

¶Men used for target practice.

STRANGE THINGS IN THE SAHARA

GORDON WEST, traveller, author and ex-propaganda director to Lloyd George, with his wife decided to seek the sun in the great North African desert, the Sahara, which totals in all some three-and-a-half million miles.

The *S.S. Viceroy of India* bore them from England across the Bay of Biscay "as calm as the mind of a nun," and landed them with two suitcases at Tangier.

In this dirty Moroccan seaport, they found traces of Englishmen who had been there before them. Scored on the brick walls were the quips about the inhabitants left centuries ago by Stuart soldiers before they blew up and evacuated the town in the reign of Charles II.

They found traces and heard tales also of the man to whom the Stuarts left Tangier, Sultan Moulay Ismail, a monster of sadism. The Sultan kept nearly 4,000 women, and frequently reduced their numbers by boiling a few in oil or feeding their flesh to his dogs. There is no record of his offspring, for although he is known to have had 800 sons, he personally strangled all his daughters at birth.

Sultan Moulay thought nothing of riding out after early morning prayers and killing ten slaves just to keep his eye in at spear-throwing. To round off, he would jump on his horse slicing off, in the same motion, the head of the man holding the bridle.

The Wests found more of Moulay's handiwork in the 40-foot walls built by 30,000 slaves near his capital, Meknes. The crumbling holes in the walls, they were told, marked the spots where Moulay Ismail had bricked up the men whom he considered were not working hard enough.

As they jolted over Saharan tracks in unsprung, windowless native buses, the Wests noticed that frightened native women spread their hands before their faces. The gesture was always directed at Mrs. West, whose red hair was considered a sign of evil.

Once they went to dinner with a rich Moor, a Caid of the town of Fez. Between two doses of highly-flavoured mint tea, the Wests had somehow to dispose of two-fifths of the following menu: two roast fowl; a brace of wild duck with

orange, radish and raisin salad; roast leg of mutton; a stew of chicken, lamb, barley sprouts, green tomatoes, almonds and haricot beans in the crater of a great heap of semolina; and sweet pastries. All this they ate with their fingers.

In a cafe in Midelt on the fringe of the Grand Atlas Mountains, they met a British

Legionnaire from London who called himself Harry Trussler. Gordon West discovered from Trussler that there are few Englishmen in La Legion, that the best Legionnaires are Germans and French; that the Foreign Legion in that part does anything but fight. Its chief occupation is road-making.—
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