A HOLIDAY TRIP IN ALGERIA.

By MAJOR F. W. BEGBIE,
Royal Army Medical Corps.

To those who are anxious to avoid the biting east wind, the cold and rain of the month of March in England, I can, with confidence, recommend a tour in Algeria.

Algiers, the capital of Algeria, is within fifty-four hours' journey from London. Leaving Victoria at 11 a.m., Paris was reached at 6 p.m. Driving from the Gare du Nord to the Gare du Lyons we were able to enjoy dinner at the excellent refreshment rooms in the station before entraining for Marseilles at 9 p.m. It is advisable, especially at this time of the year, to book seats on the train in advance, on account of the numerous passengers proceeding to the south of France. A very comfortable journey in a well warmed train, landed us in Marseilles about 9 a.m. on the following morning. The steamers of the Campagnie Translantique leave Marseilles every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday at 1 p.m., arriving in Algiers about 4 p.m. the next afternoon. Much cannot be said for these steamers; they are small and evil-smelling and the food very inferior; but, at the same time, they are excellent sea-boats. The approach to Algiers from the sea afforded us one of the best views of the town we were able to obtain. Facing the Boulevard de la Republique is a magnificent harbour, well sheltered, and able to contain the whole of the French Mediterranean Fleet; and here we dropped our anchor. Hardly had the engines ceased before the decks of our steamer were swarming with Arabs, all desirous to possess themselves of a portion of our baggage. Having fixed upon our porters we followed them to the Custom House on the quay, where we found there was little trouble in clearing our belongings; the importation of gunpowder and cartridges is, however, strictly forbidden. A three miles' drive lay before us to Mustapha Superieur, which is situated on a wooded eminence overlooking the town, and on which are to be found most of the best hotels. There is not much to choose between the Hotel St. George, the Hotel Kirsch, and the Mustapha Palace Hotel; they are all good, and the charges are 12½ francs a day.

Algiers has been a French possession since 1830. In that year
the French broke the power of the Dey, and abolished slavery throughout Algeria. The most formidable antagonist of the French generals was the famous Abd-el-Kadir, who inflicted very severe losses upon the French arms, and who was not finally routed until 1847. On the outbreak of the Franco-German War, in 1870, the French troops were withdrawn from Algeria; a general insurrection followed, which spread so rapidly that it became necessary to re-conquer almost the whole country. Since then, with occasional outbreaks, peace and prosperity have reigned through the province.

The population of Algeria consists of French, Spaniards, Italians, Maltese, Arabs, Moors and negroes. Of the European population, a large number are Jews, who first settled in the country in the fourteenth century, on being driven out of Italy, Spain and Portugal.

![The Jewish Quarter, Algiers.](image)

The French Government maintains a large standing army in Algeria, comprising some 60,000 men, and commanded by a General-in-Chief, with a residence in Algiers. The troops themselves are composed of Zouaves, Tirailleurs, Chasseurs d'Afrique, Spahis, Artillery, Engineers, and the Foreign Legion, the latter recruited mostly from deserters from foreign armies.

Every year Algeria is becoming more popular as a health and pleasure resort during the winter months. Of these months November and December are very enjoyable. January and February are
generally wet and cold, while March, April and May, resemble an English summer. During our trip we met several invalids, who declared they had derived more benefit from their stay in Algeria than they had previously done from wintering in the Riviera.

There are practically no endemic fevers in Algeria, due largely to the extensive planting of the *Eucalyptus globulus* throughout the province. The country through which we travelled has been laid by the French under a very rich cultivation. Vineyards abound in all directions, producing an excellent wine, the export of which to France is valued at two million francs per annum. Fruit of all kinds is grown in the country, and further south, on the edge of the Sahara, date palms are to be seen everywhere.

