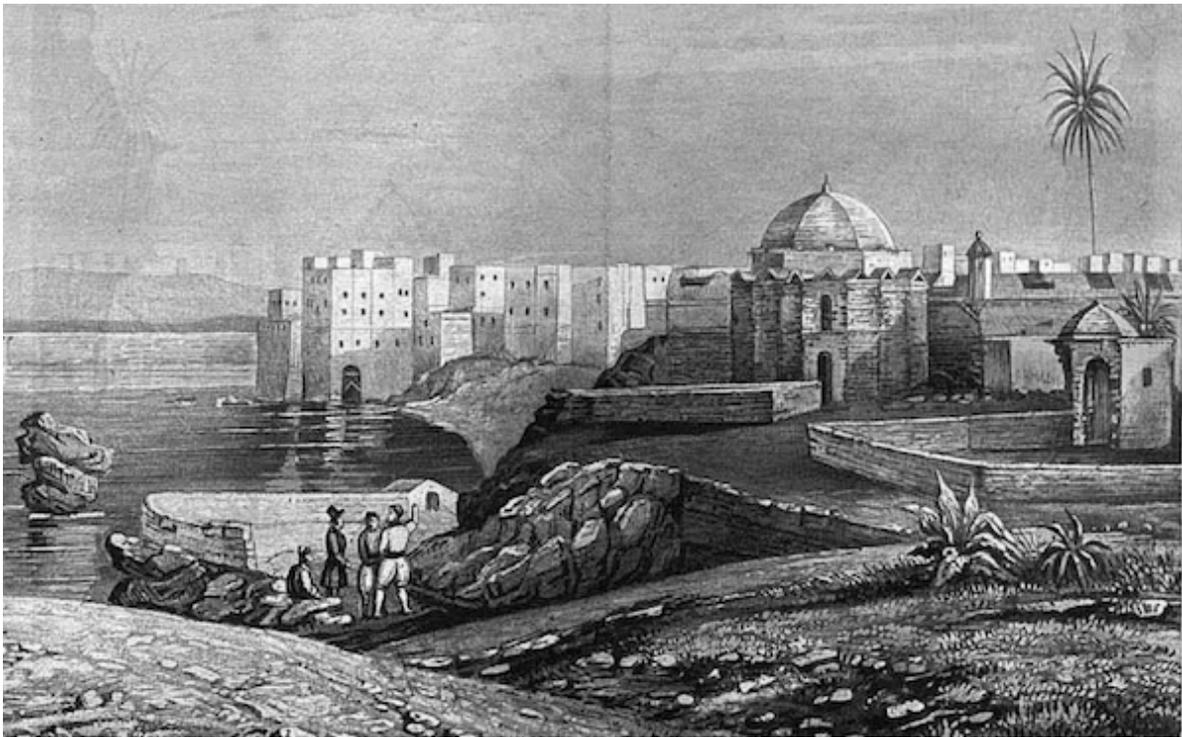


FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ALGERIA (1834)

by

Thomas Campbell (1777—1844)



View of Algiers taken from the North (detail)

Text extracted from "Letters from the South", published 1837

Transcribed and edited by Duncan S. Campbell, April 2019

Thomas Campbell (1777—1844) was born and raised in Glasgow. From a young age, he was attracted to the Classics and showed a talent for poetry. His writings were popular, and he was widely considered among the foremost poets of his age. Literary employment took him to London, where he settled in 1803. He travelled several times to France and Germany, also identifying with the cause of Polish independence.

It was in Paris in 1834 that Campbell's attention was caught by France's recent occupation of the city of Algiers and the adjacent coastal fringe of North Africa. His eight-month visit, at age 57, was a significant departure from past practice: perhaps the loss of both children (through death and insanity) and his wife's death (in 1828) may have played a part in his decision to venture further afield. He explained that the goal was to behave as "an independent English gentleman" and "faithful observer of what is passing there." Twenty-five letters were subsequently published in magazine and book format, demonstrating keen observation skills and a lively interest in the social and political consequences of the French invasion.

At his death in 1844, his remains were buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, where his statue stands to this day.

Algiers, 19th September, 1834

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ONE day that I was in the King's library at Paris, exploring books on ancient geography, I cast my eyes on a point of the map¹ that corresponds with the site of this city. Its recent eventful history rushed full on my thoughts, and seemed to rebuke them for dwelling on the dead more than the living. The question of how widely and how soon this conquest of Algiers may throw open the gates of African civilization—is it not infinitely more interesting than any musty old debate among classic topographers? To confine our studies to mere antiquities is like reading by candlelight with our shutters closed, after the sun has risen. So, I closed the volume I was perusing, and wished myself with all my soul at Algiers.

