

ALGERIA AND TUNIS

IN 1845.

BY

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18TH (ROYAL IRISH) REGIMENT.

AN ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY

MADE THROUGH THE TWO REGENCIES

BY

VISCOUNT FEILDING AND CAPT. KENNEDY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER V.

Our reception by Sidi Hadji Mohamed Hamsa—Mahadeah— Its history—Spanish fortifications—Ancient harbour—Cisterns—Tombs—Saracenic ruin—Xuruckseff— Friendly reception—Sketching and taking portraits—The evil eye— Amulets—Questions and answers—Early start—The curse of blood—The Smalah of the Kaid of Sfax—Jellooli— Arab Women—Rouga—Long ride—Jebiniiana— Uncomfortable night.

[89]

Mahadeah not being the station of any government official, we occupied a house the property of a wealthy Moor, Sidi Hadji Mohamet Hamsa, who had been ordered by the Kaid of Monasteer to receive us. The evening was enlivened by a furious squabble, arising out of the manner in which we had been received; for the order sent from Monasteer, instead of being a formal letter, was written on a dirty scrap of paper, which had hurt the Hadji's pride, and although he did not dare to disobey it, he made no further [90] preparation than to open the door of an uninhabited house. This excited the anger of our people, but when supper was sent in their indignation was at its height. As far as we were concerned the supply was ample, quite sufficient for a party twice our strength, but as it was considered an intentional slight that a man of the Hadji's wealth had not sent a more liberal meal, we sacrificed our supper to our dignity, and ordered it to be instantly returned. We threatened to report his conduct to the Bey, and if we had done so he would have been heavily fined, but he apologized next morning, and I believe that Sidi Abdallah and Baba Jebb received a handsome present to say nothing about it on their return to the Bardo.

We were indebted to the hospitality of Signor _____ for our supper, and early next morning he accompanied us over the town. Mahadeah (or Africa, as it is sometimes called by Europeans), one of the poorest places in the Regency, is in appearance one of the most remarkable. Placed on a low peninsula of rock, and naturally a strong position, it is supposed to be the site of the "Turrus Hannibalis" of ancient geographers, which name [91] has, however, been also assigned to extensive ruins at Salecto, some miles to the southward. The more modern history of Mahadeah is better known. The first Fatimite Caliph of Kairouan, who, rising into power as a religious reformer, had assumed the title of "Mahadi," or director, founded or rebuilt the town, to which he gave his own name, about the year 940, A. D. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century it was seized by the famous Dragut, who afterwards fell at the memorable siege of Malta, and in whose possession it remained but for

a short time, being taken by a Christian force, and then strongly fortified by Charles V., who intended to make it an impregnable fortress and a station for his cruisers. Not answering his expectations, the town was abandoned and the works destroyed.

It is to this that Mahadeah owes its picturesque appearance; immense fragments of the wall, with its mouldering towers, their weather-beaten remains blending with the rock on which they stand, encircle the town; the Kasbah rises in the centre, and a modern fort near the gate is placed close to a rival mass of masonry, one of the remnants of the [92] Spanish works which guarded the neck of the isthmus. Containing a population of four thousand, the inhabitants and the houses seemed equally poverty-stricken; the trade is inconsiderable, although the present harbour on the south side of the promontory is safe and sheltered, with a sufficient depth of water for coasting vessels. The ancient harbour, excavated in the space within the walls, was of an oblong form, one hundred and forty-eight paces by seventy-four, and communicated with the sea by a narrow channel, now dry and partially filled up with rubbish. There are numerous cisterns in the town, but the most remarkable are those near the Kasbah, formed in the solid rock; they are of great depth, and the flat roofs that received the rain-water are still supported by a double range of arches, one above the other.

At the eastern extremity of the cape there are many shallow tombs cut in the rock, some still contain skeletons, but nothing extraneous has ever been found in them, except that an arm-bone was discovered, wrapped round with a bandage to which some pitchy substance still adhered. Several, from their [93] small size, must have been the graves of children, but there was one, of full length, which had evidently held double.

Scattered in different directions are stone shot of considerable size, to discharge which guns of large calibre must have been required. During our progress we discovered the cause of the black, stagnant appearance of the ponds in the neighbourhood of many of the villages through which we had passed. Several women were engaged in obtaining oil for immediate use by pounding a few handfuls of olives with a stone, and then placing the paste in the nearest puddle and skimming off the oil as it rose to the surface. The olives thus treated are those of the worst description, which from fermentation and never having ripened, are small, shrivelled, and quite black.

