

ALEXIS TROUVÉ

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To the Desert
Au Désert



Le désert! — L'infini. — Rien. — Des milliers de lieues
Dont l'œil ne voit jamais que ce qu'il en peut voir ;
Un horizon borné, lignes d'or que le soir
Change en longues lignes bleues.

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MOULINS

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From Tunis. – Oriental Night. – Fanfare on board – Cape Bon . – Sousse – Leave for Sfax. – The arrival in the channel. – The Triumphal way. – Magical glimpse.

On April 21, at eleven o'clock, a motionless sea and a night such as we only see in these Eastern countries, a soft and languorous night, sprinkled with stars, the halo of the lunar disk sparkles pale gold, the Maréchal-Bugeaud weighed anchor and was heading for Sousse to the strains of martial music, that of the 4th Zouaves, on board for the festival in Sfax.

Oh! this music on this sea and under this sky, in the calm of this captivating night! - What exquisite sensations it has brought us! The passage of Cape Bon, probably so called [44] because it is generally bad, took place in excellent conditions, and the next day at nine o'clock in the morning, we anchored in the harbor of Sousse.

Sousse still has no port, but we are working to build one for it, which the Resident hopes to inaugurate in two years, which would delight me because I might have another opportunity to revisit one of the cities that charmed me most during my trip to Tunisia. It is on the large Mahones, drawn by powerful tugboats, that we went ashore. As soon as we had landed, I ran to the telegraph to send to an enthusiastic dispatch to the Havas agency which concluded: "The weather is superb, and from the harbour we admire the charming little town of Sousse, all decked out and bathed in sunlight, sprawling in a truly enchanting setting. The effect is startling. But what description will be equal to that made by Guy de Maupassant? "Here is Sousse," he said. "I've already seen that city! Yes, yes, I had this bright vision already, in my youth, in college, when I learned about the Crusades in Burette's History of France. Oh! I've known [45] it for a long time! It is full of Saracens, behind the long crenellated wall so high, so slender, with towers far apart, rounded doors and men in turbans lurking at its feet. Oh! this wall, it is just as in the comic book pictures, so regular and so clean that one would think it a cardboard cut out. It's pretty, bold and exhilarating! Just to see Sousse, this long trip is worthwhile. God! the love of this wall, to follow it to the sea, because cars can not enter the erratic narrow streets of this city of the past. And without end, it begins again, in the manner of a rosary in which each grain is a niche, and each decade a turret, enclosing their dazzling circle, as in a crown of white paper, the city locked in its embrace, and where the plastered houses arise in tiers between the bottom wall, bathed in the water, and the upper wall profiled against the sky...

"Here and there, a large palm puts its head between the houses and spreads its green branches above their plain white.

"Then, when the moon rises, it becomes a froth of silver rolling into the sea, a prodigious poet's dream realized, the unlikely apparition of a fantastic city which mounts a light into the firmament." [46] I shall add nothing to this eulogy which Sousse has merited, that Maupassant so appreciated and described so well.

The same evening, we headed to Sfax, and the next day, April 23 at six o'clock in the morning, after a superb passage in the grave splendor and the great silence of a wonderful African night, we saw from out at sea, In the gray mist of the sunrise, a long white line, initially indistinct, though a little more pronounced toward the center, which seemed to rise out of the waves. Then this line gradually deepened, as we advanced, and Sfax appeared before us in its disturbing beauty, lying lazily on the edge of the sea, pleasantly framed in greenery, of various lights and shades.

All the fishing boats of the coast and islands, very picturesquely decked, haphazardly, their sails furled, awaited the *Maréchal Bugeaud*, arranged in two lines several miles in extent, forming a triumphal way such as a victorious fleet never had, even in the most glorious days of Rome or Athens.

When the ship carrying the ministers had entered the channel, the thousands of natives who rode the boats indulged in enthusiastic demonstrations, waving the banners of the mosques with exaggerated [47] gestures, shouting, singing, rapping lustily on their drums and blowing through their fifes and *noubas*.

