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## THE IMMOVABLE EAST.

By PHILIP J. BALDENSPERGER.

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(Continued from Q.S., 1918, p. 122.)

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## NATURAL HISTORY NOTES.

THE fellah has, in general, more natural history notions than either medany or bedawy. The former, living always in towns, can hardly distinguish between an owl and a partridge, and the latter, living mostly in the sandy plains, knows the animals which occur there, almost ignoring those of the mountains. But the flora especially, because they vary so considerably, are unknown to him; yet he knows the stars and their positions better than the fellah.

The fellah has, it is true, no natural divisions of animals, much less of plants; but he knows that a cat and a leopard are related to each other, as well as a dog and a wolf and a hen and a partridge, and so forth.

There is no quadruped that he does not know, from the mouse or mole-rat to the buffalo and the greater carnivorous animals. Birds are all distinguished by proper names, either derived from their colour, as the blackbird, *suwade*[t] (صودة); from their voices, as the cuckoo, *bukoh* (بكو); or from their habits, as the pallid shrike, perching on top of trees, *abu'l elu* (ابو العلو).

Reptiles are all distinguished, except some serpents, which are confused.

Fishes are known by the general name of *samak* (سمك). Insects are known, such as beetles (خنافس), butterflies (فراشي). Worms and other lower creatures have distinct names. In the vegetable kingdom, as also in the animal kingdom, the larger the plants the more universally are they known. Trees and bushes have very distinct names. But hundreds of flowers and grasses have also a special designation.

The firmament is regarded as a vast far-away country, and the constellations are groups of personages or objects having a history of their own which reminds one of the myths of the ancients. The Milky Way is the Way of the Straw-carriers, *tarik el-tabaneh* (تریک التبانہ), the caravans of camels having left the *tibn* strewn along on their passage.

As these short notes have no pretence to be more than jottings, the most conspicuous names of animals and plants, as they happen to come to my memory, are given in the following pages, and are compared with the Hebrew equivalents of the Bible so far as they resemble the modern fellah denomination, or the recognized names in many cases.

The lion (Heb. *aryeh*, e.g., Gen. xlix, 9; Arab. *sabe'*), which was very common in Palestine, has now altogether disappeared, but as the name is so well known to everyone, it seems evident that it must have existed there. Several other animals are known by name, as the elephant (*fil*), the crocodile (*tamsakh*), but few have a real idea of their form or size, whilst the lion is even minutely described, so vividly have the recollections of the animal been handed down from generation to generation.

The leopard (Heb. *nāmer*, e.g., Isa. xi, 7; Arab. *nimr*), is found principally in the south and in very desolate places.

The bear (Heb. *dōbh*, e.g., 2 Kings ii, 24; Arab. *dib*), is now only met with in the Lebanon; it is well known, because Bulgarians often pass through the country with them.

The wolf (Heb. *zēbh*, e.g., Gen. xlix, 27; Arab. *dhib*), occurs now and then, but is not very common.

The hyaena (the Hebrew would be *sēba'*; Arab. *dub'*, ضبع) is known all over the country, and is said to roam over miles and miles every night. The one of Beer el-Helon is said to come till Castel, that of Colonieh is master of the hills as far as Jerusalem. The hyaena is the hero of hundreds of stories, and it is noteworthy that the Scriptures mention the "Valley of Zeboim" (1 Sam. xiv, 18) only where the name of the hyaena can be found. That this valley has not been identified lies in the fact that hyaena-hills, hyaena valleys, hyaena-caves, etc., are found everywhere. Compare the *Shukh ed-Debu'a*, east of Jerusalem, the *Wady ed-Dab'a*, south of Ramleh, etc.

The jackal (Heb. *shu'al*, e.g., Judges xv, 4; Arab. *wawī* وای)

is known everywhere. It is especially plentiful in the maritime plains, where the exploits of Samson are placed. In the mountains the jackal is often called *dib'y* (ذبيعي), a diminutive of *dab'*.

The cheetah is not mentioned in the Scriptures, but it is now well known by the name of *fahd*. A courageous person is always called a *fahd*. The animal only occurs in East Jordan lands.

The badger is mentioned in the Bible in the "badger-skins" (Ex. xxv, 5, etc., *tahash*) but the translation seems to have been influenced by the similarity of the Latin *taxus* or *taxo* (c.f. the German "dachs"). The badger, *ghere[t]*, is very well known, and as it feeds principally on vegetables, is very common where these are raised. As it is very fat, its meat is eaten when killed. The skin, with its very long and rough hair, does not seem very appropriate for the two purposes mentioned in the Scriptures: 1. As a covering for the Tabernacle (Ex. xxvi, 14) it is not very fit, because it is very small and very difficult to find, especially about Sinai; 2. As fine leather for the shoes (Ezek. xvi, 10) it was not at all fit; these skins were, very likely, fine tanned ram skins. But as the badger is so well known, it is very probable that the *shāphān* (translated coney, Lev. xi, 5) and placed before the hare, was intended for the badger. In Prov. xxx, 26 (so the R.V. margin, which has "rock-badger") the *shāphān* is called "but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." Badgers dwell in rocks, and come down by night and make great havoc among the vegetables of Urtās. The author of that chapter probably had trouble with them, as they destroy crops but cannot easily be caught.<sup>1</sup>

The porcupine (*nīs*, نيس) is, like the badger, very fond of vegetables, and is difficult to hunt, as it cannot easily be shot, and when attacked rolls itself upon the feet of the pursuer and seriously wounds him with his long spikes.

