burial vault. From time to time, rose-water was sprinkled over the spectators. The soldiers were followed by four men; each of these carried, on a tray, several small lighted candles, fixed in pieces of *henna* paste; the coffin, covered with shawls of great richness, had a *shaheed* adorned with magnificent head-pieces, and, besides the *safa*, a *kussah-ahwas* (an ornament of gold and diamonds to encircle the forehead). On the top of the *shaheed* was a rich diamond *kurs*. These jewels belonged to the deceased, or else, as is sometimes the case, had been borrowed for the ceremony. The women, eight in number, wore the black silk costume of Egyptian ladies; but, instead of walking on foot, as is the custom, they were mounted on donkeys with tall saddles.

We will now move on to the description of the rites and ceremonies inside the mosque and the tomb.

If the deceased lived in one of the districts located in the north of the city, the body is preferably taken to the Mosque of Sultan Hussan, unless he is poor and does not live near the venerated sanctuary. In that case, his friends carry him to the nearest mosque, in order to save time and unnecessary expense; if he was an *ulama*, that is to say, of a learned though humble profession, he is ordinarily carried to the great Mosque of Al-Azhar. The inhabitants of the southern part of the capital generally carry their dead to the Al-Sayeda Zainab Mosque, or to that of some other famous saint. The reason for the preference given to these mosques above the others, is the belief that the prayers which are made near the tomb of the saints are particularly efficacious.

Having entered the mosque, the bearers place the coffin on the ground, at the usual place of prayer, with the right side towards Mecca. The imam stands on the left side of the coffin,

with his face turned towards it, and in the direction of Mecca, while one of the subordinate officers, charged with repeating the words of the imam, places himself at the feet of the deceased. Those who attend the funeral line up behind the imam, the women apart, behind the men; for it is rare that entry to the mosque is forbidden to them during these ceremonies. The congregation thus arranged, the imam begins the prayer for the dead, commencing with these words: 'I propose to recite the prayer of the four *takbirs* (a funeral prayer which consists in the repeated exclamation of "Allah akbar!" or "God is infinitely great!") over the deceased Muslim present here.' After this kind of preface, he raises his two hands which he holds open, touching with the tips of his thumbs, the openings of his ears, and cries out: 'God is infinitely great!' His subordinate (*muballigh*) repeats this exclamation, and each of the individuals placed behind the imam does the same. Having said the *Fatiha* prayer, the imam cries out a second time: 'God is infinitely great!' After which, he adds: 'Allah, favour our lord Muhammad, the illustrious Prophet, his family and his companions, and preserve them!' A third time, the imam cries out: 'God is infinitely great!' then he says: 'Allah, in truth, here is your servant; he has left the rest of the world and its fullness, all that he loved and those by whom he was loved here, for the darkness of the tomb and for what he now experiences. He proclaims that there is no God but you alone; that you have no equal, and that Muhammad is your servant and your apostle, you who have all knowledge of what concerns you. Allah, he is gone to dwell with you, and you are the one with whom it is infinitely excellent to dwell. Your mercy is needed by him, that you need not punish him. We have come to you begging you to allow us to intercede on his behalf. Allah, if he has done good deeds, increase the sum of his good deeds, and, if he has done evil, forget his evil actions. May your mercy deign to receive him; spare him the trials of the grave and its torments; make his sepulchre wide for him, and keep the earth far from his sides. (Author's note: Muslims believe that the bodies of the wicked are oppressed, painfully, by the ground, which presses against them in the grave, which is always of great width.) Have mercy upon him that he may be exempted from your torments until the time when you bring him safely to Paradise, you, the most merciful of those who show mercy!'

Having cried out for the fourth time: 'God is infinitely great,' the imam adds:

'Allah, withhold not from us our reward for the service we render him, and save us from undergoing his trials after him; forgive us, forgive him, and all Muslims, O Lord of all creation!' The imam thus ends his prayer, and, saluting the angels, on the right and on the left, he says: 'Peace and divine mercy be with you!' — as is the normal custom at the end of prayers. Then addressing those present, he says: 'Give your testimony concerning him', and they reply: 'He was virtuous.' Then the coffin is removed, and, if the ceremony is held in the mosque of some celebrated saint, it is placed before the *maksourah*, or grating which surrounds the cenotaph of the saint. At this point some of the fakirs, and those present, recite further funeral prayers, and the procession sets off again, in its previous order, to the cemetery. The cemeteries of Cairo are for the most part outside the city, in the desert regions situated to the north, east, and south of its boundaries; the cemeteries in the city are few in number and of little extent.

We shall now give a brief description of a typical mausoleum. It consists of an oblong vault, having an arched roof; it is generally built of bricks coated with plaster. The vault is deep, so that those buried therein may sit comfortably, when visited and examined by the two angels

Munkar and Nakir (the angels who interrogate the dead). One side of the mausoleum faces the direction of Mecca, that is, in Egypt, the south-east; the entrance is to the north-east. In front of this entrance is a small square cave, covered with stones, extending from one side to the other, in order to prevent earth from entering the vault. The cavity thus built is, in turn, covered with earth. The vault can usually contain four coffins or more. It very rarely happens that men and women are buried in the same tomb; but when this happens, a wall is built to separate the two sexes. Above the cave is built an oblong monument, called a *tarkiba*, which is usually made of stone or brick; on this monument are placed perpendicularly two stones, one at the head, the other at the foot. In general, these stones are of great simplicity; however, one sees some decorated ones, and often the one on the side of the head bears as an inscription a verse from the Koran (Author's note: the Prophet however, forbade the engraving of either the name of Allah, or any word from the Koran on tombs, which were to be low and only of bare brick), and the name of the deceased with the date of his death. This stone is sometimes surmounted by a sculpture representing a turban, a cap, or some other headdress, which indicates the rank or class of the person placed in the tomb. On the monument of an eminent sheik, or a person of high rank, a small building is usually erected, surmounted by a dome. Many of the tombs erected in honor of Turkish or Mamluk notables bear marble *tarkibas*, covered with a canopy in the form of a dome, resting on four marble columns: then, the stone placed perpendicularly at the head bears inscriptions in gold letters on an azure background. In the large cemetery to the south of Cairo, one sees a large number built in this way. Most of the tombs of the Sultans are elegant mosques; some are in the capital, and others in the surrounding cemeteries.

The mausoleums described, let me continue with the burial ceremonies.

The tomb having been opened before the arrival of the body the burial is not delayed. The gravedigger and his two assistants immediately lift the body from the coffin and place it in the vault; the bandages with which it has been wrapped are untied; it is laid on its right side, or inclined to the right, so that the face is turned towards Mecca: it is secured in this position by means of unbaked bricks. If the outer covering is a cashmere shawl, it is torn, lest its value prompts the violation of the tomb by some profane thief. Some of the assistants gently place a little earth close to and upon the body; then the entrance to the vault is closed, by means of the stones of the small cavity in front of it, and of the earth which has been cleared away. Then a ceremony is performed which is performed for all except infants, since they are not considered responsible for their actions. A fakir performs the office of *mullakin (instructor of the dead)*, and, seated before the mausoleum, he says: 'O servant of God! O son of a handmaid of God! Know that two angels will now descend, sent to you and your like. When they ask you, "Who is your lord?" say to them, "Verily, Allah is my lord." And when they ask you concerning your Prophet, the man who has been sent to you, say to them: "Truly, Muhammad is the Apostle of God", and when they ask you about your religion, say to them: "Islam is my religion", and when they ask you about the book that is your guide, you shall say to them: "The Quran (*Koran*) is the book that guides my conduct, and the Muslims are my brethren," and when they ask you about your faith, you shall say to them: "I lived and died in the conviction that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah." Then the angels will say to you: "Rest, O servant of Allah, in his protection!"'

The Egyptians believe that the soul remains with the body during the first night after burial, and that on that night it is visited and examined by the two angels mentioned above, who have the power to torment the corpse.

Those hired to attend the funeral are paid at the grave; the *yimeniyeh* usually receive a piastre per head. It is said that the wealthy have water and bread brought on camels, which are distributed to the poor after the burial; so, the unfortunate flock to the cemetery, where a buffalo is sacrificed, the meat of which is also distributed to the poor; this is called *al-kaffara* (*the expiation*). It is believed that this sacrifice can expiate small sins, but not large ones. After the funeral, each relative of the deceased is complimented with the wish 'that his loss may be happily compensated,' or else is congratulated on his life being prolonged.

The night following the burial is called *leylet-el-wahsheh* (*the night of desolation*), the place of the deceased remaining abandoned.

At sunset, two or three fakirs are taken to the mortuary house, where they sup on bread and milk, in the place where the deceased died; they recite afterward the sura *Al-Mulk* (*the sixty-seventh chapter of the Koran*), as it is believed that, during the first night after burial, the soul remains with the body, before journeying either to the abode designated for virtuous souls until the day of the last judgment, or to the prison where the wicked must await their final judgment (Author's note: George Sale, in section IV of his preliminary discourse to his translation of the Koran, has enumerated the opinions of the Muslims concerning the state of souls during the period which elapses between death and judgment).

Another ceremony called that of the *sebbah* (*of the rosary*), takes place on this occasion to facilitate the entry of the deceased into a state of beatitude; it lasts from three to four hours. After sunset, some fakirs, often fifty in number, assemble in the mortuary house; if there is neither a courtyard nor a large room for their reception, mats are spread in front of the house, and they seat themselves there.

One of these fakirs carries a *sebbah* (*rosary*) composed of a thousand beads the size of a pigeon's egg, or thereabouts. They begin the ceremony by reciting the sura, *Al-Mulk*; then they repeat three times: 'God is one!' After which, they recite the sura *Al-Falaq* (*the penultimate chapter of the Koran*) and the first sura, *Al-Fatihah*. They then say three times: 'Allah, favour among your creatures, our lord Muhammad, his family, and his companions, and preserve them!' They add: 'All those who celebrate you are diligent, and those who neglect to celebrate you are negligent.' Then they repeat *three thousand times*: 'There is no Divinity but God!' One of them holds the rosary and counts each repetition of these words, by sliding one of the beads through his fingers. After every thousand repetitions, they most often rest and take coffee. Having completed the last thousand, and rested and refreshed themselves, they repeat a hundred times: 'I celebrate the perfection of God, and His praise!'— Then an equal number of times: 'I ask forgiveness from God the Almighty!' After which they say fifty times: 'I celebrate the perfection of the Lord, the Eternal, the perfection of God, the Eternal!' —Then they repeat these words of the Quran: 'Celebrate the perfections of your Lord, the Lord Almighty, by denying what is attributed to Him by the Christians and others, that of possessing a son who participates in his divinity; peace be with the apostles, and praise be to God, the Lord of all creation!' Afterwards, two or three of these fakirs each recite a verse from the Koran. This

done, one of them addresses the following question to his companions: 'Have you transmitted to the soul of the deceased the merit of what you have recited?' The others respond: 'We have transmitted it, thus; peace be with the apostles, etc.' This ends the ceremony of the *sebbah*, which among the rich is repeated on the second and third nights. This ceremony is also celebrated in families who receive the news of the death of a close relative.

Men do not change their clothes in mourning; nor do women change their clothes when the deceased is an old man; but for others they wear mourning: in this case they dye their shirts, veils, and handkerchiefs with indigo, giving these things a dark bluish tint, often approaching black; some dye their hands and arms in the same way up to the elbow, and paint their rooms with the same colour, when the master of the house or the owner of the furniture dies; and also, in other cases of grief, they turn the carpets, mats, cushions, and covers of the divans inside out. During their mourning they do not braid their hair, they cease to wear some of their finery, and, if they smoke, they use only reed-pipes.

Towards the end of the first Thursday after the funeral, and often even in the morning of that day, the women of the family of the deceased recommence their lamentations in the mortuary house; some of their friends join them; in the afternoon, or evening of the same day, the men who were friends of the house also come to visit, and three or four fakirs offer prayers there. On Friday morning, the women repair to the tomb, where they observe the same ceremonial as that which takes place at the burial. On leaving, they place a palm-branch on the grave or they distribute cakes and bread to the poor. These ceremonies are repeated on the same corresponding days, for forty days after the funeral. (See '*Genesis*, 50:3')

Among the peasants of Upper Egypt there is a singular custom: the relatives and friends of the deceased assemble before the house during the first three days after the funeral, in order to utter lamentations and perform curious dances; they smear their faces, throats, and part of their clothing with mud, and tie around their waists, as a girdle, a coarse rope made of halfa-grass. (Author's note: this custom existed among the ancient Egyptian women, see 'Herodotus, Book II: 85'). Each of them convulsively shakes in her hand a palm-stick, a lance, or a naked sabre; they dance, as one, with a slow step, but in an irregular manner, raising and lowering their bodies. This dance lasts an hour or more, even as long as two hours, and is repeated two or three times a day. After the third day, the women visit the tomb of the deceased and place their girdles made of rope there; then a lamb, or a kid, is usually killed as an expiatory sacrifice, and a feast concludes the ceremony.

