

OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON THE MODERN INHABITANTS
OF PALESTINE.

By Dr. E. W. G. MASTERMAN and Prof. R. A. S. MACALISTER.

TALES OF WELYS AND DERVISHES.

(Continued from Q.S., 1916, p. 71.)

The story of the Burning of the Nessub (the Pedigree) of Sultān Badr.

MENTION has before been made of Sheikh Ahmed el-'Ajameh, the naḳīb (administrator) of Sultān Badr. This man had a number of relatives with him during the lifetime of the Sultān, and their descendants are known as the family of 'Ajameh to-day. They do not, however, really belong to the noble family of Sultān Badr. Once there was a quarrel between the two tribes (ḥamuleh), and the descendants of Sultān Badr began to taunt the others by saying: "You are servants of our lord and now you have become more proud than we are." The feud in time led to bloodshed, until at length no member of one tribe could meet one of the other without quarrelling. It is the custom among the fellahīn that a tribe in such a difficulty should leave its village and take refuge with some noble people ('arrāf), until these latter can settle the dispute. The family of 'Ajameh thus withdrew themselves and went and lived at Beit 'Atāb with the sheikhs of Lahhām, who were then all-powerful in the district. After they had spent much time there they sought for an opportunity to rob the *nessub* (genealogical tree) from the family of Sheikh Muḥammad, the most important of the descendants of Sultān Badr. One day, therefore, when they knew that Sheikh Muḥammad was in his house alone, they broke in and took from him by force the *nessub* and carried it to Beit 'Atāb. They told the sheikhs of Lahhām that they had fought Sheikh Muḥammad, and captured the *nessub* in battle. They then sat down and found, after reading the *nessub*, that the family of 'Ajameh was not mentioned, and that they really did not belong to the noble family of Sultān Badr. When they found this out they changed the names of the

descendants of Sultān Badr, so as to make it appear that he was their ancestor, so that they should have a right to use the waḳf of the sultān, and share in all the income of the property. When they had finished their forgery they said to each other: "If this affair becomes public, and people begin asking about the *nessub*, they will find out our treachery. It is better for us that we destroy the old *nessub* and then, if the *nessub* is asked for, we will say this (the new one) is the genealogy of our fathers, and we have a right to the waḳf." So they took the old *nessub* and put it on the fire, but the fire would not burn it, so they soaked it in petroleum and still it would not burn. And a watchman of the crops, a Mughrabi, who was there, offered to burn it for them for a reward. And they offered him money, but he refused. He then said I will do it for you if you will give me one of your maidens in marriage, but, if you refuse, I will inform against you. So, in fear lest the affair would become known, they accepted the offer of the Mughrabi. Then he took the *nessub* and defiled it with dung, and it became unclean, and when he cast it on the fire it was at once consumed. But the Mughrabi who married the girl had no children, and one day, when he was sleeping in the shade of a rock, a hyaena came and ate him. And the 'Ajamehs are now scattered in the land and are mostly poor, and, though they receive money from their property, they have no blessing in it. And the people who gave them protection—the family of Lahhām—who once were the greatest sheikhs, now have no honour paid them, and no one accepts their judgment, and many are reduced to poverty. And all this is on account of the anger of Sultān Badr. And those who burned the *nessub* are now called the *dar esh-Sherīf*, because the *nessub* is now written in their name.

Story of Sheikh Merzūk.

Sheikh Merzūk was a slave whom Sultān Badr used to station upon the summit of a high mountain to the east of Deir esh-Sheikh to keep a look out for the enemy in the time of war and *Jehad*. One day Sheikh Merzūk became very ill, at the point of death, and the sultān reassured him and told him not to be afraid, for he would nourish him and take care of him and allow no one to injure him. Nevertheless, Sheikh Merzūk died and was buried upon the mountain top where he had been accustomed to keep watch. And many olive, oak and *khārūb* trees were planted around his maḳām,

