Dimoussi and the Pistol

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I

IN the maps of Morocco you will see, stretching southwards of the city of Mequinez, a great tract of uncharted country. It is lawless and forbidden land. Even the Sultan Mulai el Hassen, that great fighter, omitted it from his expeditions.

But certain tribes are known to inhabit it, such as the Beni M'tir, and certain villages can be assigned a locality, such as Agurai, which lies one long day's journey from the Renegade's Gate of Mequinez.

At Agurai Dimoussi was born, and lived for the first fifteen years of his life—Dimoussi the Englishman, as he was called, though in features and colour he had the look of an Arab with just a strain of Negro blood.

At the age of fifteen a desire to see the world laid hold upon Dimoussi. As far as the eye could see from any mound about the village, there stretched on every side a rolling plain, silent and empty. Hardly a bird sang in the air above it; and everywhere it was dark with bushes wherein the flowers of asphodel gleamed pale and small.

Dimoussi wearied of the plain. One thin, reddish line meandered uncertainly from north to south, a stone's throw from the village, where the feet of men and mules passing at rare intervals through many centuries had beaten down a path. Along this path Dimoussi allowed his fancies to carry him into a world of enchantment; and one spring morning his feet carried him along it, too.

For half a dozen men of the Beni M'tir carrying almonds and walnuts into Mequinez happened to pass Agurai at a moment when Dimoussi was watching, and his mother was at work on a patch of tilled ground out of sight. Dimoussi had no other parent than his mother.

He ran into the hut, with its tent roof of sacking and its sides of rough hurdles, which was his home, searched in a corner for a big brass-barrelled pistol which had long been the pride of the establishment, and, hiding it under his ragged jellaba, he ran down the track and joined himself on to the tiny caravan. The next morning he came to Mequinez, where he parted company with the tribesmen.

Dimoussi had not so much as a copper flouss upon him, but, on the other hand, he had a pistol and the whole world in front of him. And what reasonable boy could want more? All that day he wandered about the streets, gaping at the houses, at the towers of the mosques, and at the stalls in the markets, but as the afternoon declined, hunger got hold of him. His friends of yesterday had vanished. Somehow he must get food.

He fingered the pistol under his jellaba irresolutely. He walked along a street which he came to know afterwards as the Sôk Kubba. In the middle was built a square tent of stone with an open arch at each side and a pointed roof of fluted tiles trailed over by a vine. Just beyond this stone tent the street narrowed, and on the left-hand side a man who sold weapons squatted upon the floor of a dark booth.

„How much?“ asked Dimoussi, producing his pistol, but loth to let it go.

The shopman looked at Dimoussi, and looked at the pistol. Then he tossed it carelessly behind him into the litter of his booth.

„It is no good. As sure as my name is Mustapha, it would not kill a rabbit. But see! My heart is kind. I will give you three dollars.“

He counted them out. Dimoussi stolidly shook his head. „Seven,“ said he.

Mustapha reached behind him for the pistol, and flung it down at Dimoussi‘s feet.

„Take it away!“ said he. „I will not haggle with foolish boys who have stolen a thing of no value, and wish to sell it at a great price. Take it away! Yet, out of my charity, I will give you four dollars.“

„Five,“ said Dimoussi.

And five he received.

He bought rice and eggs in the market, and turned under an old archway of green tiles into the Fondak Henna. There he cooked his food at a fire, ate, and proposed to sleep.

But Fate had laid her hand upon Dimoussi. He slept not at all that night. He sat with his back propped against the filigree plaster of one of the pillars, and listened to a Moor of the Sherarda tribe, who smoked keef and talked until morning.

„Yes,“ said the Sherarda man, „I have travelled far and wide. Now I go to my own village of Sigota, on Jebel Zarhon.“

„Have you been to Fez?“ asked Dimoussi eagerly.

„I have lived in Fez. I served in the army of my lord the Sultan until I was bored with it. It is a fine town and a large one. The river flows in a hundred streams underneath the houses. In every house there is running water. But it is nothing to the town of Mulai Idris.“

Dimoussi clasped his hands about his knees.

„Oh, tell me! Tell me!“ he cried so loudly that in the shadows of the Fondak men stirred upon their straw and cursed him.