Appendix 8: The Population of Egypt

With the exception of the capital and a few other towns, Egypt has few fine houses. The dwellings of the common people, and especially of the peasants, are wretched structures; the houses are usually built of unbaked bricks, cemented with mud, and are often mere huts. Most of them consist of two rooms, but it is rare that they have two stories. In Lower Egypt, one usually finds in one of the rooms, opposite to, but as far from, the entrance as possible, an oven,

called a *furn*, which occupies the whole width of the far end of the room. These ovens resemble a large stone bench; the internal arch supports the bench, whose top is flat. As it is rare for the inhabitants of such houses to own blankets for winter, after heating their ovens, they sleep above them. In some of them, only the husband and wife enjoy this privilege; the children sleep on the floor. The rooms have small openings at the top of the wall to let in the light and circulate the air; sometimes, these openings are furnished with wooden grilles. The roofs are built of palm-branches and palm-leaves, or of millet stalks, etc., and covered with a coating composed of mud and chopped straw. The furniture consists of a mat, sometimes two mats, as a bed, a few earthenware vases and a hand-mill for milling wheat. In many villages one sees large square dovecotes placed on the roofs, the walls of which, as was the practice in ancient Egyptian buildings, are slightly inclined inwards; these dovecotes are often given the shape of a sugarloaf; they are built of unbaked bricks and mud, and the oval entrances have openings wide on the outside and narrow at the far end. Each pair of doves or pigeons occupies a separate entrance. Most Egyptian villages are situated on mounds formed of rubble, which site them a few feet above the height of the floods; they are sometimes surrounded by palm-trees. The rubble with which they form these eminences comes from the materials of past huts; it is observed that they seem to rise to a height corresponding to the depth of the alluvial bed of the river.

It is difficult to ascertain the population of a country in which neither births nor deaths are recorded. Some years ago, an attempt was made to perform a calculation in this regard, taking as its basis the number of houses in Egypt, and the supposition that, in the capital, each house contains eight persons, and that elsewhere, in the provinces, it contains only six. This calculation may approximate the truth quite well; however, observation only yields for cities such as Alexandria, Bulaq, and Masr-al-Qahirah an average of at least five people; while Rashid (*Rosetta*) is seen to be half deserted.

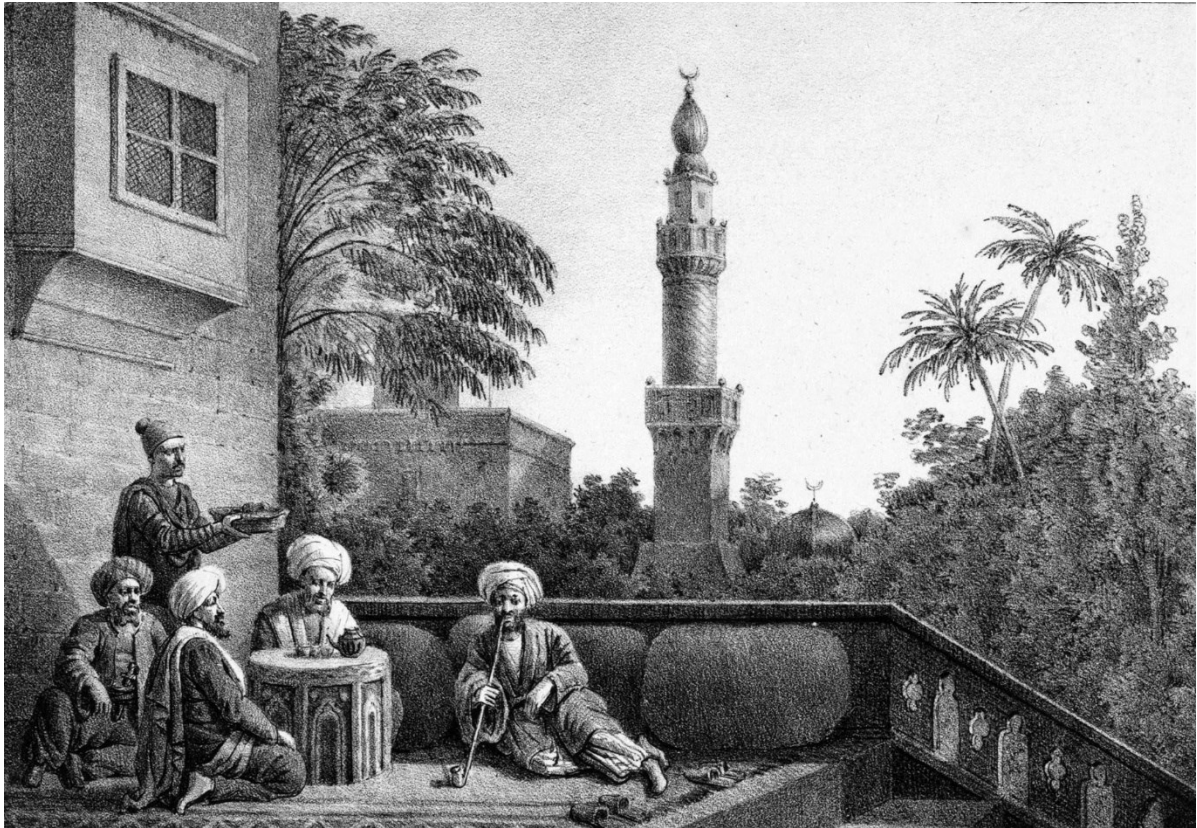
As for the city of Dumyat (*Damietta*), it is populous and may well contain six persons to a house; if the calculation is rejected, one can scarcely attain the supposed total for the number of inhabitants of the country, while the addition of one or two persons to a house, in each of the cities mentioned, cannot have a very great influence on the calculation of the whole Egyptian population, which has been estimated at little more than 2 million. In this number, there are 1.2 million males, of whom a third, or 0.4 million, are fit for military service. The main groups of which this population is composed are, approximately, as follows: Muslim Egyptians (the fellahs or peasants, plus the inhabitants of the cities), 1.75 million; Christian Egyptians (Copts), 150 thousand; Ottomans or Turks, 10 thousand; Syrians, 5 thousand; Greeks, 5 thousand; Jews, 5 thousand, Armenians, 2 thousand.

The classification of the remainder, amounting to 70 thousand souls or more, which is composed of Western Arabs, Nubians, black African slaves, Mamluks (mostly white male slaves), white female slaves, and Franks, is difficult to assess. I exclude from this count of the Egyptian population all the Arabs of the neighbouring deserts.

The Egyptian Muslims, Copts, Syrians and Jews of Egypt, speak, with few exceptions, only Arabic, which is also the language ordinarily spoken by foreigners who are established in the country. The Nubians, among themselves, speak their own idiom.

Cairo contains about 300 thousand souls. One would be greatly mistaken if one tried to judge the population of that city by the crowds which gather in the principal streets and markets, as the other streets and quarters are much less frequented.

Part XIX: Appendices – 9 to 16



View of a garden near Cairo, 1828, Otto Baron Howen

[Rijksmuseum](http://www.rijksmuseum.nl)

Appendices On Various Topics Regarding the Near East

Appendix 9: The Art of Painting Amongst the Turks

The Turks lack the art of painting, at least in the true meaning of the word. This is due, as is known, to a religious prejudice which, however, the Persians, and other Muslims of the sect of Ali (*the Shia*), do not appear to share. Persian paintings are well known from manuscripts, boxes, small ornamental objects, and even shawls and silks, which portray admirable and attractive subjects, generally representing hunting scenes. The ivory handles of sabres and yatagans are adorned with complex and painstakingly-executed carvings, which exactly resemble, often in their costumes, and always in style, our naive sculptures of the Middle Ages, while the paintings recall illustrations from our ancient manuscripts. The *Shahnameh* (*the lengthy epic by the poet Ferdowsi*), along with several other historical and religious poems, is

decorated with small gouaches representing scenes of battle or ceremonies. Portraits of the prophets are often found in religious books.

There is no article in the Koran which absolutely prohibits the reproduction of figures of men or animals, except to forbid worship of the same. The Mosaic law was far more severe, and only permitted the portrayal of seraphim, and certain sacred beasts, for fear that the people would make an idol of this or that image, be it a calf or a serpent, as they had in the desert.

Nor does it appear that the Arabs always respected this religious scruple, since several Caliphs had their likenesses engraved on coins, or their palaces decorated with tapestries featuring human beings.

Here is a striking example, which I read in a history of the Caliphs, taken from the reign of the eleventh Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, Al-Mustansir bi-llah (*ruled 861-862AD*):

‘He became Caliph the day he had his father, Al-Mutawakkil, slain. The people said that he would reign only a short time, and that was the case. The story goes that when Al-Mustansir was Caliph, a figured tapestry was handed to him, in which there was a portrait of a man on horseback, wearing a turban surrounded by a wide band, with writing in Persian. Al-Mustansir sent for a Persian to have the writing translated, the effect of which was to trouble him greatly: “I am,” it read, “Sheroe, son of Chosroes (*Khosrow II, King of the Sasanian Empire*), who killed my father and enjoyed the kingdom for only six months (*as Kavad II, in 628AD*).” Al-Mustansir turned pale, and rose from his seat; he was to reign a mere six months also.’

At the Alhambra in Granada, one can see two paintings on vellum, from the time of Muslim rule, which decorate the ceiling of a room. One represents the judgment of the adulterous Sultana (*the wife of Boabdil*) the other the massacre of the Abencerrages in the Court of the Lions. Théophile Gautier notes that the fountain depicted in this last painting, which is gilded, possesses a different form to that of today.

The Turks have many prejudices peculiar to their race, and to the various religious sects established among them. Such is the one which leads them to build no house of stone or brick, because, they say, a man’s house should not last longer than he does. Constantinople is entirely built of wood, and even the most modern palaces of the Sultan, which have hundreds of marble columns, have wooden walls everywhere, whose decorations alone imitate the tones of stone or marble. In Syria, in Egypt, and everywhere else where Muslim law reigns, but where the Turks nevertheless have only political sovereignty, the cities are built of solid materials, like ours; only the Turk whether Pasha, Bey or simply a rich individual, in possession of the most beautiful of the city palaces, cannot bring himself to dwell *amidst stone*, and has kiosks built separately of timber, abandoning the rest of the building to his slaves and horses.

Such is the power of certain ideas among the Turks; they own to neither a preoccupation with the future, nor a cult of the past. They are *encamped* in Europe and Asia-Minor, nothing is truer; always savage like their fore-fathers, the Mongols and the Kyrgyz people, who needed only a tent and a horse wherever they went. They enjoy, their possessions, moreover, without any desire to transmit them onwards, or hope of retaining them. The traveller who passes through their domain swiftly thinks to find among them the traces, or the germs, of science, art, and industry: the traveller is mistaken. The industry in the countries the Turks control is

that of the Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Syrians, the subjects of the empire; their science is that of the Arabs and the Persians, which the Turks have never known how to further. Their literature is limited to a few diplomatic documents, a few weighty historical compilations.

Even their poems, apart from a few pieces of light verse, are scarcely more than translations. Their architecture and ornamentation, borrowed partly from the Byzantines and partly from the Arabs, has not even gained from that mixture a particular and original style. As for the music, it is Wallachian, or Greek, when it is good; the airs regarded as particularly Turkish are simply composed of melodic phrases borrowed at various times from various peoples, and assimilated to Turkish taste through the use of barbarous rhythms and instrumentation.

Let me return to Turkish painting, which may yet own the best title to esteem among civilised nations. Arriving in Egypt full of European prejudice, which supposes that Islam does not allow the depiction of any living being, I was astonished to see, in the cafés, figures of leopards painted in fresco, and fairly well done. My astonishment increased on entering the palace of Mehemet-Ali, and finding first of all a portrait of his grandson hanging on the wall, painted in oil, and rendered with all the artistic skill of Europe; this fails to count as Oriental painting, but demonstrates that among the Turks the representation of figures is not absolutely rejected. I have since discovered the existence in Constantinople of a collection of all the portraits of the Sultans since Osman I and Orhan, his son. None of these sovereigns failed in their desire to transmit their features to posterity; The portraits are all painted in egg-tempera on thin cardboard, with inscriptions of four to five lines on the back of each painting. The whole forms a bound quarto volume. But only the sovereigns enjoyed the privilege of their image being reproduced without fear that it might be the object of cabalistic spells uttered against them, such being the scruple that inhibited many Muslims in the past. The Orientalist, Ignatious d'Ohsson, reports that, towards the end of the last century, there were not two Turks alive, other than the Sultan, who would have dared have themselves portrayed. An eminent person, who collected paintings, but only landscape and marine paintings, and who even then did not show them to his friends (certainly, a singular amateur!), decided to have his portrait done, and to hang it with his other paintings. But, feeling himself growing old, he was best by scruples, and chose to rid himself of the dangerous image by gifting it to a European.