It was amidst the crackling of gunfire that the *Maréchal Bugeaud* reached the port while the cannon thundered in the distance.

It is impossible to describe the picturesque and imposing splendour of our arrival in Sfax.

A huge crowd had gathered on the docks where garlands of lanterns, balloons and colored glass were swaying, surrounded by a profusion of banners and draped tricolors.

And to complete this magic tableau, military bands, Arab horsemen in white *burnous*, mounted on spirited steeds, spahis under arms, the gendarmes of the Bey severe in their sky blue suit, native officials, officers all decked up, gesticulating, giving orders ... how to render this extraordinary show, so full of impressive reality! Exaggerated enthusiasm, we will say perhaps; listen to Mr. Jacques Raymond, of *Le Soir*: "Oh! that arrival in Sfax, the shimmering ripples of the blue sea in the bright morning sun, with, on both sides of the newly dug channel, the picturesque rows [48] of boats, arranged in line, richly decorated in a whole spectrum of colors, and in the background the city, lying, a white belt set in deep

olive green! ... "Listen again to my brother in the Parliament, Mr. Gustave Babin: "We go from enchantment to enchantment, in a continual delight, an uninterrupted charm, without having to anticipate what a spectacle of light and beauty tomorrow may bring, after the excitement of today, we cry again in admiration; denying that it is possible to imagine a joy more acute or subtle than the present, hesitating to compare the present to the vision already experienced. Yet I believe that in our memories, the memory of our arrival in Sfax will remain vivid and lasting amongst all the memories of this delightful tour." Sfax, the old bulwark of resistance to French influence, the last refuge of Ali Ben Khalifa, who forced us to significantly suppress it by bombardment in 1881 (do we still remember this in France? .. .) is today an active and industrious city of more than twenty thousand inhabitants, largely open to our economic dominance, which is more than many other parts of the Regency, entered energetically [49] into the process of agricultural and commercial development.

It is from Sfax that the sponges come.

This city, like Sousse and indeed all the other cities of Tunisia, is surrounded by a remarkable wall. It seems that these ramparts of African cities have been originally erected to protect their inhabitants from marauding raids, or attacks on troops in the desert. At night, they would close the doors and the people could sleep peacefully.

It is hardly necessary to add that since the French occupation, there is no longer any such attempt.

[51]

In traveling to the "Difle" .- Abandoned! - A mule .- On the plateau of the desert - Cactus hedges .- Living Tableaux. - In fear of slavery. - How many sheep! - Improvised cave. – Bread roasted by the sun. - Facing our objective .- The mistake of a friend. - How to make the camel kneel. - No water for the "Rumi"

At ten o'clock in the morning the caravan was leaving Sfax to go to the olive grove where a hearty "*diffa*" was offered to guests of the Residence.

A "*diffa*" is simply a lunch on the grass, or more exactly on the sand, for, as should be expected, grass is rarely found in the desert.

Cars, horses, mules and [52] donkeys had been placed at our disposal to transport us to the place of rendezvous located twenty kilometers from Sfax. As a precaution, I sat in a car, the Arabian horse inspiring in me some concern, despite my sympathy for it, and the mule and the donkey do not do much for me in terms of riding.

Many of my colleagues, however, gave preference to this mode of locomotion.

The road from Sfax to the forest, if one can call it a forest, is passable for a journey of seven miles; the departure takes place in excellent conditions, ministers and official persons occupying, as reasonable, the leading cars, guests coming next in the order specified by protocol, which never loses its rights, even in the land of the protectorate.

Magnificent Arab horsemen, mounted on coquettish horses, the tip of their tails reddened with henna, beautiful in their trappings of velvet and gold, opened and closed the procession, while others pranced beside us, so that it was in a blinding swirl of dust that we made the first part of our journey.

But we did not go very far.

