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(To be continued.)

SOME SPECIMENS OF FELLAḤ WIT AND HUMOUR.

Translated by R. A. S. MACALISTER, M.A., F.S.A.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

DURING the interval between the two permits for Gezer the Committee of the *P.E.F.*, at my suggestion, commissioned Yusif Khattar Kina'an, the capable foreman of the works, to travel through Palestine in search of folklore in its various branches. It was felt that there were many points which an intelligent native could extract from the people far more completely than the most expert European. For his guidance I prepared an Arabic translation of the "Questions" issued by the *P.E.F.*, and gave him some other hints. The results of his pilgrimage, which are contained in four notebooks, far exceeded my own expectations. Till now other duties have prevented my giving proper attention to them; but I hope to be able to contribute translations of these notes regularly to the *Quarterly Statement*, beginning with the present number. When they are finished it will, I think, be found that a more complete statement of fellah life and thought will be available than

ever before. The present short instalment is all I have as yet been able to prepare for publication: longer and much more important matters will follow later.

I. Once on a time there was a fellah skilled in the Arabic [literary] language; and he was filled with pride and conceit above his kind where he lived—he being a man of learning, and most of the fellahin knowing neither reading nor writing. He had a camel; and one day he was travelling from one village to another with a load of corn on the camel. His son, who was with him, was leading the animal. The way led across a certain muddy valley, and when they reached it the boy began to guide the animal carefully, calling out from time to time in the colloquial dialect: “Look out for your steps—your fore foot—your hind foot”—and so on, till they had crossed the valley. When they had crossed, the father noticed that the words his son had said to the camel were contrary to correct diction: so he said: “Return the camel!” The boy was much annoyed, as the mud made the road difficult; but being afraid of his father’s anger, he led the camel back. Then the father, once more guiding the animal through the mud, began to say, in the literary language: “Soft! advance thy forward foot—thy hinder foot”—and as he was speaking the camel slipped, and was so injured that it was no longer fit for work; so they had to slaughter it and sell its flesh. The boy, in his grief after the camel, said to his father: “Did the camel understand literary Arabic, and not the colloquial? Has it not been destroyed?” Said the father: “Let the camel be destroyed, but not one letter of the Language!”

After that the boy watched for an opportunity of being even with his father. That day his father was lighting a cigarette with a flint, steel, and a piece of tinder. Having lit the cigarette he wished to keep the tinder to use again, so he wrapped it in his turban, not noticing that it was still alight. The boy saw what had happened, and seized the occasion, saying, in the literary language: “Soft, O Father! It hath come to pass that fire hath caused thy turban to perish!” The father raised his hand and put the fire out: but the boy had lengthened out his words to such an extent that the fire had already scorched the turban, as well as the hair of his head and his beard. So the father was angry, and said in the colloquial: “While you’ve been choosing and saying

your words, the fire has ruined it." The boy answered: "Is a handkerchief worth more than a camel? The camel was destroyed and you showed no regret: but because of a handkerchief you make mistakes in your speech." The father was ashamed of himself: and to this day the fellahin ridicule their sheikhs who affect the literary language in speech.

II. A man went from his village to the town to buy some necessaries for his household. His wife requested him to get for her a piece of cloth to make a dress for herself. So he went and obtained what was necessary, including the cloth; but while returning to the house he passed an olive tree which belonged to him, and he noticed that the branches of the tree were shaking in the wind. He thought it was shivering with fever, so he took the cloth and wound it around the trunk of the tree. Then he noticed knots on its root: these he thought were ulcers, so he heated an iron and began to cauterize the knot. He went home after that, and his wife asked about the things. He said: "Here they are, all of them, only the piece of cloth I bought I put on our olive tree, because when I passed it I saw that it was shivering with fever, and had ulcers." When she heard that she went to the tree and pulled the cloth off it. The story became known, and people, now-a-days, when they abuse each other are in the habit of saying, "The people of your village think the trees are sick!"

III. A ploughman went to plough in his field, but could not finish his work before sunset. As the way home was long he decided to hide the plough till the morning, to save the trouble of carrying it back and fore; and having done so, he cast about for something to mark the spot where he had put it. He could find nothing till he looked up to the sky and saw a cloud over the spot where he had hidden the plough. "That's the best possible mark" said he, and went home. In the morning he went back to the field and looked for the cloud, so that he might know where he had hidden the plough: but he could not find it. "By Allah!" said he, "the plough has been stolen!" and he began to weep and lament the misery of his condition. The other fellahin gathered around him and asked what was the matter: he told them the story. They began to plough up the whole length of the field, found the plough, gave it to him, and went away. The village

boys to this day have a stock formula of abuse for one another—
“Yah! your father hid a plough and set a cloud to mark the place!”