Three miles from Mahadeah, to the westward, stand the ruins of an ancient Saracenic building of great beauty; it was of small dimensions, consisting only of a vault beneath the surface, and two stories above; the interior is fourteen feet and a half square, the walls nearly five feet in thickness, and an octangular tower formerly stood at each [94] corner of the building. The masonry is executed with the greatest nicety of finish, and a band, two feet in width, sculptured with an inscription in highly ornamented Kufic characters, runs round the edifice at the height of twenty feet from the ground, and divides the exterior into two portions. Traces of an inclosure at some distance from the building still remain. The country people have no tradition relating to it, but from its general appearance, and from the fragments of the inscription which I had translated on my return to Tunis proving to be portions of a verse of the Koran, I infer that it was probably erected over the tomb of some distinguished leader, in the early period of the Mahometan rule, perhaps over that of Mahadi himself, the founder of the town.

Towards the afternoon we started for Xuruckseff, riding for two hours through an uninteresting country. We were received on our arrival with the greatest cordiality, and the three principal inhabitants of the place conducted us over the straggling village. It lies southwest from Mahadeah, on the verge of the plain of Kairouan, surrounded with monotonous olive groves, which [95] when seen day after day become wearisome to the eye.

Ascending an adjoining height, I employed myself in sketching the village, whilst Lord Feilding was employed in taking the portraits of our companions, who were at first unconscious of what he was about; two of them thought it a capital joke, and insisted on writing their names underneath the figures, lest they should be forgotten; and one, taking from his girdle his pen-case and a crumpled piece of paper, sat down with a most amusing air of gravity to take our likenesses, and in due course of time, after the consumption of all the ink in his case, produced two diabolical misrepresentations of the human form, which we had to identify with ourselves by placing our names beneath. A third man who had accompanied us, we afterwards discovered had hurried off in a terrible fright, from dread of the "evil eye," and any misfortune that may befall him in the course of the next year we were informed would be laid at our door.

This fear of the evil eye, the effects of which they believe to be the work of malignant demons that delight in injuring mankind, [96] and generally make use of strangers as their

unconscious instruments, is universal, even amongst the better orders. An instance of this occurred to us in the sook at Sfax; struck with the appearance of a lovely child of four or five years of age, I was pointing him out to my companion, when, in an instant, a woman, I suppose the mother, seized the child in her arms with every symptom of terror, and, spitting in its face, rubbed the saliva with her hand across the child's forehead as a counter-charm against the supposed injurious influence of the evil eye, conveyed in the admiring glance of a stranger.

Nearly all the Moors and Arabs wear charms or amulets about their persons, especially the women and children. These charms are composed of a most heterogenous collection of articles, but those in which the greatest faith is placed consist of various combinations of words and sentences from the Koran, and the more mysterious and incomprehensible they are, the greater is the efficacy they are supposed to possess. Usually concocted by the Marabouts, much of their virtue is also supposed to depend [97] upon the peculiar sanctity of the individual who may have manufactured them. Sewn up in leather, and sometimes placed in little embroidered bags, the amulets are worn not only by men, women, and children, but are frequently suspended about the necks of animals ; five out of the eight horses we had with us were thus equipped. Inanimate objects are also imagined to partake of the benefit believed to be derived from these devices, for the representation of an open hand— which is considered a potent charm against all spells of genii, demons, and evil spirits— is often affixed to houses; and the scallopshell, so common an ornament on the capitals of columns, &c, is said to have been intended originally as a rude imitation of a hand.

The Sheick, who was building a new. house, made many apologies for not having better accommodation to offer us, and took great pride in shewing us over the unfinished apartments. During the evening the leading characters of Xuruckseff joined the party, and old Baba Jebb was kept hard at work as an interpreter. Great curiosity was expressed to hear something about England, and innumerable questions were asked as to [98] how far it was off, what was the size of the largest town, &c; but I am afraid that the replies were not always very correctly conveyed, for Baba Jebb at last grew sleepy, and if the answers that we got to our questions may be taken as specimens of those that the Arabs received, he must have made a sad mess of it. What seemed to puzzle them most was the fact of our sovereign being a woman; and as for the description of London, its size, number of inhabitants, and the ships in

the Thames, I have little doubt but that they thought it all a lying exaggeration, although they were too well bred to say so.

