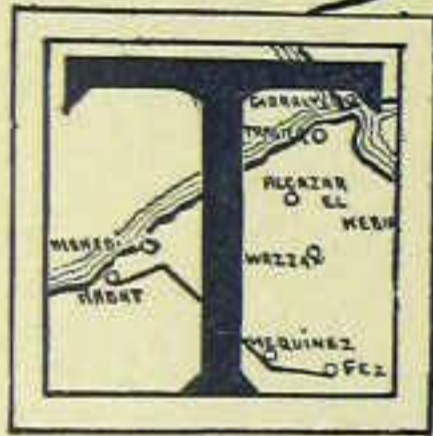
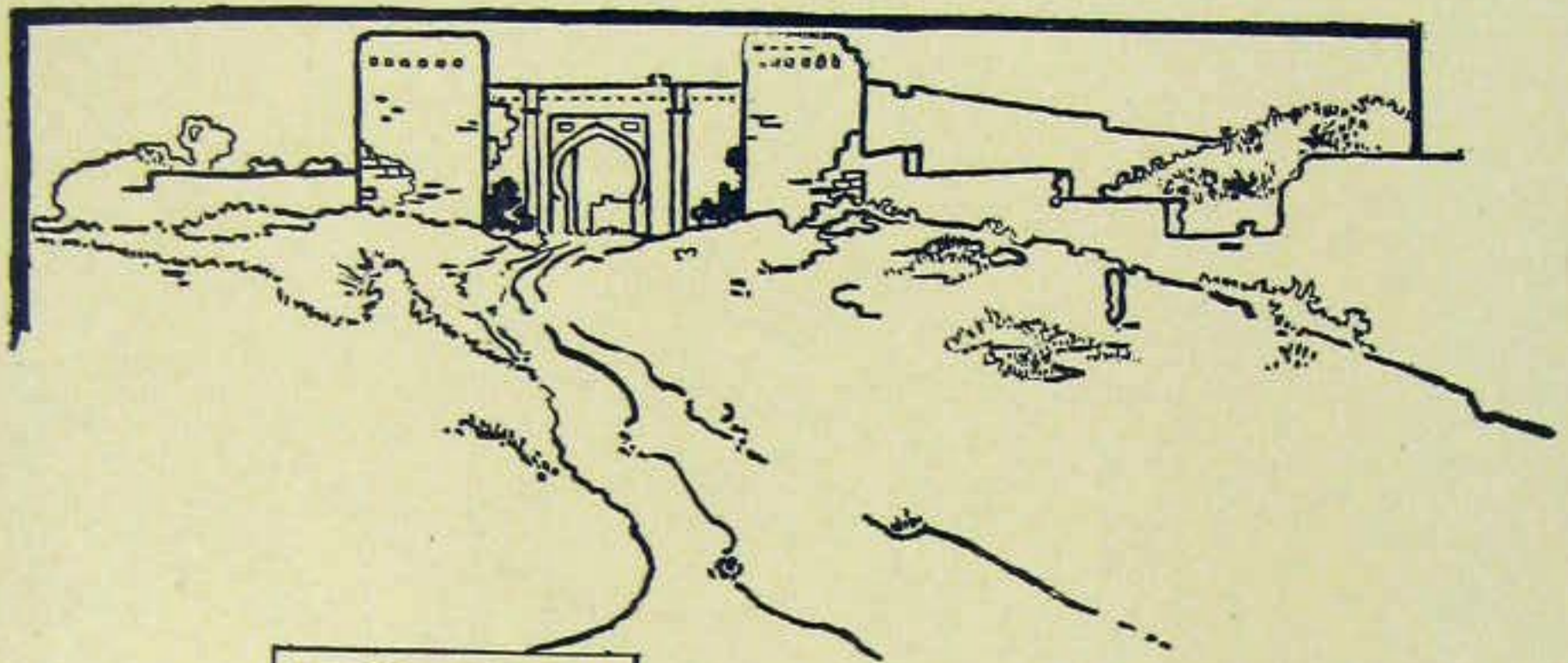




Benjamin Constant

LES DERNIERS REBELLES
(BENJAMIN CONSTANT)

THROUGH THE HEART OF THE MOORISH EMPIRE



THROUGH THE HEART OF THE MOORISH EMPIRE

THE spell of mystery is still upon Morocco. The Moors are still the people of romance. Of the land we know comparatively little ; of the race as it exists to-day we know still less. Christendom assumes that the Moorish Empire expired with the last sigh of Boabdil, leaving the Alhambra as its only legacy.

