

CHAPTER 54

Again on Board - The Strange Visage - The Hadji - Setting Sail - The Two Jews - American Vessel - Tangier - Adun Oulem - The Struggle - The Forbidden Thing.



54.1 *The Gibraltar Straits from the north*

On Thursday, the 8th of August, I was again on board the Genoese bark, at as early an hour as on the previous morning. After waiting, however, two or three hours without any preparation being made for departing, I was about to return to the shore once more, but the old Genoese mate advised me to stay, assuring me that he had no doubt of our sailing speedily, as all the cargo was on board, and we had nothing further to detain us. I was reposing myself in the little cabin, when I heard a boat strike against the side of the vessel, and some people come on board. Presently a face peered in at the opening, strange and wild. I was half asleep, and at first imagined I was dreaming, for the face seemed more like that of a goat or an orge than of a human being; its long beard almost touching my face as I lay extended in a kind of berth. Starting up, however, I recognised the singular-looking Jew whom I had seen in the company of Judah Lib. He recognised me also, and nodding, bent his huge features into a smile. I arose and went upon deck, where I found him in company with another Jew, a young man in the dress of Barbary. They had just arrived in the boat. I asked my friend of the beard who he was, from whence he came, and where he was going? He answered, in broken Portuguese, that he was returning from Lisbon, where he had been on business, to Mogadore, of which place he was a native. He then looked me in the face and smiled, and taking out a book from his pocket, in Hebrew characters, fell to reading it; whereupon a Spanish sailor on board observed that with such a beard and book he must needs be a *sabio*, or sage. His companion was from Mequinez¹, and spoke only Arabic.

¹ City in central Morocco, some 50 km west of Fez. According to James Grey Jackson, *An account of Timbuctoo and Houssa* (1820), footnote 106, p. 90, 'the city of Fas is the metropolis of the north, as Marocco is of the south. Mequinas is the court town of the north, and resembles the Hague, where few reside but such as are employed in the service of the crown'. (see also p. 118 for a longer description).

A large boat now drew nigh, the stern of which was filled with Moors; there might be about twelve, and the greater part evidently consisted of persons of distinction, as they were dressed in all the pomp and gallantry of the East, with snow-white turbans, jabadores² of green silk or scarlet cloth, and bedeyas³ rich with gold galloon. Some of them were exceedingly fine men, and two amongst them, youths, were strikingly handsome, and so far from exhibiting the dark swarthy countenance of Moors in general, their complexions were of a delicate red and white. The principal personage, and to whom all the rest paid much deference, was a tall athletic man of about forty. He wore a vest of white quilted cotton, and white kandrisa, whilst gracefully wound round his body, and swathing the upper part of his head, was the balk, or white flannel wrapping plaid always held in so much estimation by the Moors from the earliest period of their history. His legs were bare and his feet only protected from the ground by yellow slippers. He displayed no farther ornament than one large gold ear-ring, from which depended a pearl, evidently of great price. A noble black beard, about a foot in length, touched his muscular breast. His features were good, with the exception of the eyes, which were somewhat small; their expression, however, was, evil; their glances were sullen; and malignity and ill-nature were painted in every lineament of his countenance, which seemed never to have been brightened with a smile. The Spanish sailor, of whom I have already had occasion to speak, informed me in a whisper, that he was a santuron, or big saint, and was so far back on his way from Mecca; adding, that he was a merchant of immense wealth. It soon appeared that the other Moors had merely attended him on board through friendly politeness, as they all successively came to bid him adieu, with the exception of two blacks, who were his attendants. I observed that these blacks, when the Moors presented them their hands at departing, invariably made an effort to press them to their lips, which effort was as uniformly foiled, the Moors in every instance, by a speedy and graceful movement, drawing back their hand locked in that of the black, which they pressed against their own heart; as much as to say, "though a negro and a slave you are a Moslem, and being so, you art our brother - Allah knows no distinctions." The boatman now went up to the hadji⁴, demanding payment, stating, at the same time, that he had been on board three times on his account, conveying his luggage. The sum which he demanded appeared exorbitant to the hadji, who, forgetting that he was a saint, and fresh from Mecca, fumed outrageously, and in broken Spanish called the boatman thief. If there be any term of reproach which stings a Spaniard (and such was the boatman) more than another, it is that one; and the fellow no sooner heard it applied to himself, than with eyes sparkling with fury, he put his fist to the hadji's nose, and repaid the one opprobrious name by at least ten others equally bad or worse. He would perhaps have proceeded to acts of violence had he not been pulled away by the other Moors, who led him aside, and I suppose either said or gave him something which pacified him, as he soon got into his boat, and returned with them on shore. The captain now arrived with his Jewish secretary, and orders were given for setting sail.