![Image](http://militaryhealth.bmj.com/)

**Fig. 2.—View of Algiers from the Citadel (with Notre Dame d'AFrique in the distance).**

The town of Algiers is divided into three distinct quarters: the old Moorish town, the Jewish quarter (fig. 1), and the modern French quarter. It is this mixture of the Eastern and Western world, combined with the exquisite scenery throughout the province, which renders a holiday tour in Algeria so delightful. The streets and the native shops in the old quarter of the town are full of quaint charm, and afford the photographer many opportunities for taking unique snapshots. In some parts of the Moorish town one could easily imagine oneself in Cairo or Damascus, so eastern are the surroundings; and yet within a few hundred yards of the "Casbah" one finds oneself in the centre of a modern Paris. The summit of the Moorish town is crowned by the Citadel, or "Cas-
bah," formerly the palace of the Dey, from which can be obtained a magnificent view of the French town, the harbour, and the bay (fig. 2). There are numerous mosques in the French quarter well worthy of a visit; while situated on a hill to the west of the town, overlooking the sea, is the famous cathedral of Notre Dame d’Afrique, where every Sunday afternoon the officiating clergy hold a service in the open air for the souls of those sailors who have perished at sea.

![Fig. 3.—Arab diligence starting off from Maison Carrée, near Algiers.](image-url)

Of the many excursions to be made in the neighbourhood of Algiers one cannot speak too highly. Every hill-top discloses fresh valleys, rich with cultivation, to which the azure blue of the Mediterranean makes a fitting background. One of the best excursions is to Blidah, fifty-one kilometres from Algiers, where can be seen one of the finest breeding establishments of Arab horses in Algeria. A visit should also be paid to Maison Carrée (fig. 3), where a market is held once weekly, and to which flock Arabs, Moors, and Kabyles from the mountains with their cattle and horses to attend the fair. We were much amused, while wandering round, to find a voluble French quack extracting the molars of the Arabs, under a palm tree, to the running accompaniment of the beauties of his patent "pain killer." Having spent a week sight-seeing in Algiers and the vicinity, we started for Bougie, en route for Biskra. The
A Holiday Trip in Algeria

one great drawback to travelling in Algeria is the very early hour at which the trains start. We were called at 4 a.m., and were off before 6 a.m. We changed carriages at Beni Mansour and reached Bougie the same afternoon. Bougie is the chief port of eastern Kabylia, and is situated at the foot of the Gouraya Mountains, surrounded by clusters of orange, pomegranate and fig trees. We remained for the night at the Hotel de France, and were well looked after by a waiter who four years previously had been at the Hotel Cecil. An early start was made next morning by a three-horsed carriage for Kerrata, in the heart of the Kabyle Mountains, our road lying through the famous Gorge de Chabet, an enormous defile five miles in length and some 1,200 feet above the torrent. This road was cut by the French sappers in 1870, and forms a splendid testimonial to their genius. We remained the following day at the Hotel de Chabet, Kerrata, exchanging the genial warmth of the plains for the icy cold of the mountains, on which the snow was still lying. An early start was again made the following morning, and descending the mountains on the opposite side of the pass, into the fertile valleys of the plains, we reached Sétif, on the railway, in time to catch the train for El Guerrah, where we passed the night. At 9 a.m. we entrained to complete our journey to Biskra. We travelled through country rich in growing crops and fruit trees, until mid-day, when the landscape began to change and to become more rocky and barren. About 4 p.m. we passed through the rugged gorge of El Kantara and emerged into the boundless Sahara Desert. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing to be seen except sand and stones, dotted here and there with groves of palm trees,
marking the different oases, in one of which was our objective, Biskra, "the Queen of the Sahara" (fig. 4).

The town of Biskra is rapidly becoming a famous health resort, the air being dry and fresh off the desert, and the temperature in the shade between November and April only 60°F. During the winter months the rainfall rarely exceeds eighteen to twenty days in all, so there is little to prevent invalids from enjoying the open air to their heart's content.

There are several good hotels in Biskra, but the best is The Royal (fig. 5), famed for the view, which can be obtained from

![Royal Hotel, Biskra.](image)

the flat roof, of the desert sunset. Biskra is typically eastern, with a large native quarter and a straggling French town. The native market, the bazaars, the Château Landon, old Biskra, the negro village, and the Rue des Ouled Nails are all well worthy of a visit, and some excellent photographs can be obtained. The Dance de Ventre, by the Ouled-Nail dancing girls, should not be missed, as exemplifying what extraordinary contortions the human figure can be made to perform. Horses and camels can be hired for the journey across the Sahara to the sand dunes of Dumach, the oasis of Chetma, and the typically eastern village of Sidi-Okba (fig. 6). This village contains the oldest mosque in Africa, and shelters the shrine of the warrior Sidi-Okba, who conquered Africa from Egypt to Tangiers, in 680 A.D. Close to Biskra, on the eastern side, are the sulphur baths of Hammam-
es-Salahin, much esteemed by the Arabs (fig. 7), who believe that they will cure everything. Leaving Biskra in the small and early hours our train reached Batua in time for lunch. Here we found