Ah, but the distance —the "*mare saevum et importuosum*"² of Africa—the heat that must be endured—and the pestilence that may be encountered—do not these considerations make the thing impossible? No, not impossible, I said to myself, on second thoughts; the distance is not so great, and the risk of contagion has been braved by thousands with impunity: I will see this place!

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I SAILED from Marseilles the 11th instant, and we crossed the Mediterranean in six days. That they were not in all respects the pleasantest days of my life you will easily imagine when I tell you that twelve of us adult passengers, besides an obstreperous child of four years old, were potted alive in a cabin nine feet square. There was no refuge during the day-time on deck, for it seemed to be kept from being set on fire by the sun only by incessant buckets of water. It is true that we could sally from our den in the evening, and in the night-time, we had some repose, but it was constantly interrupted at day-break by the impious brat I have mentioned, beating a toy-drum, and bawling lustily when it was taken from him. At last the very mother who had borne him lost all patience; she threw his plaything into the sea, and threatened to send the little drummer himself after it. Several of us humanely, but in vain, implored her to fulfil her threat.

¹ Footnote in original: "*The ancient Roman city of Icosium*"

² (Latin) "*savage and inhospitable sea*"

We were fortunate, however, as to our ship's crew, who, from the captain down to the mousse, or cabin-boy, were all assiduously attentive to us. The Mediterranean trading-vessels have generally a bad character for feeding their passengers with tough salt-fish, and lying-to at meal-times, so as to make the rocking of the ship an antidote to their guests partaking freely even of that sorry fare. But here we had excellent food and wine, though the passage price was very moderate.

One day we had even a fête and plenty of champagne; it was when a brother skipper came on board and dined with us. He was a strange mad-cap, who, not contented with being master of a ship, imagined himself master of the "Belles Lettres" and philosophy. Nay, he was a poet to boot, and, to my misfortune, learning that I was a *litterateur*,³ he cruelly inflicted several dozens of his own verses on my naked ears.

It was a voyage altogether with many sufferings, but with some consolations. The cool of the evening gave us breath and appetite to sup upon deck, and, in order to promote cheerfulness, it was made a law that we should all sing after supper in turn, *whether we could sing or not*. I never recognised more of the natural gaiety of the French character, and I fell in with it the more easily, inasmuch as that, bating the discomforts I have described, and in the absence of stomachic affliction, I was, as far as the mind is concerned, very tolerably happy.

The prospect of seeing a new quarter of the globe, and of descrying, even afar off, Mount Atlas, with his head in the clouds and his feet in the sands of the desert—this prospect every now and then made my thoughts, I could almost say, delicious; and I blessed my fate that I had not in youth exhausted the enjoyment of travelling.

We passed between the islands of Majorca and Menorca, but at too great a distance to observe distinctly the features of either of their shores.

Early in the morning of the day before yesterday, I awoke to the joyous sound of land having been discovered from the masthead; and to the sight of land-birds wheeling around our sails. I should think that as far as thirty miles off we saw the whole portion of the Algerian territory, which stretches on the east

³ Litterateur — Literary person; especially, a professional writer

along Cape Matifu, and on the west along the peninsula of Sidi Ferruch, where the French first landed in their invasion of the regency. At that distance, and even when you come nearer, by a great many miles, the view of Algiers from the sea is not beautiful. It is true that the tops of the lesser Atlas form a fine background in the south, but the prospect assumes not its full picturesqueness till you come almost within a mile of the shore. Farther off, the city itself looks like a triangular quarry of lime or chalk, on the steep side of a hill, whilst the country-houses that dot the adjacent heights seem like little parcels of the same material lying on fields that are to be manured. On nearer approach, however, the imagined quarry turns out to be a surprising city, and the specks on the adjoining hills to be square and castle-like houses, embosomed in groves and gardens.

