

THE IMMOVABLE EAST.

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RELIGION, FEASTS, PROCESSIONS.

THE Mohammedan religion is professed by all fellahin in the south of Bethlehem as far as the desert, with Hebron, as it were, a zealous centre.¹ Christianity is scattered among the Mohammedans in a kind of oval island in the country, with its extreme ends at Bethlehem in the south, and Sebaste near Nablūs in the north, more or less on the watershed of the mountains of Judah and Ephraim, but with a very small breadth east and west. In the maritime plains from Carmel in the north to the River of Egypt in the south, there is but one small centre, not in any village, but in the trio of towns close to each other, Jaffa, Ramleh and Lydd. Galilee in the north has another small island of Christians with Nazareth as centre, and all maritime towns of Phoenicia, beginning at Haifa up to Antioch. Beyond Jordan is es-Salt, Ramoth in Gilead and Madaba.

All the rest is Mohammedan. The convents have certainly the greatest claim to have maintained the respective Christian communities in ages when it was dangerous to profess Christianity. The missionary movements of the last sixty years have encouraged Christianity and prevented its disappearance by schools, hospitals and churches erected in Christian centres. Before this event the Christians lived in a state of slavery, when outside their villages, oppressed by the Mohammedan fellahin. To avoid being crushed completely, some entire villages relapsed into Mohammedanism, others had the *tanābe(t)* (تَنْابَة), a kind of alliance—offensive and

¹ [It must be recalled that Mr. Baldensperger is referring throughout these articles to the conditions that ruled several years ago.—ED.]

defensive. Religious hatred exists and has not died out between Moslems and Christians.

One Moslem, who was murdered, and had the reputation of being very wicked, was believed to have occupied all the devils for at least seven months, in dragging him to the lowest hell, so that any Christian dying in the interval found his way to Paradise rid of every obstacle. They are on a whole tolerably good neighbours, and sometimes associate in small works, as stones, lime, or flocks for the butcher, and even in agriculture, the Christian advancing the money—they are always wealthier—and the Moslem doing the work.

Feasts are called *'eyād* (عياد), when they are religious, and of course the two religions never mix with each others. The *'id* (عيد) is really the anniversary of the same feast, occurring on a known date, and is therefore a "repetition." The feasts of Moses and others are called *mūsam* (موسم), and are always in spring and autumn, independent of the Moslem calendar. Marriages, circumcisions, vows are called each by their respective proper names, and are neither *'eyād* nor *mūsam*.

The *'id* is a home-feast, obligatory upon every Moslem. There are the *'id el-kebir* (عيد الكبير), "the Great Feast," or the *'id el-dehiye(t)* (عيد الدحية), "the Feast of Atonement," and *'id Ramadan* (عيد رمضان), "the Feast of Ramadan," sixty-five days distant from each other. The principal features of these feasts are that whoever can afford it buys new clothes for the family, and makes a sacrifice (ذبيحة, *dhabiha*[t]), which is eaten by the whole family. Blood is sprinkled on the door-posts and olive twigs are stuck about the door. These practices are evidently reminiscent of the Hebrew custom before leaving Egypt (Exod. xii, 7), and faintly recall the booths and branches of olive-trees of Neh. viii, 15. The *katib*, like Ezra (Neh. viii, 2), gathers the people, and reads to them portions of the Koran. Every family sends a portion of the sacrifice to the women of their relations married in another kindred or village. There are no dances, processions, or loud manifestations of joy at the *'eyād* feasts.

The *mūsam* feasts are visited by the corporation of villagers, with the standards and instruments. This procession (سيرة, *seyara*[t]) leaves the village with the standard of the patron saint

which, as it is very heavy, is carried by a strong man initiated into one of the holy orders; the flagstaff is stuck into a leather pouch and carried in front, followed by the musicians of the order, also initiated dervishes, who have generally two different drums, the *noby* (نوبة) and the *bāz* (باز), and cymbals (كاسة, *kasse*[t]). The men follow the instrumentalists, and if the village has a militant dervish he accompanies them, striking himself with his sword on the belly, or sticking the heavy pin into his cheeks or eye-sockets, being half-naked he exhibits his wounds to the admiration of the faithful. The women in their best attire follow by twos or threes, arm-in-arm, singing. They cease the music when on the road, and only begin again when they pass a sanctuary on the way, till they reach the gates of Jerusalem, where they fall into file, and enter towards the Haram, one procession after the other, drumming, dancing, and singing. The rhythm of the drum is invariably the same: *tam—tam—tam—tam—tam—tam*, and the cymbals are struck at the first and the fifth stroke to accompany the drum; the dervish with the *daf*, jumping and falling in at the same time with the cymbals. Another militant dervish, striking himself, holding the sword with both hands, and in horizontal movements to and from his belly, follows half-naked, bleeding and lifted up. The men and women who follow repeat in a wailing tone *Allah dāim Allah* (الله دايم الله), "God is everlasting."

