

***MARMADUKE
WILLIAM
PICKTHALL***



***THE VALLEY
OF THE KINGS***

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The Valley of the Kings

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CHAPTER I

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"Woe on you, mothers of nothing! May the scourge of Allah flay you as you go!"

The mother of Iskender held the doorway of her little house in a posture of spitting defiance. Rancour, deep-rooted and boundless, ranged in her guttural snarl. Her black eyes burned to kill, their thick brows quite united by the energy of her frown as she gazed across a sand-dell, chary of vegetation but profuse in potsherds, towards the white walls and high red roof of the Mission-house seen above a wave of tamarisks on the opposite dune. The hedge of prickly pear defining her small domain did not obstruct the view, for it consisted largely of gaps, by one of which a group of three Frankish ladies had just gone from her. She could see their white-clad forms, under sunshades, down there in the hollow, battling ungracefully with the sand for foothold. With one hand raised as a screen from the declining sun, the mother of Iskender clenched the other, and shook it down the pathway of those ladies so that the bracelets of coloured glass tinkled upon her strong brown arm.

"Ha, Carûlîn, most ancient virgin, thy stalk is a crane's! There is neither flesh nor blood in thee, but only gristle and dry skin. Thy heart is gall and poison.... O Jane, thou art a fruit all husk; half man, yet lacking man's core, half maid, yet lacking woman's pulp! In thee is no fount of joy, no sweetness. Did love of our Blessed Saviour and the Sacred Book bring the pair of you to this land? By Allah, not so; well

I know it! It was the love of change, of adventure; and what is that in a virgin save the hope of men? And now, seeing none have desired you, your longing is turned to hatred of all things sweet! My son is bad, you declare; it is a grace for him to be allowed to sweep your house. But the son of Costantîn—that sly-eyed devil!—he is good: of him you make a clergyman, a grand khawâjah! Have I not washed these twenty years for you and the false priest whose things you are? Was I not among the first to profess your damning heresy? The house of Costantîn are converts of last year. Let Allah judge between us this day."

She paused a moment, the better to gesticulate a frantic reverence to the ladies, now on the opposite slope, who were waving hands to her.

"O poor little Hilda! Thou art a ripe fruit that whispers 'Pluck me.' But those two sexless devils guard thee sleeplessly. Thou wast not angry when Iskender kissed thy mouth. Is it likely, since thou didst incite him to it by previously stroking his hand? But the rest, thy keepers.... Holy Mother of God!... When shall I hear the last of my son's guilt! Iskender is vile, Iskender is worthless, Iskender is the son of all things evil. Ah, if the great lady, the mother of George, had been here, you would never have dared to use the poor lad so, for she loved him from a babe. But alas! she is away in your native land, watching the education of her many children. You and the priest, her husband, were gentler in your ways while she was here. But since she left, you have become true devils. Aye, you are right, forsooth, and the whole world of nature is quite wrong. May Allah set the foot of Iskender upon the necks of you, O false saints!"

With a parting menace of the fist, she turned indoors, still snarling. After the sun-glare on the sands, the room was darkness. Doorway and unshuttered casement framed each its vision of relentless light; but no ray entered.

The place consisted of a single chamber, which, with door and window open as at present, became a draughtway for what air there was. A curtain veiled one corner, where the beds were stowed in daytime, with whatever else was unpresentable through dirt or breakage: for the ladies of the Mission valued tidiness above all virtues, and claimed the right to inspect the abode of their washerwoman and pet proselyte. The mother of Iskender courted their inspection, being secured against complete surprise by the position of her house upon an eminence whence approaching visitors could be descried a long way off. To-day she had run to meet them with delighted cries; but old Carûlîn had met the welcome in the dullest manner, stalking on into the house, where, instated in the only chair, with hands crossed on the handle of her parasol, she proceeded to give judgment on Iskender, while Jane and Hilda, standing one on either side, contributed their sad Amen to all she said.

"We are more grieved than we can express, Sarah," the old devil concluded in her creaking voice; "more especially on your account, who are a Christian woman. It is solely out of regard for you that we are prepared to take him as a servant, provided he repents and mends his ways. We cannot have him associating with men like that Elias."

