

OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON THE MODERN INHABITANTS
OF PALESTINE.

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A HISTORY OF THE DOINGS OF THE FELLAḤĪN DURING
THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

PART IV.

Dhaḥer el Amīr and Jezzār Pasha.

At the end of the seventeenth century one Dhaḥer el Amīr ibn 'Omar el Dhaḥer rose to fame. He was a member of the tribe of Zaidan, whose headquarters were at 'Akka, Haifa, and Shefa 'Amr. His sons, 'Alī, Aḥmad, and 'Othmān shared his fame, and the whole country from Safed to Gaza came under their control. They had a large government building or *serai* at Shefa 'Amr, but the seat of their government was at 'Akka.

One of the Mamlūks of Egypt, Aḥmad Pasha (surnamed Jezzār, "the butcher") had been dismissed from Egypt by Muḥammad Bey, and had taken refuge with, and abode for five years under the protection of Dhaḥer el Amīr. At the end of that time Muḥammad Bey died and Jezzār returned to take his place in Egypt.

Dhaḥer el Amīr and his sons revolted against the Turkish Government, and Jezzār was commissioned by the government to quell the rising, he being chosen on account of the knowledge of the country that he had acquired during his five years' sojourn there. Hostilities lasted for nine months, the victory falling now to one side, now to the other; but finally Jezzār succeeded in capturing Dhaḥer and two of his sons, Aḥmad and 'Othmān, and sending them to Constantinople. The third son, 'Alī, escaped.

The house of Dhaher's government at Shefa 'Amr was captured by Jezzâr, and 1600 soldiers were quartered there to guard it. To these entered 'Ali, dressed as a Bedâwi. The soldiers did not recognise him, and nicknamed him "Father of Moustaches" (Abu esh-Shanabain); but as soon as he was entered among them he tore off his disguises. The soldiers were panic stricken, some fled, the others 'Ali slew, and after the garrison was scattered he seized the *serai* and all the horses, weapons, and treasure that it contained, and then went to his tents at 'Akka.¹

'Ali now commenced a policy of harassing Jezzâr by small raids on the encampment of the latter, and by interrupting all the trading caravans that were bound for 'Akka. Jezzâr found himself incompetent to deal with him openly, and had recourse to a stratagem. He made a parade of dismissing one of his most important officers, who assumed the rôle of a rebel against Jezzâr, and commenced a series of successful attacks upon the troops of his leader. 'Ali heard of this, and accepting his revolt in good faith, made overtures to the officer for uniting their forces. An agreement was made between them. About ten days afterwards 'Ali was alone in his tent, his men being absent on a foraging expedition, and his treacherous comrade fired upon and killed him. He returned to Jezzâr with his men, and the head of 'Ali. This murder of the sheikh put an end to the power of the family of Dhaher, and led to its dispersion.

It is comforting to learn that Jezzâr happened to discover that the officer who perpetrated this singularly shabby trick had for thirty years himself been under Dhaher el Amîr; whereupon he commanded him to be put to death, for the very sensible reason which he expressed thus: "Thou hast eaten thy lord's bread so long, yet hast been unfaithful to him; how much the more wilt thou be unfaithful to me, who have done nothing for thee?" No doubt the ingenious Jezzâr saw that he could kill two birds with

¹ We give this incident as it is recorded in our MSS. It reads as though the writer implied that 'Ali slaughtered or scattered the whole garrison of 1600 single-handed. We do not deny that he may have done so, but the story reads not unlike the Irish peasants' legend of the giant-killing hero who, when weaponless, and attacked by seven hundred men in front, seven hundred behind, and seven hundred on each side, snatched up the man nearest him by the ankles, and used him as a club to brain all the rest, with the grim sequel that at the end of the combat his "club" has been so worn away that nothing remained in his hand but a pair of shin bones!

one stone—secure the faithfulness of the officer and save the expense of a reward. From what we know of Jezzâr the latter was probably a not unimportant consideration with him.

A weirdly dramatic incident is related which illustrates the social conditions of the country in the days of Sheikh Dhaher el Amîr. There lived in Shefa ‘Amr a very beautiful woman, who inspired an illicit affection in one of the sheikh’s suite stationed there. He made many evil advances to her; but she was virtuous and repelled him, giving him procrastinating promises. At last he realised that she was putting him off, and threatened to kill her unless she promised to receive him that same night. The poor woman, in despair, saw no course open but to give the required promise. She went home and told her husband, who said that he would kill the man as soon as he put in an appearance. She asked, were it not better to flee from the neighbourhood? but he insisted on remaining, and once more declared that he would kill the disturber of his domestic peace.