Today, there are still only a few Turks who have portraits made of themselves; but, as one may see, none of them refuse the artists' wishes, the latter desiring to collect examples of physiognomies or costume; the sitters even preserve their poses with the most perfect patience and a hint of vanity.

The portraits of the Sultans, not only those in the collection cited above, but also those larger items executed on canvas, forming a sort of family tree, which can be seen in one of the buildings of the Seraglio, were painted by Europeans, the Venetians for the most part. Everyone knows the anecdote relating to Gentile Bellini, the fifteenth century artist, of whom our museums possess several canvases representing scenes of ceremonies and receptions by the Ottoman Porte. Sultan Mehmed II, wishing to have himself painted, requested the services of that artist from the Republic of Venice. Gentile Bellini went to Constantinople, painted the portrait of the Sultan, and also several paintings for Christian churches there. It was for one of the latter that he painted a magnificent *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*. The Sultan desired

to see it, and had the painting brought to him in the Seraglio. It was then that he began with the painter that discussion, famous in the annals of art, concerning the contraction that the skin on the neck of a severed head undergoes, and had a slave decapitated to justify his comments. Gentile Bellini was so frightened by the experience that he hastened to leave for Venice, and never sought to return to Constantinople, although the Sultan requested his service again, from the Signoria of Venice, in the most flattering terms, and in a letter written in his own hand. One can still see today, in the Venetian archives, that which he wrote on the occasion of Gentile Bellini's departure.

The portraits or figures to be found in Constantinople were not executed by Turkish painters; I even doubt that it is them that we owe a miniature illustrating Muhammad's *Journey to Heaven* (*Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*) which represents the Prophet borne away in the midst of flames on the famous mare *Buraq*, which is none other than a hippogriff with a woman's head; four cherubs are part of this assumption, and flutter around the rider, whose face is hidden by a tongue of flame, since it is not permitted, even to the Persians, to represent the features of the Prophet. and this miniature, reproduced in all the manuscripts, of which there is a copy in Paris, must have been the work of a Persian artist.

I have declared what Turkish painting is not; let us see now what it is. I saw my first samples in the palace of Mehmet Ali, several rooms of which offered panels painted in tempera, and exhibiting a skill that barely exceeds that of our dining-room paintings. There were three genres: landscapes, cities, and battle-scenes; but, as it would have been difficult to represent the latter without showing the combatants, preference had been given to naval battles and the bombardment of cities, where, the ships appeared to have declared war on the houses without the help of human beings; cannons fire, bombs burst, buildings burn or collapse, furious fleets engage on the waters, and all this desolation is witnessed only by enormous sea-creatures, painted in the foreground, which jet water through their nostrils unconcerned by the thunderous quarrels of objects less alive than themselves.

Painting sea monsters and even certain animals is thus allowed. Of the latter I only saw examples of lions and leopards. A very well-executed gouache representing one of these animals was sold in Constantinople for two hundred piastres (forty-five francs). During the month of Ramadan, I viewed a collection of three hundred paintings, framed and under glass for the most part, exhibited at the entrance to the wooden bridge which crosses the Golden Horn, on the Galata side. The subjects were a little monotonous, and the execution variable in quality. The religious subjects permitted were limited to two: bird's-eye views of Mecca and Medina, the two sacred cities, always deserted of people. One may add a few views of mosques. Another subject was portrayed by a prodigious quantity of animals with women's heads; these are the only human heads which may be depicted. The colour of the eyes, the hair, the form of the face are left to the artist's fancy. Thus, a Turkish artist cannot paint a portrait of his mistress without giving her the body of a monster. Moreover, this kind of sphinx-painting is most successful and is found in all the barbers' shops. Genre paintings are limited to the reproduction of landscapes and views. The perspective is sometimes quite well done, and the colours, a little flat, produce an effect somewhat like those of our wallpapers. Marine subjects are still the most numerous. Ships of all kinds, of all flags, squadrons, and sea battles, with monstrous fish

swimming on the surface, such is the genre in which the Turkish school flourishes in full freedom. I saw no signs of a steamboat. The Turkish painters are perhaps still somewhat uncertain as to whether a steamboat is, or is not, a living creature. Sometimes one also saw a Dervish's cylindrical hat (*sikke*) set on a stool. Finally, some paintings were limited to representing the number of some Ottoman's house, drawn in various colours, or gilded, and of a large size. Such was the collection, the most complete without doubt that had ever been assembled, which was exhibited in a wooden gallery, guarded by two soldiers, and in front of which an ecstatic crowd was gathered from morning to night.

In the spice-bazaar, the shops of the medicine-sellers and dye-merchants were decorated with similar pictures, which served as shop-signs, several of which, executed in the Turkish taste, were nevertheless done by English painters. The English neglect nothing, and even compete with the poor Turkish artists.

Let us now consider the latter in depth. They generally add to this industry that of paper-making, and occupy small shops located for the most part on Serasker (*Beyazit*) Square, along which an arcade runs, beneath which one can walk in the shade. The Turks visit these shops to have painted, given the absence of portraiture, their house number accompanied by attributes relating to their profession, or ask for a sketch of a mosque which they particularly admire. One of my friends, the painter Camille Rogier, whom a three-year stay had familiarised with the Turkish language, approached one of these artists, one day, who, seated with legs crossed on the platform of his shop, was drawing for a soldier the mosque of Sultan Bayezid II, located at the other end of the square. The French painter noticed that his colleague was painting the minaret of the mosque in red, which is in fact white, and thought he should advise him. '*Peki! Peki!*' ('Very good! Very good!') he said to him, 'You draw wonderfully well; but why do you make the minaret red?' — 'Do you wish me to do one in which the minaret is blue?' replied the Turk. — 'No, but why not make it the colour it is?' — 'Because this soldier here likes red, and asked me to paint it in that colour; everyone has a favourite colour, and I try to satisfy all tastes.'

The choice of colours is still, indeed, a matter of Turkish superstition, to the point that the shade of the houses makes it possible to recognise the sect to which each owner belongs. The true believers reserve light colours for themselves, and leave darker shades to the Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and other *rayas* (*non-Muslim subjects*).

I have related here all that I know of painting among the Turks. It would be difficult to draw any further interesting detail from a subject so limited that no one has thought of treating it to-date; I wish merely to correct various false ideas, widespread among us, concerning the supposed horror in which Muslims regard images. I have already shown that this prejudice should be attributed to the Turks alone, and that even then it is subject to many exceptions. Nor should one credit the idea that the Turks mutilate images out of religious fanaticism; this can only have happened in the early days of Islam, when it was a question of extirpating idolatry from Asia Minor. The Sphinx to be seen at Gizeh, that colossal sculpture of fine execution, has suffered the mutilation of its nose, because, long after the conquest of Egypt by the Muslims, Sabaeans gathered on certain days in front of the Sphinx to sacrifice white cockerels to it. Moreover, while abstaining from sculpture even more assiduously than painting, the Turks

often allowed statues and bas-reliefs to contribute to the ornamentation of their public squares. That of the Atmeidan, which is where the ancient Hippodrome of the Byzantines stood, was decorated for a long time with three bronze statues taken from Buda during a conflict with Hungary. Even today, one may admire, in the centre of the square, a pedestal covered with Byzantine bas-reliefs, which serves as a base for an obelisk and which displays some fifty very well-preserved statues, besides the twisted bronze column depicting three intertwined serpents, the heads of which are missing, which is said to have served as a support for Apollo's tripod at Delphi, and which can be seen in the same square.

When one traverses the cemeteries of Pera and Scutari for the first time, and views the headstones, one seems to see from afar a whole army, composed, in fact, of white or painted statues scattered amidst the green lawns, in the shade of the enormous cypress trees; some are capped by turbans, others by a modern *fez* painted red, with golden tassels. They are the height of an ordinary man, in the form of a human body without arms; beneath the head-dress the stone is flat, and covered with inscriptions; bright colours and gilding distinguish the newest and richest. They alone are upright; those of the *rayas* and the Franks, placed in specific areas of the cemeteries, lie on the ground. These stones are almost images, so much so that after the massacre and proscription of the Janissaries during the reign of Mahmud II, the head, or rather the turban, was struck from all those which indicated the graves of former soldiers of that corps. They are recognisable today by that sacrilegious mutilation.

To complete the story, and exhaust the subject, let me also point to the representation of a golden dove which adorns the prow of the emperor's caique. In the days of Ignatious d'Ohsson, an eagle decorated the reigning Sultan's vessel; perhaps the bird's role was, and is, a symbolic one; in any case, the dove is now the only one which may be displayed. Finally, how may one explain the existence of those little figures which are employed during Ramadan, to people the *Karagöz* performances? They are both puppets, and Chinese-shadow figures. Their colours stand out perfectly well behind a thin, well-lit canvas, and all the costumes of the different peoples and professions are imitated to perfection, which adds to the attraction of the show; the principal character alone is, like our Punchinello, invariable in his form ... and in his deformity.

Appendix 10: Egyptian Domestic Life

The domestic life of the lower classes is, in general, so simple, compared with that of the higher classes, that it offers very little interest.

Except for a small number of town-dwellers, the lower classes are *fellahin* (farmers). Those who live in the large towns, and even towns of a lesser extent, as well as a small number of those in the villages, are small-traders, artisans or servants; their wages are small, and generally insufficient to support them and their families.

Their principal food is bread made from millet or maize, milk, soft cheese, eggs, and small salted fish called *feseekh*. They also eat cucumbers, melons and gourds which are abundant,

onions, leeks, beans, chickpeas, lentils, fresh and dried dates, and pickled vegetables. They always eat vegetables raw; the *fellahin* sometimes feast on ears of nearly-ripe corn which they roast before the fire, or bake in the oven. As far as they are concerned, rice is unaffordable; the same is true of meat.

The great luxury indulged in by these simple people is tobacco, which is inexpensive, since they grow and dry it themselves. The tobacco is greenish, and its aroma quite pleasant.

Although most of the above-mentioned commodities are cheap, the poorest people can hardly procure anything but coarse bread, which they moisten with a mixture called *sukkah*, which is composed of salt, pepper, and *zalaar* (a kind of wild marjoram), or else of mint or cumin seed. At every mouthful, the bread is dipped in this mixture. When one considers how limited is the cuisine of the Egyptian *fellahin*, one is astonished at their healthy appearance, their robust frame, and the amount of work they can bear.

Women of the lower classes are rarely idle, and many of them are devoted to more arduous work than that of the men. Their occupations consist, in particular, of preparing the husband's food, fetching water, which they carry in large vessels on their heads, spinning cotton, flax, or wool, and making a kind of round, flat cake, composed of cattle dung and chopped straw which they knead together, and which is used for fuel.

It is with this fuel called *gelley* that the ovens are heated in which food is cooked. Among the lower classes, the subjection of women to their husbands is much greater than in the upper classes. The women are sometimes not allowed to dine with the men, and when they go out in company with their husbands, they almost always walk behind; if there is anything to be carried, it is the woman who is burdened with it.

In the towns, some women have shops where they sell bread, vegetables, etc.; so that they contribute as much and often even more than the husband to the maintenance of the family.

When a poor Egyptian desires to marry, his first care is to pay the dowry, which usually comprises the sum of twenty *ryals* (from twelve to thirteen francs); if a man sees the possibility of raising a dowry, he does not hesitate to marry, for he needs to labour only a little more to provide for the maintenance of a wife and two or three children. From the age of five or six, children are employed in driving and guarding the herds, and afterwards, until the time when they marry, they help the father in his work in the fields. The poor in Egypt often depend entirely, in their old age, on their children's support; but many parents are deprived of this help and find themselves reduced to begging, or die of hunger. Not long since the Pasha, when making the journey from Alexandria to Cairo, landed at a village on the banks of the Nile; a poor man there seized the sleeve of the Pasha's garment, and all the efforts of those present who tried to force him to let go proved in vain. The man complained that, having formerly been at ease, he found himself reduced to the utmost misery, because, having reached old age, his sons had been taken from him to become soldiers. The Pasha, who usually examines, attentively, all requests made to him in person, came to the aid of the unfortunate man, by ordering the richest inhabitant of the village to gift him a cow.

