

# AN OFFICIAL TOUR

ALONG THE EASTERN COAST

OF

THE REGENCY OF TUNIS.

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY,  
AND MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF  
THE PEOPLE.

BY

AMOS PERRY, LL. D.,

LATE UNITED STATES CONSUL AT TUNIS.

AUTHOR OF "CARTHAGE AND TUNIS, PAST AND PRESENT," ETC.

---

PROVIDENCE, R. I. :

STANDARD PRINTING COMPANY, 5 WASHINGTON ROW.

1891.

of good quality and gaudy colors, they, being unable to sleep or take real comfort, were not in a state of mind to appreciate his efforts. In fact, their right to the unmolested occupancy of the quarters assigned them was so warmly contested by unseen enemies (fleas), that acting on the principle that discretion is the better part of valor, they respectively pleaded in courtly phrase — "*nolo contendere*," then retreated to the *pateo* and took seats in their carriage.

#### DEPARTURE AND ARRIVAL AT SFAX.

At eleven o'clock at night they were up arranging for their departure and at midnight set off in the light of the moon and stars and reached the city of Sfax, forty or fifty miles distant at ten o'clock in the morning. At the gate of the city they halted for their guards to notify the governor of the district of their arrival, and were soon met and escorted to the office of the chief magistrate where they were received with marks of courtesy and honor. Coffee and pipes were served, and all the Vice-Consuls of the place paid their visits. They were assigned quarters in the old government palace and a retinue of servants was directed to attend to their wants. From the balcony of the palace they saw the stars and stripes saluted by the flags of five different nations. This edifice, standing upon the summit of the highest hill, commands a fine view of the harbor and of an immense area of sea and land, including the Kerkenna Islands, from which Hannibal, defeated by foreign enemies and forsaken and even persecuted by his own countrymen, sailed away to die an exile in Asia Minor, and where Marius, driven from Italy, landed an exile on his way to Carthage. They were favored with an invigorating breeze that strongly contrasted with the suffocating desert wind that nearly blistered their faces during their stay at Susa. Towards

evening they donned their robes with gilt buttons and repaid the official visits.

A FORMAL WELCOME.

The governor took occasion to welcome the Consul in a formal manner to the hospitalities of the city. He said that his officers would be subject to the orders of his guests during their stay. In his address and in subsequent interviews his dignified manners and intelligence were noteworthy. He spoke of Tunisia as his beloved country. He was not blind to its weaknesses, nor unmoved by its misfortunes. While thus speaking he said, "God sends afflictions for wise purposes. In God we will hope." Submission to the Divine will is the notable virtue of Mussulmans,\* who often repeat the adage with evident assent to its truth, that "misfortunes are blessings in disguise." The governor referred to General Hashem, the Bey's ambassador to the United States, in the following terms: "*Sidi*: (i. e., sir,) Hashem is my special friend. The report he made of his mission to America has awakened much interest in your country."

POPULATION AND WALLS OF SFAX.

Sfax, in 1865 had 12,000 inhabitants. Twenty-four years later (1890), it was accredited in the official annual with a population of 42,500. Yet one of the fiercest struggles of 1881, took place here between the French and the native forces. Some of the walls were battered down and many fine old buildings were shattered. Since that time, however, the place has taken a new lease of life. The restrictions of race, religion and commerce have been less potent. The greater

\*The word Mussulman means in the Arab tongue a person who yields submission to the Divine will.

freedom of life and activity has resulted in trebling the population in a brief period of time.

#### THE VICE-CONSULAR OFFICE.

The consular officers of Sfax came in the evening with the express object of having an extended consultation in regard



GENERAL HASHEM. [P. 37.]

to public affairs. These officials were generally men selected from the most respectable and intelligent merchants of the place to facilitate commercial transactions with these respective nationalities. It was their duty to correspond with their superiors, who resided at the capital, and to communi-

cate all the commercial, agricultural and manufacturing statistics of their respective districts, together with such incidents and events as have a public interest. Some of these officials received compensation for their services, while others held office for the honor of it or with the hope of deriving from it some personal advantage. A fair amount of common sense, decision and energy, together with a courteous bearing, were needful to maintain the honor of their flags and cordial personal and official relations. With these qualifications, these officers serve valuable purposes, promoting a good understanding, communicating useful information and facilitating a trade that is mutually advantageous. Without these qualifications, these officials defeat rather than promote the objects for which they are appointed, interfering with the local government or fostering its vices, and confounding private matters with those that belong to their office, and so giving their superiors in office trouble instead of support. In these interviews there was the utmost freedom of expression on each side. The evil results of indiscretion were pointed out as well as the mutual advantages to be gained by the exercise of good sense and sound judgment. Through the United States consular agent at Sfax a small lucrative business might be introduced between our country and the Tunisian Gered, the latter country furnishing dates and other fruits and receiving in return cotton goods and scores of household articles; each kind, however, should be furnished in very limited quantities to avoid glutting the market.

