

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOTS IN THE LAND OF THE TURBAN.

The Thistle at Damascus—"Bothwell Bank"—Heart of James I—A Campbell among the Turks—Adventures of Thomas Keith, Aga of the Mamelukes—"Osman" the Drummer—Four Scots Pashas.

IN that scarce and quaint topographical work, the *Atlas Geographicus*, we are told that there was to be seen in 1712, in a tower of the city wall of Damascus, near the gate of St. Paul, two fleurs-de-lys and two lions carved in stone, "and near each of them a *great thistle*. This was probably in honour of some Scottish princes who went with the French to the Holy Land. From hence some think the French built the tower, but we rather believe that the Turks brought the stones from some other place once possessed by the French."

We give this story for what it is worth. The thistle *may* have been a relic of the Scottish crusaders (of whom we may be tempted to take note at another time), though Bowring and other travellers do not mention it; but a more interesting anecdote, Scoto-Syrian, is one connected with the city of Jerusalem, and related by Richard Verstegan, in his *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Antwerp, 1673, 12mo, in the chapter on the "Surnames of Ancient Families," and which we give in his own words:—

“So it fell out of late years that an English gentleman travelling in Palestine, not far from Jerusalem, as he passed through a country town heard by chance a woman sitting at the door dandling her child to sing,

“O Bothwell Bank, thou bloomest fair.”

The gentleman hereat exceedingly wondered, and forthwith in English saluted the woman, who joyfully answered him, and said she was right glad to see a gentleman of our isle; and told him she was a Scotchwoman, and came first from Scotland to Venice, and from Venice thither, where her fortune was to be the wife of an officer under the Turk, who being at that instant absent, and might soon return, she entreated the gentleman to stay, the which he did; and she, for country's sake, to show herself more kind and bountiful to him, told her husband at his homecoming that the gentleman was her kinsman, whereupon her husband entertained him, and at his departure gave him divers things of good value.”

From the *Exchequer Rolls* of Scotland we learn that the heart of James I, in 1437, was removed from his body, like that of Robert I, and taken on a pilgrimage to the East—a journey of which no details are given beyond the payment of £90 “to a certain knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem for bringing (back) the heart of the illustrious prince of blessed memory, James, the late King of Scotland, from Rhodes to the Carthusian monastery near the burgh of Perth, where the body of the said prince is buried.” Although the return of the king's heart is thus chronicled, we are left in ignorance of the nature and com-

position of the expedition with which it was sent from Scotland to Palestine.

From this date to the last year of the nineteenth century seems somewhat of a leap; but we read that in 1800, when the government sent an army under Abercrombie to expel the French from Egypt, in the last days of December, when, with other troops, the 92nd Highlanders at Marmorice Bay were waiting reinforcements from the Turks, among the latter who came particularly to see the former was an Osmanli officer of stately and dignified appearance.

He proved to be a gentleman named Campbell, from Kintyre, who, early in life, had been so affected by the death of a friend whom he had killed in a sudden quarrel near Fort-William, that he had wandered abroad, and ultimately joined the Turkish army, in which he had risen to be a general of artillery under the Sultan Selim. "When he saw our men in the dress to which he had been accustomed in his youth, and heard the bagpipes playing," says the *Caledonian Mercury*, "the remembrance of former years, and of his country, so affected him that he burst into tears. The astonishment of the soldiers may be imagined when they were addressed in their own language—the Gaelic, which he had not forgotten—by a turbaned Turk in full costume, with a white beard flowing down to his middle."

He sent off several boat-loads of fruit to the Gordon Highlanders, of whose colonel, the gallant John Cameron of Fassifern, he made several inquiries about relations who were then living at Campbelton. "They entered into correspondence with him," says the Rev. Mr. Clerk in his

privately printed memoir of Cameron, "but we have not learned what was the close of his career, whether he revisited his native land or died in his adopted country."