She spoke as the mouthpiece of the missionary, the dispenser of wealth and preferment. Sarah was obliged to thank the Lord for her kindness, instead of tearing her eyes

out, or treading her dog-face level with the ground. Yet Iskender was robbed of his birthright. It had always been known that one boy of the little congregation would be made a clergyman; and Iskender was clearly designated, his parents having been the first converts, and himself the spoilt child of the Mission till six months ago. Furthermore, he was fatherless, a widow's only son. Yet Asad son of Costantîn was put before him. Asad had a father—aye, and a clever one—a father who dwelt at the Mission-house, and was always at the ladies' ears with cunning falsehoods. If only Iskender's father—the righteous Yâcûb—had been still alive! ...

Thus brooding on her wrongs, with lips still murmurous, the mother of Iskender brushed a hand across her eyes, and looked about her. There was the chair still standing in the middle of the room where Carûlîn had sat.

Snatching up the defiled thing, she swung it to its usual place beside the wall, banging it down with spiteful energy enough to break it. Having stooped to make sure that it was not actually broken, she brushed her eyes again, and wept a little. Then, on a sudden thought, she sprang to the curtained corner, and, groping among mattresses and sweat-stained coverlets which the ladies from the Mission never dared turn over, brought forth a picture of the Blessed Virgin which Iskender had made for her with the help of a paint-box given to him by the Sitt Hilda on his eighteenth birthday. This she set upon a stool against the wall and, crossing herself, knelt down before it. Here was one at least to whom she could expose her wrongs, secure of sympathy

—a woman of almighty influence bound to her in the common tie of motherhood.

Was not Iskender clever, handsome, good? For what could any one prefer that lanky, pig-eyed son of Costantîn the gardener—the convert of a day, whereas Iskender had been a Protestant from his birth? Naturally, she had looked for some reward of her long adherence. But lo; they thrust her aside, exalting in her stead the mother of Asad son of Costantîn. They would never have dared to do it if the wife of the missionary, the excellent mother of George, had not been absent with her children in the land of the English.

At the first planting of the Mission here upon the sandhills, it had seemed to many Christians of the town to promise escape from the repressive shadow of the Muslim, and the protection of a foreign flag which bore the Cross. O sad delusion! That cold priest, those bloodless women, considered nothing but their own comfort. To that they made every convert minister; their notion being to patronise and not to raise; witness Allah how she herself had slaved for them, obeyed and flattered them, for twenty years! By the Gospel, it was black ingratitude that the son of Costantîn should be set apart for their priesthood, be made an Englishman, a grand khawâjah, whilst Iskender was offered employment—mark the kindness!—as a scullion and a sweeper in their house—Iskender, who had been their favourite till a month ago!

How had he fallen? Ah, that was a joke indeed! Listen, O Holy Miriam and all saints! It was because one hot afternoon, at their Bible-class, he had kissed the pretty Sitt Hilda, who sat close to him, teaching. Forgetting he was no

longer a child, she had caressed his hand approvingly; that was Hilda's tale. A likely one, forsooth! And the lad quite sick for love of her, as an infant of the female sex must have perceived blindfold! Already, before that, they had begun to persecute the lad, finding fault with his painting, his idleness, his language, his smoking—Allah knows with what besides!—so that he was vexed in mind, no longer quite himself. From his birth he had been a sensitive boy, always responsive to a touch of kindness. He was in love with the Sitt Hilda, and his mind was clouded; she touched him fondly, and he kissed her mouth. It was all quite natural. As well blame flowers for opening to the sun! Iskender was immoral, was he? Then what should be said of those who set such ripe and tempting fruit before a youth of the ravenous age, simply to punish him if he made a bite? Ah, they were moral, doubtless! But Our Lady Miriam and the Host of Heaven thought otherwise, they might be sure!

And if, in the month which had elapsed since then, he had turned his back on prayer-meetings and haunted taverns of the town, whose fault was that? His new associates were not depraved. Their only crime was that they were not Protestants. Even Elias Abdul Messîh, the cause of all this outcry, was a respectable man, only scatter-brained and light-hearted. He was a Christian, not a Muslim or an idolater, so what was there to justify such bitter chiding?

The missionaries called it a crime in Iskender that he idled abroad, trying to make a likeness of the things he saw with his pencils and paints—the gift of the Sitt Hilda, mark that well! It was all their own doing, yet so wrong! Did he

smoke a cigarette, it was a sin! Did he call in talk upon the name of Allah—a sin most deadly!...

