

The Seed of the Faith

Edith Wharton

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The Seed of the Faith

I

THE blinding June sky of Africa hung over the town. In the doorway of an Arab coffee-house a young man stood listening to the remarks exchanged by the patrons of the establishment, who lay in torpid heaps on the low shelf bordering the room.

The young man's caftan was faded to a dingy brown, but the muslin garment covering it was clean, and so was the turban wound about his shabby fez.

Cleanliness was not the most marked characteristic of the conversation, to which he lent a listless ear. It was no prurient curiosity that fixed his attention on this placid exchange of obscenities; he had lived too long in Morocco for obscenities not to have lost their savor. But he had never quite overcome the fascinated disgust with which he listened, nor the hope that one among the talkers would suddenly reveal some sense of a higher ideal of what, at home, the earnest women he knew used solemnly to call a Purpose. He was sure that, some day, such a sign would come, and then —

Meanwhile, at that hour, there was nothing on earth to do in Eloued but to stand and listen. . .

The bazaar was beginning to fill up. Looking down the vaulted tunnel which led to the coffee-house the young man watched the thickening throng of shoppers and idlers. The fat merchant whose shop faced the end of the tunnel had just ridden up and rolled off his mule, while his black boy unbarred the door of the niche hung with embroidered slippers where the master throned. The young man in the faded caftan, watching the merchant scramble up and sink into his cushions, wondered for the thousandth time what he thought about all day in his dim stifling kennel, and what he did when he was away from it . . . for no length of residence in that dark land seemed to bring one nearer to finding out what the heathen thought and did when the eye of the Christian was off him.

Suddenly a wave of excitement ran through the crowd. Every head turned in the same direction, and even the camels bent their frowning faces and stretched their necks all one way, as animals do before a storm. A wild hoot had penetrated the bazaar, howling through the long white tunnels and under the reed-woven roofs like a Djinn among dishonored graves. The heart of the young man began to beat.

"It sounds," he thought, "like a motor. . ."

But a motor at Eloued! There was one, every one knew, in the Sultan's Palace. It had been brought there years ago by a foreign Ambassador, as a gift from his sovereign, and was variously reported to be made entirely of aluminum, platinum, or silver. But the parts had never been put together, the body had long been used for breeding silk-worms — a not wholly successful experiment — and the acetylene lamps adorned the Pasha's gardens on state occasions. As for the horn, it had been sent as a gift, with a choice panoply of arms, to the Caid of the Red Mountain; but as the india-rubber bulb had accidentally been left behind, it was certainly not the Caid's visit which the present discordant cries announced. . .

"Hullo, you old dromedary! How's the folks up-state?" cried a ringing voice; the awe-struck populace gave way, and a young man in linen duster and motor-cap, slipping under the interwoven necks of the astonished camels, strode down the tunnel with an air of authority and clapped a hand on the dreamer in the doorway.

"Harry Spink!" the other gasped in a startled whisper, and with an intonation as un-African as his friend's. At the same instant he glanced over his shoulder, and his mild lips formed a cautious "sh."

"Who'd you take me for — Gabby Delys?" asked the newcomer gayly; then, seeing that this topical allusion hung fire: "And what the dickens are you 'hushing' for, anyhow? You don't suppose, do you, that anybody in the bazaar thinks you're a native? D'ye'veer look at your chin? Or that Adam's apple running up and down you like a bead on a billiard-marker's wire? See here, Willard Bent. . ."

The young man in the caftan blushed distressfully, not so much at the graphic reference to his looks as at the doubt cast on his disguise.

"I do assure you, Harry, I pick up a great deal of . . . of useful information . . . in this way. . ."

"Oh, get out," said Harry Spink cheerfully. "You believe all that still, do you? What's the good of it all, anyway?"

Willard Bent passed a hand under the other's arm and led him through the coffee-house into an empty room at

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the back. They sat down on a shelf covered with matting and looked at each other earnestly.

"Don't you believe any longer, Harry Spink?" asked Willard Bent.

"Don't have to. I'm travelling for rubber now."

"Oh, merciful heaven! Was that your automobile?"

"Sure."

There was a long silence, during which Bent sat with bowed head gazing on the earthen floor, while the bead in his throat performed its most active gymnastics. At last he lifted his eyes and fixed them on the tight red face of his companion.

"When did your faith fail you?" he asked.

The other considered him humorously. "Why — when I got onto this job, I guess."

Willard Bent rose and held out his hand.

"Good—by. . . I must go. . . If I can be of any use . . . you know where to find me. . ."

"Any use? Say, old man, what's wrong? Are you trying to shake me?" Bent was silent, and Harry Spink continued insidiously: "Ain't you a mite hard on me? I thought the heathen was just what you was laying for?"

Bent smiled mournfully. "There's no use trying to convert a renegade."

"That what I am? Well — all right. But how about the others? Say — let's order a lap of tea and have it out right here."

Bent seemed to hesitate; but at length he rose, put back the matting that screened the inner room, and said a word to the proprietor. Presently a scrofulous boy with gazelle eyes brought a brass tray bearing glasses and pipes of kif, gazed earnestly at the stranger in the linen duster, and slid back behind the matting.

"Of course," Bent began, "a good many people know I am a Baptist missionary" — ("No?" from Spink, incredulously) — "but in the crowd of the bazaar they don't notice me, and I hear things. . ."

"Golly! I should suppose you did."

"I mean, things that may be useful. You know Mr. Blandhorn's idea. . ."

A tinge of respectful commiseration veiled the easy impudence of the drummer's look. "The old man still here, is he?"

"Oh, yes, of course. He will never leave Eloued."

"And the missus — ?"

Bent again lowered his naturally low voice. "She died — a year ago — of the climate. The doctor had warned her; but Mr. Blandhorn felt a call to remain here."

"And she wouldn't leave without him?"

"Oh, she felt a call, too . . . among the women. . ."

Spink pondered. "How many years you been here, Willard?"

"Ten next July," the other responded, as if he had added up the weeks and months so often that the reply was always on his lips.

"And the old man?"

"Twenty—five last April. We had planned a celebration . . . before Mrs. Blandhorn died. There was to have been a testimonial offered . . . but, owing to her death, Mr. Blandhorn preferred to devote the sum to our dispensary."

"I see. How much?" said Spink sharply.

"It wouldn't seem much to you. I believe about fifty pesetas. . ."

"Two pesetas a year? Lucky the Society looks after you, ain't it?"

Willard Bent met his ironic glance steadily. "We're not here to trade," he said with dignity.

"No — that's right, too." Spink reddened slightly. "Well, all I meant was — look at here, Willard, we're old friends, even if I did go wrong, as I suppose you'd call it. I was in this thing near on a year myself, and what always tormented me was this: What does it all amount to?"

"Amount to?"

"Yes. I mean, what's the results? Supposing you was a fisherman. Well, if you fished a bit of river year after year, and never had a nibble, you'd do one of two things, wouldn't you? Move away — or lie about it. See?"

Bent nodded without speaking. Spink set down his glass and busied himself with the lighting of his long, slender pipe. "Say, this mint—julep feels like old times," he remarked.

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Bent continued to gaze frowningly into his untouched glass. At length he swallowed the sweet decoction at a gulp, and turned to his companion.

"I'd never lie . . ." he murmured.

"Well — "

"I'm — I'm still — waiting. . ."

"Waiting — ?"

