

INTRODUCTION

MY aim in this preface being to afford the untravelled reader of the following stories such a glimpse of the country and people which produced them as may render them intelligible, if not coherent, I shall begin with a glance at the past history of the Holy Land as illustrated in its present folk-lore.

Of Old Testament times the fellahin have countless stories, more or less reminiscent of their religious instruction at the mouth of Greek priest or Moslem Khatib, [1](#) vivified by the incorporation in the text of naïve conjectures, points of private humour, and realistic touches from the present day life of the country, which shock the pompous listener as absurd anachronisms. Thus the disguise of a Russian pilgrim [2](#)--a figure now commonly to be met with on the road from Jerusalem to the Jordan--is given to Satan when he beguiles the Patriarch Lot (sect. i. chap. vi.); and our father Adam has been described to me as sitting under the Tree of Knowledge, "smoking his narghileh."

Nebuchadnezzar and Titus become one person (Bukhtunussur) and the personality of Alexander the Great (Iskender Dhu el Karneyn) is stretched so as to include more ancient conquerors. Moreover, the desire inherent in Orientals to know how everything came to be, content with any hypothesis provided it be witty, has produced any number of delicious little fictions which, to all ends but the scientific, are much better than fact. Such jeux d'esprit abound in the following pages, as, for instance, the story of Noah's daughter (sect. i. chap. iii.), and of how the mosquito came to buzz (sect. iii. chap. x.); and they are useful to be known by all who must converse with Orientals, since for

the latter they are a part of learning. Mr Kipling's "Just So Stories" are examples of this vein of Eastern humour.

Of Our Lord and the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin there are sheaves of legends extant, many of them current among Moslems as well as Christians; for it must not be forgotten that the followers of Muhammad have great reverence for Jesus Christ, whom their Prophet named Ruh' Allah, the Spirit of God. They believe in His Immaculate Conception and all His miracles, but deny His Divinity. Only St Paul is anathema to them, because they say he took the pure faith of El Islâm, the faith of Adam and Noah and Abraham, as restored by Jesus, and made of it a new religion. With the very doubtful exception of the quaint story of Francesco and the Angel of Death (sect. iii. chap. v.), no legend concerning the New Testament period has been included in this work; for the reason that such legends ceased long ago to be local, and are most, if not all, of them elsewhere accessible, in the Apocryphal Gospels or one or other of the multiplied Lives of the Saints.

To most legends of the centuries between Christ and Muhammad, called by Moslems "the Interval,"--a like objection seemed to apply. The stories of the Seven Sleepers and of the Martyrs of the Pit, of St Helen's Dream and the consequent finding of the Cross, no longer belong to Palestine, though they are still told there. But the legend of the Tree of the Cross (sect. i. chap. vi.) and that of St George in the chapter on "El Khudr" (sect. i.), with a tradition, given in sect. ii. chap. vi., concerning some caves in Wady Isma 'in, called "the Upper Chambers of the Maidens," undoubtedly belong to this period. The romantic deeds of 'Antar and Abu Zeyd, with all the wealth of stories ascribed to the Arabs of the Ignorance, though known to

natives of Palestine, have not been localised. They belong to the Arabic language and literature, and must be set down as acquired.

With the conquest of Jerusalem by the armies of the Caliph Omar ibn el Khattâb begins the historical memory in this folk-lore as distinct from the Scriptural and the fabulous; and I have heard Christians as well as Moslems extol the character of Omar and depict it not amiss. They relate that when the homely old man arrived, unattended, upon the camel which had borne him all the way from El Medineh, to receive in person the submission of a place so holy as Jerusalem, the splendid slaves of the late Byzantine government, cringing, led him to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; fully expecting him to say his prayers there, and turn the church into a mosque. But he declined to pass the threshold, praying from without upon the name of Jesus. He was led thence to other churches, but would enter none of them, preferring for the scene of his devotions the summit of Mount Moriah, site of Herod's Temple and of Solomon's, which was at that time a waste of ruins. This was the Beyt el Makdas, the House of the Sanctuary, to which angels came in pilgrimage long before the creation of Adam--that "further temple" to which Muhammad was carried in his sleep from Mekka, and whence he started on his marvellous "night-journey" through the Seven Heavens. Here the conqueror caused to be built a noble shrine, the Dome of the Rock, which we to this day call the Mosque of Omar.

Omar's severity towards the Christians was so much below their anticipations that he figures in the popular memory almost as a benefactor of their religion. They were deprived of their church-bells, but kept their churches; and if large numbers of them embraced El Islâm, it was through self-

interest (or conviction) and not at the point of the sword as has been represented. Indeed, the toleration displayed by the Moslems towards the vanquished, though less than we should practise nowadays, is without a parallel in Europe till many centuries later. It was not emulated by the Crusaders, 1 who, rushing to wrest the Holy Sepulchre from the clutch of the "foul Paynim," were astonished to find it in the hands of Christians, whom, to cloak their disconcertion, they denounced as heretics.