No town that I have ever seen possesses, in proportion to its size, so many contiguous villas as Algiers; and their brilliance and high position give a magnificent appearance to this suburban portion of the coast. Meanwhile the city itself, when you come in full view of it, has an aspect, if not strictly beautiful, at least impressive from its novelty and uniqueness. Independently, indeed, of its appearance, its very name makes the first sight of Algiers create no ordinary sensations, when one thinks of all the Christian hearts that have throbbed with anguish in approaching this very spot. Blessed be our stars, that we have lived to see the chains of slavery broken here, and even about to be unriveted on the other side of the Atlantic!⁴

But, without these associations, the view of Algiers is interesting from its strangeness to an European eye. It is walled all round in the old style of fortification, its whole mural circuit being, I should think, about a mile and a half. It forms a triangle on the steep side of a hill, the basis of which is close to the sea, whilst its apex is crowned by the Casbah, or citadel. That strong place was the palace of the last Dey.⁵ His predecessors had dwelt at the foot of the town; but so many of them had died a violent death, that Hussein Pasha thought a higher position would enable him to take better care of his loving subjects and faithful Janissaries; so, he removed quietly one night, with all his treasures, to the Casbah.

⁴ The reference is to Britain's imminent abolition of slavery in its West Indies colonies.

⁵ Dey — Ruling official of the Ottoman Empire in northern Africa

Farther off, on a still higher hill, stands the Emperor's Fort—so called from having been built by Charles V—which commands the whole town. The terraced and square houses which rise, seemingly condensed, close behind one another, are, like the forts and city walls, all washed with lime, and dazzling as snow.

These objects, together with the pier and light-house, the batteries, lined, tier over tier, with hundreds of enormous cannon on the sea-side rocks, give an imposing aspect to the city that seems to justify its old appellation of "Algiers the warlike." At the same time the mosques and minarets, surmounted by the crescent, remind you that you are now among the Moslems; whilst a palm-tree which is visible, though remotely, seemed to me like a graceful characteristic feather on the brow of an African landscape.

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I slept soundly that night, except when I was shortly, but not unpleasantly, awakened by the chant of the muezzins on the minarets, proclaiming the hour of prayer.

I now write to you from lodgings which I have taken in the house of M. Descousse, a respectable merchant in Algiers, who was formerly a captain in Napoleon's cavalry, and is at present colonel of the national foot-guards of Algiers. The national footguards, I understand, amount to between five and six hundred; there is a national horse-guard also, but it reckons only one company. M. Descousse's house formerly belonged to the Aga⁶ of the Janissaries;⁷ it may be surpassed by one or two mansions of Algiers in gilded alcoves, sculptured fountains, and other ornaments; but, upon the whole, it is a fair sample of the best Algerian habitations.

From the street you enter into the lowest, or ground-floor, which is dimly lighted by a window over the door. The main apartment here is employed by my landlord as a porter's hall; but in bygone times, the Aga, surrounded by his servants, used to sit in it smoking his pipe and receiving visitors. On one side of this gloomy hall there are vaulted apartments which were formerly used as stables; but, since the Christian conquest of Algiers, they have been converted into wine-cellars. From the ground, you ascend by two flights of white marble stairs

⁶ Aga — Military or civil officer in the Ottoman Empire

⁷ Janissary — Soldier of an elite corps of Turkish troops

into full daylight, and to a court of some thirty feet square, paved with marble. This court, with a gallery passing in front of each side of its quadrangle, tier over tier, to the height of three stories, reminds you of our old English inns; only it is more elegant, and the white marble pillars, contrasted with the green and yellow glazed tiles that line the staircases as well as the arches and floor of each gallery, produce a rich effect.

From these galleries, large and handsome folding doors of wood, curiously carved, open into the rooms. The internal aspect of the house, as you look up to it from the court, is upon the whole imposing, and on the terrace of the uppermost story there is a commanding and magnificent view of the city, the sea and its ships, and the distant mountains. To save the eyes from being painfully dazzled, it is, however, necessary to consult this prospect either by moonlight or by mitigated daylight. Here I meet with my fellow-lodgers, in the cool of the evening, among whom is Dr. Revière, physician to the civil hospital, an intelligent, far-travelled, and accomplished man. He distinguished himself much in Egypt by his skilful treatment of the plague. His lady is a fair daughter of Pennsylvania. In the Turkish time, men were not privileged to walk on these roof terraces; the women enjoyed them alone, and used to visit each other by climbing ladders up and down to the contiguous houses. Hitherto I have seen no Moorish ladies upon them; but the Jewesses ogle their admirers on the housetops with a sort of feline familiarity.

