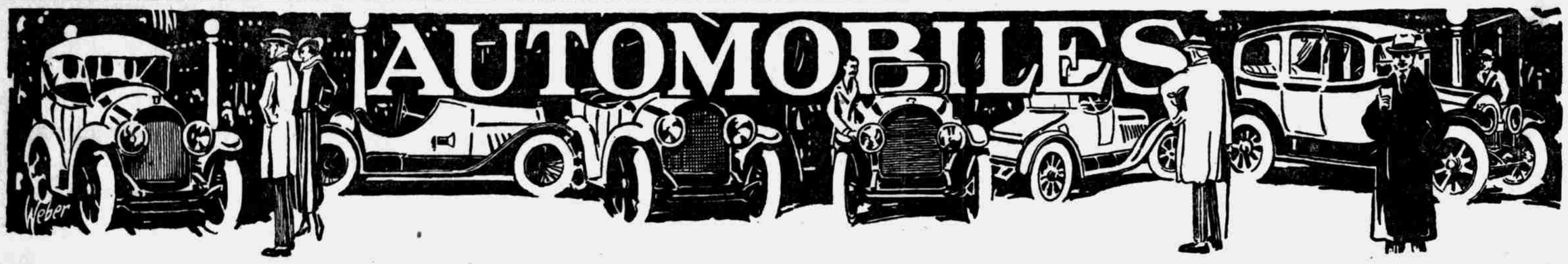

PALACE OF THE SLAVE-BORN VIZIER

How Bou Ahmed Jollied the Sultan of Morocco, Rose to Power and Reared a Moorish Castle.

When Bou Ahmed, the grand vizier, built the palace of the Bahia—"The Effulgence"—at Marakesh modern Moorish architecture reached its zenith. No man before had attempted such a work, and no man in Morocco will ever be rich enongh to surpass it. Not only would the wealth required be fabulous, but the very idea would be so fantastic that its originator could not escape being stamped as a madman. Yet twenty-two years ago it was scarcely begun, and seventeen years ago its builder died, and the work ceased. In those five years this extraordinary palace was originated and completed—such as it stands—with its wealth of decoration, its great courts, its fountains, and its colonnades. And the builder was the son of a slave, for Bou Ahmed's father, Si Moussa, the confidential servant of the Sultan Mulai Hassen, was a palace slave. By his integrity, or his cunning—probably the latter—he had risen to a position of some importance and at his death his son—only a very little less a negro than the father—was appointed chamberlain in his place, a position he held until the sultan's death in 1895.

It was then that his opportunity came—and he seized it. The sultan's death occurred while he was on a military experition against the dissident tribes of Tadla. Bou Ahmed, who with a few confidential slaves alone knew of Mulai Hassen's death—for he died in his tented enclosure in the imperial camp, amongst his women—realized that the tragic event must be kept secret. Otherwise the tribes would fall upon the army, now lacking a chief, and the soldiers themselves would join in the pillage and murder and loot. So orders were given for the court and the army to continue their march towards the coast, and at dawn the day after the sultan's death a start was made. Meanwhile Bou Ahmed's messengers were hurrying to Rabat to proclaim the late sultan's youngest son, Mulai Abdul Aziz, a boy of 12 years of age. The critical moment was past; the army was in a safe region, the dissident tribes were left far behind, and the accession was a fait accompli. It was Bou Ahmed's first card and he played it well.

Pushing to the Front.

But other things remained to be done. Bou Ahmed was only chamberlain, and the more important posts of grand vizier and minister of war were held by his rivals, two brothers of the powerful Jamai family, who, aristocrats, despised the slave's son and his origin. The situation demanded that the young sultan should proceed at once to Fez, the northern capital, for, until he had been accepted and received as sultan there, his throne was not consolidated, and Fez was no safe place for Bou Ahmed.

He played his second card—an even bolder one than his first. While the sultan was at Mekinez, only thirty miles from Fez, Bou Ahmed obtained his master's consent to the arrest of the Jamai brothers. The pretext was treason. One morning the grand vizier, Haj Amaati, rodt into the palace square of Mekinez and passed into the young sultan's presence between long rows of bowing officials. The sentries saluted, but, disdainful, the vizier noticed no one. Bou Ahmed was with the sultan. He accused the vizier of treachery, of treason, of innumerable crimes, and asked the pale boy seated upon the throne to authorize his arrest. The sultan nodded—and Haj Amaati was dragged by jeering soldiers to prison, smitten with blows, and the object of a hundred gibes. His brother, the minister of war, joined him in goal only a few moments later. Bou Ahmed was now grand vizier.

So Bou Ahmed, freed from anxiety, began the building of the "Bahia." With stone and mortar and the money and blood of men, by every exaction and cruelty, by murder and sudden death, he built it, raising court after court—grandiose and fantastic—to please his own pride or the fancies of some woman. Every favorite had her courtyard and her apartments, and little it matttered to her, or to the man who for a time cherished her, how many might die, how many might starve, that the ceilings of carved cedarwood might be paid for, or the marble foundation basins be brought from Italy. The vizier's revenues were prodigious, for every coin that came to the Moorish government passed through his hands, and a few went on to the imperial treasury, but only a few. He was lone and omnipotent. A sort of superstitious romance encircled him and his wealth. His name was whispered in the streets and in the byways.

