

EASTERN MANNERS

AND CUSTOMS

DRESS IN THE EAST



MORSEY SC

T. NELSON & SONS. LONDON & EDINBURGH.

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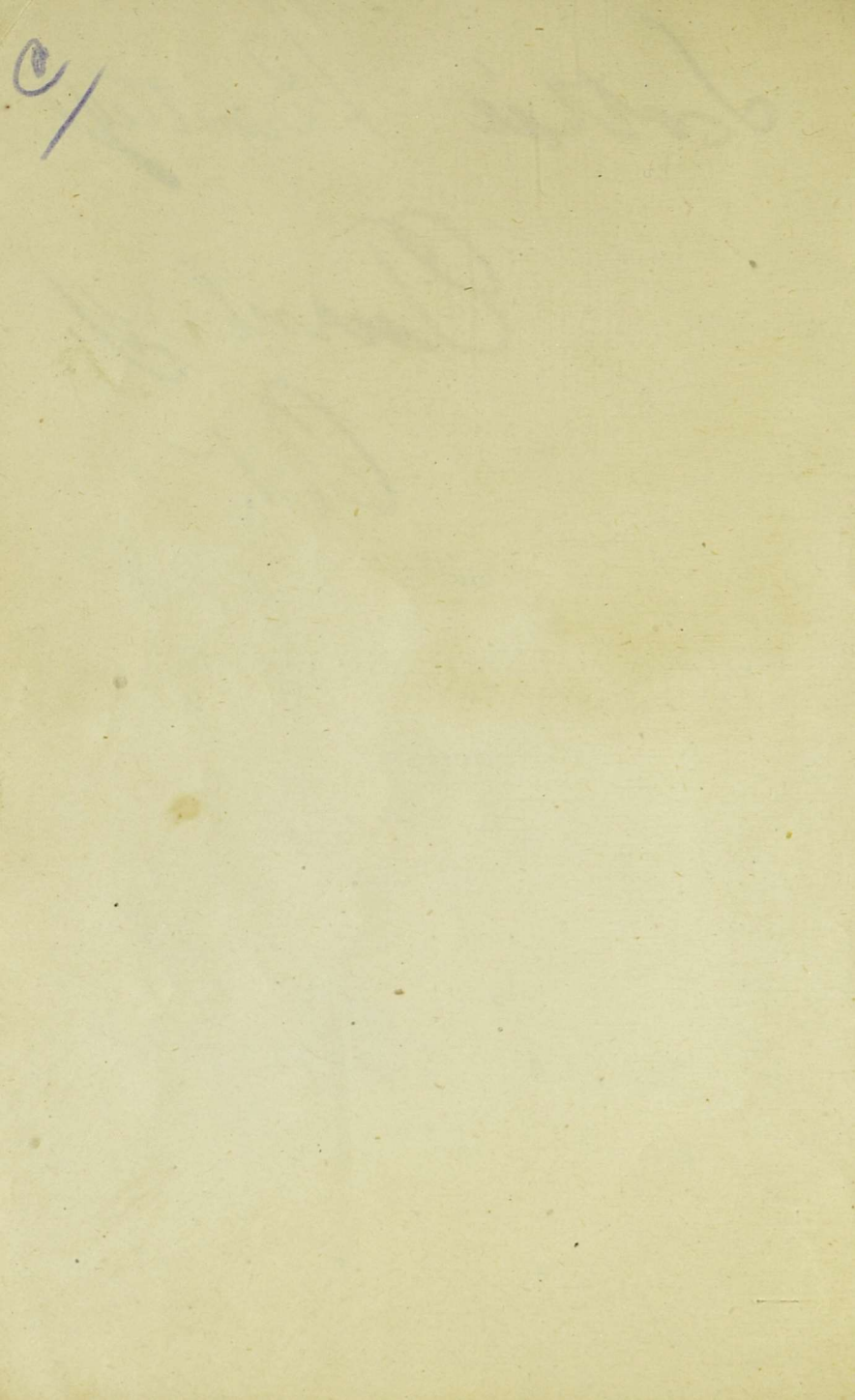
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EASTERN MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

Lottie Bentley

Eastern manners
and customs





EASTERN SHEPHERDS.



Eastern Manners and Customs.

DRESS IN THE EAST.

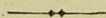
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EASTERN MANNERS AND CUSTOMS.

DRESS IN THE EAST.

