

## THE IMMOVABLE EAST.

By PHILIP J. BALDENSPERGER.

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*(Continued from Q.S., 1917, p. 17.)*

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*The General Characteristics of the Different Towns.*III.—THE SISTER-TOWNS RAMLEH AND LYDDA.<sup>1</sup>

*Er-Ramleh* (الرملة); during the many centuries when Jaffa was a ruin, or of little importance, was the capital of Palestine; and, in fact, from the destruction of Jaffa in A.D. 1267 to about the middle of the nineteenth century it was a very important town, until the government seat was transferred to Jaffa. In 1325 the Tangiers' traveller, Ibn Batuta, calls it "the greater Palestine":—

"The town of Ramleh, which is Palestine, a great city with many choice riches and fine markets."<sup>2</sup> More than a century later Bertrandon de la Broquière says: "it is a very commercial town in a fertile plain." It has been destroyed and rebuilt ever since its foundation in the seventh or eighth century, and the name itself has been altered from (*probably*) Ram to Ramlet, not on account of the sand (رمل), as is so often repeated, but on account of a complete defeat of the inhabitants, who had resisted the Egyptian Khalif, and were put to death leaving but *widows* (ارملة) and called "the widowed" (الرملة). The tradition exists among the inhabitants. Like many other towns, Ramleh can only boast of its past greatness, and the many ruined mosques and palaces tell of its beauty. Salah ed-Din often came to stay in Ramleh, and the White Mosque, one of the best preserved ruins of those days, is a witness to the glory of the past.

<sup>1</sup> [It will of course be borne in mind that all these sketches were written several years ago.—ED.]

<sup>2</sup> Madinat er-Ramlet wahi Falastin Madinat Kabirat Kathirat el-Khirat hassanat el-aswak.

Of the present 5,000 or 6,000 inhabitants, 3,500 are Moham-medans, about 1,000 or 1,200 Greek Church Christians, and the rest immigrated Latin Church Christians, Protestants, and Jews: these latter since 1889 only. In the days of Benjamin of Tudela there was a considerable Jewish cemetery, which he says was *two miles* in circumference—a statement which seems rather exaggerated. The inhabitants like to talk of its greatness and show traces of its ancient walls almost a mile to the west.

The indigenous inhabitants may be divided into three distinct classes: the Arab, the Egyptian and the Philistine. The North Africans who are numerous are considered as strangers, though many have been settled here since the French occupation of Algeria, and are almost considered as inhabitants. The children talk Ramleh Arabic.

The Arab effendis are the wealthy class. They possess the lands round about the town and almost all the fine olive-groves, the present source of wealth of the town. They hold the lands by right of first occupants, when, after a destruction by the Mamlukes of Egypt, they re-entered the town, and claiming descent from Khalid and Husain, took possession at a time when nobody cared to possess land. The impenetrable groves were the haunt of wild beasts and robbers, and this increased the security of uncontested ownership. The effendis are in charge of the standard of Rubin with all the incomes and expenses depending on the shrine and the yearly fair held on the borders of Rubin in September. Through their influence Ramleh has been comparatively safe from massacres of Christians during the last century, and if we except the massacre of the male Christians and the sale of the females which followed the retreat of Bonaparte in 1799, and which was done by the fanatics of Nablüs and Hebron, the town can be called the quietest and safest in Palestine.

The richer effendis would only have lost their wealth if they had excited the mob, which had nothing to lose, and the poor Christians had nothing to give but their lives, which after all, would be no satisfaction to them, as the Christians were scribes and faithful stewards of the money lent to the peasants and poorer classes. Although the earlier state of affairs has ceased, and the Christians are no more in their old state of slavery, yet the effendis are still the honoured and, to some degree, mighty class of Ramleh, and have not altogether forgotten their feudal rights.

The Egyptians and Philistines are a very low class of individuals, principally camel-drivers and farmers, both callings well suited to make them courageous, independent and daring. As townspeople they have the common wit and all their vices; as camel-drivers they know the roads and the wayfaring people, as well as all their habits; bringing packages and goods to the magazines and houses, they know also the interiors of the latter and the wealth there collected; and finally, as farmers, they have an excuse for being always out of doors. This mode of life has led many of them to be robbers and burglars, and quite recently (1900) they have managed so dexterously, that the burglars themselves have been placed as guardians in the streets of the town; and what is worse they know the dread of the stricter town population, and sometimes murder them without fearing their vengeance. They are strong and adroit workers, are the most impudent liars, and do not care a snap for a word given. Honour in this sense is altogether unknown, and anyone who has the misfortune to be obliged to employ them must tolerate them philosophically. The very brown and scanty-bearded fellows (the younger people shave the beards) generally carry loads from Jaffa to Jerusalem on their camels in winter, and look after their farm lands in summer and autumn. From June to September, the vast threshing floor east of Ramleh is alive with them.

