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A PASSAGE TO FRANCE

A Letter from Charles F. Gallagher

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H. has been a friend of mine for some time. I met him originally coming back from Europe on a packet headed for Casablanca, where he has had his practice for a good many years and where his family lived. He is a French doctor, a general practitioner, whose clientele is almost exclusively Moroccan, but owing to his having worked for a while at one of the American air bases in Morocco many of his patients think of him as American: at tubīb al amerikani.

These two points were enough to disqualify him in the eyes of many of his compatriots in this country. To them any association with Arabs or Americans was usually suspect; in fact, one often felt there was not much distinction made between the two nationalities by their peculiar chauvinism. The liberal political views of H., however -- he was one of the supporters of a resolution back in 1955 calling for the return of Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, as he was then known, to the throne -- widened the gap between him and the majority of the Frenchmen around him. He sometimes said semijokingly that he was thought something of a leper by many of his acquaintances and hardly a social evening passed without the inevitable question finally working its way to the surface: How can you really stand to be around them all day? As time passed, during the lean years of political tension, the social evenings grew chillier and rarer; finally they ceased altogether.

But H. had always been well-liked

in Moroccan circles and he seemed to feel more at home there than with his own people. His Arab friends were many, always charming and polite with that distinctively personal hospitality which you cannot believe is being extended to anyone else quite as lavishly as to you. The people he frequented were, on the whole, among the best in the country and although their politics were of all shades, I think a nationalist traditionalism might best describe the air. As a sympathetic Frenchman he was invited to diffas, endless banquets of chicken and whole sheep, pastries, almond milk and tea, whose sensuous informality as the guests sit shoeless on cushions and rugs could not be more removed from the occidental table whose conversation is turned like factory shifts. H. once told of being asked to Fez to attend a garden party given by friends on a certain spring night when they knew the nightingales would begin to sing. And he went often to palace functions, about which he liked to gossip, as everyone did, but without, I think, failing to understand the important place the court held at all times in the life of the country.

I should not give the impression that H.'s interests were overly dilettantish. He was, above all else, a dedicated doctor and an adviser to numbers of poor Moroccans who came to consult him for a modest fee. He was close to some of the leading French liberals in Morocco: men like the publisher Jacques Lemaigre-Dubreuil, whose assassination by French counterterrorists, which is still being investigated, was one of the last straws in the Moroccan uprisings of the summer of 1955; and the lawyer Jean-Charles Legrand, now a counsellor to the Moroccan Government, who earned such hatred from his fellow countrymen by his energetic defense of Moroccans on trial under the protectorate that he was forced to fire in self-defense against some of them who broke down the door of his apartment and tried to lynch him. And, although he will not say so directly, H. himself played some part in advising the Moroccan Government last year on parts of its new civil code restricting youthful marriages.

All in all, it occurred to me as

CHARLES F. GALLAGHER has since 1951 been a student of the affairs of Northwest Africa. He started his higher education at the University of California just after Pearl Harbor and soon was shifted to the Japanese language school at Boulder, Colo. He served out the war as an officer in the Navy and then became fine arts advisor on Japanese cultural property during the occupation of Japan. In 1949 he entered Harvard University to major in Far Eastern languages and history. He was graduated *summa cum laude* in 1951. Subsequently he was twice offered Harvard-Yenching fellowships to continue in the Far Eastern field, but decided instead to study Islamic society. Under Fulbright and Ford fellowships, he worked for two years in Paris and three years in North Africa. After completing his research in Rabat, he settled in Tangier to write a history of Morocco and a grammar of Maghrebian Arabic. He joined the AUFS in July 1956 as a staff member and participated in the 1956-57 program of visits to member institutions. In the summer of 1957 he returned to North Africa under AUFS auspices.

I talked to him last year, H. was one of the best-adapted Europeans in the country; he was of great usefulness to a society appallingly short of trained doctors and, even more important perhaps, he liked Morocco and was at home in it; he could thus take part in an intellectual give and take, which his fluent Arabic permitted, and in human contacts which are sometimes lacking in otherwise capable foreign specialists who are new arrivals. He had traveled a good deal, in Europe, South America, and the Antilles, but he often commented on the hold that Muslim society and the Arab world had on him, to the extent of surprising me once by saying, "I don't really think I could live anywhere outside an Arab country any more."

I saw him around Christmas last year, when he came to Tangier to look into buying some property on the mountain and building a house. It seemed a good time from the strictly financial standpoint, for property values were down considerably from their boom high of several years before, but I wondered that he wanted to commit himself that definitely. (Although he never said so directly, I was certain that he was independently quite wealthy and did not depend on his practice for a living.) One of the causes of my wonderment was that he seemed much disturbed over the state of affairs in Morocco in the past few months. I thought of how many people had decided quite recently not to buy anything, and how some who had were bitterly unhappy that they were now saddled with real estate which they could not get rid of.

