

These nomads were true Arabs. They had nothing in common with the hybrids who live in the Mediterranean Coast towns of Algeria. They were purebred, perhaps more so than most of the Arab races, which was the result of their isolation in this part of the world since the great Moslem expansions of the seventh and twelfth centuries. Their customs, their philosophies, their pastoral customs belonged to those eras when Islam's empire was flourishing. It seems incredible that in these days any race could remain so completely detached. Yet, so it was in the Sahara.

These nomads looked and thought as did their ancestors who built the Alcazar and the Alhambra and ruled Spain and Portugal for seven hundred years. Their tents and means of transportation had not changed since Richard I led his Crusaders into the Holy Land centuries ago. Long before Columbus discovered America, these turbaned knights roamed the Sahara without considering the outer world. They were still doing so when I joined them in the twentieth century. Unless gold or oil or uranium is discovered under their pastures, they will doubtless be continuing in the same way two hundred years hence.

It is chiefly the search for material wealth which leads men to uproot ancient customs and, in the name of progress, substitute their frenzied conception of living. More than anything, it was the Arab detachment from what went on in England and America which made me believe that I might find Serenity among these wandering tribes of the great Sahara Desert.

These men could see little good in our ways. They felt sorry for our confusion and anxiety. They wished we could set our minds at rest. Sitting beside the camp fire, we would



sometimes discuss the Occidental and his peculiarities, and while the argument followed various lines, it almost always ended with the Arab's conclusions:

"As far as we can see, your brand of civilization leads you to rush round in circles, wearing out your minds and bodies, turning your hair white and engaging in wars beside which our wars are no more than schoolboy fist fights. If that is what you call 'progress,' we prefer to be thought backward and continue in our way of life with the peace which the desert gives us."

And there was nothing I could say to contradict these observations, because the Arabs *did* have peace, not only in the silence of the Sahara but also in their daily routine and approach to worldly and spiritual problems. Religion to them was an intimate and integral part of their lives. It may have been the effect of the desert, but these men seemed to assign to God a far more important place in their scheme of things than do those whose countries are filled with all the accoutrements of modern civilization. In their eyes the Sahara was the Garden of Allah, the only place in the world where God can walk in peace unmolested by human beings. The earth was God's carpet and respected with bare feet.

So, little by little, I allowed my thoughts and habits to drift into Arab ways. I wore the nomad dress because it was best suited to desert life, and I made my home in a tent because it was the only habitation these wanderers knew. Whereas I had always regarded camping as a kind of temporary ordeal, I discovered that this attitude towards the out of doors was completely foreign to my nomad companions. They and their forebears were born in a tent, married in a tent and one day would die in a tent. Many