



TUNIS: a cosmopolitan city with a cosmopolitan face

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one had to put a bath for oneself. None of the Arab houses had bathrooms; and none had water laid on. And even where water was laid on it was strictly rationed. Rainfall is measured there in millimetres—and for 13 months on end once I remember the water was turned on for only six hours a day, and all extra water had to be carried from wells. Also, no Arab houses and not all European ones had gas or electricity (both of which were very expensive, although the radio licence was only 2/6 a year) laid on. We cooked by the old friend the primus and also over the charcoal pot. And, of course, charcoal has the one great advantage that it cooks so slowly and gently. I remember in one Arab house in which we lived there was a marble courtyard with the house built round the four sides. But it was so hot! As Arab women must not be seen inside the house or on the street, there are no windows facing the street or in the outside walls. And so there is no draught of any kind and one becomes overpowered by the heat. The only remedy is a bucket of cold water. I can still feel the sensation of standing on the warm marble of that courtyard with cool water pouring over me. That was delightful, just as the rockless, mudless, smooth beaches were; no sharks, no danger and my little girl could stay in the water three hours at a time."

Roofs, Schools, and a Library

The roofs of the Arab houses were flat and the Arabs hung their washing flatly on them to dry; doors were strongly bolted, but when she was alone at night, with only a softly-burning oil lamp for protection, Mrs. Chadraha sometimes felt far from safe—how easy it was, how often proved, for a nimble Arab to climb over the flat roof into the courtyard! But none did, though she was alone sometimes for a week or two at a time when her husband was working on the electric plant at the distant power station.

"One great delight I had," Mrs. Chadraha said. "In the Arab quarter there was an excellent library where for a subscription of 2/6 a year you could take out eight books at a time. The reading room was always full of Arabs studying. But I was the only subscriber

who regularly read *The Times*. I tried to persuade them to take *Punch* but they said it was too expensive."

Religious Riots

Mrs. Chadraha said she could not understand the message (since denied), announcing that the Bey of Tunis had fled. "He is the head of the Mohammedan religion; he is the leader of such a great majority of the people to whom their religion is of the utmost importance. I cannot think that he would leave. He seemed to be essential to their everyday life. On a feast day the Bey made the first movement and then was followed by the heads of all the families. On the Fête des Moutons he kills the first sheep in his palace at Hamman Lif and then the signal is given and all over the city sheep are being killed for the feast. The Arabs, they say, are never converted. You will hear of a riot and you will find it is because an Arab who has been naturalised by the French has died and his people have tried to bring him for burial to the Mohammedan burial ground. His family fear for him if he does not return to Mohammed; the orthodox Mohammedans fear for the sanctity of their burial ground if he does return; and so there is a riot."

To live in Tunis is, in the first place, to need to know at least a little of four languages—French, Italian, Arabic, and English. The various nationalities keep to their own languages mainly, the Maltese having their own in addition. Next it is to live within a small space in widely cosmopolitan conditions. And then it is to be between the very old world—Carthage, near at hand, is still the scene of excavations carried on by a monastic order known as the White Fathers—and the new world of anti-aircraft gunnery practice from the ruins of a fort hundreds of years old.

"Yes," Mrs. Chadraha says, "it was a good place to live for a time; it would be a pleasant place to live always if you had plenty of money and could go away for prolonged summer holidays to France to escape the quite unbearable heat and if you could send your daughter to suitable and probably expensive schools out of the country. But," she concludes, "it is not the sort of country to bring up your daughter in."

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