„I have also travelled to Rabat, a great town upon the sea, whither many consools come in fireships. A great town draped with flowers and cactus. But it is nothing to Mulai Idris. There are no consools in Mulai Idris.“

All through his talk the name of Mulai Idris, the sacred city on the slope of Jebel Zarhon, came and went like a shuttle of a loom.

The Sherarda Moor thought highly of the life in Mulai Idris, since it was possible to live there without work.

Pilgrims came to visit the shrine of the founder of the Moorish Empire, with offerings in their hands; and the whole township lived, and lived well, upon those offerings. Moreover, there were no Europeans, or „consools,“ as he termed them.

The Moor spoke at length, and with hatred, of the Europeans—pale, ungainly creatures in ridiculous clothes, given over to the devil, people with a clever knack

of invention, no doubt, in the matter of firearms and cameras and spy-glasses, but, man for man, no match for any Moor.

„Only three cities are safe from them now in all Morocco: Sheshawan in the north, Tafilat in the south, and Mulai Idris. But Mulai Idris is safest. Once a party of them—Englishmen—came rising up the steep road to the gate even there, but from the walls we stoned them back. God's curse on them! Let them stay at home! But they must always be pushing somewhere."

Dimoussi, recognising in himself a point of kinship with the „consools," said gravely:

„I am an Englishman."

The Sherarda man laughed, as though he had heard an excellent joke, and continued to discourse upon the splendours of Mulai Idris until the sleepers waked in their corners, and the keeper flung open the door, and the grey daylight crept into the Fondak.

„Oh, tell me!" said Dimoussi. „The city is far from here?"

„Set out now. You will be in Mulai Idris before sunset."

Dimoussi rose to his feet.

„I will go to Mulai Idris," said he, and he went out into the cool, clear air. The Sherarda Moor accompanied Dimoussi to the Bordain Gate, and there they parted company, the boy going northward, the Moor following the eastward track towards Fez. He had done his work, though what he had done he did not know.

At noon Dimoussi came out upon a high tableland, as empty as the plains which stretched about his native Agurai. Far away upon his left the dark, serrated ridge of Jebel Gerouan stood out against the sky. Nearer to him upon his right rose the high rock of Jebel Zarhon. In some fold of that mountain lay this fabulous city of Mulai Idris.

Dimoussi walked forward, a tiny figure in that vast solitude. There were no villages, there were no trees anywhere. The plateau extended ahead of him like a softly heaving sea, as far as the eye could reach. It was covered with bushes in flower; and here and there an acre of marigolds or a field of blue lupins decked it out, as though someone had chosen to make a garden there.

Then suddenly upon Dimoussi's right the hillside opened, and in the recess he saw Mulai Idris, a city high-placed and dazzlingly white, which tumbled down the hillside like a cascade divided at its apex by a great white mosque.

The mosque was the tomb of Mulai Idris, the founder of the empire. Dimoussi dropped upon his knees and bowed his forehead to the ground. „Mulai Idris," he whispered, in a voice of exaltation. Yesterday he had never even heard the name of the town. To-day the mere sight of it lifted him into a passion of fervour.

Those white walls masked a crowded city of filth and noisome smells. But Dimoussi walked on air; and his desire to see more of the world died away altogether.

He was in the most sacred place in all Morocco; and there he stayed. There was no need for him to work. He had the livelong day wherein to store away in his heart the sayings of his elders. And amongst those sayings there was not one that he heard more frequently than this:

„There are too many Europeans in Morocco."

Fanaticism was in the very stones of the town. Dimoussi saw it shining sombrely in the eyes of the men who paced and rode about the streets; he felt it behind the impassivity of their faces. It came to him as an echo of their constant prayers. Dimoussi began to understand it.

Once or twice he saw the Europeans during that spring. For close by in the plain a great stone arch and some broken pillars showed where the Roman city of Volubilis had stood. And by those ruins once or twice a party of Europeans encamped.

Dimoussi visited each encampment, begged money of the „consools," and watched with curiosity the queer mechanical things they carried with them—their cameras, their weapons, their folding mirrors, their brushes and combs. But on each visit he became more certain that there were too many Europeans in Morocco.

„A djehad is needed," said one of the old men sitting outside the gate—„a holy war—to exterminate them."

„It is not easy to start a djehad," replied Dimoussi.

The elders stroked their beards and laughed superciliously.

„You are young and foolish, Dimoussi. A single shot from a gun, and all Moghrebbin is in flame."

„Yes; and he that fired the shot certain of Paradise."