There was the titled English couple that had moved to Tangier and in the first flush of enthusiasm bought a house in the native town which they made over into Chelsea-in-the-Casbah. After a brief honeymoon marked by spoiling the neighborhood children who would "guard" the visiting Jaguars and Rileys for a peseta, little unpleasant incidents began to happen; the two worlds were too far apart. And finally, in a burst of claustrophobic panic they moved on to Portugal, whence they sent word recently that "it was so good to be among people who liked you."

As far as I knew, H. went ahead quietly with his projects, but one evening we had a long talk in which he confided some of his fears to me. It was a gloomy discussion.

"I was for independence you know." (I happened to know that it was true in this case, but in general it pays to be prudent about statements that begin like this in postindependence Morocco.) "But I never thought that it would turn out this way, with so much hatred and spite and ill-feeling. I am beginning to think for the first time that it all might have been a terrible mistake." But when I asked for an alternative he had none.

H. went on to say, with a feeling of almost bewilderment and disbelief, how many of his Moroccan friends had been moving away from him and from all other Europeans in the past year, and he told how difficult it was becoming to maintain the authority and prestige he felt in his work, as patients began to

confuse their political freedom with the right to run his office. Clearly his romantic vision of a pleasantly archaic Morocco, upon which I suspect his concept of service had been built, was crumbling fast. It was a disillusionment catching to quite a few Europeans in Morocco, in particular those who, having burnt their emotional bridges behind them in their own society, had "gone native" to varying degrees.

In the case of H. the disintegration of the dream was coupled with a political awakening. Like many men of good will he had believed, he said, that when Morocco divested itself of a basically tyrannical colonial regime, things would gradually right themselves and a new era of good feelings would bring about a rapprochement between Frenchmen and Moroccans. He had hopefully imagined the future as a happy mélange of the thousand-and-one-nights qualities celebrated from Loti on down through the writers of the école de jasmin: the crooked alleyways and cedar portals of Fez, the oasis gardens of Marrakesh, the noble nomad chieftain descended from Rousseau, and all this complemented by new housing, democratic self-government and interracial harmony. Progress and pageantry, in both of which he could fit. And as a Frenchman he could not bring himself to understand why that rarest of human emotions, gratitude, was so lacking on the part of Moroccans after the disinterested gesture which his country had made. Not to speak of the hidden guilt he was beginning to feel at his own role in an act which he had now begun to view with misgivings. But at least his doubts, then at Christmas time, seemed to me salutary, and he was undergoing the kind of soul-searching that is unknown either to the real reactionary, who never had expectations to be deceived, or the true fanatic, who can so happily replace the pawns on the board and call black white.

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I did not see him afterwards until he dropped in just the other day on his way to France for a vacation during the month of Ramadan. As we sat talking at dusk, wondering whether the month of fasting would begin that evening or the following, for it was not yet certain, the cannon boomed forth from the old harbor fortifications to announce the start of the sacred month, during which no food or drink may be taken between the first light of dawn and sunset. H. was explaining that he couldn't carry on his work during Ramadan without even more strain than usual.

"I have tried to tell them," he said, "an expectant mother doesn't need to fast, in fact she must not fast. Of course it is in the Qurān, but I cannot pretend to know it better than the Muslims themselves. That would cause real trouble. At least half my patients, instead of fasting, need supplementary diets if anything, but it is absolutely impossible to discuss the matter with them if you are a nesrāni, an unbeliever. For example, a woman was brought in last year during Ramadan one morning

after a miscarriage. She had lost much blood and needed various injections in addition to a transfusion at once. Her husband wouldn't allow it during the day and she wouldn't agree to it if he didn't. She died that afternoon and they blamed me."

I agreed that this was a problem; the government radio had been announcing all day that there were various exceptions to the rules for fasting, applicable to the sick, the old, and those traveling, but it was difficult to persuade the ordinary man who was, in addition, under strong social pressure from his neighbors.

"So I must shut up my clinic and take my time off now. I need it anyway." And he looked as if he did.

In the past H. had often been amusing as he told of the little incidents which occurred daily at the clinic. "If you poke a patient to find where a pain is, the answer is always, everywhere, under all circumstances 'yes.' But on the other hand, you cannot get him to describe his symptoms with any accuracy at all. Either there is a complicated family story involving necromancy and spells being cast by a jealous sister-in-law, or you will get the kind of patient who says flatly, when I ask what the matter is: 'You tell me. I paid you one thousand francs for your great knowledge, now it is your business to find out.'"

