



THE MOORISH SULTAN AND HIS WOES



Heir to a Noble Heritage, He Made Himself So Obnoxious to His People That the Nation Lost Its Unity and Relapsed Into Brigandage

It is quite probable that the unhappiest and most disappointed man in Africa today is the absolute ruler of the Moors, Abdul Aziz. He has abundant reason. His ancestor, that Boshdu who was driven from the Alhambra by the united prowess of all Spain, was the victim of worse misdeeds more actual than those which are descending on Abdul Aziz and his race.

As in the case of the picturesque goodly, too, Spain is the thorn—of them, that is—which pierces his dusky manhood. It is Spain that has weakened from her lethargy and dispatched her standing army to assist in the preservation of order in the peninsula. It is Spain, of all the nations of Europe, that has taken upon herself the job of assisting France in her rather grotesque task of policing north Africa.

That of itself must be gall and wormwood to the soul of any Moor who knows aught of the history of his race. Between the Spaniard and the Moor there has been nothing but perpetual enmity. The prescribed form of daily prayer in the sultanate includes a special malediction against every dweller on the Spanish peninsula, and no devout Moor ever omits it. "Speedy destruction, O Allah, on all the prophet's enemies," it runs, "and first of all on the cursed Spaniards!" It is all on account of Abdul Aziz, and he cannot fail to realize it. The Moors, his subjects, have not changed. They are the most unchangeable people on the face of the earth. The civilization that would penetrate the savagery even of a south sea islander would fall powerless against the thick-skinned resistance of a north African Moor. This Moor is the same—



THE UNHAPPY SULTAN OF THE MOORS.

day, today and forever. All but Abdul—he is different.

He is not at all like his father, the sultan Mulai Hassan, typical Moorish hero and ruler, whose "throne was his horse, his canopy the sky." All who came in contact with this worthy descendant of the great Sidi Mohammed, the best beloved of Moorish sovereigns, were extravagant in their praise of him. He was described as a centaur when mounted, an Apollo—dusky, of course—when on foot. His days were passed in the saddle, and for more than half of his life he slept in a tent or in the open.

He was as wise as he was good to look upon. He made himself acquainted with every class and caste of his savage people. He knew their virtues; their failings were equally patent to him. He knew that no man who loved peace at any price could be potent in north Africa, and he kept at the head of his mounted hosts for at least six months of the year, never declining to take sides in a quarrel and never accepting a peace that did not bring advantage to his country. Mulai Hassan was the idol of his people. It did not detract from his nobility that he sometimes—quite

frequently, indeed—struck terrible blows and that offending heads fell and rebel blood was shed. In Morocco such matters are regarded as quite the proper thing. Full warrant for such heroic measures is to be found in the Koran. The Moor is not a critic of his holiest book. It has never occurred to him to doubt its authority. Hassan was a great sultan, and he was lamented sincerely, so universally and so truly, indeed, that it was evident that his successor would be obliged to do great things in order to walk acceptably in his footsteps.

Not one of the great things expected

of that successor has come to pass— from the popular Moorish viewpoint, that is. Abdul Aziz, to whom the paternal blessing was given by the Lord Hassan on his deathbed, has been a disappointment pure and simple from the first. He seems to have inherited nothing from his gallant father, not even the capacity of making friends. He is probably the most thoroughly disliked man in the sultanate today. He it is who is held responsible for the woes that have fallen on the heads of Islam in north Africa.

It is current belief among the various savage tribes of Berbers that the

Unlike Any Other Moor Who Ever Lived, Abdul Exchanged His Splendid Birthright For a Worthless Collection of Mechanical Toys

sultan has been bewitched, that he has become infatuated with the deadly virus which animates the enemies of the prophet. As a variant from the Moor of tradition and even from the Moor of ordinary acceptance he is certainly a unique specimen. Hating arms and having no love for the camp, he has permitted his sovereignty to become a fiction and his empire to slip away. The warlike tribes, which were held in awe and willing subjection by his masterful father, have relapsed into brigandage, and the outlying provinces make no pretense of obeying the mandates of the court.

A Splendid Heritage.

When Abdul came to the throne his empire was composed of the three considerable kingdoms of Fez, Morocco and Taflet. There was also the great province of Sus, held in fief by the rulers of Morocco and governed by a viceroy, usually a member of the reigning family. First came the practical annexation of the western Sudan by the French, and Abdul had no army to oppose the advance of the intruder. Heretofore their gallant leader, the 40,000 warriors who had upheld the banner of his father returned to their haunts in the Moroccan wilderness and entered on a life of pillage under the formidable Raisuli and other desperate leaders.

Meanwhile Abdul concerned himself but little over the condition of his empire. He made no secret of his admiration of things Caucasian, and his most poignant regret seemed to be that he could not get the money to buy every new mechanical device that made its appearance in the market. The bicycle in its various manifestations became his greatest joy, and he developed into an expert rider of the wheel. Regardless of the fact that

such a course must in the end precipitate his utter ruin, he squandered the national treasure in all manner of mechanical toys. In time every part of the royal palace bore evidence of the sultan's passion for such extravagances. Even the imperial audience chamber was converted into a storehouse for bicycles, music boxes and talking machines. At one time he was seized with a burning desire to experiment with gas ranges, and it is asserted that no less than thirty-six different makes were tried in rapid succession. Finally his Moslem cooks fled in dismay, and a French chef from Algeria was put in command of the royal kitchen.

At first the Moors were stunned into a benighted silence. The son of Mulai Hassan was held sacred by them in spite of his un-Moorish ways of conducting himself. An absolute sultan must show abundant signs of moral and mental shipwreck before his subjects feel justified in taking matters into their own hands. The sultan is not only their temporal lord and master; he is far more than that. He is the representative direct of the prophet, and that is the real secret of his power.

How He Punished the Kaid.

The graybeards of the inner circle at the Moorish capital tried to reconstitute with the young man, to bring him to a realization of what was expected of him. Later they pointed out to him the certain disaster that his course was inviting. When they became disagreeably insistent he drove them from his presence. It is related that on one occasion the Kaid El Meshwar, whose functions are those of a grand chamberlain, took upon himself the duty of advising his young master.

"Your loving subjects are stricken with grief over the strange foreign enchantment which binds you," the old man ventured.

"Do they dare to complain?" asked the sultan, who was deep in the mysteries of a huge orchestra which he had ordered made in Germany and had set up in his bedchamber.

"Some of them complain, my master," the kaid admitted.

The sultan shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Let those who do be given a taste of the bastinado," he said. "It will distract them from their grief. As for you, Meshwar!"

The aged servant buried his face in his spotless burnoose and prostrated himself.

"As for you, Meshwar," Abdul went on in a tone of great severity, "the punishment must be more decided. I shall see to it myself." Meshwar raised his head slowly until it had reached a proper angle for decapitation. With a laugh the sultan stepped quickly to the new orchestra and started it with "The Ride of the Valkyries."

J. C. WILLCOX.

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