Sometimes a young family is an unbearable burden on poor parents; therefore, children are now and then offered for sale; these offers are made by the mother herself, or by some woman

whom the father has entrusted with them; the misery of these poor people must be extreme. If, at her death, a woman leaves one or more un-weaned children, and if the father or other relatives are too poor to provide a wet-nurse, the children are put up for sale, or else exposed at the door of a mosque when the crowd assembles for Friday prayers, and it generally happens that someone, seeing a poor creature thus exposed, is moved with compassion, and carries it away to be raised in the family, not as a slave, but as an adopted child; if this fails to happen, the child is entrusted to some person, until an adoptive father or mother can be found.

Some time ago a woman offered a lady a child born a few days previously, which the woman claimed to have found at the door of a mosque. The lady told her that she was willing to raise it, for the love of Allah, in the hope that her own child, whom she cherished, would be protected from all harm, as a reward for her act of charity; at the same time, she placed ten piastres, then equivalent to two francs and fifty centimes, in the woman's hand; but she refused the gift. This shows, however, that children are sometimes made an object of sale, and that those who buy them can make slaves of them or resell them. A slave-dealer told me, and other people have confirmed the fact, that several young girls had been given to him for sale, with their full consent. They were persuaded by being shown the rich clothing and luxury objects that would be theirs; they were taught to say that they were foreigners, but that having been brought to Egypt at the age of three or four, had forgotten their mother tongue and only knew Arabic.

It often happens that the *fellahin* find themselves reduced to a state of poverty so great that they are forced, for financial reasons, to place their sons in a position worse than ordinary slavery. When a village is required to furnish a certain number of recruits, the sheik often follows the path which causes him personally least trouble, that is to say, he enlists the sons of the richest. In these circumstances, a father, in order not to be separated from his son, offers one of the poor villagers twenty-five or fifty francs, in order to procure a replacement, and often succeeds, although the love of the Egyptians for their children is as strong as their filial piety, and they have, in general, a great horror of seeing them enlisted. This is carried to such a dreadful point, that the poor often employ violent means to avoid this misfortune; for example, at the time of the war of 1834, one could hardly find a well-formed young man who did not lack one or more teeth, broken to render them incapable of biting a cartridge, or else they lacked a finger, or an eye had been torn out; there were even examples of both eyes having been gouged out to prevent them from being caught and sent to the army. Old women, and others, make a point of visiting the villages to perform such operations on young men and boys, and sometimes the parents themselves take charge of the operation.

The *fellahin* of Egypt can scarcely be viewed favourably in respect of their domestic and social condition, and their manners. They bear a great resemblance, in this regard, to their ancestors the Bedouin, without possessing many of the virtues of those desert-dwellers, and, if they do possess them, they are of a defective nature. As regards the faults which they have inherited, these often exercise a fatal influence on their domestic affairs. It is said that the *fellahin* are descended from the various Arab races who settled in Egypt at various times; separation into different tribes is still observed by the inhabitants of all the villages. The space of time has caused each of the original tribes to be divided into numerous branches; these

smaller tribes have distinct names, and the names are often given to the villages or district which they inhabit. Those whose establishment in Egypt is the oldest have retained less of the manners of the early Bedouin, and the purity of the race has been compromised by reciprocal marriages with the Copts who have become proselytes to the Islamic faith, or with their descendants: which renders them despised among the Bedouin tribes more recently established in the country; they consider them among the *fellahin*, and arrogate to themselves the denomination of Arab or Bedouin. When the latter covet the daughters of the recently established tribes, the fathers have no objection to such a marriage; but they never allow their daughters to marry those whom they call *fellahin*. If any of their number is killed by a person belonging to an inferior tribe, they kill two, three, and even four of that tribe to avenge him. Homicide is usually punished by the death of one of the murderer's family, and when the homicide has been committed by a person of a tribe other than that of the victim, it often results in vendettas which frequently turn to open warfare between the respective tribes, often lasting for years. A slight insult, offered by a person of one tribe to a member of another tribe, frequently produces the same consequences.

In many cases, blood-vengeance is exacted a century or more after the murder has been committed, if one or other individual revives its memory after the passage of time appeared to have buried it. There are in Lower Egypt two tribes, the *Banu S'ad* and *Al Haram*, who are distinguished by their aggression and rancour (the same is true of the *Quays* and *Yaman* of Syria); hence these names are given to any persons or parties living in enmity. It is astonishing that such crimes, which, if they took place anywhere other than in villages, that is to say in the towns or cities of Egypt, would be punished with the sentence of death being executed on several of the persons involved, are tolerated, even today. Blood-vengeance is allowed according to the Koran; but it is recommended that moderation and justice are applied: the small wars that it occasions in our time are therefore contrary to the precept of the Prophet, who says: 'If two Muslims draw swords against one another, the one who slays, as well as the one who is slain, will be punished by the fires of hell), (*See also Sura 5, Al-Ma'idah, verse 45*)

In other respects, the *fellahin* resemble the Bedouin. When a *fellahin* woman is convicted of infidelity to her husband, he, or the brother of the adulterous woman, throws her into the Nile with a stone about her neck, or, after cutting her in pieces, throws the remains into the river. An unmarried daughter or sister who is guilty of incontinence is almost always punished in the same manner, and the father or brother undertakes the punishment. The parents of such girls are considered more offended than the husband by the wife's adultery, and, if the appropriate punishment is not exacted following the crime, the family is often despised by the whole tribe.

Appendix 11: The Festival of the Prophet (*Mouled-el-Nebi*)

At the beginning of the month *Rabi Al-Awwal* (that is to say the third month), preparations are made to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet; and this celebration is called

Mouled-el-Nebi. The principal place of the festival is the south-western area of a large space in Cairo called *Birket-el-Esbekieh*, almost the whole of which becomes a lake during the floods; which has happened several years in a row at the time of the *Mouled*, celebrated, in those years, at the edge of the lake; when the land is dry, the festival takes place on the bared lake-bed. Large tents called *siwans* are erected, in most of which Dervishes gather every night, as long as the festival lasts. In the middle of each of these tents, a pole called a *saariya* (*sari*) is erected, which is firmly attached with ropes, and to which are hung a dozen or more small lamps; and it is around such poles that a group of fifty or sixty Dervishes range themselves, in a circle, to sing their *zikrs* (*religious songs*). Nearby, what is called the *ckaim* is erected, which consists of four poles erected in the same line, a few yards apart from each other, supported by ropes which pass from one pole to the other and are fixed to the ground at both ends.

On these cords are hung lamps which sometimes represent through their arrangement flowers, lions, etc., and at other times, words, such as the name of Allah, that of Muhammad, or some article of faith, or simply ornaments of pure fancy. The preparations end on the second day of the month, and on the following day begin the ceremonies and rejoicings, which must continue without interruption until the twelfth night of the month; which means, according to the Muslim method of calculation, until the night which precedes the twelfth day, and which is, properly speaking, the night of the *Mouled* itself. (Author's note: the twelfth day of *Rabi Al-Awwal* is also celebrated as the anniversary of the death of Mahomet. It is remarkable that his birth and his death are both related as having taken place on the same day of the same month, and specifically on the same day of the week, Monday.)

During this period of ten days and ten nights, a large part of the population of the metropolis gathers at *Esbekieh*.

In some parts of the streets adjoining the square there are swings and various other equipment for entertainment, as well as a large number of stalls for the sale of sweets, etc.

I visited a street called *Souk-el-Bekry*, south of *Esbekieh*, to see the *zikkers* (*chanters of zikrs, the religious songs*) whom I was told gave the finest performance. The streets which we had to traverse to reach the place, were filled with people, and no one was allowed to walk around without a lantern after dark. There were hardly any women to be seen among the spectators.

On the very spot where the *zikkers* would perform, they had hung a large candelabrum, bearing two or three hundred small glass lamps, superimposed in layers, to form almost a single light. Around this cascade of light, there were also many wooden lanterns, each containing several small lamps similar to those of the large candelabrum.

The *zikkers*, about thirty in number, sat cross-legged on mats spread for the purpose before the houses on one side of the street, the mats being arranged in the form of an oval. In the midst of this oval were three wax candles, supported by low bases. Most of the *zikkers* were *Ahmed-Dervishes*, people of low condition, wretchedly dressed; only a few wore the green turban. At one end of the oval were four singers and four players of a kind of flute called a *ney*. It was among these last that we succeeded in establishing ourselves to attend the *majlis*, or gathering, for the performance of the *zikr*, which I will describe as accurately as possible.

The ceremony, according to my calculation, must have begun about three hours after sunset. The performers first recited the *Fatihah* together; their leader having cried out first: '*Al-Fatihah!*' all continued thus: 'O Allah! favour our lord Muhammad in all the ages; favour our lord Mahomet in the highest degree on the Day of Judgment, and favour all the prophets and apostles among the dwellers in earth and heaven. May God, whose name is praised and blessed, be pleased with our lords and masters Abu-Bakr, Omar, Osman, and Ali of illustrious memory. Allah is our refuge and our excellent guardian. There is no strength nor power except in Allah the high, the great! O God! O our Lord! O you, liberal in forgiveness! O you, the highest of the high! O Allah! — Amen!'

After these songs, the *zikkers* remained silent for a few minutes; then, resumed singing in a low voice.

This manner of preluding the *zikr* is common to almost all the orders of dervishes in Egypt, and is called *istifta 'hhez-zikr*. Immediately afterwards, the singers, arranged as above, began the *zikr*: *La illah il Allah* (*there is no God but Allah*), in a slow measure, and bowing twice at each repetition of the *La illah il Allah*; they continued thus for about a quarter of an hour, and then repeated it for another quarter of an hour with more lively movements, while the *murshids* sang to the same tune, or with variations, passages from a kind of ode analogous to the Song of Solomon, and generally alluding to the Prophet, as an object of love and praise.

These *zikrs* continue until the *muezzin* calls for prayer, while the performers rest between each performance, some drinking coffee, and some others smoking.

It was past midnight when we left the Souk-el-Bekry Street *zikr* to go to Esbekieh; there, the light of the moon, joined to that of the lamps, produced a singular effect; however, many of those on the *ckaim* of the *saariya*, and in the tents had been extinguished; and several people were sleeping on the bare ground, taking their rest there for the night. The *zikr* of the dervishes around the *saariya* had ended, and I can only describe the latter according to what I noted on the the following night; for, after having attended several *zikrs* in the tents, on this night I withdrew.

The next day (the one immediately preceding the night of Mouled) we returned to Esbekieh, about an hour before noon. It was too early for there to be much of a company or entertainment. We saw only a few jugglers, and jesters attempting to gather about them a small circle of spectators. But soon the crowds gradually increased, since the remarkable spectacle, on this day, which every year attracts a multitude of people always amazes. The spectacle is called the *dossah* (*the march*). And this is what it consists of:

The sheik of the *Saadyeh-Dervishes* (the Sayeed, Mohammed El-Meuzela), who is a *khatib* (*preacher*) at the Mosque of Sultan Hasan, after having spent, it is said, a part of the preceding night in solitude, while repeating certain prayers, secret invocations, and passages from the Koran, reappears at the mosque, on the Friday, the day preceding the night of the Mouled, to accomplish the customary duties of the *dossah*. The morning prayers and preaching being over, he leaves the mosque to visit, on horseback, the house of the Sheik-el-Bekry, head of all the orders of Dervishes in Egypt. This house is to the south of Esbekieh, adjoining the square and situated at the south-west corner. On the way, he is joined successively by a crowd of Dervishes

from different districts of the metropolis. The Sheik is a white-headed old man of fine stature, whose physiognomy is amiable and intelligent.

On the day of which we speak, he wore a white *benieh*, and a white *skaouk* (a cotton cap covered with cloth).

His muslin turban was of such a dark olive-green that it could hardly be distinguished from black, and a white muslin headband crossed his forehead obliquely. The horse he rode was of medium size, and weight. Why I have added the last remark will become apparent.

