

## VI

### “NOT DEAD, ONLY DRY”

“It is useless to plant anything : the earth is dead.”

“No, it is not dead, it is only dry.”

“But I tell you, it is dead. In summer the earth is always dead : see here.” And the Arab who spoke stooped and picked up a rock-like clod, that he had hewn with his pickaxe from the trench at his feet. It looked dead enough certainly; the Algerian soil in August is much the same in texture as a well-trodden highway. But it is only waiting.

“It is the very same earth that it is in winter,” I replied; “all it wants is water, and water you must give it.”

With an Oriental’s laconic patience, though all unconvinced, the man went on with the digging of his trench, and the planting therein of acacia clippings to make a new thorn hedge where it had been broken down.

And with a new hope in God my own words came back to me as I turned away. “It is not dead: it is only dry.”

For of all the soils in the world our Moslem soil in Algiers seems the most barren, while friend and foe repeat the same words: “It is useless to plant anything : the earth is dead.”