

LETTER FROM TANGIER:

The Phoney Gold Rush

John V. Taberner

TANGIER apparently has everything a man could wish for: sun-drenched villas garlanded with flowers, hillsides glowing with red hibiscus and purple bougainvillea, tessellated minarets smiling down on one of the loveliest of Mediterranean bays. People go swimming almost the year round, yet even in summer the climate is not unbearably hot. Living is easy, business flourishing, and taxation practically nonexistent. It seems like an earthly paradise.

Yet those who know Tangier have no love for the place. The same phrase is repeated to me again and again: "You're lucky; you don't have to *live* in Tangier." Around the legations, and in the offices of the American and European companies located here, men and women say it with pent-up exasperation, thinking of the time when their release will come; in the large colony of

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foreign residents who have staked everything to get here and now have no place else to go, it is said with hopelessness, and sometimes with despair.

You soon begin to understand what they mean. Once you delve beneath the surface beauty and charm, you find nastiness and even horror. There is no pity in Tangier, and no milk of human kindness. It is a lonely furtive place where each man distrusts his neighbor and dog eats dog, or whatever else he can get his teeth into. As you walk the street, strangers eye you calculatingly, as though trying to size you up and figure out your angle. Even among the professional people stationed here, who have no particular ax to grind, the poison has apparently spread, and there is little of the easy social intercourse and friendly getting-together that one expects in foreign service. A charming American girl confessed to me that she dreaded the evenings and often went back to work at the office because there was nothing else to

do. No one invited her anywhere and she couldn't go out alone at night in Tangier; it would lead to embarrassing incidents and might actually be dangerous. "I've almost died of loneliness here," she said.

ON THE MAP you'll find this paradox of a city at the Atlantic tip of North Africa opposite Spain, where the narrow straits leading into the Mediterranean separate the two continents. It is of course much more than a city: the International Zone of Tangier consists of about 150 square miles of hilly country fringing the Atlantic in a sort of moon shape. The population is estimated at some 160,000, though each year it increases by leaps and bounds. Moreover, any figure you take can only be approximate, because the bulk of the population is made up of Arabs, who object to being counted and are adept at dodging the census-taker. These Arabs, together with a large number of Spaniards, live in the médina, or Moorish town, which is medieval, picturesque, and incredibly filthy. Most of the foreign residents — at least in the beginning — have their houses and apartments in the new Tangier, which begins outside the walls of the crowded Moslem city and stretches round the bay, into the hinterland and up the mountain, on top of which millionaires' mansions with tiled courts and splashing marble fountains sparkle in the sunlight,

and magnificent eye-catching gardens are set in stately wooded parks. For Tangier is not completely heartless: to a favored few it gives great and tangible rewards; thousands flock here year by year, drawn by the magnet of easy money and the hope of riches. Tangier welcomes them; for a while it may seem to bring them good fortune, until with the cunning of a cardsharp it persuades them to throw caution to the winds. Then the luck changes and suddenly everything is lost. Those who can scrape up the fare, go back home; otherwise there is nothing to do but slink away to the médina, to eke out an existence in the muck of the Arab quarter, where no one asks questions because no one cares.

However, when the visitor arrives in Tangier, he sees no such lugubrious shadows. One overwhelming impression blots out everything else: you have landed in a town which is in the middle of a fantastic boom. Before your eyes Tangier is bursting out across the landscape. Buildings are getting taller, streets are growing longer; all over the city a haze of dust hangs in the air as the loaded trucks trail each other, dumping sand, bricks, and steel. The sound of hammering goes on endlessly so that you stop noticing it — it becomes as naturally a part of the Tangier noises as the cries of the lottery-ticket sellers or the agonized little "peep-peep" of the swarming, protesting busses.

All day and all week including Sundays and holidays the pouring of cement goes on. Plots of land are snapped up at a hundred times the normal asking price, houses that rented at forty dollars a month are now offered at two hundred, take it or leave it. Meanwhile, around the bay, gleaming new resort hotels and amusement palaces are transforming sandy wastes into a playground for the newly rich.

Travel agencies, hotels, and bars are doing a land-office business. A pot-bellied gentleman will hurry with a fat briefcase into the offices of Air France to charter a plane to New York; the matter is urgent, he declares, and price is unimportant. Flashy characters in tight-waisted suits impatiently mill around in the telephone building while a harassed clerk tries to put them through to Paris or Istanbul or Hong Kong. Little knots of rat-eyed men huddle together on street corners cooking up deals or furtively passing out wads of bills from bulging wallets. In half an hour you'll hear snatches of conversation in a dozen different tongues, but you don't have to understand the language to know what the topic is: in Tangier there's no time for small talk — money is the only thing that counts.

