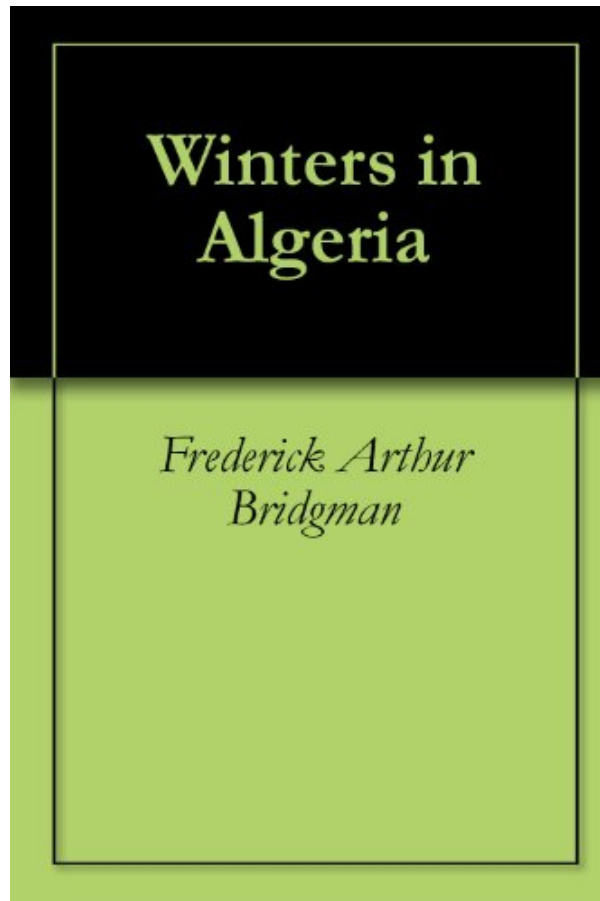


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Winters in Algeria

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This illustrated travel volume has thirty-seven chapters and was published in 1890.

Excerpts from the book:

Was it due to the fact of my having been born in Alabama, with sunlight in my bones, that I felt at home in Algeria when I first set foot on her genial soil in 1872? Or was my satisfaction the effect of the contrast to dark and dingy Brittany, where the interiors are black, and the mud floors absorb the sun's rays ; where the low gray clouds could serve as an appropriate frame and background to no other low-toned, sullen, and sombre figure than the Breton, and where white objects are not luminous, because they are not supported and encouraged to shine by the reflections from their surroundings ? Certain it is that my first impressions of North Africa can never be dispelled. The near prospect of revisiting its sunny shores was to me one of those delightful anticipations in life which haunt the fancy ; and no sooner had I set foot on land than I began with joy to sniff the odors so peculiar to Oriental towns perfumes of musk, tobacco, orange-blossoms, coffee, hashish a subtle combination which impregnates Algerine clothing and hovers about the shops and bazaars.

Algiers, seen from the sea, is a mass of white surrounded by the dark green of the olives : the Arabs compare it to a diamond set in an emerald frame. The city is also called " Alger la Blanche," and again Algiers has been compared to a white dove settling on the hill-side. The aspect of the old town which suggested to its author this comparison must have been similar to that presented to us on this ideal night; and how difficult it was to realize the change which had taken place in this hot-bed of corsairs and pirates during the nineteenth century! Only as far back as 1830 when the French took possession of Algiers anything but "doves" had settled on this hill-side ; blood-thirsty and tyrannical deys gloated on murder, bondage, slavery, rapine, and on the extortion from the rulers of surrounding countries of money, ships, cannon, munitions of war.

.....

The pupil's stationery and books at the Arab school do not cost his parents a great amount. A slate, so called, but made of hard-wood, is the medium of knowledge. The surface becomes as smooth as glass by repeated application of fine pipe-clay, which is moistened with water and rubbed on with the fingers. When the lad has filled his slate on both sides with dictations from the Koran, written in ink with a reed-pen, and has committed its contents to memory, he washes it and renews the coating of clay. A mistake is easily corrected with the wet finger.

.....

In some parts of Algeria and Tunis a curious custom is still practised at the moment the bride enters the room : the bridegroom, walking backward, holds a dagger, and the bride follows him, holding the point of the blade in the tips of her fingers.

Another custom, not less strange, consists in the partial martyrdom of the bride, who stands against a column in the public place, and under the gaze of the people, for two hours or more, and in an erect position, her eyes closed, her arms close at her sides, her feet resting only on the narrow base of the column. The bride sometimes collapses and faints during the ordeal.

.....

The Arab women here wear a long black veil, tied across the nose and just under the eyes, which, like the Cairo veil, gives a funereal appearance. This veil differs from that worn by Algerian women, which is white, and in the form of a handkerchief folded cornervise.

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