

CHAPTER II - THE WAY OF THE DESERT

It may truly be said, touching the type of culture at least, that Egypt has an Egyptian lower class, a French middle class and an English governing class. Anyhow it is true that the civilisations are stratified in this formation, or superimposed in this order. It is the first impression produced by the darkness and density of the bazaars, the line of the lighted cafes and the blaze of the big hotels. But it contains a much deeper truth in all three cases, and especially in the case of the French influence. It is indeed one of the first examples of what I mean by the divisions of the West becoming clearer in the ancient centres of the East. It is often said that we can only appreciate the work of England in a place like India. In so far as this is true, it is quite equally true that we can only appreciate the work of France in a place like Egypt. But this work is of a peculiar and even paradoxical kind. It is too practical to be prominent, and so universal that it is unnoticed.

The French view of the Rights of Man is called visionary; but in practice it is very solid and even prosaic. The French have a unique and successful trick by which French things are not accepted as French. They are accepted as human. However many foreigners played football, they would still consider football an English thing. But they do not consider fencing a French thing, though all the terms of it are still French. If a Frenchman were to label his hostelry an inn or a public house (probably written publicouse) we should think him a victim of rather advanced Anglomania. But when an Englishman calls it an hotel, we feel no special dread of him either as a dangerous foreigner or a dangerous lunatic. We need not recognise less readily the value of this because our own distinction is different; especially as our own distinction is being more distinguished. The spirit of the English is adventure; and it is the essence of adventure that the adventurer does remain different from the strange tribes or strange cities, which he studies because of their strangeness. He does not become like them, as did some of the Germans, or persuade them to become like him, as do most of the French. But whether we like or dislike this French capacity, or merely appreciate it properly in its place, there can be no doubt about the cause of that capacity. The cause is in the spirit that is so often regarded as wildly Utopian and unreal. The cause is in the abstract creed of equality and citizenship; in the possession of a political philosophy that appeals to all men. In truth men have never looked low enough for the success of the French Revolution. They have assumed that it claims to be a sort of divine and distant thing, and therefore have not noticed it in the nearest and most materialistic things. They have watched its wavering in the senate and never seen it walking in the streets; though it can be seen in the streets of Cairo as in the streets of Paris.

In Cairo a man thinks it English to go into a tea-shop; but he does not think it French to go into a cafe. And the people who go to the tea-shop, the English officers and officials, are stamped as English and also stamped as official. They are generally genial, they are generally generous, but they have the detachment of a governing group and even a garrison. They cannot be mistaken for human beings. The people going to a cafe are simply human beings going to it because it is a human place. They have forgotten how much is French and how much Egyptian in their civilisation; they simply think of it as civilisation. Now this character of the older French culture must be grasped because it is the clue to many things in the mystery of the modern East. I call it an old culture because as a matter of fact it runs back to the Roman culture. In this respect the Gauls really continue the work of the Romans, in making something official which comes at last to be regarded as ordinary. And the great fundamental fact which is incessantly forgotten and ought to be incessantly remembered, about these cities and provinces of the near East, is that they were once as Roman as Gaul.

There is a frivolous and fanciful debate I have often had with a friend, about whether it is better to find one's way or to lose it, to remember the road or to forget it. I am so constituted as to be capable of losing my way in my own village and almost in my own house. And I am prepared to maintain the privilege to be a poetic one. In truth I am prepared to maintain that both attitudes are valuable, and should exist side by side. And so my friend and I walk side by side along the ways of the world, he being full of a rich and humane sentiment, because he remembers passing that way a few hundred times since his childhood; while to me existence is a perpetual fairy-tale, because I have forgotten all about it. The lamp-post which moves him to a tear of reminiscence wrings from me a cry of astonishment; and the wall which to him is as historic as a pyramid is to me as arresting and revolutionary as a barricade. Now in this, I am glad to say, my temperament is very English; and the difference is very typical of the two functions of the English and the French. But in practical politics the French have a certain advantage in knowing where they are, and knowing it is where they have been before. It is in the Roman Empire.