There's a fly-by-night quality about these avid profit-seekers, whose eyes look anywhere but directly at you. What's at the back of this sudden prosperity? you ask.

No one has struck oil. What does it all mean? What is causing Tangier's phoney gold rush?

THE VERY ODD nature of Tangier's government. The Zone of Tangier is international: since 1945 eight powers — one of them the United States — have shared in its control. But when you get eight hens to sit on a single egg, none of them is likely to prove a particularly fond mother. So what you have got is an example of international government with the lid off. In Tangier anything goes, with the result that there has been an unparalleled influx of enterprises honest and otherwise; business men, refugees, and thugs have congregated here from almost every nation under the sun. Anyone can settle here, no matter what sort of a criminal record he has — all he needs is a valid passport. If he tries murder as an occupation he'll undoubtedly run into a little difficulty, but there are endless other possibilities. To make the prospect even rosier, Tangier has no income tax, no inheritance tax, no tax on production or sales, no capital gains tax, and no inspection of books. In fact, a man needn't even keep books, and his bank manager will obligingly record him as a code number in *his* book, so that no one can ever hope to find out who he is, what he does, or how much he is worth.

This may sound idyllic to the av-

erage business man struggling to keep pace with rising taxation, and battling with pettifogging and burdensome government regulations. But there are drawbacks to this version of rugged individualism. It's not apt to attract the most desirable type of citizen. It would be untrue to say that the postwar influx of foreigners into Tangier is made up entirely of crooks, pimps, and touts, but uncomfortable numbers of shady characters have found their way here, and too often they are the ones who have been conspicuously successful. To make your mark in Tangier, you'd better be unblushingly avaricious and more than a little unscrupulous, otherwise the competition is too tough. And you must never trust your neighbor—he's probably up to no good, and he may be after your hide.

Because Tangier is a free port, there's not too much scope for smuggling, except outward to countries like Spain and Italy. A number of prewar luxury yachts have been converted for this purpose, and you will almost certainly see one or more of them riding at anchor in Tangier Bay. Once in a while something goes wrong—a double-cross, or the owner finds the hush money too steep—and an arrest is made. I sat one evening in Dean's Bar chatting to a svelte Englishwoman of about forty with luminous brown eyes and a delightful sense of humor, who rattled on about popcorn and

princelings and who obviously knew her way around Tangier. In answer to my question she said that oh yes, she'd met people who she believed had made money smuggling such items as liquor and tobacco, but of course that sort of thing was now definitely passé. The next afternoon I read to my astonishment that she'd been clapped into jail for bringing in thousands of dollars worth of raw opium, and in the subsequent excited tittle-tattle over cocktails I learned that Tangier is rapidly becoming the world center of the drug traffic, an honor that used to be held by Hong Kong.

BUT IN TANGIER it isn't necessary to risk brushing with the local police in order to make your pile, particularly if you have enough cash to start out with. The import-export business is a most promising field. Tangier imposes a straight 12½ per cent tax on all goods imported (except silks, precious metals, and jewels), and there is no tax on anything "in transit"—a term which is liberally interpreted by certain customs inspectors.

Suppose the president of an Italian construction company needs American machine tools but his government won't allow him the necessary dollars to buy with. You order the stuff sent to you in Tangier "in transit," remove the labels, and sell it to him at a price in Italian lire—adding a fat margin of profit

of course for your trouble. Here you change your lire into dollars, Tangier being a wide-open money market, settle with the company in the United States, and you're ready for the next customer. This may be a manufacturer of French silks, who complains that his business in France is being throttled by high taxes. He "sells" the silk to you at little more than cost, which means he pays his government practically no tax. You then get rid of it at the normal price on the world market, splitting a nice profit with him which for both of you is income-tax free. And the wonderful thing is that you're absolutely safe. *He* may get caught and have to disappear for a while, but *you* are sitting pretty in Tangier.

Though governments in almost every other part of the world have a rooted objection to having gold anywhere but in a hole in the ground, Tangier is more liberal in her outlook. You can trade in it here as much as you please, provided you pay the $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent import duty. Of course, in other countries it's illegal to take gold out, so your source of supply may be a bit risky. The scheme is to get hold of a light plane (your profits will soon pay for this), fly in as a tourist to some spot like Angola or Zanzibar, and then trust to luck and your ingenuity.