The North Africans live under an acknowledged chief and form a stricter community than in any other place, and whether of Tripoli or Morocco they all accept the name of Maghraby. Though they worship at times in the great mosque, *Jame el-Kebir* (جامع الكبير), yet they have lately repaired one of the numerous mosques, the *Sheikh Risslan* (شيخ رسلان), for themselves, in 1891 as they belong to the Malki sect. They have a language of their own called *Shilh*, a Kabyle dialect, which they only use when they are in the presence of those whom they do not want to be able to understand them. Divorce being an easy matter, they marry from the lower classes of Egyptians and Philistines, for the Arabs—not only the effendi class but also the merchants—do not give their daughters to those strangers with unknown antecedents. Being generally on their homeward journey from Mecca (though I have known several for fifteen years in that state) they are all called Haj, and as they have brought spices and unknown ingredients from Arabia, with

a little knowledge of reading and writing, they practice as doctors, sorcerers and so forth, and avoid all manual labour which they detest. Whenever I wanted a guardian for the lands or crops I used to send my Maghraby to look for one ; presently, he would be back with "one of his best friends—a very honest man" with many other good qualities. On such recommendation I accept him and would have him registered, but then came the answer : "Well, I don't know his name, he has just arrived from Egypt or Mecca," and it turns out that he has not been so inquisitive as to ask for his name !

Newcomers were usually better than the old ones, as they stood very many hardships and were possibly short of money, so for a few months everything was very smooth, but never for a longer period, as they love their complete liberty and independence more than anything else. They only hire themselves for a time in order to move further with a few medjidis in their pockets. They are often French troopers, and carry their passport in the small leather bag which contains all their valuables. In spite of their French claim for outward protection they are more fanatical Moslems than the inhabitants of Palestine. Of the four nations with whom they have more or less to do, they respect the Turks as representatives of the Moslem power on earth, and having the Sultan as Khalif. The French are the nation affording them protection, but as they have taken their country there is a mingled feeling of support and fierce hatred. The Spaniards are spoken of with contempt for their not being able to subdue Morocco, but still sometimes do business with them. The English, especially for the reputation as a powerful seafaring nation and the impregnable fortress of Gibraltar, are spoken of with awe. But of real sympathy or preference for one or the other, there is absolutely none, all being simply Rumis, and profoundly hated by every good Moslem. Their love of visiting shrines and of travelling in all Arabic-speaking countries makes them keenly inventive as to how to get money, and the credulity of the natives is easily put to contribution by the sly pilgrims, as can be seen in the following adventure.

#### *Sheikh Othman's Adventure.*

Sheikh Othman, a man of about fifty years, had the honour of being descending from the Prophet's family, and as such enjoyed

the privilege of wearing the green turban. But he was not very wealthy and had to work for his daily bread. One of his forefathers died with the reputation of a saint, and was buried in his own lands between Ramleh and Lydda, where a small mosque was built, and Sheikh Othman was in charge of the grave of his ancestor Sheikh 'Ali. Though Othman was only a shoemaker, he was very proud of his descent, and together with the product of his work and a little more income from several gardens, he brought up his family decently and was considered a wealthy man in Ramleh. A wily Maghraby, having asked as many particulars as he could about his family, came to him and without any introduction saluted him: "Peace be on thee, Sheikh Othman son of Othman, well-named and destined by thy noble descent to sit on the Ottoman throne, and not a shoemaker's stool; treasures are awaiting thee in thy property, go and take them." Sheikh Othman listened and inquired about this curious prediction. "I am Haj Sleiman Ben Ahmad Abu Mohammed," answered the African, "and having struck the sand, I found that in the crypts below the spot (*makām*) where your venerable ancestor Sheikh 'Ali was buried are undreamt of riches, which can be had on any Thursday evening by whosoever wishes to receive them, provided he performs certain indispensable formulas." Othman was astonished that a stranger knew so much about himself and his ancestors, and at once believed every word, and said he had no objection whatever. Haj Sleiman offered to show him a part of the riches, and accordingly on the very next Thursday night he took him there and showed him behind a cloud of artificial fireworks many glittering things.