Leaving the sunken road, our cars found themselves on a very rough and sandy road, [53] where the wheels sank to the hub, and soon, our animals, poorly led by a Maltese driver without experience, failed us. Out of twenty-three cars, ours was the eleventh at the start, according to the established order, but it did not retain its rank long, despite the protocol. Indeed, we were not one third of the way before we found ourselves dead last, after seeing unfolding before our sad eyes the entire tail of the caravan.

At this point, I almost regretted not having chosen a horse or a mule, but I celebrate later, despite all my disappointments.

Twenty times, we were obliged to descend to lighten our vehicle and allow our unfortunate to move a few steps. But soon that is not enough, it was necessary to walk and push the wheels of the car, the hot iron cooking our hands.

We were drenched, exhausted and somewhat discouraged. Should it stay there, wait for a rescue, or detach someone to go in search of reinforcements in case our absence had not been noticed, which was a concern since the caravan consisted of over two hundred people? [54] The latter solution prevailed, and I started as a scout with Mme X ..., the wife of an editor of the Echo of Paris, who had been foolish enough to accompany us in this arduous trip.

We had already walked for a few moments when we arrived in front of a village inhabited by a band of desert nomads.

When they saw us, they all rushed out to meet us, gesticulating and jabbering extreme rapidly and with such an attitude, that we could not repress a hint of fear, but quite unjustified, because we learned on our return that the natives with almost black curly hair and skin with tattoos on the face and nose, only wanted to give us a moment of hospitality in their tents, and to offer us a refreshment we would have accepted with the more eagerness, since we had a dry throat.

I noticed, among the troupe, a wonderful young girl of fifteen or sixteen, with a queenly demeanor and lines of remarkable purity.

She had copper bracelets around the ankles and wrists, with, on the face and nose, the required tattoos. On our return, she followed our car for a long time to get some *sous* [55] which we threw her and which she hastened to cram into her mouth, as indeed do all the young indigenous Arabs or others of these lands.

We continued on the dusty road under the burning sun, wondering when our race would end, when all of a sudden, I saw a few kilometers away, atop a small hill in the direction where the caravan had gone, a band of Arab horsemen coming towards us in a furious gallop.

The bunting fluttered in the wind, the horses seemed to skim the ground their pace was so fast. It was probably the help we had so impatiently awaited coming forward to welcome us finally...

The tornado approaches, grows larger. Now, we distinguish some weapons, rifles across the saddles; I hear savage cries which panic the wild horses and thrill us.

It is an avalanche that rushes at us, but a brief command sounds, and riders stopped short, in a stunning movement. For a second, we face each other without saying a word, then the Arabs dismounted and advanced on us staring into our eyes.

I confess that at that moment, I felt a new tremor...

[56] But I soon realized that there was nothing to fear from these men, surely sent our way by ministers or by the resident general.

With the help of a pantomime that I tried to make it as expressive as possible, I made them understand that the car in search of which they had doubtless been sent, was mired in the sand a few miles back.

Without opening their mouths, they mount their horses again and galloped off in your direction indicated.

Half an hour later, our car, pulled, pushed by the Arabs, rejoined us. But we had barely taken our place on the burning leather cushions when a new stop occurred, despite the "harrri, harrri borrra!" of the natives, and "hu-hop-harri!" from our Maltese coachman. Our animals, exhausted, worn out, no longer wanted to wear a collar.

What an amount of "harris-borrra" I heard that day! ...

Finally, I abandoned the car and climbed onto a mule without saddle or stirrups, that an Arab had put at my disposal, and that is how I managed to gain, by steps, the plateau on which we had organized the "*diffa*".

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when I made [57] my entrance into the tent – a lackluster entrance, alas! The car finally came too, bringing my unfortunate companions, now unrecognizable under the thick layer of gray dust which they were covered! ...

As I said earlier, the road from Sfax to this plateau, ends after a length of only seven kilometers. The rest is a poor track, almost impassable whatever the season.