But perhaps your means are rather modest and you have only a

few hundred dollars to play around with. Then you can become the president of your own bank. Or you can set yourself up in the money-changing business. All you need is a hole-in-the-wall with a counter and a telephone. If you take a stroll down the crawling spit-laden little street which takes you into the Little Socco (a square in the médina from which radiate Arab leather and jewelry stores, night clubs, and houses of prostitution), you'll see dozens of kiosks where men earn a profitable living out of foreign exchange. There's no such thing as a black market in Tangier — here it's quite legal. Outside the dollar area most countries have been forced to block their currencies to prevent a disastrous drain on dollars, but here you can buy or sell any kind of money, in any quantity, any day of the week.

PERHAPS the saddest feature of Tangier is what has happened to the Arabs, who make up about nine-tenths of the population, and to whom in the final analysis Tangier really belongs. If you've ever visited Fez or Marrakech, you know that in spite of dirt and smell and crushing poverty, the native towns have fascination and charm. Naturally, if you're rich — and to the average Arab anyone who makes five dollars a week is rich — merchants will charge you a higher price for what you buy, but that's business. Other-

wise you will find them delightful people, open-hearted and amazingly hospitable.

But in Tangier it's different. There the Arabs have lost their roots. The Moslem virtues have gone, and the worst of the Christian vices have come in. Tangier-Médina has a worn-out predatory desperation about it, like the derelict creatures who totter out of dark alleyways at night and thrust their flaming cheeks and dyed hair at you with a leer.

It's worth taking a morning to explore the médina and climb up to the casbah, where the old palace of the Sultan, a pitiful relic of former glory, stares blankly out across the straits. But you need a guide along. In a glass case outside the gleaming marble French post office on the Boulevard Pasteur in the new town you see a large map of the city. But when it came to the médina the cartographers gave up; it appears on the map as a blank area decorated with a few wispy lines leading nowhere. It's a place of dark narrow streets and tortuous passageways, a maze of windowless walls and dank cul-de-sacs. The old Moorish warriors built it as a secret place where they could rest up after foraging raids on other tribes. In its corkscrew passages you come unexpectedly upon the green and gold mosaic of a

mosque, or the crenelated walls of an ancient palace. On its long flights of stone steps, donkeys brush past you and goats poke their noses into your pockets. Alleyways converge on little open squares or market places, where mounds of flat round loaves are piled up on primitive stalls, and pieces of evil-smelling meat are cooking on skewers over charcoal pots.

Outside the city walls is Tangier's bidonville. There, in a deplorable collection of shacks made out of tin cans, corrugated cardboard, and bits of packing cases, with no water and not a vestige of sanitary arrangements, Arab families live, eat and sleep among their garbage and excreta in unimaginable filth and squalor.

Visiting journalists have railed unceasingly at conditions they have found in the International Zone of Tangier, yet nothing has been done. Tangier is vicious because her prosperity is based on the misfortunes of others. Her recurrent nightmare is of a peaceful world, when ordinary decent citizens can once more sit down on an evening and read their newspaper without fear. For in such a case her enterprises would collapse like a pricked balloon, and her phoney prosperity would be shattered as though an earthquake had struck.

THEATER

Linnell Jones

Angel Is A Naughty Word

Broadway Through the Backer's Eye

ONE OF the most important citizens in New York theatrical circles is Joseph R. Shelcup, the gentleman who, under the impression that he was buying oil stock, invested \$5,000 in *Oklahoma!* and has been living the good life ever since.

Oddly enough, nobody in New York seems to be personally acquainted with Mr. Shelcup, although practically everyone knows somebody who knows a friend of his. Another peculiar thing about the man is that his name sometimes pops up as Shelby, or Schultz, or

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even Breckenridge; again it appears that it wasn't *Oklahoma!* he backed — it was *The Voice of the Turtle*, or *Harvey*, or *South Pacific*. But names and shows notwithstanding, the moral of the tale is always the same — man meets show, man backs show, man makes fortune.

Under the spell of the Shelcup story, close to 5,000 people each year raid their mattresses and hopefully invest \$5,000,000 in Broadway productions. Once in a heliotrope moon, one of these angels makes a bundle; a few take away a fairish profit; but the great majority end up heavy of heart and light of purse. "We was robbed," they grumble, and in a sense they were.

Now most of these patrons of the theatrical arts realize that the odds are against them when they put money in a show. They realize that of every five productions which get