"Peace on this house!" said a man's complacent voice at the doorway.

Still on her knees, the mother of Iskender turned and peered at the disturber, pressing both hands to her temples. In her confusion on the start the greeting gave her she failed at first to recognise the figure standing forth against the sand-glare, which, now that evening drew on, had the colour of ripe wheat.

"O mother of Iskender, how is thy health to-day?" pursued the visitor; and then she knew him for the brother of her dead husband.

"Is it thyself, Abdullah?" She rose up to greet him. "My soul has grief this day on account of Iskender. They treat him shamefully over yonder—worse than a dog!"

Abdullah rejected her offer of the only chair in favour of a cushion by the wall. He was an elderly man of most respectable appearance, being clad in a blue zouave jacket and pantaloons, both finely braided, a crimson sash at his waist, and on his head a low-crowned fez with long blue tassel hanging to the neck. He wore top boots and held a whip, though he had not come riding. The skin of his face had withered in loose folds, leaving the bushy grey moustache and brows unduly prominent, a crowd of wrinkles round his large brown eyes giving an effect of intelligence to orbs whose real expression was a calm stupidity in keeping with the general dignity of his demeanour.

"Even the son of Costantîn—that dirt!—is preferred before him. In this minute I was kneeling to our gracious Lady on his behalf."

"Praise to her!" exclaimed Abdullah, crossing himself. "There is none like her in a difficulty, as I, of all men living, have best cause to know, since she gave me all that I possess."

"Allah increase thy wealth!" said Sarah hastily, fearing the story she had heard a thousand times.

Years ago the respectable Abdullah had been no better than a sot and wastrel, having contracted the habit of drunkenness at Port Said, where he spent three years as porter in a small hotel. He had squandered all his savings and had drunk himself to the verge of madness, when one summer night, as he lay on the floor of his house (as he himself expressed it) "between drunk and sober," the Mother of God appeared to him, "all white and blinding like the sand at noon." The vision, after gazing on him a space, stretched out its hand and vanished. That was all. But Abdullah arose with new heart. Thenceforth he honoured himself, whom God had honoured. The change in him was plain for all to see, and he proclaimed the cause of it aloud with streaming eyes. The Orthodox Church confirmed the miracle, which made a noise at the time. The Patriarch himself wrote the seer a long letter. People who had long since washed their hands of the drunken reprobate vied one with another to help the known favourite of Heaven. Abdullah obtained good employment, first in an hotel at Jerusalem, then with an English traveller of importance. Now, for some years, he had been a trusted dragoman in

the pay of a mysterious power called Cook. His religious vogue had passed, his story and the miracle involved were quite forgotten of the multitude. But Abdullah himself remembered, viewing his respectability at the present day with the same feelings of awe and reverence with which he had received it at the first. It was the mantle of the Blessed Virgin, her gift to him. In it lay all his hope for this world and the next.

"It is of Iskender that I come to speak," he said, having pulled out his moustache to the utmost and swallowed twice with solemn gulps preliminary to the announcement. "It hurts my soul to see him wasting time——"

"Enough! enough, I say!" The woman screamed aloud to drown his words. "Am I not already killed with such bad talk, deafened with it, maddened with it every day from morn till night. Ah, by the Gospel, it has grown past bearing! They will no longer make a priest of our Iskender; that honour is for the son of Costantîn;—low, cunning devil! Iskender may now, as a favour, sweep their house. Here, in this very room, on yonder chair, the abandoned Carûlîn sat and told me the fine news—to me, the mainstay of the Mission, who have not missed a prayer-meeting for twenty years——"

"Allah is merciful!" ejaculated the dragoman. Though himself a staunch supporter of the Holy Orthodox Church, he had a regard for the Protestant, as the faith of the wealthy English. He had looked forward to the welcoming smile of English travellers when he told them that his nephew was a Protestant clergyman. This rejection of Iskender was therefore a disappointment to him. Nevertheless, since God so willed it, there were other

occupations that the boy could follow. More insupportable by far was the screaming fury of this woman, which, he feared, might lead her to disgrace her relatives by overt rudeness towards the English missionaries. He said:

"The flush of anger well becomes thee. By Allah, it enriches thy dark beauty, like the bloom on purple grapes."