The Vice-Consuls of Sfax showed in a striking manner the results of their isolated condition. They were so intermarried as to seem to be of one family. They took but few newspapers, and those were exclusively the liberal journals of France and Italy. They took no magazines and had recourse to no

well assorted libraries whence to draw instruction. But the facts that were communicated to one of their number were usually communicated to all. Meetings and discussions were frequent. Their eagerness to gain information in regard to the great outside world was noteworthy. "Europe and America—what is going on there? Whither does the world tend? to civilization or to barbarism? to liberal government or to despotism?" Questions were asked with regard to different nations and their relations with each other. "Are the Grand Sultan and the Bey of Tunis on good terms? Does the Bey possess sovereign rights, or is he a subject of the Grand Sultan? Is any one of the great powers plotting to get possession of this country?" Numerous were the enquiries, to reply to any one of which might occupy an evening. These officials were eager to gain special information about American affairs. The civil war in the United States made that country known where it had scarcely been heard of before. To the civil war was attributed not only a great advance in the price of cotton goods, but a marked change in the commercial affairs of the world. "When will your country recover from the effects of its war, so that we can get our coffee, sugar and spices at former prices?" This last inquiry was regarded by them as reasonable and accordingly received a candid reply.

#### ANCIENT CARAVAN ROUTE.

Desiring to know more about the geography, history and antiquities of that region and especially about its various branches of industry, the Consul put questions in his turn and received replies, which, though not as full as desired, were appreciated. When important communications were kept up between Carthage and Cyrene, and Carthage and Egypt, the site of the present city of Sfax was on the highway between

these distant points. On this route the Philæni Brothers doubtless passed when they hastened to extend the territory of Carthage, even at the sacrifice of their lives; and by this point came Cato with the remnant of the Pompeian forces, vainly hoping to resist the aggressions of the imperial usurper Julius Cæsar. This line of communication was kept up till within the memory of men then living. Caravans used to pass regularly back and forth between Tunis and Alexandria via Tripoli, a distance of about fifteen hundred miles. Sfax was also on a favorite caravan route to Fezzan, Timbuctoo and other southern posts of trade so long as slaves were openly bought and sold, and ivory found its way to the northern market.

#### HARBOR AND COMMERCE OF SFAX.

Sfax owes much of its importance to its harbor, in which are always to be found vessels of various kinds and capacities. Its communication with Malta is regular and frequent and between it and some European ports small crafts are constantly plying. It is the port from which are exported to Malta dates, rich woolen fabrics and other products of the Gereed, brought hither by caravans, which return laden with cotton goods and other articles usually received in exchange. Its fisheries, olive groves and sponge beds, yield a handsome revenue to the government and furnish employment to numerous laborers. The Consul visited the arsenal, passed along the docks, and while in a delightful garden in the suburbs of the city, lent a willing ear to an account of quantities of luscious dates annually brought from the Gereed and exchanged for manufactured goods.

#### THE SYRTIS MINOR.

About sunset on their second day at Sfax the visitors were

escorted by the governor and his official suite to a convenient wharf, where, entering a small boat, they were rowed to a schooner awaiting them in deep water. This vessel had been gaudily decorated for their special pleasure, and on examining its cabin and furniture, compliments were paid to their host, in terms that were at a later period somewhat modified. They were soon in an airy and delightfully arranged cabin, sipping coffee and tasting some of the luxuries that had been bountifully supplied. But anon attacked by unseen enemies they returned to the deck in dismay. The wicked fleas, not content with their doings in the government house at El Gem, began their persecutions on shipboard, causing the Consul's friend such acute pains as usually attend the sting of bees. Though for two hours becalmed, a brisk breeze in their favor at length arose, giving them a quick passage. They were subjected, however, during a brief period, to a violent storm, drenching them with rain and spray and compelling them to offer oblations to Old Neptune, who, if we are rightly informed, once played in this gulf of Gabes (then called the Syrtis Minor), some infamous tricks, which Homer has recorded in his *Odyssey*.

#### ARRIVAL, SALUTE AND ESCORT.

As Gerba appeared in sight about three o'clock in the afternoon, the American flag was raised from the schooner to notify the governor of the island and the United States consular agent of its approach. These officials, together with their subordinates and a motley multitude, promptly repaired to the wharf, and a well-manned boat on which floated the Tunisian flag, was sent to take the passengers ashore. After exchanging salutations upon the wharf the visitors were shown horses and mules well caparisoned and were requested to take their choice. They chose mules and were scarcely