In the vicinity of Sfax, the streets and roads are lined with rows of giant cacti. It is always cactus hedges that separate the fields in the countryside. Finally, the paths that lead from the plains to the road are shaded by magnificent species of this plant, whose leaves reach seven or eight meters in height, and form pale green domes with a wonderful effect.

Upon our passage, native children came to "see the motorcade", but not daring to approach for fear of being caught and taken into slavery, showing their pretty little faces between [days] left in the cactus leaves, which made them look charming, others let them see a part of their [58] body covered with brightly colored fabrics that graced the monotonous gray landscape with a quite picturesque touch.

The "olive grove" is in fact a vast expanse of fields, well cultivated, the reddish soil drying in the sun and the olive trees of great beauty, regularly spaced twenty-five meters apart in all directions.

But the more we advance, the smaller these trees become, the plain becomes more arid and the desert leaves very little, desert rocks and grasses are weak to start with, and then, desert sand on which the plow is never used.

I noticed, on the road itself, a fountain where the camels drink while returning from their work and then, from place to place, to the left and right of the route, cemeteries of uniform Muslim graves with no markings and no monuments; cisterns, huge squares of plaster, surrounded by a small masonry wall, where the concave surface directs the rainwater to a central hole. I saw camels plowing, other walking, with live sheep in baskets on their backs! It was impossible to know why these gentle beasts were brought together by these couriers from the desert. Perhaps again because the heat [59] was more than fifty degrees that day, and they would have been unable to make the long journey that they probably had to do done.

But back to our "*diffa*".

A camel hair tent, similar to all *douars* except in its dimensions, is erected on the vast plateau where the caravan meetst. All around the tent, in an indescribable jumble of cars, saddles and items of all kinds, agitated, a multitude of Arabs coming and going in their white *burnous*. Most are squatting amongst resting camels, exhausted horses and mules which are not even give a drop of water, while from all sides, the eye beholds the desert in its wild and wonderful nakedness! But no more than protocol, the stomach loses its rights. Unfortunately, I once again had the experience that latecomers are always wrong, because I sat down, exhausted and starving, at a nearly empty table, on a broken basket that served for a chair.

I would say straight away how important a role that improvised seat played towards the end of the "*diffa*", where the sheep, as we shall see, were in abundance.

[60] How many sheep, good God! such sheep! I would have preferred to say, as a famous marshal one said "only water! only water," but only a drop remained and we put suffered cruelly.

Here is the menu, as it was served: A plate of "*chekchouka*", which is mutton with eggs, tomatoes and lots of pepper, a lot; "*el ham bin Kabbara*", or mutton with capers, the inevitable "*couscous*", with pieces of mutton, the "*hallouch mechouia*", or roast mutton at the end of a spear, which is served as is, and which you eat with your fingers, off the spit. There are only good for the skin and naturally everyone argues about it. It's the only dish which I touched, since I never even saw the others, alas! I tried hard to catch myself some pastries; but eating honey cakes, with rose water, with a lot of things that may seem good to the Arabs, but that turn the stomach, for Europeans, when we try to taste it.

Fortunately there were fine wines. Oh! these wines, what subtlety of flavor! what a delicious fragrance! They saved the situation, but unfortunately they were boiling ...

[61] Sixteen bottles were reserved for our table, eight red and eight Champagne. Very cleverly, my dear colleague P. V. ..., former chief of staff of the Minister of Education, by stealing four of each kind, which are concealed in the basket on which I sat, and we did feast while the neighboring glasses were empty.

It was not without complaint from the comrades, about the scarcity of the drink so dear to Bacchus, but nobody suspected the "detour," for which I had some responsibility, and we amused ourselves greatly.

One detail that struck me, and which gives an idea of how hot it was under our tent at lunchtime: the bread was brittle as if it had been roasted by the fire of a brazier! The last glass of Champagne emptied, coffee drunk, or wandered for a moment afar (!) from the vast tent of fragrant lavender, orange blossom and wild geraniums, and some lay down on the soft Arab rugs that decorated the tent, while others ventured out to see from afar the plain smoking in the torpor of midday.

