This series focuses on Africa during the period of European colonial expansion. It includes anthropological studies, travel accounts from missionaries and explorers (including those searching for the sources of the Nile and the Congo), and works that shed light on colonial concerns such as gold mining, big game hunting, trade, education and political rivalries.

After sailing on a crowded steamer from Marseilles, Henry Baker Tristram (1822–1906) arrived in Algiers in the winter of 1856, and began preparations for an expedition into the Sahara. Although the northern areas had been well documented by the occupying French forces, the south was little travelled by Europeans. A keen naturalist and later a Fellow of the Linnean Society, Tristram made meticulous preparations for collecting specimens, and kept a thorough journal as he travelled. This book, one of the first English reports of the South Sahara, published in 1860, is an almost exact transcription of that journal. Travelling with a tin of chocolate and a collection of fine silk handkerchiefs to trade, Tristram made notes on a host of topics, from the flight of flamingos to the government and customs of the native Touareg. His account is still a valuable resource for students of the history of science.
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The Great Sahara

Wanderings South of the Atlas Mountains

Henry Baker Tristram
THE GREAT SAHARA:

WANDERINGS

SOUTH OF THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS.

BY H. B. TRISTRAM, M.A., F.L.S., &C.,

MASTER OF GREATHAM HOSPITAL,
AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO THE EARL OF DOROUGMORE.

With Maps and Illustrations.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1860.

The right of Translation is reserved.
TO

MRS. BURDON
(OF CASTLE EDEN),

The Lady,

FIRM IN FRIENDSHIP,

WHO SPED MY PARTING

AND WELCOMED MY RETURNING

STEPS,

THESE NOTES ARE DEDICATED.
PREFACE.

Various circumstances had induced me to select Algiers as a winter residence, when compelled by ill health to quit my northern home. Egypt had been recommended, but the cost and distance forbade it. Malta and Malaga possessed but few attractions for one whose favourite recreation was natural history. Algiers presented the advantages of easy access from Marseilles, of French conveniences, and of a climate which, if inferior to that of Egypt, yet certainly is more equable in spring than any to be found on the northern shores of the Mediterranean.

With strength, by God's blessing, rapidly recruited, many excursions were made into the interior; and as spring advanced, these on two occasions were pushed beyond the Atlas into the Northern Sahara. Here an atmosphere bright, dry, and invigorating convinced me that I had found the true sanatorium for any one sufficiently convalescent to dispense with the luxuries of city life.

From the officers of the French outposts, among whom I would venture gratefully to name General Gastu, MM. le Capitaine Vinçon and le Capitaine Dastugue, both "du Génie," I received unbounded hospitality, and through them was enabled to acquire the friendship of several nomad chiefs; while a very cursory survey promised abundant objects of interest in natural history to reward more patient investigation.

Being advised by my medical friends to pass another
season in a warm climate, I formed the plan of spending my second winter altogether in the Sahara, and his Excellency le Maréchal Randon, Governor-General of Algeria, most kindly seconded the scheme, by offering me all the assistance and protection in his power throughout the vast regions tributary to, or in alliance with, the French.

In company therefore with a friend, also in quest of health, the Rev. James Peed, to whose society I owe many a happy hour, and to whose pencil this volume owes many of its illustrations, these wanderings were commenced in September, and continued until the following spring.

The hasty sketches taken on the spot, while they have lost none of their original truth, have gained both beauty and vigour from the graceful hand of my kind and skilful young friend, Miss Salvin; who will, I am sure, pardon the insertion of her name among those to whom my gratitude is due.

The following pages are almost a literal transcript from my daily journal, composed at such spare minutes as could be snatched from the urgent labours of camping, cooking, horse-feeding, and preserving specimens; and generally in that recumbent posture which is supposed to woo sleep rather than the Muses.

They can therefore have no claim upon the attention of the public, except in so far as they are a faithful reflection of occurrences and impressions in a country the greater portion of which had not been before traversed by any European, and where, as I believe, no English traveller but ourselves has ever wandered. The northern portion, or “Hauts Plateaux,” of the
Sahara is well known to the French; but of the
country of the Beni M‘zab and the districts south of it
no account, I believe, has yet been published in any
European language, beyond the meagre and often most
inaccurate descriptions gathered by General Daumas
from native travellers.

Geographical research appears at the present moment
to be concentrated on the great continent of Africa;
and Livingstone, Barth, Petherick, and Speke have been
revealing to us countries but yesterday undreamt of.
Still, in less mysterious regions there may be some
scraps of interest left for tribes and oases hitherto
known only by name, and which must soon fall
more directly under European power. The policy of
France up to the present time has been to follow the
example of her Roman predecessors, to leave these
friendly or neutral tribes in the enjoyment of self-
government, and to treat the Sahara as a natural
frontier. That policy, we learn from the ‘Moniteur,’ is
now about to be reversed. No natural frontier is to be
acknowledged in Africa; and we are promised in the
coming winter a regularly organized expedition, which
is to push through the M‘zab, Waregla, Touat, and the
Touareg, to Timbuctoo, and so to unite French Algeria
with French Senegambia.

How far such an advance is likely to result in anything
beyond the destruction of the unhappy Corps d’Afrique
engaged in it may be conjectured by the difficulties
which beset even in the first portion of the route a small
party of travellers enjoying the assistance of the natives.
Against the suspicions of the inhabitants of the oases,
and the Parthian attacks of the indomitable Touareg, it
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seems scarcely possible that any armed force can achieve the march, or, if it should do so, that it can add aught but the most empty glory to the survivors and their country.

To the student of humanity the interest of the Sahara appears to centre in the M'zab and the other oases here described, whose inhabitants, the descendants of the ancient Numidians, though generally confounded in European ideas with Arabs and Moors, have contrived for centuries to preserve their language and municipal independence, while surrounded by the fierce hordes of Arabian and Touareg intruders.

These islanders of the desert, utterly cut off from all intercourse with a higher civilization, have preserved a republican and federal government as perfect and complex as that of Switzerland; and though unhappily fallen under the yoke of the false prophet, have remained uncontaminated by many of the grosser vices of Islamism.

Such races bespeak a noble ancestry, and under the benign influences of a pure and simple Christianity may yet prove themselves no unworthy offspring of that Numidia and Libya which even in decrepitude could produce an Augustine and a Cyprian.

_Castle Eden, July, 1860._
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