The position of the English in Egypt or even in Palestine is something of a paradox. The real English claim is never heard in England and never uttered by Englishmen. We do indeed hear a number of false English claims, and other English claims that are rather irrelevant than false. We hear pompous and hypocritical suggestions, full of that which so often accompanies the sin of pride, the weakness of provinciality. We hear suggestions that the English alone can establish anywhere a reign of law, justice, mercy, purity and all the rest of it. We also hear franker and fairer suggestions that the English have after all (as indeed they have) embarked on a spirited and stirring adventure; and that there has

been a real romance in the extending of the British Empire in strange lands. But the real case for these semi-eastern occupations is not that of extending the British Empire in strange lands. Rather it is restoring the Roman Empire in familiar lands. It is not merely breaking out of Europe in the search for something non-European. It would be much truer to call it putting Europe together again after it had been broken. It may almost be said of the Britons, considered as the most western of Europeans, that they have so completely forgotten their own history that they have forgotten even their own rights. At any rate they have forgotten the claims that could reasonably be made for them, but which they never think of making for themselves. They have not the faintest notion, for instance, of why hundreds of years ago an English saint was taken from Egypt, or why an English king was fighting in Palestine. They merely have a vague idea that George of Cappadocia was naturalised much in the same way as George of Hanover. They almost certainly suppose that Coeur de Lion in his wanderings happened to meet the King of Egypt, as Captain Cook might happen to meet the King of the Cannibal Islands. To understand the past connection of England with the near East, it is necessary to understand something that lies behind Europe and even behind the Roman Empire; something that can only be conveyed by the name of the Mediterranean. When people talk, for instance, as if the Crusades were nothing more than an aggressive raid against Islam, they seem to forget in the strangest way that Islam itself was only an aggressive raid against the old and ordered civilisation in these parts. I do not say it in mere hostility to the religion of Mahomet; as will be apparent later, I am fully conscious of many values and virtues in it; but certainly it was Islam that was the invasion and Christendom that was the thing invaded. An Arabian gentleman found riding on the road to Paris or hammering on the gates of Vienna can hardly complain that we have sought him out in his simple tent in the desert. The conqueror of Sicily and Spain cannot reasonably express surprise at being an object of morbid curiosity to the people of Italy and France. In the city of Cairo the stranger feels many of the Moslem merits, but he certainly feels the militaristic character of the Moslem glories. The crown of the city is the citadel, built by the great Saladin but of the spoils of ancient Egyptian architecture; and that fact is in its turn very symbolical. The man was a great conqueror, but he certainly behaved like an invader; he spoiled the Egyptians. He broke the old temples and tombs and built his own out of fragments. Nor is this the only respect in which the citadel of Cairo is set high like a sign in heaven. The sign is also significant because from this superb height the traveller first beholds the desert, out of which the great conquest came.

Every one has heard the great story of the Greeks who cried aloud in triumph when they saw the sea afar off; but it is a stranger experience to see the earth afar off. And few of us, strictly speaking, have ever seen the earth at all. In cultivated countries it is always clad, as it were, in green garments. The first

sight of the desert is like the sight of a naked giant in the distance. The image is all the more natural because of the particular formation which it takes, at least as it borders upon the fields of Egypt, and as it is seen from the high places of Cairo. Those who have seen the desert only in pictures generally think of it as entirely flat. But this edge of it at least stands up on the horizon, as a line of wrinkled and hollow hills like the scalps of bald men; or worse, of bald women. For it is impossible not to think of such repulsive images, in spite of real sublimity of the call to the imagination. There is something curiously hostile and inhuman about the first appearance of the motionless surges of that dry and dreadful sea. Afterwards, if the traveller has happened to linger here and there in the outposts of the desert, has seen the British camp at Kantara or the graceful French garden town of Ismalia, he comes to take the desert as a background, and sometimes a beautiful background; a mirror of mighty reflections and changing colours almost as strange as the colours of the sea. But when it is first seen abutting, and as it were, advancing, upon the fields and gardens of humanity, then it looks indeed like an enemy, or a long line of enemies; like a line of tawny wild beasts thus halted with their heads lifted. It is the feeling that such vain and sterile sand can yet make itself into something like a mountain range; and the traveller remembers all the tragedies of the desert, when he lifts up his eyes to those accursed hills, from whence no help can come.

