

## PALESTINIAN ANIMAL FOLK-LORE.

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THE following specimens of animal lore which I have come across during many years past were heard from the lips of Arab children in Bishop Gobat's school or of fellahin, &c., in different parts of the country. Unfortunately, when I heard the stories, I (except in a few cases) omitted to make a note of the persons from whom I heard them; this, of course, may somewhat lessen their value, but, nevertheless, I hope that they will not be altogether uninteresting to the readers of the *Quarterly Statement* :—

1. The reason of the antipathy between the dog and the cat, who were originally good friends, is, as a dragoman told me, as follows :—“When the various kinds of animals had their respective duties in the world assigned to them, the dog and cat, although classed amongst domestic animals, were exempted from menial drudgery, the former because of his faithfulness, and the latter because of her cleanliness. At their special request they received a written document attesting and confirming this privilege. It was handed to the dog for safe-keeping, and he buried it where he kept his stock of old bones. Filled with envy, the horse, ass, and ox purchased the services of the rat, who, burrowing underground, found and destroyed the charter. Ever since that time the dog has been liable, on account of his carelessness, to be tied or chained up by his master, and besides that, the cat has never forgiven him. Both cat and dog hate the rats and kill them whenever they can. The horse, ass, and ox, on the other hand, permit the rats to share their provender.”

2. “The cat is a clean beast,” said one of the Bethlehem fellahin, “it had the blessing and seal of Solomon set upon it. Therefore, if a cat drinks out of a can containing milk, drinking water, &c., what remains after she has quenched her thirst is not *nijjis* or unclean, and may be used by human beings. The dog, however, is unclean, and water, &c., from which he has drunk is polluted.”

The cat is a blessed creature, because, as is often related, it destroys not only rats but also serpents. When the Prophet was

a camel-driver, he was asleep one hot day in the shade of some bushes in the desert. A serpent came out of a hole and would have killed him had not a cat that happened to be prowling about pounced upon and destroyed it. When the Prophet awoke he saw what had happened, and, calling the cat to him, he caressed and blessed it. Ever since that event he was fond of cats. It is said that one day he cut off the long sleeve of his robe, upon which his pet cat was asleep, rather than disturb her slumbers. It was out of gratitude to the creature for having saved his life whilst he was asleep as above related. But whilst the cat is a blessed animal, strange cats that come to a house, and especially black cats, should be avoided, as they may be *'afāriyat* in disguise. The following story, which I heard from one of Sir Charles Warren's watchmen, a Nubian, proves this:—A great Mohammedan sheikh in Egypt, I forget his name, had a pet black cat of which he was very fond, and which used to sleep near him at night. One night the sheikh was unwell and unable to sleep. As he lay awake he heard a cat mewing in the street under his window. His favourite at once arose and went to the window. The other cat called her distinctly by name and asked her, in Arabic, whether there were any food in the house. She answered, also in Arabic, that there was plenty, but that neither she nor the other could get it because the name of Allah was always pronounced over the stores of provisions, &c., in the house, and therefore the would-be guest would do better to go elsewhere. This shows that demons sometimes disguise themselves as cats. Lilith, called also "La Broosha" by Spanish Jewesses, and El Karineh by the fellahin, is said to do this very often.

This is what a Spanish Jewess related to me:—"It is quite true that La Broosha often takes the shape of a cat. This is what my mother told me happened when she was born. It was told her by her mother, my grandmother. Both were very truthful women. For nine days after a child has been born the mother and baby ought never to be left alone in a room. What happened when my mother was born was this. My great-grandmother, who was nursing my grandmother, had gone out of the room, leaving the latter and the infant (who was afterwards my mother) dozing. When she came back the patient told her that she had had a strange dream during her absence. She had seen a great black cat come in as soon as her mother's back was turned. It walked into a