Notwithstanding all this showy architecture, the apartments of the Moorish houses are gloomy and comfortless. They have a few loopholes in the outer wall towards the street, but receive their air and light principally through windows that look inwardly upon the court. These windows, which are latticed either with black or white iron, and without glass, except where Europeans have put it in, give the mansion a look of what it really was meant to be, when constructed—a family prison, where it was as easy to watch the inmates as in any of our most approved penitentiaries. Niches in the walls, which have generally doors, serve for presses⁸ and cupboards. One side of each quadrangular story, in an Algerian house, contains only one long and narrow room, but a show of three apartments is made out by a wall, built half-way up to the right and left of the central room, which faces the door. At the risk of broken bones, you ascend by a ladder to the top of these walls, and there you find a new floor of glazed

⁸ Press — Closet

tiles in either side-room, with a curtain hung from the roof so as to form two *quasi* apartments.

Until the French arrived, a chimney was unknown to the Algerians, except in their kitchens, or, peradventure, in the house of a foreign consul; and it is still difficult to find lodgings with such a comfort. Yet the climate, they tell me, is very chilly in the rainy months; and a Frenchman who has been in Norway, declares to me that he had suffered less from cold there than here. The sole objects of Moorish housebuilding seem to have been to exclude the heat and confine the women.

Algiers, September 29th, 1834.

I HAVE hitherto perambulated only a part of this city, but I understand that it contains one hundred and fifty-three streets, fourteen blind alleys, and five places that can be called courts or squares; of the last of these, however, only the grand square near the sea is of any extent. Thanks to the demolitions made by the French, it is spacious and commodious. As to the rest of Algiers, it is, with the exception of one or two streets, a labyrinth of the narrowest, gloomiest, and most crooked lanes that were ever inhabited by human beings. In many of them two persons can scarcely walk abreast; and if you encounter an ass laden with wood, it behoves you to pull up cleverly to one side, if you wish to keep your lower venter⁹ from being torn up by a protruding faggot.¹⁰ This narrowness of the streets is, no doubt, some protection from the heat, and from the rain also, where the houses join their projecting upper stories into an arcade; but the stagnation of air which it occasions, together with the steaming offal and decayed vegetables that meet you at every corner, make me wonder that Algiers is ever free from putrid fevers. There are, however, large covered sewers, which rid the city of much of its filth, and might carry it all off, if the streets were properly swept. The city is also well supplied with water. There are four aqueducts, which bring it from the neighbouring heights, and which feed sixty-four public fountains, besides seventy-eight in private houses. The sewers are said to have been constructed by the Romans in a city that pre-occupied the place of Algiers. For their aqueducts the Algerians were indebted, in 1611, to one of the Moors who had been driven out of Spain, and who, having discovered a spring near the Emperor's Fort, about three-quarters of a mile from the city, laid his project for supplying the city with water before the Dey. It was approved of and executed, and the projector was well rewarded. Every fountain has a ladle chained to it for the common use, with some arabesque sculpture on the stones, and an inscription which, I take it for granted, is a verse of the Koran—probably recommending Adam's wine as a beverage, in preference to stronger liquors. The Mussulmans¹¹ are fond of quoting texts from their holy book. On an executioner's sword I have seen inscribed, in golden letters, "God is merciful."

I account for my continuing to be interested in this ugly place, only by the novelty of objects which it presents. The diversity of the people and of their costume is not only amusing to the eye, but it stirs up a curiosity in the mind

⁹ Venter — Belly

¹⁰ Faggot — Bundle of sticks for use as fuel

¹¹ Mussulman — Muslim

respecting the history of so many races, and the causes of their concurrence. The "Grande Place," as I have told you, affords the only tolerable promenade. Here, at the market-time of a morning, you see not only the various people, but the animal and vegetable productions of nature displayed in rich picturesqueness. It has been a perfect treat to me, for several days, to lounge here before breakfast. How I long for the pencil of a Flemish painter, to delineate to you the human figures of all complexions and dresses!—the turbaned Moor—the Jew, with his sly face, and his spouse Rebecca, with her yard-long headdress behind her. I could not pass even the Jew boys that blacken shoes, without being struck by the nimbleness of their tongues, and the comic play of their countenances. They all speak French, and seem the happiest creatures on earth; excepting, perhaps, the half-naked negroes, who are always chattering and laughing loudest, in proportion to the scantiness of duds upon their backs. I omit the Europeans, for they rather spoil the picture.