"Yes. The wind bloweth where it listeth. If St. Paul had stopped to count . . . in Corinth, say. As I take it" — he looked long and passionately at the drummer — "as I take it, the thing is to be St. Paul."

Harry Spink remained unimpressed. "That's all talk — I heard all that when I was here before. What I want to know is: What's your bag? How many?"

"It's difficult — "

"I see: like the pigs. They run around so!"

Both the young men were silent, Spink pulling at his pipe, the other sitting with bent head, his eyes obstinately fixed on the beaten floor. At length Spink rose and tapped the missionary on the shoulder.

"Say — s'posin' we take a look around Corinth? I got to get onto my job to-morrow, but I'd like to take a turn round the old place first."

Willard Bent rose also. He felt singularly old and tired, and his mind was full of doubt as to what he ought to do. If he refused to accompany Harry Spink, a former friend and fellow worker, it might look like running away from his questions. . .

They went out together.

THE bazaar was seething. It seemed impossible that two more people should penetrate the throng of beggars, pilgrims, traders, slave women, water-sellers, hawkers of dates and sweetmeats, leather-gaitered country-people carrying bunches of hens head downward, jugglers' touts from the market-place, Jews in black caftans and greasy turbans, and scrofulous children reaching up to the high counters to fill their jars and baskets. But every now and then the Arab "Look out!" made the crowd divide and flatten itself against the stalls, and a long line of donkeys loaded with water-barrels or bundles of reeds, a string of musk-scented camels swaying their necks like horizontal question-marks, or a great man perched on a pink-saddled mule and followed by slaves and clients, swept through the narrow passage without other peril to the pedestrians than that of a fresh exchange of vermin.

As the two young men drew back to make way for one of these processions, Willard Bent lifted his head and looked at his friend with a smile. "That's what Mr. Blandhorn says we ought to remember — it's one of his favorite images.

"What is?" asked Harry Spink, following with attentive gaze the movements of a young Jewess whose uncovered face and bright head-dress stood out against a group of muffled Arab women.

Instinctively Willard's voice took on a hortatory roll.

"Why, the way this dense mass of people, so heedless, so preoccupied, is imperceptibly penetrated — "

"By a handful of asses? That's so. But the asses have got some kick in 'em, remember!"

The missionary flushed to the edge of his fez, and his mild eyes grew dim. It was the old story: Harry Spink invariably got the better of him in bandying words — and the interpretation of allegories had never been his strong point. Mr. Blandhorn always managed to make them sound unanswerable, whereas on his disciple's lips they fell to pieces at a touch. What was it that Willard always left out?

A mournful sense of his unworthiness overcame him, and with it the discouraged vision of all the long months and years spent in the struggle with heat and dust and flies and filth and wickedness, the long, lonely years of his youth that would never come back to him. It was the vision he most dreaded, and turning from it he tried to forget himself in watching his friend.

"Golly! The vacuum-cleaner ain't been round since my last visit," Mr. Spink observed, as they slipped in a mass of offal beneath a butcher's stall. "Let's get into another soukh — the flies here beat me."

They turned into another long lane chequered with an interweaving of black reed-shadows. It was the saddlers' quarter, and here an even thicker crowd wriggled and swayed between the cramped stalls hung with bright leather and spangled ornaments.

"Say! It might be a good idea to import some of this stuff for Fourth of July processions — Knights of Pythias and secret societies' kinder thing," Spink mused, pausing before the brilliant spectacle. At the same moment a lad in an almond-green caftan sidled up and touched his arm.

Willard's face brightened. "Ah, that's little Ahmed — you don't remember him? Surely — the water-carrier's boy. Mrs. Blandhorn saved his mother's life when he was born, and he still comes to prayers. Yes, Ahmed, this is your old friend Mr. Spink."

Ahmed raised prodigious lashes from seraphic eyes and reverently surveyed the face of his old friend. "Me 'member."

"Hullo, old chap . . . why, of course . . . so do I," the drummer beamed. The missionary laid a brotherly hand on the boy's shoulder. It was really providential that Ahmed — whom they hadn't seen at the Mission for more weeks than Willard cared to count — should have "happened by" at that moment: Willard took it as a rebuke to his own doubts.

"You'll be in this evening for prayers, won't you, Ahmed?" he said, as if Ahmed never failed them. "Mr. Spink will be with us."

"Yessir," said Ahmed with unction. He slipped from under Willard's hand, and outflanking the drummer approached him from the farther side.

"Show you Souss boys dance? Down to old Jewess's, Bab-el-Soukh," he breathed angelically.

Willard saw his companion turn from red to a wrathful purple.

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"Get out, you young swine, you — do you hear me?"

Ahmed grinned, wavered and vanished, engulfed in the careless crowd. The young men walked on without speaking.

IN the market-place they parted. Willard Bent, after some hesitation, had asked Harry Spink to come to the Mission that evening. "You'd better come to supper — then we can talk quietly afterward. Mr. Blandhorn will want to see you," he suggested; and Mr. Spink had affably acquiesced.

The prayer-meeting was before supper, and Willard would have liked to propose again that his friend should come to that also; but he did not dare. He said to himself that Harry Spink, who had been merely a lay assistant, might have lost the habit of reverence, and that it would be too painful to risk his scandalizing Mr. Blandhorn. But that was only a sham reason; and Willard, with his incorrigible habit of self-exploration, fished up the real one from a lower depth. What he had most feared was that there would be no one at the meeting.

During Mrs. Blandhorn's lifetime there had been no reason for such apprehension: they could always count on a few people. Mrs. Blandhorn, who had studied medicine at Ann Arbor, Michigan, had early gained renown in Eloued by her miraculous healing powers. The dispensary, in those days, had been beset by anxious-eyed women who unwound skinny fig-colored children from their dirty draperies; and there had even been a time when Mr. Blandhorn had appealed to the Society for a young lady missionary to assist his wife. But, for reasons not quite clear to Willard Bent, Mrs. Blandhorn, a thin-lipped, determined little woman, had energetically opposed the coming of this youthful "Sister," and had declared that their Jewish maid servant, old Myriem, could give her all the aid she needed.

Mr. Blandhorn yielded, as he usually did — as he had yielded, for instance, when one day, in a white inarticulate fury, his wife had banished her godson, little Ahmed (whose life she had saved), and issued orders that he should never show himself again except at prayer-meeting, and accompanied by his father. Mrs. Blandhorn, small, silent and passionate, had always — as Bent made out in his long retrospective musings — ended by having her way in the conflicts that occasionally shook the monotony of life at the Mission. After her death the young man had even suspected, beneath his superior's sincere and vehement sorrow, a lurking sense of relief. Mr. Blandhorn had snuffed the air of freedom, and had been, for the moment, slightly intoxicated by it. But not for long. Very soon his wife's loss made itself felt as a lasting void.

She had been (as Spink would have put it) "the whole show"; had led, inspired, organized her husband's work, held it together, and given it the brave front it presented to the unheeding heathen. Now the heathen had almost entirely fallen away, and the too evident inference was that they had come rather for Mrs. Blandhorn's pills than for her husband's exhortations. Neither of the missionaries had avowed this discovery to the other, but to Willard at least it was implied in all the circumlocutions and evasions of their endless talks.