corner of the room and turned itself into a jar. A cat was then heard mewling in the street, and the jar thereupon became a cat again. It came up to the bed (my grandmother being paralysed with fear and helplessness), the cat took the baby, went with it to the window and called out 'Shall I throw?' 'Throw,' was the answer given by the cat outside. Thrice the cat in the sick room asked the same question and got the same answer. She then threw the baby (my mother) out of the window. Just at that moment my great-grandmother returned and the cat suddenly vanished. My great-grandmother, noticing that the baby was not in its cradle nor in its mother's bed, with great presence of mind hid her alarm and said to my grandmother: 'Of course you were only dreaming. It was I who came and took the little one in order to change its clothes whilst you were fast asleep, and I shall bring it back in a moment.' So saying she left the room quietly, but as soon as she got outside and had closed the door behind her, she rushed out of the house and beheld a huge cat crossing a field with the child in its mouth. Love lent her speed. She soon overtook the dreadful creature, and being a wise woman who knew exactly what to do in such an emergency, she uttered a form of adjuration which forced the demon not only to relinquish its prey, but, moreover, to swear that for eleven generations to come it would not molest her family or its descendants. My great-grandmother then brought the infant back, but it was not till long after its mother was well and strong again that she told her that her supposed dream had been a frightful reality."

The cat, as we have seen, is highly respected, especially amongst the Moslem fellahin. To kill one is considered by many a great sin, which would surely bring misfortune to the perpetrator. When a fellah of my acquaintance lost his eyesight, he and other fellahin at Urtaş attributed the misfortune to Divine retribution, seeing that he had in his younger days ventured to shoot several cats. As I have already pointed out, it is believed that demons sometimes take the shape of cats. On the other hand the cat is also considered a type of craft and hypocrisy, as is proved by the following fable:—

"A town cat that had destroyed almost all the mice and rats in the neighbourhood found itself forced to go into the fields and hunt for lizards, &c., to satisfy its hunger. In its necessity it bethought

itself of the following ruse: It stayed away for some weeks from its old haunts, and then, returning, lay down in front of a mouse and rat warren, whilst with a *muṣbahah*, or rosary, round its neck, and with eyes half closed, it began to purr as loudly as it could. After a while a mouse peeped out of a hole, but seeing the cat, hastily retired. 'Why do you flee?' asked pussy; *tefudḍul*, 'welcome, I am glad to be back home again, and instead of showing pleasure at the return of an old neighbour from the long journey that I have taken, you run away as soon as you see me. Come and visit me, fear not.' Surprised at hearing itself thus addressed, the mouse again ventured to the door of his hole and said, 'How can you expect me to visit you, are you not the enemy of my race? Should I accept your invitation you would surely seize and devour me as you did my parents and so many others of my kindred.' 'Alas!' answered the cat, 'your reproaches are just, I have been a great criminal and deserve your abuse and enmity. But I am sincerely penitent, and have turned over a new leaf. I have, as you see from this *muṣbahah* round my neck devoted myself to prayer, meditation, and the recital of holy books, the whole of which I have learned by heart, and was just repeating when you happened to look out of your hole. Besides this I have visited the holy places and have just returned from my pilgrimage so that I am now not only a *ḥāfiẓ* (i.e., a scholar who knows the whole Scripture by rote), but also a *ḥajjī*. Go, my injured, but nevertheless generous and forgiving friend, make my change of life and sentiments known to the rest of your people and bid them no longer shun my society, seeing that I am become a recluse. Whilst you are absent I shall resume my recitation. Purr, rrr, rrr, rrr, &c.'

"Much surprised at the news he had just heard the mouse made it known to the rest of his tribe. They were at first incredulous, but at last, after one and another had ventured to peep from the mouth of its hole and had beheld the whiskered ascetic with the rosary round his neck, apparently oblivious of all earthly things, and steadily repeating his purr, rrr, rrr, rrr, which they supposed to be the recital of holy books, they thought that there might be some truth in the matter and convened a meeting of mice and rats to discuss it. After much debate it was judged right to test the reality of the cat's conversion, but to be prudent at the same time, and so a large and powerful rat was sent out to forage for the community. Being a wary and experienced veteran he kept out of

the cat's reach, though he saluted him respectfully from a distance. The cat allowed the rat to prowls about unmolested for a long time in the hope that other rats and mice would soon issue forth and that his prey would then be not only easily caught but also be plentiful. No others came, however, and at last the pangs of hunger made him resolve to wait no longer but seize the game in sight. The rat, however, was on the alert and darted off the instant he noticed, from a slight movement of the cat's muscles, that the pretended saint was about to slay him. 'Why do you go away so abruptly?' mewed puss, 'are you tired of hearing me repeat Scripture, or do you doubt the correctness of my recitation?' 'Neither,' answered the rat as he peeped from the hole in which he had taken refuge, 'I am convinced that you have indeed committed the holy books perfectly to memory, but at the same time I am convinced that, however much you have acquired by rote, you have neither forgotten nor unlearned your habits of pouncing upon us.'"

