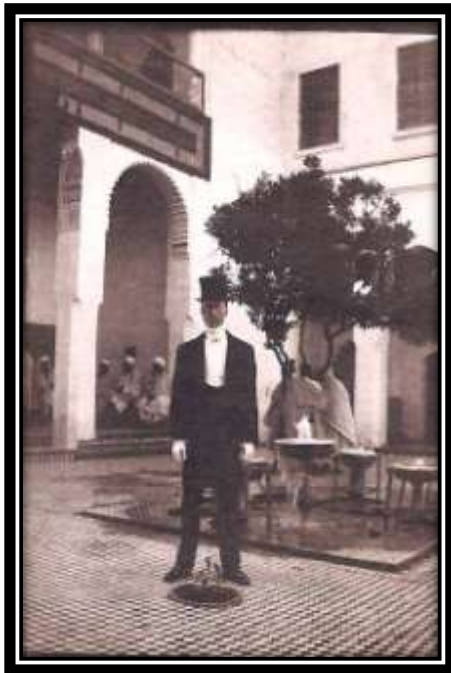


## THE FIRST AMERICAN MISSION TO FEZ

By Sidney J. Repplier, M.D.

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As a result of the important part taken by the United States in the Algeciras Conference through its two members, Mr. White, at that time Ambassador to Italy, and Mr. Gummeré, Minister to Morocco, this government decided to inaugurate closer diplomatic relations with the government of Morocco. For this purpose Mr. Gummeré was instructed, in the Autumn of 1906, to present his credentials in person to the Sultan, to enter into certain negotiations with the Makhzen (palace authorities) and to press the various claims of American citizens against the Sultan's subjects.



This was the reason for the first American Mission to Fez.

The representatives of the different foreign Governments live in Tangier on the sea coast, and all diplomatic relations are carried on through the Sultan's Lieutenant. In order to communicate directly with His Majesty, he must be visited in whichever of the two capitals he is then holding Court. The present Sultan – perhaps I should say, the late Sultan, for Mulai Abd al-Aziz has been successfully deposed by the Pretender, Mulai Hafid – favored Fez as a residence rather than Morocco City or Marrakesh, as the Moors term it.

The task of a Foreign Minister, who must see the Sultan himself, is to proceed to the city in which the Monarch is at that time dwelling. The word "task" may sound at first thought ill-advised, but to anyone who has seen the ins and outs of such an undertaking, it commends itself as most appropriate. It is especially so when applied to the first American Mission. The European Governments have been making these pilgrimages for a number of years and not only have they the advantage of past experiences, but they have at their disposal the complete and comprehensive paraphernalia used by former Missions. It verges

on the ridiculous that in this day and generation, a journey involving a trip of only one hundred and fifty miles in each direction and a lapse of time of three months, must be provided for almost as if one were setting out to discover the Pole. Yet such is the case in Morocco today. It is not essential to go into details concerning the exact extent and character of the preparations necessary. Suffice it to say that it required on Mr. Gummeré's part months of unremitting work and thought.

The personnel of the Mission were as follows:

The Honorable Samuel E. Gummeré, Envoy Extra-ordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Morocco; Captain J. G. Fremont, Naval Attaché; Captain W. S. Guignard, Military Attaché; William O'D. Iselin, Esq., Private Secretary; Albert J. Nathan, Esq., Interpreter; and the writer, Physician. Miss Gummeré accompanied her brother and acted as hostess to the guests entertained during the stay in Fez. In addition there were Staff-Sergeant Mathews of the Royal Engineers, stationed at Gibraltar, who was given a leave of absence and permission to join the Mission; Abrinez, Dragoman to the Legation; Bennetuile, an American citizen of Tangier; Sid. Thami Slawi, a Moorish gentleman under American protection, acting as American Agent at El K'sar; his ten-year-old son Hamedo; and last but not least, Ben Chimol, the Chef. This latter personage, upon whom so much of our comfort depended, had spent