The young man's situation had been greatly changed by Mrs. Blandhorn's death. His superior had grown touchingly dependent on him. Their conversation, formerly confined to parochial matters, now ranged from abstruse doctrinal problems to the question of how to induce Myriem, who had deplorably "relapsed," to keep the kitchen cleaner and spend less time on the roofs. Bent felt that Mr. Blandhorn needed him at every moment, and that, during any prolonged absence, something vaguely "unfortunate" might happen at the Mission.

"I'm glad Spink has come; it will do him good to see somebody from outside," Willard thought, nervously hoping that Spink (a good fellow at bottom) would not trouble Mr. Blandhorn by any of his "unsettling" questions.

At the end of a labyrinth of lanes, on the farther side of the Jewish quarter, a wall of heat-cracked clay bore the inscription: "American Evangelical Mission." Underneath a door opened into a court where an old woman in a bright head-dress sat under a fig-tree pounding something in a mortar.

She looked up, and, rising, touched Bent's draperies with her lips. Her small face, withered as a dry medlar, was full of an ancient wisdom: Mrs. Blandhorn had certainly been right in trusting Myriem.

A narrow house-front looked upon the court. Bent climbed the steep stairs to Mr. Blandhorn's study. It was a small room with a few dog-eared books on a set of rough shelves, the table at which Mr. Blandhorn wrote his reports for the Society, and a mattress covered with a bit of faded carpet on which he slept. Near the window stood Mrs. Blandhorn's sewing-machine: it had never been moved since her death.

The missionary was sitting in the middle of the room, in the rocking-chair which had also been his wife's. His

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large veined hands were clasped about its arms and his head rested against a patchwork cushion tied to the back by a shoe-lace. His mouth was slightly open, and a deep breath, occasionally rising to a whistle, proceeded with rhythmic regularity from his delicately cut nostrils. Even surprised in sleep he was a fine man to look upon; and when, at the sound of Bent's approach, he opened his eyes and pulled himself out of his chair, he became magnificent. He had taken off his turban, and thrown a handkerchief over his head, which was shaved like an Arab's for coolness. His long beard was white, with the smoker's yellow tinge about the lips; but his eyebrows were jet-black, arched and restless. The gray eyes beneath them shed a mild benedictory beam, confirmed by the smile of a mouth that might have seemed weak if the beard had not so nearly concealed it. But the forehead menaced, fulminated or awed with the ever-varying play of the eyebrows. Willard Bent never beheld that forehead without thinking of Sinai.

Mr. Blandhorn brushed some shreds of tobacco from his white djellabah and looked impressively at his assistant.

"The heat is really overwhelming," he said, as if excusing himself. He readjusted his turban, and then asked: "Is everything ready down-stairs?"

Bent assented, and they went down to the long bare room where the prayer-meetings were held. In Mrs. Blandhorn's day it had also served as the dispensary, and a cupboard containing drugs and bandages stood against the wall under the text: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden."

Myriem, abandoning her mortar, was vaguely "tidying" the Arab tracts and leaflets that lay on the divan against the wall. At one end of the room stood a table covered with a white cloth, with a Bible lying on it; and to the left a sort of pulpit-lectern, from which Mr. Blandhorn addressed his flock. In the doorway squatted Ayoub, a silent gray-headed negro: Bent, on his own arrival at Eloued, ten years earlier, had found him there in the same place and the same attitude. Ayoub was supposed to be a rescued slave from the Soudan, and was shown to visitors as "our first convert." He manifested no interest at the approach of the missionaries, but continued to gaze out into the sun-baked court cut in half by the shadow of the fig-tree.

Mr. Blandhorn, after looking about the empty room as if he were surveying the upturned faces of an attentive congregation, placed himself at the lectern, put on his spectacles, and turned over the pages of his prayer-book. Then he knelt and bowed his head in prayer. His devotions ended, he rose and seated himself in the cane armchair that faced the lectern. Willard Bent sat opposite in another armchair. Mr. Blandhorn leaned back, breathing heavily, and passing his handkerchief over his face and brow. Now and then he drew out his watch, now and then he said: "The heat is really overwhelming."

Myriem had drifted back to her fig-tree, and the sound of the pestle mingled with the drone of flies on the window-pane. Occasionally the curses of a muleteer or the rhythmic chant of a water-carrier broke the silence; once there came from a neighboring roof the noise of a short catlike squabble ending in female howls; then the afternoon heat laid its leaden hush on all things.

Mr. Blandhorn opened his mouth and slept.

Willard Bent, watching him, thought with wonder and admiration of his past. What had he not seen, what secrets were not hidden in his bosom? By dint of sheer "sticking it out" he had acquired to the younger man a sort of visible sanctity. Twenty-five years of Eloued! He had known the old mad torturing Sultan, he had seen, after the defeat of the rebels, the long line of prisoners staggering in under a torrid sky, chained wrist to wrist, and dragging between them the putrefying bodies of those who had died on the march. He had seen the Great Massacre, when the rivers were red with French blood, and Mr. Blandhorn had hidden an officer's wife and children in the rat-haunted drain under the court; he had known robbery and murder and intrigue, and all the dark maleficence of Africa; and he remained as serene, as confident and guileless, as on the day when he had first set foot on that evil soil, saying to himself (as he had told Willard): "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

Willard Bent hated Africa; but it awed and fascinated him. And as he contemplated the splendid old man sleeping opposite him, so mysterious, so childlike and so weak (Mrs. Blandhorn had left him no doubts on that point), the disciple marvelled at the power of the faith which had armed his master with a sort of infantine strength against such dark and manifold perils.

Suddenly a shadow fell in the doorway, and Bent, roused from his dream, saw Harry Spink tiptoeing past the unmoved Ayoub. The drummer paused and looked with astonishment from one of the missionaries to the other.

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"Say," he asked, "is prayer-meeting over? I thought I'd be round in time."

He spoke seriously, even respectfully; it was plain that he felt flippancy to be out of place. But Bent suspected a lurking malice under his astonishment: he was sure Harry Spink had come to "count heads."

Mr. Blandhorn, wakened by the voice, stood up heavily.

"Harry Spink! Is it possible you are amongst us?"

"Why, yes, sir — I'm amongst. Didn't Willard tell you? I guess Willard Bent's ashamed of me."

Spink, with a laugh, shook Mr. Blandhorn's hand, and glanced about the empty room.

"I'm only here for a day or so — on business. Willard'll explain. But I wanted to come round to meeting — like old times. Sorry it's over."

The missionary looked at him with a grave candor. "It's not over — it has not begun. The overwhelming heat has probably kept away our little flock."

"I see," interpolated Spink.

"But now," continued Mr. Blandhorn with majesty, "that two or three are gathered together in His name, there is no reason why we should wait. — Myriem! Ayoub!"

He took his place behind the lectern and began: "Almighty and merciful Father — "

IV

THE night was exceedingly close. Willard Bent, after Spink's departure, had undressed and stretched himself on his camp-bed; but the mosquitoes roared like lions, and lying down made him more wakeful.

"In any Christian country," he mused, "this would mean a thunder-storm and a cool-off. Here it just means months and months more of the same thing." And he thought enviously of Spink, who, in two or three days, his "deal" concluded, would be at sea again, heading for the north.

