

CURIOSITIES OF THE HOLY LAND

Although it is not in the war zone, Palestine is much in the public eye at present, and much speculation is indulged in as to what will be its fate if the Turks are defeated. There are those who anticipate that the Jews will return to their old home in large numbers and that the country will be under the protectorate of Great Britain. A recent number of the Wide World magazine has an article by Harold J. Shepstone, under the title: "Curiosities of the Holy Land," which contains an interesting description of peasant life in Palestine, from which we take a few extracts:

Tucked away at the "dead end" of the Mediterranean stands Palestine—without question one of the most interesting and fascinating of countries. Although familiar by name to everyone because of its Biblical and historical associations, the picturesque life and quaint manners and customs of its people are really little known. This is because the ordinary tourist follows the guide and seldom attempts to strike away from the beaten path, along which the inhabitants get sophisticated and more or less spoiled. Indeed, to understand something of the romantic life of the dwellers in this ancient land you must leave the cities with their artificial civilizations and get away into the heart of the country. Then you discover a picturesque and hospitable people, whose life and habits have not greatly changed since Bible times. Here the peasants sow and reap their crops in the same primitive way as they did in the days of the patriarchs, while the shepherds guard their flocks at night from the attacks of wild beasts and warlike tribes just as they were doing on that memorable night nearly two thousand years ago, when the Prince of Peace was born.

This antiquity is Palestine's great charm. Throughout the land there is not a single village that has been founded in modern times. True many of the dwellings are of recent construction, but the sites of the villages are very old, some of them dating back thousands of years. These villages are, as a rule, located on the tops of hills, or near some spring or other water supply. The houses themselves—especially those occupied by the fellahs, or country folk—are decidedly primitive. They invariably consist of one large room, generally square. The material of which they are built depends upon the neighborhood. In the hills there is plenty of stone and in the plains plenty of earth; so, in one case the walls are of stone and in the other of brick.

A steep outside staircase, unprotected by any railing, leads up to the roof, for the surface must be repaired from time to time. The flat, open space of the roof also forms a handy place on which to dry figs and raisins and to store goods, while during the hot weather the family may sleep here at night.

We have only to enter such a dwelling, typical of the village home in Palestine, and inspect its interior, where the family and cattle reside, to realize we are back in Bible times. It consists, as already stated, of one large room, but three-quarters of this space is devoted to a masonry platform raised eight or ten feet above the ground, supported by low-domed arches. Crude steps give entrance to this platform, which is called the mustabeh and here the family live, while in the lower portion are stabled the horses and cattle. On one side of the mustabeh is the open fireplace and chimney, while one or two small windows serve for light and ventilation. Until about half a century ago it was thought unsafe to build even medium sized windows, and any man presuming to do so would have been considered rash.

The women of the Holy Land are rigorously ruled by the men. Their lot is a hard one and has not greatly changed since Bible times. A woman must obey her husband implicitly; etiquette forbids her to address him in the presence of other men, and she may not go on a visit to friends without his consent. On the country roads one often sees a man riding comfortably along on his mule or donkey, smoking his pipe, while his wife follows meekly behind on foot.

An interesting point about the dress of the women of this strange land is that it differs sufficiently in each district to enable one to distinguish readily where the wearer comes from, though naturally the costumes have much in common. The dress called a tobe, is like a long, loose shirt, the sleeves narrow at the shoulders and then widening out something like the kimono of the Japanese. The front and back are each made of one width of cloth, with a gore on either side to widen the skirt. A girdle, either of white linen or bright striped silk, is wound around the waist. According to the manner in which the garment is worn, coupled with its adornment of embroidery, it is possible to tell the home of the wearer. In the same way one is often able to detect whether a woman is married or single, from her head gear. In the Hebron district, for instance, the unmarried

girls wear a large silver coin on their foreheads. On the other hand, the married women of Bethlehem wear coins on their caps, which in shape resemble a man's fez. The women never part with them, and to admit that she has lost one is considered a great disgrace. This custom throws a stronger light upon the parable of the woman who lost her ten pieces of silver. In the same way, it may be added, it is possible to tell where a man comes from and also his status by his turban.

As soon as a girl reaches the age of twelve she begins to think of marriage, and longs for the day when some suitable young man will come along and purchase her, for among the Mohammedans—who constitute more than three-fourths of the population of the country, and who follow the ancient customs more closely than any other races—a man buys his wife, the price depending upon her age, beauty, usefulness and the family to which she belongs. When a youth reaches the marriageable age—about twenty—and can afford the expenses of a wedding, he begins in a businesslike way to look out for a bride. If his choice rests upon a certain girl from simply seeing her in the village (no courtship is allowed), or if a girl is heard of in another hamlet that strikes his fancy, then his mother, with a retinue of daughters and women friends, goes to see the prospective bride. If she is from another village they may spend a couple of days "looking her over" as the expression is, learning whether she bakes well and is handy at all kinds of work, seeing if she is good looking, and ascertaining, above all, that her eyes are perfect.

