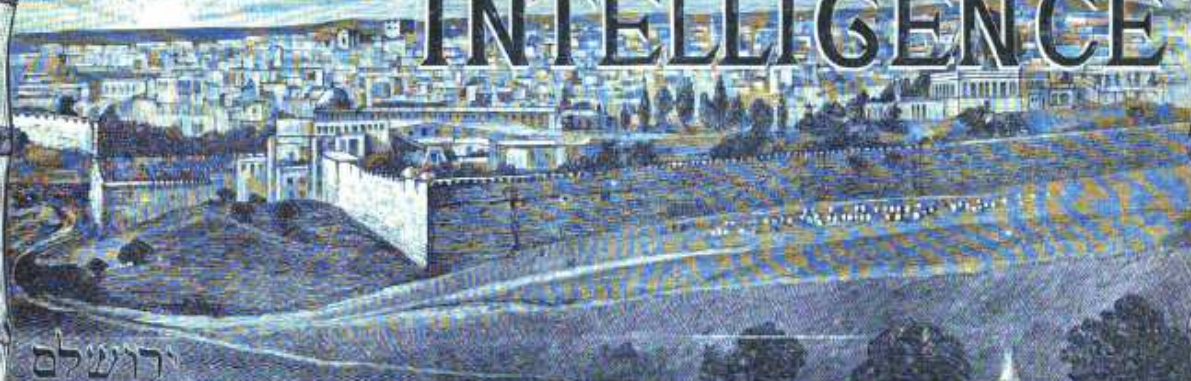


Vol. XII.

JEWISH MISSIONARY INTELLIGENCE



THE · MONTHLY · RECORD · OF · THE · LONDON · SOCIETY
FOR · PROMOTING · CHRISTIANITY · AMONGST · THE · JEWS



PALESTINE PLACE

FOR THE YEAR 1896,

*total 871.4
n.o.
v. 12
1896*

"I say then, Hath God cast away His people?
God forbid."—Romans xi. 1, *verse 3*

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NEW SERIES.

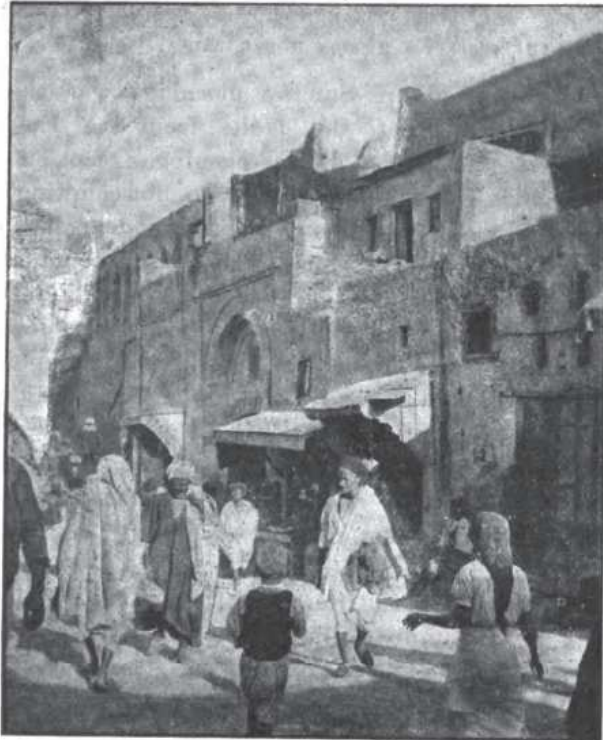


MOUNT ZION.

A MISSIONARY JOURNEY IN TUNIS.
(pp60-62)

THE example of Aquila and Priscilla was a good deal before my mind (writes the Rev. C. F. W. Flad), when undertaking this journey. Of them it is written, that together " They took him (Apollos) unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts xviii. 26). As I knew from experience, that my wife would ably assist me in this way, I realized a long cherished wish of Mrs. Flad, and took her with me on this journey, which lasted over three weeks.