THIS is a point which requires to be in some degree understood before the many allusions to it in Scripture can be plain to a Western reader. In Exodus xxii. 26, 27, for example, we read: "If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep?" Now that refers to the upper garment or cloak, commonly made of wool, worn by Orientals—which could be dispensed with, and usually was so when the owner was at work; but it was his blanket at night, hence the considerate legislation of the passage quoted. The same remarks explain the words, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have

thy cloke also" (Matt. v. 40)—that is, both the upper garment and the nether. And again, this explains the passage which tells that Peter "girt his fisher's coat unto him, for he was naked" (John xxi. 7); in other words, he had stripped off his upper garment the more easily to follow his occupation.

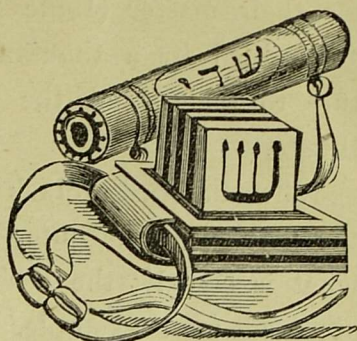
Again, we are told, in Matt. ix. 20, that on a certain occasion "a woman touched the hem of Christ's garment." It was the woollen cloak of his country, worn over the other part of the raiment, which was commonly of linen—the same garment as that which he laid aside (John xiii. 4) when he washed the disciples' feet. By the "hem" is most probably meant the tufts or fringes worn at the extremities of the cloak, according to the law. It was the upper garment (properly cloak) and the under garment (properly coat) that constituted a change of raiment.

Further: "the coat which was without seam, woven from the top throughout" (John xix. 23), was another form of the upper garment. Such articles of clothing are not uncommon in the East to this day; and "the coat of many colours" is still in use among some tribes.

The phylacteries mentioned in Scripture as worn by the Pharisees, were portions of the Law written upon parchment, and worn on the forehead, the hand, and

elsewhere during worship—a substitute, too often, for inscribing the Law upon the heart.

The loose and flowing nature of garments in the East explains other scriptural allusions. In Isa. lii. 10, we read that “the Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations;” and the gesture which suggested the words is very often seen. When a blow is about to be struck, the wide sleeve of the right arm is tossed up, and the limb being thus disengaged descends with greater force upon the object aimed at.



PHYLACTERIES.

The girdle is a part of Eastern dress very often mentioned in Scripture. The cases of Elijah (2 Kings i. 8), of the Baptist (Matt. iii. 4), and the command to the Ephesians to stand with their loins girt (Eph. vi. 14), will at once occur. The reference is even carried beyond the grave (see Rev. i. 13). Now the girdle—a large shawl or other fabric used as a belt—is essential to comfort in the East. It binds up the flowing robe; it imparts strength to the frame; it carries the knife, the poniard, the snuff-box, and the purse of the wearer. From its binding and strengthening force, the girdle suggests many scriptural allusions; as when Peter

enjoins believers to "gird up the loins of their mind" (1 Peter i. 13); or when the Saviour speaks of some who have their "loins girded" like servants waiting for their master (Luke xii. 35). It is thus that we are helped by a thousand material emblems of Scripture to understand the spiritual, and mind heavenly things.

When the girdle binds the loose robe round the waist, the portion of the outer garment up to the neck forms what is called "the bosom," to which many references are made; for example, "He shall carry the lambs in his bosom" (Isa. xl. 11). The following extract will make this plain: "The usual dress is a long robe, not much unlike a woman's gown. It is fastened about the waist with a girdle. The part of the dress above the girdle, having an opening, is used for stowing away all sorts of things; handkerchiefs when they have any, bread, fruit, &c.—nothing comes amiss, they put it into the bosom. As the receptacle goes all round the body, it is equal to three or four of those large pockets our great-grandmothers used to wear."

These matters of dress and costume have a certain Biblical interest, and therefore form a necessary part of our study. The first garments were manufactured by God himself, and, in addition to their primary intention, had, as I believe, a typical significance. The skins with

which the two first sinners, penitent and reconciled, were clothed, were those of the lambs offered in sacrifice, and not obscurely symbolized the robe of righteousness purchased for penitent believers by the sacrifice of the *Lamb* of God on Calvary. And in many subsequent incidents and institutions, garments are invested with a religious and typical signification. Such facts elevate the subject far above the category of mere trivialities. But, indeed, that cannot be a matter of indifference to the Christian student and philosopher in which all men, all women, all children, of every age and country, do, and will, to the end of time, feel a deep solicitude, and upon which is expended an infinite amount of time, money, and labour. It would be a curious exercise of ingenuity to trace out the very gradual development of human costume, from the first fig-leaves and coats of skins, to the complicated toilets of a highly civilized society. We, however, must restrict ourselves to the Bible.

