

SLAVES IN SALLEE

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne

Table of Contents

<u>SLAVES IN SALLEE</u>	1
<u>C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne</u>	2

SLAVES IN SALLEE

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

MAJOR JOSEPH COLT rapped smartly on the cabin door with the butt of his pistol. "Miss Clarice," he called, "please come out and get it over."

"In a minute," the vivandière replied. "You must give me another minute. I cannot get ready — for such a change — all in a moment, like you great strong men."

"A minute may be too late, miss," Colt pleaded. "The ship's surrendered. The Moor's boat may be back here any second now, and once they come below and see you, and set hands on you, you know what follows. Come out and get it over."

"And have you no final message for me?" came the woman's voice through the door. "Aren't you going to tell me that you love me, even now?"

"Miss," replied the American desperately, "you force me to repeat to you that I am still engaged to Miss Patience Collier of Boston, and though I am never likely to see her again, I haven't it in me to break my word to her even now. But, as regards yourself, I am sure you know what I feel."

"Well, Joe, as you won't say anything beyond that, I'll come out."

The lock of the cabin clicked, and Major Joseph Colt cocked his flint and raised his pistol. The schooner's narrow alleyway was lit by one small smoking lamp, and in its feeble radiance the man's sallow face, with its square-cut black whisker, looked drawn and ghastly. But this final shot was necessary. Any fate was better for a woman one cared about than to fall into the hands of the Barbary pirates in the year 1811. He was going to shoot her through the heart. She herself had asked him to put the final bullet through her brain, but he, could not bring himself to fire into Clarice's face. It was her dear heart that he would still.

The catch lifted, and the door swung slowly open. Major Colt lifted his pistol to the place, and pressed the trigger with his forefinger to half its firing pin. He would explode it as soon as his eyes rose to hers.

Then the pistol-muzzle dropped as though the brass-armed butt had scorched him, and "My Land!" rapped Major Colt, "who's this?"

He saw a dissolute-looking young man in stained finery; with a patch over one eye, and hair drawn into a queue behind, and tied with a knot of ribbon.

"Now this," said Clarice, "is what we call a fine dramatic situation. It would bring down the house anywhere. Ah, if I only had played this piece that day when the Emperor came to the Port St Martin, he never would have hissed me off the French stage."

"Curse your acting, miss," said Colt, brutally. He flung his pistol to the deck, and strode off to the schooner's tiny main cabin. "I shall never forgive you for what you have made me go through this last five minutes."

She ran lightly after him, and when he had sat down moodily at the table, dropped an arm upon his shoulder. "Joe, mon cher, forgive an actress her little piece of comedy."

"I am in no mood for it. I had wound myself up for tragedy."

"Well, there's tragedy enough. I've had to cut off quite a third of my hair. And does not that even move you, Joe? The loss of my hair that you have been so kind more than once to admire."

"I never told you I admired your hair, miss."

"Oh, not in plain crude words, I admit. But you have looked upon it, and your so speaking eyes have told me what they thought. You cannot deny, dear Joe, that you have imagined yourself caressing my soft red hair."

"It's brown. I mean, I give no thought whatever to your hair, miss. I can see for myself that you've done it as a man's now, and I must say your get-up disgustingly effective. Heaven send it sees you through, for I flatly tell you we're in desperate hands. As soon as the boat comes back we'll have to go."

Clarice shrugged her shoulders. "It seems to me you are unduly gloomy. We were chased by Captain Meadey half way to Gibraltar, and then when the Frolic turned back, the other John Bull chivied us through the Straits.

SLAVES IN SALLEE

Then came the squall, and away went our masts. We are waterlogged and helpless, and in two days more must have starved. This xebec turns up, and at least we shall be kept alive for the present."

"As slaves in Sallee."

"Like your great English hero, Robinson Crusoe."

"I am an American, miss," said Colt sourly. "I never heard of the gentleman."

"Then let me tell you that in youth he was taken prisoner by a rover of Sallee, and made slave to a Moor in Barbary, and presently escaped to follow fortune elsewhere."

"Well, we must do the same. Heaven intended me for a free man, miss, and I cannot and will not live as a slave."

"Do you think I am more eager for slavery than yourself? My duty as one of the Emperor's Escape Agents is in Cabrera or near it, not on this awful Barbary coast. You prate, my Major, of that marshal's bâton that is in store for you. Do you think a woman cannot be just as keen to earn distinction?"

"Miss," said Major Colt, with an angular bow, "I honour your brave spirit. What we have gone through these last few days would have been enough to daunt Ephraim Taylor, who fought Indians for forty years; yes, and I believe it would even have daunted Emperor Bonaparte. This desolate sea that's so near us now; the rover that'll ferry us presently to Sallee; the chains there, and what's beyond 'em in savage Barbary: I tell you flatly that they have frightened me. But I will just shake you respectfully by the hand, miss, if you do not mind, and borrow a pottle-full of your courage. My Land! Did you feel that bump? And, listen; there are bare feet pattering upon the deck. The boat's come back from the xebec!"

