

***CLEMENS  
LAMPING,  
ERNEST ALBY***



***THE FRENCH  
IN ALGIERS***

**Clemens Lamping, Ernest Alby**

# **The French in Algiers**

**The Soldier of the Foreign Legion; and The Prisoners  
of Abd-el-Kader**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

[PREFACE.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER IX.](#)

[CHAPTER X.](#)

[CHAPTER XI.](#)

# **PREFACE.**

## [Table of Contents](#)

CLEMENS LAMPING, the author of the first part of this little volume, is a young lieutenant in the Oldenburg service, who, tired of the monotonous life of a garrison, resigned his commission in July, 1839, and went to Spain to win his spurs under Espartero. Unfortunately he was detained by contrary winds, and arrived just as the treaty of Bergara had put an end to the war.

After spending six months at Madrid in abortive attempts to join the army in Arragon, then the seat of war, he resolved to go to Africa, and take part in the French crusade against the infidels. He accordingly went to Cadiz, encountering many adventures on his way through La Mancha and Andaluzia, and thence to Algiers, where he entered the foreign legion as a volunteer.

After two years of danger and hardship, the author returned to Oldenburg, having lost many illusions, and gained some experience. His sovereign restored him to his former grade in the service of Oldenburg, where he sits at his ease by his own fireside, and relates his adventures to his friends.

Lieutenant Lamping's Reminiscences are followed by the abridgement of a narrative of five months' captivity among the Arabs, by M. de France, a lieutenant in the French navy. The author modestly assures his readers that he is better skilled in the management of a ship than of his pen, and that his book would never have been published but at the

request of his friends. It has nevertheless reached a second edition in France.

L. D. G.





# **THE FRENCH IN ALGIERS.**



# CHAPTER I.

## Table of Contents

### **Coleah—Arab Coffee-houses—The Hakim's—Court of Justice—Arab Women and Domestic Life—Marriages—False Alarm—Sofi the Modern Hâfiz—Grief for the Departed Glory of the Moors—Abubekr's Piety rewarded.**

Coleah, September, 1841.

AT last, my dear friend, after so many hardships and such various wanderings, I have leisure to write to you; and I have much, very much, to tell. The events of my life have lately followed each other in such rapid succession, that the dangers and sorrows of the noble, much-enduring Odysseus, nay, even the immortal adventures of the valiant Knight of La Mancha, are mere child's play in comparison with my own.

Since the month of April we have scarce had time to take breath; so rapidly did expedition follow expedition, and *razzia razzia*. The new Governor, Bugeaud, naturally enough wishes to show that he is equal to his post. His predecessor, Vallée, drew upon himself the imputation of indolence, but no one can deny to Bugeaud the possession of great energy and untiring activity. He encounters the Arabs with their own weapons, harassing them with incessant attacks, and burning and plundering the whole country. We have made

two very important expeditions; the first against Thaza, a strong fortress belonging to Abd-el-Kader, situated on the borders of the desert. After destroying this place, we returned through the iron gates (*portes de fer*) to our own camp; this expedition occupied about four weeks. A few days afterwards we started again to throw provisions into Milianah, and to lay waste the plains of the Chellif with fire and sword. It was exactly harvest time. In order to cut off from the Bedouins all means of existence, it was of course necessary to drive away their cattle and to burn their corn. Before long the whole plain looked like a sea of fire.

These expeditions, sent out in the very hottest season of the year, had such an effect upon the health of the soldiers, that the Governor was compelled to allow them a short rest. The regiment to which I belonged had scarcely a third part fit for service, the other two-thirds were either dead or in the hospital. We were accordingly sent to Coleah to recruit our strength.

You will have a tolerably correct idea of our recruiting quarters when I tell you that one day is passed on guard, another in reconnoitring the enemy for several hours, and the third in working at the dry ditch (a sort of *pendant* to the great wall of China) intended to defend the plain of the Metidja against any sudden attacks of the Hadjutes. I assure you, however, that we think this life vastly agreeable, and consider ourselves as well off as if we were in Abraham's bosom. There was a time, indeed, when I should not have been quite so contented with my lot, but every thing is relative in this best of all possible worlds.