The Sheick was greatly pleased with a small quantity of English gunpowder that we gave him, and still more so with several dozen copper caps, for he had a French percussion gun, and as far as we could learn it seemed that he had never possessed a cap in his life. A provoking accident happened this day, Angelo having succeeded in breaking the barometer; the large thermometer having been crushed to pieces the day before, by one of the baggage horses rolling upon it, rendered the mishap the more annoying, as we were now entering that part of the country [99] in which we had particularly wished to take observations.

As it was uncertain where we should halt the next night, we started at an early hour, being in our saddles at a quarter to three. Our object was to reach the "smalah"* of the Kaid of Sfax at a sufficiently early hour to enable us to resume our march in the afternoon. The smalah was known to have been removed within a day or two, and we only received a general direction as to where we were likely to find it.

* A douar is called a smalah when it is the habitual residence of a distinguished chief, and when it contains his family and personal property.

Shortly after leaving the village, Sidi Abdallah sent on one of the Hambas as an advanced guard, and warned us to look to our arms and keep together. Although there was but little fear of our being attacked yet it was as well to be prepared, for the plain of Kairouan is a favourite resort for roving parties of the marauding tribes, who descend from the mountains to the westward for the purpose of plundering travellers. As if to give a colouring of reality to the long stories of murders and robberies which Baba Jebb was relating, for the benefit of all parties [100] first in Arabic and then in Italian, we passed some heaps of stones, just visible in the obscurity of the early morning, the rude memorials of deeds of blood committed on the spot. It is a custom that each passerby should cast a stone upon the heap, and as he does so he lays the curse of blood upon the perpetrator of the murder, dooming him to perish by the same death that another had received at his hands; the mound of stones piled on the victim's grave being symbolical of the united curses of mankind heaped upon the head of the murderer.

Our route lay south-westerly for some distance, through uncultivated plantations of stunted olives and patches of brushwood, which grew scantier as we advanced across the dreary

plain. For nearly five hours we rode without catching sight of tent, flock, or human being, and the sole incident that occurred to vary the scene was at day-break, when a herd of gazelles sprang up affrighted, from a hollow near our track, and, as they fled, in the dull gray light of the morning, seemed but bounding shadows, soon lost to view in the floating mist that hung' over the surface of the ground.

At eight o'clock we discovered three [101] douars, pitched within short distances of each other, and, receiving proper directions for our course, arrived two hours afterwards at the smalah. Gellooli, the Kaid of Sfax, is reported to be the wealthiest man in the Regency, his father having been one of the most enterprising and successful pirates of modern days. During several months in the year he leaves the town and wanders with his smalah over the extensive plains of his government; his tent is a very grand affair, of large size, lined with coloured drapery, and divided by curtains into three compartments. Having when a young man spent some time with his father at Malta, he speaks Italian and has a liking for the English; it was only with great difficulty that we were allowed to take our departure at noon. The Kaid added to our party four armed horsemen, who were to guide us to Rouga, the ruins of the ancient city of Carraga.

Two miles from the smalah we stopped to allow our horses to drink at a small pond of dirty water, the first we had seen since the morning, and here we found nearly all the women and girls of the smalah. There were forty or fifty females of all ages, many of them standing [102] above their knees in the water, engaged in filling the goat skins, that, daubed with tar and tallow, give such a detestable flavour to their brackish contents. Even when we rode in amongst them they were not in the least chary of exposing their charms, and many of the younger girls who were in the water with their garments tucked up, made a liberal display of form and figure. One or two were decidedly pretty, a few tolerably good-looking, but the majority, to say the least of it, were very plain, and some of the elderly ladies frightfully ugly.

At Rouga there are two sets of cisterns of considerable magnitude, and nearly perfect. They are of an unusual form, being circular, and the largest, which is one hundred and twenty feet in diameter, has its roof supported by eight rows of square piers, the arches between each formed of five blocks of stone. The only access to them is by a narrow underground passage, leading to a breach in the side wall. The debris of the ancient city, extends over several acres of ground, and the remains of a triumphal arch are still standing.

We were now not very far from El Jem, [103] which lay a few hours journey to the northwest.

Whilst in the cisterns I was seized with my old Chinese enemy the ague, and knowing from past experience that if the fit proved a severe one I should not be able to sit my horse, there was nothing left for it but to gallop on to Jebiniana, the village where we were to pass the night. Taking with us Scheadli, the hamba who was best mounted, we rode through a region still more dreary than that traversed in the morning, a peculiar appearance of desolation being given to the scenery by the wild olives, their dwarfed and withered forms possessing just sufficient vitality to retain existence, scattered at distant intervals over the sandy soil.