But this is only a first glimpse from a city set among green fields; and is concerned rather with what the desert has been in its relation to men than with what the desert is in itself. When the mind has grown used to its monotony, a curious change takes place which I have never seen noted or explained by the students of mental science. It may sound strange to say that monotony of its nature becomes novelty. But if any one will try the common experiment of saying some ordinary word such as "moon" or "man" about fifty times, he will find that the expression has become extraordinary by sheer repetition. A man has become a strange animal with a name as queer as that of the gnu; and the moon something monstrous like the moon-calf. Something of this magic of monotony is effected by the monotony of deserts; and the traveller feels as if he had entered into a secret, and was looking at everything from another side. Something of this simplification appears, I think, in the religions of the desert, especially in the religion of Islam. It explains something of the super-human hopes that fill the desert prophets concerning the future; it explains something also about their barbarous indifference to the past.

We think of the desert and its stones as old; but in one sense they are unnaturally new. They are unused, and perhaps unusable. They might be the raw material of a world; only they are so raw as to be rejected. It is not easy to define this quality of something primitive, something not mature enough to be fruitful. Indeed there is a hard simplicity about many Eastern things that is as

much crude as archaic. A palm-tree is very like a tree drawn by a child--or by a very futurist artist. Even a pyramid is like a mathematical figure drawn by a schoolmaster teaching children; and its very impressiveness is that of an ultimate Platonic abstraction. There is something curiously simple about the shape in which these colossal crystals of the ancient sands have been cast. It is only when we have felt something of this element, not only of simplicity, but of crudity, and even in a sense of novelty, that we can begin to understand both the immensity and the insufficiency of that power that came out of the desert, the great religion of Mahomet.

In the red circle of the desert, in the dark and secret place, the prophet discovers the obvious things. I do not say it merely as a sneer, for obvious things are very easily forgotten; and indeed every high civilisation decays by forgetting obvious things. But it is true that in such a solitude men tend to take very simple ideas as if they were entirely new ideas. There is a love of concentration which comes from the lack of comparison. The lonely man looking at the lonely palm-tree does see the elementary truths about the palm-tree; and the elementary truths are very essential. Thus he does see that though the palm-tree may be a very simple design, it was not he who designed it. It may look like a tree drawn by a child, but he is not the child who could draw it. He has not command of that magic slate on which the pictures can come to life, or of that magic green chalk of which the green lines can grow. He sees at once that a power is at work in whose presence he and the palm-tree are alike little children. In other words, he is intelligent enough to believe in God; and the Moslem, the man of the desert, is intelligent enough to believe in God. But his belief is lacking in that humane complexity that comes from comparison. The man looking at the palm-tree does realise the simple fact that God made it; while the man looking at the lamp-post in a large modern city can be persuaded by a hundred sophisticated circumlocutions that he made it himself. But the man in the desert cannot compare the palm-tree with the lamp-post, or even with all the other trees which may be better worth looking at than the lamp-post. Hence his religion, though true as far as it goes, has not the variety and vitality of the churches that were designed by men walking in the woods and orchards. I speak here of the Moslem type of religion and not of the oriental type of ornament, which is much older than the Moslem type of religion. But even the oriental type of ornament, admirable as it often is, is to the ornament of a gothic cathedral what a fossil forest is to a forest full of birds. In short, the man of the desert tends to simplify too much, and to take his first truth for the last truth. And as it is with religion so it is with morality. He who believes in the existence of God believes in the equality of man. And it has been one of the merits of the Moslem faith that it felt men as men, and was not incapable of welcoming men of many different races. But here again it was so hard and crude that its very equality was like a desert rather than a field. Its very humanity was inhuman.

