

flour used for their bread with barley meal—(See John vi. 9.) Barley is largely cultivated for food for animals. There is a great variety and great abundance of vegetables in the well-watered and cultivated plains; but the shallower and drier soil of the mountains affords much less. I need hardly tell you that your most valuable vegetable—the potato—is scarcely known here. Milk is in some places abundant, and in others not. It would hardly now be called 'a land flowing with milk.' The only other article of food of the inhabitants of these villages is fruit, for they very rarely taste animal food. The most important kinds of fruit are olives and grapes. Olives are eaten either raw, or dressed in various ways, but they are chiefly valuable for the oil extracted from them. At some seasons of the year, a great part of the food of the people consists of vegetables cooked in this oil, eaten sometimes with and sometimes without bread. This oil is almost the only substance burned for light. It is by the light of a lamp burning olive oil that I am now writing.—(See Matt. xxv. 1.) Olive trees are abundantly cultivated throughout the whole country. Often does the traveller through Lebanon see the steep sloping side of a glen terraced with level plots of ground rising one above another, like the steps of stairs, each terrace, according to its breadth, supporting one or more rows of olive trees—the whole being the result of great labor. They remind one of that 'Mount of Olives' with which many of the most sacred and delightful recollections of our Lord's history are associated.

The fruit of the vine is the only other kind which can be said to form a substantial part of the food of the people, and it is to enable me to point out accurately the importance of the place occupied by this fruit among the other species of food, that I have given this account of these latter.

Grapes come into season in August, and continue in season for about four months. During this period, they are used constantly, not as an agreeable dessert to stimulate and gratify the appetite after it has been satisfied by a substantial meal, but as a substantive part of the meal itself—so much so, that I believe I am correct in stating that, from August to December, bread and grapes are substantially the food of the people. Very thin cakes of bread made of flour, or of barley-meal and flour mixed and eaten with plenty of grapes, form the meals of the inhabitants of Lebanon, morning, noon, and night.\* I may add that it is perfectly safe to eat grapes constantly to satiety; or, if there is any thing unwholesome in them, it produces its effects very slowly and imperceptibly. Now, this is a mode of using the fruit of the vine of which I was ignorant till I came here.

Here, too, as in Europe, grapes are dried in large quantities, to preserve them as raisins; and in this form also they supply an article of food to be used after the grape season. The process of drying, however, is so ignorantly and carelessly managed or mismanaged, that the raisins are very inferior to yours—scarcely like the same thing. I may observe that almost every other process requiring regular and attentive industry, and even a moderate amount of knowledge and skill, is, in like manner, spoiled now in this country, though formerly it was evidently not so.

Besides raisins, there is another form in which the fruit of the vine is preserved for use, after the season of grapes has passed. By a simple process, a substance called dibs is made out of the grapes. It is purified by means of lime, in some way like that in which sugar is prepared for use. It is about the consistence of honey, and resembles it in appearance. I suppose, indeed, that it mainly consists of one of the principal components of honey—namely, the substance called by chemists grape-sugar, or glucose-sugar. Dibs is eaten with bread. It is made in considerable quantities; and bread and dibs is a very common meal in winter and spring. There are two kinds of dibs—one made from grapes and the other made from raisins.

But the fruit of the vine, besides largely supplying food in the three forms of grapes, raisins, and dibs, supplies the universally known and prized drink—wine. I need scarcely add that this wine is very abundant, and that, as used here, it is simply the fermented juice of grapes, without any mixture of distilled

liquor. In fact the price at which it is sold secures it from adulteration with such liquors.

There is also a liquor called *arak*, made from grapes by distillation. The scum taken off the wine when it ferments, and the dregs left in the vessels, as well as the juice of grapes, are subjected to the process of distillation to obtain this spirit. It is, of course, in appearance and properties very much the same as the distilled spirit familiarly known in Ireland.

The above account is drawn, as I have already said, from my own knowledge of Mount Lebanon; but it is equally applicable I believe, to all country villages. The food of the inhabitants of Damascus and other large cities differs, of course, from that of the country people. But, after all, even in the cities, the great body of the people live principally on bread, vegetables, olives, olive-oil, and grapes, in the season; and grapes are hardly less important to the common people in the cities than to the inhabitants of the villages.

That this account of the value of the fruit of the vine as an article of food, and of the place it occupies among the other articles of food in this country, may be complete, I have one other point to notice—namely, the cost at which grapes can be produced. Nothing which I have learned about them since I came here surprised me so much as the extremely low price at which they are sold.

During the greater part of the grape season, the regular price of the most plentiful kind—purple grapes—was about one farthing per pound, or fourpence per stone. Another very plentiful kind, though less common than the preceding—the green grapes—cost about sixpence per stone. There was a kind of very large red grapes, which sold still higher, but they were not common. Black grapes were sold at the same price as the purple grapes. It is to be observed, also, that this is the rate at which grapes are sold in a large and populous city, after being brought from some distance, for there are no vineyards immediately around Damascus. Thus, in a place where many of the articles of use and convenience in civilised life are dearer, and few of them cheaper, than in Belfast, grapes are sold at about the price of potatoes in that town. I think this fact will give you a just impression of the importance of grapes as a common article of daily food, better than anything else I could say. Consider, too, how delicious a fruit fresh grapes must be in hot weather, in such a climate as this,

Dibs is sold for eighteen or twenty pence per stone, which is very cheap for such a substance as it is. I am unable to state, exactly, the price of raisins here; but wine is sold for less than threepence per bottle. When bought at this price, it has not, of course, been bottled, or kept, or qualified by the addition of distilled liquors. Formerly, 'old wine' must have been not uncommon.—(Matt. ix. 17.)

It is thus evident that to a dense population, in a dry and warm climate, the fruit of the vine must have been invaluable. And even if you will not go the whole length with me in my estimate of its importance, you must agree with me that it fully sustains the high character which the Bible gives of it, and that in the passages quoted above, and other Scriptures which speak of the vine in a similar style, there is not the slightest tinge of hyperbole or exaggeration.

## PERILS IN THE POLAR SEAS.

(From Wilkes' Expedition.)

On the 26th of December, the Vincennes, accompanied by the Peacock, Porpoise, and Flying-fish, sailed from Port Jackson on her Antarctic cruise—a service for which, as Captain Wilkes more than hints, they had been very indifferently provided. This want of the special equipments necessary to the safety of the undertaking was in a great measure common to the whole Squadron; but the Peacock in particular was in other respects so defective as to be wholly unfit for any but a short and easy voyage; and it was not without the most serious misgivings that Captain Wilkes yielded to the zealous anxiety of Captain Hudson to accompany the Squadron, instead of remaining at Sydney to refit. The proceedings of the expedition during the two succeeding months form perhaps the most interesting portion of the narrative. Among all the perilous and exciting adventures of a seaman's life, there are none to be compared, either in formidable aspect, or in

\* Note by the Author.—When bread and wine are mentioned as taken of together in the English version of the Scriptures, it is frequently better to understand bread and grapes as the articles alluded to. (See Genesis xiv. 8.)