

THE NATIVES OF PALESTINE.

WE have from time to time been able to give papers on the manners and customs of the natives of Palestine, which have been received with great interest. The Rev. James Niel, formerly incumbent of Christ Church, Jerusalem, has just produced a work on the same subject, in which he embodies his own observations while resident in the country. Many of them are extremely interesting and valuable as illustrations of the Bible. We are permitted to quote one or two passages from this book. The first extract is on the measuring of corn.

One of the characteristic sights of Palestine, shortly after the harvest has been gathered in, is the measuring out of wheat and barley, which sometimes takes place in the corn-market, but more frequently in the courtyard of the purchaser's house. All families at this time, that is, during July and August, lay up in store the wheat which will be required to provide bread for the use of the household throughout the ensuing year, and also barley sufficient for their horses, mules, and asses during the same period. Samples are procured either from the farmer or merchant, and when approved the whole quantity ordered is delivered to the purchaser bound up in sacks. A professional measurer is always present on these occasions, and in the presence of the seller and buyer, or their representatives, duly proceeds to ascertain the contents of each sack. This is done by meting out the grain in a circular wooden measure in the shape of our own bushel, but less deep, called in Arabic a *timneh*. The measurer seats himself cross-legged on the ground, and proceeds to shovel the wheat or barley, as the case may be, into the *timneh* with both his hands until it is partly full. Next he seizes the measure, and shakes it strongly from side to side, by means of two or three rapid half turns, without raising it from the ground, in order that the grain may settle into a smaller space. This quick shaking together of the corn is a striking part of the process, and is very effective in forcing it to occupy less room. He then fills it further, and repeats the shaking from side to side, going over the same thing again and again until it is full up to the brim. As soon as this is the case, he gently but firmly presses upon it with his hands, so as to drive it into a yet smaller space. Finally, having first made a slight hollow on the top, he takes some more handfuls of grain, and very skilfully constructs a cone of corn upon the flat surface of the *timneh*, which he has now filled. He continues carefully to build up this cone until no more grain can possibly be held, and that which he adds begins to flow over and run down. Upon this the measure is considered to be of full weight, and is emptied into the purchaser's sack. This is the universal method by which grain is now meted out, and the price is always quoted at so much per *timneh*.

These professional measurers are often dishonest, taking bribes from seller or buyer, and in this case are very skilful in cheating either party as it suits their purpose. If it is to their interest to do so, while apparently going through the ordinary process, they can so contrive as to bring the contents of the measure to half a *rotte*, or three pounds less than the proper quantity, involving a loss

to the purchaser of over 6 per cent. On the other hand, their dishonesty more commonly favours the merchants and townspeople, who buy from the poor *fellahen*, the peasants. The cunning of the measurers in this way is said to be brought to the highest degree at *Nablous*, the ancient Shechem. If one of them in that town is bribed by the buyer of wheat, not only does he bring his measure to take up the largest possible quantity, but in raising it after it is flowing over, he secretly lifts up with the hand supporting the bottom of the measure a considerable quantity of grain, which is so swiftly and adroitly done as to escape the observation of the *fellah* who is selling it.

I have taken means carefully to ascertain the capacity of the Palestine *timneh*. It is true, different kinds of wheat differ in weight. The following measures give the contents in the case of the best quality. A *timneh* filled up to the brim, without being shaken or pressed, weighs six *rottles* and one-sixth, or just thirty-seven pounds. The same *timneh*, not only filled to the top but running over, that is, piled up above in the shape of a cone, also without being pressed and shaken, weighs seven *rottles* and one-third, or forty-four pounds. When, however, the measure in question is not only filled till it flows over, but is, at the same time, shaken together and pressed down, it holds just eight *rottles*, or forty-eight pounds.

No doubt it is to this simple and familiar custom that our Blessed Lord alludes, when He speaks under an allegory of the recompense of those liberal souls who shall assuredly themselves be made fat. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom [that is into the capacious natural pocket formed by that part of the loose Eastern shirt which is above the girdle]. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Luke vi, 38; Matthew vii, 2; Mark iv, 24). The above facts lend far more power and definiteness to our Saviour's graphic illustration than we should at first sight have supposed it to contain. There is no less than eleven pounds' difference in weight between a "measure" filled to the brim, as we should fill it here, and one such as I have described filled according to the bountiful method of Bible lands, when it is "pressed down, shaken together, running over." In this latter case no less than about 30 per cent. is added to its worth!

The next extract illustrates a remarkable passage in Ezekiel (xxiv, 7, 8) with other passages.

A practice to be constantly noticed throughout Syria is that of hiding any blood, which may happen to be spilled on the ground, by covering it over with the surrounding soil or dust. If while you are on a journey a *Bedaween* of your escort only so much as cuts his hand, or suffers from bleeding at the nose, he is very careful to let the blood fall upon the earth, without leaving any stain upon his clothing or person, and he then and there buries it out of sight by scraping over it the sand or dust of the desert before he proceeds on his way. The reason which they give for this observance I have not been able to discover. Most probably it comes from the thought in Numbers xxxv, 3) and from the plain direction in the case of the huntsman who caught any beast or fowl, to "pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust" (Leviticus xvii, 13). It is reasonable to

suppose that this direction, like many other matters contained in the Law, embodied and sanctioned an already well-known and universal practice. Very likely it arose from anxiety lest any blood appearing upon the ground might by any possibility be construed to represent some act of violence, and thus, in the language of Scripture, "cause fury to come up to take vengeance." This, in a land where the law of blood-revenge causing endless sanguinary family feuds is so stringent, may well be no imaginary fear. In any case, it is deeply interesting to mark its observance at the present day. It would seem to be referred to in the strong figurative language of several passages, notably that where Job in the bitterness of his soul cries (Job xvi, 18),

"Earth, cover not thou my blood."

A very striking Scripture in connection with this Eastern usage is that in Ezekiel, where God fortells the judgments coming upon Jerusalem at the hands of the Chaldeans. These judgments are declared to be a retribution for the reckless violence and cruelty that had openly stalked through her streets. "For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it upon the bare rock; she hath not poured it upon the ground to cover it with dust. That it may cause fury to come up to take vengeance, I have set her blood upon the bare rock, that it should not be covered" (Ezekiel xxiv, 7, 8). There is here a force of meaning that might at first sight be overlooked. Jerusalem, as I shall have occasion elsewhere to explain at length, is essentially a rock city. The rock crops up to the surface in every part of it. In ancient times, before the rugged slopes and precipices of limestone and indurated chalk were choked up and covered over, as they are now, by mountains of *débris*, it appeared, as at the fortress of Jebus, with its walls resting on rock scarps in some places fifty feet high. Hence one of its proud titles was "The Tableland Rock."

CITY OF DAVID.

PLYMOUTH, March 24th, 1881.

The Editor, "Quarterly Statement" of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

SIR,—Will you allow me to point out in reference to the question whether the "City of David" was on Ophel, as contended by the Rev. W. F. Birch; that on page 229 of the number for October 1880, Lieutenant Conder maintains, that "these royal sepulchres on Ophel are identical with the "field of burial of the kings" (2 Chron. xxvi, 23), where Uzziah was buried," and are a "*place distinct from the Royal Cemetery in the City of David.*"

Now if the two passages in which account is given of the burial of Uzziah, be compared together, it will be seen that the place where Uzziah was interred, was *in the City of David*. They are as follow:—

2 Kings xv, 7.

"So Azariah (Uzziah) slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers *in the City of David*: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead."

2 Chron. xxvi, 23.

"So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which *belonged to the Kings*; for they said, he is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead."