

FOLK-LORE AND OTHER NOTES FROM DAMASCUS, ETC.

By REV. CANON J. E. HANAUER.

1. THE TEKIYEH (Hospice, or Almshouse), founded by Sultan Selim I, about A.D. 1516, for the accommodation of Moslem pilgrims on their way to Mecca, is one of the first buildings deserving notice on reaching Damascus from the West and after passing the great "Hamidiyah" Military Hospital close to the Baramkeh railway station. Its large low dome, evidently suggested by that of the St. Sophia Church at Constantinople, and its two slender minarets with many-sided shafts, are conspicuous at a distance. Connected with the twin minarets is a legend worthy of note, because almost identical with one related by English visitors of two towers belonging to Glasgow Cathedral. The tale is that, on completing the first of the minarets, the builder boasted that if any other architect could match it he would cast himself to the ground from its gallery. When his assistant accepted the challenge and successfully finished the second and exactly similar tower, he kept his word and died in the way he said he would. It would be interesting to know whether other versions of this story are related in connection with other towers in Europe or elsewhere.

I have been told by credible persons that, during Turkish rule, all the old and filled-up Government and Municipality registers, account-books, etc., at Damascus used, in order to be "out of the way," to be dumped in chambers in the Tekiyeh, and that in law-suits dealing with land, the litigants were often obliged either to go themselves to the place and hunt for entries in these archives, or employ reliable persons to do so for them. As there was no official in responsible charge of these old books, and besides, pilgrims had free access to and sometimes used them as fuel, the condition of things, as far as law and justice were concerned, may be imagined.

2. JOBAR.—During my stay at Damascus I several times visited this place which, according to local Jewish tradition, is the "Hobah," on the left hand, that is, north of Damascus, "to which Abraham pursued the kings of the East" (Genesis xiv, 15). I had been told that there were inscriptions on stones in the Mosque courtyard, but with the exception of a few small capitals and stone pedestals, found

nothing remarkable. The following, translated from a paper by J. Rivlin in No. 37 of the short-lived German military newspaper *Jilderim*, published at Damascus and dated 23rd September, 1918, will, I hope, not be deemed uninteresting.

"Jobar, the second largest village in the neighbourhood of Damascus, is situated at a distance of about half-an-hour's walk from Bab Tuma, the northern gate of the city. The people of Jobar have an evil reputation, illustrated by the saying that when a raven had dared to steal a walnut from a tree belonging to the village, the fellahin turned out with their guns and pursued the marauder as far as the village of Abun, an hour distant.

"There was a time when most of the inhabitants of Jobar were Jews. About eighty years ago there were many Jewish families living there. Now, however, all but a few have left the place. Those remaining reside in the spacious court of the synagogue, which, like many of the places visited in pilgrimage in the East, is intended to serve as a sort of hostel.

"To the right, on entering the court, one notices a well, the water of which is believed to bring health and good luck to whomsoever drinks thereof. In the right-hand corner of the court and opposite to the well stands the synagogue, which is one of the most ancient 'holy places' in the East, and, according to tradition, goes back to the time of Elisha the prophet. This opinion was held by the Jewish traveller, Rabbi Petakhia of Regensburg, who visited the East about A.D. 1175-80. (*See* Robinson's *Researches*, Vol. II.)

"The last repairs of the old building and fresh ornamentation of the Heikal, or 'Ark of the Covenant' (*i.e.*, the receptacle containing the rolls of the Law), were carried out about thirty years ago with the help of contributions received from wealthy Jewish families at Damascus. This is attested by inscriptions with letters in relief, both over the synagogue and 'the Ark.' In general features the synagogue resembles others in the Orient. However, its floor, like those of very old synagogues, lies somewhat deeper (lower) than the surface of the ground outside. The reason given for this are the words of Psalm cxxx, 1, 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord.'

"To this 'holy place' there come in pilgrimage not only Jews from the most distant regions but also Moslem and Christian Arabs, who also believe in El-Khudr, the prophet Elijah, who never saw death, and whom they venerate as a well-tested and attested Saint.

"On entering the synagogue, one notices, just opposite the door, and a few metres distant, a marble stone on which Elisha is said to have been anointed to the prophetic office in the year 3043 according to Jewish chronology. This is stated in a perfectly new bi-lingual inscription in Hebrew and French, on two sides of the stone itself.

"In the wall opposite the entrance door there is, on the right, a small ante-room from which steps lead down to a dark narrow cave. In this a round stone, in fact the capital of a column, is said to be the seat on which Elijah was seated 'in the Desert of Damascus' in order to anoint Hazael king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha to be prophet (1 Kings xix, 15 sq.).

"To this cave there is attributed, as also to others where the Prophet Elijah is said to have resided, for instance that in the celebrated synagogue of Rabbi Johannan ben Zakkai at Jerusalem, and at Haifa, on Carmel and elsewhere, the power to heal sick people who spend the night, or else sleep there for a certain time. The people powder their eyes with lime that has been scratched off the walls, and, in honour of the prophets, pilgrims light tallow candles of the size of a man, which the synagogue servant has always in stock for sale.