Sheikh Othman retired well satisfied, but Haj Sleiman told him that his riches were kept back by a dozen ghosts who were quite naked and could be bribed by receiving earthly clothes such as the people in Ramleh wore, that is, the red silk shirt and white underclothes, caps, turbans and red shoes from his shop. Naturally enough food had to be prepared for the reception. Moreover, everything was to be kept as secret as possible, and as the ghosts (who for the occasion would be transformed into bodyguards for the new Sultan) had no money about them, they were to receive a trifle of ten or fifteen pounds each as pocket money to start with in this new life. Finally, a divulgement of the secret to anybody would immediately destroy the whole scheme and the treasures would be lost.

So Othman secretly mortgaged his lands to raise the money and provided the twelve "suits of garments," which are inevitable in every feast. The cauldrons were put up, rice and meat were set a boiling, and bread was not wanting. As the muezzin called out for the midnight prayers on the distant minaret of the Great Jame' in Ramleh, twelve naked bronze figures seemed to arise from the fumes of the fire which Haj Sleiman had kindled in the porch, and incense was spreading its odours. Drums and cymbals announced the disclosure of the treasures, and Sheikh Othman, who had big sacks with him, was told to gather his property, which he, in a lordly manner, declined to do till he had clothed "his own" bodyguards and when they had eaten. When supper was over every man-ghost received his share in terrestrial pounds, the music became more intense, and Sheikh 'Ali, the noble ancestor, was invoked in frantic rounds and dances while the whirling ghosts knocked and jostled each other, bowing reverently before "their lord and master," uttering very unhuman voices. At last the treasures began to spring up and heap themselves before his astonished eyes, and he now joined the wild dances and whirled round and jumped about until he remembered no more what happened, except that he awoke when day was dawning and found himself lying alone and cold in the porch of the *makām*. Empty sacks and cauldrons were there, the ashes long ago cooled down, but Haj Sleiman and the bodyguard had disappeared. Sheikh Othman came back to his shop, and for many weeks kept repeating the words "I saw it with my own eyes, nobody told me so." He had lost his money and his senses, till after two years he felt his reason creeping back, and took to shoemaking again, which he continued till his death, when he left the shop to his sons as the ancient Egyptians did.

As regards the Christians. By an edict of Sultan Mutawakkil, A.D. 847, the Christians and Jews had to be distinguished from the true believers by wearing a black turban and a leather girdle; they were not allowed to ride on horses (donkeys were allowed), nor were they permitted the use of iron stirrups. Linen, silk, or woollen girdles were worn by the Moslems, just as by the Hebrew priests, who also had linen girdles (Ex. xxviii, 4, *et seq.*). The Christians, as well as the Jews, are now emancipated, and every one is clothed as he chooses, yet the Ramleh Christians, mostly belonging to the Greek Church, now only differ from the Moham-

medans in wearing no turban at all. The Roman Catholics and other Christians (very few until recently) are more emancipated. Many of the Christians are gold, silver, copper or tin-smiths, grocers and oil manufacturers. They have received a slight education, yet there are but few who really know how to read and write, but they can all calculate with astonishing accuracy, remembering the minutest details as long as it appertains to sums received or spent. Now-a-days they wear the tarbush only, without the turban, and red shoes without stockings, leaving the calf of the leg bare, as they have very short trousers. The women are hardly distinguishable from their Moslem sisters, as they are always veiled out of doors and have the izar round their bodies. On Sundays they go for a walk along the road, and share all the superstitions and beliefs (outside of their catechism) of the wonderful and supernatural appearances of good and bad jinns.

*(To be continued.)*

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#### NOTES ON THE CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM FOUNDED BEFORE A.D. 1099.<sup>1</sup>

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C.B., M.A., R.E., etc.

It is somewhat to be regretted that the word "church," in the English language has several different meanings, which sometimes lead to a confusion of ideas. For example, it would be correct to say that there was a Christian church in Jerusalem prior to the siege of that city by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70, and it would also be allowable to say that there was no church in Jerusalem before that date. The word may be used to express the body of Christians in a particular town or country, or for the assembly of the believers, or for the place where such an assembly was held, or, lastly, to denote a building specially designed and erected for the

<sup>1</sup> [Although Sir Charles Watson did not live to complete this essay, these "Notes" are too useful to be left unprinted, and the MS. has been printed as it left his hands and without the benefit of any modifications which he may have wished to make.—ED.]