

## LIFE, HABITS, AND CUSTOMS OF THE FELLAHIN OF PALESTINE.

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Before giving a slight sketch of the Fellahin method of agriculture, it will be as well to describe the present state of the Land Tenure. It is of three kinds:—

I. *Ard miri*,<sup>1</sup> or taxed Crown land.

In this class are included nearly all the large and fruitful plains like those of Jaffa, Ramleh, and Esdraelon. These lands are leased by the government to various individuals, or sometimes to a whole village. The lessee pays a tenth of the produce of the soil for his right of cultivation. *Miri* land, therefore, cannot be sold by the lessee, nor has he the power to transfer it; he merely possesses the right of cultivation for a given time, and this only holds good during the lifetime of the lessor. In the event of his death, the contract he has made becomes null and void, even though its term be not expired.

The *muzāra'a* descends to his children. Should he not have any, it goes to his brothers or sisters or their descendants, and failing them, to his father or uncles and cousins on the paternal side. In the case of a man possessing none of the above-mentioned relations, the *muzāra'a* reverts to the State. A few years ago a large piece of land, in the plain of Jezreel, fell in this manner, and was sold by the government to the firm of Sursuk in Beirut.

II. *Ard wakūf*, or glebe-land, is land which has been left to the Mosques and Holy Places, or for the maintenance of schools and religious institutions. Rich tracts of such land are owned by the Mosque of Omar, the Neby Daud sepulchre, and the Mosque in Hebron. These lands cannot be sold, but only leased. The lessees are responsible, not to the government, but to the *mutaweli* or bailiff, who retains a share of the tithes for himself. By this means many poor Effendi families obtain an income. Great abuses have crept into the management of the *wakūf*, and there is only too much foundation for the complaint that the Effendis "eat up" and misappropriate the revenues.

III. *Ard mulk*, or freehold, is chiefly composed of small pieces of ground in the neighbourhood of the villages, such as fig and olive plantations, gardens, and vineyards. These are generally enclosed by mud walls or cactus hedges. The proprietor is, of course, free to sell them if he thinks fit, or, as it often happens, to exchange<sup>2</sup> them for other *mulk* lands. Hitherto the title-deeds of these lands have been drawn up by a writer in

<sup>1</sup> Shortened form of *ard emiri*—land of the Emir.

<sup>2</sup> *Badal*—exchange; *baya*—sale.

the village, and provided they had the necessary names of witnesses and the proper seals, the owner's right was not disputed. Lately, however, the Turkish government has been trying to get even the *mulk* under its control.

In some parts of Palestine there is a good deal of *ard bawr*, or fallow land. This is due partly to the scantiness of the population, and partly to the prevailing poverty and indolence. There is not much in the fertile valleys, but in the hilly districts some of the land only bears a thin crop of grass in the spring-time, which forms but scanty pasturage for the cattle. The *bellān*, a kind of thorny shrub, also grows on this poor sort of land. It is collected in large quantities by the charcoal-burners, and when burnt with *jift*<sup>1</sup> it gives a tremendous heat and is valuable for fuel. Sometimes the dry grass and herbage on such land is set on fire, and the hill, by this means, is slightly manured, but manure does not enter into the farming operations of the Fellahin. Both the supply and the means of transport are wanting, so it is only used in the gardens and occasionally in the olive and fig plantations.

*Ard majamid* (dead land) is land which has not been under cultivation for many years. If reclaimed, it becomes the *mulk* of the reclamer. In Nazareth I have seen many good vineyards which the owners had obtained in this manner, through cultivation.

*Arādi majhule* (unknown land) is deserted land which has been left vacant either by the death of the owner, or by his sudden departure, which not unfrequently occurs in the event of his being in debt, or much behind-hand with the taxes. Such land falls to the Crown according to the class to which it originally belonged.