But though this human sentiment is rather rudimentary it is very real. When a man in the desert meets another man, he is really a man; the proverbial two-legged fowl without feathers. He is an absolute and elementary shape, like the palm-tree or the pyramid. The discoverer does not pause to consider through what gradations he may have been evolved from a camel. When the man is a mere dot in the distance, the other man does not shout at him and ask whether he had a university education, or whether he is quite sure he is purely Teutonic and not Celtic or Iberian. A man is a man; and a man is a very important thing. One thing redeems the Moslem morality which can be set over against a mountain of crimes; a considerable deposit of common sense. And the first fact of common sense is the common bond of men. There is indeed in the Moslem character also a deep and most dangerous potentiality of fanaticism of the menace of which something may be said later. Fanaticism sounds like the flat contrary of common sense; yet curiously enough they are both sides of the same thing. The fanatic of the desert is dangerous precisely because he does take his faith as a fact, and not even as a truth in our more transcendental sense. When he does take up a mystical idea he takes it as he takes the man or the palm-tree; that is, quite literally. When he does distinguish somebody not as a man but as a Moslem, then he divides the Moslem from the non-Moslem exactly as he divides the man from the camel. But even then he recognises the equality of men in the sense of the equality of Moslems. He does not, for instance, complicate his conscience with any sham science about races. In this he has something like an intellectual advantage over the Jew, who is generally so much his intellectual superior; and even in some ways his spiritual superior. The Jew has far more moral imagination and sympathy with the subtler ideals of the soul. For instance, it is said that many Jews disbelieve in a future life; but if they did believe in a future life, it would be something more worthy of the genius of Isaiah and Spinoza. The Moslem Paradise is a very Earthly Paradise. But with all their fine apprehensions, the Jews suffer from one heavy calamity; that of being a Chosen Race. It is the vice of any patriotism or religion depending on race that the individual is himself the thing to be worshipped; the individual is his own ideal, and even his own idol. This fancy was fatal to the Germans; it is fatal to the Anglo-Saxons, whenever any of them forswear the glorious name of Englishmen and Americans to fall into that forlorn description. This is not so when the nation is felt as a noble abstraction, of which the individual is proud in the abstract. A Frenchman is proud of France, and therefore may think himself unworthy of France. But a German is proud of being a German; and he cannot be too unworthy to be a German when he is a German. In short, mere family pride flatters every member of the family; it produced the arrogance of the Germans, and it is capable of producing a much subtler kind of arrogance in the Jews. From this particular sort of self-deception the more savage man of the desert is free. If he is not considering somebody as a Moslem, he will consider him as a

man. At the price of something like barbarism, he has at least been saved from ethnology.

But here again the obvious is a limit as well as a light to him. It does not permit, for instance, anything fine or subtle in the sentiment of sex. Islam asserts admirably the equality of men; but it is the equality of males. No one can deny that a noble dignity is possible even to the poorest, who has seen the Arabs coming in from the desert to the cities of Palestine or Egypt. No one can deny that men whose rags are dropping off their backs can bear themselves in a way befitting kings or prophets in the great stories of Scripture. No one can be surprised that so many fine artists have delighted to draw such models on the spot, and to make realistic studies for illustrations to the Old and New Testaments. On the road to Cairo one may see twenty groups exactly like that of the Holy Family in the pictures of the Flight into Egypt; with only one difference. The man is riding on the ass.

In the East it is the male who is dignified and even ceremonial. Possibly that is why he wears skirts. I pointed out long ago that petticoats, which some regard as a garb of humiliation for women are really regarded as the only garb of magnificence for men, when they wish to be something more than men. They are worn by kings, by priests, and by judges. The male Moslem, especially in his own family, is the king and the priest and the judge. I do not mean merely that he is the master, as many would say of the male in many Western societies, especially simple and self-governing societies. I mean something more; I mean that he has not only the kingdom and the power but the glory, and even as it were the glamour. I mean he has not only the rough leadership that we often give to the man, but the special sort of social beauty and stateliness that we generally expect only of the woman. What we mean when we say that an ambitious man wants to have a fine woman at the head of the dinner-table, that the Moslem world really means when it expects to see a fine man at the head of the house. Even in the street he is the peacock, coloured much more splendidly than the peahen. Even when clad in comparatively sober and partly European costume, as outside the cafes of Cairo and the great cities, he exhibits this indefinable character not merely of dignity but of pomp. It can be traced even in the tarbouch, the minimum of Turkish attire worn by all the commercial classes; the thing more commonly called in England a fez. The fez is not a sort of smoking cap. It is a tower of scarlet often tall enough to be the head-dress of a priest. And it is a hat one cannot take off to a lady.

This fact is familiar enough in talk about Moslem and oriental life generally; but I only repeat it in order to refer it back to the same simplification which is the advantage and disadvantage of the philosophy of the desert. Chivalry is not an obvious idea. It is not as plain as a pike-staff or as a palm-tree. It is a delicate

balance between the sexes which gives the rarest and most poetic kind of pleasure to those who can strike it. But it is not self-evident to a savage merely because he is also a sane man. It often seems to him as much a part of his own coarse common sense that all the fame and fun should go to the sex that is stronger and less tied, as that all the authority should go to the parents rather than the children. Pity for weakness he can understand; and the Moslem is quite capable of giving royal alms to a cripple or an orphan. But reverence for weakness is to him simply meaningless. It is a mystical idea that is to him no more than a mystery. But the same is true touching what may be called the lighter side of the more civilised sentiment. This hard and literal view of life gives no place for that slight element of a magnanimous sort of play-acting, which has run through all our tales of true lovers in the West. Wherever there is chivalry there is courtesy; and wherever there is courtesy there is comedy. There is no comedy in the desert.

