OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE HOT WIND FROM THE DESERT

FOR the better part of my adult life—ever since, as a young man, I played the violin in orchestras aboard French ocean liners—I have thought of Morocco as just about a perfect country. Members of the French crews I travelled with, as well as colonials I met in various French overseas territories—Guadeloupe, Martinique, Algeria, Tunisia, Indo-China, Tahiti, Réunion, Madagascar, Pondichéry, Somaliland—used to tell me what a wonderful place Marshal Lyautey's Morocco was. A happy land, they said, with fine, gleaming-white towns, wealthy traders, and contented natives—a progressive country, with a modern civilization. Even my friend Maurice, the *chef d'orchestre* I played under most of the time, who was a man dedicated to artistic liberty and the pursuit of alcoholic happiness, and for the most part held France's colonies in low esteem—because, he claimed, they never contributed enough in the way of *pinard* (the *vin ordinaire* he liked best)—was enthusiastic about the Moroccan city of Marrakech. "The air there tastes like *pinard*," he frequently assured me. Then he would add, "If you have the chance, *mon petit*, go to Morocco. I know you will be *bienvenu* there." Somehow, until recently, I never got around to following his advice, but through the years I cherished the romantic picture conjured up by Maurice and my other French confreres.

Now, in retrospect, I am afraid that the several days I spent in the Moroccan cities of Casablanca and Rabat not long ago rather altered that picture. I am not at all sure I was *bienvenu* there. In Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria, through which I passed on my way to Morocco, French officials, upon learning from my passport that I was an American journalist, seemed distressed about my destination. I would get a distorted view of a beautiful country, they said; it was definitely a *mauvais moment* for such a trip. Why not wait until the situation had become stabilized? Moslems began to show up in the hotels I stopped at en route, eager to press on me documents purporting to prove that the French in Morocco were terrorizing the Arabs, and French diplomatic officials got in touch with me to caution me against what one of them called "irrational native elements, which are either fanatic nationals or Communists." When I arrived at the airport in Casablanca, a suspicious French police official questioned me relentlessly about my "intentions and connections." This concern is, of course, by no means unjustified. The French naturally feel it is wise to keep a check on visitors to Morocco these days, what with all the talk of Communist infiltration.

AN American friend of mine, a man who has been in the country long enough to understand its complex political situation, had come in his car to meet me at the Casablanca airport. "The French have done a great job of colonization in Morocco," he told me as we drove into town. "They brought in capital, and they brought in some of their ablest administrators. Look at those skyscrapers," he went on, waving his hand toward the center of the city. I did, and I saw several buildings, of modern design, the highest about twenty stories. "Casablanca will soon have a population of six hundred thousand," he said. "Back in 1912, before the French came here, it was just a small trading and fishing town. Oh, the French have chalked up an impressive record, all right. There's the Pasteur Institute, here in Casa, with its biological and serological laboratories, and the Moroccan Institute of Hygiene, in Rabat, and a lot of new hospitals, for both French and Arabs, all over the country. In 1917, there was just one city in Morocco with over a hundred thousand inhabitants. That was Fez. Now there are four more—Casa, Marrakech, Meknes, and Rabat. The swamp known as the plain of Rharb has been turned into a rich agricultural area. Irrigation projects have been set up, and huge hydroelectric power stations, along with a thriving mining industry and many new factories. In 1924, seven thousand people were employed in Moroccan industries. Today, there are a hundred and twenty thousand. One could go on and on. It's a tremendous achievement."