Nothing affects the agriculture of a country so much as the climate. In Palestine the year is really divided into two parts—the dry season and the rainy season. As a rule, the rainy season lasts from the middle of October until about the end of April, and the dry season the rest of the year, but sometimes the rains do not commence until November or December. These months and January are generally very wet, and rain will fall almost incessantly for a week at a time. The late rains fall in March and April, but from May the vegetation depends for moisture on the dampness of the earth and the heavy night dew (*nada'*). During six months not a drop of rain ever falls, save in a very exceptional year. The Fellahin, like ourselves, divide their year into four seasons, *rabia'*, *sayf*, *kharif*, and *shita*—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The spring begins in February, which is much the same as our April, an uncertain, showery month; still, according to the Fellahin saying, February “blows with the breath of summer.” March is called the month of earthquakes and storms, but “the shepherd can dry himself without fire,” namely, in the warm sun. The late rains are considered so precious that there is a saying to the effect that April rain does more good than the plough and the oxen. In July the heat becomes excessive.

<sup>1</sup> The remains of the olives after the oil has been pressed out.

Sometimes as early as October, but oftener about the beginning of December, when the rains have softened the cracked and burnt-up earth, the Fellaah puts in the winter seed, wheat, barley, and lentils. The earth is broken up with a most primitive plough, in fact, the surface of the ground is scratched up rather than turned, the furrow never being deep. The plough is drawn by a yoke of oxen, or an ox and an ass, and sometimes by a camel, but very rarely by a horse. The ploughman urges on the animals with a long staff furnished with an iron point; this he also uses for breaking up the clods of earth. Except in the case of young animals not used to the plough, the progress is very slow. When the animals are their own, or if they happen to be ploughing for someone else, the Fellaah does not hurry them. The plougher will often pass over deeply-rooted thorns rather than take the trouble to press more heavily on the plough. Where, from the rocky nature of the ground, or from a thick growth of thorns, the ploughing is very difficult, a sort of pickaxe or hatchet is also used. Many bits of stony ground, especially amongst the mountains, are only picked up, and light ground which can be worked without being moistened is sometimes merely sown. In such ground the seed springs up directly after the rain and yields an early crop. But in the absence of rain, seed thus sown is often lost. The putting in of the winter crops often lasts till January; it is slow work, for some of the people have to travel with their oxen a two or three hours' journey before reaching their land, and have to return again in the evening. The winter crops are succeeded by the summer crops of dura and sesam, which grow in the dry season. A season of heavy rains is always followed by an abundant harvest, for the moisture sinks deep into the earth, and is, so to speak, stored up. Tobacco, cotton, cucumbers, and melons are also grown in the summer. They are planted after the rains, and ripen during the hot months, the heavy night dew aiding their growth.

It has been already mentioned that by far the greater part of the cultivated land is not private, but government property, either *miri* or *wakuf*, and that the cultivator is merely the holder. Each district has certain tracts of such lands, and after the rains they are let to the different inhabitants in separate plots. The division is decided by lottery. Herr Schick has given an account of the manner in which this lottery takes place. All those who are desirous of land assemble in the *sāha* (an open place generally in front of the inns). The Imam, or *khatib*, who is writer, accountant, and general archivist to the whole village, presides over this meeting. The would-be cultivators notify how many ploughs they can muster. If a man has only a half-share in one, he joins another man with a like share. Then the whole number is divided into classes. Supposing the total number of ploughs to be forty, these would be divided into four classes of ten, and each class would choose a Sheikh to represent them. The land of course varies in quality, and this division into classes makes the distribution simpler. Say, they are four classes, the land is divided into four equal portions, so that each class may have good as well as bad. When the Sheikhs have agreed that the division is fair, the lots are drawn.

Each of the sheikhs put some little thing into the *khatib's* bag. Then the *khatib* calls out the name of one of the divisions, and some passing child is made to draw out one of the things from the bag, and to whichever Sheikh it belongs, to his class belongs the division named by the *khatib*. This decided, the Sheikhs have to determine the individual distribution of the land. In the case of ten ploughs to a class, they do not each receive a tenth piece of the whole, but, in order to make it as fair as possible, the land is divided into strips, so that each portion consists of a collection of strips in different parts of the village lands. The boundaries are marked by furrows or stones, and to move a neighbour's landmark is still accounted an "accursed deed," as in the days of ancient Israel (Deut. xix, 4).