Another quite logical and consistent element, in the very logical and consistent creed we call Mahometanism, is the element that we call Vandalism. Since such few and obvious things alone are vital, and since a half-artistic half-antiquarian affection is not one of these things, and cannot be called obvious, it is largely left out. It is very difficult to say in a few well-chosen words exactly what is now the use of the Pyramids. Therefore Saladin, the great Saracen warrior, simply stripped the Pyramids to build a military fortress on the heights of Cairo. It is a little difficult to define exactly what is a man's duty to the Sphinx; and therefore the Mamelukes used it entirely as a target. There was little in them of that double feeling, full of pathos and irony, which divided the hearts of the primitive Christians in presence of the great pagan literature and art. This is not concerned with brutal outbreaks of revenge which may be found on both sides, or with chivalrous caprices of toleration, which may also be found on both sides; it is concerned with the inmost mentality of the two religions, which must be understood in order to do justice to either. The Moslem mind never tended to that mystical mode of "loving yet leaving" with which Augustine cried aloud upon the ancient beauty, or Dante said farewell to Virgil when he left him in the limbo of the pagans. The Moslem traditions, unlike the medieval legends, do not suggest the image of a knight who kissed Venus before he killed her. We see in all the Christian ages this combination which is not a compromise, but rather a complexity made by two contrary enthusiasms; as when the Dark Ages copied out the pagan poems while denying the pagan legends; or when the popes of the Renaissance imitated the Greek temples while denying the Greek gods. This high inconsistency is inconsistent with Islam. Islam, as I have said, takes everything literally, and does not know how to play with anything. And the cause of the contrast is the historical cause of which we must be conscious in all studies of this kind. The Christian Church had from a very early date the idea of reconstructing a whole civilisation, and even a complex civilisation. It was the

attempt to make a new balance, which differed from the old balance of the stoics of Rome; but which could not afford to lose its balance any more than they. It differed because the old system was one of many religions under one government, while the new was one of many governments under one religion. But the idea of variety in unity remained though it was in a sense reversed. A historical instinct made the men of the new Europe try hard to find a place for everything in the system, however much might be denied to the individual. Christians might lose everything, but Christendom, if possible, must not lose anything. The very nature of Islam, even at its best, was quite different from this. Nobody supposed, even subconsciously, that Mahomet meant to restore ancient Babylon as medievalism vaguely sought to restore ancient Rome. Nobody thought that the builders of the Mosque of Omar had looked at the Pyramids as the builders of St. Peter's might have looked at the Parthenon. Islam began at the beginning; it was content with the idea that it had a great truth; as indeed it had a colossal truth. It was so huge a truth that it was hard to see it was a half-truth.

Islam was a movement; that is why it has ceased to move. For a movement can only be a mood. It may be a very necessary movement arising from a very noble mood, but sooner or later it must find its level in a larger philosophy, and be balanced against other things. Islam was a reaction towards simplicity; it was a violent simplification, which turned out to be an over-simplification. Stevenson has somewhere one of his perfectly picked phrases for an empty-minded man; that he has not one thought to rub against another while he waits for a train. The Moslem had one thought, and that a most vital one; the greatness of God which levels all men. But the Moslem had not one thought to rub against another, because he really had not another. It is the friction of two spiritual things, of tradition and invention, or of substance and symbol, from which the mind takes fire. The creeds condemned as complex have something like the secret of sex; they can breed thoughts.