Bent was honestly distressed at his own state of mind: he had feared that Harry Spink would "unsettle" Mr. Blandhorn, and, instead, it was he himself who had been unsettled. Old slumbering distrusts and doubts, bursting through his surface-apathy, had shot up under the drummer's ironic eye. It was not so much Spink, individually, who had loosened the crust of Bent's indifference; it was the fact of feeling his whole problem suddenly viewed and judged from the outside. At Eloued, he was aware, nobody, for a long time, had thought much about the missionaries. The French authorities were friendly, the Pasha was tolerant, the American consul at Mogador had always stood by them in any small difficulties. But beyond that they were virtually non-existent. Nobody's view of life was really affected by their presence in the great swarming mysterious city: if they should pack up and leave that night, the story-tellers of the market would not interrupt their tales, or one less bargain be struck in the bazaar. Ayoub would still doze in the door, and old Myriem continue her secret life on the roofs. . .

The roofs were of course forbidden to the missionaries, as they are to men in all Moslem cities. But the Mission-house stood close to the walls, and Mr. Blandhorn's room, across the passage, gave on a small terrace overhanging the court of a caravansary upon which it was no sin to look. Willard wondered if it were any cooler on the terrace.

Some one tapped on his open door, and Mr. Blandhorn, in turban and caftan, entered the room shading a small lamp.

"My dear Willard — can you sleep?"

"No, sir." The young man stumbled to his feet.

"Nor I. The heat is really . . . Shall we seek relief on the terrace?"

Bent followed him, and having extinguished the lamp Mr. Blandhorn led the way out. He dragged a strip of matting to the edge of the parapet, and the two men sat down on it side by side.

There was no moon, but a sky so full of stars that the city was outlined beneath it in great blue-gray masses. The air was motionless, but every now and then a wandering tremor stirred it and died out. Close under the parapet lay the bales and saddle-packs of the caravansary, between vaguer heaps, presumably of sleeping camels. In one corner the star-glitter picked out the shape of a trough brimming with water, and stabbed it with long silver beams. Beyond the court rose the crenellations of the city walls, and above them one palm stood up like a tree of bronze.

"Africa — " sighed Mr. Blandhorn.

Willard Bent started at the secret echo of his own thoughts.

"Yes. Never anything else, sir — "

"Ah — " said the old man.

A tang-tang of stringed instruments, accompanied by the lowing of an earthen-ware drum, rose exasperatingly through the night. It was the kind of noise that, one knew, had been going on for hours before one began to notice it, and would go on, unchecked and unchanging, for endless hours more: like the heat, like the drought — like Africa.

Willard slapped at a mosquito.

"It's a party at the wool-merchant's, Myriem tells me," Mr. Blandhorn remarked. It really seemed as if, that night, the thoughts of the two men met without the need of words. Willard Bent was aware that, for both, the casual word had called up all the details of the scene: fat merchants in white bunches on their cushions, negresses coming and going with trays of sweets, champagne clandestinely poured, ugly singing-girls yowling, slim boys in petticoats dancing — perhaps little Ahmed among them.

"I went down to the court just now. Ayoub has disappeared," Mr. Blandhorn continued.

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"Of course. When I heard in the bazaar that that black caravan was in from the south I knew he'd be off. . ."
Mr. Blandhorn lowered his voice. "Willard — have you reason to think . . . that Ayoub joins in their rites?"

"Myriem has always said he was a Hamatcha, sir. Look at those queer cuts and scars on him. . . It's a much bloodier sect than the Aissaouas."

Through the nagging throb of the instruments came a sound of human wailing, cadenced, terrible, relentless, carried from a long way off on a lift of the air. Then the air died, and the wailing with it.

"From somewhere near the Potters' Field . . . there's where the caravan is camping," Willard murmured.

The old man made no answer. He sat with his head bowed, his veined hands grasping his knees; he seemed to his disciple to be whispering fragments of Scripture.

"Willard, my son, this is our fault," he said at length.

"What — ? Ayoub?"

"Ayoub is a poor ignorant creature, hardly more than an animal. Even when he witnessed for Jesus I was not very sure the Word reached him. I refer to — to what Harry Spink said this evening. . . It has kept me from sleeping, Willard Bent."

"Yes — I know, sir."

"Harry Spink is a worldly minded man. But he is not a bad man. He did a manly thing when he left us, since he did not feel the call. But we have felt the call, Willard, you and I — and when a man like Spink puts us a question such as he put this evening we ought to be able to answer it. And we ought not to want to avoid answering it."

"You mean when he said: 'What is there in it for Jesus?'"

"The phrase was irreverent, but the meaning reached me. He meant, I take it: 'What have your long years here profited to Christ?' You understood it so — ?"

"Yes. He said to me in the bazaar: 'What's your bag?'"

Mr. Blandhorn sighed heavily. For a few minutes Willard fancied he had fallen asleep; but he lifted his head and, stretching his hand out, laid it on his disciple's arm.

"The Lord chooses His messengers as it pleaseth Him; I have been awaiting this for a long time." The young man felt his arm strongly grasped. "Willard, you have been much to me all these years; but that is nothing. All that matters is what you are to Christ . . . and the test of that, at this moment, is your willingness to tell me the exact truth, as you see it."

Willard Bent felt as if he were a very tall building, and his heart a lift suddenly dropping down from the roof to the cellar. He stirred nervously, releasing his arm, and cleared his throat; but he made no answer. Mr. Blandhorn went on:

"Willard, this is the day of our accounting — of my accounting. What have I done with my twenty-five years in Africa? I might deceive myself as long as my wife lived — I cannot now." He added, after a pause: "Thank heaven she never doubted. . ."

The younger man, with an inward shiver, remembered some of Mrs. Blandhorn's confidences. "I suppose that's what marriage is," he mused — "just a fog, like everything else."

Aloud he asked: "Then why should you doubt, sir?"

"Because my eyes have been opened — "

"By Harry Spink?" the disciple sneered.

The old man raised his hand. "'Out of the mouths of babes — ' But it is not Harry Spink who first set me thinking. He has merely loosened my tongue. He has been the humble instrument compelling me to exact the truth of you."

Again Bent felt his heart dropping down a long dark shaft. He found no words at the bottom of it, and Mr. Blandhorn continued: "The truth and the whole truth, Willard Bent. We have failed — I have failed. We have not reached the souls of these people. Those who still come to us do so from interested motives — or, even if I do some few of them an injustice, if there is in some a blind yearning for the light, is there one among them whose eyes we have really opened?"

Willard Bent sat silent, looking up and down the long years, as if to summon from the depths of memory some single incident that should permit him to say there was.

"You don't answer, my poor young friend. Perhaps you have been clearer-sighted; perhaps you saw long ago

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that we were not worthy of our hire."

"I never thought that of you, sir!"

"Nor of yourself? For we have been one — or so I believed — in all our hopes and efforts. Have you been satisfied with your results?"

Willard saw the dialectical trap, but some roused force in him refused to evade it.

"No, sir — God knows."

"Then I am answered. We have failed: Africa has beaten us. It has always been my way, as you know, Willard, to face the truth squarely," added the old man who had lived so long in dreams; "and now that this truth has been borne in on me, painful as it is, I must act on it . . . act in accordance with its discovery. . ."

He drew a long breath, as if oppressed by the weight of his resolution, and sat silent for a moment, fanning his face with a corner of his white draperies.

"And here too — here too I must have your help, Willard," he began presently, his hand again weighing on the young man's arm. "I will tell you the conclusions I have reached; and you must answer me — as you would answer your Maker."

"Yes, sir."