Peculiarly striking is the look of the Kabyles, the aboriginal highlanders of Barbary,¹² who have, all of them, a fierce air, and, many of them, legs and square forms that would not disgrace the grenadier company of the 42nd. Taller, and generally slenderer, are the Arabs, descended from those who conquered the country in the seventh century. They are distinguishable by vivid black eyes, shaped like an almond laid sidewise; and though many of them look wretched and squalid, you see some among them whose better drapery and forms, and fine Old Testament heads, give them a truly patriarchal appearance. I thought myself looking on a living image of antiquity, as I stood this morning beside a majestic old Arab, whilst he made the camels he had led into the market kneel before him to be unloaded of their enormous cargoes of herbs and fruits. I felt "my very een enriched"¹³ at the sight of the vegetable treasures around me, glowing with all the colours of the rainbow—splendid heaps of purple grapes in one pannier, and oranges, peaches, lemons, and pomegranates in another. Here were spread out in piles the huge and golden-hued melons and pumpions,¹⁴ and there the white garlic, "and the scarlet and green pepper-pods," together with the brown melongenes,¹⁵ an excellent pot-vegetable, in size, shape, and colour resembling a polished cocoa-nut.

¹² Barbary — Coastal region of North Africa, inhabited by Berber people

¹³ (Adapted) Phrase from the poem *Tam o' Shanter* by the Campbell's fellow countryman Robert Burns (1759-1796)

¹⁴ Pompion — Pumpkin

¹⁵ Melongene — Eggplant

Altogether the vegetable profusion here beats even that of Covent Garden;¹⁶ the only exception to its glory is, that their carrots, turnips, and potatoes are smaller and dearer, in proportion to general prices, than with us. I was particularly astonished at the cheapness of Barbary figs¹⁷—ten for a sou¹⁸—in Scotch, a bawbee.¹⁹ It is a fruit entirely distinct from the true fig, and, though sweet, is insipidly flavoured; but still it is palatable and nutritious, especially if the stomach requires a slight astringent. I ceased to be surprised at its cheapness, when I found that it grows wild on the road-side, and may be had for the trouble of gathering. It is not an universal production over Barbary, but, where it grows, the poorer Arabs live on it almost entirely during the weeks when it is in season. It is about the size of an ordinary lemon, and grows on the cactus-bush.

This plant, the cactus, does not assume the shape of a tree till its leaves, which are about ten inches long, and an inch thick, twist themselves together into a trunk. It affords the singular phenomenon of leaf springing out of leaf. The leaves are thickly covered with prickles, which, when they get into animal flesh, are with difficulty coaxed out of it. It is much used for hedges about Algiers; but, if you should ever come to this country, my dear friend, I exhort you never to let your linen be spread out on the cactus. An affecting story is still told of a Dutch family who had a country house near this city. In the house there were five plump, interesting daughters, who, in an evil hour, gave their garments to be washed to an ignorant European laundress. She hung them out to dry on these prickly bushes, and such evils were entailed on the lovely wearers of them, that they could neither sit nor recline with comfort, for a week or two afterwards. There is also a fish-market here; but its smell not being so inviting as that of the vegetables, I took an informant's word for it, that the fishes are the same with those caught on the opposite coast of the Mediterranean.

Besides the general market in the Grande Place, there is a smaller one farther up the town, which is exclusively appropriated to fruit. I have been able to obtain a painted design of the latter; but the absence of the best artist of Algiers has disappointed me in getting what I much desired—a view of a morning market in the Grande Place.

¹⁶ Covent Garden — Formerly the principal fruit and vegetable market in Central London

¹⁷ Barbary fig — Fruit of the prickly pear cactus

¹⁸ Sou — (French) Small amount of money

¹⁹ Bawbee — Scottish coin of small value

Among the indigenous quadrupeds of this country, the stately camels, of course, are first to command your attention. Their tall slender foals, with their curly fleeces, look as gentle as lambs; but in the grown animal's physiognomy there is an expression of ferocity which is not always absent from his real character. The camel is not that meek animal which report generally leads us to suppose him. I went up to pat one of them, but he showed his teeth with so menacing a cry, that I made a precipitate retreat from him. He is particularly fierce in the rutting season, and is then sometimes dangerous even to his native owner. It is true that the Arab contrives almost always to manage and attach him, though he loads him heavily, and treats him often to hard fare, even now and then to a blow; but, on the whole, the Arab deals kindly with him, and gives him good provender when he can afford it. The animal, in fact, grows up like a child under the tent of his master, partakes of his plenty as well as his penury—enjoys his song, and understands his biddings. His docility springs from habit and affection—nay, we may almost say from moral feeling—for he rebels when his temper is not sagaciously managed. When the French came to Algiers and got possession of camels, they thought that their obedience might be enforced, like that of mules and asses, by simple beating; but the camels soon showed their conquerors that they were not to be so treated, and that both their kick and their bite were rather formidable.