The noon-day heat had been oppressive, but towards evening the heavens grew black with clouds, the rain descended like a water spout, and being driven by the wind that swept furiously across the naked plain, our horses refused to face it. To add to our discomfort we now found out that we had lost our way; Scheadli knew nothing about it, and at last, after riding about for some time [104] in the vain hope of discovering a douar, we determined to make for the sea shore. At half past six we entered a cultivated olive garden, and overtook a labourer mounted on a camel, which bore also on its back a bundle of hoes and three entire ploughs. The labourer was returning home to Jebiniana, where we arrived a little before eight, having been sixteen hours on the road; our baggage, which we had left at Rouga to come on quietly, having arrived an hour before us. Whether the change of weather or the excitement of being lost effected the cure, I know not, but by this time I was much better.

Jebiniana, a small village a shade better than Hergla, has the character of possessing a lawless, thieving set of inhabitants, and Baba Jebb made a great fuss about arranging the arms for the night, and insisted upon one of the hambas sleeping across the inside of the doorway. We afterwards heard that some native travellers had been attacked and robbed a few weeks previously, in passing near the village; but that is a very different affair from a well armed party, like ourselves, who carried nothing likely to tempt the cupidity [105] of plunderers, except our arms, which they would have found it no easy matter to take; enquiries would besides have been made if any thing had happened to us, whilst a few natives, or half a dozen camel-loads of merchandise, more or less, would not much signify; and, in case of a night

attack, it is so difficult to identify the assailants that unless the matter is taken up seriously by the government at Tunis, they generally escape.

We had flattered ourselves that by this time we had become flea-proof, but this night's experience proved our mistake; every article of outer clothing that we had with us was soaked in the rain, and as the nights were cold, we were obliged to borrow a couple of rugs from the Sheick. Tired as we were, sleep was out of the question; myriads of tormentors swarmed over us; they issued from the blankets, the mats, the ceiling of the chamber, and from the crevices in the whitewashed wall, from whence, by the light of the lamp, we could see them advancing in squadrons to the attack,—ears, eyes and noses were invaded; I do not think it possible [106] to pass a more detestable night, and the heavy complaints made in the morning by all, even by the Arab servant, who ought to have been well accustomed to such companions, proved that they had been more than usually annoying.

CHAPTER VI.

Inchla—The sand grouse—Sfax—Its trade—Gerbeh—Moorish cookery—The Kaid's country house—Flowers—Gardens, and the house tax—Freedom from bigotry—Bivouac—An alarm—The Amphitheatre of El Jem—Ruins of Tysdrus —Saltpetre works—Medical practice among the Arabs— Arab school—The Hadji's well—The plain of Kairouan— The Holy City.

[107]

Gladly welcoming the first rays of the sun, on the morning of the 22nd, we left Jebiniana for Sfax at five o'clock. The thunder-storm of the preceding evening had cleared the air, and the fresh invigorating breeze was a grateful change from the atmosphere of the wretched little chamber where eight persons had passed the night, stowed, with their saddlery and baggage, into a space twenty feet long by six wide.

A little more than an hour's ride brought us to Inchla, the ruins of a temple, or, more probably, of a Christian church, which at [108] some period subsequent to its foundation, had been converted into a fortress. The walls had been greatly increased in thickness, and round towers added at each corner; the original square edifice serving merely as a skeleton to the more modern building. The roof also had been replaced by three oblong vaults, resting upon antique marble pillars, their capitals sculptured with fruit, flowers, and birds, and having a ram's head at each angle, the whole now very much defaced. Around are scattered the insignificant remains of an ancient town, and numerous wells are sunk in the neighbourhood, many of which are used for irrigation at the present day.

Besides partridges and quail, we found to-day, for the first time, the banded sandgrouse,* a remarkably handsome bird about the size of a partridge, of an ash colour, speckled with dark spots, a rich black band across the breast, and the whole of the under part of the body of the same hue. This bird prefers rocky, stony ground, is swift and strong on the wing, and when sprung, utters a very peculiar guttural note, which is repeated during its flight.

* Pterocles Arenarius.

[109]

Proceeding along the plain, we kept a direct course for Sfax, cutting off the angle formed by a sweep of the coast, at the extreme point of which stands the fort of Bordj Sidi Masour. Five miles from Sfax, the aspect of the country had completely changed, although the nature of the

soil remained the same. In place of the naked, un tilled plain, the road lay between earthen banks, planted with cactus, enclosing a succession of olivegroves and gardens, studded with the towers and country houses at which the inhabitants of the town are accustomed to pass the hottest months of summer.