We now come to the story of one whose adventures, if related at length, would surpass any romance ever written, that of Thomas Keith, who became the last Aga of the Mamelukes and governor of Medina—*Medinet-el-Nabi*—(or the city of the prophet), yet whose name is utterly unknown in his own country!

Thomas Keith, a record of whose service was furnished to us by the War Office, was a native of Edinburgh, where he served his apprenticeship to a gunsmith before he enlisted, on the 4th of August, 1804, in the 2nd battalion of the 78th Highlanders, commanded by Major-General Mackenzie Frazer of Castle Frazer; and soon after he went with the corps, under Lieutenant-Colonel MacLeod of Gienis, to join the army in Sicily under Sir John Stuart, the Count of Maida, where he took part in the victorious battle of that name, and the subsequent capture of Crotona on the Gulf of Taranto.

Keith, proving a smart, intelligent, and well-educated soldier, was appointed armourer to the Ross-shire Buffs, now ordered to form a part of the expedition fitted out in Sicily in 1807 to occupy Alexandria, to compel the Turks to defend their own territories, and relieve our allies, the Russians, of the pressure they put upon them.

Like most British expeditions, this one under Mackenzie Fraser proved too slender; it consisted only of the 20th Light Dragoons, a regiment then clad in blue with orange facings; the 31st, 35th, and 78th Regiments, with that of

De Rolle and *Les Chasseurs Britanniques*, a mixed corps, formed of deserters from all countries.

On the 18th of March General Fraser disembarked this force near the Arabs' Tower, westward of Alexandria, and began his march for the latter, with the view of attacking it and keeping open a communication with the naval squadron; but he was either ignorant of the actual strength of the Turkish forces in and about the city, or that the Mameluke Beys, though in arms apparently against the new viceroy, Mehemet Ali, now were ready to follow him against the British troops.

Alexandria was captured, but then followed our defeat at Rosetta (or *Raschid*) on the Bolbiton branch of the Nile, where General Patrick Wauchope of Edmonston fell, with 185 officers and men of the 31st Regiment alone, and next day the heads of these were displayed on stakes along the road that leads towards Tantah.

Another disastrous affair—when Keith fell into the hands of the enemy—followed at the village of El Hamet, four miles south-west of Rosetta, on the banks of the canal that unites the Nile with Lake Etko. There Colonel Macleod, with five companies of his Highlanders and two of the 35th, with a few of the 20th Dragoons, took post on the embankment, when in the mist, on the morning of the 21st April, they were furiously attacked by an overwhelming force of Albanian cavalry and infantry, that came down the Nile in 70 large river-boats. MacLeod formed a square, but the rush of the foe proved too great for him, with their lances, matchlocks, and yataghans. A company of the 35th and another of the Ross-shire Buffs were cut

down though making a desperate resistance, and every officer and man of both companies perished, save some 22 who escaped, and Keith and a Highland drummer who were taken prisoners. Seven Albanians were slain in succession by the claymore of Sergeant John MacRae of the 78th ere his head was cloven from behind by a yataghan; and, ere Lieutenant MacRae fell, six men of his surname, all from Kintail, perished by his side. MacLeod also fell, and the Albanians were seen caracoling their horses on all sides, each with a soldier's head on the point of a lance. (*General Stewart.*)

Keith with a few survivors was dragged to Cairo, where 450 heads, hewn from MacLeod's men, were exposed in the market-place, with every mark of barbarous contempt; and there he became the property of Ahmed Aga, who purchased him for a few coins from an Albanian lancer. Ahmed, fortunately for Keith, conceived a strong fancy for him, and finding all chance of escape utterly hopeless, according to the means of locomotion in those days, he and the drummer adopted the turban — Keith taking the name of Ibrahim Aga and the latter that of Osman, under which we shall have to refer to him again when in old age.

Keith had soon to quit the service of his new friend Ahmed. A Mameluke of the latter, a renegade Sicilian, having insulted him, swords were drawn, and the young Scotsman killed the Sicilian on the spot, and, to escape the consequences, fled to the favourite wife of the Viceroy, Mehemet Ali, and procured her protection. She gave him a purse of money, and sent him disguised to her second

son, Tusoun Pasha, born at Kavala, in Macedonia (where Mehemet's father had been head of the police), and he took Keith into his service, pleased to find that he was a skilful armourer and master of the Arabic language.