several years in this Country at resorts along the Maine Coast and both spoke and understood English. He presented a very picturesque appearance with his two hundred pounds of avoirdupois, astride a mule, further decorated by panniers containing his pots and pans, and the whole surmounted by a white cotton umbrella. Beside the personal servants and those employed to pitch the tents, tend to the baggage and provisions, and look after the horses, an escort of fifty Moorish Soldiers was provided by order of the Sultan. This brought the total strength of the Caravan close to two hundred and fifty. It was also commanded of each Kaid or Governor of the different provinces through which we passed to furnish an additional escort of about thirty men, whose duty it was to accompany us through the district and to stand guard at night.

The matter of fresh provisions was in the hands of an Amin appointed by the Government to accompany us. He bought from the villagers meat, vegetables, fruit, milk, and charcoal. Unless this official possessed more probity than is usual in others of his race, he profited hugely by these transactions. Backed up as he was by the military escort, his requests became commands, and the peasant was lucky who received adequate compensation for his goods.

We left Tangier on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1906, the date which had been determined on by Mr. Gummeré several months before. It occasioned surprise and admiration among the European residents of Tangier who are accustomed to Moorish delays to see us start on the day agreed upon. We were accompanied for several hours on our way by representatives of most of the other Embassies and by members of the European Colony. At the borders of the city the escort provided by the Governor of Tangier handed us over to the escort of the Kaid of the adjoining province and departed amid a salute from their guns. For the next two days and nights we were under the protection of the bandit Rais Uli, the Kaid of the District which had been given him as part of his price demanded for the ransom of Mr. Perdicaris. For diplomatic reasons, Rais Uli did not appear in person, but delegated the command to his Halifa or Lieutenant.

Our first camp was at Kahawi, which we reached about sunset. The length of our daily marches was dependent to a great extent upon our finding a suitable camping place with water. At that season of the year, after the long, hot Summer, most of the streams and water-holes are dried up so that the procuring of water becomes a weighty matter. We boiled and filtered all the water used for drinking, cooking and washing. The Moors considered this absolutely superfluous and refused to avail themselves of the privilege of using it. Generations of drinking such polluted liquid must have bred an immunity to the various diseases communicated in this way, for it seemed to have no ill effects.

Our second day's march brought us to the Red Hills, called in Moorish, Akaba Hamara, which we crossed. This is the only considerable range of hills in Morocco between Fez and the Coast. It is a barren spur with scarcely any vegetation and formed apparently of reddish shale, from whence it derives its name. After crossing the flat, table-like top and descending on the other side. We came to the Wad el Hasheef, a tidal river which empties into the sea, west of Tangier. The tide being out, we crossed without difficulty and camped on the other side. While there we saw great numbers of camels and donkeys composing other caravans, waiting for the tide to go out sufficiently to allow them to cross. Among the others was a Jew with his wife, children and household goods who had been compelled by the authorities to fly from Morocco City and had been thirty-five days on the road. Our afternoon's march brought us finally to Char Djedid, where we found camp pitched.

The weather at this time of year was still very warm. The sun beat down mercilessly from a cloudless sky and the way was absolutely without shade. Flies in great numbers settled on our white helmets and on our shoulders and returned unconcernedly each time they were brushed away. Our day's march began at eight o'clock each morning and we rode usually till about eleven, depending on the distance of the next watering place. The tents in which we had slept the night before were already in process of being packed up when we left and in half an hour to an hour after our departure the whole caravan was on the move. When we halted at noon, a single tent was pitched under which we had lunch and whiled

away the time during the most intense heat by sleeping, reading or writing. The part of the caravan with the tents and baggage made no stop at Noon except to water the men and beasts. They kept on and reached the evening camping place an hour or so before our arrival, during which time the tents were pitched and the water boiled. About half past two or three o'clock we left our mid-day halting place and arrived at our camp between five and six.

