

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MARCH OF THE LEGION

THE streets were full. The news of the trouble had stirred the town even to the depths of the ghetto, and Jean and the girl had to take the middle of the road to avoid the knots of people on the pavement—long-haired Jews, Levantines, Spaniards, townsmen of all sorts and all interested in the marching of the Legion.

Sidi despises the légionnaire who has no money to spend, but is proud of the Legion, and on the occasion of a *marche militaire* turns out to see the spectacle.

But this was no promenade. There was trouble in the south.

Sidi has never forgotten the Beni Amen. The Arab threat, though drawn off and far away, is not dead. It had just taken strength and approached a step, and the thunderbolt was to be launched against it.

Nearing the southern gate, the crowd had become thicker, the police were pushing the people back, and Jean and his companion found themselves brought to a stop.

It was impossible to pass through the gate before the on-coming regiment. After, perhaps, but not before. Now far off and mixed with the cries of the crowd, could be heard the quarrelling, cantankerous noise of the drums and now the full music of the band.

The band was playing the march of the Legion,

absolutely forbidden on any occasion except on a Marche Militaire or departure for active service—an extraordinary, fierce, soul-stirring rhythm, punctuated by the blaring of bugles and under-run by the cacophany of the drums.

And here they came sure enough, the Commander-General of Algeria riding at their head, marching in column of four, *en tenue de campagne d'Afrique*, shoals and shoals, and shoals of men, the lamplight and the starlight striking on the rifles and tin gammelles, and the strappings of the ammunition carts, packed with sharp ammunition. The concealed striking energy of this formidable regiment that still passed four deep and in full swing, though the band was now far beyond the gates.

Then at last came Madame la Cantinière and her little wagon. The crowd, no longer held back, grew less dense, spreading over the street.

At the gate it was easy to pass through, the Legion had sucked after it a lot of people, and even the guards were on the road taking a last look at the departing troops. Jean and Karan found themselves on the road free of Sidi and free now of the townsfolk who had gone back, having seen the last of the pageant.

On the road, with nothing but the great Algerian stars above, and the night wind and the road broad, white and filled beyond with dust.

The band of the Legion had ceased, the drums no longer sounded, but had one listened one could have heard a susurrous on the wind blowing from the south. The sound of marching troops moving like a shadow far ahead.

To reach Samia they had to follow the Legion !