The old man lowered his voice. "It is our lukewarmness, Willard — it is nothing else. We have not witnessed for Christ as His saints and martyrs witnessed for Him. What have we done to fix the attention of these people, to convince them of our zeal, to overwhelm them with the irresistibility of the Truth? Answer me on your word — what have we done?"

Willard pondered. "But the saints and martyrs . . . were persecuted, sir."

"Persecuted! You have spoken the word I wanted."

"But the people here," Willard argued, "don't want to persecute anybody. They're not fanatical unless you insult their religion."

Mr. Blandhorn's grasp grew tighter. "Insult their religion! That's it . . . to-night you find just the words. . ."

Willard felt his arm shake with the tremor that passed through the other's body. "The saints and martyrs insulted the religion of the heathen — they spat upon it, Willard — they rushed into the temples and knocked down the idols. They said to the heathen: 'Turn away your faces from all your abominations,' and after the manner of men they fought with the beasts at Ephesus. What is the Church on earth called? The Church Militant! You and I are soldiers of the Cross."

The missionary had risen and stood leaning against the parapet, his right arm lifted as if he spoke from a pulpit. The music at the wool-merchant's had ceased, but now and then, through the midnight silence, there came an echo of ritual howls from the Potter's Field.

Willard was still seated, his head thrown back against the parapet, his eyes raised to Mr. Blandhorn. Following the gesture of the missionary's lifted hand, from which the muslin fell back like the sleeve of a surplice, the young man's gaze was led upward to another white figure, hovering small and remote above their heads. It was a Muezzin leaning from his airy balcony to drop on the blue-gray masses of the starlit city the cry: "Only Allah is great!"

Mr. Blandhorn saw the white figure too, and stood facing it with motionless raised arm.

"Only Christ is great, only Christ crucified!" he suddenly shouted in Arabic with all the strength of his broad lungs.

The figure paused, and seemed to Willard to bend over, as if peering down in their direction; but a moment later it had moved to the other corner of the balcony, and the cry fell again on the sleeping roofs:

"Allah — Allah — only Allah!"

"Christ — Christ — only Christ crucified!" roared Mr. Blandhorn, exalted with wrath and shaking his fist at the aerial puppet.

The puppet once more paused and peered; then it moved on and vanished behind the flank of the minaret.

The missionary, still towering with lifted arm, dusky-faced in the starlight, seemed to Willard to have grown in majesty and stature. But presently his arm fell and his head sank into his hands. The young man knelt down, hiding his face also, and they prayed in silence, side by side, while from the farther corners of the minaret, more faintly, fell the infidel call.

Willard, his prayer ended, looked up, and saw that the old man's garments were stirred as if by a ripple of air.

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But the air was quite still, and the disciple perceived that the tremor of the muslin was communicated to it by Mr. Blandhorn's body.

"He's trembling — trembling all over. He's afraid of something. What's he afraid of?" And in the same breath Willard had answered his own question: "He's afraid of what he's made up his mind to do."

TWO days later Willard Bent sat in the shade of a ruined tomb outside the Gate of the Graves and watched the people streaming in to Eloued. It was the eve of the feast of the local saint, Sidi Oman, who slept in a corner of the Great Mosque, under a segment of green-tiled cupola, and was held in deep reverence by the country people, many of whom belonged to the powerful fraternity founded in his name.

The ruin stood on a hillock beyond the outer wall. From where the missionary sat he overlooked the fortified gate and the irregular expanse of the Potter's Field, with its primitive furnaces built into hollows of the ground between ridges shaded by stunted olive-trees. On the farther side of the trail which the pilgrims followed on entering the gate lay a sun-blistered cemetery, where hucksters traded between the crooked gravestones and the humblest caravans camped in a waste of refuse, offal and stripped date-branches. A cloud of dust, perpetually subsiding and gathering again, hid these sordid details from Bent's eyes, but not from his imagination.

"Nowhere in Eloued," he thought with a shudder, "are the flies as fat and blue as they are inside that gate."

But this was a fugitive reflection: his mind was wholly absorbed in what had happened in the last forty-eight hours, and what was likely to happen in the next.

"To think," he mused, "that after ten years I don't really know him! . . . A laborer in the Lord's vineyard — shows how much good I am!"

His thoughts were moody and oppressed with fear. Never, since his first meeting with Mr. Blandhorn, had he pondered so deeply the problem of his superior's character. He tried to deduce from the past some inference as to what Mr. Blandhorn was likely to do next; but, as far as he knew, there was nothing in the old man's previous history resembling the midnight scene on the Mission terrace.

That scene had already had its repercussion.

On the following morning, Willard, drifting as usual about the bazaar, had met a friendly French official, who, taking him aside, had told him there were strange reports abroad — which he hoped Mr. Bent would be able to deny. . . In short, as it had never been Mr. Blandhorn's policy to offend the native population, or insult their religion, the Administration was confident that . . .

Surprised by Willard's silence, and visibly annoyed at being obliged to pursue the subject, the friendly official, growing graver, had then asked what had really occurred; and, on Willard's replying, had charged him with an earnest recommendation to his superior — a warning, if necessary — that the government would not, under any circumstances, tolerate a repetition. . . "But I dare say it was the heat?" he concluded; and Willard weakly acquiesced.

He was ashamed now of having done so; yet, after all, how did he know it was not the heat? A heavy sanguine man like Mr. Blandhorn would probably never quite accustom himself to the long strain of the African summer. "Or his wife's death — " he had murmured to the sympathetic official, who smiled with relief at the suggestion.

And now he sat overlooking the enigmatic city, and asking himself again what he really knew of his superior. Mr. Blandhorn had come to Eloued as a young man, extremely poor, and dependent on the pittance which the Missionary Society at that time gave to its representatives. To ingratiate himself among the people (the expression was his own), and also to earn a few pesetas, he had worked as a carpenter in the bazaar, first in the soukh of the ploughshares and then in that of the cabinet makers. His skill in carpentry had not been great, for his large eloquent hands were meant to wave from a pulpit, and not to use the adze or the chisel; but he had picked up a little Arabic (Willard always marvelled that it remained so little), and had made many acquaintances — and, as he thought, some converts. At any rate, no one, either then or later, appeared to wish him ill, and during the massacre his house had been respected, and the insurgents had even winked at the aid he had courageously given to the French.

Yes — he had certainly been courageous. There was in him, in spite of his weaknesses and his vacillations, a streak of moral heroism that perhaps only waited its hour. . . But hitherto his principle had always been that the missionary must win converts by kindness, by tolerance, and by the example of a blameless life.

Could it really be Harry Spink's question that had shaken him in this belief? Or was it the long-accumulated sense of inefficiency that so often weighed on his disciple? Or was it simply the call — did it just mean that their

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hour had come?

Shivering a little in spite of the heat, Willard pulled himself together and descended into the city. He had been seized with a sudden desire to know what Mr. Blandhorn was about, and avoiding the crowd he hurried back by circuitous lanes to the Mission. On the way he paused at a certain corner and looked into a court full of the murmur of water. Beyond it was an arcade detached against depths of shadow in which a few lights glimmered. White figures, all facing one way, crouched and touched their foreheads to the tiles, the soles of their bare feet, wet with recent ablutions, turning up as their bodies swayed forward. Willard caught the scowl of a beggar on the threshold, and hurried past the forbidden scene.

He found Mr. Blandhorn in the meeting-room, tying up Ayoub's head.

"I do it awkwardly," the missionary mumbled, a safety-pin between his teeth. "Alas, my hands are not hers."