The horse here may be believed to have degenerated from the old Numidian breed; for he is lanky, and seldom elegantly shaped, and he never shows the blended fire and muscle of a prime English horse. Yet I am told that his hardihood and fleetness are often astonishing, and that his speed in sweeping down declivities would task the horsemanship of an English jockey. It is surprising how safe and serviceable these animals are, though never mutilated. They will certainly give a snap at times, both in joke and earnest, but they are seldom vicious; and I am just come from seeing a "*cheval entier*,"²⁰ a beautiful creature, who will put his fore-foot into your hand for the bribe of a sugar-plum.

The mules are large and powerful. Of the asses there are two kinds—one, of the true old biblical size, that might take Saul upon his back; the other, very diminutive, and most wretchedly treated. In the streets you are never a moment without hearing the cry of " Harri, harri," from a human brute of a driver, who is urging the speed of some of these unfortunate little donkeys, and making them

²⁰ Cheval entier — (French) stallion

feel his command by goading them with an iron pike on that part of their hips where a wound has already been made and left open.

I have seen no sale of live cattle in the square, unless you give the name of cattle to a poodle-dog, a raton, a monkey, or a caged wild-cat, which is now and then offered for sale. I was particularly struck yesterday with the beauty of one of the last of these animals. She lay so sleekly and gracefully on her bed of straw, that if she had been tried for killing birds and rabbits, I could not have condemned her. Near her was a long-nosed animal, which the French call a raton, about seventeen inches without the tail, though I believe he has nothing of the rat about him but the name, for his eyes are gentle, and he suffers himself to be caressed. I am told, however, that he is treacherous, and a devil among the poultry.

Still more was I fascinated by a white, sagacious poodle, who whined in my face, and beseeched me to buy him, in a dog-lingo more persuasive than Ciceronian Latin. He told me all about it, and how cruelly hard it was to be standing the livelong day, tied by a string to the hand of his salesman. I bought him, and took him home; was ever dog in this world so happy? I thought he would have gone mad with joy. The French maidservant exclaimed, as he ramped up and down, "*Il est fou—il est fou.*"²¹ Unhappily for herself, the poor cat of the house encountered him. He seized her by the nape of the neck, but without hurting her, except that her pride was offended, and galloped round the gallery with her, as she uttered hissing and gurgling sounds from her throat, and sprawled with ludicrously unavailing efforts to scratch him. At last he dropped her, and, coming to an open window, showed his contempt of Mahomedan delusion, by howling in exact accordance with the voice of an old muezzin, who was proclaiming the hour of prayers from an opposite mosque.

But the most popular candidate for purchase at Algiers is the small tail-less monkey, about a foot and a half in height. These gentlemen, though the most diminutive of the simious²² tribes in Barbary, are more formidable when they congregate and get shelter among the woods about Collo and Bougia, than the wildest beasts of the forest. They devastate in a single night whole orchards and cornfields. They are cunning and regular in their tactics, having leaders, sentinels, and spies. They have a regular discipline, and a system of warfare: at least

²¹ *Il est fou* — (French) He is mad

²² Simious — Simian; relating to monkeys or apes

I have been told so. No traveller is accountable for all that he relates upon hearsay; it is enough if he quotes his authorities, and I can assure you that a highly respectable French drummer gave me his word of honour as to the fact, that the monkeys of Bougia are well officered, and that their commander-in-chief has a regular staff. Query, might he not mean a switch? Yet, formidable as they are in their strategics,²³ the natives contrive to make many of them prisoners.

The Kabyle peasant attaches a gourd, well fixed, to a tree; he puts some rice into it, and strews some grains at the aperture to show that there may be more within, making a hole just large enough to admit the paw of the monkey. Unfortunate pug puts in his open paw and grasps his booty, but is unable to draw it back, because it is clenched, and he is not wise enough to think of unclenching it. Hence, he remains, as the law phrases it, with "*his person attached*," and is found next morning, looking, you may suppose, very foolish and penitent. The olden custom was to put him instantly to death, but, as he will now fetch twenty francs at Algiers, he is sentenced only to transportation, so that the monkeys are at least one part of the population who have been benefited by the arrival of the French.

The streets of Algiers, as I have told you, are very dismal; and really, when you meet a Moorish woman, under their gloom, in a drapery much resembling the dress of our dead in England, and looking as much as possible like a mummy or a ghost, she is far from inspiring gallant sensations. Where you have light to see them, the bandiness²⁴ of their legs is generally observable under their shrouds, and the shrivelled skin around their eyes indicates that there is no great cruelty in their veiling themselves. Still I must own that I have not seen the Moorish ladies so as to judge of them fairly.