Naturally, cameras were again brought out, and everyone passed the before objective, on the back of a camel, [62] on a mule, or just squatting or standing in groups, in the most extraordinary poses, with, as a backdrop, the "*diffa*" tent with its large black stripes, or the vastness of the desert on the horizon where the gigantic silhouettes of Arabs stood with their horses.

About photography, I forgot to mention a funny incident that occurred on board the *Bugeaud* during the voyage from Tunis to Sfax, and at which we cheered a lot: One of my colleagues had borrowed photographic plates from his friend M. A... this .. M.A... who greatly resembles, in body size, the Minister of Justice.

It was towards evening, Mr. Darlan was leaning on the railing of the *Bugeaud*, looking toward the blue water and the foam produced by the silver bow of the ship, when our colleague approached him, and thinking him to be M. A...., he said, clapping him on the shoulder: "Hey! Well, old chap, you know, your plates are worthless." "Hey! Well, my friend, I am very sorry!" replied M. Darlan with a big laugh, turning ... and everyone chimed in with the minister.

Few people know without doubt what method the natives employ to make [63] their camels kneel or lie down. This method is very simple: they pull their tail, and the good beasts immediately fall on their knees, allowing them to mount or load them, as the case may be. It is on the plateau of the desert that I noticed this for the first time.

We left the "defamation" at four o'clock in the evening to go to Sfax. The heat was still strong, but still much more bearable than coming. To say how many times our car got stuck again is impossible, but a crowd of Arabs was with us, and whenever the horses stopped, they rushed to the wheels with deafening shouts and wild gestures, raised the vehicle and in an instant resumed the journey, soon interrupted, alas! by a new obstacle.

Details to note: the explorer Blanc, to whom the spices at lunch gave a burning thirst, asked for some water from an old Arab woman he met on the road, crouching in the entrance of her tent. - "By God, master of the world, I have none! " she replied emphatically, placing her hand over her heart. However, she lied, the wicked witch, because the Arabs still have water in their tank or in their wells at this time of year, but we did not insist.

[64] This is a trait characteristic of the sentiments generally professed by the natives towards us, for we must not consider this as an exception that I have mentioned above. At seven, everyone was back aboard the *Marshal Bugeaud*, but it was easy to recognize those who made the trip on horseback or mule, as their approach was something painful and hesitant.

I know, indeed, whose sufferings were intolerable after this journey of fifty kilometers under a burning sun, perched on very wide Arab stools, which held their legs in a position that only they could call inconvenient.

VII

Ominous words – A “jettatore”^{} on board. - Negligence of the Police. –
An attempted anarchist. - Catastrophe avoided. - The news embargo. -
My secret meetings with ministers. - The instruction is to be silent.*

Here comes an incident of exceptional significance, an incident on which the press has been absolutely silent, except for one newspaper, which did indeed say only that it was appropriate to deceive the public in case the fact had been revealed by some indiscreet journal

It is worth being told: Leaving Tunis aboard the *Marshal Bugeaud*, I was not a little surprised to hear these words whispered to Poreille by the assistant resident General: "It seems that the unfortunate will happen before we reach Sousse; they say [66] that there is actually a "jettatore" amongst us. > As well you might think, I was deeply intrigued by this bit of conversation, to which the resident merely responded with a shrug of the shoulders, but I could catch on his face a worry which struck me seriously.

However, we arrived in Sousse without the fatal prediction occurring, and when we landed in Sfax, two days later, I had completely forgotten about the prophecy of doom.

I remember it only on the evening of the 23rd, during the official dinner aboard *Bugeaud*, after our return from the "*diffa*".

The ministers and their guests had just sat at the table when I noticed some to-ing and fro-ing, mysterious confabulations confirming my suspicions and reviving my fears of days before.