The list is not extensive until the times of the later prophets. Aprons of fig-leaves, man's first vain invention to hide the nakedness of sin—coats of skin, given in mercy by our heavenly Father—cloaks, mantles, shirts, breeches, girdles, bonnets, and sandals, invented at various dates, and most of them consecrated to religious purposes by Moses in the garments of the Hebrew priesthood—

these constitute almost the entire wardrobe for the first three thousand years of man's history. The fact is, that



SYRIAN GENTLEMEN IN
FULL DRESS.

the whole subject is much more doubtful and obscure than most people suppose. The ancient Hebrew costume is thought to have resembled, more or less closely, the Oriental dress of our day. But *which?* I should like to know. It differs more than that of Western nations. We shall select that of the Syrian Arab, which in all probability does actually approach nearest to that of the patriarchs; and with the aid of engravings, accompanied by explanations, the size and shape of the various articles, as well as the ordinary mode of wearing them, will be sufficiently ap-

parent. You need not attempt to remember, or even pronounce the Arabic names; but it is difficult to talk about nameless things, and therefore we cannot dispense with these hard words.

LIST OF GARMENTS, WITH THEIR ARABIC NAMES EXPLAINED.

Kūmīs, inner shirt, of cotton, linen, or silk. Those of the Bedawin are long, loose, and made of strong cotton cloth,—the most important item in their wardrobe.

Libās, inner drawers of cotton cloth.

Shintiān, drawers, very full.

Sherwāl, very large, loose pantaloons.

Dikky, a cord or sash with which the pantaloons are gathered and tied round the waist.

Suderīyeh, an inner waistcoat, without sleeves, buttoned up to the neck.

Mintiān, an inner jacket, worn over the *suderīyeh*, overlapping in front,—has pockets for purse, handkerchief, &c.

Gumbāz or *Kūftān*, long open gown of cotton or silk, overlapping in front, girded tightly above the loins by the *zūnnār*.

Zūnnār, girdle of leather, camel's hair, cotton, silk, or woollen shawl.

Sūlta, an outer jacket worn over the *gūmbaz*.

Kūbrān, a stout, heavy jacket, with open sleeves fastened on at the shoulder by buttons.

Jibbeh, *Jākh*, *Benīsh*, a long loose robe or mantle, with short sleeves, very full,—used in full dress.

'*Aba*, '*Abaiyeh*, '*Meshleh*, a strong, coarse cloak, of various forms and materials. The '*abaiyeh* is often short, and richly ornamented with gold and silver thread inwoven with the cloth. The most common are made of black sackcloth of goat's or camel's hair, very large, so that the owner wraps himself in it to sleep.



DRESS OF WORKING CLASS.

Bârnûs, long loose cloak of white wool, with a hood to cover the head. It is sometimes called *mügrabîn*, from the Algerin Arabs.

For the *head* there is, first, the—

'*Arâkîyeh* or *Takîyeh*, a cotton cap fitting closely to the head, whether shaven or not. If the head is shaved, a soft felt cap is often worn under the *takîyeh*.

Tarbush or *Fez*, a thick red felt cap. The best come from Algiers.

Turban, a shawl of wool, silk, or cotton, wound round the *tarbush*. The Turks now wear nothing but the *fez*, and many Arabs nothing but the *tarbush*, with its long tassel. Others have a small coloured handkerchief (*mandeel*) tied round the *tarbush*. The Bedawin have a heavier article, woven with golden tissue, thrown over the *tarbush*, and confined there by a twisted rope of goat's or camel's hair, called '*Akal*. This is a picturesque and very distinctive article in the costume of a genuine Arab of the Desert.

For the *feet* there is, first,—

Jerabât or *Kalsât*, socks or stockings of every variety.

Kalshîn, inner slippers of soft leather, yellow or black.

Sûrmaiyyeh, shoes, commonly of red morocco.

Bâbûje, a kind of half slipper, answering in part to the ancient sandal, which is not now used.

Jezmeh, boots of red morocco, very stout and clumsy.

There are many variations and additions to this list in different parts of the vast regions inhabited by the Arab race; they are, however, only slight departures from the general types and patterns given above, and need not be described. The Mamlûk dress is considered very graceful by Europeans. It is the official costume of the army and navy of Egypt, or was so in the days of Mohammed Ali.