At dinner that evening, I remarked to my friend that in view of all the French have accomplished in Morocco, I wondered what was responsible for the tension there. "The French don't want to face the fact that times have changed," he replied. "We had to face

that fact in the Philippines, and we did, and so did the Dutch in Indonesia, and the British in India. But the French around here still talk as if this were 1912." That was the year, he reminded me, when the French imposed the Treaty of Fez upon the Sultan of Morocco, establishing a French protectorate over a large part of his empire. "The French didn't even profit by their own experiences in Syria and Lebanon and Indo-China," my friend continued. "The British are more realistic. They make mistakes, but they've the courage to admit them and then try to correct them. The French here won't consider any revision of the Treaty of Fez. They talk vaguely of reforms within the framework of the protectorate. But the protectorate itself doesn't satisfy anyone and doesn't help the problem of over-all Western security one bit. To make matters even more difficult, the United Nations has granted Libya its independence. The Moroccans contend that they have a far greater right to independence than the politically and economically backward Libyans. It's a mess."

The Moroccan crisis, my friend explained, started in October, 1950, when Sidi Mohammed Ben Youssef, the Sultan of Morocco, went to Paris at the invitation of President Auriol. There he was given many fancy receptions and gold-plate state dinners, but not the independence he wanted for Morocco. Theoretically, the Sultan is an absolute spiritual and temporal sovereign, but actually he has no real political power. The French Resident General is his Foreign Minister, and French administrators run the country, with the help of pashas (urban administrators) and caids (rural administrators), whom the Sultan appoints, but only with the approval of the French. On the other hand, the Sultan's theocratic power *is* absolute, not only in French Morocco but also in barren, impoverished Spanish Morocco and in the rich International Zone of Tangier. As a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, he is venerated by Moslems all over the world.

Officially, the Sultan, an earnest man in his forties, stands above all parties, but, according to my friend, his sympathies are with the Istiqlal, or Independence, Party. The Istiqlal Party, a consolidation of a number of groups that had previously been agitating for independence, came into being in 1944. At that time it issued a manifesto demanding complete independence and a demo-

cratic form of government under the Sultan, and citing the Atlantic Charter in support of its demands. The Istiqlal is a tightly knit organization whose simple objective of independence can be grasped by even the most backward farmer, and some of the leaders of the Party spend more time in jail than out. Off and on, the Istiqlal finds itself outlawed. When I was in Morocco, it was outlawed but was carrying on vigorously, and more or less openly, and the French, I gathered from my friend, were uncertain whether to make a frontal attack on it or close their eyes to it; as in other sections of North Africa, there was always the possibility that any large-scale drive against such an intensely nationalist faction might set off a chain reaction extending all the way to Cairo, Beirut, Teheran, Lahore, and Batavia. In this dilemma, my friend said, the French had fallen back on a series of what might be called prepared propaganda positions. One of these was that the Istiqlal had been taken over by the Communists. But another was that it is a bourgeois party of ambitious, wealthy businessmen who want independence for selfish reasons and are out of touch with the masses.

"Obviously, both can't be right," my friend said. "The French gift for rationalization is slipping in Morocco. It's true, of course, that the Communists would like to use the Istiqlal for their own purposes. Right now, they are trying to be even more nationalistic than the Istiqlal. They dominate the Confedération Générale de Travail here, but at their Party meetings the attendance is largely French and Spanish, rather than Moslem. As is the fashion nowadays, everybody is talking, sketchily but noisily, of democracy—probably in this instance hoping to get American support. The Istiqlal leaders promise democratic liberties for the individual—comparable, they say, to what is found in the democracies of Oriental Moslem countries. Well, you know what *that* means. But the Sultan considers Islam the true democracy, which isn't very reassuring, either. And the French talk about democracy but maintain a dictatorship, in which the Arabs have no freedom of assembly and no freedom of movement. As workers, they have no right to organize. The Istiqlal manages to get out a newspaper, but when it isn't subject to outright censorship, it is constantly being harassed by government lawsuits. A state of emergency was proclaimed at the beginning of the war and has never been lifted."