Though little else than a boy, Tusoun (we are told by the author of *Egypt and Mohammed Ali*) had a fiendish temper, and on Keith incurring his sharp displeasure by some omission of duty, he ordered the latter to be assassinated in bed, and beset the house with armed slaves, whose instructions were to mutilate him and bring away his head. But Keith was prepared for them!

Ere they could enter his room he was out of the doorway, which he had barricaded, and which he defended for half-an-hour with his sword and pistols, till a pile of dead lay before him; then seizing a lucky moment, when they shrank from that ghastly barrier, he leaped into the street, and brandishing his bloody sabre, once more sought the protection of Tusoun's mother.

She effected a reconciliation between them, and the savage young prince, in admiration of his courage, appointed him Aga of his body of Mamelukes, a post of importance, in which he displayed many brilliant qualities. "In the bearded Aga of the Mamelukes, who shaved his head in conformity to the rules of the Prophet, it might have been difficult to recognise the kilted Ross-shire Buff of a year or so before; but now his former military experience made him of vast service in infusing a species of discipline among the Mamelukes and other wild and barbarous horsemen in the Pasha's army, while his knowledge of all kinds of weapons, his bodily strength, bravery, and hardihood,

made him almost their idol. Thus he stood high among the Agas of the Pasha of Egypt."

Freed from the British, the latter now began to adopt warlike measures against the Wahabees, who had plundered many caravans, and forbidden people to pray in their mosques for his master the Sultan—being in the East not unlike the Puritans under Cromwell.

It was on the 1st March, 1811, just before Tusoun was to begin his march against these people in Arabia, that the dreadful massacre of the Mameluke Beys and their soldiers took place at Cairo. Keith escaped that event, warned, it is supposed, by Tusoun to absent himself, as he was to command the latter's cavalry; but, if in the capital, he must have been cognisant of that awful scene in the citadel, when (as Ebers relates) from every window and loophole musketry and cannon volleyed on these gorgeously-accounted horsemen, till hundreds with their horses lay in the narrow way wallowing in blood, though some snatched sword and pistol but in vain, and in unutterable confusion men and chargers, living, dying, and dead, rolled in one mighty mass—at first shouting and screaming, then silently convulsive, and more silent and still, and 480 lives were quenched, one alone escaping by leaping his horse over the terrific rampart—Ameer Bey.

Leading Tusoun's cavalry, as Ibrahim Aga, Thomas Keith, then only in his eighteenth year, had under him 800 sabres, chiefly Bedouins, while the infantry, 2,000 Arnauts in the kilt, were led by Saleh Bey. In October they attacked Yembo, on the Red Sea, and Keith's Bedouins pillaged the town. In January, 1812, Tasoun

and Keith set out to attack the city of Medina, and on their march by the sandy caravan route, after capturing Bedr-Honein and Safra, in a narrow defile between two rugged mountains, they were attacked by more than 20,000 fanatical Wahabees.

The infantry took to flight, the Bedouins followed fast, all abandoning the prince save Keith and one other horseman. The three broke, sword in hand, through the enemy, reached the camp in the rear at Bedr-Honein, and escaped to the Red Sea, the whole shore of which was now swept by the victorious Wahabees; but Keith for his fidelity in the Pass of Jedeida was appointed treasurer to Mehemet Ali, by orders from whom he lavished gold to detach the Bedouins from the Wahabees, against whom Tusoun marched again in 1812, accompanied by Keith.