Not one of them had thought to fire the shot. They were chatterers of vain words. But the words sank into Dimoussi's mind; for Dimoussi was different. He began to think, as he put it; as a matter of fact, he began to feel.

He went up to the tomb of Mulai Idris, bribed the guardian, who sat with a wand in the court outside the shrine, to let him pass, and for the first time in his life stood within the sacred place. The shrine was dark, and the ticking of the clocks in the gloom filled Dimoussi's soul with awe and wonderment.

For the shrine was crowded with clocks: grandfather clocks with white faces, and gold faces, and enamelled faces, stood side by side along the walls, marking every kind of hour. Eight-day clocks stood upon pedestals and niches; and the whole room whirred, and ticked, and chimed; never had Dimoussi dreamed of anything so marvellous. There were glass balls, too, dangling from the roof on silver strings, and red baize hanging from the tomb.

Dimoussi bowed his head and prayed for the djehad. And as he prayed in that dark and solitary place there came to him an inspiration. It seemed that Mulai Idris himself laid his hand upon the boy's head. It needed only one man, only one shot to start the djehad. He raised his head and all the ticking clocks cried out to him: „Thou art the man." Dimoussi left the shrine with his head high in the air and a proudness in his gait. For he had his mission.

Thereafter he lay in wait upon the track over the plain to Mequinez, watching the north and the south for the coming of the traveller.

During the third week of his watching he saw advancing along the track mules carrying the baggage of Europeans. Dimoussi crouched in the bushes and let them pass with the muleteers. A good way behind them the Europeans rode slowly upon horses. As they came opposite to Dimoussi, one, a dark, thin man, stretched out his arm and, turning to his companion, said:

„Challoner, there is Mulai Idris."

At once Dimoussi sprang to his feet. He did not mean to be robbed of his great privilege. He shook his head.

„Lar, lar!“ he cried. „Bad men in Mulai Idris. They will stone you. You go to Mequinez.“

The man who had already spoken laughed.

„We are not going to Mulai Idris,“ he replied. He was a man named Arden who had spent the greater part of many years in Morocco, going up and down that country in the guise of a Moor, and so counterfeiting accent, and tongue, and manners, that he had even prayed in their mosques and escaped detection.

„You are English?“ asked Dimoussi.

„Yes. Come on, Challoner!“

And then, to his astonishment, as his horse stepped on, Dimoussi cried out actually in English:

„One, two, three, and away!“

Arden stopped his horse.

„Where did you learn that?“ he asked; and he asked in English.

But Dimoussi had spoken the only five words of English he knew, and even those he did not understand.

Arden repeated the question in Arabic; and Dimoussi answered with a smile:

„I, too, am English.“

„Oh! are you?“ said Arden, with a laugh; and he rode on. „These Moors love a joke. He learned the words over there, no doubt, from the tourists at Volubilis. Do you see those blocks of stone along the track?“

„Yes,“ answered Challoner. „How do they come there?“

„Old Mulai Ismail, the sultan, built the great palace at Mequinez two hundred years ago from the ruins of Volubilis. These stones were dragged down by the captives of the Salee pirates.“

„And by the English prisoners from Tangier?“ said Challoner suddenly.

„Yes,“ replied Arden with some surprise, for there was a certain excitement in his companion‘s voice and manner. „The English were prisoners until the siege ended, and we gave up Tangier and they were released. When Mulai Ismail died, all these men dragging stones just dropped them and left them where they lay by the track. There they have remained ever since. It‘s strange, isn‘t it?“

„Yes,“ said Challoner thoughtfully. He was a young man with the look of a student rather than a traveller. He rode slowly on, looking about him, as though at each turn of the road he expected to see some Englishman in a tattered uniform of the Tangier Foot leaning upon a block of masonry and wiping the sweat from his brow.

„Two of my ancestors were prisoners here in Mequinez,“ he said. „They were captured together at the fall of the Henrietta Fort in 1680, and brought up here to work on Mulai Ismail‘s palace. It‘s strange to think that they dragged these stones down this very track. I don‘t suppose that the country has changed at all. They must have come up from the coast by the same road we followed, passed the same villages, and heard the pariah dogs bark at night just as we have done.“

Arden glanced in surprise at his companion.