Night came, and with it the intruder. The husband hid himself in an ambush, the woman opened the door. In came the man, and she pretended to make him welcome. She took his arms from him, escorted him to supper, which was ready, and commenced to converse with him, all the time expecting her husband to come out and vindicate her in the way he had undertaken. But no husband appeared, and she took an opportunity of going to look for him. She found the wretched creature, his courage all oozed away, and he not able to stand with fright. Three times she went back to him, trying to persuade him to do his duty by her; but the only satisfaction she got was an order to “go to the man and let him do what he liked and then go about his business.”

Forced thus to depend on herself, our heroine returned to the unwelcome visitor, and again entered into conversation, during which she began fingering his gun. Then she took it up and began to look it over. “Truly, strong is the heart of man!” said she. “And it is with this you fight and kill each other?” “Yea, truly,” said he. “And how do you use it?” she asked innocently. The owner of the gun began to explain. She, pretending to be stupid, asked so many foolish questions, and handled the gun so awkwardly, that he began to laugh at her. Suddenly, when in his merriment he was thrown completely off his guard, she aimed straight at his heart and shot him dead.

Once more she called her husband, but that worthy was taken with fresh terrors. He absolutely declined to have anything to do with the matter, for now he feared lest he should be held responsible for the murder of one of the sheikh's officials. So his unfortunate wife had to set about the removal of the body. She decided to place it in a certain cave in the neighbourhood, which was commonly said to be haunted by ghouls, and which on that account no one would enter. The only way she could carry it was in a large basket on her shoulder, and to fit it into the basket she was obliged first to dismember it.

Now it happened that that very night some of the family of Sheikh Dhaher were discussing the question whether or not ghouls actually did haunt the cave; some said yes, others, no; and at last 'Ali Dhaher undertook to give his sword as a reward to whosoever would dare to enter the cave and put a certain mark within it. His nephew, a man famous for his bravery, undertook to gain the reward; he was one whom nothing would turn from any purpose which he might take in hand, and he rose at once and made his way to the cave, which he reached just a minute or two after the woman had entered it with her gruesome burden.

The woman naturally thought that this was some one who had discovered the matter, and who had come to take her prisoner. She could see the prince entering at the door, but he of course could not see her, and was unaware of her presence. In the instinct of self-preservation she threw at the intruder the only missile which she could find at the moment—one of the dead man's hands. It struck the prince on the chest. He stooped and picked it up; when he found out what it was, he very naturally paused before entering further into this cave of horrors. The thought of the sword he was to earn, however, roused up his courage, and he advanced a few more paces, but was stopped once more by a blow from the second hand; the feet and head followed. At last he drew his sword, and said, "Whoso thou art in the cave, rebel, or ghoul, or devil, or man, I shall fight with thee! Guard thyself." Seeing there was no escape, the woman made herself known to the prince, told him all the story, and threw herself on his mercy.

The prince, astonished at her bravery, took her back with him to his own relatives, and told his uncle the sheikh what had taken place. The sheikh sent immediately to fetch the husband, whom the messenger found still shivering in his corner. However, he had

to appear before the sheikh, who ended the story by administering poetic justice worthy of a three volume novel. The husband, in spite of his whines that he had nothing to do with the matter at all, and that his wife alone was answerable, was contemptuously ordered to be put to death, and of course the heroine was married to the young man who brought her from the cave. It is to be hoped that Jezzâr Pasha allowed them to live happy ever after.

In 1798 the French army under Napoleon I came against Jezzâr.¹ He captured Jaffa, Ramleh, and Lydd, with all the coast, and besieged Jezzâr in 'Akka. This foreign invasion united for a while the ever-opposing factions of Yaman and Kais; but the people were poorly armed and could make no stand against the well equipped Europeans. 'Akka resisted his efforts, but a detachment of troops was sent under the command of Kléber across the plain of Esdraelon to take Nazareth and Tiberias. The Arab tribe Es-Sabḥah and some of the Eastern Bedâwin collected a great host to fight against the French. They were quite unable to stand against the French artillery; the famous Amîr Rabâḥ, chief of the Beni Sakhr, expressively contrasted his poor spear with the French cannon balls and bullets by saying that he "could not swim in hell with a stick." Were it not for English interference, which compelled Napoleon to raise the siege of 'Akka and to withdraw his troops, the whole country would have lain at his feet.

Suleiman Pasha succeeded Jezzâr. In his time the government was again decentralised among the provincial sheikhs, whom Jezzâr had kept in a very secondary position, under his own domination.

¹ Napoleon was returning from his unsuccessful attempt to found an empire on the Nile, and hoped to foster a Syrian rising against the Turkish authorities.

(To be continued.)
