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Stuart A. Donaldson, D.D.

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

UNDER the term "North Africa" we must include not only the Roman Province of Africa, but also the Kingdoms of Numidia and Mauretania, all of which came more or less under the influence of Roman Rule and shared in the advantages as well as the disadvantages incident thereto. The Dictator, C. Julius Caesar, had done much to reorganize the government of the country; in fact as Mommsen truly says, "Latin Africa is not much less his work than Latin Gaul." On the destruction of Carthage in B.C. 146, the Roman Province of Africa had been constituted: to this Caesar added part of Numidia, and "the old and the new Africa" included not only the modern state of Tunis, but also Tripoli and the French Province of Constantine: and this remained the constitution of the Roman Province until the end of the reign of Tiberius. In the year 37 A.D. it was arranged that the coastland from Hippo (*Bona*) eastward to Cyrene should be called Africa and placed under the direction of the Proconsul: whereas the western part of the Province

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including Cirta (*Constantine*) the capital, and all the great military camps in the interior, was to be placed under the commander of the African Legion.

The immediate result of this was the rapid development of the country. Under the skilful care of the Roman government, large permanent camps for the maintenance of their troops were prepared, connected with one another by roads, and before the end of the first century A.D. North Africa became one of the most populous, fertile, and highly cultivated regions of the Roman Empire. Carthage itself was indisputably the second city of the Latin half of the Empire: next to Rome it was the most lively, perhaps also the most corrupt, city of the West, and the most important centre of Latin culture and literature.

From Carthage radiated the network of roads, traces of which still survive after more than 1000 years of Mussulman rule: and travellers to-day in Tunis and Algeria are amazed at the evidences of Roman civilization and power which meet them at every turn. Theveste (*Tebessa*) 190 miles S.W. of Carthage was a military centre of great importance: founded during the reign of Vespasian it was the headquarters of the Third Augustan Legion and the centre of defence against the inroads of Berbers, standing as it did at the junction of nine roads. Towards the end of the second century A.D. it was surpassed in its wealth and importance only by Carthage, and under Septimius

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Timgad (Thamugas).

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Severus it reached a high degree of prosperity and became the central trade depôt of the country. About 100 miles due west of Theveste, we reach the "Pompeii" of Africa, Timgad, ancient *Thamugadis* or *Thamugas*, a colony apparently founded by Trajan, and handed over to the Thirtieth Legion, the *Ulpia Victrix*, to recompense its veterans for their share in his victory over the Parthians, and also as entrusting them with a position of great military importance. (A general view of the present condition of the remains is given in the adjoining photograph.) Eighteen or nineteen miles west of Timgad, on the way to Batna, lies another important military centre, Lambèse (*Lambessa*, or *Lambaesis*), built about 169 A.D. as the new headquarters of the Third Augustan Legion, ultimately becoming a city of some 60,000 inhabitants, and the headquarters of the Roman army. It was in immediate communication with Cirta, Calama (*Gelma*), and Hippo Regius (*Bona*), as well as with stations to the south towards the desert; the modern El Kantara (*Calceus Herculis*), and Biskra (*Beskera*), and eastwards to Ain Khenschla (*Mascula*), one of Trajan's colonies. In fact the whole country bears on every side marked traces of Roman vigour and enterprise, even after the long period of Arab domination, and the great importance of the district to the Roman Empire is very clearly brought to the notice of everyone who travels there to-day.

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The N. and N.W. portions of the province of Africa were the great corn-producing areas: even in the time of Augustus, while one third of Roman corn came from Egypt, another third was sent by North Africa. Later on, in the fourth century, Africa was the chief source of the oil used for Roman baths, though it was of inferior quality to that from Italy and Spain, less skill being used in its preparation. We also find that the export trade of horses and cattle from Numidia and Mauretania was extensive. Altogether, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the part played by N. Africa of the second and third centuries in the development of European history: for although geographically part of Africa, Tunis and Algeria really belong to Europe: a fact which is delightfully brought home to the reader in Mr Belloc's brilliant Essay, *Esto Perpetua*.

Thus North Africa must be understood to be that part of Africa which the Arabs, with their eye for the configuration of natural features, have called Djezirat-el-Maghreb, "The Isle of the West," a district with the modern Tunis for its centre, jutting out from the African continent towards Sicily and Italy, bounded on the north by the Mediterranean, on the south and east by the desert of the Sahara, and on the west by the Atlantic ocean. The great range of Atlas runs along its whole course from east to west, causing the country to look northwards towards Europe, rather

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than southwards towards Africa: it is in fact an "annexe of Europe," and since the foundation by the Phoenicians of its metropolis Carthage, with its commanding position on what is now the Bay of Tunis, its history has had to do with Europe and the basin of the Mediterranean rather than with its own continent.

After nearly 150 years of rivalry and conflict, Carthage had been obliged to submit to the might of Rome, but before long she had reappeared after her eclipse, and resumed her position as one of the world-centres of trade, though she could be no longer formidable as a military power.

It was doubtless through Carthage that Christianity reached the interior, and found there almost as wonderful a fusion of races as go to make up the Anglo-Saxons. Not to speak of the aboriginal Libyans, who appear so little in history that they may be passed by, we find the "African" type consists of an inter-fusion of indigenous Berbers and Moors on the one hand, with Phoenicians and Europeans—Italians or Greeks—on the other: these again naturally divided themselves into men of the mountain, the plain, and the sea coast, each with their marked characteristics, and each contributing their share to the development of the national type.

So far as the Church of North Africa is concerned, we find its whole genius summarized as well as typified in the three great names of Tertullian, Cyprian and

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Augustine: apart from these three, though it produced men of action, it gave to the world no great thinker, no great poet, no great representative of literature¹. But these three leaders are enough in themselves to redeem any society from the charge of being ordinary or commonplace, and are indicative of the strong vitality that underlay the quiet surface of the national life.

Mommsen has well said (*Prov. Rom. Emp.* vol. II. p. 343) "In the development of Christianity Africa plays the very first part: if it arose in Syria, it was in and through Africa that it became the religion for the world...If Christianity was by the destruction of the Jewish Church-state released from its Jewish basis, it became the religion of the world by the fact, that in the great world-empire it began to speak the universally current imperial language: and those nameless men, who since the second century Latinized the Christian writings...were in part Italians, but above all Africans. In Africa, to all appearance, the knowledge of Greek, which is able to dispense with translations, was far more seldom to be met with than at least in Rome: and, on the other hand, the oriental element, that preponderated particularly in the early stages of Christianity, here found a readier reception than in the other Latin-speaking lands of the west.

¹ The writer is not forgetful of the claims of Arnobius, Lactantius, and Apuleius.