

## P E L L A.

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EARLY on the morning of February 18th, 1887, we rode out of the southern gate of Tiberias, taking our course along the lake shore to the hot baths and the Jordan valley. The morning was very misty, and heavy clouds foretold us that an excursion at this time of the season would make us sufficiently acquainted with the disagreeableness of a Syrian winter. Our cavalcade could be called noble, for we were accompanied by the Governor, or Kaimakam, of Tiberias, several soldiers, an officer, servants, and some German colonists to aid me in my exploration work: we were also followed by muleteers with loaded animals, carrying, besides a tent, cooking implements and the necessary provisions, and some well-mounted Bedawin. The Governor had less the intention of taking part in my exploration than of spending a day of rest among a tribe of the Jordan

valley, the Ghôr, which, no longer burnt by the summer heat, presented itself as a luxurious grass growth and a blossoming wild flower field. We crossed the Jordan at its outflow from the lake with some difficulty, the depth rising up to six feet and more, and the width not being less than 60 yards; and we first had to procure a little boat for the luggage, and to drag the animals behind, which were obliged to cross the river swimming. After this troublesome job was accomplished we went on, and before mid-day we rested on the borders of the Yarmuk, in sight of the cascades formed by this river, which rushes over large basaltic blocks near the Jisr el-Saghîr—a stone bridge built in Muhammedan ages, which crosses the ancient Hieromax, very near where its floods unite with those of the Jordan. Servants with tent pushed forwards to the tribe of the 'Arab Segûr el-Ghôr, who were encamped little south of the Jisr el-Mejâmia', while we took a more eastern direction, crossed the plain, and arrived at Esh Shûni in the beginning of the afternoon. This little village,\* containing huts, stores, and graneries, built on the ancient site of Khirbet el-Ekseir, is the property of our Kaimakam, who added to the Fellahîn population some Bedawîn and Greek gardeners of Beirût, supplied them with European agricultural implements, planted orange and lemon gardens,

\* See 'Within the Decapolis,' by G. Schumacher.

watering them by a canal from the adjacent stream of the Wâdy el-'Arab, built grinding mills, and made



Esh-Shuni (Kh. el-Ekseit). From a Photograph.

other improvements, which, if followed up by the lazy Bedawîn, would soon render that part of the

Ghôr a permanently paying, flourishing garden. We



View of Wâdy el-'Arab. From a Photograph.

took a short refreshing swim in the above-mentioned stream, which is bordered by oleander bushes, enjoy-

ing the picturesque view of this lower part of the Wâdy. Here, as seen from the photograph of this part, the Wâdy rushes into the Jordan valley, near an old bridge, with the ruins of Abu Dabbûs, a Muhammedan burial-place, and its immediate transition from a steep rocky ravine into an evergreen mild valley.

It was at sundown when we reached the camp of the 'Arab Segûr el-Ghôr, welcomed by a troop of their best horsemen, whom we followed galloping through this wide encampment to the place where our tent was pitched. The head Sheikh, Raja, had chosen for us a spot of elevated ground straight above the Jordan river, having thus a free view over this powerful, rapid stream, which, in endless zig-zags, rolls southwards. The Bedawîn camping-place was in the notable depression which bounds the Jordan on its entire course along both shores with steep ascents of alluvial earth, and which, doubtless, formed the original bed of the river. We had hardly become seated at the entrance of our tent when the Sheikh's servants began to occupy themselves with the preparation of a Bedawîn dinner, and therefore spared us the conventional request for this repast which is used among Bedawîn, in order to help the host over the critical choice of meals. In its modest way, it is thus uttered in the Bedawîn dialect: 'Ya mu'az-zib, waddy Kahwa tent'alletsh (تعلق), wa

tuthun yehatshy (یحكى) wa dafint (دفيئة) ma yanuttha el Kutt, wa lel Ahsân 'elbet sha'îr, wa rûh wa ta'âl ya Muâzzib.' Literally: 'Bring, oh host, a coffee which pastes;\* tobacco which speaks; † and a heap ‡ which cannot be leaped by a cat, and an 'Elbet § of barley for the horse, and go and come, oh host.'

We added to the frugal dinner some fish we had caught in the Jordan, but which the Bedawîn looked upon as 'Nijis,' or impure, a belief which I have found now and then among the Bedawîn.

The next morning promised a fine day, and our Sheikh would under no circumstances let us go, promising for the following night a 'Sahjy,' or dance, as arranged on festival occasions, but generally excluding strangers; such a rare treat persuaded us to stay a day longer. While the Governor assembled around him the elders of the tribe during the day, settling disputes and calling their attention to Government laws, encouraging them to cultivate soil, &c., we explored the shores of the river and its vicinity. The female members of

\* That is, strong and stout.

† Good tobacco must whisper, while burning.