To the Biblical student these matters are specially interesting so far only as they throw light on the sacred Scriptures; but this they do in very many passages. For example, it was the 'aba or meshleh, I suppose, with which Shem and Japheth covered the nakedness of their father (Gen. ix. 23). It was the jibbeh that Joseph left in the hands of that shameless wife of Potiphar, called Zuleika, according to Moslem tradition (Gen. xxxix. 12). This jibbeh may answer to the mantle which fell from Elijah, and was taken up by Elisha (2 Kings ii. 8, 13); to the cloak in the precept, "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (Matt. v. 40). The *coat* is probably the *sũlta*. It was this jibbeh that our Saviour laid aside when he washed the feet of the disciples (John xiii. 4). It can be so worn, or taken off, or torn in grief or rage, as to answer every mention of it in the Bible. The same remark applies to the *zũnnār* or girdle, to the *sũrmaiye*h and *bābũje*—the shoes and sandals—and, in fact, to all other articles of dress which we have described.

By the time of Moses, the costume, I presume, had attained to about its present state among tribes purely Oriental; I mean as to pattern, not as to the number, nature, and quality of the materials. These have greatly multiplied and improved, both in variety and in fineness of fabrics.

The toilet of the ladies corresponds in most respects to that of the men, with, of course, certain additions. As was to be expected, it developed faster than the other.



DRESS OF SYRIAN OR EGYPTIAN LADY.

Even during the life of Jacob there were habits appropriate to maids, others to married women, and others again for widows; such, too, as distinguished those who were honest, and another habit for those who were otherwise. This implies a great variety in female attire; and thus it went on enlarging, until their toilets became as complicated and mysterious in Jerusalem as they now are in Paris or New York. In the 3rd chapter of Isaiah we have a catalogue, about as intelligible

to the English reader as the Hebrew seems to have been to our translators: Cauls, round tires like the moon, sweet balls, mufflers or spangled ornaments, tablets or houses of the soul (Isa. iii. 18-23), &c., &c.

It would require half a volume to discuss these names, and then they would be about as unintelligible as when we began.

I cannot muster sufficient courage to enter minutely into the female costume, nor is it necessary. It varies from that of the men mostly in the veils, which are very various; and in the head-dress, which with the tarbush for the basis, is complicated by an endless variety of jewels and other ornamental appendages: these, however, appear in the engravings, and can be better studied there than on the persons who wear them. You will not easily get permission to inspect them there. To ask it would be, in most cases, a serious insult.

THE POTTER.

EARTHENWARE jars and vessels are very ancient, and are often mentioned in the Bible. The Egyptians worked much with clay; and as one of the chief occupations of the Israelites in Egypt was making brick, they very probably learned at the same time to make the vases and jars of clay which were in use among their tyrannical masters. It is possible that the art may have been even known sooner, for we are not certain whether Rebekah's pitcher was of skin or earthenware. The first

distinct mention of earthenware is in the story of Gideon (Judges vii. 16, 19).

The potter may still be seen in the land of Israel at the present day working the clay, and forming it into vessels at his pleasure, just as former potters did long ago in Bible times.

A distinguished American missionary tells us that he saw a native manufactory of pottery while he was travelling in Palestine, and that he was delighted to find it was exactly as it is described in the Bible. "There," says he, "was the potter sitting at his 'frame,' and turning the 'wheel' with his foot. He had a heap of prepared clay near him, and a pan of water by his side. Taking a lump in his hand, he placed it on the top of the wheel (which revolves horizontally), and smoothed it into a low cone, like the upper end of a sugar-loaf; then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the centre, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it got larger and thinner, he gave it whatever shape he liked with great ease and quickness. This power of the potter over the clay, to make it what he pleases, is used by God as a comparison to explain his power over us, the creatures he has made; as it is said in Jeremiah, 'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the

clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel' (Jer. xviii. 6). When Jeremiah was watching the potter, the vessel was marred [or spoilt] in his hand;



THE POTTER AT WORK.

and 'so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it' (Jer. xviii. 4). I had to wait a long time for that, but it happened at last. From

some defect in the clay, or because he had taken too little, the potter suddenly changed his mind, crushed his growing jar instantly into a shapeless mass of mud, and beginning anew, fashioned it into a totally different vessel."

This idea has been further explained by St. Paul in the ninth chapter of the Romans, to teach us that the Lord our Creator knows best how to form us his creatures, where to place us, and how to order all things concerning us. He has all power over us. "Has not the potter power over the clay?"

The potter's vessel was the emblem of what was most easily broken and destroyed. This may seem strange to us, as now glass is more easily broken, and our earthenware seems strong in comparison.