Almost novel is the thought that the Moors still live as a nation ; that Morocco is to-day what Spain would have become had the forces of the Prophet prevailed in the Peninsula. Who would not welcome as a precious privilege the possibility of turning back the pages of history in Spain, to revel in the actual Moorish life as it was lived before the Christian victories of 1492 ? Who would not gladly leave, at least for a short space, the familiar round of present-day

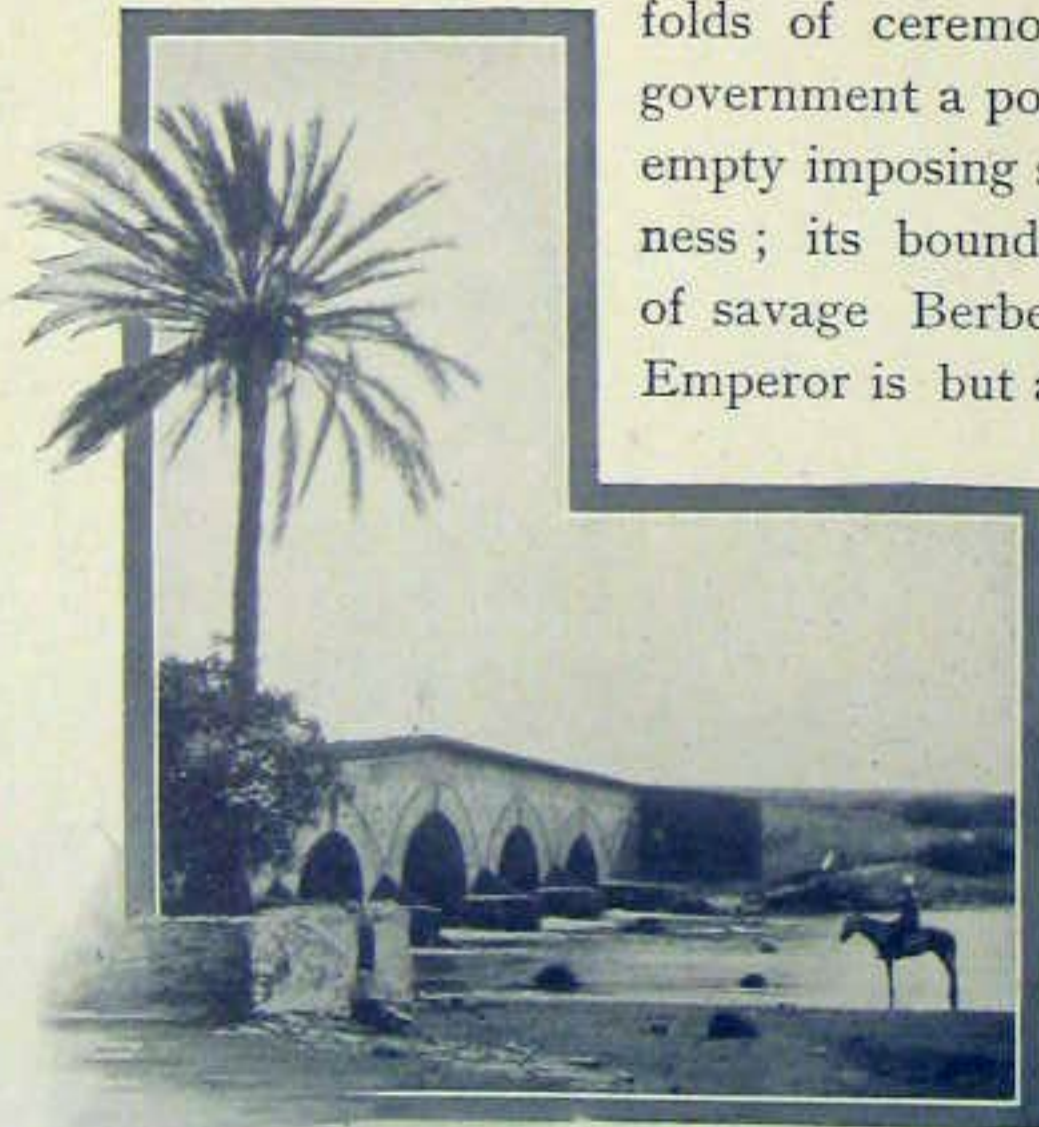
existence and the hackneyed paths of travel, to plunge into a past so picturesque, to see a civilization so refined and yet so utterly unlike our own? No reader of Washington Irving but has longed to people with white-clad cavaliers the courts on the Alhambra Hill, to hear the Arab accents in the streets of old Granada, or the murmuring of the Moslem prayers in the old mosques. But why persist in holding Spain to be the sole stage on which the Moors appropriately can play their parts?