a carriage waiting for us and started for a drive of thirty miles to Timgad, passing on the way Lambése, the ancient Lambœsis, built by the Romans in A.D. 125, to form the headquarters of the Third
Augustan Legion. The ruins of Lambêse are still in an excellent state of preservation, and we were able to examine at our leisure the remains of the Prêtorium (fig. 8), temples of Jupiter and Æsculapius. In the cool of the evening we finished our journey to Timgad, but left the examination of the ruins until the following day.

The ruins of Timgad are in an almost perfect condition, and

---

**Fig. 8.**—The Prêtorium, Lambêse.

**Fig. 9.**—View of the Ruins, Timgad.
each year fresh marvels are unearthed, owing to the energetic manner in which the old Roman city is being brought to light by the present French Government. The old city is divided into two parts by a broad paved road, the Cardo Maximus, on the large flagged stones of which are to be seen the marks of the chariot wheels of old. The Forum (fig. 9) is now entirely unearthed, and an idea of its size, as well as of the general excavations, can be seen in the accompanying photograph. The Thermæ, or hot baths, with a still readable inscription, dating from the reign of Septimus Severus, in 179 A.D., are wonderfully preserved. No one visiting Algeria should neglect to visit Lambèse and Timgad; in my mind,

![Image](http://militaryhealth.bmj.com/)

even more worthy of a visit than Pompeii itself. There is a good, but somewhat small and primitive, hotel at the ruins where accommodation can be obtained. Leaving Timgad, we returned by carriage to Batua, and thence the same day trained to Constantine, arriving in time for dinner.

Constantine (fig. 10), situated some 600 feet above sea level, in a gorge in the hills, is a fortress of the first order. It is reported to have withstood in the early days eighty sieges, and to have been finally taken by the Romans in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, from whom it derived its present title. In 1535, Constantine became part of Algeria under the Turks, and later, in 1837, fell into the hands of the French, who now quarter 3,000 troops in the town.
The Palace of the Bey, El Hadj-Ahmed, is well worthy of a visit, if only to study the well-preserved and ancient painted tile-work. The Palace is now used as the official residence of the General Officer Commanding. The views of the surrounding country to be obtained from various parts of the town are beautiful in the extreme; while a walk through the Gorge des Tourists should not be missed. The Hotels in Constantine, however, leave much to be desired. Before quitting this province the baths of Hammam-Meskoutine should be visited. They are of the greatest antiquity, and were largely used by the Romans. In 1837 the French sent chemists and medical men to report on the hot springs, and so satisfactory was the result of their investigations that a large thermal establishment grew up there. The hotel and baths are situated on a beautiful plateau, 960 feet above the valley, in a garden overflowing with flowers and fruit, amongst which strawberries, gooseberries, lemons and peaches abound. Wild boar, hare and partridge shooting can be had in the vicinity. The waters themselves are strongly impregnated with carbonate of lime, magnesia, strontium and iron, with a mixture of sulphate of soda, and are largely sought after by those suffering from rheumatism and skin diseases. On leaving Hammam-Meskoutine two routes can be taken: one towards Tunis, to view the ruins of ancient Carthage, and thence by steamer either to Palermo or Marseilles; the other directly back by train, taking from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., to Algiers. We chose the latter in order to visit the mountain regions of Kabylia. There is an old Kabyle proverb which says: “He who has not seen Kabylia has not seen Algeria,” and this is in a large measure true. The beautiful mountain scenery can best be compared to that which surrounds many of our Indian hill stations, and the Kabyles themselves very closely resemble the Indian hill tribes. The drive from Tizzi Ouzon, the Simla of Kabylia, to Fort National, should not be missed; but we were unfortunate enough to perform the journey in a blinding snowstorm. There is a small inn for the accommodation of travellers at both Tizzi Ouzon and Fort National.

Leaving the mountain capital next day we descended into the genial warmth of the plains and made our way back again to Algiers, and two days later set out for England, having spent a most enjoyable, and by no means expensive, holiday in Algeria.