Acres of Household Razed.

He started largely. He took a whole quarter of the town and razed it to the ground. It covered many, many acres. No householder could resist his onslaught. Where necessity arose, he compensated, according to his own ideas, the owners of the houses he destroyed. In other cases he found it unnecessary to do so. Whole households were turned loose into the world. Beyond were gardens, great groves of olives and oranges. He became possessed of them, tearing down the dividing walls and laying out the whole as a great park. He built a raised irrigating tank as large as a lake, and encircled the whole property with immense walls. The energy of this small, dark, awkward, unsympathetic man was immense. He governed as he built, without a thought of human life or of the suffering he occasioned. He destroyed whole tribes and confiscated their wealth. It all served to build the "Bahia."

On the ruins of the demolished quarter he raised his palace, encircled with walls—and what walls!—great windowless expanses of masonry thirty feet and forty feet high, here and there pierced with gateways that led into vast open spaces, seemingly as objectless as the walls themselves—great, barren, dusty courtyards And then, passing through a small gate, a blaze of color—an immense court, paved in white marble and colored mosaics, surrounded by a colonnade roofed in brilliant green tiles spported upon wooden pillars, painted red and green and white and orange in strange designs. The ceilings under the colonnade are richly decorated and colored. In a line in the center of the court are three great marble fountains, splashing water—the whole a blaze of sunlight and color. The surrounding buildings are of one story only, but the height of the great apartments, with their gilded, painted and domed ceilings, that open into the court yard, renders this one story of very considerable altitude.

In contrast with this great open sunlit space is a shady walled garden, full of flowering trees, from amongst which tall cypresses rise high above the walls and tree-tops. Here, too, there is water everywhere in marble fountains and marble basins, that fill the cool air with the music of their streams. In the surrounding walls are deep recesses, festooned with delicate arabesques in incised plaster, and roofed with carved and painted beams, cool retreats from the fitful sunlight that pierces the foliage of the trees. At either end of this delicious garden are vast apartments, the lofty ceilings of which, half hidden in the gloom, rise tier above tier of carved and painted domes. Colored mosaics from Fez, full of luster, line the lower part of the walls to a height of some six or seven feet, and the floors are of marble and similar mosaics. On the walls pass long bands of delicately fretted plaster, bearing geometric designs and Arabic inscriptions. All is still, cool, and mysterious, and half veiled in the half light of the shade of the trees without.

The Gem of the Palace.

A small exit and tortuous narrow passages lead into other suites of apartments, each more gorgeous than the last. In one case the rooms open into a covered courtyard, its ceiling some forty feet above the marble floor—great beams and painted and gilded surfaces of wood— rich in geometric designs. A row of little windows, just below the ceiling and encircling the whole court, give light to this fine hall, with its marble fioor and marble fountain, and in exquisite designs in mosaics of faience. On all sides are rooms, half-lit and mysterious, but rich in decoration. The great carved and gilt doors stand open and a glimpse is obtained of the dim richness of the rooms within. Then long passages again—here straight, here turning sharply to right and left—and courts and more courts, and great rooms, and endless colonnades till the very vastness and complexity of the palace wearies. And then, suddenly, hidden away in the recesses of this labyrinth the gem of all—a wonderful little garden, surrounded by arched recesses and great rooms, the walls of the garden a mass of exquisite design in white incised plaster work; and above, a deep cornice, richly carved in little arches and columns, of cedar wood, supporting overhanging eaves of the same beautiful wood, upheld by delicate beams. Above is a glimpse of rich green iridescent tiled roof. The paths, which bisect the little garden, raised a foot or so above the soil, are paved in marble and mosaic and edged with a low delicate design in iron work in a frame of wood. The marble basin is there, too, with its cool splashing water falling upon the mosaics of colored tiles. Beyond this garden lies another infinity of apartments, each series a house in itself.

Death and Devastation.

In five years Bon Ahmed built it all, with the life and blood of the tribes—and then he died, in 1900.

The sultan wept the loss of the man of iron will who had set him firmly on the throne. On foot he followed his body to the grave, and returned to sign the edict of the confiscation of all his property. In the Bahia reigned confusion and lamentation. The great courts rang with the wailing of the shieks of the women—and the palace, deprived of the iron hand of its master, became a pandemonium. Its inmates knew a great crisis was at hand, and each strove to steal as much as he or she could in the few hours that remained. Safes were broken open, jewels were torn from thei settings, the more easily to be concealed, the doors of the treasure rooms and the store rooms were torn from their hinges. Wives, concubines, and slaves fought and looted—and it is said killed—for how many jealousies found their chance of revenge; and in the midst of it all came the sultan's emissaries and the soldiers, to continue the loot and pillage in the name of the sovereign. For days caravans of mules passed through the streets bearing Bon Ahmend's treasures to the sultan's palace. Then the women were driven forth—the older ones to hunger, and perhaps to death; the younger to live as best they might. The slaves fled, or were passed on to new masters.