Morocco was their home ere Spain was conquered for them. When Andalusia ungratefully cast out the race that brought it light and knowledge at a time when Europe groped in the blackness of deep ignorance, back to Morocco went the Empire of the Moors. Empires rise and fall. The Moorish Empire rose but did not fall; it was shaken but not shattered; it is still erect. It stands a living skeleton wrapt in the shroud of Islam, its hollowness concealed by the vague

folds of ceremonial observances; its government a pompous sham; its cities empty imposing shells of former greatness; its boundless plains the haunts of savage Berber tribes to whom the Emperor is but a name, the Empire a

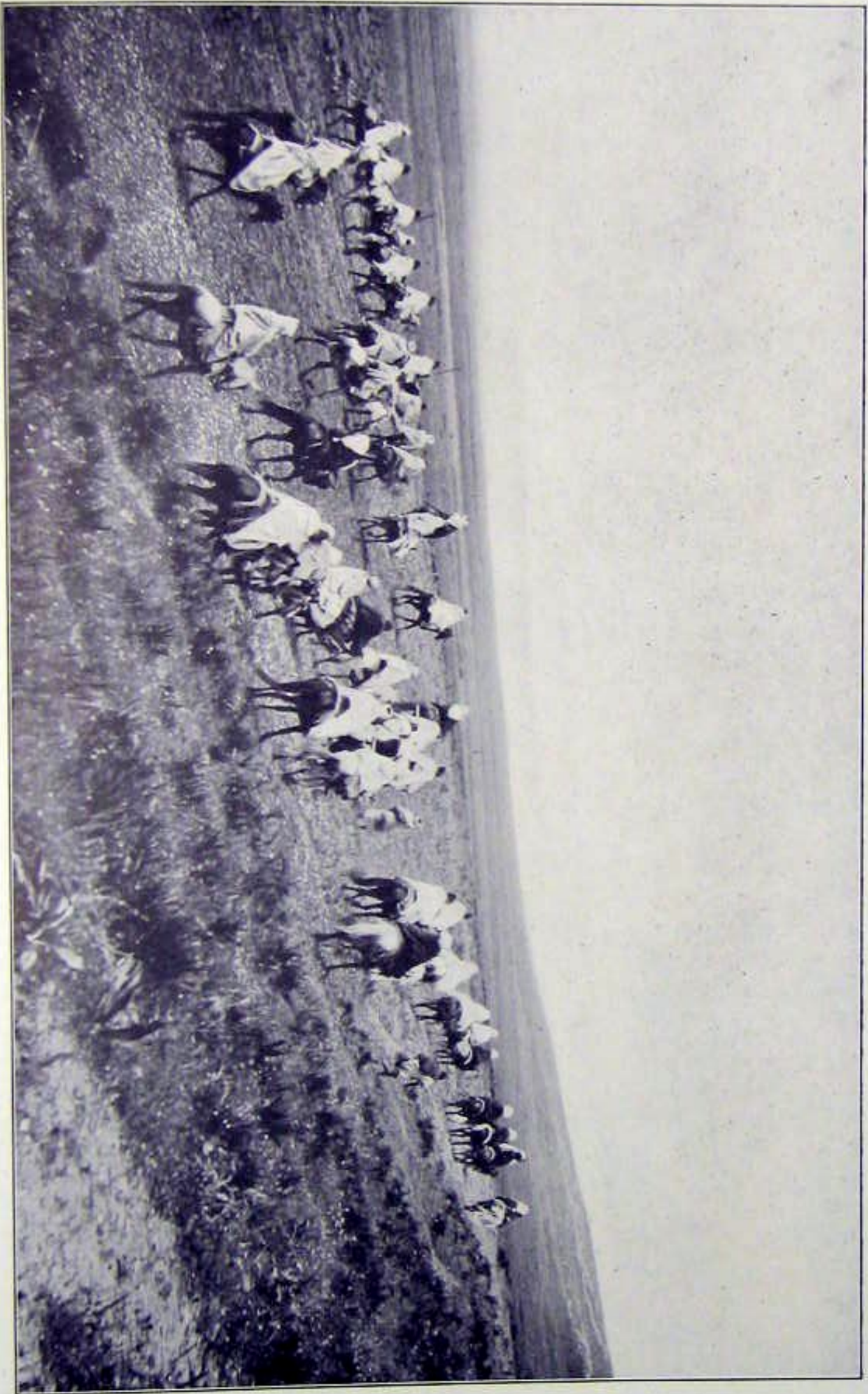
free space in which to ride broad-chested chargers and do battle with hereditary enemies.