"Dear Mary!" murmured Clarice, "what shall I do if they find I am not a man?" She seized Major Colt's large hand in both her own, and pressed it to her heart, and then as suddenly cast it away as the bare brown feet of a couple of Moors showed themselves coming down the cabin stairs.

On the xebec they were treated with small consideration. The little vessel was decked only forward and aft, and under these shelters were stored her cargo of pirated merchandise. Her people harboured in the open; and if they were content to expose their own skins to the sprays, the rain, the wind, or the scorching sun, it could scarcely have been expected that they would be more nice with their prisoners.

It happened that the rover was returning loaded after a tolerably successful foray. She had tackled some eight Christian vessels, Spanish for the most part, had made a third of their crews prisoners, and had sent the rest to Eblis, and incidentally had forwarded a goodly percentage of her own people to Paradise in the process. There was no chance, as Major Colt gloomily noted, of an uprising amongst the slaves. Each and all of them were most scientifically chained. Moreover, the allowance of food and water doled out to them was so small that the souls of most of them barely hung in their shrivelled carcasses, and all fighting spirit had been completely chastened away.

The wind held, and the xebec sailed well; and on the fourth day of their captivity brought up to her anchors in Sallee Roads. Kherbs were rowed off through the surf and took her guns and the weightier bales of her cargo; and when her draught had been sufficiently lightened, she hove up and hoisted sail again; and presently was being very skilfully handled as she drove in over the spouting bar of the Buragrag River, which divides Sallee (or Slá, as the Moors call it) from its twin place of iniquity, Rabat. Her copper flamed in the sun as she danced amongst the breakers, and then she shot over into calm water amongst the other shipping, and came to an anchor. And then came a disembarkation of the cargo, the part of it that could not walk being packed on the tottering backs of the part of it that could.

At the subsequent auction sale the disreputable-looking young Frenchman, with a patch over one eye (who happened to be Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage), was knocked down to a stout and elderly Jew named Benzaki, but an officer of the Kaid stepped in and stopped the bidding for Major Joseph Colt.

"This slave," said the officer, "is requisitioned by His Holiness the Sultan for work on the new Kasbah." He looked hard at the American, and noted the grim strongness of his face beneath the four days' stubble of blue-black beard. "Take him, and show the deaths those slaves die who try to escape. Show him also the tortures those endure who do not work for the Sultan at their hardest, and then give him a rammer, and bid him pound earth for the new walls."

There for the time the two Escape Agents parted, after their names and descriptions had been taken down by a Redemptionist Father, who was himself also an Escape Agent in his way.

The house of Benzaki, the Jehudi, to which Clarice clanked along in the wake of her purchaser, was in the

SLAVES IN SALLEE

quarter assigned to his race, and was almost ostentatious in its unpretentiousness. Facing on the filthy street, it showed a narrow front of untended whitewash, which was broken only by one slim grated window, and a lowly door. But inside it was a regular warren of unexpected rooms, and somehow one gathered that in the thickness of the walls were other rooms which might well contain matters of interest. The internal odours were divided between the scent of partly-dried hides and the smell of decaying malt, with a racy spice of garlic thrown in to tincture the whole.

Benzaki led the way to a little dark room, lowered himself on to a divan, and motioned his new slave to stand before him.

"Do you speak French, Spanish, or English?"

"All three, señor. A French soldier who has served is of necessity a linguist."

"Moorish?"

"No, señor."

"Well, you must learn that. I shall whip you if you do not make good progress. What is your trade?"

"The military, señor. And also I have acted on the stage."

"A loafer, that is to say. Well, I have my own ways of teaching loafers industry. Do you know anything about brandy?"

"I have sold it."

"And drunk it also when it has come in your way, I'll be bound. Well, here you will learn to brew it. If you do not learn readily, I shall whip you."

The slave's one grey eye glinted dangerously.

"It will be advisable for your own comfort that you take also what discipline is given without open resentment, or otherwise I shall sell you to another master."

"Who I suggest, señor, might prove more kind."

"Possibly, possibly. But in this house you will learn secrets I do not wish passed on. Moors buy my brandy if it is offered to them quietly, but if it were made public that the stuff were brewed here, the Kaid (who is one of my best customers) would have no choice but to boil me in my own still. I tell you this as an example of one of the many secrets this house contains, which I do not wish to be carried abroad."

"If I am kindly treated, I can keep a secret with anyone."

"Ah," said Benzaki quickly, "but I see you mistake my hint. If you prove fractious, if you prove unremunerative, I shall take out your tongue before I sell you. It would not be so bad a piece of work for me as you might suppose. There is a steady demand for mutes all over Barbary."

Benzaki rose up heavily from the divan. "The sooner we get you into a Moor's jelab the better. Come with me now, and I will knock off those chains, and then I will see you strip off those faded swashbuckler's clothes. I know a renegado they would just fit, and who will pay a good price for them. So you see, slave, I am pointing out a way in which you can begin to earn moneys for your master already. Come with me and let me see you strip."