If the report is favorable the young man, with his father, uncles and male relatives and friends, next make a visit, and, everything being satisfactory, formally asks for the girl's hand. If the father is willing the bargaining commences. This may occupy some time, but at last a price is agreed upon, which may vary from twenty pounds to as much as eighty pounds. In addition to this sum the bridegroom has also to bear the expense of a wedding, and is expected to give a present to the guest-chamber of the bride's village, a new dress to the bride's mother and suitable gifts to the girl's father and other relatives. He has also to provide the wedding feast. From the money the father receives for his daughter he hands her a small sum, with which she is expected to buy the proper coins and with them make her first married woman's head gear. The bridegroom and the bride's representative, generally her father, appear before the teacher or religious head of the village, when the marriage contract is drawn up and signed. This proceeding over, the wedding feast is held, at which the bridegroom is the principal figure, after which sports are indulged in.

In the tilling of the soil and the reaping of the crops the methods in vogue in the days of the Patriarchs are still followed. Oxen are the favorite animals for yoking to the plough. Sometimes an ox and a camel may be seen yoked together, but never an ox and an ass, for this is against the Biblical command. The peasant farmer throws the grain on the bare ground and then ploughs it in. On rocky soil a man or woman follows with a pick to loosen the earth in the spots that may have been skipped by the plough.

When the corn is ripe it is reaped by hand. Destitute women and girls are allowed to follow the reapers and glean the fallen ears, which they tie into neat little bundles, dropping them on the ground as they go along, and these they gather every evening and beat out the grain with a stick, just as Ruth did of old in the fields of Bethlehem. The threshing of the corn is still done, to a large extent by oxen. The corn is placed upon the ground two or three feet deep, and the oxen driven round and round, six or eight abreast, thus treading the corn out with their feet. When so engaged they are invariably muzzled.

Water is still carried from place to place in goat skins, and at Hebron, one of the oldest cities in Palestine, there are large tanneries where these Oriental water-bottles are turned out by the thousands. Each skin is inflated, either with water or with air, so that the buyer may know it is perfectly water tight. The majority of the skins used come from Arabia, while a large number are also received from the Lebanon. They are brought to Hebron by the camel caravans and are purchased by the tanneries and turned into bottles. They pass through many processes, and a tanner will spend a week upon a single skin before it is water-tight and serviceable. The hospitality of these simple-minded and simple-living people is proverbial, and even today they are kindness itself to the stranger within their gates. Every village boasts of its upper room or guest chamber, but during the hot summer the shade of some large tree is often substituted for this room. However, in either

case, this guest-chamber or tree is the social centre for all the village men, where many spend an evening or the entire day when they have nothing with which to occupy themselves. Sociability is one of their characteristics; they love gossip and chat about the local news. Of course, not a single newspaper is to be had; so all their information is derived from those who have recently been to town.

The villagers take it in turns to supply the coffee drunk at one of these gatherings, while a hired servant looks after their wants. They also take it in turns to supply bedding and food for any guest that may happen to come to the hamlet and stay overnight. The fare offered in this case depends entirely upon the rank of the individual. If a common man, the repast will consist of a couple of fried eggs, with bread and olives, while a well-to-do and influential visitor will be given a pair of roast chicken for his supper. If the guest should happen to be the sheikh of a neighboring village, then a lamb or kid is killed in his honor, while the nose bags of his horses are replenished with barley. In the case of an ordinary repast, as already stated, the food is supplied by the villagers in turn, but the more expensive meals are apportioned among them in the following curious manner; In the possession of the man who looks after the guest chamber are three small wooden bowls, on the cords of which are strung strips of paper, each bearing the name of one of the men in the village. The slip first in order indicates the name of the person whose turn comes next to supply the requisite food and in this simple manner the proper accounts are kept.

FRANCE'S DAY

LORD CURZON'S TRIBUTE TO OUR ALLIES

A Royal Garden Party

The celebration of "France's Day" in London on Wednesday lost a little in brightness through the heavy rain showers of the morning, and the tribute to the courage and determination of our Ally found its fuller volume in the churches, schools—where the children sang the "Marseillaise"—and the theatres rather than in the streets. The French flag flew taut before the wind over many buildings, and thousands of people wore the Tricolor badge, which ladies sold for the benefit of the French Red Cross at the railway stations and in the hotels and restaurants and shops.