"They certainly get their money's worth, too" he added. "Many of them fail to take the medicaments I prescribe, either because they can't afford to buy it and won't tell me, or else because they have forgotten my instructions which must usually be oral, cannot read the directions on the medicine and are ashamed to ask friends or neighbors. Thus, many are not cured, of course. But they don't give up, or go to another doctor. They come back again and again to me to complain and get their money back, or they bring their family in for free treatment, and threaten me in every way."

"Then there are the certificates of virginity before marriage; they are something again. I used to be naive enough to give a negative answer at the beginning, but after several fathers came in literally blood-mad I learned that the only thing to do, if the girl is not a virgin, is to say that I cannot tell and send her to another doctor. You know, three times recently I have been assaulted going to or from the clinic at night and, while it might be the ordinary pickpocket types after money, I am sure some of the cases were disgruntled patients."

On this visit H. was infinitely more pessimistic than he had been before. "I am taking all my things, including anything valuable, to Paris with me this time. And when I come back I will live with an absolute minimum household for as long as I can stay. Anyone who keeps valuable personal property here is out of his mind," he added with a shake of his head. He was obviously thinking of several Europeans who had been expelled on a few hours' notice and had to leave everything behind, with consequent risks of theft, for later shipment. And he mentioned the

case of a friend of his who had a large estate near Meknes for which he had once been offered 40 million francs /nearly $100,000/ "in the old days." The owner, now in France, decided to have the property assayed recently with an eye to possible compensation from the French Government should there be any difficulties about it. The evaluation was three and a half million francs /about $8,000/.

I guessed that H.'s decision had been prompted in part by the noticeable change in popular feeling, apparent everywhere, since Sakiet (the bombardment by French aircraft of Sakiet Sidi Youssef, in Tunisia, on February 8). I mentioned it.

"Oof," he said. "That was it. It was the final straw that has made life here impossible. And I decided it the moment I read the headlines. Do you know that as late as January, after I had considered buying in Tangier, I was looking for a house in Casablanca. I still had hopes. And I found a remarkable place with an excellent view, everything I wanted, which was offered to me for 17 million; I refused. It was offered at 12 million and I refused. Then at 10 million, I refused again. Finally, 8 million and I accepted. That was the week before Sakiet. But when I read the newspapers I called the lawyers within the hour and told them to stop working the documents for the house. It was no longer any use."

"After Sakiet there were times when I used to drive around the block in front of the clinic three or four times wondering whether I should go in. It was really that bad. It took about three days for the meaning of Sakiet to penetrate to Moroccans; I remember that the Monday and Tuesday after that week end were reasonably normal. But then...."

"You mean it took three days or so for the grapevine and the political interpreters to explain the meaning in the medinas." He agreed.

"Most Moroccans thought that Sakiet was in Morocco. Perhaps because the radio kept repeating 'on the Algerian border' and many of them knew that Algeria touched Morocco. But even when I explained that it was far on the other side of Algeria, a thousand or so kilometers away from Morocco, that made no difference. 'Bhal bhal' they said, 'It's all the same thing.' France was attacking all the mselmin now, was their attitude. It might as well be Morocco as Tunisia."

"But not many of them would even discuss it. And that was the worst part, the silence. A hard, contemptuous, disdainful silence, and the looks in their eyes that pervaded the room just as strongly as a bad odor. And, mind you," he added, unable to resist the thrust, "many of them think that I am American, because they or their relatives came to me when I worked for the Americans."

I knew that for the first time America was being put directly into the line of overt criticism, both in the press and by public opinion. The new view of the United States was conditioned by the B-26's at Sakiet.

"And there is nothing to say to them when they look at you with all this hate and reproach. As a Frenchman I feel terribly badly about Sakiet, although, after all, the Tunisians had it coming to them." He is changing, I thought. He would not have said that three months ago.

We had a good dinner out at a rooftop restaurant in Tangier, but H. did not cheer up. Morocco did not get mentioned any more and I knew that he thought it wiser not to talk publicly as he had in private. The conversation turned to Algeria, a subject we had often discussed openly in the past, and gradually I realized that he was beginning to talk in familiar clichés: "One hundred twenty-five years of settlement," "All that we have done for them" and finally, with the faint wellings of tears in his eyes, he said, "Why is all this happening to France? It is an injustice."

There was no answer. It is as immoral to make the individual responsible for the deeds of the collectivity as it is to take hostages for the acts of one man. And it is especially difficult to do this with the French who so often possess the most striking virtues as individuals. But we were drifting farther and farther apart in our talk, and I felt that H. was gradually being drawn away from his own thoughtful personality and was falling into the nationalist mental posture that abounds everywhere in our times. In the bitterness of his disappointment it was probably the only sure rock of refuge. As I said goodby, with a promise to look him up on my next visit to Casablanca after he came back, I wondered whether he really would return, and whether in fact he should.

Charles F Gallagher