"What's he done to himself?" Willard growled; and above the bandaged head Mr. Blandhorn's expressive eyebrows answered.

There was a dark stain on the back of Ayoub's faded shirt, and another on the blue scarf he wore about his head.

"Ugh — it's like cats slinking back after a gutter-fight," the young man muttered.

Ayoub wound his scarf over the bandages, shambled back to the doorway, and squatted down to watch the fig-tree.

The missionaries looked at each other across the empty room.

"What's the use, sir?" was on Willard's lips; but instead of speaking he threw himself down on the divan.

There was to be no prayer-meeting that afternoon, and the two men sat silent, gazing at the back of Ayoub's head. A smell of disinfectants hung in the heavy air. . .

"Where's Myriem?" Willard asked, to say something.

"I believe she had a ceremony of some sort . . . a family affair. . ."

"A circumcision, I suppose?"

Mr. Blandhorn did not answer, and Willard was sorry he had made the suggestion. It would simply serve as another reminder of their failure. . .

He stole a furtive glance at Mr. Blandhorn, nervously wondering if the time had come to speak of the French official's warning. He had put off doing so, half hoping it would not be necessary. The old man seemed so calm, so like his usual self, that it might be wiser to let the matter drop. Perhaps he had already forgotten the scene on the terrace; or perhaps he thought he had sufficiently witnessed for the Lord in shouting his insult to the Muezzin. But Willard did not really believe this: he remembered the tremor that had shaken Mr. Blandhorn after the challenge, and he felt sure it was not a retrospective fear.

"Our friend Spink has been with me," said Mr. Blandhorn suddenly. "He came in soon after you left."

"Ah? I'm sorry I missed him. I thought he'd gone, from his not coming in yesterday."

"No; he leaves to-morrow morning for Mogador." Mr. Blandhorn paused, still absently staring at the back of Ayoub's neck; then he added: "I have asked him to take you with him."

"To take me — Harry Spink? In his automobile?" Willard gasped. His heart began to beat excitedly.

"Yes. You'll enjoy the ride. It's a long time since you've been away, and you're looking a little pulled down."

"You're very kind, sir; so is Harry." He paused. "But I'd rather not."

Mr. Blandhorn, turning slightly, examined him between half-dropped lids.

"I have business for you — with the consul," he said with a certain sternness. "I don't suppose you will object —"

"Oh, of course not." There was another pause. "Could you tell me — give me an idea — of what the business is, sir?"

It was Mr. Blandhorn's turn to appear perturbed. He coughed, passed his hand once or twice over his beard, and again fixed his gaze on Ayoub's inscrutable nape.

"I wish to send a letter to the consul."

"A letter? If it's only a letter, couldn't Spink take it?"

"Undoubtedly. I might also send it by post — if I cared to transmit it in that manner. I presumed," added Mr. Blandhorn with threatening brows, "that you would understand I had my reasons —"

"Oh, in that case, of course, sir —" Willard hesitated, and then spoke with a rush. "I saw Lieutenant

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Lourdenay in the bazaar yesterday — " he began.

When he had finished his tale Mr. Blandhorn meditated for a long time in silence. At length he spoke in a calm voice. "And what did you answer, Willard?"

"I — I said I'd tell you — "

"Nothing more?"

"No. Nothing."

"Very well. We'll talk of all this more fully . . . when you get back from Mogador. Remember that Mr. Spink will be here before sunrise. I advised him to get away as early as possible on account of the Feast of Sidi Oman. It's always a poor day for foreigners to be seen about the streets."

VI

AT a quarter before four on the morning of the Feast of Sidi Oman Willard Bent stood waiting at the door of the Mission.

He had taken leave of Mr. Blandhorn the previous night, and stumbled down the dark stairs on bare feet, his bundle under his arm, just as the sky began to whiten around the morning star.

The air was full of a mocking coolness which the first ray of the sun would burn up; and a hush as deceptive lay on the city that was so soon to blaze with religious frenzy. Ayoub lay curled up on his door-step like a dog, and old Myriem, presumably, was still stretched on her mattress on the roof.

What a day for a flight across the desert in Harry's tough little car! And after the hours of heat and dust and glare, how good, at twilight, to see the cool welter of the Atlantic, a spent sun dropping into it, and the rush of the stars. . . Dizzy with the vision, Willard leaned against the door-post with closed eyes.

A subdued hoot aroused him, and he hurried out to the car, which was quivering and growling at the nearest corner. The drummer nodded a welcome, and they began to wind cautiously between sleeping animals and huddled heaps of humanity till they reached the nearest gate.

On the waste-land beyond the walls the people of the caravans were already stirring, and pilgrims from the hills streaming across the palmetto scrub under emblazoned banners. As the sun rose the air took on a bright transparency in which distant objects became unnaturally near and vivid, like pebbles seen through clear water: a little turban-shaped tomb far off in the waste looked as lustrous as ivory, and a tiled minaret in an angle of the walls seemed to be carved of turquoise. How Eloued lied to eyes looking back on it at sunrise!

"Something wrong," said Harry Spink, putting on the brake and stopping in the thin shade of a cork-tree. They got out, and Willard leaned against the tree and gazed at the red wall of Eloued. They were already about two miles from the town, and all around them was the wilderness. Spink shoved his head into the bonnet, screwed and greased and hammered, and finally wiped his hands on a black rag and called out: "I thought so — Jump in!"

Willard did not move.

"Hurry up, old man. She's all right, I tell you. It was just the carburetor."

The missionary fumbled under his draperies and pulled out Mr. Blandhorn's letter.

"Will you see that the consul gets this to-morrow?"

"Will I — what the hell's the matter, Willard?" Spink dropped his rag and stared.

"I'm not coming. I never meant to."

The young men exchanged a long look.

"It's no time to leave Mr. Blandhorn — a day like this," Willard continued, moistening his dry lips.

Spink shrugged and sounded a faint whistle. "Queer — !"

"What's queer?"

"He said just the same thing to me about you — wanted to get you out of Eloued on account of the goings-on to-day. He said you'd been rather worked up lately about religious matters, and might do something rash that would get you both into trouble."

"Ah — " Willard murmured.

"And I believe you might, you know — you look sorter funny."

Willard laughed.

"Oh, come along," his friend urged, disappointed.

"I'm sorry — I can't. I had to come this far, so that he wouldn't know. But now I've got to go back. Of course what he told you was just a joke — but I must be there to-day to see that nobody bothers him."

Spink scanned his companion's face with friendly flippant eyes. "Well, I give up — What's the use, when he don't want you? Say," he broke off, "what's the truth of that story about the old man's having insulted a marabout in a mosque night before last? It was all over the bazaar — "

Willard felt himself turn pale. "Not a marabout. It was — where did you hear it?" he stammered.

"All over — the way you hear stories in these places."

"Well — it's not true." Willard lifted his bundle from the motor and tucked it under his arm. "I'm sorry, Harry

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— I've got to go back," he repeated.

"What? The Call, eh?" The sneer died on Spink's lips, and he held out his hand. "I'm sorry, too. So long." He turned the crank of the motor, scrambled into his seat, and called back over his shoulder: "What's the use, when he don't want you?"

Willard was already laboring home across the plain.