But in the land of the Bible the comparison is true. There the jars are so thin and frail that they are literally "dashed to shivers" by the slightest stroke (Ps. ii. 9). "Water jars are often broken by merely putting them down on the floor; and nothing is more common than for a servant to return from the fountain empty-handed, having had all his jars smashed to atoms by some irregular behaviour of his donkey."

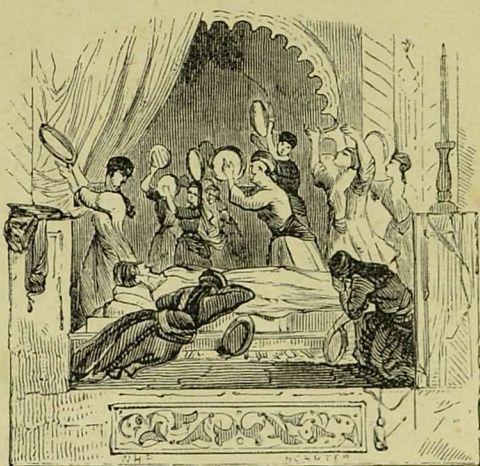
When Isaiah means to describe complete destruction, he compares it to the breaking of a potter's vessel into pieces so small that not one bit could be found large enough to lift a drop of water from the well, or a few

embers from the fire. It is still common in Palestine to find broken bits of pottery, out of which the people drink at the public wells; and to see the children of the poor carrying home a few embers from the public ovens in a "sherd" of pottery to warm their evening meal. Complete must have been the destruction of the vessel which was broken in pieces too small for this (Isa. xxx. 14).

MOURNING.

It will readily be believed that grief would be violent and eruptive among the Easterns; and we accordingly know, from many passages of Scripture, that the outcry and lamentation over their dead were often vehement and tempestuous. From the days of Job and of Joseph downward, we read that it has been so. Jeremiah (ix. 17, 18) says: "Call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come: and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters." Amos (v. 16) speaks of a time when men would "call them that are skilful of lamentation to wailing." All will remember that when Lazarus was dead, and Mary in grief left the house, her friends followed her, saying, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there" (John xi. 31).

Many a word-picture from the East represents such a scene, where the cypress shade and the mementos of death point us to our last earthly abode. Let us think of one near some tomb, immersed in grief. She appears to be the chief mourner; and beside her are other friends, mingling their tears and their wailing with hers. On



WAILING OVER THE DEAD.

occasions of such bereavement, the grief was sometimes wild and vociferous. Minstrels, we know, were hired, and the people made a noise. (See Matt. ix. 23.) Moreover, when Dorcas was dead, and when Peter went to Lydda to her house, he found "all the widows standing by weeping" (Acts ix. 39). Such lamentation, indeed, gave rise to a separate profession; there were people who