„I did not know that. I suppose that is the reason why you wish to visit Mequinez?“

Challoner‘s sudden desire to travel inland to this town had been a mystery to Arden. He knew Challoner well, and knew him for a dilettante, an amiable amateur of the arts, a man always upon the threshold of a new interest, but never by any chance on the other side of the door, and, above all, a stay-at-home. Now the reason was explained.

„Yes,“ Challoner admitted. „I was anxious to see Mequinez.“

„Both men came home when peace was declared, I suppose?“ said Arden.

„No. Only one came home, James Challoner. The other, Luke, turned renegade to escape the sufferings of slavery, and was never allowed to come back. The two men were brothers.

„I discovered the story by chance. I was looking over the papers in the library one morning, in order to classify them, and I came across a manuscript play written by a Challoner after the Restoration. Between the leaves of the play an old, faded letter was lying. It had been written by James, on his return, to Luke‘s wife, telling her she would never see Luke again. I will show you the letter this evening.“

„That‘s a strange story,“ said Arden. „Was nothing heard of Luke afterwards?“

„Nothing. No doubt he lived and died in Mequinez.“

Challoner looked back as he spoke. Dimoussi was still standing amongst the bushes watching the travellers recede from him. His plan was completely formed. There would be a djehad to-morrow, and the honour of it would belong to Dimoussi of Agurai.

He felt in the leathern wallet which swung at his side upon a silk orange-coloured cord. He had ten dollars in that wallet. He walked in the rear of the travellers to Mequinez, and reached the town just before sunset. He went at once to the great square by the Renegade‘s Gate, where the horses are brought to roll in the dust on their way to the watering fountain.

There were many there at the moment; and the square was thick with dust like a mist.

But, through the mist, in a corner, Dimoussi saw the tents of the travellers, and, in front of the tents, from wall to wall, a guard of soldiers sitting upon the ground in a semicircle.

Dimoussi was in no hurry. He loitered there until darkness followed upon the sunset, and the stars came out.

He saw lights burning in the tents, and, through the open doorway one, the man who had spoken to him, Arden, stretched upon a lounge-chair, reading a paper which he held in his hand.

Dimoussi went once more to the Fondak Henna, and made up for the wakeful night he had passed here with a Moor of the Sherarda tribe by sleeping until morning with a particular soundness.

II

The paper which Arden was reading was the faded letter written at „Berry Street, St. James's" on April 14, 1684, by the James Challoner who had returned to the wife of Luke Challoner who had turned renegade.

Arden took a literal copy of that letter; and it is printed here from that copy:

Berry Street, St. James's,
April 14, 1684.

My dear Pamela,

I have just now come back from Whitehall, where I was most graciously received by his Majestie, who asked many questions about our sufferings among the Moors, and promised rewards with so fine a courtesy and condescension that my four years of slavery were all forgotten. Indeed, my joy would have been rare, but I knew that the time would come when I must go back to my lodging and write to you news that will go near to break your heart. Why did my brother not stay quietly at home with his wife, at whose deare side his place was? But he must suddenlie leave his house, and come out to his younger brother at Tangier, who was never more sorry to see any man than I was to see Luke. For we were hard pressed: the Moors had pushed their trenches close under our walls, and any night the city might fall. And now I am come safely home, though there is no deare heart to break for me, and Luke must for ever stay behind. For that is the bitter truth. We shall see noe more of Luke, and you, my deare, are widowed and yet no widow. Oh, why did you let him goe, knowing how quick he is to take fire, and how quick to cool? I, too, am to blame, for I kept him by me out of my love for him, and that was his undoing.

In May … I commanded the Henrietta Fort, and Luke was a volunteer with me. For five days we were attacked night and day, we were cut off from the town, there was no hope that way, and all our ammunition and water consumed, and most of us wounded or killed. So late on the night of the 13th we were compelled to surrender upon promise of our lives. Luke and I were carried up to Mequinez, and there set to build a wall, which was to stretch from that town to Morocco city, so that a blind man might travel all those many miles safely without a guide. I will admit that our sufferings were beyond endurance. We slept underground in close, earth dungeons, down to which we must crawl on our hands and knees; and at day we laboured in the sunlight, starved and thirsting, no man knowing when the whip of the taskmaster would fall across his back, and yet sure that it would fall. Luke was not to be blamed—to be pitied rather. He was of a finer, more delicate nature. What was pain to us was anguish and torture to him. One night I crept down into my earth alone, and the next day he walked about Mequinez with the robes of a Moor. He had turned renegade.