The country through which we rode exemplified well the Abomination of Desolation. There are no roads in Morocco for there is no wheeled vehicle in the whole country. Narrow bridle-paths, two or three running parallel and frequently interlacing, stretched out as far as the eye could see over a slightly rolling country, devoid of any living thing but man. Corpses of pack animals in various stages of decomposition mark the road all the way from Tangier to Fez. When his animal drops from exhaustion, the Moor gives it no further thought, nor does he waste any powder in ending its sufferings. In Fez, the only improvement in conditions consists in dragging the bodies to a common dumping-ground outside the walls near the Jewish cemetery, where they stay, a stench in the noses off the neighborhood till Nature and the birds have finished their work. If the fierce heat has spared any vegetation, it looks dead and withered, as though a blight had fallen upon it. The millet fields are yellow and lifeless and the occasional patches of palmetto gumcistus, dust covered and gray. Every now and then a village is passed, made up of ten or fifteen miserable thatched hovels and surrounded by a high hedge of cactus and prickly pear, and at long intervals small groves of stunted olive trees whose shade is eagerly welcomed.

A rather spectacular feature of the trip was the ceremony attendant on our being handed over from one Kaid to another at the border of each Province. As we approached the boundary, we could see our future escort lined up awaiting our arrival. At this juncture the Commander of our attending Guard rode up to Mr. Gummeré, saluted and announced that the pleasure of accompanying us further was denied him. The escort departed with a flourish, evidently not caring to establish any more intimate relations with the adjoining tribe. Our ride for a little way was unattended till we actually met the advancing body of horsemen. Another halt was then made while the leader advanced and paid his respects to the "Bashhador", as the Moors call a foreign Minister. This being over, our caravan drew up along the side of the path and we were treated to a truly Buffalo Bill exhibition. Forming in the ranks of five or six, the escort drew off slightly and faced about. On a signal, the front rank started forward suddenly with their horses on the run. Standing in their stirrups, with garments flying and guns held aloft, they swept toward us with wild cries. When directly opposite, they fired off a salute and galloped by in a cloud of smoke to give place to the next rank which had already started.

The Moorish Tribesmen reckoned by civilized standards, do not measure up well as soldiers. Swarthy and fierce-looking, with their long black locks flowing out from under not too neatly rolled turbans, their voluminous robes and antiquated firearms, they do not present the picture of well-trained soldiery we are accustomed to see in this country and in Europe. What they lacked in discipline and equipment, however, they atone for in bravery and fanaticism, for the spirit of their Mohomedan ancestors still lives in many a Moor of today. This was well-proved by the recent trouble at Casablanca against the French under General Drude, and it foretells hardships and blood-shed for any nation that tries to subdue these Sons of Islam with the sword.

On the afternoon of our fifth day we reached El K'sar el K'bir, the only town of any prominence on our trip. It is rather pleasantly situated on the west bank of the Wad el Koos and proved an agreeable sight as it appeared before us. Toward one end of the town were several large private groves of orange and olive trees while the rest seemed a collection of whitish buildings with here and there a mosque's minaret pointing sky-ward. We were met by the Kaid attended by the municipal band, consisting of two mounted men blowing shrill wind instruments and two drummer boys on foot. The populace added to the pleasure of the occasion by firing off guns and kicking up as much dust as possible. We rode single file through the narrow, winding, dirty streets of the town till we came to the river. We descended the

steep bank and forded the stream and found our camp prepared on a pleasant grassy stretch, not many yards from the river-bank.

In order to rest and also to impress the people with the importance of their fellow-townsmen, Sid' Thami Slawi, Mr. Gumeré decided to spend a full day in this place. We were the recipient of an enormous dish of Kous-Kous from Sid' Thami and we further enjoyed his hospitality by having tea with him in his own house. His wife, for our friend is American enough to have only one, was not present, for he has not yet dared to violate the rules of his religion to that extent. His elder son poured the tea, which was prepared in the customary Moorish way. Seated cross-legged on the floor before the tray containing the ingredients, he placed in a brass pot the green tea and many large pieces of loaf sugar. The boiling water was then poured on and a handful of crushed mint leaves added and it was allowed to steep for a few minutes. Except for the disadvantage of not being allowed to consult your own taste in the matter of sugar, the brew was excellent.