3. From Sir Charles Warren's fellah excavators in 1867, or thereabouts, I heard the following:—"The reason why dogs, jackals, &c., sometimes go mad is well known. It is simply this: There exists a wonderful bird called *tayr es-sáfât*, (طير الصافات). It never alights upon the earth, but mates whilst on the wing, lays its eggs and also manages to hatch them whilst flying. The shells of this bird's eggs and its droppings only reach the earth's surface. They are very poisonous, but, nevertheless, they are eagerly devoured by a wild beast called *esh-shîbeh*.<sup>1</sup> The *sáfât* egg-shells eaten by the *Shîbeh* bring on hydrophobia. The creature goes mad, biting every animal that crosses its path and thus the deadly water-fear-sickness is spread and propagated."

<sup>1</sup> This animal was described to me as being something between a badger and a hyæna, both in appearance and size. It is said to be very ferocious, has long and powerful claws, with which it burrows underground and also digs dead bodies out of their graves. In 1869 it was reported at Jerusalem that one of these creatures had carried off some Ta'amireh children from a camp somewhere near the Frank mountain. In September of the same year, whilst accompanying Sir Charles Warren's party to Hermon and the temples on the Anti-Libanus, we were frequently told that the *shîbeh* had carried off children recently from some place or other. Europeans at Beirût and on the Lebanon explained the story by the hypothesis that a cane-brake on the Euphrates having caught fire, one or more lions driven from their lairs by the conflagration had wandered westwards and done damage.

In a former paragraph I remarked that the dog is considered an unclean animal. Some of the stricter Moslems (as I have heard) are said to think it so unclean that if one of these animals got wet and shook the water out of his coat at a distance of 40 steps from a member of the Shafi sect who was performing his prayers, that worshipper would at once rise, perform the preliminary ablutions again, and then begin the prayers from the very beginning. This statement, however, may be only an Oriental exaggeration. On the other hand, although it is generally allowed that the dog is *najjis*, i.e., unclean, there are always people who are fond of the affectionate and sagacious creature. There was, in my boyhood, a story told of a Moslem who owned a beautiful *slâgi* or greyhound to which he was very much attached. When it died he buried it in his garden with his own hands. Enemies of his thereupon went and accused him to the authorities of having buried an unclean beast with the respect and ceremonies due only to a believer. He would have been severely dealt with had he not let the judge know that the dog had earned the right to decent burial by having left a will in which a large sum of money had been mentioned as a legacy to his worship.

A fellah shepherd, whom I often met on the hill sides near Artûf, who had a large and handsome Kurdi dog, of which he was very fond and with whom I frequently saw him sharing his meal, told me one day that though the animal was indeed *najjis* outside, yet that his *nâyeh* (نَيَّة) or character was good, and added that Ibrahim El-Khalil, on whom be peace, was in his day hospitable, not only to men but to dogs also. His flocks were so numerous that 4,000 dogs were needed to guard them, and were daily fed by the Patriarch's bounty. I have also been told (I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, but give it as I heard it) that in ancient times if anybody killed a dog belonging to another he was liable to be called upon to pay a *dîya* (دِيَّة), or blood-compensation for the creature just as he would have to do had he taken the life of a human being. The way in which this amount of compensation is said to have been calculated is worth describing. The dead creature was hung up by the tail with its nose touching the ground. Wheat, or, according to another statement, flour was then heaped around the carcass till the latter was quite hidden. The value of the grain or meal thus heaped up was then estimated,

and the slayer of the dog had to pay the equivalent. The popular ideas concerning dogs may be gathered from proverbs. The following are specimens of Arabic dog-proverbs:—"It is better to feed a dog than to feed a man," the reason given being that the dog will not forget the kindness, whilst the human animal may. "For want of horses dogs were harnessed." "It is the sheikh's dog that is sheikh."