The mother of Iskender started and blushed hotly, struck in the face by such audacious flattery. She exclaimed:

"Be silent, imbecile! Are such words for the ear of one like me? Keep thy fine phrases for the tourist ladies, who know the fashion, and can answer thee."

"Nay, the daughters of our land nowadays rival the foreign ladies in wit and fashion," said Abdullah gravely, pursuing his advantage. "I myself assisted at a wedding in Beyrût where the ladies talked and jested freely with the gentlemen, with roars of laughter in the Frankish manner. Ah, that was a sight! A hundred carriages, all festively bedecked, conveyed the guests to church, with cracking of whips and shoutings to clear a way. All the women were arrayed in splendid dresses brought from Fransa, and grand big hats with ostrich plumes and flying ribbons. A sight, I tell thee, equal to anything to be seen in Barîs or Lûndra."

"Thou seest such things!" The mother of Iskender pouted, envious. "Here there is never anything to call a show. Even when Daûd el Barûdi married, there were no fine dresses. Every woman present wore the head-veil. I fain would try a Frankish hat myself; but the ladies will not let me—curse their father!"

"They fear to be outshone," put in Abdullah, and continued quickly, apprehending a fresh storm: "Now, as

concerns Iskender, I have a project for thee. It was for that I came here, not to blame the lad. Know that a young Englishman arrived yesterday at the Hotel Barûdi, in search of amusement, it would seem, for when Selîm Barûdi inquired how long he wished to stay, he replied it might be all his life if the place pleased him. From that and the plenteousness of his luggage I conclude him to be the son of a good house—no less than an Emîr, by Allah—though why he comes here out of season Allah knows! Elias and the rest have not got wind of him. He as yet knows no one in the land except the two Barûdis and myself, who met him at their house an hour ago. My plan is to present our dear one to him——"

At this point Iskender's mother interrupted him with sudden outcry as of one possessed:

"Aha, O cruel priest! O soured virgins! Let the son of Costantîn be your dog if he will. My son shall tread on all your faces, the friend of an Emîr."

She shook her fist towards the Mission, seen in fierce sunlight through the shadowed doorway.

"Hush, woman!" cried Abdullah in an agony. Her foolish words set wasps about his head. "For the love of Allah, let Iskender anger no man, but be supple, politic, and so respected. Now that he is cast off by your Brûtestânts, there is nothing for it but he must become a dragoman. The Englishman of whom I spoke is but a step. He has need of all men's favour, and must court it diligently... Where is the boy himself? I thought to find him."

"Ask me not where he is!" The woman raised her hands despairingly. "He went out early this morning with his paint-

things, and has not returned. May his house be destroyed! He is the worst of sons. He shuns all counsel, and does nothing that one asks of him. How often have I begged him to renounce his painting, or to go with me to the Mission and make show of penitence. As well instruct the sand. It is likely he will scout this plan of thine. Oh, what have I ever done to be thus afflicted? Why, why has he not the wit of Asad son of Costantîn?"

"Let us go out and meet him," proposed old Abdullah, still bent on diverting her mind from its maddening grievance. "He cannot be far off, and to smell the air is pleasant at this hour."

The mother of Iskender flung her cares aside. To walk out by the side of so respectable a man, at an hour when many people took the air upon the sandhills, was to gain distinction. She draped a black lace shawl upon her head, while Abdullah strode to the doorway and stared out, flicking his boots with his whip. Then, gathering up the skirt of her flowered cotton gown in one hand, she placed the other in Abdullah's arm, ready crooked to receive it.

"It is the fashionable way," she tittered as they set forth.

CHAPTER II

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Beyond the ancient town and its dark green orange gardens, between the tilled plain and the shore, the sandhills roll away to north and south, with here a dwelling, there a patch of herbage. To Iskender, lying prone on the crest of the highest dune, caught up into the laugh of sunset, their undulations appeared flushed and softly dimpled, like the flesh of babes. Returning homeward, hungry, from a day of much adventure, he had espied from this eminence a camp of nomads in a certain hollow, and at once forgot his supper in desire to sketch it. He had settled to the work with such complete absorption that Elias Abdul Messîh, his companion, for once grew tired of the sound of his own voice, and left him, with a sigh for his obtuseness. And Iskender was glad to be rid of him, to lie alone and nurse his secret joy; for he had this day made the acquaintance of an Englishman, whose affability restored his pride of life. Might Allah bless that light-haired youth, for he was the very lord of kindness, and beautiful as an angel from Allah. His cheeks had the same rose-bloom as the Sitt Hilda's, while his blue eyes danced and sparkled like sea-waves in sunlight. How different from the priest of the Mission, whose gaze was of green ice! Moreover, he had praised Iskender's painting and taught him a trick of colouring, which consisted in washing the page yellow and letting it dry before setting to work on it. The artist had never been so happy since the day, six months ago, when the missionary had declared against his sketching as mere