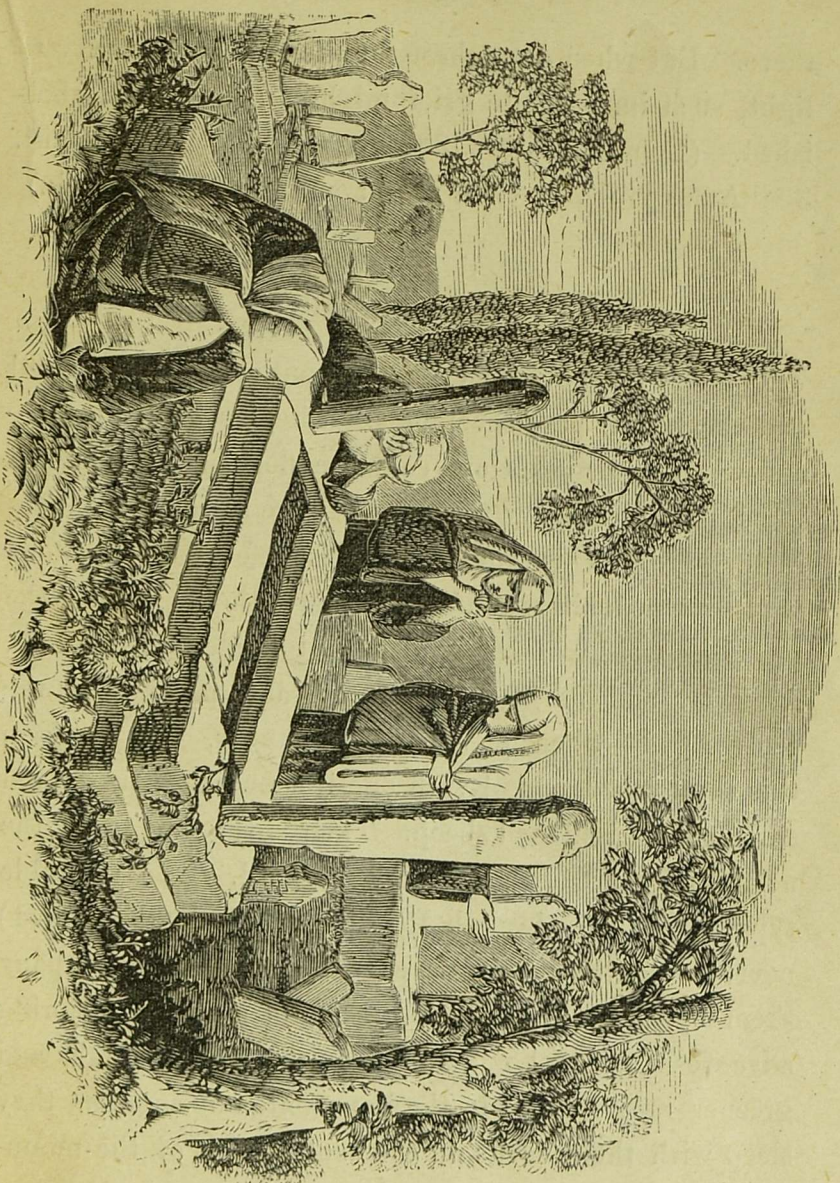
made it their calling in ancient times to howl and to wail for the dead. Beginning in a desire to show affection to the departed, the practice soon degenerated into heartless formality. Bought tears then outraged both nature and truth.

But the practice is still common; and more than one traveller tells us in substance that when a death happens in a family, the women break out into violent lamentations. They utter such incoherences as these: "O my master! O camel of the house! O my misfortune!" There are, moreover, individuals who still make it their business to weep for the dead, and who depend on such exertions for their livelihood. They watch by the corpse; they aid the mourners in bewailing the death; their gesticulations are violent; their wail is a shriek; and in every way, with Eastern violence, they betoken a grief which hireling weepers cannot feel. The practice, as we have seen, is ancient; and Hebrew doctors say that even the poorest man would hire one mourner at least to lament for his wife. When a person in a family died, we read, it was usual for the female relatives to seat themselves on the ground in a separate apartment, in a circle, in the centre of which sat the wife, daughter, or other nearest relative; and thus, assisted by the mourning women, they conducted the loud and piercing lamentations. At intervals the mourning women took the leading part, on a

signal from the chief mourner ; and then the real mourners remained comparatively silent, but attested their grief by sobs, by beating their faces, tearing their hair, and sometimes wounding themselves with their nails. The description reminds us, in some particulars, of a Highland coronach or an Irish wake. In some countries musical instruments are still employed to intensify the clangour, as if the ruling maxim were, the louder the grief the more honouring to the dead.

But there are other texts which these practices illustrate. Ezek. xxiv. 17 contains a prohibition to indulge in the customs common among mourners in his age. "She being desolate shall sit upon the ground" (Isa. iii. 26), is a picture often seen in reality. "The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground" (Lam. ii. 10), suggests the same remark. And, to name no more, one of the most solemn incidents ever witnessed is thus described: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre" (Matt. xxvii. 61). To illustrate all this, one traveller in the East has recorded that he found a crowd of women sitting around a recently-dug grave at Bethlehem, lamenting the loss of one lately laid there. Many of them hung down their heads upon their breast; others were wringing their hands, weeping bitterly, and looking at the same time into the grave, as if hope itself had been buried

WEeping AT THE GRAVE.