The slave shivered, and then backed up defiantly against the wall, with fetters clanking.

"You shall not have my clothes, you old beast."

Benzaki sat back on the divan, and clapped his fat hands. "Then you shall be whipped. It is always well to whip a slave soon after he comes into one's possession, otherwise he never learns to love one."

A couple of burly negroes bustled in, and the Jew gave them certain commands in the Moorish tongue. Clarice could distinguish one word only, and that was *bastinado*, and her heart for the moment stopped its beating. But then her high courage returned. "After all," she told herself, with a shudder, "there were worse things than having the soles of one's feet whipped to a jelly."

But, as it turned out, the discipline was postponed, at anyrate, for the present. There came into the room a stout, dark lady, trousered, and profusely veiled, who, it appeared, was Benzaki's sister.

"Ah," she said, and wagged a stumpy finger, "just what I heard. You've been buying another Christian."

Benzaki's shoulders admitted the obvious.

"Well," said the lady, squatting beside him on the divan, "you remember what I told you I'd do."

"I can't have you interfering with my business affairs, Esther."

"Poof! as if they aren't as much mine as yours. With every coin of my money invested in your hides, and your corn, and your arrack, and the other things, do you think I'm not going to interest myself in how you handle them

SLAVES IN SALLEE

to profit? Now, when you lost money on the last two slaves you bought from the rovers — and you know the Kaid said he'd take off your skin and stuff it with straw if anyone else came out of this house and talked as they did — I told you flatly after that I should manage the next one, if you bought another, myself."

"Tell me your wishes, Esther, and I will carry them out. It is not proper that you should give order direct to a white man slave."

The lady was clearly flattered, but she did not yield her point.

"He will merely see in me an employer. He will not be enamoured. My veil protects me. Isaac, you have my permission to go. Now, slave, attend to me, and remember I am merely your owner. What is your name? Your first name, I mean."

"Clarice."

"What!"

"Clarence."

"That is not what you said before."

"The other slipped out. It is a nickname I got in the army because I was slim and had a high-noted voice."

"You are a little man, but you do not look effeminate. I rather like little men," said the lady, and lowered her veil. "How did you lose your eye? Fighting? Yes, of course, you did, and you don't want to tell me about it. Well, I'll hear the tale of that when we know one another better. You are a Frenchman, of course, and therefore, you must have served under Bonaparte."

"Yes, señorita, I had the honour of serving under the Emperor till recently."

"They say he is a great fascinator. But he would not get affection from me. He is too fat. For myself, I could love only a slim, small, thin man."

Clarice straightened her shoulders, and the lady languished. "You Frenchman are dreadfully bold creatures, so I'm told. I shall hardly dare to have your chains taken off. And I've let my veil slip; how could I have been so careless? You mustn't think me bold, Clarence."

"I think you entirely charming," said the slave, and with a clank of fetters lifted one of the lady's hands, and kissed it delicately. "I wish we were on more equal terms."

"Oh, you are so sudden. That may come later. I wonder what you are? Not quite what you seem."

The slave swallowed some emotion. "No, señorita, I am not what you think me."

"Some day you may tell the mystery of your past."

"Kind treatment may get it from me, señorita, but till I had the great honour of meeting you I have come across little enough of that in Barbary. Your brother was just about to give me torture when you came in and rescued me."

"Oh, my brother! You should not mind him much. His bark is far worse than his bite. He never tortures his slaves as the Moors do. Why, Clarence, if you had a Moorish master, and you offended him, he might skin you, or burn you, or have you thrown on the hooks, or pulled to bits by horses. Now, my brother would never waste a slave like that under any provocation. A whipping's the only thing you have to fear, and you may avoid that if you'll learn to please me."

"Then, señorita, my business in life is an easy one, and the bastinado is far enough away. Permit me," said the slave, and once more saluted the chubby fingers with a grace that had been learned by the tedious teachings of the stage.

Now, Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage was, as has been shown before in these memoirs, very neat handed over matters of nice diplomacy; and, with an opening like this before her, was likely to do well, especially in Sallee, where unspeakable tortures would be the reward of mistakes. She was not fond of manual work — in fact, disliked it; but in the household of the Benzakis, where all were industrious, Clarice found it advisable to do some small violence to her feelings in this matter. At first the Jew was minded to put her on to the indelicate business of handling hides, but here Esther intervened, and this was relegated back to the grosser thews of the blacks. Similarly, in dealing with the import and export of salt, the new slave triumphantly proved that it is most uncommercial to expend a fine brain and small muscle on mere portage.

But noting shrewdly enough that she would not be allowed to eat the couscousoo of idleness, Clarice dropped with all outward readiness into the affairs of the distillery, and was presently brewing an abominable arrack, which certain true believers, who had more affection for their stomachs than for their souls, bought unobtrusively

SLAVES IN SALLEE

and in increasing quantities. The excitement and the danger of these secret sales were not without their charm. And always in the meanwhile she gave her patroness a most courtly attention.