² Burke [Glossary]: 'Apparently a Hispanized form of the African Arabic *jabdali*, a gold-embroidered waistcoat.'

³ Burke [Glossary]: Arabic. An open waistcoat. More correctly, *bad'iyya*..

⁴ Title carried by every Muslim who has performed the obligatory pilgrimage (*hadji*) to Mekka, and is therefore entitled to wear the green turban [Burke, Glossary].

At a little past twelve we were steering out of the bay of Gibraltar; the wind was in the right quarter, but for some time we did not make much progress, lying almost becalmed beneath the lee of the hill; by degrees, however, our progress became brisker, and in about an hour we found ourselves careering smartly towards Tarifa.⁵



54.2 Gibraltar Straights from the water

The Jew secretary stood at the helm, and indeed appeared to be the person who commanded the vessel, and who issued out all the necessary orders, which were executed under the superintendence of the old Genoese mate. I now put some questions to the hadji, but he looked at me askance with his sullen eye, pouted with his lip, and remained silent; as much as to say, "Speak not to me, I am holier than thou." I found his negroes, however, far more conversable. One of them was old and ugly, the other about twenty, and as well looking as it is possible for a negro to be. His colour was perfect ebony, his features exceedingly well formed and delicate, with the exception of the lips, which were too full. The shape of his eyes was peculiar; they were rather oblong than round, like those of an Egyptian figure. Their expression was thoughtful and meditative. In every respect he differed from his companion, even in colour, (though both were negroes,) and was evidently a scion of some little known and superior race. As he sat beneath the mast gazing at the sea, I thought he was misplaced, and that he would have appeared to more advantage amidst boundless sands, and beneath a date tree, and then he might have well represented a Jhin⁶. I asked him from whence he came, he replied that he was a native of Fez, but that he had never known his parents. He had been brought up, he added, in the family of his present master, whom he had followed in the greater part of his travels, and with whom he had thrice visited Mecca. I asked him if he liked being a slave? Whereupon he replied, that he was a slave no longer, having been made free for some time past, on account of his faithful services, as had likewise his companion. He would have told me much more, but the hadji called him away, and otherwise employed him, probably to prevent his being contaminated by me.

⁵ The same voyage is described, with much the same observations, by Arthur Capell Brooke [vol. 1, chapter 8], who sailed on a felouk to Tangiers in 1831.

⁶ In Muslim folklore a spirit, halfway between man and the angels in the spiritual hierarchy, who may either be good or evil. It says something about Borrow's knowledge of Arabic that he here uses the plural of the word, of which the correct singular would be *Jinnee*.