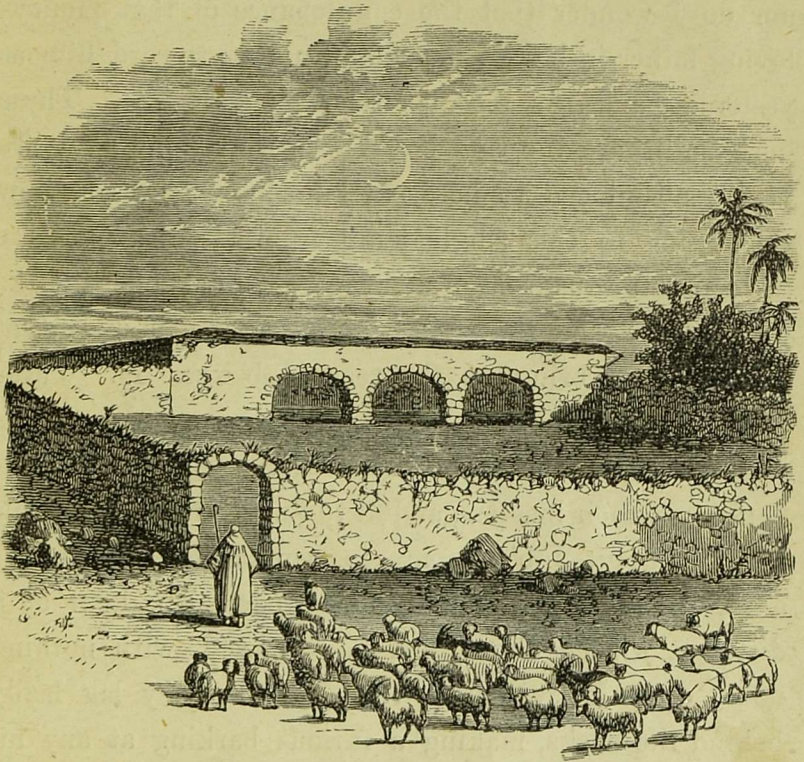


there. But when Jesus brought life and immortality to light, such immoderate grief might all have been abolished. (Consult Mark v. 38; Acts viii. 2; 2 Sam. xviii. 33; Amos viii. 10; Ezra ix. 3; and the Book of Job.)

SHEEPFOLDS.

THOSE low flat buildings (says the author of "The Land and the Book") are sheepfolds. They are called *mârâh*, and when the nights are cold the flocks are shut up in them, but in ordinary weather they are merely kept within the yard. This, you observe, is defended by a stone wall crowned all around with sharp thorns, which the prowling wolf will rarely attempt to scale. The *nimer*, however, and *fahed*—the leopard and panther of the Holy Land—when pressed with hunger, will overleap this thorny hedge, and with one tremendous bound land among the frightened sheep. Then is the time to try the nerve and heart of the faithful shepherd. These humble types of Him who leadeth Joseph like a flock (Ps. lxxx. 1) never leave their helpless charge alone, but accompany them by day, and abide with them at night. As spring advances, they will move higher up to other *mârâhs* and greener ranges; and in the hot months of summer they sleep with their flocks on the cool heights of the mountains, with no other protection than a stout palisade of

tangled thorn-bushes. Nothing can be more romantic, Oriental, and even Biblical, than this shepherd life far away among the sublime solitudes of goodly Lebanon. We must study it in all its picturesque details. See,



MARAII—SHEEPFOLD.