The harvest begins as early as the middle of April or the beginning of May in the valleys, but later in the mountains. In the wide-spreading plains of Gaza, Esdraelon, and Jaffa, the reaping and transport of grain employs many hands, and attracts numbers of poorer Fellahin from their own villages to act as reapers, whilst many poor widows go with their children to glean. Every evening these latter thresh their gleanings with a stone or a piece of wood. I have often known poor women, who, after a few weeks' gleaning, returned home with enough grain to carry them through the whole year. The reapers generally wear a leathern apron to protect their chest and legs. The grain is cut down with a *manjal*, or sickle, but not very close to the ground. As soon as he has an armful, the reaper binds it into a shock, and throws it on one side. These shocks are collected into bundles and carried by donkeys or camels to the threshing-floor. In spite of the great heat, the work of harvesting is always done cheerfully, and the song of the men and the shrill *zagharit* of the women may often be heard floating over the hills and valleys.

The threshing-floor is a flat place in the neighbourhood of the village. If possible, a rocky place is chosen, so that it may be easily swept. Where this is not obtainable, a hard, flat piece of ground is made to answer the purpose. The floor is common property, but each thresher keeps to a certain part of it. For four months the Fella has nothing to fear from rain or bad weather. During that time he almost lives at the *beiyâdir* (threshing-floor) and some of the villages are nearly deserted, at least by the men. The wheat, &c., is spread out, and the oxen and asses are driven round so many hours a-day to tread out the grain with their hoofs, at the same time treading and softening the straw so that it becomes fit for fodder. This straw is called *tibn*, bundles of ordinary straw and stubble they call *kash*. The animals as a rule are not muzzled. Another method is the use of a weighty plank, into the under side of which are sunk a number of small bits of basalt stone, forming kind of teeth. This instrument, called a *môrej*, and made somewhat in the fashion of a sledge, is drawn by a horse over the heap of unthreshed barley or wheat, and crushes out the grain partly by its weight, for the driver sits upon it, and partly by the sharp teeth which tear the corn. The grain being separated from the straw, the work of winnowing begins. This must be done whenever there is a gentle breeze, for with too much or too little wind it is

equally impossible. The threshed grain is tossed with a three-pronged wooden fork; the wind scatters the chaff to a distance, and carries away the dust. The grain is next collected into large heaps, and arranged in certain ways so that it cannot be disturbed without the knowledge of the owner. Besides this, the floors are constantly watched, and at night the owners generally sleep beside their grain. Great care is taken to guard against fire; a really destructive one is of very rare occurrence. From the grain thus stored the 'ashr, or tithes, are assessed and are paid direct to the government or to the *wakûf*. The extortion and oppression which results from this system is but too well known.

Very often a portion of a peasant's harvest is due to some townsman from whom he has borrowed money, and this is always claimed after the threshing, excepting when the negligence of the lender, or some stratagem on the part of the borrower, delays the evil day. The Fellah finds it very easy to borrow money, but thinks it very hard to be obliged to pay it back. If a ploughman has been employed, he now receives what is due to him. The *khatib*, too, has his reward. This worthy not unfrequently acts in the capacity of village barber. In short, when the Fellah requires anything, and has no money, he puts off payment until the "time of threshing," and then everyone seeks as speedily as possible the settlement of their claims. Dervishes, poor priests, the blind, and the lepers all make a pilgrimage to the *bedar*, and seldom leave it empty-handed. Many a small peasant, after he has settled the numerous just and unjust claims on his produce, has scarcely enough grain left to carry on his family until the next harvest, and many, after a few months, have again to borrow money in the city on the same security. The well-to-do Fellah carries his grain away in sacks on donkeys or camels, and sells what he does not want at the corn-market. Sometimes it is carried long distances. Every year lines of grain-laden camels are driven from Hauran to Nâblus and Jerusalem. A great deal is also bought up by brokers and sent to Jaffa, Haifa, and Akka. The rest of the grain is stored in magazines, dry rooms or underground granaries; and the straw kept for the cattle is also stored in dry places, very often in caves in the rocks. On an average the crop shows a return of six-fold the amount sown; twelve-fold is considered very good, but the sixty or a hundred-fold of the New Testament is not yielded in the present day.

The measure by which the Fellahin divide their land is the *feddân*. It is decided by the amount which a man with a yoke of oxen can plough per day, and is therefore a most uncertain measure.