Certainly something serious was going on, but what? Soon a double cordon of troops drew up on the platform. Some soldiers, with fixed bayonets, were placed on the bridge of the ship, to which access was forbidden for anyone not equipped with a foreign pass, or an official invitation.

[67] Clearly, this must be disturbing, but I still did not know what it was.

It was not until the next morning that I learned of it, after all danger was averted.

Because we had actually risked a serious danger, as we will see: In Tunis, an individual whom nobody knew, had offered to work on the *Marshal Bugeaud* as an assistant cook, and this individual had been embarked for the crossing from Tunis to Sfax and back.

* A *jettatore* seems to be the equivalent to the English "jinx," i.e. someone who brings misfortune.

However, the individual in question was none other than the brother of an anarchist executed in Place de La Roquette, three years ago, for a attempted attack in Paris, and of which the repercussion was enormous.

During our trip to Tunisia, this individual was the acknowledged leader of the anarchist party in the Regency.

We knew, but we cared little, and the residence had not thought it necessary to take special measures for the arrival of three ministers in Tunisia.

The first warnings came from Paris.

But when they arrived in Tunis, we had been at sea for a long time .. with the anarchist aboard the *Bugeaud*.

[68] The information from the Sûreté in Paris was immediately relayed from Tunis to the police in Sousse, where the *Bugeaud* would be early in the morning the next day.

On the arrival of the ship, the anarchist was "disembarked" with a discretion which awoke no suspicions, either among the crew or the passengers.

But, incredibly, the police, though warned of his intentions, let him loose! which allowed him to return on board during the day, in disguise, in order to get hired again in order to get to Sfax, where the attack was likely to be perpetrated.

Recognized, he was removed, without consideration of the other projects that were meditated...

The *Marshal Bugeaud* leaving Sousse in the evening, it was assumed that there was nothing to fear from the scoundrel.

They were wrong.

In Sfax, we found the anarchist, who was prowling the docks.

Again, merely the "tail", but the "tailing" was so well organized that we lost sight of him during part of the day.

He was arrested that evening, as he set foot on the boat to put his criminal plans into execution.

[69] It was this that caused the incident that I reported earlier, and that the company was made responsible for the surveillance of the *Marshal Bugeaud*.

Everyone knew the next day we had been two fingers from a catastrophe, but the secret had been well kept.

Nevertheless, I wanted to report the fact to the *Havas Agency* a by a dispatch which presented it very concisely.

But I had reckoned without the veto of the resident, who had taken steps to stop all telegrams referring to the attempt from we had narrowly escaped being victims.

Here, moreover, is the text of the telegram that I deposited at a telegraph office in Sfax on the morning of April 24. We will see that this telegram was hardly subversive:

"We record, without prejudice, rumors of an attack that was only foiled thanks to the vigilant assistant resident. The ministers request for silence to avoid disturbing the festivals the brilliance of which exceeds all expectations. They do not want us to communicate any information; but let us hold a reliable source that all danger is removed. I will not send this information to Algiers, leaving you the initiative."

This telegram was immediately sent to the Resident-General, Mr. Revoit, who [70] called me to ask me to withdraw it.

Naturally, I made objections, and a lengthy discussion ensued on this issue between the Minister of Justice, Mr. Revoit and myself.

M. Darlan was in favor of the publication of my telegram "with some slight modifications in the wording" but the contrary advice of the resident prevailed.

So the only thing left was for me execute this, which I did in very bad grace, one can believe without difficulty.

Did I not fear, in fact, that one of my colleagues, aware of these things, would not telegraph the news to his journal? What would then be my situation, and that of the *Agency*?

I would be told that the scrutiny of the telegrams in the office of Sfax, should deprive me of any apprehension.

But for news of this significance, could this fellow not have taken himself to either Sousse or Gabes, and send it at an office where he would have nothing to fear from the censorship of the resident? This event did not happen, fortunately, and the anarchistic attempt in Sfax was not broadcasted.