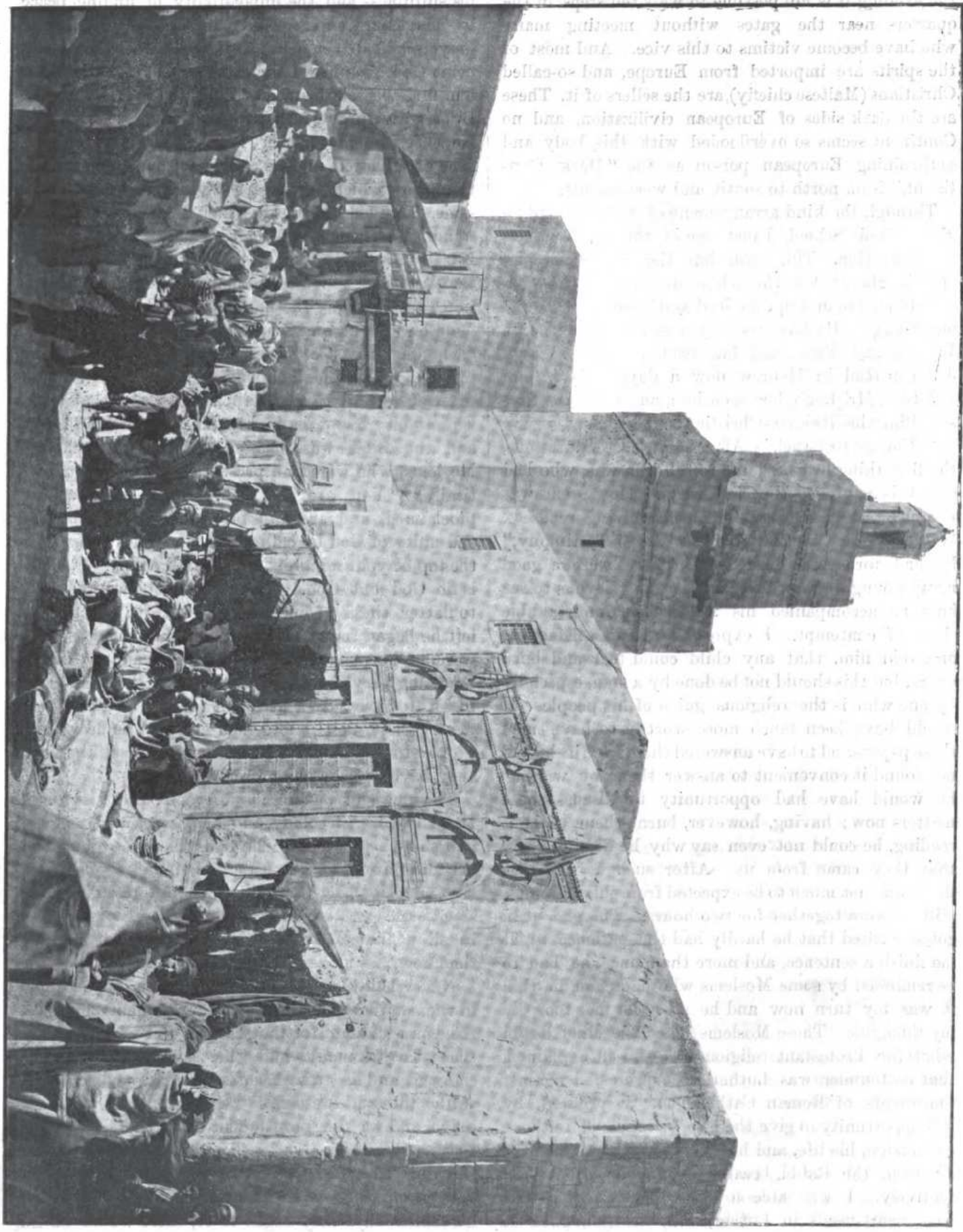
We had decided to avoid European and semi-European hotels and restaurants, consequently, we took with us camp-beds and folding-chairs, cooking utensils, &c. I was astonished at the compactness of our luggage, the heaviest part of which were the books for distribution, of which we took a good many.