Shortly after the Sultan returned

from Paris, the then Resident General, General Alphonse-Pierre Juin, a soldier by temperament and a proconsul who, according to my friend, "preferred giving orders to engaging in discussions," lost patience with him and issued an ultimatum: Either the Sultan would publicly disavow the Istiqlal or he would have to abdicate. A convenient front man for the General turned up in the person of the seventy-five-year-old Pasha of Marrakech, Si Thami El Glaoui, a shrewd fellow who rules the southern part of the country, plays ball with the French (and in return is allowed to levy heavy taxes and receive presents from his appointees), represents the feudal lords of the Atlas Mountains, and, most important of all, has three hundred thousand tough, well-trained Berber cavalrymen at his command. At six-thirty on the evening of February 25th of last year, the Sultan's palace in Rabat was surrounded by thousands of Berber horsemen who had suddenly appeared in the city.

"There is some disagreement as to why the Berbers came up from the south," my friend went on. "The French say they came of their own volition to demand the Sultan's resignation. The Istiqlal people say they had been told by their caids that they were going to parade for an American general. Take your choice. The Sultan was given exactly two hours to accept the ultimatum. By eight-thirty, he had capitulated. He fired his trusted aides, appointed French-sponsored pashas and caids, and his Grand Vizier vaguely condemned the activities of an unspecified political party." My friend chuckled. "Since the name of the Istiqlal was never mentioned, the Istiqlal boys felt encouraged to carry on. Now they are doing better than ever. The French say that the Istiqlal's following represents only ten per cent of the population. According to the Istiqlal, it is ninety per cent. The truth, of course, is probably somewhere in between. You ought to try to see one of their leaders—Balafredj. But you won't find it easy. He is a hard man to get to. Still, it would be interesting to find out what he has to say."

"Who?" I asked.

"Hadj Ahmed Balafredj, the Istiqlal's general secretary. He's the only top party man who's still out of jail."

THE next day, I began a search for people who knew people who knew people who could get me in touch with Balafredj—a search that finally led me to Rabat, the capital of French Mo-

rocco, and into its *médina*, the old, walled Arab section of the town. In Rabat's *médina*, life goes on pretty much the way it did a thousand years ago, except that the shops sell fountain pens and bicycles and there are Coca-Cola signs (recognizable even in Arabic) all over the place. I also saw a good deal of the modern, or French, sections of Rabat. There must be a lot of uneasiness there, but the casual stroller would never suspect it. The tree-lined avenues, the sleepy parks and antiques shops, the white villas, with their lovely gardens, and the bougainvillaea reminded me of Nice or Menton, but the people didn't. Most of them are colonial *fonctionnaires*, who have little money and spend even less, and who show no interest in intellectual discussions at sidewalk cafés, and care nothing about new books or night life. On a couple of evenings, I talked with a few of them; one, whom I shall call M. Durand, stands out in my memory. A small, dehydrated man, who now shaves only every other day, the price of razor blades having gone up, he was wearing a blue beret and a woollen scarf, and a buttoned-up sweater under his suit coat, although the night happened to be quite warm. M. Durand told me that he takes a solitary walk every evening after his *souper;* it helps relieve a chronic intestinal disorder, he said. Because of this ailment, he declined to have a glass of wine with me and accepted instead a small bottle of Vichy. He is a retired public servant. Born in Morocco, he had worked all his active life for the Residency, and now, he said, after all those years of devotion to duty, he found himself beset by anxieties. The cost of living was getting out of hand. Why, life was more expensive in Rabat than in the *Métropole*—the French colonial's word for Paris. And if you listened to the big *fonctionnaires*, the ones who made a hundred thousand francs ($285) a month, you would think they were worse off than the little fellows like himself, who couldn't even buy an apéritif and go to the cinema on the same night. "I used to go to the cinema a lot," M. Durand said. "It took my mind off my worries. Do you think there will be war, Monsieur?"

I said I certainly hoped not, and for a while we talked about the Russians, of whom M. Durand was very much afraid. Then I asked him if he didn't feel the Arabs constituted a greater immediate danger to his way of life. He gave me an astonished glance. "But, Monsieur, there has always been trou-

ble with the Arabs," he said. "It is *une condition normale*. One gets used to it, as to the hot wind from the desert."