Coleah is a true Arab town, which stands on the south-eastern declivity of the Sahel range of mountains, in a charming little nook, and is well supplied with water.

We are only twelve leagues from Algiers and about three from the sea, the proximity to which makes the place extremely healthy. The constant sea breeze renders the heat even of this season quite tolerable.

At our feet is stretched the vast plain of the Metidja bounded by the blue hills of the lesser Atlas range. We are quartered in a fortified camp outside the town, on a small eminence which commands it. Of course all the gates of the town and the market-place are guarded by our troops. My leisure hours, which, indeed, are not too many, are generally passed in sauntering about the streets.

The inhabitants of Coleah are pure descendants of the Moors, and still retain some traces of their former refinement; you must not confound them with the Bedouins and Kabyles, who always have been, and still are the lowest in point of civilisation. I have nowhere found the Arab so polished and so attractive as at Coleah, not even at Algiers and Oran; in those towns, their intercourse with the French has called forth all their rapacity, and spoiled the simplicity of their manners. It is a remarkable fact that in all these towns near the sea the Spanish language is still spoken, of course in a most corrupt dialect; a proof that some connection with Spain has constantly existed—often, no doubt, a very reluctant one on their parts: as in the reign of Charles V., who conquered great part of this coast.

To me this is very welcome, as it enables me to talk with the Arabs; it is not however easy to enter into conversation

with them, as they are almost always silent and reserved towards strangers. In order to get them to talk it is necessary first to inspire confidence.

All my spare time is passed in the Arab coffee-house, the resort of the fashion and aristocracy of Coleah, and I have already succeeded in making some acquaintances. I have even obtained marks of evident goodwill from them by my earnest and sympathising attention to their singers and story-tellers, who never fail to attend the best coffee-houses.

The clerk of the Hakim (the chief magistrate) is a great friend of mine. He is an exceedingly well-informed man, and with you he would be called "Mr. Secretary." He knows the whole Koran by heart, besides a host of Persian poems.

Like every man of sense he is exceedingly modest, lamenting his ignorance, and inquiring diligently into our European habits and manners. I have occasionally had the pleasure of seeing my friend Ben Jussuf (for that is his name) occupied in the fulfilment of his duties as clerk. Every Friday is kept by the Arabs as a holiday on which markets are held and judgments given. On this day the Hakim sits in the public place before the great coffee-house, and holds his court; on his right hand stands his clerk who commits his judgments to paper, and on his left the executioner who inflicts the punishments awarded by the Hakim on the spot. This generally consists in some fifty or hundred strokes of the bastinado, and sometimes even in death; the latter, however, only for political offences, such as treasonable correspondence with the enemy, &c. Should the case be doubtful, the Hakim orders a certain number of strokes of

the bastinado to be given to both parties, and takes to himself the object of contention, generally a sheep or a donkey—a proceeding only differing from our own inasmuch as it has the great advantage of being more summary. If any one is too profuse in his excuses, the Hakim says to the executioner, “Give my comrade (among the Arabs every one is a comrade) some thirty strokes of the bastinado, to teach him not to confuse me any more with his ingenious evasions.” In this country, you see, an advocate’s fees would not be very high.

Coleah is held in great reverence by the Arabs as it contains Abd-el-Kader’s vault, in which are deposited the bodies of several members of his family. The French have spared this tomb, in consideration of which Abd-el-Kader has vowed never to attack the town or its immediate neighbourhood.

The Hakim belongs to the family of the Emir, and is very rich: the sheath and handle of his yataghan are of pure gold, and his horses the finest I ever saw. He is the ideal of a noble Arab—terrible to his enemies, hospitable and munificent to his friends, and especially charitable to the poor. I have seen him during the great fast, when the Mahomedans may eat nothing till after sunset, call together some thirty beggars every evening before his door, bring them food, and wait upon them himself with the help of his three grown up sons.