Thus, avoided by the Moslems, I betook myself to the Jews, whom I found nowise backward in cultivating an intimacy. The sage of the beard told me his history, which in some respects reminded me of that of Judah Lib, as it seemed that, a year or two previous, he had quitted Mogadore in pursuit of his son, who had betaken himself to Portugal. On the arrival, however, of the father at Lisbon, he discovered that the fugitive had, a few days before, shipped himself for the Brazils. Unlike Judah in quest of his father, he now became weary, and discontinued the pursuit. The younger Jew from Mequinez was exceedingly gay and lively as soon as he perceived that I was capable of understanding him, and made me smile by his humorous account of Christian life, as he had observed it at Gibraltar, where he had made a stay of about a month. He then spoke of Mequinez, which, he said, was a Jennut, or Paradise, compared with which Gibraltar was a sty of hogs. So great, so universal is the love of country. I soon saw that both these people believed me to be of their own nation⁷; indeed, the young one, who was much the most familiar, taxed me with being so, and spoke of the infamy of denying my own blood. Shortly before our arrival off Tarifa, universal hunger seemed to prevail amongst us. The hadji and his negroes produced their store, and feasted on roast fowls, the Jews ate grapes and bread, myself bread and cheese, whilst the crew prepared a mess of anchovies. Two of them speedily came, with a large portion, which they presented to me with the kindness of brothers: I made no hesitation in accepting their present, and found the anchovies delicious. As I sat between the Jews, I offered them some, but they turned away their heads with disgust, and cried *haloof* (hogsflesh). They at the same time, however, shook me by the hand, and, uninvited, took a small portion of my bread. I had a bottle of Cognac, which I had brought with me as a preventive to sea sickness, and I presented it to them; but this they also refused, exclaiming, *haram* (it is forbidden). I said nothing.⁸

We were now close to the lighthouse of Tarifa, and turning the head of the bark towards the west, we made directly for the coast of Africa. The wind was now blowing very fresh, and as we had it almost in our poop, we sprang along at a tremendous rate, the huge lateen sails threatening every moment to drive us beneath the billows, which an adverse tide raised up against us. Whilst scudding along in this manner, we passed close under the stern of a large vessel bearing American colours; she was tacking up the straits, and slowly winning her way against the impetuous Levanter⁹. As we passed under her, I observed the poop crowded with people gazing at us; indeed, we must have offered a singular spectacle to those on board, who, like my young American friend at Gibraltar, were visiting the Old World for the first time. At the helm stood the Jew; his

⁷ It is somewhat baffling that Borrow did not grasp that repeating this selfsame remark time and time again on every possible occasion, would - rather than impress them more - only make his readers doubt its veracity.

⁸ As the below will show, Borrow is proud to pretend that he knows more of *kosher* laws than these wayward Jews themselves.

⁹ And against the tide, the water streaming out of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic through the Gibraltar Straits being one of the strongest and fiercest flows encountered in the oceans.

whole figure enveloped in a gabardine,¹⁰ the cowl of which, raised above his head, gave him almost the appearance of a spectre in its shroud; whilst upon the deck, mixed with Europeans in various kinds of dresses, all of them picturesque with the exception of my own, trod the turbaned Moors, the haik¹¹ of the hadji flapping loosely in the wind. The view they obtained of us, however, could have been but momentary, as we bounded past them literally with the speed of a racehorses so that in about an hour's time we were not more than a mile's distance from the foreland on which stands the fortress Alminar, and which constitutes the boundary point of the bay of Tangier towards the east. There the wind dropped and our progress was again slow.



54.3 Tangiers from the north, before the mole was demolished

For a considerable time Tangier had appeared in sight. Shortly after standing away from Tarifa, we had descried it in the far distance, when it showed like a white dove brooding on its nest. The sun was setting behind the town when we dropped anchor in its harbour, amidst half a dozen barks and felouks about the size of our own, the only vessels which we saw. There stood Tangier before us, and a picturesque town it was, occupying the sides and top of two hills, one of which, bold and bluff, projects into the sea where the coast takes a sudden and abrupt turn. Frowning and battlemented were its walls, either perched on the top of precipitous rocks, whose base was washed by the salt billows, or rising from the narrow strand which separates the hill from the ocean.

¹⁰ Burke [Glossary]: A long coat, or cloak, usually applied to the distinctive dress worn by the Jews under compulsion. Said to be from the Spanish and Old French *gaban*, a great coarse cloak with a hood, a word itself supposed to be connected with *capa*.

¹¹ Burke [Glossary]: A white cloth worn over the head by the Moors.