I was told that the Bashaw had taken him into his service, but I never had the opportunity of speech with him again, although I once heard his voice. That was six months afterwards, when peace had been re-established between his Maj. and the Emperor. Part of the terms of the peace was that the English captives should be released and sent down to the coast, but the renegade must stay behind. I pleaded with the Bashaw that Luke might be set free too, but

could by no means persuade him. We departed from Mequinez one early morning, and on the city wall stood the Bashaw's house; and as I came opposite to it I saw a hand wave farewell from a narrow window-slit, and heard Luke's voice cry, „Farewell!" bravely, Pamela, bravely!

James Challoner.

When Arden had finished this letter he walked out of the tent, passed through the semicircle of sentinels, and stood in front of the Renegade's Gate. There Challoner joined him, and both men looked at the great arch for a while without speaking. It rose black against a violet and starlit sky. The pattern of its coloured tiles could not be distinguished; but even in the darkness something of its exquisite delicacy could be perceived.

„Luke Challoner very likely worked upon that arch," said Arden. „Yet, as I read that letter, it seemed so very human, very near, as though it had been written yesterday."

„I wonder what became of him?" said Challoner. „From some house on the city wall he waved his hand to his brother, and cried *Farewell!* bravely. I wonder what became of him?"

„I will take a photograph of that gate to-morrow," said Arden.

III

THE next morning Dimoussi came out of the Fondak Henna and walked to the little booth in the Sôk Kubba. Mustapha was squatting upon the floor, and with a throbbing heart Dimoussi noticed the familiar pistol shining against the dark wall behind. It had not been sold.

„Give it to me," he said.

Mustapha took the pistol from the nail on which it hung.

„It is worth fourteen dollars," said he. „But, see, to every man his chance comes. I am in a good mind to-day. My health is excellent and my heart is light. You shall have it for twelve."

Dimoussi took the pistol in his hand. It had a flint lock and was mounted in polished brass, and a cover of brass was on the heel of the butt.

„It is not worth twelve. I will give you seven for it."

Mustapha raised his hands in a gesture of indignation.

„Seven dollars!" he cried in a shrill, angry voice. „Hear him! Seven dollars! Look, it comes from Agadhir in the Sus country where they make the best weapons."

He pointed out to Dimoussi certain letters upon the plate underneath the lock. „There it is written."

Dimoussi could not read, but he nodded his head sagely.

„Yes. It is worth seven," said he.

The shopman snatched it away from the boy.

„I will not be angry, for it is natural to boys to be foolish. But I will tell you the truth. I gave eight dollars for it after much bargaining. But it has hung in my shop for a year, and no one any more has money. Therefore, I will sell it to you for ten."

He felt behind his back and showed Dimoussi a tantalising glint of the brass barrel. Dimoussi was unshaken.

„It has hung in your shop for four months," said he.

„A year. That is why I will sell it to you at the loss of a dollar."

„Liar, and son of a liar," replied the boy, without any heat, „and grandson of a liar. I sold it to you for five dollars four months ago. I will give you eight for it today."

He counted out the eight dollars one by one on the raised floor of the booth, and the shopman could not resist.

„Very well," he cried furiously. „Take it, and may your children starve as mine surely will!"

„You are a pig, and the son of a pig," replied Dimoussi calmly. „Have you any powder?"

He changed his ninth dollar and bought some powder.

„You will need bullets, too," said Mustapha. "I will sell you them very cheap. Oh, you are lucky! Do you see those signs upon the barrel? The pistol is charmed and cannot miss."

Dimoussi looked at the signs engraved one above the other on the barrel. There was a crown, and a strange letter, and a lion. He had long wondered what those signs meant. He was very glad now that he understood.

„But I will not buy lead bullets," said Dimoussi wisely. „The pistol may be enchanted so that it cannot miss, but there are also enchantments against lead bullets so that they cannot hurt."

So Dimoussi walked away, and begged a lump of rock salt from another booth instead. He cut down the lump until it fitted roughly into the hexagonal barrel of his pistol. Then he loaded the pistol, and hiding the weapon in the wide sleeve of his jellaba, sauntered to the great square before the Renegade's Gate. There were groups of people standing about watching the tents, and the inevitable ring of sentries. But while Dimoussi was still loitering—he would have loitered for a fortnight if need be, for there were no limits to Dimoussi's patience—Arden came out of the tent with his camera, and Challoner followed with a tripod stand.