From the Moslem conquest downward--with the exception of the mad destructive inroads called crusades, and the short-lived Frankish kingdom (often referred to by the Mohammedan fellahin as the Time of the Infidels)--one tradition has prevailed in the land till quite recent years. In that conquest the East reclaimed her own, the young civilisation of the Arabs overpowering the luxury of the moribund Roman empire: a judgment from God, it is said. It was a return to the time of David at least, if not of Abraham; and this tremendous relapse must be borne in mind of those who would deduce from existing conditions in Palestine the life that was led there in the time of Christ. From Omar's time, with the reservation already made, the fellahin, whether ruled in chief from Baghdad, Cairo or Constantinople, have been subject to an Oriental form of government, rough in the hand but genial in the head, which, allowing great liberty to the individual, has furnished rich material for song and story. A vast majority of the stories here collected have the keen Oriental flavour of this period.

In the fourth decade of the last century the Pasha of Egypt, Muhammed Ali, rebelled against his sovereign lord the Sultan; when an Egyptian force under Ibrahim Pasha

invaded Syria and occupied it for some time. Owing to French influence European ideas had already made some way among the governing class in Egypt, and the radicalism of Ibrahim made his rule offensive to the conservative notables of Syria. Still he was the kind of tyrant to appeal most strongly to Orientals, heavy-handed but humorous, knowing how to impart to his decisions that quaint proverbial savour which dwells in the mind of the people, and makes good stories; and his fame among the fellahin is that of a second Solomon (see "Detective Stories," sect. ii. chap. v.). With him begins the age of progress in the Holy Land. Since the withdrawal of the Egyptian troops in 1840, things have moved fast in a European direction; till there is now such an inflow of civilisation and education as to threaten the very source of folk-lore, making some such Noah's Ark as this seem necessary, if aught is to survive the banal deluge.

The region from which Mr Hanauer has drawn these stories is the hill-country between Bethel on the north and Hebron in the south. It is holy land for the Mohammedan and the Jew hardly less than for the Christian, and its population comprises all three branches of that monotheistic faith, whose root is in the God of Abraham. The Moslems, who are the dominant class, are the offspring of the Arab conquerors and of such of the conquered as espoused El Islâm; the Christians, the descendants of those old inhabitants of Syria, subjects of the Byzantine Empire, who at the conquest preferred their religion to worldly advancement. Their stories against one another, though abounding in sly hits, breathe as a rule the utmost good nature. Only in the Jewish legends one detects a bitterness which, in view of the history of their race, is pardonable.

In the Middle Ages there existed in Jerusalem and Hebron, as in the cities of Europe, small despised communities of Jews, strictly confined to one quarter, the gates of which were locked at night. To these were added some three hundred years ago a company of Spanish Jews (Sephardim), fleeing hither from the Inquisition with their wives and families; who still at this day form a separate group and use among themselves an antiquated kind of Spanish which they pronounce oddly. Another company of old time immigrants, whose descendants have preserved individuality, were the Mughâribeh (sing. Mughrabi) or Moorish Jews. Pure Orientals in dress, speech and character, they have earned a bad name in the land as charlatans, many of them being professed wizards and conjurers. But a vast majority of the large and growing Jewish population are immigrants of the last fifty years, borne to Palestine on the waves of the Zionist movement, and looking about them surlily, with foreign eyes. Coming from the towns of East and Central Europe, the agricultural life expected of them is as strange as the country, and at first hostile. The Jew is now a foreigner in the Holy Land; and the standpoint and posture of his ancestors of the time of Christ to-day is found with the Moslem, who also claims descent from Abraham.

About one-third of the matter here presented has been published in America [1](#) in another version, and the chapters on Animal and Plant-lore were originally contributed to the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, from which they are reprinted by permission of the committee. Stories spread fast and far in the East, and are soon localised (I have found a considerable number of these current among the people of Lower Egypt), and it may well be that some of the following have found their way into

print; but the author would have it clearly understood that he has derived them all from the legitimate source of folklore, the lips of the people themselves. Where he has observed a coincidence or similarity he has endeavoured to point it out, but neither he nor his editor are skilled folklorists. There are sure to be many such kinships which have escaped our vigilance.

Although this compilation is but a pailful from the sea, as compared with the floating mass of folklore which exists in Palestine, I know of no other attempt at collection on anything like so large a scale; and it has been our object so to present the stories as to entertain the casual reader without impairing their value for the student of such matters. With much that is puerile, they contain both wit and humour, and withal not a little of that Heavenly Wisdom, the Wisdom of Solomon and of the Son of Sirach, to which, in the East, churches were once dedicated.

MARMADUKE PICKTHALL.

Footnotes

[xi:1](#) Village preacher and schoolmaster.

[xi:2](#) The Russian Church, and the Coptic, still include a pilgrimage to the Holy Places among the duties of the devout Christian.

[xiii:1](#) The Time of the Ignorance is the name given to the days before Muhammad, when a majority of the Arabians were idolators.

[xv:1](#) Many of the Crusaders were so ignorant as to believe that the Moslems were idolators.