

TRAVELS
IN
GREECE, PALESTINE, EGYPT,
AND
BARBARY,

DURING THE YEARS 1806 AND 1807.

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K. 111*
BY F. A. DE CHATEAUBRIAND.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY F. SHOBERL.

EMBELLISHED WITH A MAP,
AND THREE COPPER AND FOUR WOOD ENGRAVINGS.

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1814.

The following day, the 17th, steering north north-west, we discovered Mount Ida. Its summit, covered with snow, resembled an immense cupola. We made for the island of Cerigo, and were so fortunate as to pass it on the 18th. On the 19th, I once more beheld the coasts of Greece, and saluted Tænarium. To our great joy, a gale sprung up from the south-west, and in five days we arrived in the sea of Malta. We descried that island on Christmas eve; but the next day the wind shifting to west north-west, drove us to the south of Lampedosa. For eighteen days we lay off the east coast of the kingdom of Tunis, suspended between life and death. Never while I live shall I forget the 28th. We were in sight of Pantalaria; at noon we were overtaken by a profound calm; a lurid light illumined the gloomy and threatening atmosphere. About sun-set, so thick was the darkness that enveloped us, as to justify, in my opinion, the beautiful expression of Virgil: *Ponto nox incubat atra*. A tremendous uproar ensued. A hurricane burst upon the vessel, and whirled her round like a feather on a basin of water. In a moment the sea was agitated to such a degree, that its surface exhibited one continued sheet of foam. The ship, which no longer obeyed the helm, was like a black spot upon the whitened ocean; the violence of the wind seemed to raise her out of the water: she turned round in every direction, plunging her head and stern alternately in the waves. The return of light showed us the extent of our danger. We were almost close to the Island of Lampedosa. In the same hurricane two English ships of war perished at Malta, as was stated in the newspapers of the time. M. Dinelli, considering the loss of the ship as inevitable, wrote upon a slip of paper; "F. A. de Chateaubriand, wrecked on the island of Lampedosa the 28th of December 1806, on his return from the Holy Land." This paper I corked up in an empty bottle, with the intention of throwing it into the sea at the last moment.

Providence was pleased to save us. A slight variation of the wind enabled us, at noon, to clear Lampedosa, and we found ourselves once more in the open sea. The wind getting round again to the north, we ventured to hoist a sail and bore away for the Lesser Syrtis. The bottom of this Syrtis keeps gradually rising to the shore, so that, by paying attention to the soundings as you approach, you may anchor in any depth of water you

please. From the shallowness of the water, the sea is calm here in the violent winds, and this gulph, so dangerous to the barks of the ancients, is a sort of port in the open sea for modern vessels.

We cast anchor off the island of Kerkeni, close to the line of the fishery. I was so heartily tired of this long passage, that I would gladly have landed at Sfax and thence proceeded to Tunis by land; but the captain durst not put into the harbour of Sfax, (the entrance of which is really dangerous. We lay at anchor eight days in the Lesser Syrtis, and here I passed the first day of the year 1807. Under how many stars and in what a variety of situations had I already witnessed the renewal of the years which either glide away so swiftly or seem so tedious! How far were flown those days of infancy, when, with a heart throbbing for joy, I received the parental benediction and presents! With what impatience was this first day of the year always expected! But now, on board of a foreign ship, in the midst of the sea, in sight of a barbarous region, this day fled without pleasure, without the embraces of relatives, without any of those tender wishes of felicity which a mother forms with such sincerity for her son. This day, sprung from the bosom of tempests, sprinkled nought but cares, regrets and gray hairs upon my brow.

We nevertheless thought it right to celebrate this day, not to do honour to an agreeable host, but out of regard for an old acquaintance. We slaughtered the remainder of our poultry, with the exception of a cock, our faithful time-keeper, which had never ceased to watch and crow in the midst of the greatest perils. The rabbis, the Barbaresco, and the two Moors, came from the ship's hold to partake of our banquet. This was my treat. We drank success to France: we were not far from the island of the Lotophagi, where the companions of Ulysses forgot their country; but I know not any fruit so delicious as to make me forget mine.

We were almost close to the Kerkeni islands, the Cercinæ of the ancients. In the time of Strabo, there was a fishery off these islands, as at present. The Cercinæ witnessed two extraordinary reverses of fortune; they beheld Hannibal and Marius successively pass them as fugitives. We were very near Africa (*Tarris Annibalis*) where the first of these two great men was obliged to embark, to escape the ingratitude of the Carthaginians. Sfax is a

modern town, which, according to Dr. Shaw, derives its name from the word Fakouse, on account of the great quantity of cucumbers which grow in its vicinity.

On the 8th of January, 1807, the tempest having at length abated, we quitted the Lesser Syrtis, proceeded northward along the coast of Tunis for three days, and on the 10th doubled Cape Bon, the object of all our wishes. On the 12th we came to an anchor before Goletta, the harbour of Tunis. The boat was despatched to the shore, and I sent a letter to the French consul, M. Devoise. I was apprehensive of being obliged to perform another quarantine, but M. Devoise obtained permission for me to land on the 18th. It was with sincere joy that I left the ship. I hired horses at Goletta, made the circuit of the lake, and at five in the evening reached the house of my new host.