Emerging from this wide belt of verdure, forming a semicircle around three sides of the town, we came in view of Sfax, half a mile distant. Standing on the sea-shore, the only objects visible over the battlemented walls were the kasbah, the towers of the mosques, the tops of a few houses more ambitiously built than their neighbours, and the feathery crowns of some scattered palms imprisoned within the walls and waving gracefully in the wind. A Tunisian frigate lay at anchor in the roads, and several small coasting vessels and Maltese boats were lying in the harbour. [110] Crossing the tract of barren sand that lies between the town and the gardens, we entered Sfax at noon, and proceeded to the Raid's house, where we were received by his elder son, the Kaid having sent off a messenger from the smalah the day previously, to inform him of our probable arrival.

Sfax, or Sfakus, with a population of thirteen thousand inhabitants—owing to its local position with regard to the Jereed and the island of Gerbeh, the manufacturing districts of the Tunisian dominions—is a place of considerable trade.* It is also renowned for the abundance and flavour of the pistachio-nuts, the produce of the neighbouring gardens, and immense quantities of these, as well as of almonds, are exported annually. The town, as to its buildings and internal arrangements, only varies from those before described inasmuch as it possesses the widest and cleanest street in the Regency, extending from the inner gate to the harbour.

* The principal manufactures and productions of the Jereed, are hernous of various qualities, haicks, coarse woollens, carpets and rugs, striped with brilliant colours,—saltpetre, dates, and henna, together with a few articles from the interior. Those of Gerbeh are the beautiful stuffs of mingled wool and silk, shawls, and pottery.

[111]

After having made inquiries, we found ourselves obliged to abandon our plan of visiting the island of Gerbeh, on account of the difficulty of getting back to the main land, the wind often continuing to blow from the same quarter for weeks; a Roman Catholic priest, who had gone off for two days, had already been detained a fortnight, and, it was stated, would very probably have to wait another ere he could return. Although we had selected a boat to take us over, we could not afford time to run the risk of being windbound, so that we were obliged, reluctantly, to renounce our intention.

At seven o'clock we dined with the Kaid's second son, the governor of the town, under his father, who rules over an extensive district. As the first dishes were placed on the table, a long napkin was passed round, so as to serve for the whole party, and the dinner was a triumph of the science of cookery, as practised by the Moors. Amongst the numerous dishes the following were especially worthy of note: pigeons roasted, and stuffed with a pudding composed of almonds, pistachio-nuts, raisins, pepper, spices, herbs, and crumbs of bread, mixed with butter, [112] and slightly flavoured with saffron; lambcutlets stewed in a rich sauce, with sweet almonds; small triangular pieces of light pastry, containing a spoonful of forcemeat, and fried in oil; mutton stuffed with pistachio-nuts; and greens boiled in oil to the consistence of porridge. Besides all these we had the usual Moorish dishes, soups, hashes, sweetmeats, &c, finishing with couscousoo; we were also supplied with very tolerable wine.

Next morning we went to see the Raid's country house and garden, situated three quarters of a mile from the western gate of the town. The sandy space between the gardens and the walls was white with innumerable tombs, the domes of several marabouts interspersed amongst them slightly varying the sameness of the oblong slabs. Passing through a gate, to which is attached a porter's lodge, and up an avenue of cypresses, we reached the house, an irregular building of no beauty. In one of the interior courts was an open bath, containing several feet of water, clear as crystal, which mirrored the deep blue of the lovely sky, and the graceful foliage of an adjacent palm tree.

[113]

From the terraced roof there is an extensive view of the sandy coast of the gulf of Gabs,* of the low islands of the Kerkennas, and of the town, fenced in from the wide expanse of the barren plain by the broad belt of the surrounding gardens, gay with a profusion of roses, jasmine, and other flowers, thriving luxuriantly in a soil little other than pure sand. The fondness for flowers shewn at Tunis is still more prevalent at Sfax, nearly every person seen in the streets has a rose, or small bouquet, and the favourite method of carrying them is to insert the stalks under the head-dress, so that the blossoms rest upon the cheek; a rosebud, fresh gathered, pure, and fragrant, with its blushing leaves just opening to the day, is thus often seen reposing on the dirt-begrimed features of a squalid beggar. The ottos, both of the white and red rose and of the jasmine, are prepared at Sfax; the former is inferior to that of Tunis, but the latter is considered the finest in the world, and is very highly

* The rise and fall of the tide is greater in the gulf of Gabs than in any other part of the Mediterranean.

esteemed throughout [114] the Levant, selling, when unadulterated, at four times the price of the otto of rose.