And when all was accomplished, when not a hole or a corner had been left unsearched for treasure—and how fews days it all took!—when no one was left, except a few in poverty and in exile to tell of its past glories, when even the children of the great vizier were starving in the open country or hidden in the houses of a faithful few, and his wives and concubine had fallen a prey to others, then the sultan closed the grea: palace and set his seal of state upon the doors of the man who had given him a throne.—London Times Letter.

PRIEST CAPTURES ENTIRE COMPANY

Germans in "Dragon's Cave" Lay Down Their Arms When Surprised by French Stretcher-Bearer.

(Correspondence of The Associated Press.)

French Front, Aug. 1.—The story of the capture of nearly a company of German troops who were trapped in the Dragon's Cave near the famous Chemin Des Dames, when the French troops stormed and carried the German position along that historic road was told to The Associated Press correspondent by Father Py, a Franciscan priest, who, with a doctor, brought the prisoners into the French near lines. Father Py was acting as stretcher-bearer to one of the most celebrated regiments of the French army, the 152d infantry.

The Dragon's Cave is near the farm of Hurtebise, or what was a farm, for it has now become nothing but a heap of bricks, mud and splintered timbers.

He is a small man, is Father Py, who when the war broke out was engaged in missionary work in Brazil. The call of his country brought him back to France, and, although he is a native of the south of France, he volunteered for service in the ambulance section of the 152d, a regiment from the Vosges. He explained to the correspondent how on the day of the battle he had been detailed to go out and tend to the wounded, but not to advance beyond a certain trench, which was very near the most advanced French line. When he got there he found no one. The French soldiers had gone forward with one bound right in the track of the curtain fire put up by the artillery and had reached German trenches on the other side of the crest out of sight with miraculously slight losses. The priest and a companion looked about in search of wounded but could find none. Then, thinking under the circumstances they were justified in disobeying orders they climbed over the top of the trench and went further forward.

Clothing On Fire.

A little farther on they saw a German running about with his clothes aflame and uttering cries for help, at the same time pointing behind him to a hole in the ground where two other men were gesticulating. The priest went on thinking to find some more wounded men—perhaps men of his own regiment, but soon he saw they were Germans. At once he raised his crucifix in the air in the belief it would protect him, and he continued to advance. The Germans did not threaten him as he approached and soon he saw they were wounded.

On arriving at the entrance to what he had believed was a dugout, he found the hole went far into the side of the crest. He entered the Dragon's Cave still holding his crucifix before him and shouting "Catholic!" Inside he found the hole spread out in all directions and that it was full of armed German soldiers. Four or five of them were officers and, under the impression some of them at least would understand French, he called out in that language that he was a Catholic priest and that if there were any German wounded there he was prepared to administer the rites of the church.

One of the officers spoke to him, asking what he was doing there and what was going on outside. He informed him the French had made a long advance over their heads and had crossed the crest and that they had better lay down their arms, for they would either be killed or taken prisoners in any event.

Officers Hold Conference.

The officers then held a discussion among themselves, at the end of which one of them with tears streaming down his face said he supposed they must resign themselves to their fate, but they could only surrender to an officer.

Father Py scribbled on a piece of paper a note to one of the French captains, which was handed to his companion who had remained outside the cave.

While the note was being carried to the French officer a German doctor in the cave showed the priest the resting place of several German wounded. Among them was a Jesuit priest who was serving in the German army as a soldier, with whom the French priest spoke in Latin. To the other wounded Germans Father Py gave the consolations of the church.

Afterwards and while awaiting the return of his messenger with the French officer, Father Py advised the German officers to disarm their men in order to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding. He himself superintended the operation, telling each soldier to discard every weapon he possessed, but that they might retain small pocket knives.

Germans Surrender.

A little later, just when the process of disarmament was being completed, a French officer—or rather a doctor—appeared at the mouth of the cave and the German officers surrendered their swords and revolvers to him..

Then began the exit of the prisoners through the narrow entrance and they were all marched through a communication trench back to French regimental headquarters, with an escort composed only of the priest, his stretcher-bearing comrade and the French doctor. They were almost a company and their arrival caused considerable surprise at headquarters.

The little priest, who always was a favorite in the regiment, with which he participates in all the hardships of fighting and in constant exposure to wounds and death, is now quite a hero. He never leaves the men to go on leave and did not even go to Paris when a detachment of the regiment went there to receive the decoration of the knotted cord in the colors of the military medal which has been conferred on it for having been five times mentioned in general army orders for bravery The 152d is the only regiment in the French army besides the Foreign Legion which has won this honor.

As a result of its good work at Hurtebise and on the Californie plateau further east, the Chemin des Dames is now almost entirely in French hands. The women for whom it was constructed would scarcely recognize it in its present condition, for there is not a foot of its length which is without a shell hole and the whole of the sheltering trees which formerly lined its sides have all been torn away.

To discover why Hurtebise has attained such prominence one has to learn of its high importance as a military position. It forms the highest point on the crest along which runs the Chemin des Dames—the Ladies' Way.

The correspondent was able to note the peculiar value of this part of the crest when he went out to observe one of the many fights for its possession which have been waged