Miss Benzaki was dark, fat, and forty — which, for a Moroccan Jewess, means that she was well advanced in old age; but she carried still the remnant of past good looks, and the graceful courtship of one who had learned her man's manners in male costume on the boards of the Porte St Martin theatre in Paris, came to the lady just for the moment as one of the most delightful pleasure of her life. Hitherto, it must be remembered, Miss Benzaki had been forced to content herself with the local Sallee civilities; and the manners of pirates are notoriously crude.

The Christian house slaves of Sallee in the year 1811 wore no chains, and were allowed a large range of liberty. Escape was practically impossible, and the horrible examples that were made of those who tried to escape and failed, were festooned from the walls as an open advertisement of what might befall the restless. Even the ex-vivandière, who had seen the sack of cities — Saragossa amongst them — shivered and shrank when these met her eye; but she ranged resolutely about the garbage-strewn streets of the town whenever she could get away from the house, searching always for Joseph Colt.

The Sultan of Morocco stabled his Christian slaves, who were employed in cutting stone and pounding earth for the new Sallee Kasbah, in a row of arches that had been originally planned to shelter horses; so that as things went on the Barbary coast they were well off. Clarice searched through all of these; but Colt was not there. By degrees she saw every workman on the Kasbah, and on all the other public buildings, still without finding him. A dreadful fear began to gnaw at her that he had already lost his life, perhaps to the accompaniment of horrid circumstance; and each time her eye fell on the hooks that carried those frayed rags of what was once humanity, something cold would surge against her heart.

But one day a Redemptionist Father, the same who had taken her name and description on landing, put this fear aside. Colt was working over the river in Rabat. In her thankfulness, she pulled from her pocket a few small coins which from time to time the frugal bounty of Esther had given her, and pressed these into his thin hand. "For your work, my Father. I did not know it till a minute ago, but there are moments when a slave can be gay, even in Sallee, and give his fortune to encourage those who are less fortunate."

A day later Clarice was escorting the portly Esther across the Buragrag ferry.

The finding of so inconsiderable a trifle as one particular American slave amongst the four thousand white men who toiled and groaned and laboured over the public works in Rabat was a big task, especially as Clarice had lured Miss Benzaki across the river to look for a certain cosmetic in the Sok-el-Attarin of the Rabat bazaar, which was guaranteed to conserve eternal youth. Moreover, it is hard to push inquiries amongst tradesmen, whose language you do not speak, for a delicacy which does not exist; and so the morning was wasted very fruitlessly. Neither by build nor habit was Miss Benzaki cut out for walking, and about midday she had worn out both her slippers and her temper, and had waddled herself to a standstill. They found a handful of shade under a deep archway, and Miss Benzaki squatted in that and ate some food. She made Clarice remain out in the sunshine.

"Your affection for me has cooled," she snapped, "or you would never have let me get so deadly tired. Besides, I cannot have you sitting beside me as an equal in this public place. Any girl would be talked about who did such a thing."

So, whilst Miss Benzaki lunched, Clarice stood out in the aching sun, and outwardly, at anyrate, looked penitent and amorous and submissive by turns. But presently the heat and the full meal and the unaccustomed exercise had its normal effect, and when Clarice was sure that her mistress slept, she also crept into a neighbouring archway and rested in the shade.

Donkeys came past her, bearing white-robed Moors, slave porters and free porters envied her rest as they plodded by in the heat; laden camels sneered at her when their supercilious heads swung to that side of the street. But even the buzzing swarms of flies that filled the place failed to keep her awake. She nodded drowsily, still seeing processions of camels with reeking loads of hides, and men with long guns escorting them, and Moors on switch-tailed horses, and other Moors on asses and stately mules, and still more Moors and slaves on foot. Especially slaves; yes, Christian slaves; but never amongst them one who was tall and straight and strong, with sallow face and blue-black hair——

"Clarice! My Land! it is Clarice, and still in those man's clothes and carrying the eye-patch. They told me these beasts had caught a woman slave rigged out as a man. My God! you can't guess what I've gone through, thinking of it. Here, miss, wake up."

SLAVES IN SALLEE

"I am awake. I've never been asleep. I merely closed my eyes. Good—morning, Monsieur the Major. It is quite a pleasure to see you again. You'd be flattered if you knew how much I've been hoping you'd pay me a call, but I suppose you've been otherwise employed."

"Yes," said Colt grimly. "I've been otherwise employed. I tried to come twice, but the second time they caught me." He pointed to his feet, which were wrapped up in rags of bandage. "It was only yesterday that I was just able to hobble about again."

"Dear Mary! They bastinadoed you?"

"I believe that's the local term. Next time they chop off a foot, so I shall have to have my arrangements better planned. I don't mind giving you a foot, you'll understand, miss, if it can do any good. But I don't want the foot to be wasted."

"Dear Mary! what a country!"

"It's no place for you, miss. I'd sooner see you in a village of Pottawottomie Indians. I'm just going to put all my think into that one thing till you're away from here and safe."