In two preceding lectures I have told the story of a journey into Morocco, and of a sojourn in

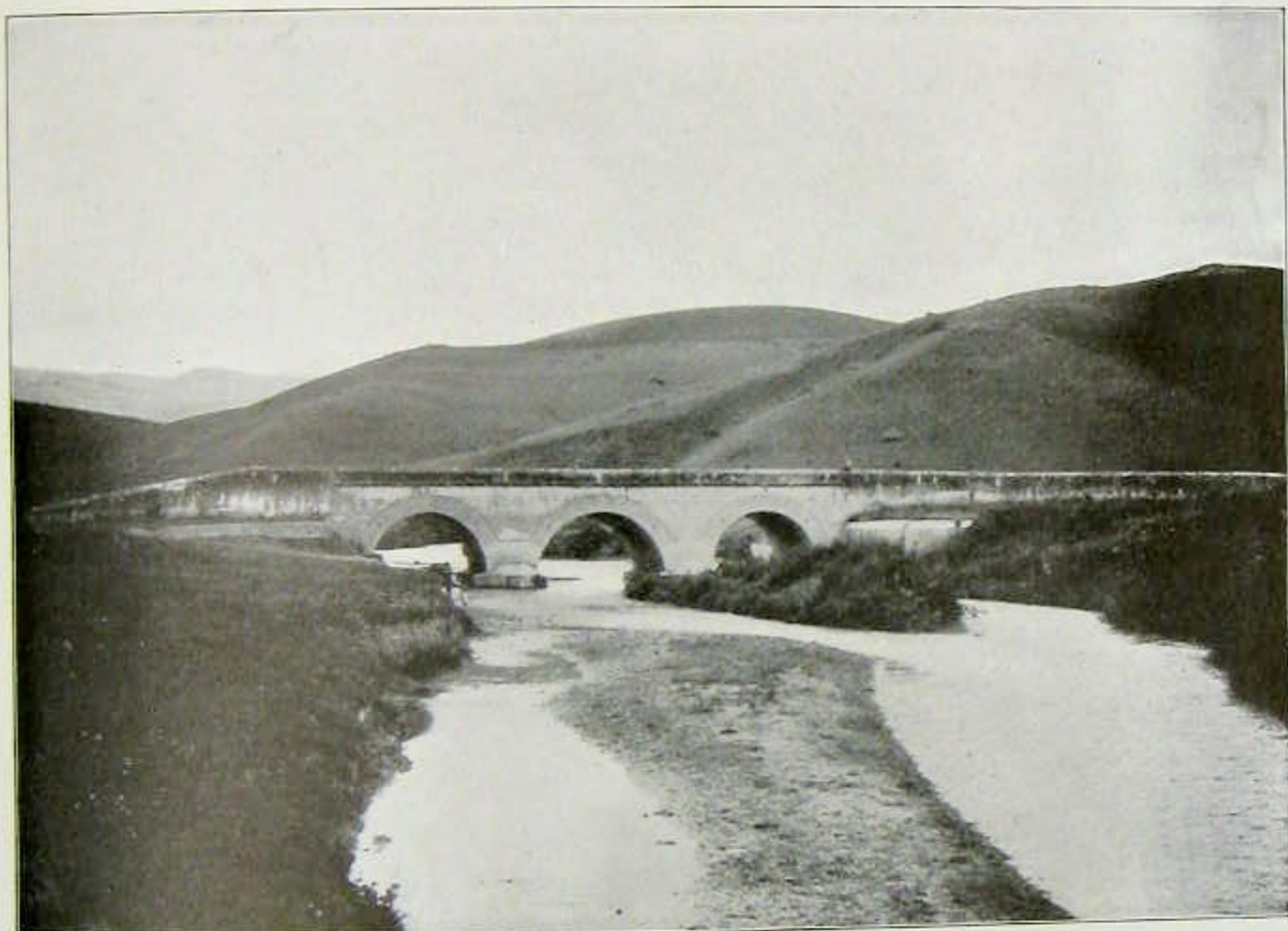


ON THE ROAD TO MEQUINEZ Fez, the metropolis

DIGNITARIES EN VOYAGE



of the Moors. There yet remains to tell a third, concluding chapter of the tale—the narrative of the return from Fez to the sea, from a remote yesterday back to the world of to-day. “Out of Morocco” would serve as an appropriate heading for this chapter,—a chapter rich in adventure and in picturesque experiences. For ten days we have dwelt in



BRIDGES COMPETE UNSUCCESSFULLY WITH FORDS

medieval Moslem Fez—unwelcome visitors, objects of suspicion to the jealous Moors.

Two routes are open to us—the direct road to Tangier and the less-frequented road to Rabat on the Atlantic Coast. Despite the protest of the authorities, who warn us of many dangers, we chose the road that leads westward to Mequinez, the Beni-Hasan Plain, and the Atlantic. But the word “road” must be regarded only in its Moroccan sense. As

has been said already, there are no roads in this wild land ; the slow caravans and the swift troops of Moorish horsemen have followed the hoofmarks left by the caravans or troops



MIDWAY BETWEEN FEZ AND MEQUINEZ

which have preceded them, until a system of narrow trails meandering in uncertain parallels has been created between the inland cities and the sea.

These Moorish highways were never surveyed and never tended ; like Topsy — who, also, by the way, was an African product — they were never born, “ they just grewed ; ” and like Topsy they are wilfully unreasonable ; they exasperate us by their defiance of conventionality ; amuse us with their peculiar antics, and delight us with preposterous surprises.

As an example, take the highway that leads from Fez to the neighboring city of Mequinez. As we approach a river,