Almost every family in Sfax, excepting the very poorest, possesses one or more of these gardens, to which they retire during the heats of summer, and as the cultivated ground is five or six miles in width, and many of the gardens do not contain more than an acre, they must be very numerous; but everybody that we questioned made it such a point of honour to exaggerate, that it was impossible even to guess how many there really were. An occurrence that took place in connexion with these gardens during the reign of a former Bey, proves that their number must be considerable. — It happened that, in common with the other towns of the Regency, an impost was laid upon Sfax, which the inhabitants considered to be too heavy, and accordingly petitioned the Bey for a remission of at least a portion of the tax. The Bey granted their request by offering, if they were willing, to receive in lieu of the tax of which they complained, a certain small sum which he named, from the proprietor of every garden in which stood [115] a house of a certain size; the commutation was accepted with gratitude by the inhabitants, and it was not until after this popular house-tax had been collected, that they discovered it amounted to nearly double the sum originally demanded.

In Sfax is to be found fresh evidence of the reigning Bey's freedom from religious bigotry, for a Roman Catholic chapel, with all the outward marks of a Christian place of worship, is in course of erection on a site granted by the Bey for the express purpose, and the stones employed in its construction are taken by his permission from some ancient ruins on the adjacent islands of the Kerkennas.

Coins and engraved stones are frequently to be procured from the Jews of Sfax, and we were tolerably fortunate in our purchases. In the sooks we did not succeed so well, as owing to the contrary winds that had prevailed for some time past, there had been no arrivals from Gerbeh; in the whole town there was only one specimen of the beautiful fabrics of the island to be obtained, and as for the far famed otto of jasmine, the last bottle of the first quality had been sent off [116] to Tunis a few days previously to our arrival, and there was not a drop to be procured in the town.

At three, p.m., we commenced our journey northwards to El Jem. Leaving behind us Sfax and its gardens, we entered upon the plain, and having passed the Marabout of Sidi Salah,

three hours ride from Sfax, we continued our monotonous route till dusk, when, there being no douar within many miles, we halted for the night under a solitary, stunted olive, near a puddle of muddy, brackish water. Sidi Abdallah would not allow a fire to be lighted for fear of attracting the notice of wandering parties, but the night was fine, and it was no hardship to be without one. Having hobbled the horses, placed our arms in readiness, and supped on some cold provisions we had brought with us, the whole party lay down, with the exception of one, who mounted guard, and Lord Feilding, who not feeling inclined to sleep, was taking a lesson in Arabic I had been asleep for some time when I was aroused by several smart kicks, and starting up, I found my assailant to be no other than Mohamet, the Arab lad, who trembling in every limb, thrust [117] my gun into my hand. At this instant the Shawsh rushed forward, half drawing his sabre, and whilst we gathered round the tree, challenged a party who were approaching our bivouac. During the parley that ensued, the first four who came up were joined by five others; they declared themselves to be travellers, and were evidently as suspicious of us as we of them, and keeping together in a body, they moved off towards Sfax. As soon as the moon rose, our escort determined upon changing ground, in order, as Baba Jebb facetiously expressed it, that if our visitors should return with a reinforcement, they might find nothing but the chicken bones. After riding six or seven miles we again halted, and finding a bed upon some scrubby bushes, a few inches high, slept soundly until within an hour of daybreak, when we were again in our saddles and en route.

Within a few miles of El Jem we observed an extensive salt lake, glittering in the sun; still nearer we passed some beds of reddish earth, from which saltpetre is extracted, and at eleven o'clock a turn in the road, as we entered a plantation of olives and cactus, disclosed to view the gigantic ruins of the [118] amphitheatre, towering above the wretched hovels of the village of El Jem, the modern representative of the once splendid city of Tysdrus.

Soon after our arrival we set forth, accompanied by half the population of the place, to the amphitheatre. It is seldom that expectations which have been highly raised by the descriptions of others, are not disappointed at the first view of the object, but here the reality far surpassed the utmost I had ever pictured to myself. Erected, according to Shaw's conjecture, during the reign of the Gordians, who were first recognised as Emperors at Tysdrus, this noble monument of imperial gratitude is rendered still more impressive by the desolation in the midst of which it stands.