They stormed Medina, the latter leading the Arnaouts, sword in hand, in his twentieth year. "At Medina," says the *History of Arabia*, "he fought with courage, being the first man who mounted the breach, and after distinguishing himself on many other occasions he was made governor of the city in 1815." But nowhere did he do so much than in the repulse of the Turks before Taraba, when 14,000 of them were killed or wounded. Keith captured a cannon in a charge, and served it with his own hands. In 1816 he was in command at Mecca, near where, on one occasion, 5,000 human heads were piled before the tent of the victorious Mehemet. In the cavalry fight at El Rass, Keith, while succouring Tusoun, slew four with his sabre in quick succession, but was unhorsed, cut to pieces, and beheaded on the spot.

His comrade, "Osman" the drummer, long survived these events, and the strongest feature of his character, says one who met him, was his intense nationality. "In vain men called him *Effendi*; in vain he swept along in Eastern robes, and rival beauties adorned his harem. The joy of his heart lay in this:—that he had three shelves of books, and that *these books were thorough-bred Scotch*; and, above all, I recollect that he prided himself upon the 'Edinburgh Cabinet Library.'" (*Traces of Travel.*)

So lately as 1854, Colonel Cannon, son of the Rev. Dr. Cannon, minister of Maine and Strathmartin, and Colonel Ogilvy of Tanuadyce, entered the Turkish service. The former, known as Behram Pasha, commanded the Turkish Light Division at Silistria while Naysmith was there, and also at the battle of Giurgevo.

Later still, in 1868, Mr. H. E. Frost, a native of Aberdeen, held a high office in the gun-factories at Constantinople under Sir John Anderson, and for his great services and improvements in gunnery was made brigadier-general, with the rank of pasha; "and, commenting on a *sabre d'honneur* to Abdul Kerim Pasha, the *Invalide Russe* declares that the real conqueror of Servia was not Abdul, but Arthur Campbell Pasha, a military agent, who, with six British officers, was the real leader of the Turkish troops." (*The World*, 1877.) In 1886 Borthwick Pasha was appointed a member of the Gendarmerie Commission; and in the *Scotsman* for August, 1876, we read that Blacque Bey, a Catholic, then director of the Press at Constantinople, and formerly the Turkish Minister at Washington,

is of Scottish descent from a Mr. Black who followed King James VII to France.

European discipline was first introduced into the Persian army by two Scottish officers during the early part of the present century. The first Persian artillery corps was organised by Lieutenant Lindsay of the Madras army, who had every difficulty thrown in his way by the prejudices of the Mahomedans. But the then Shah gave him unlimited powers. The *serbaz*, or infantry, were organised by Major Christie of the Bombay army, an officer of the greatest merit, who inspired them with an *esprit de corps* never before known in Persia. The surgeon-general of the army of the Prince Abbas Mirza, when encamped on the frontiers of Yam, in Azerbaijan, in 1810 and 1816, was Dr. Campbell, a Scotsman, as Morier states in his *Travels*; and it was from these officers that the Persian buglers and trumpeters acquired the British "calls" in the field, the use of which by them perplexed our troops—particularly the Ross-shire Buffs—at the Battle of Khooshab, when Sir James Outram so thoroughly routed the Persians under Shooja-ool-Moolk. In 1831 Dr. Littlejohn, another Scot, on leaving India, entered the service of Daood Pasha at Bagdad, and, accompanying the army of Abbas Mirza in the Kermon campaign, commanded the garrison of Azerbaijan, but was compelled to surrender to the Firman Firma, after which he remained to the day of his death at Shiraz.

In 1840 Sir Henry Lindsay-Bethune, Bart., of Kilconquhar, was a general officer in the Persian service, and a prior-general in Asia.

In 1821 the governor of Tripolizza, which under the Turks had been the capital of the Morea, was Sir Thomas Gordon Knight, previously an officer of the Scots Greys. The town had been sacked by the Greeks in the same year. On the breaking out of the war between France and Russia he had served as a volunteer in the army of the latter, and was an A.D.C. on the retreat from Moscow. He afterwards returned to Scotland, and then taking £20,000 with him, went to the Morea to fight for Greece, and is "now at the head of Yps Tlonti's staff and commandant of Tripolizza." (Ed. *Weekly Journal*, No. 1253.)