the wandering trails converge and form a beaten track that grows more and more like a real road as it winds down toward a substantial bridge. But just as we are about to compliment the road on its reform, it suddenly grows weary of good behavior, becomes rebellious, and, like a balky mule, refuses to cross the bridge. Incredible as it may seem to those who do not know this land of contradictions, Moorish roads will not cross Moorish rivers by means of Moorish bridges. The old way is preferred. Fording was good enough in the old days, and it is good enough to-day. The roads turn sharply from the bridge abutments, scramble down the muddy banks, and plunge into the yellow rivers to emerge slimy and dripping on the opposite shore. The bridges, ponderously useless, studiously neglected, are falling into decay, and have become almost impassable.

We pitch our camp not far from one of those disdained reminders of an attempt at progress. We are midway between Fez and Mequinez in a region notorious because of the thieving bands with which it is infested. It appears



MIDDAY REPOSE

wholly unpeopled ; yet we are not without misgivings, for, of our caravan, four mules and two men have gone astray. With us are Haj, the dragoman, Achmedo, the valet, and the muleteers, Abuktayer and Bokhurmur. The missing are Kaid Lharbi, the military escort, and the new packer who joined our force in Fez. We have our tent and Haj's kitchen ; the other tents and all the supplies and furniture are in the packs of the missing mules somewhere on this gloomy plain, possibly already become the loot of some lawless sheik, or, as we hope, merely delayed because of broken harness, or gone astray because of a mistaken trail. Our groundless fears are set at rest an hour later by the safe arrival of the precious convoy, and once more our palates are delighted by the delicious dinner cooked by Haj, our thirst quenched by cooled oranges, and our weary bodies laid to rest upon our comfortable camp-cots.



WIFE, CHILD, AND SLAVE.