The beggars feasted upon kuskussu (porridge made with barley meal) and baked mutton with great dignity and grace; and when they were satisfied they rose, kissed the Hakim on the shoulders and cheeks, and departed. The

most contradictory qualities are often united in the Arab nature—harshness and benevolence, cruelty and generosity, rapacity and munificence: we should beware how we condemn them without further knowledge of their character, and we must on no account measure them by our Christian and European standard.

The great fast of the Mahomedans, which lasts forty days, began a few days ago. During all this time the Arabs eat nothing during the whole day, and are especially enjoined by the Prophet to be constant in devotion and to give freely to the poor:—and the Arab is a very strict observer of all his religious duties. Three times a day, at the hours of sunrise, mid-day, and sunset, the loud voice of the marabout, or priest, is heard from the minaret of the mosque summoning the faithful to prayer.

The moment the Arab hears the call of the marabout he throws himself upon the earth, wherever he may chance to be, and touches the ground with his brow, then rising again he stretches his arms toward heaven with his face turned in the direction of Mecca. His white flowing bernouse and his long beard give him a venerable and patriarchal air. Thus, surely, did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worship their God. The Arab has no hesitation in performing his devotions in the presence of the crowd, and is totally without either the false shame or the religious hypocrisy of an European.

Most Mahomedans wear a rosary of beads, which they tell while repeating sentences out of the Koran; to this is usually appended a large brass comb, with which they comb their beards during their orisons with the most solemn earnestness. The impression produced by this on Europeans

is highly comical, but to the Mahomedan it seems natural enough, as any purification of the body, such as combing and washing, are to him in themselves religious acts.

They are by no means behind us in superstition, and frequently hang, as an amulet round the neck of a favourite horse, a leathern bag containing some verses out of the Koran, to protect them from evil machinations.

The Arab is great and admirable at the hour of death. I have seen many Arabs die, but never did I see one beg his life or utter any unmanly complaint. When his hour is come he recommends his soul to Mahomed, and dies.

They have physicians only for external injuries or for fevers incidental to the climate: when one of them is attacked by an internal disorder or by the decrepitude of age, his relations quietly leave him to his fate, and no one troubles his head about him again.

It was but a few days ago that I saw an Arab die thus on the threshold of his own house: he had already lain there some days with his bernouse drawn over his head. When he felt the approach of death he exclaimed with a loud voice, "Mahomed! Mahomed!" and died.

The burial is conducted much in the same manner as with us. The corpse, rolled in a mantle, and with the face uncovered, is borne to the grave by four men. The priest who walks before it sings a song to which the others respond in chorus: but their song is cheerful, and their step quick; for the departed has quitted the hardships and sorrows of this life, and now rests in Paradise beside a shady fountain, served by women whose beauty is unfading.

After the corpse has been lowered into it, the tomb is carefully bricked up, in order to prevent the jackals and hyænas from scratching up the body. The mourners then sit round the grave, and one of the near relations of the deceased gives to every one present a piece of bread and some fruit.

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The fair sex is not altogether fair here, at least in my opinion. No one can deny that the Arab women have graceful figures and regular features, but they want those essential requisites of beauty—a soul and individual expression. They are all exactly alike, and their faces express but two passions—love and hate; all nicer shades of feeling are wanting. How, indeed, would it be possible for them to acquire intellectual or bodily cultivation, when the greater part of their time is spent seated cross-legged grinding corn in a hand-mill, or asleep?

The married women are seldom seen out of their houses, and then only closely veiled. The young girls, on the contrary, are to be found every morning at sunrise outside the gate of the town, standing by the fountain, at which they assemble with stone jars on their shoulders, to fetch water for the day's consumption. This truly Eastern scene calls to mind Rebecca at the well, drawing water for her father's flocks.

If a stranger asks a daughter of the town to give him a draught of water (*alma*), the maiden reaches him the jar with a kindly nod; but when he has slaked his thirst she pours away the remainder and draws fresh water, for the lips of the infidel have polluted it.