A Street Scene in Sfax

At 3 o'clock in the morning of October 17th our steamer cast anchor before Sfax, and at five we entered a small sailing boat, which took one and a half hours to bring us to shore. On landing we were heartily welcomed by the Colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and by the son of Rabbi Berdah, father of our two undermasters in the Tunis Mission School. Several others too, who knew us at Tunis, gave us a bright welcome. We gladly made use of the Colporteur's kind offer of empty rooms in his apartment, and some hours after our humble furniture was making the place comfortable and homely enough. A Jewish furniture merchant, whom I have known for many years, sent us of his own accord four good chairs, so that we might be able to receive visitors.

Sfax is, for population, position, commerce, social and religious life, the second town in importance in this country. The natives are decidedly more energetic, alive, bright, and pushing than in other places. This may be due to a good deal of commercial movement caused by the sponge fisheries and export of halfa. At the time of the occupation of this country by the French troops (twelve years ago), Sfax was the only place which offered serious resistance. All the European residents had to Hoc, and some lived for almost a month on the men-of-war ; even the Jews left the city in a body, and a good many were sent over to Malta for a time, which is still held to be the great event of their lives. The French have placed an important garrison here and are busy building a new European Sfax outside the picturesque granulated walls of the city. A port is being made, and a railway will soon be run into the interior, Gafsa and Tebessa, where large amounts of phosphates have been found, which will probably be chiefly worked and exported by English companies. No doubt Sfax has a future, and in this future none are more interested and eager than the Jews, who form almost the fourth part of the population, that is between 8,000 and 9,000.



During the first few days I went about a good deal with the Colporteur, and had like him a bag full of Old Testament Scriptures. We sold a good many, and I had opportunities of getting known amongst the people, so much the more as these enquired from me the reason of my coming. I was very pleased to notice the friendliness of most Jews to the Colporteur, who told me they were his best customers. He is glad that he has so much access among them and is able to gain their confidence, because the French authorities have strictly forbidden him to sell amongst the Arabs. It is hardly credible that a European administration should make such hard and unjust restrictions, where there never has been any excitement or trouble. Strange it is, that whilst these authorities prohibit the spreading of the Word of life, they put no stop to the ever-increasing drunkenness and immorality! In Sfax, anyhow, it would be difficult to see much confirmation of the old reputation for sobriety among the Moslems, so often praised in temperance meetings. After 7 o'clock in (p63)the evening it is not possible to walk ten steps in the quarters near the gates without meeting many who have become victims to this vice. And most of the spirits are imported from Europe, and so-called Christians (Maltese chiefly), are the sellers of it. These are the dark sides of European civilization, and no Continent seems so overflowed with this body and soul-ruining European poison as the " Dark Continent," from north to south, and west to east.

Through the kind arrangement of a former pupil of our Tunis School, I met one of the chief Rabbis for discussion. This man has the reputation, not only in Sfax, but in the whole Regency, of being an enlightened man, unprejudiced and open to examine new things. He has travelled a good deal, has seen London and Paris, and has read about all that a Jew can read in Hebrew now a days. My former assistant, Mr. Laub, had seen him, and for some time sent him the Hebrew-Christian paper **עדות לישראל** "Testimony to Israel." After very polite salutations, the first thing he asked me to tell him was, who had sent this paper to him and why? How great was my surprise, when he told me, that,