In the morning a service with special music was held at Westminster Abbey, and at noon the Lord Mayor attended Low Mass at Westminster Cathedral in State. Among the congregation at the Cathedral were the French Ambassador, the French Consul-General, members of the French Chamber of Commerce, and the Diplomatic and Consular representatives of Russia, Italy, Japan, Serbia, Belgium and Montenegro. The British Foreign Office was represented by Mr. Cecil F. Dormer. The mass was said by Bishop Butt, and Cardinal Vaughan gave the Pontifical blessing. The music throughout was by French composers.

In the afternoon there was a garden party at Montagu House, the residence of the Duke of Buccleuch. The rain fortunately stopped shortly after 1 o'clock, and the guests were able to saunter about the pleasant lawns as well as through the rooms which had been thrown open. The Queen, Queen Alexandra, Queen Amelia, the Princess Royal, Princess Christian, Princess Mary, and other members of the Royal Family were present and were received in the saloon by the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, the Duke and Duchess of Somerset, and Lady Paget. At 5 o'clock the Royal visitors came out on the marble terrace to hear an address from Lord Curzon. The Prime Minister had also been announced to speak, but was unable to be present.

Alliance Cemented by Sacrifice

Lord Curzon said they were met to offer a tribute of respect and admiration to the glorious country of France which though it had been separated from us by many a fierce rivalry in the past, had never failed to impress the hearts of Englishmen with its lofty and chivalrous ardour. "Had we been meeting a year ago," he continued, "who would have promised that the friendship between ourselves and France steadily growing as it has been during the past 50 years, and blossoming as it did into fresh life under the fostering hand of the late King Edward, would have expanded into an alliance which rests not merely upon the necessities but upon the deep emotions and convictions of both peoples, and which has now been cemented, as we all know, by twelve months of suffering and sacrifice and tears? Who would have foreseen a year ago that Englishmen and Frenchmen would have been shedding their blood throughout this year on the unconquerable soil of France, and that the symbol of the Cross, the supreme emblem of the religious faith of both our peoples, would have been raised, as I have seen it, on the graves

of thousands of Englishmen and Frenchmen, raised almost side by side on the soil which they had consecrated by their heroism and which they will still redeem by their sacrifice."

"I think this is due, not merely to the fact that we have been fighting the same enemy, and that the guns which still threaten Calais and Dunkirk are also aimed at Dover; it has come about because we are fighting to keep alive the precious flame which has burned in the sanctuary of the hearts of both our peoples for centuries—the flame of liberty. This alliance of ours is an alliance of the spirit as well as of the body, and in this war in which we are engaged, the soul has put on its armour and gone forth to conquer or to perish. A German victory in this war would mean not only the mutilation and maiming of our national existence for a century to come, but the occupation of our territory, the crippling of our resources, the disappearance of our Colonies, the subjugation of our people for a generation under the iron heel of the conqueror, and it would mean the extinction of all that makes life worth living for our two peoples, besides dealing a heavy, if not a fatal blow, at the cause of morality, of humanity, and of civilization for all mankind."

An Inspiration and an Example

Lord Curzon went on to show how France had suffered from the invasion of the enemy for nearly a year, had seen her population scattered and subjected to nameless horrors, and had lost hundreds of thousands of the flower of her population. "She had borne this without a murmur or complaint, or the slightest symptom of hesitation. He admired, even above the gallantry of her soldiers, the generalship of her commanders, and the resolution of her statesmen, the indomitable spirit of her people. (Cheers.) They had seen the quick emotions and the light hearted gaiety for which the French were famous transformed by this year of suffering into inflexible and indomitable resolve. France had ennobled herself and added to the glories of her glorious traditions. France had been an inspiration to us, as she had been an example to mankind.

"May I not assure her," Lord Curzon said in conclusion, "that we who are not at all behind her in the spirit and the endurance with which we mean to face these issues, like her and with her are resolved to endure to the end? We will not take our hand from the plough until the furrow, long and bloody though it be, is driven through to the end. We were with France side by side at the start. We will be with her side by side at the finish, and we will not be satisfied with any premature or uncertain goal. Then when all is over, when we have won the price of our common exertions, is it too much to hope that this alliance between our people, born as it was in the stress of a common danger, consecrated as it has been by the blood of our two peoples, and vindicated as we hope it will be, by the results which we shall have obtained, may remain a permanent factor in the history and life of the two peoples? (Cheers.) Those whom war has joined together peace must not be allowed to put asunder. If that shall be as we hope, the result of all we are now going through, it will, indeed, be compensation for all that both nations have suffered, it will be the supreme vindication of our efforts and we hope it will be our final reward." (Cheers.)

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