The Arab women wear a white woollen garment confined under the breast by a girdle, and a white cloth twisted round the head. Their ornaments generally consist in rings in their ears and on their ankles, which are invariably naked. One cannot deny the efficiency of this graceful manner of calling attention to the beauty of their feet, which are truly exquisite. These rings, among women of the lower class, are of silver; among those of the higher class (and here, as in every other country, there are distinctions of class), they are of gold.

A few days ago my friend Ben Jussuf invited me to go with him to his house. I, of course, seized with joy this opportunity of seeing him in his domestic circle.

He knocked at the door, which is invariably kept shut by day and by night in all Arab houses, a woman shortly appeared and inquired who was there; at Ben Jussuf's answer the door was opened, but when the woman saw me with her husband she instantly concealed her face, and was about to run away; my friend, however, commanded her to remain. She was his wife, and besides her he had two others, who were seated cross-legged in the court, one of them grinding corn in a hand-mill, the other combing the hair of a boy about five or six years old. I should have guessed them all three to be at least forty, but Ben Jussuf assured me that they were all under five-and-twenty; their faces and figures were withered, and the bloom of youth quite gone, their eyes alone still retained their fire. At twenty the Arab women begin to fade, and at thirty they are old matrons.

They all seemed to live in perfect harmony, and the manner of the women towards their lord and master was obliging even to servility. To judge by appearances, it must be easier to keep house with three wives than with one; perhaps the rule "*divide et impera*" holds good in love as well as in politics, I must however confess that I do not envy the Mahomedan gentlemen their frigid joys, nor do they seem to find much satisfaction in them themselves.

The women here are mere slaves; of that chivalrous homage paid by the Spanish Moors to their women no traces are left save in the songs and poems of the Arabs.

The children are educated by women up to their seventh year; on reaching that age the boy is put in possession of a bernouse and a pony, and is no longer allowed to eat with the women; should his father be away he has supreme authority over the whole household, not excepting his own mother.

The manner of arranging a marriage is very simple among the Arabs. A man takes a sum of money or any article of value, and offers it to whomsoever he happens to meet with, saying, "Comrade! I hear you have a marriageable daughter, give her to me as a wife, and take this as a marriage gift." If the other thinks the match a suitable one, he replies, "Yes: here she is, take her with you;" and the marriage is concluded. The father must, however, warrant her to be a maid; and if the husband finds she is not, he takes her home next morning and demands his present back again.

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Yesterday we made one of the most interesting reconnoitring expeditions in which I have been engaged. These expeditions occupy several hours, and are undertaken for the purpose of driving the Hadjutes out of the *rayons* of the blockhouses, and the gardens belonging to the town. The Hadjutes inhabit the Sahel mountains to the westward of Coleah, and are notoriously the most thievish set of fellows in all Africa. They are the people who, on the 1st of May, cut off the heads of about forty of our regiment at Delhi Ibrahim.

We set out before sunrise, and marched down towards the Metidja. I was detached on one side with a dozen others, to search the thicket with which all this country is covered. We followed a track trodden by wild beasts, for a human foot rarely wanders in this place. We suddenly emerged into an open space of about thirty square feet, and as we stepped out of the thicket a large panther stood before us, at about twenty feet distance, and gazed at us with a look of mingled wonder and indignation as though he would say, "What seek ye in my kingdom?" We, however, appealed to the right of the strongest—two or three muskets were instantly levelled and discharged at him, but with one bound the panther disappeared among the bushes. A ball or two must have reached him, but if they do not happen to hit him on the head, which is his only tender point, he takes no heed of them. These beasts, and still more hyænas and jackals, abound in this district, as is shown from the ridiculously small price which is asked by the Arabs for the skins of these animals.

The Arab chiefs consider the skin of the tiger and the panther as one of their principal ornaments. The head of the animal is generally fastened to the saddle-bow, (the head and teeth are essential,) and the skin waves to and fro with every motion of the horse, so that at a distance one might almost imagine that some wild beast had just taken a deadly spring upon the rider.