IV. There was a man affected with sickness, who was always making use of papers and charms given him by the *darwishes*, but he derived no benefit from them. One day a townsman came to his village and told him that he ought to go to a town and get medicine from one of the doctors there. So he went to Jaffa and saw the doctor. The doctor examined him, and gave him a prescription, bidding him take what was written on the paper and dissolve it in water, and drink three cupfuls daily, morning, noon, and night, and if it did no good to let him know. The sick man went home, carrying the paper, instead of going to the dispensary to get the medicine, for he thought the lines written on the paper were themselves the medicine. So he macerated the prescription as he had been accustomed to macerate the charms of the *darwishes*, and drank the water as the doctor ordered. He recovered—doubtless from drinking the macerated prescription.

V. There is a village called Burberah in the district of Gaza. In it there was once a humble man who one day wanted money, and was obliged to sell an ox he had. As he was going to the town he passed among olive trees, on one of which was an owl. As he passed her, she cried out “*Kûk Kûk.*” He thought she was speaking about buying the ox, so he said “Make an offer.” The owl answered “*Kûk.*” Said the man: “Five napoleons.” The owl said “*Kûk.*” Said the man: “Pay the money.” The owl said “*Kûk.*” Now there was a heap of stones beside the tree on which was the owl, and he tied the ox to the tree and began to excavate in the heap, and found inside it a pot full of gold pieces. So he took out five napoleons, returned the pot to its place, and, leaving the ox tied to the tree, went home.

His wife asked him: “How have you been so quick? And where is the ox?” He answered: “I sold him to the owl for five napoleons: she was sitting on an olive tree beside such a road. But my dear, how rich she is! And how generous too—for she gave me as much as I asked, and did not give me the money with her hand, but said, ‘Note that heap of stones—dig in it: you will see a pot, and take the price of your ox.’ So I dug as she said, and found the pot, and took the price of the ox, and buried the

rest." The wife was angry, and said: "Bad luck to you, lead me to the place you speak of." So she went with her husband to the place, and dug for the pot, and found it, and brought it home. The ox, however, had been stolen.

When they reached the house her husband said to her: "Now you have stolen other people's money. I shall certainly inform against you to the government." The woman was frightened, and considered how to arrange that matter. In the middle of the night she arose, took a pair of pigeons and a pair of chickens, cooked them, and threw them out of the window outside the house. Then she went and waked her husband, saying: "Get up and look, the sky is raining pigeons and chickens!" The man jumped up from his bed, and saw the pigeons and chickens which his wife had thrown out. He wondered greatly at it: then they ate the pigeons and chickens, and went back to bed.

In the morning her husband went and informed against his wife to the government, saying: "My wife stole the money of other people and put it in her house." They sent for the woman and enquired about the robbery. She said: "What day did I commit the theft?" Her husband answered: "The day the sky rained pigeons and chickens." And the officials of the government laughed, and said "The man is a fool"; and they let his wife go.

To this day the people of the villages round Burberah laugh at them, saying, "The people of your village sell cows to owls!"¹

VI. The villagers of Palestine collect straw and manure, and pile it in heaps outside their houses for fuel for the ovens. These piles are like domes, and are called *shân*. Once an Egyptian was passing along by certain villages of the fellaḥin, and saw in every one of them a number of these dome-shaped structures. He thought they were erections over the tombs of sheikhs or saints, and kept repeating the opening chapter of the Korân at every place he passed, saying: "In very truth this land is a holy land." A fellaḥ saw him and, recognizing his ignorance, wished to make a mock of him. So he sat in the shade of a tree, and began to tell tales of the saints of the land, and to praise them diligently. The Egyptian believed every word. While he was telling tales

¹ Quite recently some Burberah people made a formal complaint to the government against some persons who imitated the cry of an owl in their presence.

a scorpion crept on the road: the Egyptian said, "What is that?" The fellah said, "That is the Prophet's Mare: do not you see how it is raising its tail over its back? That is an invitation to you to kiss it." The Egyptian believed him, and stooped to kiss the scorpion which stung him in the lip. He cried out for the violence of the pain, and begun to abuse and curse the fellah, and to say: "May Allah curse the Prophet who rode such a mare." So he departed, cursing the land. And the fellah spread the news about the Egyptian.¹

(To be continued.)

THE BEDOUIN OF THE SINAITIC PENINSULA.

(Continued from p. 137.)

By W. E. JENNINGS-BRAMLEY, Esq.

XX. *Peace and War.*

It would be an exaggeration to say that the covenant of salt is so binding on Bedouins that no cases of its violation are known. Men are now and again murdered by those with whom they are travelling, and with whom they have certainly broken bread, as we should say, or, as they put it bread and salt, *'aish u melh*. But the obligation to be true to those with whom you have eaten is held sacred, and treachery in such a case infamous. I believe that very few, if any, cases are on record in which such treachery was premeditated. Where faith has been broken, it has been because a sudden temptation of gain was too powerful to be resisted. Certain is it that if a man refuses to accept your hospitality or eat food with you, you should be on your guard. He probably means you no good. An Arab would look upon such conduct as an absolute

¹ Mr. Baldensperger has recently referred to the first part of this story in one of his communications to the *Quarterly Statement* (1907, p. 13).