‡ Literally, 'dafina' means 'the buried,' and represents a young cooked ram covered by a heap of cooked rice, and thus served on a large dish, forming together a meal heap 'too high for a cat's leap.'

§ 'Elbet (علبية) means half a keil, or about a bushel and a quarter.

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the tribe occupied themselves exclusively during this day by gathering dry shrubs and tamarisks found in the Ghôr and in the jungles along the river, and piled them up in heaps before our tents.

After the sun disappeared behind the mountain of 'Serîn,' bordering the western banks of the Ghôr, and when the large flocks had entered the encampment, the dim fires gathered the inhabitants of each tent to their meals, while now and then a monotonous song was heard from a female member calling her immediate neighbours together for the festival of the evening. Soon appeared three half-grown lads, who lighted just in front of us part of the gathered bushes, placing arms on shoulders, they attempted a dance with rather primitive movements, which soon degenerated into trying to push each other into the fire. The Sheikh's brother, a sort of Master of Ceremonies, richly dressed, with a mighty cane in his hand, now appeared on the tableau, drove the boys away, and, followed by others, prepared the field for the dance; then he uttered a long loud cry, and groups of singing women, shouting young men, married men and elders of the tribe successively appeared. The latter sat in groups around us and our tents smoking 'Ghalawîn' (pipes) and 'Nargiles,' while a coffee, 'which pasted,' was passed round without interruption by the Sheikh and the 'Natûr' (a sort of landlord). The Master

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of Ceremonies now set the young men one by one in a long row, shoulder to shoulder ; behind the front row a second and then a third similar followed, thus numbering altogether about 150 dancers. The young men were only clothed with their blue shirt, which they fastened in the girdle so high that their legs were bared to the knees. The fire was fed until its flames struck high over the heads of the dancers ; then the Master of Ceremonies clapped his hands, made a dancing motion, and in one moment the whole crowd of young men, with the upper part of their bodies bent forwards, clapping their hands in measure, moved towards the fire, making a step forwards and then a step backwards, shouting in a moaning, oppressed tone, 'hojîya, hojîya, hojîya.' About five minutes passed, when a finely dressed young woman, with a long blue silk robe, broke out of the rows of the women, who sat opposite the young men, at the other side of the fire, and planted herself between the fire and the dancers ; now rose the Sheikh, who, marching towards her, drew out his sword and handed it graciously to the handsome young woman—one of his wives. She received the sword, and swinging it several times around her head, danced up and down the rows of the young men, who now broke out into loud shouts and continued their dance with increased vehemence and a louder 'hojîya, hojîya.'



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The young woman now put herself in a kneeling position, and feigned to be fighting with the sword with a practice and ability, which did her credit, against the crowd, which continually made rushes towards her. The higher the fire burnt the more impetuous became the motions, and the more boldly the dancers approached to the woman. Presently she sprang up from her kneeling position to her full height with a wonderful elasticity, and swinging the sword around, drove the crowd backwards. They slowly gave way, but only for a minute ; then they returned again, forming a half circle around the fighting woman and the fire. The attacks began again, and again the woman repulsed them with activity ; with astonishing changing movements the long robe and the long ends of her sleeves followed her motions ; but slower and slower became her motions until she finally fell down on her knees, hardly able to continue. This sign of exhaustion was perceived by another young woman, who stood ready behind the fire ; she ran to the fighter, who with incredible quickness threw her robe (which proved merely to be a mantle over her national costume, the shirt) over her reliever, put the sword into her hand and disappeared. The dance meanwhile was not interrupted, and the new fighter took up her duty with no less ability than her predecessor. After she also had exhausted her power, she retired ; not less exhausted were the young men,

who had worked themselves into such an ardour that after stopping they fell on the ground with every sign of over-exertion.

A cup of coffee now was offered, but only a small part had the pleasure of a taste ; most of the dancers were engaged in a dispute about the dance, until the fire was lighted again, and the 'Sahjy' was renewed. Midnight was near before the piles of brush were burnt out and the physical strength of the young consumed. This dance, 'Sahjy' (not to be confounded with the 'Delky,' or ring dance, which is more common), is one of the oldest Bedawin amusements known ; it illustrates the attempted capture of a woman ; the bravest of the young men being the lucky proprietor. Certain young men told me that a Bedawy once victoriously entered the camp of another 'Hamûl' (part of a tribe) with the object to win or rob a bride ; but their united choice fell on the jewel of the tribe, who defended her virtue with the sword, until, exhausted, she delivered herself into the hand of the most brave.

The firing of muskets and pistols gathered old and young for a moment once more ; a dance without order was tried, and then the members of the tribe left the place, singing and laughing, until the silence of the night proved that each family had retired to their hair tent.

Next morning at daybreak, while the others pre-