Yonder are two or three tiers of batteries, displaying heavy guns which command the harbour; above them you see the terraces of the town rising in succession like steps for giants. But all is white, perfectly white, so that the whole seems cut out of an immense chalk rock, though true it is that you behold here and there tall green trees springing up from amidst the whiteness: perhaps they belong to Moorish gardens, and beneath them even now peradventure is reclining many a dark-eyed Leila, akin to the houries.¹² Right before you is a high tower or minaret, not white but curiously painted, which belongs to the principal mosque of Tangier; a black banner waves upon it, for it is the feast of Ashor¹³. A noble beach of white sand fringes the bay from the town to the foreland of Alminar. To the east rise prodigious hills and mountains; they are Gibil Muza and his chain; and yon tall fellow is the peak of Tetuan; the grey mists of evening are enveloping their sides. Such was Tangier, such its vicinity, as it appeared to me whilst gazing from the Genoese bark.

A boat was now lowered from the vessel, in which the captain, who was charged with the mail from Gibraltar, the Jew secretary, and the hadji and his attendant negroes departed for the shore. I would have gone with them, but I was told that I could not land that night, as ere my passport and bill of health could be examined, the gates would be closed; so I remained on board with the crew and the two Jews. The former prepared their supper, which consisted simply of pickled *tomates*¹⁴, the other provisions having been consumed. The old Genoese brought me a portion, apologizing at the same time, for the plainness of the fare. I accepted it with thanks, and told him that a million better men than myself had a worse supper. I never ate with more appetite. As the night advanced, the Jews sang Hebrew hymns, and when they had concluded, demanded of me why I was silent, so I lifted up my voice and chanted Adun Oulem:-

"Reigned the Universe's Master, ere were earthly things begun;
When His mandate all created, Ruler was the name He won;
And alone He'll rule tremendous when all things are past and gone,
He no equal has, nor consort, He, the singular and lone,
Has no end and no beginning; His the sceptre, might and throne.
He's my God and living Saviour, rock to whom in need I run;
He's my banner and my refuge, fount of weal when called upon;
In His hand I place my spirit at nightfall and rise of sun,
And therewith my body also; God's my God - I fear no one."¹⁵

¹² Burke [Glossary]: The women of Moslem Paradise. Plural of the Arab, *ḥawrá* = black-eyed.

¹³ Burke [Glossary]: *Hebr.* Jewish feast of the tenth (day), '*āsor*. It is really the Arabic '*ashūrā*.

¹⁴ In most modern editions the word is corrected to 'tomatoes', but Borrow originally wrote this cursive *tomates*, which Burke [footnote to 751] explained by saying that the plant, introduced into Spain from Peru in the 16th century, 'was hardly known in England in 1839, and was not common for 40 years after, so Borrow may be excused for giving the word in its Spanish form.'

¹⁵ Borrow's own translation of the poem *Adōn 'Olām*, 'Lord of the Universe', from the Hebrew Psalter [Knapp II : 281]. Borrow had already included it in his book of translations *Targum*, printed in 100 copies in Saint Petersburg in 1835. Burke [footnote to 751] translates the title as 'Lord of the World', and explains than '*Adun* or *Adon* is the well-known Hebrew word for Lord, and is said to be the origin of the Spanish title Don. *Oulem* is the Arab '*Olam*, "of the world".'

Darkness had now fallen over land and sea; not a sound was heard save occasionally the distant barking of a dog from the shore, or some plaintive Genoese ditty, which arose from a neighbouring bark. The town seemed buried in silence and gloom, no light, not even that of a taper, could be descried. Turning our eyes in the direction of Spain, however, we perceived a magnificent conflagration seemingly enveloping the side and head of one of the lofty mountains northward of Tarifa; the blaze was redly reflected in the waters of the strait; either the brushwood was burning or the Carboneros¹⁶ were plying their dusky toil. The Jews now complained, of weariness, and the younger, uncording a small mattress, spread it on the deck and sought repose. The sage descended into the cabin, but he had scarcely time to lie down ere the old mate, darting forward, dived in after him, and pulled him out by the heels, for it was very shallow, and the descent was effected by not more than two or three steps. After accomplishing this, he called him many opprobrious names, and threatened him with his foot, as he lay sprawling on the deck. "Think you," said he, "who are a dog and a Jew, and pay as a dog and a Jew; think you to sleep in the cabin? Undeceive yourself, beast; that cabin shall be slept in by none to-night but this Christian Cavallero." The sage made no reply, but arose from the deck and stroked his beard, whilst the old Genoese proceeded in his philippic. Had the Jew been disposed, he could have strangled the insulter in a moment, or crushed him to death in his brawny arms, as I never remember to have seen a figure so powerful and muscular; but he was evidently slow to anger, and long-suffering; not a resentful word escaped him, and his features retained their usual expression of benignant placidity.