"And what about the marshal's bâton that is in store for you, my brave? That will never be earned if you leave off trying for it for one short day. And then there are the chapters you are to have to yourself in Miss Collier's 'Conduct of the Continental Wars.'"

"The bâton can be burned. I'm an American, miss, and out West, where I was brought up, I was taught that bâtons don't come first every time. As for Miss Collier's book, I want to tell you——"

"Clarence!"

"There's my patroness. Now listen. You must come across to Sallee with me. Only agree to everything I say."

"Clarence! You tiresome wretch, I'll have you whipped."

"Coming, dearest mistress — I'll make the old cat buy you — I have been watching every instant of your sleep. And then once we are together, we'll act as our own escape agents. —Your distresses of this morning have so racked me, sweet lady, that I have done the impossible. I have found the man who in France rediscovered the Bloom of Niñon, which is used exclusively by the Empress Josephine. He is a wise man from the wild backwoods of America. The Emperor heard of him there, and sent for him to France. He is a marvellous man, our Emperor. And now this great American cosmetic—maker is here to humbly offer his unique services at my lady's footstool."

"Why that," said Miss Benzaki, "is a slave."

"For the moment, yes."

"But he is a fine figure of a man, although I see he is not very sound in the feet. Stand before me, slave, and let me have look at you. Fine black hair, bold black eyes, and a great strong beak of a nose, almost like a Jew's. You've all the essentials of beauty, but I shouldn't call you bonny. Well, for myself, I prefer a man who looks strong like you do, rather than one who is slim like Clarence here. Now I wonder what's your price? If you are for sale, and your people would take Clarence here in part exchange, I might deal for you."

The vivandière knelt at Miss Benzaki's knee in a terror that was genuine enough. "My adored mistress," she pleaded, "do not sell me. I should die if I was separated from you. Besides, think how useful I am at the still."

"Yes, that's true, and you know more than we dare let you carry away and tell. My brother says he will have to tear out your tongue if ever we sell you. But I shall not do that unless you force me to it. Frankly, I should not like to cut out any tongue that has rippled out such a constant stream of pretty things. And, after all, you did find me this Americano, who you say can brew the cosmetic you have made me fancy. You there, Blackbeard, did you in your benighted land, wherever that may be, find out the secret of Eternal Youth?"

"A Mr Ponce de Leon did that, señorita, way down in Florida. But I guess you don't know you're quite wrong in speaking of America as benighted. The United States is one of the few counties that welcome Jews. Why, in a short time from now, they say the original settlers will be under—dogs altogether, and by the year eighteen—five—three, the States will be governed by Jews and Irish exclusively."

"How often do they impale Jews in the United States, or burn them, or pull off their skins and stuff them with straw?"

"Never, señorita. It's the low—down niggers you're thinking about, and it's only done to them in the South, and when they need it."

Miss Benzaki stood up and shook out her trousers. "Tell me your price, Blackbeard," she said, "and then come along with me to your owner, and let me see what you can be got for. Limp, Blackbeard, and curve your back; I

SLAVES IN SALLEE

want to buy you as a damaged slave, not as a sound one."

"Miss, wait a minute. I'm very sorry to say that I'm the property of the Government."

"That's Kaid Stephan Stephanopulos, the renegade here in Rabat. Well, it might be worse. Kaid Stephan owes us a large bill for arrack, and threatens to fill up my brother with gunpowder and set a light to him when he presses for payment. Blackbeard, if you limp sufficiently, and bear out my words that your feet have made you valueless, I shall get you for nothing, merely in settlement of our just and lawful debt."

Miss Benzaki was very jubilant that night to Brother Isaac over her commercial astuteness in bringing home two sound slaves in place of the one she had set out with; and although she was so dead tired she could hardly keep her eyes open during the recital, the sad eyes blinked with more than ordinary admiration at the fine figure of Major Joseph Colt.

The vivandière was given to understand that the days of favour were over. "I have always found something lacking in you, Clarence," said Miss Benzaki, with yawning frankness; and the slave, who was a woman herself, knew what that something was.

For a man who said he had no appetite for the job, Major Colt's courtship of the portly Jewess was (according to Clarice) singularly proficient; but even he did not escape that rule of the house which dealt with work. It was put to him very plainly that all the Benzaki assets must become dividend earning from the very first, and so presently behold him as a manufacturer of cosmetics.

It chanced that one of the rovers' ships had brought in a great lump of ambergris amongst her looted cargo, and this scent so beloved of the Oriental, Isaac Benzaki had bought. For long enough it lay in store amongst the mingled odours of the house because no one offered to purchase. But with the arrival of the new black-bearded slave, the opening came.

Now Major Colt, till that moment in Rabat, had given no thought to cosmetics, and was quite unhampered with any knowledge of how to compound them. He had more than once seen Mohawks and Ojibbway braves make up in their war paint, and tried to deduce inspiration from this, but finally was driven to conclude that the two cases were hardly parallel. So inventing by the light of inner consciousness alone, he worked up tiny doses of the grey ambergris into mutton fat, coloured it faintly pink with cochineal insects he caught on the prickly pear hedges, added a little crude borax as a preservative, and so produced a cosmetic that was no better and little worse than the thousand other nostrums of its kind in daily use elsewhere. But having, too, all the American talent for a label, he put up his mixture in jars of native red pottery, and so produced an article of toilette that proved most readily saleable.