I said it seemed strange to me that he should be fearful of the Russians, who were a long way off, and unconcerned about the Arabs, who were right at hand. M. Durand smiled condescendingly and said I was much too *alarmé*, just like people from the *Métropole*. The Istiqlal, he felt, was just a bunch of silly extremists. The *fonctionnaires* were in control, and there were always the *militaires* to back them up. Then he asked me whether I had seen the mausoleum of the Maréchal. When people in Morocco talk of the Maréchal, they mean not Pétain, as in France, but Lyautey, who pacified the country and was one of the few Frenchmen who have ever known how to get along with the Arabs.

I FINALLY met the right people and succeeded in making arrangements to visit M. Balafredj, who was convalescing from a long illness at his home in Rabat. These arrangements, it developed, because of dangers, real or imagined, involved maneuvers suggesting a parody of "The Third Man." On a certain afternoon, I was to take a taxi—one driven by a Frenchman, not an Arab—near the railroad station and get out before I came to the *médina;* I was then to walk along a certain route until I came to the printshop of the Istiqlal newspaper, *El Alam* (*The Flag*). On the appointed afternoon, following directions, I made my way without trouble to the printshop, a bright stucco building in a small, deserted courtyard, beyond which the rumbling of a small press could be heard. Turning toward a staircase in the courtyard, I came face to face with two shabbily dressed Arabs, who stared at me with steely eyes. One of them asked curtly what I was doing there. I had a letter of introduction with me, which I hastily handed over, and, after the men had scanned it, their manner softened. One of them walked up the stairs and presently returned with a rotund Arab wearing a fine white burnous and a red fez, who introduced himself as Monsieur Etienne, a name that, he assured me, with a conspiratorial smile, was not his right one. He shook hands with me warmly, and made me feel for the first time that I was, to some extent, anyway, *bienvenu* in Morocco.

We climbed the stairway, passing a number of tough-looking Arabs. M. Etienne said they were guards, and explained to me with obvious pleasure—

he seemed to be delighted at the opportunity to impress upon an American what the Istiqlal was up against, or might be up against at any minute—that such "precautions" had to be taken. The printshop was raided by the French police on an average of three times a week, he said.

Leading the way to a small office on the second floor, M. Etienne said that M. Balafredj was expecting me at his home, and that he himself would guide me there. Other precautions would have to be taken first, though. Thereupon, he dispatched two men with whispered messages, made a couple of cryptic telephone calls, and conferred with a couple of members of *El Alam's* editorial staff. Messengers were rushing in and out, as at a military field headquarters during a battle. I got the impression that they all enjoyed enormously what they were doing and would have felt let down if the Istiqlal had suddenly been declared legal. M. Etienne said *El Alam* was doing fine, in spite of the measures taken to suppress it. To be sure, it didn't sell many copies, but the paper was read all over the Moslem world, and it made up in courage for what it lacked in circulation. "The French are afraid of the paper," he said. "They claimed that no one in Morocco had been arrested for political reasons. So we printed the names of all the people in Chtouka, Tamanar, Massa, Aghbal, Agoulmine, Tafraout, Beni Amir, and Aït Haddidou who *had* been arrested for political reasons. You are lucky to meet M. Balafredj. He would probably be in jail now if he hadn't had the good fortune to be very sick."

There was another phone call and some more whispering among members of the staff, and then M. Etienne said we could leave. We walked down the stairway and got into a Citroën. M. Etienne said it was unwise to use the main streets, so he went through a number of dusty back alleys. He drove at high speed except when we came to intersections; then he stopped the car

so abruptly that several times I was thrown against the windshield. Afterward, he would put his head out the window and look back along the alley we had just driven through. I saw no signs of our being followed, and finally I said as much. "You were followed from the moment you left the taxi," M. Etienne said. "We are always followed. Look!" We were passing a driveway out of which a man wearing dark glasses was trying to back a big gray open car. "An agent of the Sûreté," M. Etienne asserted with grim satisfaction. "We are under continuous surveillance." He went on to say that Allal El Fassi, the head of the Istiqlal, had fled to Tangier, where he had set up a Party headquarters to keep in touch with the Arab League and the rest of the Moslem world. Then he turned a corner and said, "Well, here we are."