After the confinement incident to our residence in city quarters, the free life of the plains is doubly exhilarating, and we find intense pleasure in the satisfaction of the simple, keen desires to eat, drink, and sleep. All food is good, all drink is better, sleep the sweetest gift of the gods.



"YO SOY CHINO, SEÑOR"

The morning finds us early in the saddle; four hours' westward progress brings us at noon to one of those rare oases of shadow in this bare land of sunshine. Here hunger, thirst, and weariness are again assuaged by food and drink and sleep. Sharp darts of brilliant, blinding sunshine burn through the leafy masses of the two fig-trees, and with almost malicious persistence pursue the would-be slumberer, who, to avoid this, must every now and then crawl after the receding shadows.

But we are not the only travelers who have sought mid-day shelter in this forest. On our approach we were greeted by a family group, — a man and woman with a little child, and a black slave. To our surprise the man addressed us in Spanish: —

"Buenos dias, Señor, habla usted Español?"

“*Si, Señor, un poco,*” we reply, and then begins an interesting conversation.

“Where are your animals?” we ask.

“Stolen with all my goods, last night,” he answers. “We must now go on foot to Fez to report our loss to the authorities.”

We learn that our unfortunate friend is a maker of sausage cases, that he lives in Mequinez, and that he is hospitably inclined; for in return for our sympathy, he begs us to make use of his house in Mequinez, where another of his wives will welcome us and give us food and lodging.