Stout old Esther herself introduced it into many harems, and week by week gazed with shrewd black eyes on the complexions it had anointed, and bore noisy witness to the improvements that had been effected there. The Moorish ladies who paid for these attentions considered themselves as first discoverers of this Bloom of Niñon, and talked (in the strictest confidence) of their find on Fridays at the cemetery, when feminine Sallee met for its week's gossip. And so the sale increased. Then by a stroke of financial genius the quality of the mutton fat was slightly economised in, a cheaper scent substituted for the ambergris (which had run out of stock) and the price per red pot was raised till it became quite valuable. The result was splendid. Even those ladies who had done without it when it was cheap, found it indispensable when it became costly, and so the commercial success of the venture was made sure.

Miss Benzaki's first admiration for Colt had frankly been for his exterior, and once she had him in the rabbit-warren house in Sallee, she coquetted with him in the most brazen manner imaginable. Major Joseph Colt was emphatically not a lady's man; but under stress of circumstances he was willing to play a game to save his neck, or at anyrate his feet. He reciprocated the lady's advances at first awkwardly, but presently, when he, so to speak, got his eye in, with more art.

Isaac Benzaki, although he knew his sister's ways, and although moreover he was a Jew, had all of an Oriental's idea of seclusion for his womenfolk, and was openly scandalised by the whole affair. A dozen times a week he would break in up their intercourse, and would drive the American back to his grease pots with threats of instant torture and mutilations, and scurry his elderly relative away to the women's apartments by the sheer torrent of his shrill and angry abuse. Had she come to her time of life without learning a proper sense of tribal pride? She was a disgrace to the name of Benzaki! Flirting with a slave, indeed, when in her day she might have married the

SLAVES IN SALLEE

pick of Israel!

But Clarice was the worst of Major Colt's trials. If Clarice had ever guessed that he would turn poor Mademoiselle Esther's head in that disgusting way, never, never would she have taken him away from those horrors in Rabat. "You call yourself a man, and you let the poor old thing make such a show of herself. Poof! I have no patience with such vanity. To me you prate of your prim Miss Patience Collier who keeps school in Boston. But do you ever tell your dear Esther that she is making her silly sheep's eyes at an engaged man, Monsieur Joseph?"

"I am not enjoying myself," Colt would tell her with his grimmest look. "I am hoeing for our mutual advantage, miss, the row you set me, and if you'd show me a better way of keeping our scalps in their proper place I'd be glad to hear it. I tell you plainly I've stood up to the torture stake amongst Indians in my day, and not winced; but when I remember I've you to look after amongst these beastly pirates, my nerve's shook. Or, at anyrate, my invention's gone." He pulled out and screwed together the sections of a long pipe. "Even their tobacco's barely fit for a God-fearing American to smoke."

"I believe," said Clarice spitefully, "you've even kissed the old hussy."

"Well, miss, first it's wrong all the civilised world over to kiss and tell, and I expect it's the same in Barbary; and secondly I wish to remind you of your own theory that kisses leave no mark. I don't agree with that last, as I've told you many times; but as you're pushing me, I just want to bring up your own words to your recollection. Will you allow me a few draws on this pipe?"

"I hope you got a mouthful of your own nasty grease every time you put your lips to her wrinkles. Well, I suppose you will presently turn Jew and marry this pretty sweetheart of yours. You've made such a sound business in your cosmetics, that I suppose she thinks you're worth marrying for your talents. Dear Mary! But I am thankful that I am engaged already to M. Le Brun, and am free from these temptations to turn renegado."

"Miss," said Colt, puffing savagely, "there are times when I should like to shake you. The last occasion you mentioned the gentleman, too, it sticks in my mind his name was Le Grand."

"Dear Mary!" shrilled the vivandière, "is it at a time like this you must twit me with a moment's forgetfulness? I shall leave you, Monsieur the Major, and trust that through the night you will think of your degradation, and repent before morning. Faugh! fancy kissing a made-up old thing like that, and for aught I know dandling her on your knee."

But presently there arrived the unexpected, and existing arrangements in the house of Benzaki were terminated with suddenness. Stout old Isaac tottered in through the narrow doorway one noon, with his mouth filled with blood, and his heart loaded with rage and terror in equal parts.

The Kaid of Sallee had that morning summoned him to the Kasbah, politely offering settlement of a long-standing account; and Isaac had gone cheerfully enough, with the savour of money smelling very pleasantly in his nostrils. But, lo! on arrival, the Kaid, with that true Moorish humour, which rarely ascends above the grisly, invited him to witness the trial of a co-religionist for malpractices. The trial was short, the sentence curt, and its execution swift; and presently Isaac was exuding the sweat of horror and fear as he witnessed the impalement of a poor wretch whose one crime was that he brewed arrack, and sold it to true believers.