The absence of all petty detail of ornament, as well as its imposing proportions, give an air of simple grandeur to the edifice. Oval in form, four hundred and twenty-nine feet in length, by three hundred and sixty-eight in breadth,* the façade consists of three [119] ranges of arches, rising to the height of ninety-six feet, and above them are the remains of a fourth tier, which was destroyed during an insurrection by the Arabs, who converted the amphitheatre into a fortress, and used the stones as weapons of defence against their assailants. At this period, ninety years ago, the whole building was in good preservation, but to guard against such an occurrence for the future, the Bey ordered the great western entrance to be blown up with gunpowder, and since then it has served as a quarry, from whence stone may be procured at pleasure. With the exception of this breach, and the loss of the upper story, the exterior is nearly perfect; solidly built of hewn stone, many of the blocks that form the arches still bear the numbers cut upon them to prevent their being misplaced. The pillars and arches, sixty in number, vary slightly in each tier, and are of the Doric order, with Egyptian capitals.

* These dimensions are from the work of Sir Grenville Temple, who is so correct in his measurements, that it would have been a waste of time to have repeated them, with the probable result of differing an inch or two.

It appears as though in the original plan, it had been intended that every key-stone of the lower tier of arches should bear an emblem, as a rough block projects from each, but only two, on the north side of the breach, are thus decorated, one having a female head, [120] and the other that of a lion, sculptured in bold relief, whilst the others remain unfinished. The interior is much injured, nothing remains except the sloping vaults that supported the rows of seats, the passages, and the connecting stairs, which have all perished. Although the exterior is of stone, the interior is built of concrete; and the lining of masonry having been destroyed, it has failed in many places, although there is enough left standing to afford access to every part of the ruin. The arena is covered with a deep bed of rubbish; but a gallery that runs underneath, to the centre of the amphitheatre, communicating with a square shaft, by which the wild beasts were introduced into the circus, is partially cleared, as are also several small chambers diverging to the right and left, in which the animals were confined. Myriads of hawks and jackdaws, dwelling together in unity, build their nests in the most inaccessible parts of the ruins.

As usual, the remains of Tysdrus lie buried in the soil; a few partial excavations have been made by the Arabs, in search of columns, which, when found, are sawn into proper lengths for the use of oil mills; owing to this many curious objects of antiquity have [121] been

discovered, coins, bronzes, engraved stones, &c, and from the numerous tombs in the vicinity pottery, glass, and a few ornaments are easily obtained. In the course of the afternoon we opened two tombs, excavated in the rock, and covered with large slabs, imbedded in mortar as hard as the stone itself; they contained nothing but coarsely constructed earthen jars; in another, which we ordered to be opened next morning, a lamp, a small glass bottle, and the remains of a bronze finger ring were found. We purchased a considerable quantity of ancient pottery, amongst which were four vessels of fine red clay, grotesquely formed in the shape of birds and quadrupeds.

The cultivated ground near the village is barely sufficient to supply the wants of the seven hundred inhabitants. The mosque, the marabouts, and the village of El Jem, as well as the new saltpetre works lately erected by the Bey, are all built of stone taken from the amphitheatre. The method of extracting the saltpetre from the earth through which it is disseminated, is simple. The earth, brought on the backs of camels and asses from the extensive beds in the [122] neighbourhood, is placed in open tanks, and pressed down, to prevent the water poured upon it from running through too quickly. The saltpetre is carried off in solution into large coppers, placed at a lower level than the tanks, where evaporation is carried on until the liquid is sufficiently concentrated to crystallize on cooling. About thirty-five tons is the annual produce of the works at El Jem, and the whole is used in the government powder-mills in the kasbah of Tunis.

Previous to our departure, on the afternoon of the 25th, we practised with great success as medical men, the basis of our fame being the cures effected upon Solyman, who had had a bilious attack from over eating and getting drunk at Susa, and old Baba Jebb who was really ill, from the unaccustomed fatigue of the journey. The most serious case was that of a young man, who had received a few days previously a musket ball through the leg; but as the bone was uninjured, he would soon recover if he followed the directions we gave. His father, a venerable old man, was waiting at the outskirts of the village and stopped us as we rode out, to kiss our hands in token of his gratitude.

[123]

From the summit of a ridge to the westward we had a last view of the amphitheatre, and leaving behind us the most magnificent memorial of the Roman empire in Africa that time has spared, we set out for Kairouan, where we hoped to arrive the following evening.