The Sheik entered the *Birket-el-Esbekieh*, preceded by a large procession of Dervishes, of whom he was their leader. A short distance from the house of the Sheik-el-Bekry, the procession halted; there followed a considerable number of Dervishes and others. I could not count them, but there were certainly more than sixty; they lay flat on their bellies on the path, in front of the horse mounted by the Sheik. They ranged themselves side by side, as close together as possible, with their legs stretched out, and their foreheads resting on their crossed arms, murmuring without interruption the word *Allah!* Then twelve Dervishes or more began to run over the backs of their prostrate companions, some of them striking *bazes* or small drums, which they held in their left hands, and also crying out: *Allah!* The horse bearing the Sheik hesitated for a few minutes to set hoof on the first of the men lying across its path; but, being urged from behind, it decided to do so, and, without apparent fear, trotted over them all, led by two men who held it on each side, themselves running, one over the feet, the other over the heads of the prostrate men. Immediately there arose a long cry among the spectators of '*Allah! Allah!*' Not one of the men, thus trampled under the hooves of the horse and the feet of its two guides, appeared injured, and each man, rising with a bound as soon as the animal had passed over him, joined the procession which followed the Sheik. Each had endured the weight of two hooves of the horse, a forefoot, and a hindfoot, without forgetting the feet of the two guides. It is said that these Dervishes, as well as the Sheik, recite certain prayers and invocations the day before, in order to run no risk during this ceremony, and rise again safe and sound. Some, having had the temerity to participate in this devotion without having previously prepared themselves for it, have, on occasion, been killed or cruelly maimed. The success of this religious practice is considered a miracle granted to each Sheikh of *Saadyeh* (Author's note: it is said that the second Sheikh of *Saadyeh*, the immediate successor to the founder of the order, ran his horse over pieces of glass without a single piece being broken.)

A custom followed by some of the *Saadyeh*, on such occasions is to eat live snakes, before a select gathering in the house of Sheikh-el-Bekry; but the present Sheikh has lately opposed this custom in the metropolis, by declaring it an unpleasant practice and contrary to the religion, which places reptiles among the class of animals that should not be consumed. However, we saw the Sadis more than once eating snakes and scorpions during our first excursion in the countryside. It must be added that the fangs of the snake, which contained the venom, had been removed, and that the creature was incapable of biting, since its jaws were pierced, and a silk cord was passed through them to bind them together, which silk cord was replaced by two silver rings when it was led in procession.

When a Sadi ate the flesh of a live snake, he was, or affected to be, excited by a sort of frenzy. He pressed the tip of his finger hard upon the back of the reptile, seizing it about two

inches from the head, and consumed it only as far the place where he had pressed; which required three or four mouthfuls. The rest of the body he threw away.

However, snakes are not always handled without danger, even by Sadis. We were told that some years ago, a Dervish of this sect, who was called El-Fil, or Elephant, on account of his corpulence and muscular strength, and who was the most famous snake-eater of his time, and perhaps all time, having had the desire to tame a snake of a very venomous species which had been brought from the desert, placed this reptile in a basket, and kept it there several days to weaken it; after which, wanting to take it to extract its fangs, he thrust his hand into the basket, and felt himself bitten on the thumb. He called for help; but, as there was only one woman in the house, who was too frightened to come to him, some minutes elapsed before he could obtain assistance, and, by the time they arrived, his whole arm was black and swollen, and the man died after a few hours.

Appendix 12: The Beguines

It is the responsibility of travellers to enlighten the public regarding facts and events which they have observed and which are connected in some way to European society. The trial relating to the Beguine sect, a trial which all the newspapers have reported (*January 1851*), has given rise to only limited historical research into the origin of this religion.

It seems to me that this sect is not only linked, as has been said, to certain English congregations who preceded the Anabaptists of France and Germany, but that it relates to the very origins of the Christian religion.

There have been found on the coasts of Syria, from Carmel to Tripoli, extant traces of a religion whose followers are called Nazarenes, mainly inhabiting the region between Latakia and Antakia (*Laodice and Antioch*). The Comte de Volney, who has devoted several pages to this singular sect, calls them *Ansaries*.

It seems certain that these people believe in the primitive heresies of Christianity. Perhaps one might go back further by connecting them to some Hebrew sect, especially that of the *Essenes*, which was founded under the influence of certain inspired neighbours of Phoenicia, such as Pythagoras, whose memory is honoured at Carmel, and Elijah, the particular prophet of that mountain.

The hills of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon contain a large number of these sectarians, who are accused of the same errors as the Beguines of our countries.

It should not be forgotten, moreover, that the primitive Christians were accused in Rome of similar practices, and that these also gave rise to suppositions of immorality.

Among the Nazarenes, we find the same belief in the prophet Elijah, who returns, at certain times, under various incarnations, and who, then, reestablishes neglected dogma. Everything is then permitted to him, as one who represents, at the same time, the prophet and the Divinity.

And, though the faithful are generally sworn to continence, his divine character allows him to ignore that oath, when it is a question of begetting the expected Madhi or Messiah.

Their processions take place in the depths of the woods, as among the Beguines of Europe; but there is no question there, as here, of naked men or women. Only retirement at night to temples called *kaloues*, where the divine service is limited to the reading of the holy book, that is to say of a sort of apocryphal Bible which these people possess. It is true that at one moment of the ceremony, the lights are extinguished, or are reduced to a faint glow; but it has never been proven, even in Syria, that reprehensible acts then take place.

I have heard Egyptian officers, who took part in the occupation of Syria in 1840, express themselves on this subject with some levity. They claimed that once the lights were extinguished, unedifying scenes took place in the *kaloue*; but we should not trust the ironic claims of these Egyptians any more than that of our Marseillais who, finding themselves in contact with the populations of the lower slopes of Mount Lebanon, have attributed to the ceremonies of this cult a character which is certainly exaggerated. Moreover, it is probable that the cult, passing into our colder countries, was purified there, as happened with primitive Christianity, of which it was an important sect.

Appendix 13: The Arts in Constantinople and the Near East

(Original Editor's Note: this appendix rounds out Appendix 9: *The Art of Painting among the Turks*. We thought its handful of repetitions insufficient reason for exclusion.)

There is a prejudice among us which considers the Oriental nations as the enemies of paintings and statues. This is an ancient accusation, akin to that which attributed to Umar's lieutenant the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, which had been dispersed long before, after the fire which ravaged the Serapeum.

Oriental newspapers have informed us, moreover, that the Sultan has devoted large sums to the restoration of Hagia Sophia. At a time when European civilisation seems little interested in the marvels of artistic imagination and execution, it would be wonderful if the Muses were to find refuge on the shores of the Bosphorus, from whence they visited us. Nothing prevents it, in truth.

We know there are pictures painted on parchment, in the Alhambra of Granada, and that one of the Moorish kings of that city had a statue of his mistress erected in a place called *The Garden of the Girl*. I have already said that in one of the rooms of the Seraglio in Constantinople there is a collection of portraits of the Sultans, the oldest of which was painted by the Venetian, Gentile Bellini, who had been invited to execute the work, at great expense.

I even took the opportunity to attend an exhibition of paintings which took place in Constantinople, during the Ramadan festivities, in the suburb of Galata, near the entrance to

the bridge of boats which crosses the Golden Horn. It must be admitted, however, that this exhibition would have left much to be desired by Parisian critics. Thus, anatomical studies were completely lacking, while landscapes, and still lifes uniformly dominated.

There were five hundred and more pictures, framed in black, which could be divided as follows: religious paintings, battles, landscapes, seascapes, animals. The first consisted of reproductions of the most considerable mosques of the Ottoman Empire; pure architecture, with at most a few trees highlighting the minarets. An indigo sky, an ochre ground, red brick, and grey domes, that was their scope, tyrannised by a sort of hieratic convention. As for the battle-scenes, their execution was singularly hampered by the impossibility established through religious dogma of representing any living creature, be it a horse, a camel, or even a cockroach. This is how Muslim painters handle the matter: they suppose the spectator to be extremely far from the scene of the fight; the folds of ground, mountains, and rivers are alone outlined with a degree of clarity; the layouts of the cities, the angles and lines of the fortifications and trenches, the position of the squares and batteries are indicated with great care; large cannon in the act of being fired, and mortars, from which the fiery curves of the bombs arch, animate the spectacle and represent the *action*. Sometimes, human beings are indicated by dots. Tents and flags indicate the various nationalities, and a legend written at the bottom of the painting informs the public of the name of the victorious leader. In the naval battles, the effect is more striking due to the presence of fighting vessels, which are relatively animated; these paintings also gain a livelier effect from certain groups of whales and other amphibians which are rendered as spectators of this maritime triumph of the Crescent.

It is, in fact, quite singular to see that Islam only allows the representation of a few creatures, those classified as monsters. Such, for example, is a sort of Sphinx of which one finds representations, by the thousands, in the cafés and barber-shops of Constantinople. It reveals a very beautiful woman's head on the body of a hippogriff; her black hair in long braids spreads over her back and chest, her tender eyes are rimmed with black, and her arched eyebrows meet on her forehead; the painter is able to grant her the features of his mistress, and all those who see her can see in her the ideal of beauty; for she is, in the end, merely the representation of a celestial creature, Buraq, the steed that carried Muhammad through the heavens.

This is the only study of the figure allowed; a Muslim cannot gift a portrait of himself to his beloved or his parents. However, there is a way in which he may offer them a cherished, and perfectly orthodox, image: which is to have painted in large, or in miniature, on boxes or medallions, the representation of the mosque which pleases him most in Constantinople, or elsewhere. It signifies: 'There my heart rests, it burns for you beneath the eye of Allah.' In Serasker Square, near the Bayezit mosque, where doves flutter by the thousands, one comes across a row of small shops occupied by painters and miniaturists. It is there that lovers and faithful spouses go on certain anniversaries and have these sentimental pictures of mosques painted: each give their ideas on the colour and on the features; they usually have a few verses added which depict their feelings.

It is not entirely clear how Muslim orthodoxy deals with the delicately cut and painted puppets used in the representations of *Karagöz*. It is also worth mentioning certain coins and

medals from the past, and even the standards of the ancient militia of the Janissaries, which bore figures of animals. The Sultan's ship is decorated with a golden eagle with outstretched wings.

By another singular anomaly, it is customary in Cairo to paint the house of every pilgrim who has recently made the journey to Mecca, doubtless with the idea of representing the countries he has seen; for in this circumstance alone they allow themselves to represent characters who, however, are only with difficulty recognisable as living people.

These prejudices against figurative painting exist, as we know, only among the Muslims of the sect of Umar; for those of the sect of Ali display paintings and miniatures of all kinds. We must not therefore accuse Islam as a whole of a disposition fatal to the arts. The source of dispute arises from an interpretation of a holy text which suggests that it is not permitted for man to create forms, since he cannot create souls. An English traveller was once in the process of drawing figures while watched by an Arab out of the desert, who said to him most seriously: 'When at the Last Judgment all the figures you have created present themselves before you, and Allah says to you: "Here they stand, complaining of their existence, and yet of not being fully alive. You have granted them a body; now grant them a soul!" what will you answer?' – I will reply to the Creator, said the Englishman: 'Lord, as for making souls, you acquit yourself too well for me to attempt to emulate you.... But, if these figures seem to you worthy of life, do me the favour of animating them.'

The Arab found this answer satisfactory, or, at least, knew not what to say in response. The English artist's reply seems to me most ingenious; and, if God wanted, in fact, at the Last Judgment, to give life to all the figures painted or sculpted by the great masters, he might repopulate the world with a crowd of admirable creatures, worthy of dwelling in the New Jerusalem of the Apostle, Saint John.

It is worth noting, moreover, that the Turks respect the artistic monuments in places subject to their power far more than is believed. It is to their tolerance and their respect for antiquities that we owe the conservation of a host of Assyrian, Greek, and Roman sculptures that conflict between the various religions would else have destroyed in the course of the centuries. Whatever may be said, widespread destruction of statues only took place in the early eras of fanaticism, when certain populations alone were suspected of worshipping them as part of their cult. Today, the greatest proof of the tolerance of the Turks, in this regard, is shown by the survival of the obelisk at the centre of Atmeidan Square, opposite the Mosque of Sultan Selim, the base of which is covered with Byzantine bas-reliefs, in which one can distinguish more than sixty perfectly preserved figures. It would be difficult, however, to cite other sculptures of living beings preserved within the city of Constantinople, apart from those contained in the Catholic churches. A complete restoration of Hagia Sophia has, in our day, been executed by the Fossati brothers (*Gaspare and Giuseppe*), the mosaic figures of the apostles on the dome, having been covered with a protective layer of plaster on which arabesques and flowers have been represented to designs by Antonio Fornari. The *Annunciation of the Virgin* is only veiled. There is a most interesting work describing this restoration by Francois Noguès (*editor of the Journal de Constantinople*).

In the Church of the Forty Martyrs, located near the aqueduct of Valens, the mosaic images have also been preserved, although the building is now a mosque.