Besides the cultivation of grain, which forms the chief employment of the people dwelling in the great plains, the care of the vineyards, and the fig and olive plantations, takes a good deal of time and attention.

Vines are generally planted in the hilly districts, the slopes and natural terraces being well suited for them, whilst such rocky land is useless for cultivating grain. Many of the villages own fine vineyards, some near, some at a distance, but unluckily large tracts of land, well suited for the purpose, and apparently used for it in former times, now lie uncultivated.

The vineyards are enclosed by stone walls or cactus hedges. With the somewhat too plentiful supply of stones, artificial terraces are made on which the vine can climb and hang over. In some places the vines are allowed to trail on the ground, as in Nazareth and Ramleh; in others they are trained upright, as in Kolonia and Abu Ghosh, near Jerusalem. A watch-tower is built in the vineyards, generally of large stones without mortar, and on the top of it is a little hut roofed with branches. From this coign of vantage the vineyard can be overlooked and watched; near it there is often an arbour formed of rough tree stems, and covered with vines. There are no wine-presses. The Fellah does not understand the art of making wine, and the majority of them being Mussulmans, they dare not attempt it. In many of the vineyards the old wine-presses of the Canaanites and Hebrews are still to be found in the form of two basins hewn in the rock, one into which the grapes were pressed, the other, on rather a lower level, for the juice to run into, by means of a connecting channel.

The Fellahin of Bethlehem and Beit Jala certainly attempt to make wine, but as they neither understand the process nor have any means of keeping it when made, the result is very poor stuff. The work in the vineyards consists in hoeing and breaking up the ground several times after the rains, and in pruning the vines. Bits of rock are carefully taken out of the ground, but beyond this the Fellah bestows but little pains on his vineyard. A newly planted vineyard will bear fruit in three years. All kinds of fruit trees as well as vines are planted in the vineyards—fig-trees, pomegranate, apple, pear, apricot, peach, quince, and mulberry trees. Directly the fruit is of any size the owner's family watch over it, and as soon as it becomes eatable they take up their abode at the vineyard, and remain there until it is all over. Everyone tries to pass some weeks or months during the hot unwholesome summer in a vineyard. Those who do not possess one hire a portion of one, and the well-to-do townsman counts himself lucky if he can camp out with his wife and children in a vineyard, living in a tent or a booth. Few noble families seeking change of air and scene at Ems or Kissengen are as happy as the Arabs under the shade of their fig-trees. A greater part of the daily food of the family then consists of bread and fruit. At this time of year many of the poorest people about Lydda and Jaffa subsist almost entirely on *sabr* and a little bread. The grapes which have not been consumed are carried in boxes or baskets to the next market, or to villages which have no vineyards. At these latter they are often exchanged for grain, the people being usually employed in threshing. Hebron is celebrated for its grapes, and so also is Es Salt, on the other side of Jordan, from whence come the much-prized "Cibeben."

In some neighbourhoods, instead of vineyards there are fig-gardens. The district around Bethel, and as far as the beginning of the Nâblus valley, is famed for them. A good portion of the figs (*tîn*), of which there are various sorts, are eaten when ripe, but the greater portion of them are dried in the sun and kept for winter consumption. To lay in a sufficient

quantity of dried figs is an essential part of the provisioning of a well-ordered Fellahin household. Dried figs are also used for producing spirit. The fig-gardens are sometimes dug up or hoed, but no further attention is paid them.

The finest plantations of olives are in the Nâblus district, but nearly every village has its larger or smaller grove. There is no doubt that the olive-tree is one of the most valuable products of the country, and that it could be made a still greater source of revenue than it is at present. It requires but little attention, and lives and yields fruit even when neglected. It only requires grafting and a little digging up and clearing out, and this done, it yields a plentiful crop in return for the small amount of pains bestowed upon it. The Fellahin say that the vine is a *sitt*, a delicate town lady who requires a great deal of care and attention; the fig, on the contrary, is a *fellaha*, a strong country woman who can flourish without such tender care, but the olive-tree is a bold *bedawije*, who, in spite of neglect and hardship, remains a strong and useful Arab-wife.