"According to Jewish tradition there are four graves inside the synagogue. The first lies below the Ark of Covenant and is that of a person who accompanied Elijah on his flight from Ahab. His name is said to be known, but unfortunately I could not learn it. (See 1 Kings xix, 3.)"

(According to Jewish tradition Elijah's servant and companion as far as Beersheba, was the son of the widow of Zarephath, and known later on as the Prophet Jonah.)

"The second grave, which is said to be underneath the circular altar or reading platform in the centre of the synagogue, is of a person unknown. A labourer who, whilst working on the spot, happened to open this grave, instantly, so it is said, dropped down dead. The third grave, that of a miracle-working servant of the synagogue, is in the eastern wall of the building. According to a legend, a certain ruler of Damascus had everyone condemned to be hanged executed in front of the synagogue, in order that the house of prayer should be filled with the stench from the rotting corpses. All petitions and supplications addressed to the tyrant proving useless, the pious synagogue servant earnestly called on God for help, and in the same hour the oppressor died. The fourth

grave, which is on the right hand of the entrance, is the resting place of Rabbi Samuel ibn Khazira, a Moroccan sage who lived here 350 years ago, of whom many legends are told, and to whose tomb the Jews often make pilgrimage, especially on feast days and at the end of the month. Special prayers have been composed for use at this sacred spot. In summer, when the fellahin have gone to gather in the harvest, and the Jews of Damascus come to live at Jobar, the synagogue swarms with sick folk who encamp here in order to be healed through the intercessions of Ibn Khazira. Close to the tomb there is a well, over the water of which the mantles of the sick are hung all through the night. About ten years ago there was over the grave a room used as a 'Genizah' or receptacle for old worn-out books and other writings, but these were bought and carried away shortly before the War by Ephraim Deinard, an American savant. The threshing floor, close to the synagogue, is said to have been an ancient Jewish burial ground, about which many legends are told. The gate of the synagogue was once on this side."

3. YABRUD.¹—The Rev. J. E. Cheese, M.A., the present English Chaplain at Beyrouth, who recently visited parts of the Anti-Libanus, north of Damascus, called upon me some weeks ago and informed me that at Yabrud he was shown an old stone, recently discovered, on which was sculptured a picture of the Infant Christ in the manger, together with the Virgin Mother, and an ox and ass. In Greek letters was the inscription "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib." It would be interesting if this picture could be photographed, or at least the inscription, which is taken from Is. i, 3, accurately copied, because, according to footnote 5 on page 14 of Farrer's *Life of Christ*, Vol. I, the Pseudo-Gospel on Matth. xiv imagines the ox and the ass kneeling in adoration, an incident imagined with reference to Is. i, 3, and Hab. iii, 2, mistranslated in the Septuagint, "Between two animals Thou shalt be made known" ($\epsilon\nu\ \mu\acute{e}σω\ \delta\nu\ \zeta\acute{ω}ν\ γνωσθήσῃ$) and the Vet. Itala ("In medio duorum animalium innotesceris") "Cognovit bos et asinus quod puer erat Dominus." (Pistor, *De Nativ. Dom.*, 5.)²

¹ Yabrud is an ancient site and has been identified with the *Jabruda* of Ptolemy and the episcopal city *Jambruda*, whose bishop, Gennadius, was present at the Council of Nice, A.D. 325.

² Driver (Habakkuk, l.c.) refers to A. West, *Contemp. Rev.*, Dec., 1903, pp. 873 sqq., for an interesting article on the subject.

4. A MODERN "PAGAN" LITANY.—Whilst at Damascus I was informed by an intelligent native, who was collecting materials for a book on local peasant superstitions, that in years when the rains did not come in their season, and the harvest was endangered, it was customary in Hauran for the women to perambulate the fields in torchlight processions, with their hair hanging loose and their bosoms bared, whilst they beat their breasts and sang a chant imploring the nature-goddess "Umm ul-Ghayth" or "Mother of Showers" to send them rain.

Here in Southern Palestine a similar custom, though apparently differing in details, prevails. The following have been elicited in conversations with three different people, the first a semi-Bedouin belonging to the Sawakhereh el-Wad in the Kedron Valley, the next a fellah-woman from Liftau in our service, and the third one from the district between Bethlehem and Hebron.

According to these the oldest woman in a village is placed on donkey-back with a hand-mill, which she has to keep turning, in front of her. She is thus led through the fields accompanied by a troop of the village children carrying a cock which they torment in order to make it cry aloud, whilst they chant the response, or refrain, to the following litany :—

Old woman (making the millstone rumble) :

"Ya Umm el-Ghayth, ghetheena,"	"O Mother of Showers, rain on us,"
Wa iskee aradeena,	And water our lands,
Wa bullee bsutt ra'eña,	And wet our shepherd's (or pastor's) prayer-rug.
Ra'eña Hassun ul-Agra'a	Our shepherd (or pastor) is Hassan Bald-head
Ma bish ba'a walla bign'a	Insatiable and discontented
Ma bizra'a walla big'la'a	He neither sows nor plucks (<i>i.e.</i> , weeds)
Ya Umm el-Ghayth, ya Dayim	Mother of Showers, Eternal One,
Billee zara'ana innayim.	Water our sleeping crops.

The children now break in with the following petition :—

"Ya Rabbana, Ya Rabbana.	"O ! our Lord, O ! our Lord.
Nahñ es-sughar ihda banna.	Guide us little ones.
Tullubna ḥubz nim ummuna	We asked bread of our mother,
Darbatna 'alu tummunna	She smote us on the mouth.

The old woman again repeats "Ya Umm el-Ghayth," etc.

A voice representing the Mother of Showers is heard asking :—

"Shoo biddek ya k'ak el-layl?"	"What do you want, O cake of night?"
--------------------------------	--------------------------------------

(The term "cake of night" is in reference to the shape of the hand-mill.)

Old woman replies :—

" Hayn bo, ya ḥayn bo.
 Ya lal-mattar, ya lal-mattar,
 Ma kamḥ, sawat wa la inbadar,
 Bidee mattar, bidee sayl,
 Bidee ḥubz lil-yatuma.
 La bayt esh-Shaykh dayafeh
 In-nir wa is-sikeh in hajar
 Shamah la tugdeena
 La Musr la tuwadeena.
 Ya Seif ud-Din bit natrajak
 Nashk el-matar yo'bor feek.

" The pity of it, the pity of it.
 O for rain, O for rain
 No corn has grown, nor been scattered
 I want rain, I want torrents (spates).
 I want bread for the orphans.
 For Hospitality in the Shaykh's house.
 The ploughs and yokes are useless.
 Do not send us northwards,
 To Egypt do not send us.
 We beseech thee O Saf ed-din (the
 village saint).
 That the rainfall come through thee.

The voice of Umm el-Ghayth replies :—

" Kubbu moy bab doorkom
 Ta yuzra' feddankum.
 Kubbu moi bab sirkom
 Ta yaḥruth bakkarkom "

" Pour out water at your house-doors
 That your feddans (acres) be sown.
 Pour water at the entrance to your
 cattle-yards,
 That your cattle may plough."

I have been gravely assured that persevering repetition of the foregoing doggerel Arabic rhymes infallibly brings rain. When that blessing has been bestowed a thanksgiving song to Umm ul-Ghayth is chanted as follows :—

" Raḥat Umm ul-Ghayth jabat er-ru'd
 Sarat ez-zara'a tul el-qu'u'd
 Raḥat Umm ul-Ghayth jabat ul-matar
 Sarat ez-zara'a 'a tul esh-shajār.
 Umm ul-Ghayth ed-Dayim
 Usqut zar'ana in nayim."

" Umm ul-Ghayth went and fetched
 the thunders.
 The crops grew as high as the seat on
 the camel's back.
 Umm ul-Ghayth went and fetched the
 rain
 The crops grew as tall as the tree-tops,
 Umm ul-Ghayth, the Eternal One
 Watered our sleeping crops."

In this litany it is easy to distinguish, I believe, (1) a nature-goddess, Umm ul-Ghayth, (2) a bald-headed, grumbling, avaricious and useless heathen priest, Hassan Bald-head; and (3) the libations demanded as a condition of the descent of rain. The whole is suggestive as a survival to modern times of one of those ancient

pagan litanies, for which, about A.D. 467, Mamertus, Bishop of Vienne, and later on St. Ambrose and Gregory the Great substituted Christian ones to be used as processionals.¹

The following is the torchlight processional prayer chanted by women in the Hauran :—

يا أم الغيث غيثنينا	Ya Umm ul-Ghayth, O Mother of Showers gheetheena.	O Mother of Showers rain on us.
واسقى اليوم أراضينا	Waskee il yom-aradeena.	Give drink to our fields to-day.
يا الله مطر يا الله خير	Ya Allah matar, ya Allah Khayr.	O Allah ! (give) rain, O Allah (give) plenty.
تسقي التريس والخيل	Taskee il-tareess wal-Khayl.	Give drink to the tethered cattle and horses.
يا الله مطر يا دائيم	Ya Allah matar, ya Dayim.	O Allah ! (give) rain, O Eternal One.
تسقي زرعنا النائم	Taskee zar'ana il-nayim.	Give drink to our sleeping crops.

The difference between this prayer and that chanted by the peasant-women of Southern Palestine is striking.

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE PHILISTINES ?

A BIOLOGIST'S POINT OF VIEW.

By REDCLIFFE N. SALAMAN, M.A., M.D.

IT is with no small amount of hesitation that one attempts to deal with a problem, the subject matter of which has hitherto been the legitimate *terrain* of the historian and archaeologist. The origin of the Philistines, or rather their cultural and social relationship to other nations and peoples, has been the work of the Egyptologist and the students of the dawn of European History. Their history as a people is only known to us from the Bible, where they played the unenviable part of a feared and dangerous foe and rival to the

¹ See Blunt's *Key to the Book of Common Prayer*; Bishop Barry's *Teachers' Prayer Book*.