But to return to my reconnoitring expedition. On coming near the plain we turned westward, to pass the gorge in which Coleah lies. As there is no lack of water here, the most abundant vegetation prevails, and we were delighted and astonished at the extreme richness of the scene. The luxuriant aloe sends up its blossoms to a height of twenty feet, and a species of sedgy rush grows as high as a moderate house.

From thence we turned towards our dry ditch, which is nearly finished, and climbed past it up to the very top of the chain of mountains, from whence the sea is visible. Here we found plenty of fruit trees, on some of which the fruit was quite ripe; the pomegranates and the figs were delicious. In this spot the commander ordered his troops to halt. After the necessary precautions had been taken, we were allowed to gather the fruit, and were soon scattered about the gardens in all directions, filling our *shackos* and pocket handkerchiefs.

After plucking some fine pomegranates, I lay down under a shady pomegranate tree, and looked out over the sea.

I could clearly discern on the blue surface of the sea a ship whose prow was directed towards Europe, and whose sails were filled by a favourable breeze; the thought

involuntarily occurred to me, "Would I were on board that ship, sailing towards my own home." This indeed looks a little like home-sickness, but I know not why any one should be ashamed of the feeling. Even Odysseus, the wisest of mortals, was not ashamed to weep aloud, and to long after his paternal hearth, his wife, and his child; and why should not I—who am the least wise of men—honestly confess that there are moments when I also long for those who are dear to me? Besides, I have seen nearly all there is to see in Algeria, the future can but be a repetition of the past.

I was on the point of beginning a touching monologue—a failing I have long been subject to—when I was startled out of my dreams by several shots, and a cry of "*Aux armes! Aux armes!*" We all ran to our muskets, and were ready in a moment, but the alarm proved a false one. Some twenty Hadjutes, who were lying in ambush behind a neighbouring hill, had fired several shots at our sentinels, who thought a considerable force must be concealed there. But the moment we showed ourselves the Hadjutes fled towards the open country, chased by a squadron of our horse: the Arabs, however, got clear off, and the only damage done was to my monologue, and to the ripe pomegranates which I threw away in the hurry and confusion. It was not till about nine o'clock, just before the oppressive heat of the day, that we returned to Coleah.

The chief wealth of the inhabitants of this town consists in large herds of cattle and fruit-tree gardens; it is surrounded by the most magnificent fruit trees as far as the eye can reach. The figs and pomegranates are now ripe, and we feast on them luxuriously. I say we, for the most

complete community of goods prevails among the Arabs and ourselves. The soldier and the beggar are born communists. I must say, however, that the Arabs do not seem much to relish this same communism, for we have several times missed some of our soldiers; it is true we found them again in the gardens, but without their heads.

The fruit here is at times extremely dangerous to the head, and when eaten immoderately, it is equally injurious to the stomach; this is particularly the case with the figs which produce violent thirst, and if this is allayed with draughts of water fever and diarrhœa are the inevitable consequences. The fig trees bear fruit three times a year, but one of the crops is usually of inferior quality: the natives generally gather this crop and press it into large cakes; when dry these are exceedingly wholesome, and form, throughout the year, a favourite dish at the Arab's table. The pomegranate is a delicious fruit, and much less unwholesome. The oranges are so wholesome that any one may eat twenty a day with impunity. Unfortunately it is not till November that they are ripe.

The wild laurel grows in great quantities near the town, and attains a very considerable height; I can boast of having tasted the fruit of the laurel as well as its leaf. It is about the size of a strawberry and very sweet. The sight of a laurel tree always recalls to my mind that noble Roman folded in his imperial mantle, with the laurel wreathed round his bald head. Time was when I would have given the last drop of my blood for but one leaf from this same laurel wreath; but I have now begun to perceive that when one is no emperor

but a mere corporal of *voltigeurs* the laurel is only good in soup.