"Now that," said the Kaid with genial meaning, "removes a business competitor for somebody, eh, Jehudi?"

"Yes, Effendi."

"I believe you came here wanting payment of certain matters."

"Oh, no, Effendi."

"What, is there no debt between us?"

"I owe much for your Excellency's countenance and benevolence."

"Then, by Allah," said the Kaid simply, "you shall pay what you owe. It is not fitting that a dog of a Jehudi should be in debt to a true believer. The debt according to my memory is the weight of a bushel of barley in gold pieces."

"If I pay that," whined Isaac, "I shall not have enough to eat."

"Then pull out five of his teeth," ordered the wise Kaid, "and thereafter he will eat less. Shall the representative of his Holiness the Sultan here in Sallee go without payment of his just and lawful debts because the dog of a Jehudi must needs fill his great gross belly? Bismillah, no! Ho, you there, not the bastinado as well to-day. Pull me those five teeth and let him go. If to-morrow he brings here the money, we will forgive his

SLAVES IN SALLEE

presumption in daring to be in our debt."

Poor old Isaac mumbled out to his household this tale of oppression, and glared round with eyes glinting with pain and hate in search of someone on whom to fix the blame.

"I always told you," said his sister, "that there was danger in brewing that arrack, and that one day the Kaid (on whose name I spit) would cook you in your own still."

The Jew shook a vicious fist at Clarice. "It's you that made the arrack good so that even the Kaid would drink it. If I'd had warning of this morning's business, it's your teeth the Kaid should have pulled; yes, or I would have let him impale you if that would have glutted him. Good teeth mine were, too; the finest of ivory, and now gone for ever."

"You'll excuse me," said Colt; "but in the States they could fix you up with a new set for a matter of fifteen dollars, that would defy detection even under the closest scrutiny. They are said to eat very well also, if you don't tempt Providence with chewing gum. But if you'll let a practical man make a suggestion, Mr Benzaki, I'd like to point out that the old Kaid isn't gunning for you because you make moonlight whiskey. He likes his glass of corn as well as anybody, and he probably had that stake put through your competitor because he found the poor man was peddling a spirit that gave His Excellency a head the next morning. Isn't that so?"

"Poor Benjamin did brew a filthy arrack, and I know the Kaid complained of it more than once."

"There you are, then. It's dollars the Kaid's really after, not teeth, nor even whisky. His Excellency has had his financial eye on you. He's seen the arrack business is good; he's seen the Bloom of Niñon trade bud and blossom like the rose; he's noted (probably by the increase in the smell of the street outside) that your connection in hides is steadily growing; and I guess the Moors in the local wheat-pit have given him news that you've driven them out of trade."

"Yes," mumbled Isaac, "I'll not deny I've done well of late, and in one way you two Christians have been a good investment. But if I'm to be stripped of all, I wish I'd let both of you be flogged to death on the Kasbah works instead of buying you."

"And I guess under the circumstances that's a very natural wish. But it strikes me as being outside the political situation at present. The fact you've got to face is this: that old Kaid has got his nose on to your dollars. And here is the question you've got to ask yourself: Are you going to sit tight right here in Sallee while the Kaid milks you dry?"

Benzaki mopped at his injured mouth. "There is no help for me. It is the fate of Israel to be oppressed."

"Then let me tell you, sir, you know very little of your modern tribal history. The United States is the place for your capital and talents. It's God's country first, last and all the time, and it's the one country on earth for any white man. I guess," he added candidly, as he looked at his master's swarthy skin, "I guess they might take you for coloured at first, but climate and some hot water would soon fetch off a lot of that."

"And the women have liberty there, you tell me?" suggested Miss Benzaki.

"They are looked up to most reverently," Major Colt assured her. "I'm not recommending Boston, perhaps, as a residence, Miss Esther; but in New York I believe you would be able to shine in the most exclusive circles, as soon as Mr Isaac here has got his dollar mill fairly started to churn."

But old Isaac put a hand on his black skullcap and shook his head beneath it. "I am a Barbary Jew, and am too old to go to new countries, especially to your New York, where I am told the Indians come in and torture Jews, even as the Moors do here. It is no use your telling me they do not, because I should not believe you. Besides, your New York is too far away across the seas. Now if it had been Spain, where once my people lived till they were expelled, or France——"

The vivandière smacked the knee of her jelab. "Come to France, Monsieur Benzaki. With your talents, and your so perfect Parisian French you would leap into instant success."

"Not without influence with the Corsican Emperor. We had a slave here once, a matelot who had deserted from a frigate, who said that without favour from the Emperor no one in these days could rise to wealth or eminence in France."