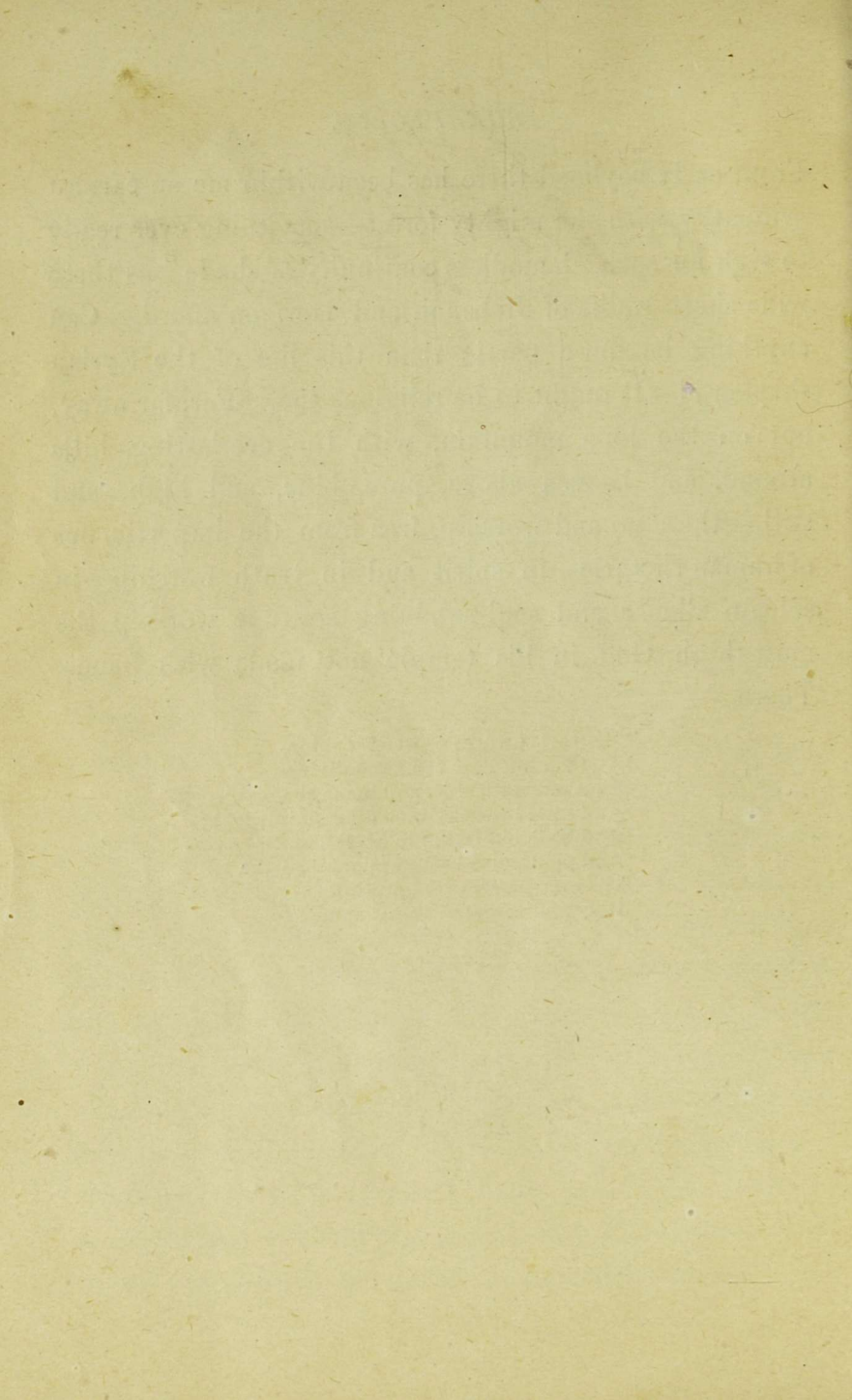
the flocks are returning home as the evening draws on ; and how pretty the black and spotted goats, with their large, liquid eyes, and long, pendent ears—now in bold relief on the rocks, now hid among the bushes, but all

the while rolling along the hill-side like a column of gigantic ants! If some sharp-witted Jacob should take all the spotted, ring-straked, and speckled of these flocks, he would certainly get the lion's share (Gen. xxx. 35); nor do I wonder that the countenance of that money-loving father-in-law of his should not be toward him as yesterday and the day before (Gen. xxxi. 2). These bushy hills are the very best sheep-walks, and they are mostly abandoned to herds and flocks. They are now converging to this single point from all quarters, like the separate squadrons of an army. The shepherd walks before them, and they follow after; while the dogs that Job talks of bring up the rear (Job xxx. 1). These Oriental shepherd-dogs, by the way, are not, like those in other lands, fine faithful fellows, the friends and companions of their masters, and fit to figure in poetry. This would not suit Job's disparaging comparison. They are a mean, sinister, ill-conditioned generation, kept at a distance, kicked about, and half starved, with nothing noble or attractive about them. Still, they lag lazily behind the flocks, making a furious barking at any intruder among their charge, and thus give warning of approaching danger.

I notice that some of the flock keep near the shepherd, and follow whithersoever he goes, without the least hesitation, while others stray about on either side or loiter

far behind; and he often turns round and scolds them in a sharp, stern cry, or sends a stone after them.

Some sheep always keep near the shepherd, and are his special favourites. Each of them has a name, to which it answers joyfully; and the kind shepherd is ever distributing to such choice portions which he gathers for that purpose. These are the contented and happy ones. They are in no danger of getting lost or into mischief, nor do wild beasts or thieves come near them. The great body, however, are mere worldlings, intent upon their own pleasures or selfish interests. They run from bush to bush, searching for variety or delicacies, and only now and then lift their heads to see where the shepherd is, or, rather, where the general flock is, lest they get so far away as to occasion remark in their little community, or rebuke from their keeper. Others, again, are restless and discontented, jumping into everybody's field, climbing into bushes, and even into leaning trees, whence they often fall and break their limbs. These cost the good shepherd incessant trouble. Then there are others incurably reckless, which stray far away, and are often utterly lost. I have repeatedly seen a silly goat or sheep running hither and thither, and bleating piteously after the lost flock, only to call forth from their dens the beasts of prey, or to bring up the lurking thief, who quickly quiets its cries in death.



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