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All Arabs of any education or wealth assemble at the coffee-house. To them it supplies the place of theatres and concerts, balls and tea-parties. There they spend the whole day, sometimes staying till past midnight. The coffee-house, like almost all other houses in the south, is built round a square court paved with white marble, in the middle of which plays a fountain. Round the court are two rows of pillars supporting the women's apartments; the rooms all look into the court: on the outside nothing is to be seen but high dismal walls, for the Arab does not choose that inquisitive eyes should peer into his holy of holies.

The vine or ivy is generally trained up the house so as to shade the whole court, and keep out the oppressive rays of the sun. Under this natural arcade the sons of Ishmael sit on soft carpets lazily splashing with their naked feet in the water which flows from the fountain over the marble floor.

Here they imbibe coffee, sherbet, songs, and tales: in short, it is a foretaste of Paradise. The coffee is not bad, only that they drink it black and have the bad taste to reckon the grounds the best part of the coffee. Before the slave hands one the cup, he stirs it with a reed for fear the dregs should sink to the bottom.

The Arab is a passionate lover of music and poetry: the coffee-houses are, therefore, never without their poets and story-tellers. Their songs are monotonous, and they accompany them with the mandoline, as in Andalusia. Coleah possesses the best story-teller and singer in all

Africa, so celebrated for the melody of his voice as to be called the second Hâfiz.

I must confess that fame has not said too much in his favour. His name is Sofi; at the age of thirteen he had the misfortune to lose a leg in an encounter with the Hadjutes, and since that time he has devoted himself entirely to singing and poetry. I never saw an Arab whose countenance wore so noble an expression, or whose features so clearly reflected the feelings of his soul. He does not usually come to the coffee-house till after sunset: as soon as he is seated the Arabs place themselves in a half-circle round him, with their eyes attentively fixed upon him. After striking a few notes on the mandoline, he began one day to recite a ballad of the great deeds and of the downfall of the Moorish kings. It was always the same measure, the same tune, sung now in a louder, now in a lower tone, and one would have expected its monotony to weary the hearers: but not so; the longer one listened, the more fascinating it became. First he sang the conquest of Spain, the battle of Xeres, and the death of Don Rodrigo. He then struck the cords of the mandoline more loudly, and sang the victories of Abd-el-Rahman, and the pomp and glory of Cordova, till the eyes of his hearers glistened. By slow degrees the notes became softer, and his voice trembled as he sang the death of the Abencerrages, and the shameful flight of Boabdil, the last king of Granada. The sounds of his mandoline died away, the Arabs hung their heads upon their breasts, and the pipes fell from their hands.

The unfeigned grief of the Moors touched me to the heart. I told my friend Ben Jussuf, who sat next to me, that I

had visited the scenes of their former greatness, the palace of their kings—the Alhambra, and the mosque of Cordova, the Kaaba of the west.

Scarcely had he told this to the others, when they crowded round me begging me to tell all I had seen, and I thus became an involuntary story-teller, with Ben Jussuf for my interpreter. I gave them an account of the grandeur and beauty of the mosque of Cordova, its thirteen hundred columns, and the tombs of their kings. I described to them the Alhambra, the marble lions who keep watch at the palace gates, the splendid hall where the Abencerrages held their feasts, and where they were barbarously murdered. I told them that I myself had seen the traces of their noble blood which time itself had been unable to efface from the polished marble floor.

Overcome by the remembrance of the tragical fate of their most heroic race, the Arabs covered their faces with their bernouses. “Young man,” said the Hakim, kissing my forehead, “thank the Prophet that he hath vouchsafed to thee the sight of these marvels.”

After a pause the Hakim said, “Friend Sofi, know you not some pleasant story which may dissipate the melancholy of our comrades, who still sit with drooping heads?” and Sofi, without further entreaty, began the following tale.

“Far beyond Milianah, on the banks of the Mina, there once lived an Emir, on whom Allah had bestowed every blessing. His life was pure and blameless. He gave the fourth part of all he possessed to the poor, and the hour of prayer was more welcome to him than the hour of feasting. This Emir, whose name was Abubekr, had a mare which he