having read six lines of the first number of the " Testimony," he had torn and burned it. There were a good many young Jews present, and it was grievous to see how he accompanied his words by unmistakable signs of contempt. I expressed my dissatisfaction, and told him, that any child could tear and burn paper, but this should not be done by a man, especially by one who is the religious guide of his people. It would have been much more worthy to have read these papers and to have answered them; and if he had not found it convenient to answer them by writing, he would have had opportunity to discuss these matters now; having, however, burnt them without reading, he could not even say why he did it, except that they came from us. After such a beginning there was not much to be expected from this meeting; still we were together for two hours. The poor man got so excited that he hardly had the patience to let me finish a sentence, and more than once he had to be reminded by some Moslems who had come in, that it was my turn now and he must let me, too, say my thoughts. These Moslems asked the chief Rabbi what the Protestant religion was, and he explained, that its founder was Luther, who protested against the errors of Roman Catholicism. I profited by this opportunity to give them some details of Luther's conversion, his life, and his work. At this moment all, even the Rabbi, became calm and listened attentively. I was able to show them that there were heart-needs in Luther, that the realization of his sinfulness and the impossibility of finding peace by his own efforts, fastings, pilgrimages, and prayers had driven him to despair, and that at this point God, who heard the sighing of his heart, made him find a Bible fastened to a chain in the convent. By reading prayerfully God's Word, especially the New Testament, Luther found peace and assurance of salvation, and he could not but speak of the things of which his heart was full. It was the same, I added, with all true Christian ministers. Coming back to my real object to shew that Jesus of Nazareth is truly the Messiah, I quoted as one of the strongest proofs the tremendous change that has taken place among the nations, and that millions of idolaters had become worshippers of the true, eternal God, and that the

Bible has since been translated into several hundred languages. Alas, that argument did not tell upon the Rabbi. He said that what Christianity had done for the making known of God and the Bible was nothing, and turning to the Moslems, who were still present, he exclaimed pathetically, "You are the people who have chiefly proclaimed, and are still proclaiming, the existence and unity of God by calling out five times a day from the top of your minarets, 'La Illah il Allah!' There is no God but God." That the Rabbi wanted only to flatter these people was evident, for when they left he began to say what a good thing it was they were no longer the masters of this country. And, becoming very polite again, he said. " Please forgive me if I have got a little bit too hot, I respect you nevertheless, and I beg you hi the name of my people to thank the English people for all the good they have done to our nation."

The news of our discussion soon spread through the whole Jewish colony, and many were now reserved and short. Mrs. Flad, who had previously found an entrance into several houses, and sitting down beside the women had been able to tell them Gospel stories and parables with explanations, was now told in all politeness by the majority that they had no time now.

Nevertheless, we still found many an opportunity in the shops and bazaars. The statement that we, too, were waiting for the Messiah to come a second time startled many, and some said, " Ah, then we can wait and see, whether Jesus whom you expect is really the true Messiah !" " But He will

come as judge, and for the punishment of all those who wilfully refuse His salvation," was my reply. In one shop the chief topic was Anti-Semitism ; in another, a Jew said, " If all Christians were what the New Testament says they ought to be, there would be no more Jews left!" Another remarked, " p63 Christianity is only 1800 years old, and already we see that many, if not most, of its professors desert it, what could then induce us to accept it ?" Alas, we did not meet with even one truly thirsting soul! There may be some nevertheless. What, after all, are ten days in such a large place! We were able to leave some tracts here and there; but I did not find one eager to read the Hebrew New Testament, besides they would not accept it.

Rabbi Berdah, formerly teacher of Hebrew in our Schools, and whose two sons are now undermasters, received us very cordially, and invited us to his Sabbath dinner. We appreciated his attention. He complained of the fanaticism of the people and their slavish submission to the rabbis. Exemplifying his statement, and pointing to a burning lamp before us, said, " Suppose they all saw this burning lamp, and the rabbi said, ' This is a board, ' they would all repeat it, although they saw the contrary! " We have since been much praying for this dear old affectionate venerable-looking man, who wept when he took leave of us. I had one more opportunity of pointing him to Christ, and he promised to read again the Hebrew New Testament which I gave him six years ago.

(To be continued.)

Jewish Missionary intelligence, 1896

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