*Bîr el-Kelb* is the name given to a cistern close to the Tombs of the Kings, and situated just at the point where the road coming from Bab es-Sâhiri "Herod's Gate," joins the great road to Nablûs. My own opinion is that the said cistern derived its name from the fact that the modern Jews of Jerusalem call the Tombs of the Kings the Sepulchres of Kalbâ Shebna, the father-in-law of Rabbi Akiba. During the years 1887-1891 I was living in a large house close by, and the old sheikh of the adjacent Moslem shrine of Sheikh Jerrah told me the following legend:—"A great many years ago a man was murdered at this spot, and it is said that his dog used to come and lie down there and attack everyone who passed by. The animal was therefore killed, but it was of no use, for his ghost (*raşad*) and that of his murdered owner now appeared and frightened wayfarers. In order to appease the ghosts the brother of the murdered man had the cistern and drinking fountain constructed on the fatal spot for the free use of men and beasts. Since then the apparitions have no longer been seen, but the cistern is still called *Bîr el-Kelb*, the dog's cistern as well." Another version of the story is that the dog discovered the body of his murdered master which had been thrown into the cistern by those who slew him.

4. "The hyæna is an evil and accursed beast. Not only does he dig up and devour the bodies of the dead, but he also bewitches the living and lures them to his den. He is wont to come up at night to the solitary wayfarer, rub himself against his side, &c., as a cat does when she rubs against a person's legs, and then he runs on ahead of him. The man against whom he has rubbed himself is instantly bewitched and with the loudly repeated cry, 'O my uncle, stop, and wait for me,' he follows the hyæna as fast as he can till he gets into his den and is devoured. It sometimes happens that the entrance to the den is very low, and that when he tries to enter the human victim hits his head against a projection of the

rock. If that happens he at once recovers his senses and saves himself by flight, for the hyæna is a great coward and never attacks a man unless the latter be asleep, or has been bewitched by a hyæna. Sometimes the frightful creature hides itself behind stones or bushes near the roadside, and when after nightfall a single person passes without a lantern the hyæna sets up a groaning like that of a person in great pain. If the wayfarer turns aside to see what the matter is the wild beast will leap upon him and so startle him that he will be at once bewitched and follow the hyæna."

The following story is often told of a fellah who caught a hyæna in a very clever way: "The fellah was on a journey and had with him a donkey bearing a heavy sack of grain. About sunset he reached a wayside khan. As it happened to be a very hot night he tied his donkey up safely in the stable but left the sack in the open air, and wrapping his 'abba round him laid himself down upon it and went to sleep. About midnight he was awakened by the sound of something scratching up the ground near him. Opening his eyes, he saw a large hyæna that was digging a grave alongside of him, evidently intending to kill and bury him, and later on to dig up and devour him at his leisure. As the grave was still very shallow, the fellah let the hyæna dig on till the ridge of its back was some inches lower than the level of the surrounding ground. Then, suddenly starting up, the peasant quickly rolled the heavy sack of corn on to the hyæna, and kept him thus cooped up in the grave till next morning, when it was an easy task to secure him, for, though a lion at night, *ed-dab' bil-layl sab'*, 'the hyæna is but a dog in the daytime.'" However, even at night he fears fire, and a simple way to drive him away is to burn matches or to strike sparks with flint and steel.

5. "Abu Hassan, the fox, is one of the most cunning of beasts. His tricks and wiles are without number. If he sees that there are partridges about he notices in what direction they are likely to run, and then he runs ahead of them and lies down as if dead, foaming at his mouth. When the partridges come up they think him dead, and peck at him. They dip their bills into the saliva running from his mouth, and then he snaps at and catches them. He one day played a similar trick on a fellah-woman who was carrying a basketful of live poultry to market. Seeing the way she was going,

he ran ahead and lay down as above described. When passing the spot she saw him, but did not think it worth her while to stop and skin him. As soon as she was out of sight the fox jumped up and, making a detour, again lay down in the road at a point she would have to pass. She was surprised to see it, and said to herself, 'Has a pestilence broken out amongst the sons of Awî? Had I skinned the first I saw lying by the roadside it would have been worth my while to stop for this one, but as I did not then, I shall not do so now.' She went on her way and her surprise was unbounded when, after a while, she noticed what she believed to be a third fox dead on the roadside. 'Verily, I have done wrong,' thought she 'to neglect the good things Allah has placed in my way. I shall leave my fowls here, and return to secure the pelts of the first two before others take them.' No sooner said than done, but before she had time to return, wondering, but empty-handed, Abu Hassan had secured his prey and departed."