The next morning we left el K'sar and again took up our way to Fez. At our noonday stopping place, we had our first glimpse of one of the high Moorish dignitaries – El Mokri – one of the former Moorish delegates to the Algeciras Conference, who passed us on his way to Tangier. He selected the same camping ground as we did, but fortunately there was room for two. He had three or four tents pitched, one for himself, one for his ladies and one for his lieutenants, so that our single tent seemed insignificant by contrast.

On our ninth day we forded the largest river in Morocco, the Wad s'Bou. In winter this stream is a raging torrent and caravans wishing to cross must use the ferry boat, but at this time of year there is scarcely any current and the water reached only to the horses bellies. By the side in the river and marking the ford is the Hajar el Wakaf, or Standing Stone. It rises thirty or forty feet in the midst of an absolutely flat country and can be seen for miles around.

The next day we encamped in a valley just below the village of Beni Amar. This is one of the Holy of Holies of the country, for nearby is the tomb of Mulai Edriss I, founder of the present Shereefian dynasty. An amusing incident occurred during that evening which showed plainly the veneration in which the Saint's resting place was held. A storm, rolling up suddenly, made its presence known by vivid lightning flashes and deafening peals of thunder. Immediately a half-dozen of the Moors made a dash for the big dining tent and climbed up the ropes in order to remove a large gilt ball which had ornamented the top. They believed that the holy man was showing his displeasure at our presumption in appearing before his shrine so gaudily adorned. The Moorish Sultans claim direct descent from Mohammed and by virtue of this, constitute themselves heads of the Mohammedan religion. As to the rival and apparently equal valid claims of the Sultan of Turkey, I am not in a position to judge, but it is certain that the tenets of the faith are more closely adhered to in Fez than in Constantinople.

The next afternoon, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1906, and the twelfth day out from Tangier, we had our first sight of Fez. About three o'clock we entered a broad flat plain which stretched on up to the city walls several miles distant and which ended in a confused mass of buildings, white in the afternoon sun, nestled in a basin at the foot of a semi-circle of hills. The spires of many mosques could be distinguished and, on our approach, the houses gradually separated themselves from the blur and took on their rightful shapes. We pitched camp at M'salla Feradji about a mile from the town and awaited the arrival of the Moorish dignitaries to welcome us in the Sultan's name to the city. The next morning we were officially greeted by Si Lukeli, Secretary to the Grand Vizier, and after this was over we mounted and prepared to start. In front rode the standard bearer carrying the red flag of Morocco, attended by a mounted file of soldiers. Directly behind him, rode Mr. Gummeré, accompanied by Mr. Nathan, the interpreter. Following, came the four members of Mr. Gummeré's official family, then Miss Gummeré, next the minor officials and lastly the servants. Before we had gone very far, we were met by the Sultan's band playing on brass instruments and drums, and rendering the national anthem in a way that seemed eminently satisfactory to themselves. They took their places at the head of the procession, which now

moved between ranks of cavalry and infantry extending all the way to the city wall. Kaid Sir Harry Mclean, dressed in a gorgeous red uniform of Moorish design and wearing a fez and turban, greeted us warmly and came with us to our quarters. We entered by the principal gate, Bab Sagma, and took up our march, single file, through the narrow streets.

Fez is a fortified town with the walls and battlements in a remarkably good state of repair. The many mosques are much more pretentious than those in Tangier or el K'sar and the houses are much larger and richer. Fez, as a whole, is divided into two main districts – Fez el Djedid and Fez el Bali. The former, or New Fez, contains the Dar el Makhzen or Government buildings and the Mallah or Jewish quarter while the latter or Old Fez houses the Sultan's palace, the residences and the shops. A common rampart surrounds both but each half of the city has its own wall pierced with gates which are locked at night.

*To be continued...*