The population of the city of Algiers must have been greatly exaggerated by the guesses of travellers in the last century, for it is impossible to conceive 80,000 or 100,000 human creatures ever to have been packed together within its walls. The French census in 1833 enumerates the inhabitants thus: 11,850 Moors, 1874 negroes, 5949 Jews, 2185 French (of course, not including soldiers), and 1895 other foreigners, making a sum total of 23,753.²⁵

²³ Strategics — Strategy

²⁴ Bandy — Bow-legged

²⁵ Footnote in original: "*This census was taken after the expulsion of the Turks, whose numbers may have probably swelled the population to nearly 30,000.*"

Algiers has one Catholic church, formerly a mosque, and fourteen Jewish synagogues. The religious houses of the Mussulmans, by far the most imposing of their public buildings, amounted before the arrival of the French to ten large mosques, and fifty marabouts or chapels; several of them, however have been occupied by the French for military convenience, and some of the marabouts demolished. The mosques are almost all alike. At the entry there is a fountain, with water flowing into a basin, where the Mussulmans perform their ablutions before they prostrate themselves in prayer. Every mosque has an octagonal dome, and a tall minaret, like our steeple, terminating in a crescent, to which a piece of wood is attached whereon to plant a flag, when the muezzin ascends to the battlements of the minaret in order to call the faithful to prayer, that his signal may be seen where his voice cannot be heard. Some of the minarets are covered with glazed tiles of different colours, which have a brilliant and not unpleasing effect.

The largest mosque of Algiers stands at the entrance of the street leading from the harbour. It is a long rectangular edifice, divided longitudinally into three naves by two rows of pillars, and, under the dome, at about two-thirds of the length of the building, there are two other rows of pillars, which form a cross with the former. On each side of the grand nave there are galleries supported on pillars, of which galleries those nearest the door are public, whilst those beyond the dome are appropriated to the gentry. Five or six lustres²⁶ of cut glass, and several lamps, are suspended with chains along the whole length of the grand nave, as well as along the two rows of pillars which intersect the dome. The lamps are lighted for the evening prayers, but the lustres only on grand occasions, such as the feast of the Bayram. There is a niche for the Imams, and a pulpit, ascended by a flight of stairs, for the preacher. Mats of reed and rich carpets are spread on the pavement.

There are a great many vapour-baths in Algiers. In these establishments, you enter a chamber paved with marble, vaulted, and lighted from above by small glass windows. The steam is created by hot water being poured into basins that stand on the sides of the room. A Moorish young man, who conducts you hither, is arrayed only in a linen cloth around his middle, and after dismantling you of your customary dress, he affords you a similar covering. After you have been seated for some minutes on a bench, inhaling the vapour and perspiring plentifully, he throws warm water over you, rubs, or rather scrapes the skin, pats and

²⁶ Lustre — Prismatic glass pendant

paws the whole body, except what the cloth covers, as if he were kneading dough, singing all the time an Arabian song, and finally dries you with a towel. In an old account of Algiers by an Englishman, I find that this operation in the baths used to be quite formidable to a stranger—there was such rubbing with pumice-stones, and stretching the joints till they cracked. The treatment nowadays is sufficiently gentle, but I felt myself less invigorated by it than by the cold or tepid bath.

The coffeehouses and taverns of Algiers are very amusing, and not the least so when they exhibit European and Moorish manners so much amalgamating, that you find Moors eating with knives and forks, and sitting on chairs instead of squatting on mats and sofas. In the best French coffeehouses, I have observed several Moors whom you might recognise at once to be men of the upper class, by their fine white turbans and dresses, as well as by their graceful manners and shapely hands. The Moorish gentlemen, I should say, are not more swarthy than dark-haired Europeans—only that a ruddy complexion is never to be seen. The other evening, I took my coffee near two of them, each of whom I was told was supposed to be worth at least *40,000l.*²⁷ sterling. I was, at first, Englishman enough to laugh at the idea of men worth *40,000l.* going about with bare legs; but, recollecting my own Highland origin, I said to myself: and has not the chieftain of my own clan, in the best old times, shown as much of his naked limbs? I have seen a Highland clergyman mount the pulpit in a filibeg.²⁸

I was struck with the perfectly gentlemanlike air of these Moors. There was grace in every movement of their white and well-formed hands. By the tones of their voice, I knew that they were arguing, but it was with mildness and light pleasantry, and their Arabic sounded like a musical language, in comparison with the guttural harshness of the common speech.