Towards sunset we reached a douar of the Suehs, the most wealthy tribe in the plain of Kairouan; their Sheick, Hassan Jellooli, being a younger brother of the Kaid of Sfax.

This evening we had no sinecure, for besides Baba Jebb, who nearly fainted when he was taken off his horse, we had a regular succession of patients, till dark. Not that all were ill, for many had nothing the matter with them, but were only anxious to get medicine in case they should be so; these last would soon have swallowed the whole of our slender stock of physic, so all that could be done was to look at their tongues (a proceeding of which they were rather suspicious), feel their pulses, and retire into a corner for a consultation, leaving the wouldbe patient rather nervous at the solemnity of the whole affair, and then administering a couple of bread pills rolled in soda; these he had to take in the presence of the assembled [124] crowd, the Arabs composing which, seated three or four deep in front of the tent, were looking on with the most edifying gravity. To those who were really ill we afforded what relief we could; for it would have been but an ungrateful return for their hospitality to have deceived them. In the morning Baba Jebb was better, although at one moment the fever had attained such a height that I was on the point of bleeding him; we wished to leave him behind, but he would not consent, and trusting for his recovery to the halt we intended making at Kairouan, we allowed him to proceed.

Whilst our horses were being saddled and the sembeels packed, the Sheick, observing that my attention was attracted by the noise of many voices, issuing from a tent next our own, took me by the wrist, led me to the front of the tent, and pointed out the boys of the tribe at school, seated in a circle round an old man, and each repeating his lesson with a loud voice. Every douar has its schoolmaster, and education, as far as being able to write, and to read the Koran, is almost universal amongst the Arabs, but beyond this they seldom go.

[125]

Part of the plain, over which we rode today for ten hours, was dotted with low bushes and small clumps of thorny brushwood, which frequently bore the singular appearance of growing on a patch of snow, from the ground beneath being covered to the depth of several inches with thousands of white snail shells. During the morning we passed several wells, or rather reservoirs, with narrow mouths, excavated in the sandstone rock, to collect and preserve rain-water throughout the summer months. They owe their origin to the charity of a pious pilgrim, who, returning from Kairouan, found on this spot the bodies of an entire

family who had perished from thirst, and who caused these wells to be dug for the benefit of all future pilgrims and travellers.

For hours we encountered neither man, horse, nor camel, yet the vast plain was full of life; the ground was pierced with the burrows of the jerd; black-coated, hardworking beetles, walking backwards, were with their hind legs rolling towards their dwellings large balls of dung, much bigger than themselves; hundreds of lively, brighteyed lizards, were playing among the tufts of grass, and a tortoise crossed our path [126] with creeping pace, as if oppressed with the burden of its variegated shell. The partridges, now breeding, ran for shelter to the bushes as we approached; quails rose under our horses' feet; the golden plumage of the yamounnas* glanced in the sunbeams, as, in company with a flight of swallows, they skimmed through the air in chase of insects; three or four varieties of smaller birds were twittering in the bushes and a dozen kites, which had just finished picking the bones of a dead camel, were circling high in air in quest of other carrion.

We halted for an hour at a spring near which were some insignificant ruins, and towards the afternoon crossed the nearly dried-up stream of the Oued el Zeroud, which falls into the lake of Kairouan, an extensive sheet of water to the eastward, and shortly afterwards came in sight of the Holy city, the lofty tower of the grand mosque being visible for many miles around. As we drew near the city a hamba was sent forward to announce our arrival, and, after waiting for a short time in an olive grove, a quarter [127] of a mile from the walls, Sidi Hammouda, the acting Kaiya, rode out to meet us, and, placing himself between us, we entered Kairouan, the fourth city in order of sanctity in the Mahometan world, and where a Christian or a Jew would meet, unless protected, as we were, by the especial order of the Bey for our admittance, and by the presence of the Kaiya, a certain death at the hands of the fanatic inhabitants. During our stay we were lodged in what the mameluke called the Bey's palace, an immense building not far from the grand mosque; a guard was placed in the doorway leading to the court, servants were in attendance, the divan was furnished with silk and satin coverlets, and an abundance of well-cooked dishes were supplied at every meal.

Algeria and Tunis
in 1845,
by
Captain J. Clark Kennedy
18th (Royal Irish) Regiment

An account of a journey
Made Through the Two Regencies
by
Viscount Feilding [sic. Fielding] and Capt. Kennedy

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