waste of time. The ladies of the Mission, who had fostered it, obsequious to the edict, then condemned it strongly. His mother, too, turned round and blamed him for it. Only the Sitt Hilda still was kind, comforting him in secret, till his love leapt up. And then came outer darkness. Iskender was a profligate, and driven forth.

Debarred from Christian society, hardly less than Muslim, by his English education and his Protestantism, he was a pariah in his own land. This very morning, sketching a gateway in the town, he had been beaten by some Muslim boys and called an idol-maker; and, traversing a Christian hamlet among the gardens, had been reviled and pelted by its Orthodox inhabitants. For company he had been obliged to consort with English-speaking touts and dragomans, who welcomed his proficiency in the foreign tongue; and these he hated, for they mocked his art. The one exception was Elias Abdul Messîh. Elias could read Arabic fluently (a feat beyond Iskender, who had been schooled in English), and from trips to Beyrût and the towns of Egypt had brought back any number of miraculous romances, which he read and read again until they turned his brain. Impersonating the chief characters, he dwelt in a world of magical adventure, and spoke from thence to ears that understood not. For this he was named the Liar and the Boaster, and, though well liked, derided. He had taken a fancy to Iskender, and often sat beside the artist while he sketched.

His talk revealed new worlds to the pupil of the English missionaries, who hitherto had looked to England as the realm of romantic ambition—the land where, by simply entering holy orders, a poor son of the Arabs could attain to

wealth and luxury. Now, for the first time, he was shown the wonders of the East. Elias, in his tales, despised the Christians, his own folk, anathematised the Jews, and praised the Muslims, till Iskender longed to embrace the doctrine of Muhammad, and become a freeman of the land of old romance. But when he said as much, Elias shook his head. It was known that every Muslim would be damned eternally.

Moved by the example of this friend, Iskender's brain conceived wild dreams of greatness, enabling him in imagination to enslave the wicked missionaries and carry off his blushing love amid applause. He told Elias that his father, Yâcûb, had left a treasure buried in the ground, which he would dig up some day, and astound mankind; and Elias accepted the statement as quite probable. But such fancies were of no real comfort to Iskender, being rendered feverish by his sense of wrong. He had known no solace till this day at noon, when the English youth from the hotel had smiled on him. Now, once again, he looked to England as of old—to England where great honours were conferred on painters.

With a final dab at the sky, he held his picture off from him, to mark the effect. In love with the figure of a camel belonging to the camp, which was chewing the cud superbly in the foreground, he had at unawares so magnified the creature that it bestrode the whole page of his drawing-book; while the camp itself, the sandhills, some scattered houses and a palm-tree in the distance, the very sky, seemed no more than the pattern of a carpet upon which it stood. There was something wrong, he perceived—

something to do with that perspective which, despite instructions from the Sitt Hilda, he could never rightly comprehend.

But his pride in the monster camel condoned everything. He just lengthened all the tent-ropes a little with his smallest paint-brush, thereby imparting to the black pavilions a look of spiders squashed by the triumphant beast, and laid aside his work, well pleased. There were many groups abroad, of people enjoying the cool evening; he saw them stalking ghostlike in the coloured light; but they kept to the bound sand of the trodden pathways, and if any one descried him on his perch, none laboured up to see what he was after.

At ease upon the ground, with chin on palm, he tried to judge what colours would be needed in order faithfully to reproduce the sunset glow. He compared that glow to the insurgent blood ever ready to mantle in the cheeks of the Sitt Hilda; but this was a warmer, swarthier flush than ever dyed the white skin of a Frank. Then, looking east, he watched the blue increase on the horizon, its drowsy glimmer radiating thoughts of rest, as if a hovering spirit whispered "Hush!" A star glanced out above the distant palm-tree; in that direction it was night already behind the crimsoned earth. A flash from the grand glass windows of the Mission, ruddy with the last of daylight, caused him to wag his head and sigh:

"Would to Allah I were rich like one of them!" The English youth from the hotel had laughed at missionaries. Though here so great and powerful, it seemed they were little thought of in their own country. When Iskender eagerly

inquired whether a famous painter would take rank before them, the Englishman had said: "Yes, rather!" with his merry laugh.