which became wakf to him. One day a man from the village of er-Rās came to the place and plundered the olive trees, and began to return to his village with the stolen goods upon his donkey. But on the way the load fell off and he found his donkey was blind, and when he emptied the olives from the sack he found they had all turned into cockroaches. So he quickly refilled the sack, reloaded the donkey and returned to the scene of his robbery. When he got there and poured the contents of the sack on the ground he found they were all olives again. Leaving the olives there he went to the forest and cut wood for making ploughs and sticks for hoes, but when he had carried the wood beyond the wakf property the sticks turned in his hands into serpents, and the larger pieces for ploughs, which he had loaded on the donkey, became tortoises. And the serpents began to twine themselves upon his body and upon the donkey. To save himself he left the donkey and fled home without stopping. But when his wife saw him she was afraid because his skin had become as black as charcoal and his tongue was tied so that he could not utter a word. And she ran and fetched his relations who at once began to question him. He replied as well as he could by signs, and when they understood they went off to bring the donkey lest the load still on its back should betray them. They searched all day, and at length, late in the afternoon, they found the donkey, still loaded, sheltered beneath a *kharūb* tree. While they were unloading the wood from its back they saw to their astonishment that there were dates growing on the *kharūb* tree. So they made up their minds to leave the donkey there and return at night to plunder the tree. On reaching the spot that night they found the donkey lying in the same place with a hyaena lying asleep beside it, At this they were much afraid, and, for fear of the hyaena, dared not approach the donkey. And while they hesitated, suddenly a voice like thunder exclaimed "These are robbers, seize them." They at once turned to run away but were unable to move a single step, and had to remain fixed in their places till the morning. Meanwhile, the wife of the man having become tired of waiting, and fearing that someone had seized her relations while they were in the midst of their robbery, went to the Mukhtar of the village, who was also a relative, and told him all that had happened. The Mukhtar took some people with him and went in search of the men. At length he found them standing near the donkey and the hyaena. The latter, however, at

once ran away. And the whole party with the donkey went to the summit of the mountain to the maḳām of the wely. And there they removed their shoes and recited the fathāh to Sultān Badr, and they all took a solemn oath that they would never return near the waḳf of Sheikh Merzūk, and they imposed on themselves and the owner of the donkey the rule that every one of them should bring a jug of oil annually to the wely. Thus it is you see in this maḳām jugs of oil and lamps and jars and incense and candle ends. And many women bring, each one, a jug of oil or a coffee cup of oil when any of her household is sick, and they leave these bringing back some of the oil in the maḳām with which they rub the sick. Other women also take herbage from the neighbourhood and make a fumigation (baḥūr) for the sick. Others also take seven small stones for healing which, by the will of God, will be effectual.

Another Story of Sheikh Merzūk.

Once, when a couple of herdsmen were passing the maḳām of Sheikh Merzūk they found among the many jars lying there two almost full of oil. And they filled some vessels from the jars and took them home, and having closed the mouths of the vessels with clay they put them away against the time they should need them. And after this they returned to look after their cattle. At the place where they were accustomed to feed their cattle were two vines and a fig tree. And one of the men began to climb the fig tree. While he was doing this one of the cows began to eat leaves from one of the trees of the wely and immediately the branch of the fig tree where the herdsman was, broke off, and the man was precipitated to the ground, and broke his foot and had to be carried to the maḳām. The cow, startled by the fall, ran away and fell from the top of the mountain to the valley below and was so badly injured that she had to be killed, and the meat sold for next to nothing.

Half a year later some soldiers came to the herdsmen's house to collect taxes and as the latter had no money they fetched the vessels of oil, intending to sell the oil and raise money for the tax collector. What was their dismay to find them empty, although after the most careful search they could find neither hole nor crack out of which the oil could have escaped. Having no money to pay, and being hard pressed by the government they had, to bargain to herd

the cow of one of the villagers for the whole year without payment in return for the owner advancing the needed money.

And when one day after this they were herding their cattle around the *makām* of *Sheikh Merzūk*, they entered the *makām* and found all the jugs and lamps as full of oil as before.¹

Story about Sheikh Munjid.