After struggling along for half an hour in the heavy sand he crawled under the shade of an abandoned well, and sat down to ponder. Two courses were open to him, and he had not yet been able to decide between them. His first impulse was to go straight to the Mission, and to present himself to Mr. Blandhorn. He felt sure, from what Spink had told him, that the old missionary had sent him away purposely, and the fact seemed to confirm his apprehensions. If Mr. Blandhorn wanted him away, it was not through any fear of his imprudence, but to be free from his restraining influence. But what act did the old man contemplate, in which he feared to involve his disciple? And if he were really resolved on some rash measure, might not Willard's unauthorized return merely serve to exasperate his resolve, and hasten whatever action he had planned?

The other step the young man had in mind was to go secretly to the French Administration, and there drop a hint of what he feared. It was the course his sober judgment commended. The echo of Spink's "What's the use?" was in his ears. It was the expression of his own secret doubt. What was the use? If dying could bring any of these darkened souls to the light . . . well, that would have been different. But what least sign was there that it would do anything but rouse their sleeping blood-lust?

Willard was oppressed by the thought that had always lurked beneath his other doubts. They talked, he and Mr. Blandhorn, of the poor ignorant heathen — but were not they themselves equally ignorant in everything that concerned the heathen? What did they know of these people, of their antecedents, the origin of their beliefs and superstitions, the meaning of their habits and passions and precautions? Mr. Blandhorn seemed never to have been troubled by this question, but it had weighed on Willard ever since he had come across a quiet French ethnologist who was studying the tribes of the Middle Atlas. Two or three talks with this traveller — or listenings to him — had shown Willard the extent of his own ignorance. He would have liked to borrow books, to read, to study; but he knew little French and no German, and he felt confusedly that there was in him no soil sufficiently prepared for facts so overwhelmingly new to root in it. . . . And the heat lay on him, and the little semblance of his missionary duties deluded him . . . and he drifted. . .

As for Mr. Blandhorn, he never read anything but the Scriptures, a volume of his own sermons (printed by subscription, to commemorate his departure for Morocco), and — occasionally — a back number of the missionary journal that arrived at Eloued at long intervals, in thick, mouldy batches. Consequently no doubts disturbed him, and Willard felt the hopelessness of grappling with an ignorance so much deeper and denser than his own. Whichever way his mind turned, it seemed to bring up against the blank wall of Harry Spink's: "What's the use?"

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He slipped through the crowds in the congested gateway, and made straight for the Mission. He had decided to go to the French Administration, but he wanted first to find out from the servants what Mr. Blandhorn was doing, and what his state of mind appeared to be.

The Mission door was locked, but Willard was not surprised; he knew the precaution was sometimes taken on feast-days, though seldom so early. He rang, and waited impatiently for Myriem's old face in the crack; but no one came, and below his breath he cursed her with expurgated curses.

"Ayoub — Ayoub!" he cried, rattling at the door; but still there was no answer. Ayoub, apparently, was off too. Willard rang the bell again, giving the three long pulls of the "emergency call": it was the summons that always roused Mr. Blandhorn. But no one came.

Willard shook and pounded, and hung on the bell till it tinkled its life out . . . but all in vain. The house was empty: Mr. Blandhorn was evidently out with the others.

Disconcerted by this unexpected discovery, the young man turned and plunged into the red clay purlieus behind the Mission. He entered a mud hut where an emaciated dog, dozing on the threshold, lifted a recognizing lid, and let him by. It was the house of Ahmed's father, the water-carrier, and Willard knew it would be empty at that hour.

A few minutes later there emerged into the crowded streets a young American dressed in a black coat of

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vaguely clerical cut, with a soft felt hat shading his flushed cheek-bones, and a bead running up and down his nervous throat.

The bazaar was already full of a deep holiday rumor, like the rattle of wind in the palm-tops. The young man in the clerical coat, sharply examined as he passed by hundreds of long Arab eyes, slipped into the lanes behind the soukhs, and by circuitous passages gained the neighborhood of the Great Mosque. His heart was hammering against his black coat, and under the buzz in his brain there boomed out insistently the old question: "What's the use?"

Suddenly, near the fountain that faced one of the doors of the Great Mosque, he saw the figure of a man dressed like himself. The eyes of the two men met across the crowd, and Willard pushed his way to Mr. Blandhorn's side.

"Sir, why did you — why are you — ? I'm back — I couldn't help it," he gasped out disconnectedly.

He had expected a vehement rebuke; but the old missionary only smiled on him sadly.

"It was noble of you, Willard . . . I understand. . ." He looked at the young man's coat. "We had the same thought — again — at the same hour." He paused, and drew Willard into the empty passage of a ruined building behind the fountain. "But what's the use — what's the use?" he exclaimed.

The blood rushed to the young man's forehead. "Ah — then you feel it too?"

Mr. Blandhorn continued, grasping his arm: "I've been out — in this dress — ever since you left; I've hung about the doors of the Medersas, I've walked up to the very threshold of the Mosque, I've leaned against the wall of Sidi Oman's shrine; once the police warned me, and I pretended to go away . . . but I came back . . . I pushed up closer . . . I stood in the doorway of the Mosque, and they saw me . . . the people inside saw me . . . and no one touched me . . . I'm too harmless . . . they don't believe in me!"

He broke off, and under his struggling eyebrows Willard saw the tears on his old lids.

The young man gathered courage. "But don't you see, sir, that's the reason it's no use? We don't understand them any more than they do us; they know it, and all our witnessing for Christ will make no difference."

Mr. Blandhorn looked at him sternly. "Young man, no Christian has the right to say that."

Willard ignored the rebuke. "Come home, sir, come home . . . it's no use. . ."

"It was because I foresaw you would take this view that I sent you to Mogador. Since I was right," exclaimed Mr. Blandhorn, facing round on him fiercely, "how is it you have disobeyed me and come back?"

Willard was looking at him with new eyes. All his majesty seemed to have fallen from him with his Arab draperies. How short and heavy and weak he looked in his scant European clothes! The coat, tightly strained across the stomach, hung above it in loose wrinkles, and the ill-fitting trousers revealed their wearer's impressive legs as slightly bowed at the knees. This diminution in his physical prestige was strangely moving to his disciple. What was there left, with that gone — ?

"Oh, do come home, sir," the young man groaned. "Of course they don't care what we do — of course — "

"Ah — " cried Mr. Blandhorn, suddenly dashing past him into the open.

The rumor of the crowd had become a sort of roaring chant. Over the thousands of bobbing heads that packed every cranny of the streets leading to the space before the Mosque there ran the mysterious sense of something new, invisible, but already imminent. Then, with the strange Oriental elasticity, the immense throng divided, and a new throng poured through it, headed by riders ritually draped, and overhung with banners that seemed to be lifted and floated aloft on the shouts of innumerable throats. It was the Pasha of Eloued coming to pray at the tomb of Sidi Oman.

Into this mass Mr. Blandhorn plunged and disappeared, while Willard Bent, for an endless minute, hung back in the shelter of the passage, the old "What's the use?" in his ears.

A hand touched his sleeve, and a cracked voice echoed the words.

"What's the use, master?" It was old Myriem, clutching him with scared face and pulling out a limp djellabah from under her holiday shawl.

"I saw you . . . Ahmed's father told me. . ." (How everything was known in the bazaars!) "Here, put this on quick, and slip away. They won't trouble you. . ."

"Oh, but they will — they shall!" roared Willard, in a voice unknown to his own ears, as he flung off the old woman's hand and, trampling on the djellabah in his flight, dashed into the crowd at the spot where it had swallowed up his master.