"O Allah, help me," was Iskender's prayer now, "that I may travel to the countries of the Franks, and reap the honour they accord to painters!"

This with a fond glance at his drawing-book, which contained a camel—ah, but a camel such as Allah made him!—a camel worthy to be framed in gold and hung in king's palaces!

"Is—ken—der!" A shrill, trailing cry disturbed his reverie; when, looking forth in the direction of the sound, he saw in a dell beneath, where ran a footpath, a man and a woman standing still amid the shadows, gazing up at him.

"Ya Iskender! Make haste, descend, come down to us!" The call came again more peremptorily.

The voice was his mother's. Muttering, "May her house be destroyed!" he emptied the pannikin of paint-foul water which he had carried with him all day long, picked up his drawing-book, and obeyed. As he prepared to descend, the last red gleam forsook the sand-crests, leaving them ashy white.

"Make haste, O shameless loiterer. We bring thee news—fine news! Praise Allah who assigned to thee Abdullah for an uncle—one so kind, so considerate, so thoughtful for thy welfare.~.~.~. But first I must tell thee how the three ladies came in thy absence to inform me of their intention to educate the son of Costantîn to be a clergyman; whilst thou, whose mother has washed for them these twenty years, art required to sweep their house."

"What matter!" rejoined Iskender, with a listless shrug. "My ambition is to visit the country of the Franks and gain the honour of a mighty painter."

His mother stretched out her hands to heaven, screaming:

"Hear him, Allah! Is he not bewitched? Desire of the lady Hilda has made him mad. O Holy Maryam, O Mar Jiryis and all saints, condemn those who have led him thus to ruin. Hear him now; he would make pictures! Well, to Allah the praise; but it is their doing!~.~.~. Now, for the love of Allah, put such toys aside and hear Abdullah's generous plan for thy advancement. Know that a young Englishman has lately come to the Hotel Barûdi——"

"I know that well," Iskender grunted irritably. "He is my friend. This day he spent two hours with me."

"Thy friend!~.~.~. O merciful Allah!" cried his mother.

"Thou knowest him?" exclaimed Abdullah, much affronted.

"Come, cease thy dreaming, tell the story, mad-man!" His mother shook his arm and screamed at him. "Art possessed with thy dumb devil. Speak! What sayest thou?"

"May thy father perish!" cried Iskender, startled.

"Curse thy religion!" retorted his mother hotly. "Is thy uncle dirt to be thus disregarded? Ask his pardon, O my dear!"

Abdullah the dragoman laughed at that, and suggested they had best be moving, for the night was near. A trace of grievance lingered in his voice and manner, for he loved ceremonies, and had looked forward to a formal presentation of his nephew to the English nobleman.

"Come, tell the story of thy day!" he too insisted. At first it had not been a happy one, Iskender told them. He had tried to paint the beauty of the sea between two dunes, but it turned to a blue gate on yellow gate-posts; then a boat turned upside down upon the beach, but the portrait made resembled nothing earthly. Then the Englishman had taught him a new way, and things went well, and he had drawn a camel.~.~.~.

He was opening his sketch-book to display the masterpiece; but his mother shrieked:

"Who cares to hear all that. Tell of the Englishman; how came he with thee?"

"They stoned me," he replied indifferently; "and I was running from them, weeping, when he met me, and I cried to him in English to protect me. He had compassion on me, and admired my pictures——"

Iskender became aware that his companions were no longer listening, so stopped abruptly. His uncle seemed to think some miracle had happened, for he heard him praising Allah and the Holy Virgin, the while his mother kept exclaiming in her shrill-pitched tones. His mind strayed far from them, occupying itself with distant features of the landscape. All the earth was now obscure: stars sparkled in the dome of the sky. From a high, sandy neck their path surmounted, he beheld the minarets of the town, seeming to cut the sky above the sharp sea-line. The timbre of his mother's voice made for inattention like the monotonous shrill note of the cicada; and he had at all times a trick of projecting his wits into the scene around him, whence it