To finish with the publicly visible figures, I can also mention a certain tavern situated at the far end of Pera, at the edge of a road which separates the suburb from the village of Saint Dimitrios — this road is formed by the bed of a ravine, at the bottom of which flows a stream which becomes a river on rainy days. The location is most picturesque, thanks to the varied view of the hills which extend from the lesser Field of the Dead to the European coast of the Bosphorus. The painted houses, interspersed with greenery, most of them devoted to *guinguettes* or cafés, stand out by the hundreds on the crests and slopes of the heights. A motley crowd presses around the various establishments of this Muslim *Courtille*. The pastry-chefs, the food-fryers, the sellers of fruit and watermelons deafen you with their curious cries. One hears the Greek criers selling bunches of grapes for *deka paras* (ten paras, a little more than a penny), and there are pyramids of corncocks boiled in saffron water. If one enters the tavern, the interior is vast; high galleries with carved wooden balustrades reign around the large room; on the right is the tavern keeper's counter, where he tirelessly busies himself pouring Tenedos wines into pale glasses with handles, where the pearls of amber liquor hover; at the back are the cook's stoves, loaded with a multitude of pots of stew. People sit down to dine on small stools, in front of round tables that only rise to knee height; drinkers settle closer to the door or on the benches that surround the room. There, the Greek with his red tarbouch, the Armenian with his long robe and black *kalpak*, and the Jew with his grey turban, demonstrate their perfect independence from the proscriptions of Muhammad. The complement of this scene is the local decoration that I wish to mention, composed of a series of figures painted in fresco on the wall of the cabaret. It is the representation of a fashionable promenade, which, if we are to believe the costumes, dates back to the end of the last century. One sees there about twenty life-size characters, dressed in the costumes of the various nations that inhabit Constantinople. There is among them a Frenchman in the costume of the Directory period (1795-99), which gives the approximate date of the composition. The colour is perfectly preserved, and the execution not too inadequate, for a neo-Byzantine painting that is. A touch of satire contained within the work indicates that it is not that of a European artist, because one sees a dog raising its paw to spoil the mottled stockings of a dandy; the latter tries without success to push it back with his rattan cane. This is, in truth, the only publicly exhibited figure-painting that I was able to discover in Constantinople. We therefore see that it is not impossible there for an artist to place his talent at the service of innkeepers, as Simon Lantara did in France. It only remains for me to excuse myself for the length of this note, which may at least serve to counter two European prejudices, by proving that there are in Turkish countries both paintings and taverns. Several of our artists do very well there, moreover, by painting portraits of saints for the Armenians and the Greeks of the Fener district.

As for the painting of ornaments, and the design of graceful arabesques, I admit the superiority of the Turks in this respect. The pretty fountain of Tophane will edify travellers as to the genius of ornamentation in Constantinople.

Appendix 14: Amrou's Letter

The author is motivated by the story of Caliph Hakim to complete his description of modern Cairo with a description of ancient Cairo, animated by memories of its finest historical era.

A document that should not be neglected, one rendering an impression of Egypt after its initial adoption of the Islamic faith, is a letter written by one Amrou (or Gamrou) to the Caliph Umar, at the time of the conquest of the country by the Muslims.

I cannot conclude my remarks on present-day Egypt better than by citing it. This detail also allows me to cover a historical event which seems to have misled many scholars. Jean-Jaques Ampère, who has published a very detailed and important work on Egypt, (*Voyages et Recherches en Égypte et en Nubie, 1846*) has indulged in the common error which supposes that the Caliph Umar himself laid siege to Alexandria. We will see, from the following, that it was his general Amrou who was charged with that expedition. I have preserved here the style of the seventeenth century Orientalist, Pierre Vattier, who rendered the Arabic style admirably.

Here, first of all, is the letter that the commander of the faithful, Umar, wrote to Amrou (the French language only imperfectly renders the consonances of Arabic):

From Lord Umar, son of Al-Khattab, to Amrou, son of Gase: ‘Allah grant you his peace, O Amrou, and his mercy and his blessings, and grant peace to all Muslims generally! After these events, I thank God for the favour he has shown you; there is no other God than him, and I pray to him to bless Muhammad and his family. I know, O Amrou, from the report that has been made to me, that the province you command is fine and well-fortified, well-cultivated and well-populated; that the Pharaohs and the Amalekites reigned there; that they made exquisite works and excellent things there; that they displayed, there, the marks of their greatness and their pride, imagining themselves to be eternal, and counting on what they should not. Allah, however, has established you in their place, and has granted you power over their goods, their servants, and their children, and has granted you inheritance of their land. May He be praised and blessed and thanked for doing so; it is to him that the honour and glory belong. When you have read this letter of mine, write to me of the particular qualities of Egypt, both inland, and on its shores, and make it known to me as if I were seeing it myself.’

Amrou, having received this letter, and seen what it contained, replied to Umar; in these terms:

From Lord Amrou, son of Gase, son of Vail the Saharan, to the successor of the apostle of God, to whom God grant peace and mercy, Umar, son of Al-Khattab, Commander of the Faithful: ‘O Caliph who follows the straight path, whose letter has been received and read and whose request has been heard, I wish to dispel from your mind the cloud of uncertainty through the truth of my speech. It is from Allah that strength and power derive, and all things return to Him. Know, Lord Commander of the Faithful, that the land of Egypt is nothing but black earth and green vegetation between powdery mountains and red sand. There are between the mountains and the sand raised plains and low eminences. It consists of level strips which provide it with food, and which extend a month’s journey for a man on horseback from Syene (*Aswan*) to the end of the land, and likewise to the coast. Through the middle of these, and the whole country, flows a river, blessed in the morning, and favoured by heaven in the evening,

which increases and decreases in flow, according to the courses of the sun and moon. There exists a season when the fountains and springs of the earth are opened, according to the command given them by its Creator, who governs and dispenses the river's course to provide food for the province, and it flows, in accord with what has been prescribed, until, its waters being swollen and its waves sounding, and its floods having reached the highest elevation, the inhabitants cannot pass from village to village except in small boats, and these boats are seen moving to and fro, appearing as black and white camels might to the imagination. Then, when it is in this state, behold it begins to withdraw and to close itself up in its channel, as previously it had emerged, rising little by little. And then, the quickest and slowest prepare themselves for work; They spread out in groups over the countryside, the people of the law whom God keeps, and the men of the alliance whom men protect; one sees them walking like ants, some weak, others strong, and wearying themselves in the tasks that have been given them. We see them ploughing the earth which the river has moistened, and sowing all kinds of seed that they hope to be able to multiply with the help of Allah; and the earth does not delay, black from its watering, to clothe itself with green and to spread a pleasant odour, as it produces stems and leaves, and ears, making a beautiful show and giving hope of good harvest, the dew watering it from above, and the humidity giving nourishment to its produce from below. Sometimes, a few clouds bring moderate rain; sometimes, only a few drops of water fall, and, sometimes, none at all. After this, Lord Commander of the Faithful, the earth displays its beauties, and parades its graces, rejoicing its inhabitants and assuring them of the harvest of its fruits, for their sustenance and that of their mounts, bearing more, and multiplying their livestock. It appears now, Lord Commander of the Faithful, like a dusty plain, then immediately like a bluish sea; now like a white pearl, now like black mud, then like green taffeta, then like an embroidery of various colours, then like an outpouring of red gold. Then, they harvest their wheat, and they thresh it to extract the grain, which then passes variously between the hands of men, some taking what belongs to them, and others what does not belong to them. This vicissitude returns every year, each thing in its time, according to the order and providence of the Almighty: may He be praised forever this great God, may He be blessed, the best of creators! As for what is necessary for the maintenance of these things, and to render the country well-populated and well-cultivated, to preserve it in good condition and advance it from good to better, according to what we have been told by those who know, having had the government in their hands, I note three things in particular: the first of which is not to hearken to the ill speeches the rabble make against the principal people of the country, for they are envious, and ungrateful for the good that is done them; the second is to employ a third of the tribute levied on the upkeep of bridges and roads: and the third is not to extract tribute of any particular sort, except from that same when it is abundant. This is a description of Egypt, Lord Commander of the Faithful, by means of which you may know it as if you had seen it yourself. Allah maintain you in your righteous conduct, and see you govern your empire in happiness, and help you to discharge the burden that He has imposed on you. Peace be with you. May Allah be praised, and may He assist with his favour and blessing our lord Muhammad, and those of his nation, and those of his party.'

The commander of the faithful, Umar, having read Amrou's letter, spoke thus, says the author: 'He has acquitted himself well in describing the land of Egypt and its attributes; he has

depicted it so well, that his letter should not be ignored by those who are capable of knowledge. Praised be Allah, O assembly of Muslims, for the grace He has shown you in granting you possession of Egypt, and other lands! It is him whose help we should implore.'

Appendix 15: The Catechism of the Druze

Question. 'You are a Druze?' — Answer. 'Yes, by the help of our Almighty Master.'

Q. 'What is a Druze?' — A. 'One who obeys the law, and worships the Creator.'

Q. 'What does the Creator command of you?' — A. 'Truthfulness, observance of His worship and observance of the seven conditions.'

Q. 'What are the harsh duties from which your Lord has exempted you, and which He has abrogated; and how do you know that you are a true Druze?' — A. 'Abstaining from what is unlawful; and by doing what is lawful.'

Q. 'What is lawful and unlawful?' — A. 'Lawful is that which belongs to the priesthood and to agriculture; and unlawful, to temporal places, and renegades.'

Q. 'When and how did our Mighty Lord arrive?' — A. 'In the year 400 of the Hegira (*Hijra*) of Muhammad. He was then said to be of the race of Muhammad to hide his divinity.'

D. 'And why did he wish to hide his divinity?' — A. 'Because his worship was neglected, and those who worshipped him were few in number.'

Q. 'When did he appear and manifest his divinity?' — A. 'In the year 408.'

Q. 'How long did he remain thus?' — A. 'The whole of the year 408; then he disappeared in the year 409, because it was a disastrous year. Then he reappeared at the beginning of 410, and remained the whole of the year 411; and finally, at the beginning of 412, he hid himself from sight, and will not return again until the Day of Judgment.'

Q. 'What is the Day of Judgment?' — A. 'It is the day when the Creator will appear in human form and will reign over the universe with power and the sword.'

Q. 'When will this be?' — A. 'That is unknown; but signs will declare it.'

Q. 'What will these signs be?' — A. 'When we see a change of kings, and the Christians gain advantage over the Muslims.'

Q. 'In which month will this take place?' — A. 'In the moon of Jumada al-Thani, or in that of Rajab, according to the calculations of the Hegira.'

Q. 'How will God govern peoples and kings?' — A. 'He will manifest himself by power and the sword, and will take away the life of them all.'

Q. 'And after their death, what will happen?' — A. 'They will be reborn at the command of the Almighty, who will order them as he pleases.'

Q. 'How will he treat them?' — A. 'They will be divided into four parts; namely, the Christians, the Jews, the renegades, and the true worshippers of God.'

Q. 'And how will each of these sects be divided?' — A. 'The Christians will give birth to the sects of the Nazarenes (*of Lebanon, in the provinces of Tripoli and Sidon*) and the Metuali (*Shia Muslims*); from the Jews will derive the Turks. As for the renegades, they are those who have abandoned faith in our God.'

Q. 'What treatment will God grant the worshippers of his unity?' — A. 'He will grant them empire, royalty, sovereignty, goods, gold, silver, and they will dwell in the world as princes, pashas and sultans.'

Q. 'And the renegades?' — A. 'Their punishment will be dreadful. Their food and water, when they wish to eat and drink, will be bitter. Moreover, they will be reduced to slavery and subjected to the harshest labour amidst the true worshippers of God. The Jews and Christians will suffer similar torments, but much lighter in degree.'

Q. 'How many times did Our Lord appear in human form?' — A. 'Ten times, which are called *stations*, and the names that he bore successively were: El-Ali, El-Bar, Alia, El-Maalla, El-Kaiem, El-Maas, El-Azis, Abazakaria, El-Mansour, and El-Hakem.'

Q. 'Where did the first station, that of El-Ali, take place?' — A. 'In a city in India, called *Rchine-ma-Tchine*.'

Q. 'How many times did Hamza appear, and what was his name at each appearance?' — A. 'He appeared seven times in the ages that have passed from Adam to the prophet Samed. In the age of Adam, his name was Chattnil; in that of Noah, his name was Pythagoras; David was the name he bore in the time of Abraham; in the time of Moses, his name was Shaib, and in that of Jesus, he was called the true Messiah and also Lazarus; in the days of Muhammad, his name was Salman-el-Farsi, and in the time of Sayd his name was Saleh.'