Sheikh Munjid was one of the sons of *Sultān Badr* and his *makām* is at *Tell es-Sāfi*. Belonging to this *makām* is a garden in which there are fig trees. A man whose land joined on to this *wakf* property was one day making a wall of loose stones, and seeing some suitable stones in the garden of the *makām* he entered and began to roll them towards his own property. And as the work was heavy he brought in the afternoon a camel to carry the stones. While the camel was going through the garden of the *makām* it seized a branch of a fig tree there and at once its neck became withered and it was unable to swallow the branch. And when the man noticed this, he made the camel kneel down and loaded it up with stones, but when he wanted to make it rise up it could not, even though the man beat it, because it could not move its neck. The man saw at once that the camel was doomed, and began to unload it before it died, but now he was unable to get the stones off its back. At this moment a woman passed along the road and the man sent her to the village with a message to his brother and his wife that they should come to him at once. And the woman found the brother sitting with some other villagers at the door of the wely of *Sheikh Munjid* and gave her message. And the brother rose up and went with his friends, among whom was the servant of the wely, to the garden, and there they saw the camel with the fig-branch in its mouth, and its neck dried up and unable to move. Then the servant of the wely exclaimed: "This has all happened to you because you were robbing stones from the garden of the wely, for these stones belong to the grave of a pious man, as you can see by the inscription on them. But now all of you clear away from the camel." And he took the halter in his hand and exclaimed: "Stand up in the name of God and in the secret power (سِرّ) of *Sheikh Munjid*." Immediately the loaded camel arose and walked before all the crowd. And he walked to the door of the wely of

¹ The implication being that the oil which had disappeared from their vessels had been supernaturally restored to the wely.

Sheikh Munjid and there he sat down and the stones were removed from his back and were rested against the sides of the door. This man, the servant of the wely, was named Sheikh 'Ali es-Suri; he came from Beit Nattif. He was a dervish who had received his gifts from Sheikh Muhammad, the servant of Sultān Badr.

These inscribed stones remained at the door of the wely a long time, until one day some Christian monks passed that way on their way to visit el-Khudr, and they admired these stones very much and paid the mukhtar of the village, 'Abd el-Karīm, to bring the stones to them. This he did, sharing the money with Sheikh 'Ali. And in consequence of selling these stones of the pious people all Abd el-Karīm's children died in one year, and the Sheikh 'Ali got a pain in his foot which developed into a sore beside his ankle, which remained open to his death.

Story of Sheikh Hübāny.

There is a makām near Beit 'Atāb called after Sheikh el-Hübāny, which is held in much honour: no one swearing falsely by him can escape the evil consequences. As an example of this the following tale is told. Once there was a quarrel between the people of el-Kabu and those of Rās Abu 'Amār over the robbery of a goat. It was well known that the latter people had stolen the goat from the people of Kabu and that the goat was in the possession of a certain individual. But the robber himself denied the whole story. At length the people of Kabu demanded that the robber should take an oath with Sheikh Hübāny on a Friday after the mid-day prayers. This was agreed to, and all the people assembled at Sheikh Hübāny at the appointed time. The shepherds of Kabu began to advise the people of Rās Abu 'Amār to come to terms without swearing, because it was universally known that Sheikh Hübāny was revengeful and that harm would happen; for it was a public secret that the Rās Abu 'Amār people really had the goat. The people replied: "We have no goat, and you have no claim against us except to make us take the oath." And when they reached the makām the father of the supposed thief went in and took the oath. What usually happened was that if anyone left the makām after having perjured himself the wely began to gnash his teeth like a fasting camel. This time nothing of the kind occurred, and the suspected man exclaimed: "We have now taken the oath and now you have no claim against us. Let the wely rise up himself

and reveal where your goat is." This was making a mock of the wely. But when all the people had gone out the goat's owner entered the maḳam and said: "O my lord Sheikh Hūbāny, I take refuge in you, and my hope was that you would reveal the justice of my claim against these people before they left here. And now they have taken an oath and think lightly of you, while I put my trust in you because I knew that you were very vengeful against perjurers in your name. And now I am treated unjustly, and I am a poor man and have no one but you to reveal my rightful claim against these people." And he approached the stones of the sheikh's tomb and kissed them and departed. And as he came out he found a crowd collected round a horse belonging to Rās Abu 'Amār which was fallen to the ground; this horse was the property of the father of the thief. And at this moment a man came running from the village of Rās Abu 'Amār, who said to the father of the robber: "Hasten home, because your son is dangerously ill, and if you have not yet taken the oath do not do so, but please come to terms with the people of Ḳabu, because since you left home to take this oath your son has been taken ill and is now at the point of death."

