Scenes in FEZ

Dickering for Wool in a Fez Market.

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YOU may stroll through the narrow lanes of Canton, the broad streets of Peiping, the bazaars of Cairo and Stamboul, the climbing alleys of Algiers, and the vaulted souks of Tunis; but Fez, Morocco, so near to the Atlantic ocean, no doubt will seem to you the most oriental city of them all.

A few years ago, it would surprise a visitor to see any but Moor, Jew, or Negro in the crowded souks of Fez. To discover a French officer was a novelty. And it was stranger still to behold a well-dressed European girl standing before a silk merchant's booth calmly feeling a length of shining material between finger and thumb.

But now, sightseers are not so rare. Alien women wander safely through the dim and crowded alleys of Fez, where, two dozen years ago, France's sons — officers, soldiers, and civilians — were cruelly massacred. Yet this change has been achieved without harshness or injustice to the native inhabitants. Their prejudices are deferred to, their religion and customs not interfered with. No Christians may enter their mosques. No sight-seeing European is allowed to visit their beautiful theological colleges, by the resident general's orders, because of some visitors' irreverent behavior.

There are the shops of the sellers of gold-embroidered belts for women—beautiful girdles, two or three inches broad, of padded velvet heavily worked in gold wire. There are the venders of leather articles—large, square, red bags with rings by which they are slung like satchels over the shoulders; long fringed bags stamped in quaint designs or worked with colored thread; purses, notecases, triple-folding and adorned with cut-out designs on a colored background. Most of these leather articles smell like polecats!

Buying Heelless Slippers.

In the Street of the Slipper Sellers are stacked columns of heelless babouches, some with fronts beautifully ornamented with gold, silver, or silk embroidery; others just plain yellow leather down-at-heel slippers. This Eastern footgear is so speedily worn out that the trade in it should be lucrative. You may chance upon a wild rush of men crowding about some shops, clamorous and holding out eager hands to snatch at long lengths of babouches thrust one within another. Then you will see them scurrying from these wholesale establishments, for such these booths are, to the shops of the retail merchants.

One rushes up to the grave, bearded vender sitting cross-legged on his counter-shop floor, and thrusts a yard of yellow slippers at him. The retail man looks at them languidly, shakes his head, and the middleman hurries on to the next, to be succeeded by another and another until the squatting figure in the square pigeonhole makes his purchase to replenish his stock.

Such a scene, and an excited mob of women at an open-air auction of wool mattresses screaming out offers, are the two most animated glimpses of native life that the souks can give.

The Street of the Coppersmiths resounds with the musical clang of their hammers on the rounded pots. The Street of the Silk Sellers glows with color. The Street of the Brass Workers shines with the golden brightness of the artistically shaped vessels, huge kettles, the stemmed banqueting dishes with their tall conical covers, and the hanging lamps with colored glass sides.

Then there is the Street of the Dyers. Half - naked figures, faces, arms, and bodies stained all colors, stir big earthenware pots of bright-hued liquids, dip into them or haul out cloths, masses of silk thread, or lengths of flimsy material.

The camera rarely can help the pen in depicting the quaint native life in the souks, so gloomy are they under the shading mattings overhead, so incessant the coming and going of the passing throngs that will not halt their hurrying steps.

Beautiful Mosque

There are things of greater moment in Fez than the varied crowds and the fascinating souks. A sudden turn in a narrow covered lane, and you see a wide-open arched door that gives a view into a marvelous mosque, the Karouiine. A vestibule glowing with bright-tiled walls and floor, a broad central tiled court, a graceful fountain spouting water, a forest of carved pillars—270 of them—with their long vistas showing masses of white and black.

There white - robed men kneel, swaying forward and back together, bending until their foreheads touch the tiled pavement, rising to their feet, bowing, sinking to their knees again, prostrating themselves with faces to the ground—all in perfect unison. And never a sound! Picture the scene on a Friday when fifteen or twenty thousand Moslem men fill this great mosque.

Women are not admitted, except into a corner of it. But you will see them come to the gateways—there are fourteen of these—and, putting their heads timidly just inside, kiss the lintels of the open doors.

The Karouiine mosque was begun in the Ninth century and finished in the Eleventh; but successive sultans further embellished it. One of its gates, covered with bronze ornaments, dates from 1136. Besides serving as a place of worship, it is the seat of the Fez Mohammedan university, to which hundreds of students from all parts of Morocco flock to study theology, grammar, Moslem law and jurisprudence from its renowned professors.

There are many other mosques in Fez, but none can compare with this, the largest in Africa.

Madrasahs, ecclesiastical colleges, and Zaouias, seats of religious confraternities, abound. The former are generally housed in beautiful buildings. The bronze gates and the tiled halls and courts are all that can be seen by the Infidel now, unless he be highly favored.

The many fonduks dotted about the capital, like the caravansaries of farther East, are the oriental equivalents of our hotels. Many are architecturally fine and date back hundreds of years.

Only Hotels Are Fonduks.

You enter one through a massive gateway leading into a square courtyard surrounded by two or three-storied buildings. On the ground floor are lock-up shops in which the traveling merchant can display and sell the goods he has brought, perhaps from distant lands. Carved wood galleries run round the upper stories and off them open rooms in which the wayfarer can lodge until he has sold off his stock or finished his business and is ready for the road again. No food is supplied.

The common fonduk has stables on the ground floor or else the travelers' horses, mules, camels, and donkeys are picketed round the court, making the place noisome with stench.

A curious relic of the past is to be seen on the front of one of the houses in the Tala Souk. From the ornamented plaster and wood facade jut out thirteen carved wooden beams; on the end of each rests a large green bronze flattened bowl or gong. Above each is a narrow window in alignment. All these are supposed to have formed part of a timepiece constructed in 1357 and are called in consequence "the Clock of Bou Inania."

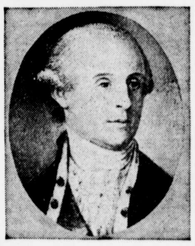
Through Fez rushes tumultuously the little River Fez. You will cross it over one bridge in the heart of the city without noticing it; for the bridge is lined with shops and seems just part of an ordinary souk. For a space the stream runs swift in a deep chasm of blank-walled houses. From the garden of one a solitary date palm rises, sharply outlined against the sky.

Plenty of Water There.

The city seems well supplied with water, which rushes noisily underground down the steep slopes; and you wonder how the water carriers do such a good trade with their skin bags and the two bright brass cups linked by a chain to their belts. For all day long you see them giving drink to the pigeonhole shopkeepers and the passers-by.

In a little recess in the wall beside the door of a dentist's house (you cannot fail to recognize the abode of an Arab tooth-drawer, for he displays a small glass case filled with molars and grinders that he has pulled) a column of clear water bubbles up fiercely like a geyser. It gushes out of the spouts of the tiled wall fountains; sparkling jets shoot up in the marble basins in the courts of the mosques; it flows freely into the rectangular stone baths at the doors of the sacred buildings where the Faithful perform their ablutions before entering to pray.

Washington at 25



WHEN George Washington sat for this rare miniature, he was only twenty-five but he was already well on the way toward becoming Virginia's first citizen. His marriage to Martha, the wealthy widow of Daniel Custis, in 1759 and the death of his half brother, Lawrence, made George at twenty-nine perhaps the richest man in Virginia and certainly one of the richest in America. But before that—in his early twenties—he had made his mark as a soldier who could combine reckless courage with thoughtful purpose.

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