The coney is called *wabr*, and is extremely rare, it is known only to very few fellahin.

The hare, Heb. *arnebeth* (e.g., Lev. xi, 6; Arab. *arnabe[t]*), is known all over the country, and is hunted and eaten by the fellahin.

The wild boar (*hāzīr*, e.g., Lev. xi, 7, Arab. *khanzēr*) is found in the Jordan Valley, where the herds very seriously damage the

<sup>1</sup> [According to the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* the modern Arabic form of the word (*thafun*) is still used among the southern Arabs for the jerboa.]

wheat and barley ; they are also found in the maritime plains and oak forests of the mountains. Mohammedans do not eat them when they kill them, but sell them to Christians if there are any near, for they do not even like to touch them. But, curious to say, they take their tusks and fix them with silver one against the other, thus forming the crescent, and hang it at the neck of their horses.

The ibex (*cf.* Job xxxix, 1, Ps. civ, 18 ; Arab. *badan*) is found chiefly about the regions of 'Engeddi.

The gazelle (Heb. *zēbhā*, *e.g.*, Deut. xiv, 5 ; Arab. *ghazāl*) and the ibex are only known in Western Palestine. The gazelle is found everywhere, but the various other animals of Deut. xiv, 5, are not known.

Bats of all kinds (Heb. *ʾāṭallēph*, Lev. xi, 19 ; Arab. *waṭwat*) are found everywhere. Millions of bats inhabit the caves of She'ha, east of Ramleh. The sight is a unique one when they fly out in thick columns just a few minutes after sunset in regular order in the direction of Ramleh and Lydd, and then, when these armies have continued thus for one half to three quarters of an hour pouring forth, they spread in every direction, hunting among the millions of flies and insects about the infected mosquito-producing wadis, and rendering quiet but immense service to the inhabitants of the plains, who, but for them, would be so much more inoculated with typho-malarial fever ; not to say anything about the sleepless nights produced by their stings. The Greek fruit-eating bats (*Cynonycteris aegyptiaca*) feed on oranges in Jaffa ; they slightly envelope the fruit with their great wings (measuring a foot or more from end to end) and suck out the soft parts, leaving the skin on the tree. They are found in the subterranean vaults of the tower of Ramleh—in fact, the only place where I have ever met them in day-time—and I wonder whether they still fly to Jaffa in the evening and come back by the first streak of daylight, as Ramleh does not furnish food enough in the few palm-trees, the fruit of which they delight in. Water-wheel wells do not offer sufficient shelter for them.

The rat (*jardōn*) and mouse (*far*) are man's constant companion, and follow his tracks in the fields as well as in the house. The jerboa, (جربوع) is a small spiny mouse found in Philistia, and supposed to be the 'akbar (עכבר, mouse) of Lev. xi, 29 ; but this, as will be seen hereafter, was most probably the tortoise. There are many other kinds of field mice, especially in the desert of Judea and the plain of Jordan. The whole mouse tribe is called *far*, *i.e.*, the *pēr* of Isa. ii, 20 (according to one view).

The hedgehog (Arab. *kunfud*, Heb. *kippōd*, in Isa. xxxiv, 11, transl. *bittern*), lives in ruined places and in hedges, where it feeds on worms. It comes forth only by night.

The above quadrupeds are the principal and best known ones. Most of them can easily be tamed, if brought up with care. A hyaena which we brought up was very tame, till it received raw meat, then it began to attack us, and had to be killed. A young bear from Tripoli in Syria was as gentle as a baby. Jackals and foxes are very tame. A young jackal in Jaffa would on no account leave the house, in spite of my carrying him away to the impenetrable hedges where he could find his friends and kindred, but next morning he again pleaded behind the door for admittance, though the dog would not live on friendly terms with him, no matter how humbly the jackal begged. Hares, gazelles, the ibex, etc., can be tamed for a time; lack of free space shortens their lives in civilized places.

Birds (Arab. *ṭiyūr*, Heb. *oph*, Gen. i, 20, etc.) of all kinds, however small, have their special names, and are well known by the fellahin, from the ostrich *na'ame*[*t*] (نعامة), met with only in the Syrian desert, to the small pygmy warbler, *fesaysi* (فسيسي), hardly bigger than the figs on which he feeds, and often confused with them, because it has the colour of a ripe fig.

The best known birds are the bearded vulture (Arab. *badej*), the griffon vulture (Heb. *nesher*, Arab. *nīsr*), and the Egyptian vulture (Heb. and Arab. *rākham*). These vultures are the most numerous, and wherever a carcass is thrown away, they are certainly the first to find it, and numbers flock in from every direction. This is the bird alluded to in Jesus' foretelling of the destruction of the temple: "Where-soever the carcass is, there will the *eagles* (or vultures) be gathered together" (Matt. xxiv, 28). Together with the jackals they are the effective hygienic police-agents, and are referred to as the fowls of the heavens (1 Sam. xvii, 46; Jer. vii, 33, etc.).

(To be continued.)