The olives ripen towards the end of the summer; the trees are then beaten with long sticks, care being taken not to destroy the young leaves and shoots. The fruit is collected and spread out on the roofs, or somewhere, and then put into heaps for a little while in order that it may slightly ferment, after which it is taken to the oil-press, where it is crushed under a heavy millstone and, packed in little straw baskets, is finally pressed. The oil (*zayt*) runs into a little cemented cistern, from which it is drawn in leathern bottles or large earthenware jars for carrying away. The Fellah uses it both for light and nourishment. If he has nothing better, he is content to eat some bread soaked in oil. It is also used a great deal in the town cookery, but as a means of light it has been almost superseded by petroleum. A great deal of inferior olive oil is used for making soap, and some years a great deal of oil is exported to France and Italy. The *jift*, or refuse of the olives, is used for fuel, having great properties of heat.

With regard to vegetables, their cultivation is only successful where irrigation is possible, though there are a few kinds which will grow without such, as gherkins, vegetable marrows, and tomatoes. Those which will grow dry are called *ba'l*, those which require water, *sakî*. In irrigated gardens all sorts of vegetables are planted, cabbages, turnips, pepper plants, radishes, egg plants, and sugar peas. If the water for several gardens is supplied by one spring, a fixed time is arranged for each owner to turn the water in his channel on to his land. The fruitfulness of the land when irrigated is really astonishing.

In cattle breeding the Fellahin are not successful. The oxen and cows are under-sized, and are kept entirely for agricultural purposes; it is only when they are of no further use for work that they are sold to the butcher. Fattened cattle are unknown. Very few sheep are kept, and mutton, which is the favourite meat, is either obtained from the Bedawin, or else it is brought from Kurdistan or Hedschaz. The Fellahin, however, keep a great number of goats; cheese is made of their milk, and also the *laben*,

of which the Arabs are so fond. Butter is but little made, and *samn*, a kind of ghee, is seldom used except by the Bedawin. The best time for dairy produce is in the spring, when the early herbage appears, but when this is dried up a bad time begins for the unlucky cattle. The goats fare best, for they are turned out in all weathers, and can often find food on the hills. When the season is very bad, they are given oil-cake made from sesam. Sheep, and even goats, have a hard struggle to subsist through the winter months, and many an animal dies a miserable death for want of proper nourishment and care. Oxen and cows are fed throughout the winter on *tibn*, or crushed straw. Living the hard life that he does himself, the Fellah can hardly be expected to take much care of his cattle. If one animal after another dies from want of care, it is the will of Allah, and he must submit. He bears it philosophically, and tries by cheating and deception to recover the loss.

A townsman once entrusted a Fellah in Siloah with a number of goats in which they were "to go halves," that is to say, that for the trouble and cost of maintaining the whole, half the goats and half their offspring were to become the property of the Fellah. This sort of partnership is often entered into in the case of a horse. After a time the townsman sent to inquire how the little flock was getting on, and received the joyful news—*walladen*—"they have kids." The townsman now hoped for a good supply of milk, but soon came the unwelcome intelligence—they are giving no milk—and a little later on came word that they were dead. Whether it was all true, or whether the Fellah had over-reached him, the townsman could never ascertain. In the spring and early summer, when there is good stubble-feeding for the cattle, the cowherd drives them to the fields every morning, and brings them back at night.

If, as it often happens in the colder districts, no grass is to be found, the larger cattle owners depart with their cattle to warmer lands near the Jordan Valley and winter there, living in the open by day, and taking shelter at night in the natural caves with which the country abounds.

And here I must close these notes on the rural economy of the Fellahin. To enter into fuller details would swell them from a paper into a volume.

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### THE NAMELESS CITY.

The position of the city where Saul met Samuel (1 Sam. ix) is without doubt the most perplexing question in Biblical topography. We seem to be hopelessly involved in the following dilemma: Saul, in walking from a city apparently *north* of Jerusalem to his destination also *north* of Jerusalem, passes Rachel's sepulchre, four miles *south* of it. How is this apparent contradiction to be satisfactorily explained?

It is proposed to show (I) that the nameless city was certainly Ramah, where Samuel usually lived and was buried; (II) that it was close to