M. Etienne stopped the car in front of a white brick wall against which an old beggar wearing a dirty robe was sitting cross-legged, staring straight ahead of him. As we got out of the car, the beggar lifted his garment from his left ankle. This was apparently a signal, for M. Etienne acknowledged it with a nod. Then he opened a door in the wall and we stepped into a beautiful garden filled with flowers. A small boy and girl were playing there. We walked through the garden, passed under an archway, and entered a patio with rosebushes planted here and there among the multicolored tiles with which it was paved. M. Etienne led me into a large, light room carpeted in a soft gray, with a low divan, covered with flowery chintz, running along three walls. Vases of flowers stood on small tables in the corners. There was no other furniture.

M. Etienne asked me to sit down, but he remained standing, in a respectful, expectant attitude. Presently a man came in and was introduced to me as M. Balafredj. A slim, dark-haired man, with a pale face and intense eyes, he was wearing a light-gray suit, a silk shirt, a conservative tie, and red moccasins. His movements were slow, and he seemed very tired and weak. "I wish I could have met you openly, in a public place, as befits the general secretary of Morocco's largest political party," he said in French—the French, I thought, of a foreigner who has studied at a lycée in the *Métropole* and perhaps at the Sorbonne. His voice was curiously lacking in animation. "Even here in my own house, I am not a free man," he said. "They won't touch me as long as I stay

indoors, but the moment I go out, I am almost sure to be arrested. This arrangement suits them. They can tell the world that I am free, and at the same time they can keep a close check on everybody who comes to see me. It would, of course, be much simpler for them to have two ordinary policemen stationed at the entrance, but that would be contrary to the peculiar rules of conduct at the Residency. Right now, this house is surrounded by representatives of the Sûreté and the local police, but you won't see any of them."

A servant entered with a big carafe of orange juice and three glasses. M. Balafredj filled the glasses and handed one to M. Etienne and one to me. "The French don't want to realize that you can't turn back the clock," he said. "A few years ago, we would have been willing to discuss gradual reforms. The French kept vaguely talking of *droits de l'homme* and *droits politiques*—always talking, never doing anything. Now we will no longer compromise. We will settle for nothing short of independence. Only then will we be ready to discuss an alliance with France. We need France. But France needs us too."

M. Etienne shook his head dejectedly. "It may still be possible to deal with the French in Paris, but there's no hope when it comes to the French in Rabat," he said.

"About eight million Moslems and only three hundred thousand Frenchmen live in this country," M. Balafredj said to me. "Yet our people cannot even get lowly jobs such as mailmen and railroad switchmen. The French bring in their own people from the Continent for those jobs, to increase their numbers. Morocco is booming and skilled workers are needed, but French employers are not encouraged to train Arab employees. Our people are considered just good enough to be truck drivers and messengers. And in the exceptional instances when Moslems do get better jobs, they are paid less than Frenchmen doing the same work. The French have three labor organizations in Morocco, but Moroccans are not permitted to join any of them. There are separate French and Moroccan chambers of commerce. The country's entire economy is divided along national and racial lines. One hundred per cent of the French children in Morocco go to school, and only seven per cent of the Moslem children. More than a million Moroccan children can't go to school because the budget makes no provision for them. Those are disquieting figures. The French keep telling us that we

haven't the experienced technicians and administrators necessary to run a modern state, but they do nothing to help us train them. Of course, we haven't enough adequately trained men. But unless we do something about it, we never will have."