The two consools passed the line of guards and set up the camera in front of the Renegade's Gate. Dimoussi was quite impartial which of the two should be sacrificed to begin the djehad, but again an ironical fate laid its hand upon him. It was Arden who was to work the camera. It was Arden, therefore, who was surrounded by the idlers, and was safe. Challoner, on the other hand, had to stand quite apart, so as to screen the lens from the direct rays of the sun.

„A little more to the right, Challoner," said Arden. „That'll do."

He put his head under the focussing cloth, and the next instant he heard a loud report, followed by shouts and screams and the rush of feet; and when he tore the focussing cloth away he saw Challoner lying upon the ground, the sentries agitatedly rushing this way and that, and the bystanders to a man in full flight.

Dimoussi had chosen his opportunity well. He stood between two men, and rather behind them, and exactly opposite Challoner. All eyes were fixed upon the

camera, even Challoner's. It was true that he did see the sun glitter suddenly upon something bright, that he did turn, that he did realise that the bright thing was the brass barrel of a big flintlock pistol. But before he could move or shout, the pistol was fired, and a heavy blow like a blow from a cudgel struck him full on the chest.

Challoner spoke no more than a few words afterwards. The lump of rock salt had done the work of an explosive bullet. He was just able to answer a question of Arden's.

„Did you see who fired?"

„The boy who came from Mulai Idris," whispered Challoner. „He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol." That seemed to have made a most vivid impression upon his mind, for more than once he repeated it.

But Dimoussi was by this time out of the Renegade's Gate, and running with all his might through the olive grove towards the open, lawless country south of Mequinez. By the evening he was safe from capture, and lifted up with pride.

Certainly no djehad had followed upon the murder, and that was disappointing. But it was not Dimoussi's fault. He had done his best according to his lights. Meanwhile, it seemed prudent to him to settle down quietly at Agurai. He was nearly sixteen now. Dimoussi thought that he would settle down and marry.

Here the episode would have ended but for two circumstances. In the first place Dimoussi carried back with him from Mequinez the brass-barrelled pistol; and in the second place Arden, two years later, acted upon a long-cherished desire to penetrate the unmapped country south of Mequinez.

He travelled with a mule as a Jew pedlar, knowing that such a man, for the sake of his wares, may go where a Moor may not. Of his troubles during his six months' wanderings now is not the time to speak. It is enough that at the end of the six months he set up his canvas shelter one evening by the village of Agurai.

The men came at once and squatted, chattering, about his shelter.

„Is there a woman in the village," asked Arden, „who will wash some clothes for me?"

And the sheikh of the village rose up and replied:

„Yes; the Frenchwoman. I will send her to you."

Arden was perplexed. It seemed extraordinary that in a little village in a remote and unusually lawless district of Morocco there should be a French blanchisseuse. But he made no comment, and spread out his wares upon the ground. In a few moments a woman appeared. She had the Arab face, the Arab colour. But she stood unconcernedly before Arden, and said in Arabic:

„I am the Frenchwoman. Give me the clothes you want washing."

Arden reached behind him for the bundle. He addressed her in French, but she shook her head and carried the bundle away. Her place was taken by another, a very old, dark woman, who was accompanied by a youth carrying a closed basket.

„Pigeons," said the old woman. „Good, fat, live pigeons."

Arden was fairly tired of that national food by this time, and waved her away.

„Very well," said she. She took the basket from the youth, placed it on the ground, and opened the lid. Then she clapped her hands and the pigeons flew out. As they rose into the air she laughed, and cried out in English—„One, two, three, and away!"

Arden was fairly startled.

„What words are those?“ he exclaimed.

„English,“ the old woman replied in Arabic. „I am the Englishwoman.“

And the men of the village who were clustered round the shelter agreed, as though nothing could be more natural:

„Yes, she is the Englishwoman.“

„And what do the words mean?“

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

„My father used them just as I did,“ she said. She spoke with a certain pride in the possession of those five uncomprehended words. „He learned them from his father. I do not know what they mean.“

It was mystifying enough to Arden that, in a country where hardly a Moor of a foreign tribe, and certainly no Europeans, had ever been known to penetrate, there should be a Frenchwoman who knew no French, and an Englishwoman with five words of English she did not understand.