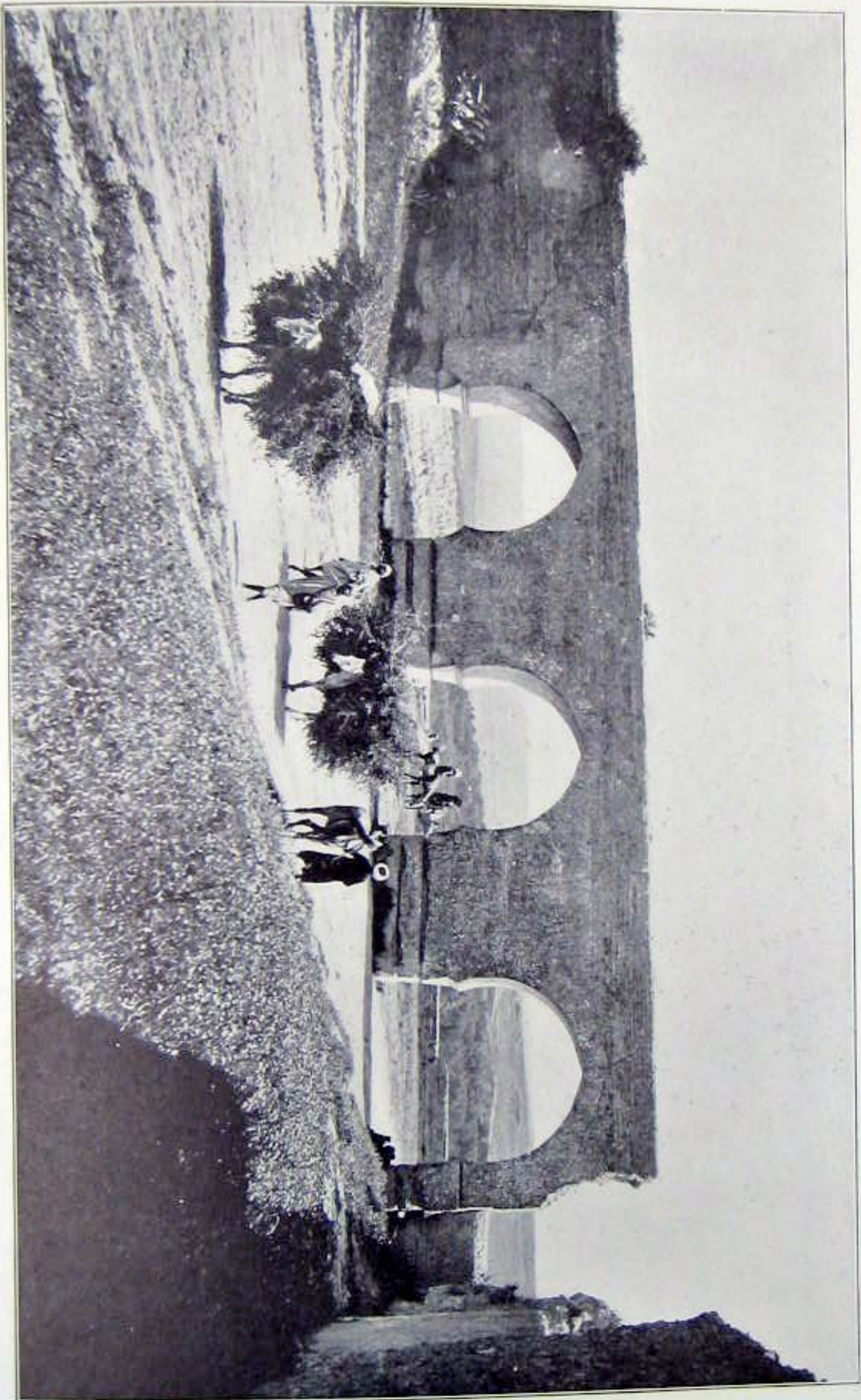


OUR DUSKY CHARGE

This strange offer of hospitality, coupled with a something in the man's expression leads me to say, “But, Señor, you are not like a Moor.”

“Why should I be?” he smilingly asks. “*Yo, yo soy Chino.*” “I, I am a Chinese.”

WALLS THAT DO NOT KEEP EVEN THE SUNSHINE OUT



He is the happy father of a dainty little girl, a type of Chinese beauty, and two lusty boys, who bear upon their faces maps of Peking and Canton. The negress, his slave, he is sending back to Mequinez with tidings of his loss. Haj,



MULAI ISMAIL'S WALL

with Occidental gallantry, offers the dusky damsel his place on a pack-mule, and after the exchange of many kindnesses our little company, made up of individuals so diverse in race, in language, and in thought, breaks up.

Our Chinese Moor with wife and child go trudging off toward Fez, while the American caravan with its Arab escort and African passenger moves toward the other great interior city, Mequinez. Long before we come in sight of Mequinez, we find our progress barred by a huge wall forty feet or more in height, stretching away in two directions as far as the eye



WANDERING WALLS

can reach. But there are ogive archways, through which our caravan passes as freely as the sunshine or the breeze. There are no gates, no guards, to hinder us. On we file across vacant fields until we reach a second wall as forbidding as the first and apparently as interminable.

“What are these walls?” we ask. “Why were they built? what purpose can they serve?”

And Haj tells us that they were reared to protect the city from the turbulent surrounding tribes, to cut off, if need be, the approach of hostile bands.

A third wall, wide and high, beginning at the city gate wanders away toward the south, its utility not easily divined. As we trace its curving course over a distant ridge, we think of the Roman aqueducts in the Campagna, and of the great wall of China, for this unknown Moorish work vies with those famous masses of masonry in impressiveness of aspect if not in hugeness and in length of years. It was the creation of the crazy Sultan, Mulai Ismail, a contemporary of Louis XIV, of France, a Moorish emperor who suffered from a mania for masonry, and made his people suffer that he might satisfy his madness for works of colossal inutility.

One of his wildest projects was the building of an elevated boulevard, two hundred miles in length, along which he could ride from Mequinez to Morocco City, safe from the attack of the rebellious tribesmen who hold the intervening provinces.

The huge north gate of this his favored city appears to us as we approach late in the afternoon like the entrance to some "mysterious nowhere." It seems to be a portal to the empty sky, a door through which the traveler might pass into the infinity of space. It is, in fact, the gate of an almost deserted metropolis, a city that was built for a population of one hundred thousand and contains to-day less than six thousand souls. Small wonder that we find it empty and forsaken in aspect as we pass from court to court and through gate after gate. There are in Mequinez more houses vacant than occupied, more roofs fallen than intact, more palaces in ruins than huts in good repair. The Sultan is forced to maintain a palace here, for Mequinez ranks with



LIKE THE PORTAL TO A "MYSTERIOUS NOWHERE"



THE SULTAN'S PALACE — MEQUINEZ

Fez and Morocco City as one of the three capitals of the Moorish Empire, each city jealous of its dignity as the abode of the Imperial master.

The Sultan always dwells amid the wreck of ages. The snow-white palace of the actual sovereign may be seen rising above the crumbling walls of the Imperial Garden. Around



"THROUGH GATE AFTER GATE"