As for its author, I am ignorant of what was done about it and what became of him.

VIII

*The official day. – This is the "Sirocco". - "See Havas!" - Fantasia .- The Caïd –
Leaving Sfax. - In view of Kerkennah. - Back in Sousse.*

APRIL twenty-fourth! This is the big day, the official day that includes the inauguration of the port, the speeches, the presentation of decorations, the laying of the first stone of the line from Sfax to Gafsa, the fantasia, punch and banquets.

But it is also the day the sirocco! Ah! the sirocco!

It blows from the morning with extreme violence; of the trophies of flags, of the strings of colored glasses prepared for the illuminations, of the lanterns that were swaying so gracefully yesterday on large [72] poles planted in the harbor and the avenues, there is nothing left now. All these sadly litter the ground, swept by fierce gusts which nothing can resist.

If only with these bursts we got a little freshness! But the opposite is happening, because the sirocco only blows that fire, at the same time as it raises huge clouds of burning sand, fine sand, impalpable, that stings you and blinds you, penetrates the pores, rushes into the ears, nostrils, dries in the throat.

God! how I have suffered during this terrible day, with my "slap" on the head, and my coat on my back! I have suffered, and in what a state was my clothing, by the evening! What was so much more painful was that all my colleagues refrained from telegraphing their newspapers, or rather, I'm wrong: they telegraphed them, but just two words: "See Havas" So that the entire responsibility of the service fell on me.

I will remember Sfax! About three o'clock, the fantasia took place, which allowed us to once again admire the energetic grace and flexible bearing of the Arab horsemen, and beautiful clothes, sun-drenched with beautiful sweeping gestures, and the fluttering[73] draperies prepared as a feast for the eyes. "This took place," - wrote Gustave Babin, whose descriptions will be reproduced in their entirety, as they are gripping with reality in their charming style – "it took place on a large polygon alongside the sea, almost under the ramparts at the peaks of which, the light silhouetted against a sky of dull silver, with veiled women, children in rags watching. The beautiful Centaurs went past one by one or half leaning against each other, and their *gandouras* and the trappings of their horses floating behind them like a meteor's hair. A furious gallop, a flash of color in a cloud of dust, gunfire and a large movement of the bare arm, flinging the weapon over the shoulder; and then we saw the rider return to the pace of his mount, flexible steps, like a rhythmic dance; at the end of the vast plain, he was off again and turning around, a gold

ring trembling in his ear. And I have never understood like that day, before this orgy of color and light, how great a painter was Eugène Delacroix. All glory paled before his."

On the evening of that day, the last of our stay in Sfax, we were in a band walking through the streets of the city, when [74] one of us expressed the idea of asking the Caïd to put some police at our disposal to visit certain areas less accessible to foreigners at that time of night.

It was simply to see some Moorish cafes where you can practice belly dancing, and nothing more, but that was not enough, it appears, to some of my colleagues, who wanted to make some more "natural" studies.

To this somewhat bold request, and presented in terms a little crude, the Caïd grimaced. He nevertheless gave us the men requested, but I left thinking what opinion he must have had of the Parisian press! The day after this escapade at eight forty in the morning, after an official *Te Deum* sung in the cathedral of Sfax, the *Marshal Bugeaud*, weighed anchor and returned to Sousse in magnificent weather and good seas.

Soon, the charming town appeared only as a long white line, barely emerging from the water's dark gulf, and finally, fading completely behind the horizon ...

We pass in sight of Kerkennah, which can be seen as a little spot on the blue water. It was to those islands that, a long time [75] ago, adulterous women and concubines with formidable charms were deported! But as with Sfax, the Kerkennahs are just a memory ...

At seven o'clock in the evening we arrived in Sousse harbor after a superb crossing, and I went ashore immediately, aboard a "mahone" to send my mails to the *Agency*.

But in the evening the sea became very rough, and the return to the ship was most difficult.