In the strictly native Algerian coffeehouses you find the Moors and Arabs squatting themselves for hours on benches, smoking and sipping black and sugarless coffee, which in taste much resembles worm-powders. There they also play at two games, which, as far as I could observe, are like drafts and chess. They listen meanwhile to the vocal and instrumental music of their indigenous minstrels—a music which, to an European ear, if I may judge by my own, is unintelligible and execrable. They have a finger guitar, with four strings, a fiddle with only

²⁷ 40,000l. — Forty thousand pounds (abbreviation from Latin *libra*)

²⁸ Filibeg — Kilt

two, and a flageolet, which is their best instrument, though bad is the best. I have seen them also use a drum made of parchment stretched over a jar of burned clay. The jar might indeed be painted as a symbol of their music. Really against an Algerian concert I would *almost* pit the bagpipes of Lochaber.

A Highland piper gives you at least some idea of lilt or rhythm in his rudest pibroch²⁹—something to which you could dance or beat time; but in the Algerian airs I could discern no rhythm. What, you will say, melody without rhythm! it is impossible, and the fault was in your ears. Well, I own to you the utter difficulty of imagining music without rhythm, and I thought at first that the fault lay wholly in my own ear; but when I spoke on the subject with a Frenchman here, who is the leader of a regimental band, he told me that the rhythm in Moorish melodies is so capricious as to puzzle him.³⁰

The natives have also a sort of opera-house of their own, where Mooresses³¹ dance unveiled—if their monotonous, see-saw of movements can be called a dance. Of course, the reputed purity of those ladies cannot be compared with the unsunned snow, but, in justice to the *beauty* of the Algerian fair sex, which I have impeached upon suspicion, I ought to say that more than one of these opera-women appeared to me exceedingly handsome.

The shops that have been opened by the French are of course after the fashion of Europe; but those of the Moors and Jews are in general formed by a recess in the side of a house, some four feet deep, and seven feet long, and raised above the ground. In these booths you see the tailor sewing an embroidered garment, the shoemaker shaping slippers of morocco-leather, and a variety of native artisans plying their different trades. In the butchers' shops I observe a luxury (at least we Scotchmen esteem it as such) which I little expected to meet with so far from home, namely, a singed sheep's head. The meat here is but indifferent. The restaurants affect the Paris cuisine; but, whether it be the fault of the cook, the viands, or the climate, I have had little gastronomic pleasure since my arrival.

²⁹ Pibroch — Martial or mournful music played on the Scottish Highlands bagpipe

³⁰ Footnote in original: "*At a later period of my residence in Algiers, a most accomplished vocal musician, the lady of Colonel De Verger, had the kindness to write out for me the notes of some Algerian airs; but she said, 'I have been obliged to put a rhythm of my own to them, for I never could discern what the natives mean the rhythm to be.'*"

³¹ Mooress — Moorish woman

The general food of the natives is cuscousou,³² a preparation of flour somewhat like macaroni, but enriched with a mixture of the yolks of eggs, and stewed with a little portion of animal food. I found it very palatable, though a little too highly peppered. Far different were my sensations when I tasted a bit of their mutton, which they preserve unsalted in suet. I believe they smoke it first; it is horrible stuff.

Before the arrival of the French, an European could not find at Algiers either an inn or an eating-house. The African merchants arriving in the city had, and still have, covered bazaars where goods are laid, with sleeping-places in the upper stories, forming a rude hostellerie.³³ Near one of these bazaars I remarked also a cook's-shop—a miserable dirty hole, where a Moor was roasting bits of meat about the size of a walnut, spitted on an iron wire, over a charcoal fire before the shop. When they were done, he whipped them cleverly off the spit into the plates of his customers, who grabbed them with their dirty hands, and seemed to relish them much.

As the Algerians shave their heads, though not their beards, they have barbers among them, and the barbers' shops are here, as they have ever been in a simple state of society, great places of resort for loungers. They are a great deal larger than the shops of other artisans, sometimes fifteen feet deep and proportionably broad, with benches around them for the loungers to seat themselves. On the walls they have daubs of pictures representing naval victories of the Algerians over the Christians, executed, I am sorry to believe, by Christian artists who had been prisoners here. Here the Moslem has his head shaved and his beard stained. The Algerian barber is, as everywhere else, a mighty newsman. In these shops the French spies reported that they had found conspiracies hatched, and plans for insurrection, which probably never existed.

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³² Cuscousou — (spelling: variant of couscous) North African dish of steamed semolina usually served with meat or vegetables

³³ Hostellerie — Hotel; hostelry