And the father arose and began to make peace with the people of Ḳabu and to beg for their forgiveness. But the people of Ḳabu when they saw what disasters had occurred said: "We are ourselves now altogether satisfied, but you have now to make your peace with the wely in whose name you have perjured yourself. We told you many times that it was better to settle this affair satisfactorily without an oath. You must now save yourself from the wely." So the people of Rās Abu 'Amār made a sacrifice at the wely, and they entertained all the people of Ḳabu, and then they departed.

Story about Sheikh Hūbāny.

It happened one day that a man from Beit 'Atāb, who had been ploughing near Sheikh Hūbāny, decided, at the approach of evening, to leave his plough to the guardianship of the wely, instead of carrying it home. He put his plough and goad in the maḳam and went to his village. By chance a man from Gaza, who had just stolen a donkey from Bittir, passed that way in the night. As he was very wet from the rain, and dared not go to the village because it was so near to Bittir, he decided to sleep in the wely. He reached the door of the wely and tried to get the donkey to enter, but it refused to do so. After a great deal of vain effort, he

tied the donkey near the door and went in. On entering, he found the plough there, and exclaimed, "Thank God, now I shall be able to plough the fields. Before break of day I will carry off the plough on my donkey's back." Accordingly, when he arose from sleep, he seized hold of the plough and started to leave the wely, but could not cross the threshold. It seemed to him as if he was held fast by someone who kept pulling him back as long as he held the stolen property. Then he began to hear a roaring sound and a voice, as if a man wanted to rush on him; this was followed by a roaring like an excited camel and by a gnashing of teeth. And he looked at the maḳām, and, lo, it was shaking like a tree moved by the wind, rolling up and down. When he saw these signs, which he knew were made by the wely to protect the property committed to his care, he stood still in fear. Now while he did so the iron part of the plough fell on his foot and pierced it and entered the ground, pinning down his foot like a nail, and he was unable to move on account of the agony. When dawn appeared, the owner of the plough found the donkey outside the wely, and the man in this predicament inside. And when he asked what had occurred, the robber confessed that he had stolen the donkey from Bittir, and begged the newcomer, for God's sake, to carry him out of the maḳām, because he felt as if he were choking. But the man, fearing lest the robber's relations should accuse him of the misfortunes which had occurred, went to Beit 'Atāb to bring some witnesses. And the people of the village, together with the Sheikh Aḥmed esh-Sherif, the dervish, came and found the robber with the iron through his foot, and he narrated to them all he had told to the other man. The people tried to lift the robber but they were unable to pluck the iron out of the ground, it being fixed in the ground like a nail driven into wood. At last Sheikh Aḥmed esh-Sherif drew near and read the fathāh, and said: "O my lord, O Hūbāny, for the honour of my grandfather, Sultān Badr, relieve this man." At once the iron sprang out of the ground and the men took the robber to their village, and sent word to his own village, Suwāfir, that his relations should come and fetch him. And when they came and looked at the wound in his foot they found it full of maggots. And they exclaimed: "O God! God, how strong is your power, O Hūbāny, that the worms begin to eat a man while he lives." And the people took the man away, but, before he reached his village, he died.

Story about Sheikh Sālāh abu Lebban.