"Listen, monsieur," said Clarice, and held out at him a slim brown forefinger. "The Emperor's highest favour can be procured by you, Isaac Benzaki, by the very simplest and most inexpensive of means. By the misfortune of a faulty general, four thousand of the Emperor's troops are imprisoned on the Balearic Islet of Cabrera. The French Navy is occupied elsewhere, and so it cannot go to enlarge them. As a consequence, His Imperial Majesty

SLAVES IN SALLEE

the Emperor has appointed Major Colt and myself as his Escape Agents, to arrange for the freeing of these prisoners. I am open to tell you that for the moment our operations are interrupted."

"Yes, I can see that," mumbled the old man. "You can make few arrangements in the Mediterranean whilst you are chained up here as slaves in Sallee."

"So there, Monsieur Benzaki, comes in your so magnificent opportunity. Sail to Cabrera yourself, you and your wealth, take us with you as slaves to work your ship; procure a cargo of the prisoners; carry these to the Emperor, and say: 'See what I, a Barbary Jew, have brought.' Now I ask you, Monsieur Benzaki, as a man of vast intellect yourself, what will the Emperor say?"

"I think he could not do less than give me a concession to deal in hides. I should brew no more arrack, once I was free of Sallee. But hides and the Bloom of Niñon" — he rubbed his hands appreciatively — "they should together spell fortune in France."

"They'd do more in the States. My Land! If you've a commercial proposition worth——"

"My friend, Major Colt, is an enthusiast for his new and rather savage country, but I do not think you would care to take mademoiselle to shine amongst the painted Indians who have their wigwams in New York."

"Don't you believe it, Mr Benzaki. There's nothing cheaper'n a frame house in New York City. And a lot of the better houses now are built of rock. As for Indians, you don't find them nearer than Albany since Ephraim Taylor——"

Benzaki angrily slapped his hands. "Peace you two, and quiet, or I'll have your tongues bored through. America I will not go to, because I hear they eat beans there, and their only meat is the accursed hog. France and the goodwill of the Corsican are not without their attraction. You, Clarence, will you lay your hand upon your beard and swear that what you have told me about these prisoners and the Emperor is true?"

The vivandière placed a hand on her smooth chin. "I swear!" she said, and broke off into a fit of coughing.

The uprooting of the house of Benzaki from the soil of Barbary was not a thing its heads could have carried out in less than a matter of weeks. Old Isaac, when it came to the point, sat helplessly on a divan, and held his aching jaw with one hand, whilst he gesticulated against fate with the other. Esther bustled with furious industry. She packed, and she fussed, and she ordered. From old forgotten corners she produced old forgotten rubbish, and decided and redecided a score of times over each item as to whether it should be taken to France or left in Sallee. And in the end of course she had to desert the lot.

Isaac had a trading xebec at moorings in the river, and in this they were to make their evasion; and, as she was naked of stores, food would have to be their chief burden. When from its hidden nooks in the thickness of the walls the old man's capital in gold and silver coin was added, the two white slaves and the two blacks of the household had all they could stagger under. It was madness, as both Colt and Clarice pointed out, to linger. To-morrow the Kaid would come and rob them of all. On the morrow, if by the disorder of the house the Kaid discovered their intention of leaving Morocco, he would make their stay permanent by those horrible methods which were peculiarly his own.

So for the Kaid's benefit they left behind them in the house a goodly stock of the Bloom of Niñon in its attractive jars of native red pottery, a fine parcel of stinking hides, and many demi-johns of rasping fiery arrack. There were also, heaped up to the size of a goodly haystack, garments which represented Miss Benzaki's wearing apparel for the last forty years. She was a tremendous collector of old clothes. It was a racial habit she never could break herself of.

Night fell moonless and chill; the pirates of Sallee snuggled into their homes; and when midnight came, and sleep was at its deepest, the lowly door beside the narrow window in the unkempt whitewashed wall was opened, and a procession came out loaded down with bags and bundles. Old Isaac and his staff led the way; a dead-tired Esther tottered behind him, with one arm thrust through that of Clarice, and the other hand clutching Colt's sleeve; and in the rear staggered the two black slaves, heaped up with burdens like the carrying animals that they were.

Dogs sniffed at them in the street, but forebore to howl; no human being accosted them. They came to the river side, and heaped themselves and their belongings into a boat. They rowed off to the xebec and made transshipment. And thereafter they hoisted plain sail, cast off from the moorings and blew away down stream towards the river bar roared against which the outer sea.

"The dear Esther will be woefully disappointed unless you marry her when we get to France," said the vivandière maliciously.

SLAVES IN SALLEE

"I think," retorted Colt, "that when she finds she's been tricked into making love to a pretty girl rigged out in breeches, she'll have nothing more to do with either of us."

"You do think I am pretty, then, Joe? Dear Mary, how jealous Monsieur Le Beau would be if he could hear you! Still, I warrant you do not write me down as pretty in those letters you send to your Miss Collier in Boston, which give the facts for her great book on the wars."

"Le Beau!" said Colt. "I thought your fiancé's name was Le Brun. Well, I don't think I'm very terrified of him anyway. My Land! Look out! Here we are on the bar. It's all Barbary to a tin-tack she's swept before we get her out to sea."