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They would — they should! No more doubting and weighing and conjecturing! The sight of the weak unwieldy old man, so ignorant, so defenseless and so convinced, disappearing alone into that red furnace of fanaticism, swept from the disciple's mind every thought but the single passion of devotion.

"That he lay down his life for his friend — " If he couldn't bring himself to believe in any other reason for what he was doing, that one seemed suddenly to be enough. . .

The crowd let him through, still apparently indifferent to his advance. Closer, closer he pushed to the doors of the Mosque, struggling and elbowing through a mass of people so densely jammed that the heat of their breathing was in his face, the rank taste of their bodies on his parched lips — closer, closer, till a last effort of his own thin body, which seemed a mere cage of ribs with a wild heart dashing against it, brought him to the doorway of the Mosque, where Mr. Blandhorn, his head thrown back, his arms crossed on his chest, stood steadily facing the heathen multitude.

As Willard reached his side their glances met, and the old man, glaring out under prophetic brows, whispered, without moving his lips: "Now — now!"

Willard took it as a signal to follow, he knew not where or why: at that moment he had no wish to know.

Mr. Blandhorn, without waiting for an answer, had turned, and, doubling on himself, sprung into the great court of the Mosque. Willard breathlessly followed, the glitter of tiles and the blinding sparkle of fountains in his dazzled eyes. . .

The court was almost empty, the few who had been praying having shortened their devotions and joined the Pasha's train, which was skirting the outer walls of the Mosque to reach the shrine of Sidi Oman. Willard was conscious of a moment of detached reconnoitring: once or twice, from the roof of a deserted college to which the government architect had taken him, he had looked down furtively on the forbidden scene, and his sense of direction told him that the black figure speeding across the blazing mirror of tiles was making for the hall where the Koran was expounded to students.

Even now, as he followed, through the impending sense of something dangerous and tremendous, he had the feeling that after all the effort of will pumped up by his storming heart to his lucid brain might conceivably end in some pitiful anticlimax in the French Administration offices.

"They'll treat us like whipped puppies — " he groaned.

But Mr. Blandhorn had reached the school, had disappeared under its shadowy arcade, and emerged again into the sunlight, clutching a great parchment Koran.

"Ah," thought Willard, " now — !"

He found himself standing at the missionary's side, so close that they must have made one black blot against the white-hot quiver of tiles. Mr. Blandhorn lifted up the Book and spoke.

"The God whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you," he cried in halting Arabic.

A deep murmur came from the turbaned figures gathered under the arcade of the Mosque. Swarthy faces lowered, eyes gleamed like agate, teeth blazed under snarling lips; but the group stood motionless, holding back, visibly restrained by the menace of the long arm of the Administration.

"Him declare I unto you — Christ crucified!" cried Mr. Blandhorn.

An old man, detaching himself from the group, advanced across the tiles and laid his hand on the missionary's arm. Willard recognized the delegate of the Caid.

"You must restore the Book," the delegate said gravely to Mr. Blandhorn, "and leave this court immediately; if not — "

He held out his hand to take the Koran. Mr. Blandhorn, in a flash, dodged the restraining arm, and, with a strange new elasticity of his cumbrous body, rolling and bouncing across the court between the dazed spectators, gained the gateway opening on the market-place behind the Mosque. The centre of the great dusty space was at the moment almost deserted. Mr. Blandhorn sprang forward, the Koran clutched to him, Willard panting at his heels, and the turbaned crowd after them, menacing but still visibly restrained.

In the middle of the square Mr. Blandhorn halted, faced about and lifted the Koran high above his head. Willard, rigid at his side, was obliquely conscious of the gesture, and at the same time aware that the free space about them was rapidly diminishing under the mounting tide of people swarming in from every quarter. The faces closest were no longer the gravely wrathful countenances of the Mosque, but lean fanatical masks of pilgrims, beggars, wandering "saints" and miracle-makers, and dark tribesmen of the hills careless of their creed but hot to

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join in the halloo against the hated stranger. Far off in the throng, bobbing like a float on the fierce sea of turbans, Willard saw the round brown face of a native officer frantically fighting his way through. Now and then the face bobbed nearer, and now and then a tug of the tide rolled it back.

Willard felt Mr. Blandhorn's touch on his arm.

"You're with me — ?"

"Yes — "

The old man's voice sank and broke. "Say a word to . . . strengthen me . . . I can't find any . . . Willard," he whispered.

Willard's brain was a blank. But against the blank a phrase suddenly flashed out in fire, and he turned and spoke to his master. " Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth."

"Ah — " Mr. Blandhorn, with a gasp, drew himself to his full height and hurled the Koran down at his feet in the dung-strown dust.

"Him, Him declare I unto you — Christ crucified!" he thundered: and to Willard, in a fierce aside: "Now spit!"

Dazed a moment, the young man stood uncertain; then he saw the old missionary draw back a step, bend forward, and deliberately spit upon the sacred pages.

"This . . . is abominable . . ." the disciple thought; and, sucking up the last drop of saliva from his dry throat, he also bent and spat.

"Now trample — trample!" commanded Mr. Blandhorn, his arms stretched out, towering black and immense, as if crucified against the flaming sky; and his foot came down on the polluted Book.

Willard, seized with the communicative frenzy, fell on his knees, tearing at the pages, and scattering them about him, smirched and defiled in the dust.

"Spit — spit! Trample — trample! . . . Christ! I see the heavens opened!" shrieked the old missionary, covering his eyes with his hands. But what he said next was lost to his disciple in the rising roar of the mob which had closed in on them. Far off, Willard caught a glimpse of the native officer's bobbing head, and then of Lieutenant Lourdenay's scared face. But a moment later he had veiled his own face from the sight of the struggle at his side. Mr. Blandhorn had fallen on his knees, and Willard heard him cry out once: "Amy! Amy!" It was his wife's name.

Then the young man was himself borne down, and darkness descended on him. Through it he felt the sting of separate pangs indescribable, melting at last into a general mist of pain. He remembered Stephen, and thought: "Now they're stoning me — " and tried to struggle up and reach out to Mr. Blandhorn. . .

But the market-place seemed suddenly empty, as though the throng of their assailants had been demons of the desert, the thin spirits of evil that dance on the noonday heat. Now the dusk seemed to have dispersed them, and Willard looked up and saw a quiet star above a wall, and heard the cry of the Muezzin dropping down from a near-by minaret: "Allah — Allah — only Allah is great!"

Willard closed his eyes, and in his great weakness felt the tears run down between his lids. A hand wiped them away, and he looked again, and saw the face of Harry Spink stooping over him.

He supposed it was a dream-Spink, and smiled a little, and the dream smiled back.

"Where am I?" Willard wondered to himself; and the dream-Spink answered: "In the hospital, you infernal fool. I got back too late — "

"You came back — ?"

"Of course. Lucky I did — ! I saw this morning you were off your base."

Willard, for a long time, lay still. Impressions reached him slowly, and he had to deal with them one by one, like a puzzled child.

At length he said: "Mr. Blandhorn — ?"

"They did for him in no time; I guess his heart was weak . . . I don't think he suffered. Anyhow, if he did he wasn't sorry; I know, because I saw his face before they buried him. . . Now you lie still, and I'll get you out of this to-morrow," he commanded, waving a fly-cloth above Willard's sunken head.