This Sheikh Sālāh was one of the descendants of Abd el-Kader ; there are many now in the village of Zakariyeh who claim descent from him. Sheikh Sālāh used to live in Deir 'Abān, and a son of his, a shepherd, lived at Khurbet Mejenah. One day two men of Kuriet el-Brij had a quarrel, in which one killed the other. The murderer fled from Brij and took refuge with the son of Sheikh Sālāh at Khurbet Mejenah, for fear of blood-vengeance. The relations of the murdered man learned where the murderer was hiding, from a villager of Sur'ār. The murderer had told his protector why he had come, and, to help him, the son of Sheikh Sālāh had changed clothes with him. When the blood avengers from Brij reached the Khurbet, they stood around the mouth of the cave, while the man from Sur'ah came to the entrance. He reported that there was a man sleeping inside alone in the cloak which he had seen on the murderer, and they drew near and killed him without knowing who he was, and fled away thinking that they had taken blood-vengeance. But the victim was the son of Sheikh Sālāh. When the news came to the ears of the old sheikh, he cried out: "Thank God that it is my son that is killed, and not the man who came to him for protection, for that would have been a disgrace." He knew, however, who was really responsible for his son's death ; not the people of Brij, but the man who had led them there : and he determined upon revenge. So some days later, when going towards Sur'ār, the Sheikh found this man watering his flock by the roadside, and exclaimed : "Not everyone who can kill people's children can himself escape. I shall now take vengeance upon you for my son," and he drew his sword and killed him. He then collected the goats that were with him and departed to Deir 'Abān, leaving the dead man beside the well. The people of Sur'ār saw all this happen, and, having taken up the body and buried it, they went to the governor of the country, the head of the house of Lahhām at Beit 'Atāb. (The government of the land was then in the hands of those powerful sheikhs.) When the people of Sur'ār had told their story to the sheikhs of Deir Lahhām, the sheikhs summoned Sheikh Sālāh abu Lebban to appear before them. But he refused, and sent a message as follows : "I will not come, I will not listen to your government, I am not under your command, If you are sheikhs, and the descendants of sheikhs, and have

power among the people, I am greater than you. I am the son of a sultan, and have more people with me. If they want to make war I will bring against them fighting men more in number than the ants." The messenger returned and told the sheikhs all that had happened, and what Sheikh Sālah had said: so the people of Deir Lahhām sent information to Abu Nabbūt in Jaffa, the most powerful sheikh in the district, who summoned Sheikh Sālah to appear before him. And when Abu Nabbūt asked the sheikh, "Did you kill the man," he replied: "Yes, I killed him in blood-vengeance for my son, for this is the law, if one does a murder he must be murdered." Abu Nabbūt gave orders that Sheikh Sālah should be hanged; but when the sheikh heard of "hanging," he drew near to Abu Nabbūt and opened his mouth wide. And Abu Nabbūt saw in his mouth "a sea and ships." And Abu Nabbūt was afraid, and exclaimed: "Pardon me, O Sheikh Sālah, and ask from me whatever you need." And Sheikh Sālah said: "I want you to forgive me all the taxes due on my land." Abu Nabbūt replied: "I forgive them, and I give to you also for yourself the taxes on the Wady es-Sur'ār for fifteen years, because this is the land on which your son was killed." So Sheikh Sālah was released from custody and departed to his village; and he took the taxes from all the villages in Wādy es-Sur'ār to the day of his death.

When, after many years, Sheikh Sālah became ill, he asked to be taken to his village, Zakariyeh, and, after a time, he realized that his illness was mortal. So he summoned his relatives around him and told them that that night he should be removed in God's mercy. "Don't trouble," he said, "about me, but I will now tell you my place of burial. Go and dig me a grave in the makām of the Nebi Zakariyeh," and he indicated the exact spot. And they went to Nebi Zakariyeh and began to dig. But the sheikh, as he was lying on his bed at home, exclaimed: "The place where they are digging is not the right one. I know because I hear the sound of the *fas* (pick) in the ground. Go and tell them." And the messengers went and gave the diggers fresh directions, and when they dug at the place indicated they found an unused grave, roofed with flat stones (سواقيف) as if the mason had just made it. In the night the sheikh died, as he had said, and they took him to the Nebi, and washed the body, and put on the shroud, and offered prayers and buried him there. And no others of the house of Deir Lebban is there buried: if they were to bury in

the grave of Sheikh Sālah, that same year many of the family would die. Also, it is believed, if anyone wants to know the antecedents of Deir Lebban and consults the books, he will die the same year. And if a dervish, belonging to the family, reveals their secrets, or performs a miracle, he dies the same year.