An idealistic intellectual remarked recently that there were a great many things in the creed for which he had no use. He might just as well have said that there were a great many things in the Encyclopedia Britannica for which he had no use. It would probably have occurred to him that the work in question was meant for humanity and not for him. But even in the case of the Encyclopedia, it will often be found a stimulating exercise to read two articles on two widely different subjects and note where they touch. In fact there is really a great deal to be said for the man in Pickwick who read first about China and then about metaphysics and combined his information. But however this may be in the famous case of Chinese metaphysics, it is this which is chiefly lacking in Arabian metaphysics. They suffer, as I have said of the palm-tree in the desert, from a lack of the vitality that comes from complexity, and of the complexity that comes from comparison. They suffer from having been in a single movement in a single

direction; from having begun as a mood and ended rather as a mode, that is a mere custom or fashion. But any modern Christian thus criticising the Moslem movement will do well to criticise himself and his world at the same time. For in truth most modern things are mere movements in the same sense as the Moslem movement. They are at best fashions, in which one thing is exaggerated because it has been neglected. They are at worst mere monomanias, in which everything is neglected that one thing may be exaggerated. Good or bad, they are alike movements which in their nature can only move for a certain distance and then stop. Feminism, for instance, is in its nature a movement, and one that must stop somewhere. But the Suffragettes no more established a philosophy of the sexes by their feminism than the Arabs did by their anti-feminism. A woman can find her home on the hustings even less than in the harem; but such movements do not really attempt to find a final home for anybody or anything. Bolshevism is a movement; and in my opinion a very natural and just movement considered as a revolt against the crude cruelty of Capitalism. But when we find the Bolsheviks making a rule that the drama "must encourage the proletarian spirit," it is obvious that those who say so are not only maniacs but, what is more to the point here, are monomaniacs. Imagine having to apply that principle, let us say, to "Charley's Aunt." None of these things seek to establish a complete philosophy such as Aquinas founded on Aristotle. The only two modern men who attempted it were Comte and Herbert Spencer. Spencer, I think, was too small a man to do it at all; and Comte was a great enough man to show how difficult it is to do it in modern times. None of these movements can do anything but move; they have not discovered where to rest.

And this fact brings us back to the man of the desert, who moves and does not rest; but who has many superiorities to the restless races of the industrial city. Men who have been in the Manchester movement in 1860 and the Fabian movement in 1880 cannot sneer at a religious mood that lasted for eight hundred years. And those who tolerate the degraded homelessness of the slums cannot despise the much more dignified homelessness of the desert. Nevertheless, the thing is a homelessness and not a home; and there runs through it all the note of the nomad. The Moslem takes literally, as he takes everything, the truth that here we have no abiding city. He can see no meaning in the mysticism of materialism, the sacramental idea that a French poet expressed so nobly, when he said that our earthly city is the body of the city of God. He has no true notion of building a house, or in our Western sense of recognising the kindred points of heaven and home. Even the exception to this rule is an exception at once terrible and touching. There is one house that the Moslem does build like a house and even a home, often with walls and roof and door; as square as a cottage, as solid as a fort. And that is his grave. A Moslem cemetery is literally like a little village. It is a village, as the saying goes, that one would not care to walk through at night. There is something singularly creepy about so strange a street of houses,

each with a door that might be opened by a dead man. But in a less fanciful sense, there is about it something profoundly pathetic and human. Here indeed is the sailor home from sea, in the only port he will consent to call his home; here at last the nomad confesses the common need of men. But even about this there broods the presence of the desert and its dry bones of reason. He will accept nothing between a tent and a tomb.

The philosophy of the desert can only begin over again. It cannot grow; it cannot have what Protestants call progress and Catholics call development. There is death and hell in the desert when it does begin over again. There is always the possibility that a new prophet will rediscover the old truth; will find again written on the red sands the secret of the obvious. But it will always be the same secret, for which thousands of these simple and serious and splendidly valiant men will die. The highest message of Mahomet is a piece of divine tautology. The very cry that God is God is a repetition of words, like the repetitions of wide sands and rolling skies. The very phrase is like an everlasting echo, that can never cease to say the same sacred word; and when I saw afterwards the mightiest and most magnificent of all the mosques of that land, I found that its inscriptions had the same character of a deliberate and defiant sameness. The ancient Arabic alphabet and script is itself at once so elegant and so exact that it can be used as a fixed ornament, like the egg and dart pattern or the Greek key. It is as if we could make a heraldry of handwriting, or cover a wall-paper with signatures. But the literary style is as recurrent as the decorative style; perhaps that is why it can be used as a decorative style. Phrases are repeated again and again like ornamental stars or flowers. Many modern people, for example, imagine that the Athanasian Creed is full of vain repetitions; but that is because people are too lazy to listen to it, or not lucid enough to understand it. The same terms are used throughout, as they are in a proposition of Euclid. But the steps are all as differentiated and progressive as in a proposition of Euclid. But in the inscriptions of the Mosque whole sentences seem to occur, not like the steps of an argument, but rather like the chorus of a song. This is the impression everywhere produced by this spirit of the sandy wastes; this is the voice of the desert, though the muezzin cries from the high turrets of the city. Indeed one is driven to repeating oneself about the repetition, so overpowering is the impression of the tall horizons of those tremendous plains, brooding upon the soul with all the solemn weight of the self-evident.