Q. 'Teach me the etymology of the name Druze.' — A. 'The name is derived from our obedience to the Hakem by the order of God, which Hakem is our master Muhammad, son of Ishmael, who manifested himself by himself to himself; and when he had manifested himself, the Druze, by following his orders, *entered* into his law, which made them Druze: for the Arabic word *enderaz*, or *endaradj*, is the same as *dakhala*, which signifies *to enter*. It signifies that the Druze wrote the law, became imbued with it, and *entered* the state of obedience to the Hakem. Another etymology may be found by writing Druse with an *s*; then, it comes from *darassa*, *iedros*, *to study*, which signifies that the Druze *studied* the books of Hamza, and worshipped the Almighty, as is fitting.'

Q. 'What is our intention in adoring the Gospel?' — A. 'Know that we thereby wish to exalt the name of him who upholds the command of God, and that is Hamza; for he it is who uttered the Gospel. Moreover, it is fitting that in the eyes of every nation we should acknowledge their belief. Finally, we worship the Gospel, because it is founded on divine wisdom, and contains the evident marks of true worship.'

Q. 'Why do we reject every book other than the Quran (Koran), when we are questioned as to this?' — A. 'Because we need not be known as who we are, when amidst the followers

of Islam. It is therefore appropriate that we recognise the book of Muhammad; and, so we may not be treated badly, we have adopted all the Muslim ceremonies, even that of the prayers for the dead; and all this only externally, in order to be left untroubled.'

Q. 'What do we say of those martyrs whose intrepidity and number the Christians so praise?' — A. 'We say that Hamza did not recognise them, even if their martyrdoms were believed in and attested to by all the historians.'

Q. 'But if Christians tell us that their faith is not in doubt, because it is supported by stronger and more immediate proofs than the word of Hamza, how do we answer them, and how do we recognise the infallibility of Hamza, the pillar of truth on which our salvation depends?' — A. 'By the testimony which he himself gave regarding himself, when he said, in the Epistle of the Commandment and the Defence: "I am the first among the creatures of God; I am his voice and his word; I have knowledge by his command; I am the tower and the well-founded house; I, am the master of death and resurrection; I am he who will sound the trumpet; I am the head of all the priesthood, the master of grace, the edifier, and the dispenser of justice; I am the king of the world, the destroyer of the two testimonies; I am the fire which devours."'

Q. 'What is the true religion of the Druze priests?' — A. 'It is the opposite to every creed of other nations and tribes; and whatever is impious in others, we believe, as has been said in the Epistle of Deception and Warning.'

Q. 'If a man should come to know our form of holy worship, to believe in it, and conform to it, would he be saved' — A. 'Never; the door is closed, the matter is finished, the pen is blunted; and, after his death, his soul will join his original nation and religion.'

Q. 'When were all souls created?' — A. 'They were created after the creation of the pontiff Hamza, son of Ali. After him, God created from light all the spirits which are numbered, and which will neither decrease nor increase until the end of the ages.'

Q. 'Does our august religion admit the salvation of women?' A. 'Without doubt, for Our Lord wrote a chapter on women, and they obeyed at once, as is mentioned in the Epistle of the Law of Women, and it is the same in the Epistle of Daughters.'

Q. 'What do we say of other nations who claim to worship the Lord who created Heaven and Earth?' — A. 'Even if they say that was so, it would be a falsehood; and even if they really worship Him, if they do not know that the Lord is the Hakem Himself, their worship is sacrilegious.'

Q. 'Who are the elders who preached the wisdom of the Lord to those who established our belief?' — A. 'There are three whose names were Hamza, Esmail and Beha-Eddine.'

Q. 'Into how many parts are the sciences divided?' — A. 'Into five parts: two of them belong to religion and two to nature. The fifth part, which is the greatest of all, is not divided. It is the true science, that of the love of God.'

Q. 'How do we know that a certain man is our brother, an observer of the true worship, if we meet him on the way, or if he approaches us in passing and calls himself a Druze?' — A. 'In this manner: after the usual compliments, we say to him: "Is the seed of myrobalan (*aliledji*) sown in your country?" If he answers: "Yes, it is sown in the hearts of the believers," then we

question him about our faith: if he answers correctly, he is our compatriot; if not, he is merely a stranger.'

Q. 'Who are the fathers of our religion?'— A. 'They are the prophets of Hakem, namely: Hamza, Esmail, Muhammad and Kalime, Abou-el-Rheir, and Beha-Eddine.'

Q. 'Do the ignorant Druze win salvation or employment with the Hakem, when they die in a state of ignorance?' — A. 'There is no salvation for them, and they will exist in dishonour and slavery before Our Lord until the eternity of eternities.'

Q. 'Who is Doumassa?'— A. 'He is Adam the first; he is Arkhnourh; he is Hermes; he is Edris; John; Esmail, son of Mahomet-el-Taimi; and, in the century of Muhammad, son of Abdallah, he was called El-Mekdad.'

Q. 'What is the ancient and eternal?' — A. 'The ancient is Hamza; the eternal is the soul, his sister.'

Q. 'What are the feet of wisdom?'— A. 'The three preachers.'

Q. 'Who are they?'— A. 'John, Mark, and Matthew.'

Q. 'How long did they preach?' — A. 'Twenty-one years in total; each of them preached for seven.'

Q. 'What are those buildings which are in Egypt and which are called the Pyramids?' — A. 'The Pyramids were built by the Almighty, to achieve a wise end which he in his providence conceived.'

Q. 'What was this wise purpose?' — A. 'To place there, and preserve there, until the Day of Judgment and His Second Coming, the secrets of and designs for all creatures which His divine hand has composed.'

Q. 'For what reason did he appear at each new rendering of the law?' — A. 'To exalt the worshippers of his true worship, that they might be strengthened in it, that they might know that it is He who dispenses justice, at his will, and that they might believe in none beside Him.'

Q. 'How do souls return to their bodies?'— A. 'Whenever a man dies, another is born, and so is the world.'

Q. 'What is Islam called?'— A. 'The *sending down (el tanzil)*.'

Q. 'And Christianity' — A. 'The *explanation (el taaouil)*. These two denominations signify, as regards the latter, that it an *explanation* of the words of the Gospel; as regards the former, the suggestion that the Koran was *sent down* from heaven.'

Q. 'What might the will of God have been in creating the genies and angels who are designated in the Book of the Wisdom of Hamza?' — A. 'The genies, spirits, and demons are akin to those among men who have not responded to the invitation of Our Lord, the Hakem. The demons are spirits before they acquire bodies. As for the angels, we must view them as a representation of the true worshippers of God, who have obeyed the invitation of the Hakem, who is the Lord worshipped in all the cycles of the ages.'

Q. 'What are the cycles of the ages?' — A. 'They are the virtuous cycles of the prophet, who appears in turn, and to whom the people of the century in which they live bear witness, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Sayd. All these prophets are but one and the same soul which has passed from one body into another, and the soul, which is also the cursed demon, the guardian of Ebn-Termahh, and also Adam the disobedient, whom God drove from his paradise, that is to say, from whom God took away the knowledge of His unity.'

Q. 'What was the role of the devil in Our Lord's eyes?' — A. 'He was dear to Him; but he conceived pride and refused to obey the vizier Hamza; then God cursed him and cast him from paradise.'

Q. 'Who are the chief angels who uphold the throne of Our Lord?' — A. 'They are the five primates who are named: Gabriel who is Hamza, Michael who is the second brother, Esrafil-Salame-Ebn-Abd-El-ouahab, Esmaïl Beha-Eddin, and Metatroun-Ali-Ebn-Achmet. These are the five viziers who are named also El-Sabek (*the forerunner*), El-Cani (*the second*), El-Djassad (*the body*), El-Rathh (*the opener*), and Fhial (*the horseman*).'

Q. 'Who are the four women?' — A. 'Their names are Ishmael, Muhammad, Salame, and Ali, and they are named also: El-Kelmé (*the word*), El-Nafs (*the soul*), Beha-Eddin (*the beauty of religion*), and Omm-el-Rheir (*the mother of good*).'

Q. 'What is the Gospel the Christians possess, and what do we say of it?' — A. 'The Gospel came from the mouth of the Lord, the Messiah, who was Salman-el-Farsi in the age of Muhammad, which Messiah is Hamza, son of Ali. The false Messiah is he who was born of Mary, and was the son of Joseph.'

Q. 'Where did the true Messiah dwell, when the false one was with his disciples?' — A. 'He was among the latter. He professed belief in the Gospel; he gave instructions to the Messiah, the son of Joseph, and said to him: "Do this and that," in accord with the Christian religion," and the son of Joseph obeyed him. However, the people conceived hatred against the false Messiah, and crucified him.'

Q. 'What happened after he was crucified?' — A. 'They placed him in the tomb. The true Messiah came, stole the body from the tomb, and buried it in the garden; and he spread the report that the Messiah had risen again.'

Q. 'Why did the true Messiah behave thus?' — A. 'To strengthen the Christian religion, and grant it longer life.'

Q. 'And why did he also favour heresy?' — A. 'That the Druze might cloak themselves, as with a veil, in the religion of the Messiah, that none might know them as Druze.'

Q. 'Who is he who came from the tomb, and entered among the disciples through closed doors?' — A. 'The living Messiah who does not die, and who is Hamza.'

Q. 'Why did the Christians not become Druze?' — A. 'Because God wished things so.'

Q. 'Why then does God suffer evil and heresy?'— A. 'Because his constant practice is to deceive some and enlighten others, as it is said in the Koran: "He has given wisdom to some, and taken it away from others."'

Q. 'And why did Hamza, son of Ali, command us to hide wisdom and not to reveal it?'— A. 'Because it contains the secrets and designs of Our Lord, and it is not appropriate to reveal to any other, the things on which the salvation of souls and the life of spirits depend.'

Q. 'Are we selfish, if we do not wish all to be saved?' — A. 'There is no selfishness in this; for the invitation is no longer given; the door is closed; he is a heretic who is a heretic, and he is a believer who is a believer, and all is as it ought to be.'

Q. 'Why do we fast?' — A. 'The period of fasting, which was formerly ordained, is now abolished; but when a man fasts at other times, and mortifies himself by fasting, that is praiseworthy; for it brings us closer to the Divinity.'

Q. 'To whom are alms given?'— A. 'Among us, alms given to our brothers, the Druze, are legitimate; but it is wrong to give alms to others, and not fitting.'

Q. 'What is the aim of the solitaries who mortify themselves?' — A. 'It is to gain merit, so that when the Hakem appears he may grant each of us, according to our efforts, Vizierates, Pashaliks, and the government of others.'

The author of a work on Turkey (*Lettres sur La Turquie*), Jean-Henri-Abdolonyme Ubicini, rightly notes that, despite steamships, despite the application of modern statistics, the Orient is hardly better known today than it was during the last two centuries. It is certain that, if the number of travellers has increased, the commercial relations formerly established between our southern provinces and the cities of the Levant have diminished considerably. Ordinary tourists scarcely stay long enough to penetrate the secrets of a society whose customs so carefully elude superficial observation. The mechanism of Turkish institutions has, moreover, been entirely changed since the new period of Reform, called the *Tanzimat*, the long-desired realisation of the *Gülhane Hatt-i Serif* ('*The Supreme Edict of the Rose-House*', issued by *Abdülmejid I*, in 1839). Today, Turkey is assured of an orderly government based on the complete *equality* of the various subjects of the empire. (Author's note: here are the most recent population figures applicable to the Turkish Empire: The Ottoman race numbers eleven million, seven hundred thousand souls. The other sections of the population in the various parts of the empire, the Greeks, Slavs, Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Syrians etc., make up a total number of thirty-five million, three hundred and fifty thousand souls. —The population of Constantinople is seven hundred and ninety-seven thousand souls, of whom four hundred thousand are Muslims. The budget is one hundred and sixty-eight million. The regular army, comprised of a hundred and thirty-eight thousand six hundred and eighty men, can be increased, with its reserve and its contingents, to more than four hundred thousand men.)

The letters and travel memories collected in this book, being simple accounts of actual travels, cannot offer the action, intricacies, and denouement that the novelistic form provides.

The truth is what it is. The first part of this work seems to have owed its success mainly to the interest inspired by the slave, whom I bought in Cairo from the jellab (*slave-trader*) Abd-el-Kerim. The Orient is less distant from us than we think, and, as this person exists, her name has been changed in the printed edition. Authentic and circumstantial details inform me that she is today married in a city in Syria, and her fate seems, happily, to be settled. The traveller who, almost without being aware of it, found himself led to alter the fate of this person forever, was only reassured with regard to her future by learning that her current situation was entirely of her own choosing. She adhered to the Muslim faith, though efforts had been made to introduce her to Christian ideas. The French can no longer buy slaves in Egypt; so that none risk today creating such difficulties for themselves, difficulties, moreover, that entail a particular moral responsibility.