I now assured the mate that I had not the slightest objection to the Jew's sharing the cabin with me, but rather wished it, as there was room for us both and for more. "Excuse me, Sir Cavalier," replied the Genoese, "but I swear to permit no such thing; you are young and do not know this canaille as I do, who have been backward and forward to this coast for twenty years; if the beast is cold, let him sleep below the hatches as I and the rest shall, but that cabin he shall not enter." Observing that he was obstinate I retired, and in a few minutes was in a sound sleep which lasted till daybreak. Twice or thrice, indeed, I thought that a struggle was taking place near me, but I was so overpowered with weariness, or "sleep drunken," as the Germans call it¹⁷, that I was unable to arouse myself sufficiently to discover what was going on; the truth is, that three times during the night, the sage feeling himself uncomfortable in the open air by the side of his companion, penetrated into the cabin, and was as many times dragged out by his relentless old enemy, who, suspecting his intentions, kept his eye upon him throughout the night.

About five I arose; the sun was shining brightly and gloriously upon town, bay, and mountain; the crew were already employed upon deck repairing a sail which had been shivered in the wind of the preceding day. The Jews sat disconsolate on the poop; they complained much of the cold they had suffered in their exposed situation. Over the left eye of the sage I observed a bloody cut, which he informed me he had received from the old Genoese after he had dragged him out of the cabin for the last time. I now produced my bottle of Cognac, begging that the crew would partake of it as a slight return for

¹⁶ Burke [Glossary]: charcoal burners

¹⁷ *Schlaf-trunken*, i.e. very drowsy.

their hospitality. They thanked me, and the bottle went its round; it was last in the hands of the old mate, who, after looking for a moment at the sage, raised it to his mouth, where he kept it a considerable time longer than any of his companions, after which he returned it to me with a low bow. The sage now inquired what the bottle contained: I told him Cognac or aguardiente, whereupon with some eagerness he begged that I would allow him to take a draught. "How is this?" said I; "yesterday you told me that it was a forbidden thing, an abomination." "Yesterday," said he, "I was not aware that it was brandy; I thought it wine, which assuredly is an abomination, and a forbidden thing." "Is it forbidden in the Torah?" I inquired. "Is it forbidden in the law of God?" "I know not," said he, "but one thing I know, that the sages have forbidden it." "Sages like yourself," cried I with warmth; "sages like yourself, with long beards and short understandings: the use of both drinks is permitted, but more danger lurks in this bottle than in a tun of wine. Well said my Lord the Nazarene, 'ye strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel'; but as you are cold and shivering, take the bottle and revive yourself with a small portion of its contents."¹⁸ He put it to his lips and found not a single drop. The old Genoese grinned.

"Bestia," said he, "I saw by your looks that you wished to drink of that bottle, and I said within me, even though I suffocate, yet will I not leave one drop of the aguardiente of the Christian Cavalier to be wasted on that Jew, on whose head may evil lightnings fall."

"Now, Sir Cavalier," he continued, "you can go ashore; these two sailors shall row you to the Mole, and convey your baggage where you think proper; may the Virgin bless you wherever you go."

¹⁸ Hopkins [*GBB* II : 6, 102 & 117] explains: 'Since wine is used in Christian ritual, consumption of wine is a sensitive issue among observant Jews. In general, wine made by or owned by gentiles is avoided. This restriction does not apply to spirits.'