M. Balafredj sipped his orange juice and looked out into the patio. "You should go and visit one of the *bidonvilles*," M. Etienne said to me. "That would give you a different picture of Moroccan life."

I was able to reply that I had already visited a *bidonville*, or city of tin cans. *Bidonvilles* are the shantytowns one finds outside the gates of nearly all Moroccan cities. The one I had seen at Rabat is called Douar Dabbagh, but despite its exotic name it isn't mentioned in any of the colorful booklets on Morocco put out by the travel agencies. I'm afraid my old friend Maurice would not have thought that the air of Douar Dabbagh tasted like *pinard*. In Douar Dabbagh, more than thirty thousand men, women, and children and several billion flies are crowded together in miserable huts built of flattened tin cans and cardboard boxes, many of them bearing the familiar trademarks of American merchandise. The hovels in Douar Dabbagh struggle in disorderly rows up the side of a hill from a ravine; I was told that during the torrential spring rains everything seems to sag, and that during the hot summer months the heat and stench are beyond belief. There are no sewers. Two public fountains provide the only water for the thirty thousand people, and some of them have to walk two or three miles to reach the one nearest them. Professional water-drawers charge five francs (a cent and a half) for a five-quart *bidon* of water, and that is more than most of the inhabitants can afford, for the population consists of menial workers, many of them unemployed, lured from the hinterland by false tales of well-paid jobs in the city. Casablanca, Fez, Meknes, Marrakech, Fedala, Agadir, and Port-Lyautey also have their *bidonvilles*, with an estimated total population of two hundred and fifty thousand. French officials have worked hard to prevent disastrous fires or epidemics from breaking out in these places, but no money has been appropriated for improving the wretched living in them.

WHEN I said that I had seen Douar Dabbagh, M. Balafredj shrugged sadly. "Didn't you wonder whether there wasn't some violent Communism there?" he asked. "After

all, it's a made-to-order setup for the Reds. If you go back there and ask the people, they will tell you that the Istiqlal has warned them not to join the Communists. We have repudiated the Communists publicly on several occasions, but we are still being called pro-Communist by the people at the Residency. We have also been called terrorists, although we never use violence."

A servant stuck his head through the door, and M. Balafredj nodded and stood up. "The old tricks won't work," he said, and for the first time I saw him smile. "Even the old divide-and-rule technique won't work. The French tried to play the Berbers against the Arabs. We have our differences with the Berbers, but the pressure of the police state is going to unite us. The Berber tribal chiefs of the Atlas Mountains want independence as badly as we do. The Pasha, El Glaoui, who has cast his lot with the French, is fighting for a lost cause. He is where he is only because the French Army protects him."

M. Balafredj accompanied M. Etienne and me into the patio but said goodbye to us before we reached the door in the white wall. We got into the car. Half an hour later, I was in my room at the Tour Hassan Hotel, a luxurious, Moorish-style building with a magnificent view of fine white houses, palm trees, broad avenues, and walls covered with bougainvillaea. For a moment, I was almost ready to believe that my old friend Maurice was right, after all.

—Joseph Wechsberg

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Bellevue Tigers, third-ranking team in the NKAC, chalked up their 13th victory of the season by nosing out Williamstown Demons 61-60 at Williamstown. The game was much closer than the score indicates.—*Cincinnati Enquirer.*

Well, *that's* a mercy.

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Many of the American visitors recognized the world-famous man of letters and swarmed him for his autograph. Mr. Coward gave in with his customary charm. "It is the price of fame," he quipped to some of his sympathizers. —*Kingston (Jamaica) Daily Gleaner.*

That Noel! He's a quick one.

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Mrs. Olivia Luetcke [harpist] is the only woman in the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

She has another distinction in the B.S.O. She is one of the shortest—if not the shortest—players—five and one-quarter inches tall.—*Boston Globe.*

You ought to see her swan-dive glissando from the top of the harp!