Appendix 16: Letter to Théophile Gautier

(Original editor's note: while Gérard de Nerval was travelling in the Orient, Monsieur Théophile Gautier, having overseen a performance at the Royal Academy of Music and Dance of the ballet *La Péri*, for which he provided the scenario, to music by Friedrich Burgmüller, which was first presented on July 17th, 1843, sent his friend a report of the performance, by means of a column in *La Presse*. In response to this report, Gérard had the letter, reproduced here, inserted in the *Journal de Constantinople*, of the 7th of September, a letter which embodies the sensitive spirit, heartfelt poetry, and gentle philosophy which made us love, in Gérard de Nerval, the man and the writer both.)

— 'What joy that you write to me via a newspaper, and not by means of a letter! The letter would be slumbering at this very moment among the uncollected ones, in Cairo, where I no longer dwell, or else it would still be following the footsteps of your fickle friend from one region of the Levant to another; while the newspaper, as you wisely foresaw, arriving at the same time at every place where I might happen to be, found me, precisely, in Constantinople, where I am residing. Moreover, the world is so small and the press is so great, that I will be able to answer you twenty days from today by the newspaper from the Bosphorus with the largest distribution in Paris, which the goodwill of old friend's places at my disposal, in order for me to pen a reply. Is this not marvellous, and even troubling for the management of the postal service?

As for the public, perhaps they would be only too willing to respect our private affairs; I mean especially mine.

But you write to me of a matter which interests them as much as it does us, and which will be no less popular in Istanbul than in Paris, since, if I credit your account of it, the work you have just produced would do honour to the imagination of a true Muslim poet.

La Péri is both a ballet and a poem: a poem like *Medjnoun and Leyla*, a ballet like so many charming ballets that I have seen danced by the kind and hospitable people of the Orient. The latter would hardly be surprised at one thing: that it is necessary to visit Paris, to view your ballet, and to pile by the thousand into a large sort of cage made of wood gilded with copper, and sparsely furnished with sofas; all without *hookahs* or *chibouques*, or coffee, or sorbets.

A somewhat well-to-do resident, here, would gather his friends, seat them on soft cushions, his wives behind a grille, and have *La Péri* performed by dancers, female or male according to his taste; and I am certain that he would be most edified by the composition, and delighted by the choreographic details with which Jean Coralli has embroidered it. He would, however, lack the divine Carlotta (*Carlotta Grisi*), whom the Opera holds by a golden thread; but who knows if some real *peri* would not obey the call of the zealous believer in her place? However, I agree, the Orient is no longer the land of wonders, and *peris* hardly appear here, since the North has lost its feys and its sylphs of the mists. Moreover, it is not Cairo that those daughters of heaven would visit seeking platonic love and hearts faithful to the old beliefs of the Hejaz. The divine employment of those ladies would risk being labelled, in a somewhat materialistic and severe manner, by the police, who would send them to ply their trade, in the vicinity of the first cataract, among the ruins of Esna.

Oh, my friend! You asked me for local and picturesque details regarding the *almahs* of Cairo and their much-celebrated dances, and I took it upon myself to do some research concerning the *pas de l'abeille* and other local cachuchas; I hoped to position myself as a choreographic Charles Texier (*the historian, author of a 'Description of Asia Minor' and other related works*), or a Karl-Richard Lipsius (*the Orientalist*), as a correspondent of the Academy of Music. And you were surprised that, far from fulfilling so easy and charming a commission, I described to you only English dress, the cast-offs of *Franks (Europeans)*, and the rags of the fellahin.... Alas! At the moment when you were crediting all the splendours of the Opera to the Cairo of your imagination, I, in the real Cairo found only the baroque elements of a pantomime by Jean-Baptiste Debureau (*the celebrated mime whose stage-name was 'Pierrot'*).

If I have told you scarcely anything as regards the dances of Cairo, it is because I would have risked disillusioning you. The first dance I saw took place in a brilliant café, in the free quarter commonly called *El Mosky*. I would like to set the scene for you a little; though, in truth, the decoration does not include clover-shapes, or columns, or porcelain panels, or suspended ostrich-eggs. It is only in Paris that one encounters such oriental cafés. Imagine instead a humble square shop, whitewashed, where the image of a clock, placed in the middle of a meadow between two cypresses, is repeated several times, as arabesque. The rest of the ornamentation is composed of mirrors with painted surrounds, hung there to reflect the brilliance of a chandelier made of palm-sticks, loaded with bottles containing oil in which float night-lights, to rather fine effect however. Sofas of a rather hard wood, around the room, are bordered by palm-cages serving as stools for the feet of tobacco smokers, or consumers of hashish. It is here that the fellahin in blue blouses, the Copts in black turbans, and the Bedouin in striped coats, indulge in dreams that are doubtless the exact opposite of yours. They dream perhaps of a homeland without palm-trees and without dromedaries, of rivers devoid of crocodiles, a foggy sky, snowy mountains a paradise above all of which Mehemet-Ali, their

ruler, is not the god. As for the *peris* who appear to them, in reality, amidst dust and tobacco smoke, they struck me at first sight by the brilliance of the golden caps which surmounted their braided hair. Their heels, which struck the ground while the raised arms repeated the brusque movement, made their bells and rings resonate; their hips quivered with a movement which is met among us with *municipal* disapproval; their waists were visible beneath the muslin, in the gap between the jacket and the ornate belt, loosened like the cestus (*girdle*) of Venus. One could barely distinguish, amidst their rapid whirling, the features of these attractive people, who performed valiantly to the accompaniment of the primitive sounds of tambourine and flute. There were two very beautiful ones, with smooth faces, Arabian eyes brightened by their surrounding henna, and full and delicate cheeks with lightly-applied make-up; the third ... why not say it aloud? ... The third peri, subordinate to the others, betrayed a sex less tender with an eight-day beard! And I, who was preparing to apply a mask of coins to their brows, according to the purest traditions of the Orient, I felt I must refuse that gallantry in regard to the sweating faces of the other two also, who, all things considered, were evidently only male *almahs*. You understand from then on that I had no curiosity to have them perform the *pas de l'abeille* (*dance of the bee*) — which, it is said, only failed to have its effect at the Opera, because the fair Carlotta failed to perform it in every detail.

You will ask me why one risks encountering, in Cairo, beneath an often very attractive surface, the reality of a poor unemployed workman.... to which I reply, according to scrupulously-sought information, that it is in the interest of public morality that the government relegates to Esna the real *almahs*, and other courtesans of the Delta. The same morality, which so happily substitutes one sex for another, has also reserved to the inhabitants of Cairo a choreographic compensation of which it would be difficult for me to give you a fitting idea.

To travel from Esbekieh square to El Mosky (*the Frankish quarter*), one follows a long, winding street, quite wide, crowded with beggars, donkey-drivers, orange-sellers and sugar-cane sellers; on the left, reign the long walls of the convent of the whirling Dervishes, up to the Suez carriage-house, whose door is surmounted by a large stuffed crocodile. On the right, there are some beautiful houses, cafés, stalls and even an Italian tavern. Nearby resound the trumpets of a troupe of Greek tightrope-walkers. The place is, as you can well imagine, extremely crowded, very noisy, full of sellers of fried-food, pastries, and watermelons. There are also always singers of laments, wrestlers, and jugglers exhibiting monkeys or snakes; finally, one comes upon that public spectacle, which realises the most exorbitant images from Rabelais' droll tales. The principal puppet, whose body, held by a string, obeys the knee of a jovial old man, who makes it speak, dance and move, is none other, as you predicted, than the immortal *Karagöz*, the caricature of some magistrate of Cairo who lived long-ago under Saladin. I had never heard of him except as a simple Chinese-shadow figure; but in Cairo he is granted a completely solid existence. I will not relate the drama spoken, sung, mimed, and danced before a circle of amazed women, children and soldiers; it is a classic of the Orient, and the local censorship has not expunged or curtailed any of it, as it is said that our people have in Algiers. After watching this naive spectacle, I understood the reason for exiling the poor *almahs* even less than I had before, those women reduced to debasing the morals of the Thebaid, out of respect for the morals of Cairo, of which it is an example.

Oh, my friend! How well we realise, between us, the fable of the man who chases after good fortune, and the one who waits for it at home. Though it's not fortune that I pursue, it is the ideal: colour, poetry, love perhaps, all of which attend on you who remain, while escaping I who seek them. Once, imprudently, you spoiled Spain for yourself by going there, and it took much skill and invention for you to avoid admitting the fact. I have already lost, kingdom by kingdom, province by province, the most beautiful half of the world, and soon I will no longer know where to find refuge for my dreams; and it is Egypt that I most regret having chased from my imagination, to lodge, sadly, in my memory!... You can yet believe in the ibis, the purple-lotus, the yellow Nile; you can yet believe in the emerald palm-tree, the nopal, the camel too, perhaps.... Alas! The ibis is only a wild-bird, the lotus a common flower; the Nile a red flood with slate-coloured reflections; the palm-tree looks like a slender feather-duster, the nopal is in truth only a cactus; while the camel exists only in the form of a dromedary; the almahs are male, and, as for real women, it seems one is not permitted to view their forms and faces!

No, I will no longer think of Cairo, the city of *The Thousand and One Nights*, without remembering the English travellers I described to you; the carriages of Suez, with modern suspension, those cuckoos in the desert nest; the Turks dressed in European style, the Franks dressed in oriental style, the new palaces of Mehemet-Ali built like barracks, furnished as in provincial circles with mahogany armchairs and sofas, billiard tables, figured clocks, Carcel lamps (*mechanised, with an oil-pump*), portraits in oil of artillerymen sons, all the ideal accoutrements of the country bourgeois!... You speak of the citadel; the stage-scenery done for your production at the Opera no doubt displays as yet the red granite standing columns of the Old Palace of Saladin; I found there, dominating the city, a vast square construction that looks like a corn-market, and which they claim will be a mosque when finished: it is as much a mosque, in truth, as the Madeleine, in Paris, is a church; modern governments always take the precaution of building dwellings for God that can be used for another purpose, that is, when people no longer believe in Him!

Oh! How curious I am to visit Paris and view the Cairo of René Philastre and Charles-Antoine Cambon (*the stage-decorators*); I am sure therein lies my Cairo of old, the one I saw in dreams so often that it seemed to me, as it did to you, to exist still, in I know not what age, perhaps in the reign of Sultan Baibars or of Caliph Hakim!... that Cairo, I have sometimes recalled again amidst some deserted district or in some crumbling mosque; it seemed to me that my feet moved midst the traces of my own interior journeys; I walked on, I muttered to myself: 'By turning the corner of this wall, by passing through this door, I will see such and such a thing' and the thing was there, in reality, but in ruins.

Let us think of it no more! That Cairo lies beneath ashes and dust; the spirit of progress, and modern need, have triumphed over it like Death. Ten years more, and Europeanised streets will cut at right angles through the dusty and silent old city, which crumbles in peace above the poor fellahin. What gleams, what shines, what grows, is the quarter of the Franks, the city of the English, the Maltese, the French from Marseilles. Oh! Do not come here, to view the latter which now devours the former, a warehouse for goods from the Indies, a flourishing shopfront for the only merchant of Egypt, a store possessed by its sole trader! You would no longer think of fantastic *peris* fluttering over the happy brow of a sleeping and virtuous Muslim. Do not

come here, to view the Nile, which the steamboat contests with the crocodile, where the desert is furrowed by English carriages, and the island of Roda has been transformed to an English garden by Ibrahim Pasha, with artificial rivers, lawns, and Chinese bridges. The pavilions of Shubra are lit by gas, the Mokattam hills are covered with windmills, and there is talk of restoring the pyramids, from Giza to Darfur, so as to employ them as telegraph-stations!... No! Stay in Paris, and may your ballet's success last till I return! I will find there, at the Opéra the real Cairo, the immaculate Egypt, the Orient that escapes me here, and which smiles upon you with the rays of its divine eyes. Happy poet! You began by realising your Egypt in newspaper articles and books; today, painting, music, choreography hasten to capture in flight all you have dreamed; the genies of the Orient have never possessed more power. The work of the Pharaohs, the Caliphs and the Sultans disappears almost entirely beneath the dust raised by the *khamsin* (*the hot dry wind of North Africa and Arabia*) or beneath the hammer-blows dealt by a prosaic civilisation; but, beneath your gaze, oh magician, its animated ghost rises once more to recreate the palaces, gardens well-nigh real, and *peris* well-nigh ideal! It is in that Egypt that I still believe, not the other: moreover, the six months I have spent here are past; they are already nothing; I have seen a few more countries vanish thus, behind my steps, like theatre-scenery. What remains? An image, as confused as that of a dream: the best of what one finds there, I already knew by heart.'

The End of Gérard de Nerval's 'Travels in the Near East'