6. "The story of the death of Mûsa, who spoke with Allah, and on whom be peace, is too well-known to need repetition. Suffice it to say that, disgusted with the solicitations of Azrael, the Angel of Death, that he would give him permission to take his spirit, he left the children of Israel in their camp, and wandered amongst the hills near Buḥairat Lût (the Dead Sea). Here he met the shepherd in whose charge the flocks of Sho'aib, the father-in-law of Mûsa, and also Mûsa's own flocks had been placed when the latter was sent to rebuke Pharaoh. After mutual greetings, the shepherd, who had noticed that the Prophet was troubled, asked the reason, and, when told, laughed at his lord, and tried to persuade him to yield to the desire of the Angel of Death and give up the ghost. Now this vexed Mûsa greatly, 'Allah grant that thou mayest never die, but perpetually have charge of these goats,' said he to the shepherd. Full of joy at the supposed blessing, which, however, was in reality a curse, the latter answered 'Amen.' When the time came when in the ordinary course of nature he would have died, he sickened and became unconscious. Thinking him dead, the Banu Israel buried him near the grave of Neby Mûsa, and there his tomb is pointed out to this day. But he is not dead. He still wanders about amongst the hills on each side of the Ghor from Wâdy Mûsa to Tabariya, pasturing the *beden* (ibex). He flees from the approach of men, but, nevertheless, he has been frequently seen. His appearance

is that of a decrepit and aged old man covered with white hair. Some of those who have seen him have supposed him to be El-Khudr, on whom be peace, but verily this is a mistake."

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"THE STRANGE FINDING OUT OF MOSES HIS TOMBE."

*(Concluded from p. 148.)*

THE Jesuits conceived, that before the Pilgrims and father Guardian could return to Jerusalem, to give notice of what had passed, which could not be till the night following, and that the Sanziack not knowing who had committed this insolency, nor much caring, it being but upon a company of Gowers or misbelievers, as they call Christians, they made no doubt, but that they might be ship'd out of their reach, before they could be met with; wherefore letting their Mules and horses of the Druses to graze upon the fragrant hearbes of that little valley, they betook themselves to pluck down the entrance into the Sepulchre which was easier to be pull'd down, then to be made up. But see how their Ship did sink, even in the entrance of the harbour. For the Jesuits had brought with them from Constantinople an old Janizarie called Ibrahim, who had served them many years faithfully, without the company of one of which there is no travailing in Turkey. This man they had sounded a farr off, to try if they could make him of their plot.

But he not willing in his old age to leave his Country, religion, wife, and children, they desisted. This and daily the words which he heard from the mouths of those French Gentlemen and Merchants who being in the plot, were too lavish of their tongues before him, who by reason of his long conversation amongst the French, understood more of their language, then they were aware of. This with other matters of the like nature, made him strongly to suspect the design. And thereupon acquainted the Sanziack of Jerusalem therewith, faining himself also ill at ease, to the end he might not be invited to that journey. The Sanziack perceiving that Ibrahim was not able to make it out, and yet doubting the worst, being of a more subtle braine then Turks ordinarily are (he being in truth a Renegado Christian, a notable knave, and a Scottish-man borne; his right name being Sande Murrey, but upon his circumcision he called himself Ram Dam) he gave notice of his feares to Nazuffe the Sanziack of Saphetta, who was also a Renegado of Hungary, and as cunning a knave as himself, advising him that he should give notice hereof to certain troupes of Spahces who lay grassing of their horses on the other side of Jordane untill they received orders from Morat, Bashaw of Damasco, to goe against the soune of Ipsheer Bashaw,