This "Moses procession" reminds one of the procession of the ark, which was organized by King David; thousands of Judah had come, probably with their standards (*degel*, Numb. ii, 2), towards Jerusalem. Probably representatives of six tribes only with their standards were present. David stripped himself half-naked, jumping and dancing the special dervish distortions (*kirkēr*, 2 Sam. vi, 16), so that Michal became offended.

Having passed a few days in Jerusalem with the Great Standard of Moses (*beyrak en-nabi Mūsa*, بيريقي النبي موسى), they go to the grave and back again. Every procession returns home. This spring feast, with the processions towards the east, is probably the "feast of the Resurrection of Nature" of the Phoenicians, which was also accompanied by dervishes. They, too, cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives or swords and lances like the modern dervishes, till the blood gushed out (1 Kings xviii, 28).

The *mūsam* of Rubin resembles that of Moses only as regards the processions. It is always in autumn and is towards the west. Rubin, near the sea, is in a sandy waste. People come from all Palestine and remain about one month. This feast has a more frivolous character; it is a modern Baal-Peor in one sense. Perhaps it is also a remainder of the Phœnician "feast of betrothal between sweet water and salt water," still observed at a well near Tyre; when the waters become troubled, they take some salt water and pour it in to clear it again. As the Rubin flows into the sea it may be for this reason that the feast is celebrated here.

Every prophet or saint has a shrine and lands belonging to it; there is also a private administrator, who holds the standard of the saint. The government has taken most of these lands under its protection, repairing the mosques, lighting the lamps, providing mats for pilgrims, and covering the graves with the silk or velvet cover.

The standard of Moses is in green silk with golden brocade. It bears an inscription taken from the third sura of the Koran and the dedication: "there is no God but one, and our Lord Moses is a prophet of God."

Rubin has a white standard with the same inscription, except that Rubin is inserted in place of Moses. The Turkish arms, the moon and star, are on the usual standard which is put above the tent of the manager during the feast. The real standard worth about £7 is not usually put out. The manager told me he had about £125 to £140 income yearly from the Rubin properties, which he entirely spent in feasts and alms. The repair of the minaret in 1886 alone cost him about £400. He killed nearly a hundred goats during the thirty days' feast, and about 1,000 lbs. of rice were boiled for the poor before his tent.

The tribes of Israel had also standards (*degel*), and ensigns (*ōth*) of their father's house (Numb. ii, 2), which belonged to each manager. But in the camp they set up only four standards to the four cardinal points, and every standard represented three tribes. Judah's standard was first, towards the rising sun, Reuben's was south. The inscription and colour of every standard was evidently different. The former was, perhaps, based on the blessing pronounced by Jacob on each of his sons. On this view Reuben's standard was white, "unstable as water," with the inscription: "Reuben, my firstborn, my might, the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, the excellency of power" (Gen. xlix, 3).

We have already seen that ploughs and agricultural implements are deposited in the mosques if the lands are far from the villages. The saint is believed to protect them against theft.

Every saint is entitled to a lamp, and this ought to be kept burning, either from the regular income of the maḳām, or by the liberality of those who have olives or oil-presses, or even by a passer-by, who may light the lamp and furnish a small jug of oil to invoke a blessing on his undertakings. Lamps were always considered indispensable to sanctuaries (cf. Exod. xxvii, 20).

Visiting sanctuaries is an act of piety, and small rags are tied to the window-grates or bushes surrounding the sanctuary in remembrance of the visit.

The feasts of vows (*nidher*), like the marriages, are not accompanied by standards and the holy instruments, but by the joyous crowd, who shoot in the air or at targets, and play the *neye(t)* "the flute of the young." A young player at the head is followed by the rest clapping their hands. These visits to shrines are generally thanksgiving feasts for the recovery from illness, or escape from military service, etc., and are, therefore, very joyous, like those of the Hebrews—"with the voice of melody (Isaiah li, 3).

The women, who are always in the rear of the procession, sing as they approach the destination; they fire in the air, and, if there are horsemen, they gallop up and down with a pretence of attack and defence, while drawing the sword. At the shrine the sacrifice, a sheep or goat, is killed and prepared in large cauldrons; the choice part, however, is reserved for the priest, imam, or whoever is the president of the shrine (1 Sam. ii, 15). Whilst the meat is on the fire, a woman dances in the centre of women or girls, with a handkerchief or sword in her hand. This dancing (مهالي, *mehala*) consists mainly of movements of the body, with an occasional hop to the right, to the left, forwards or backwards, the sword above her head, inclining the upper part of her body right or left, singing all the while a single sentence, which is then repeated by the others in unison. Such maiden dances were practised by the Hebrews at every joyous event. After the passage of the Red Sea, Miram took the timbrel, and, followed by all the women, danced the *mehōloth* (מהלות, Exod. xv, 20), saying one sentence, and the others in unison answering: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into