But there was more than this to startle Arden. He had heard those same words spoken once before, by a Moorish boy who had declared himself to be an Englishman, and that Moorish boy had murdered his friend Challoner.

Arden glanced carelessly at the youth who stood by the old woman‘s side.

„That is your son?“ said he.

„Yes. That is Dimoussi.“

Dimoussi‘s cheeks wore the shadow of a beard. He had grown.

Arden could not pretend to himself that he recognised the boy who had sprung up from the asphodel-bushes a few miles from Mulai Idris.

He bethought himself of a way to test his suspicions. He took from his wares an old rusty pistol and began to polish it. A firearm he knew to be a lure to any Moor. Dimoussi drew nearer. Arden paid no attention, but continued to polish his pistol. A keen excitement was gaining on him, but he gave no sign. At last Dimoussi reached out his hand. Arden placed the pistol in it. Dimoussi turned the pistol over, and gave it back.

„It is no good.“

Arden laughed.

„There is no better pistol in Agurai,“ said he contemptuously. In his ears there was the sound of Challoner‘s voice repeating and repeating: „He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol—a brass-barrelled pistol.“

The contempt in his tone stung Dimoussi.

„I have a better,“ said he, and at that the old woman touched him warningly on the arm. Dimoussi stopped at once, and the couple moved away.

Arden wondered whether this was the end. There was a chance that it was not. Dimoussi might return to compare his pistol with Arden‘s, and to establish its superiority. Arden waited all the evening in a strong suspense; and at ten o‘clock, when he was alone, Dimoussi stepped noiselessly into the shelter, and laid his brass-barrelled pistol on the ground in the light of the lamp.

„It is better than yours. It comes from Agadhir, in the Sus country, where the best pistols are made. See, those letters prove it.“

Arden had no doubt that he had now Challoner‘s murderer sitting at his side. But he looked at the letters on the pistol-barrel to which Dimoussi pointed. The

letters were in English, and made up the name „Bennett.“ There was also engraved upon the brass of the barrel „London.“ The pistol was an old horse-pistol of English make. Even its period was clear to Arden. For above the lion and the crown was the letter C. Arden pointed to those marks.

„What do they mean?“

„They are charms to prevent it missing.“

Arden said nothing. His thoughts were busy on other matters. This pistol was a pistol of the time of Charles II, of the time of the Tangier siege.

„How long have you had it?“ he asked.

„My father owned it before me.“

„And his father before him?“

„Very likely. I do not know.“

Arden‘s excitement was increasing. He began to see dim, strange possibilities. Suppose, he reasoned, that this pistol had travelled up to Mequinez in the possession of an English prisoner. Suppose that by some chance the prisoner had escaped and wandered; and suddenly he saw something which caught his breath away. He bent down and examined the brass covering to the heel of the butt. Upon that plate there was an engraved crest. Yes! and the crest was Challoner‘s!

Arden kept his face bent over the pistol. Questions raced through his mind. Had that pistol belonged to Luke Challoner, who had turned renegade two hundred years ago? Had he married in his captivity? Had his descendants married again, until all trace of their origin was lost except this pistol and five words of English, and the name „Englishwoman“? Ah! but if so, who was the Frenchwoman?

It was quite intelligible to Arden why Dimoussi had slain Challoner. Fanaticism was sufficient reason. But supposing Dimoussi were a descendant of Luke! It was all very strange. Challoner was the last of his family, the last of his name. Had the family name been extinguished by a Challoner?

Arden returned to Mequinez the next day, and, making search, through the help of the Bashaw, who was his friend, amongst documents which existed, he at last came upon the explanation.

The renegades, who were made up not merely of English prisoners of Tangier, but of captives of many nationalities taken by the Salee pirates, had, about the year 1700, become numerous enough to threaten Mequinez. Consequently the Sultan had one fine morning turned them all out of the town through the Renegade‘s Gate and bidden them go south and found a city for themselves.

They had founded Agurai, they had been attacked by the Beni M‘tir; with diminishing numbers they had held their own; they had intermarried with the natives; and now, two hundred years later, all that remained of them were the Frenchwoman, Dimoussi, and his mother.

There could be no doubt that Challoner had been murdered because he was a European, by one of his own race.

There could be no doubt that the real owner of the Challoner property, which went to a distant relation on the female side, was a Moorish youth living at the village of Agurai.

But Arden kept silence for a long while.