There is indeed another aspect of the desert, yet more ancient and momentous, of which I may speak; but here I only deal with its effect on this great religion of simplicity. For it is through the atmosphere of that religion that a man makes his way, as so many pilgrims have done, to the goal of this pilgrimage. Also this particular aspect remained the more sharply in my memory because of the suddenness with which I escaped from it. I had not expected the contrast; and it

may have coloured all my after experiences. I descended from the desert train at Ludd, which had all the look of a large camp in the desert; appropriately enough perhaps, for it is the traditional birthplace of the soldier St. George. At the moment, however, there was nothing rousing or romantic about its appearance. It was perhaps unusually dreary; for heavy rain had fallen; and the water stood about in what it is easier to call large puddles than anything so poetic as small pools. A motor car sent by friends had halted beside the platform; I got into it with a not unusual vagueness about where I was going; and it wound its way up miry paths to a more rolling stretch of country with patches of cactus here and there. And then with a curious abruptness I became conscious that the whole huge desert had vanished, and I was in a new land. The dark red plains had rolled away like an enormous nightmare; and I found myself in a fresh and exceedingly pleasant dream.

I know it will seem fanciful; but for a moment I really felt as if I had come home; or rather to that home behind home for which we are all homesick. The lost memory of it is the life at once of faith and of fairy-tale. Groves glowing with oranges rose behind hedges of grotesque cactus or prickly pear; which really looked like green dragons guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides. On each side of the road were such flowers as I had never seen before under the sun; for indeed they seemed to have the sun in them rather than the sun on them. Clusters and crowds of crimson anemones were of a red not to be symbolised in blood or wine; but rather in the red glass that glows in the window dedicated to a martyr. Only in a wild Eastern tale could one picture a pilgrim or traveller finding such a garden in the desert; and I thought of the oldest tale of all and the garden from which we came. But there was something in it yet more subtle; which there must be in the impression of any earthly paradise. It is vital to such a dream that things familiar should be mixed with things fantastic; as when an actual dream is filled with the faces of old friends. Sparrows, which seem to be the same all over the world, were darting hither and thither among the flowers; and I had the fancy that they were the souls of the town-sparrows of London and the smoky cities, and now gone wherever the good sparrows go. And a little way up the road before me, on the hill between the cactus hedges, I saw a grey donkey trotting; and I could almost have sworn that it was the donkey I had left at home.

He was trotting on ahead of me, and the outline of his erect and elfish ears was dark against the sky. He was evidently going somewhere with great determination; and I thought I knew to what appropriate place he was going, and that it was my fate to follow him like a moving omen. I lost sight of him later, for I had to complete the journey by train; but the train followed the same direction, which was up steeper and steeper hills. I began to realise more clearly where I was; and to know that the garden in the desert that had bloomed so suddenly about me had borne for many desert wanderers the name of the promised land.

As the rocks rose higher and higher on every side, and hung over us like terrible and tangible clouds, I saw in the dim grass of the slopes below them something I had never seen before. It was a rainbow fallen upon the earth, with no part of it against the sky, but only the grasses and the flowers shining through its fine shades of fiery colour. I thought this also was like an omen; and in such a mood of idle mysticism there fell on me another accident which I was content to count for a third. For when the train stopped at last in the rain, and there was no other vehicle for the last lap of the journey, a very courteous officer, an army surgeon, gave me a seat in an ambulance wagon; and it was under the shield of the red cross that I entered Jerusalem.

For suddenly, between a post of the wagon and a wrack of rainy cloud I saw it, uplifted and withdrawn under all the arching heavens of its history, alone with its benediction and its blasphemy, the city that is set upon a hill, and cannot be hid.