Story of Sheikh Shehādy in Abu Dis.

There is a dervish called Sheikh Shehādy, belonging to Beit Unia, who was long accustomed to go about among the many villages in the neighbourhood of his home. Many of the people believe in him, that he is a holy man, and they get amulets from him (حباب) as a cure for fever. He also fans (lit. "blows") the sick people with his aba (cloak). One day when the sheikh was sitting in Abu Dis with the "noble" people, who belong to the family of 'Araḳāt, a woman drew near and said: "O, my lord Sheikh Ishhādy, I beg you to accompany me to my house and see Khalil. He asked from what he was suffering, and she replied: "He has just arrived from Jericho ill with fever. He has headache, and his skin is hot like fire, and he drinks much water and is continually vomiting." And when the sheikh came to the house he found Khalil delirious, and he said: "There is no refuge or power except in God. That which has happened to Khalil is not fever, but a jinn has entered into him which can only be expelled with very great effort." Safiyeh, the wife, replied: "Thank God, that you my lord are here, and by the permission of God and the power of your ancestors you will restore him to health. You will have from us a vow before the face of God. But Khalil is a Muslim and poor and he has a family, my lord." The sheikh said: "Now everything must be done as I say, or he will not get better." Safiyeh and her relations replied: "Do what you will, we deliver him to God and to you." Then the sheikh told everyone to go out and sent Safiyeh to bring him a stick and a rope. When she returned he tied Khalil hand and foot, and shut the door, and having turned back the bed clothes began beating Khalil with the stick, shouting out: "Come out, O Isaac!" And the sick man began to cry out with pain and exclaimed: "Take this man away from me, he is killing me, he is killing me, he is killing me!" And the sheikh continued his beating and would let no one come to his help, and would not let his wife speak to him while he continued to exclaim: "Come out,

O Isaac!" And he told Safiyeh not to answer her husband, because the speaker was not Khalil but Isaac. "This Isaac is a jinn who comes from Salonica, and he has entered into Khalil." And Khalil, on account of the many blows, was unable to stand, and cried out to his wife: "This man is killing me, I am at the point of death. Take him away and give me some water to drink. I am going to die, you cursed woman, why do you stand by and not help me?" The sheikh said: "Do not give him water, for the speaker is Isaac"; and he increased the violence of the blows, saying: "Come out, O Isaac, I know you come from Salonica to make mock of Khalil and Safiyeh." And the sick man was unable to utter a word, and beckoned with his hand that his wife should give him water. But the sheikh stopped her, saying: "Isaac will soon come out, but if you give him water he will return." And he increased his efforts, until at length, after a severe blow on his side, Khalil said no more and became lifeless. And when the sheikh saw this he said: "Now Isaac has left him and he is at rest. Give me his aba." And he covered him with it, and directed that he was to be left undisturbed until he woke. And he made the wife come out and locked the door, and then joined some of the 'Arakāt people in one of the houses. But Safiyeh and her friends waited long for Khalil to wake, but when in the late afternoon there was no movement they persuaded Safiyeh to go inside. And when she came in she saw him sleeping, and she put her hand to his head to see if he was perspiring, but to her horror it was cold as snow. And she called the others and they found the man was dead, and that Sheikh Shehādy had killed him. And they searched for him and found him with a son of 'Arakāt, and wanted to kill him there, but the man protected him. And they went to the governor of Jerusalem and laid information against Shehādy, and the governor came with a doctor and examined the corpse, and then took the sheikh to Jerusalem. And they asked him why he had killed the man and he replied: "It was not I, but Isaac the jinn who killed him; while he was coming out of him he caught him by the throat and killed him."

All this happened quite recently; Sheikh Shehādy was in prison just before the War, and may very likely be there still.

(To be continued.)