

LIFE IN BIBLE LANDS

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There is no truth that the student of the Bible in these lands of the West needs more continually to keep in mind than the fact that the Bible is essentially an Eastern book. And whereas the Divine message which it contains is a message for all nations of men, and has a meaning for mankind everywhere, the messengers themselves were Orientals who spoke and taught in an Eastern tongue, and employed necessarily Eastern imagery to express their thoughts.

By keeping this thought always before us we shall discover in our study of the Scriptures that far from losing anything we shall see continually fresh beauties revealed in its pages, as we seek to understand more perfectly the background and setting amid which God's messengers of old lived and taught.

Our object in this paper will be merely to touch the fringe of a fascinating study and to suggest some new lines of thought, some fresh avenues of study by means of which something of the difficulty that has enshrouded not a few passages in the Word of God, may be removed and fresh tracts of Biblical territory may be revealed that will more than repay whatever time and study we may expend in their exploration.

We would notice first of all the great amount of hyperbole which is used by Orientals in the ordinary courtesies of daily life.

For example,—Abram is seeking to purchase the cave of Macpelah from the children of Heth. To his proposal Ephron makes answer, "Nay, my Lord, hear me, the field give I thee and the cave that is therein I give it thee, in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee, bury thy dead."

Now all this is only the exaggerated language of Eastern courtesy, which is clearly seen from the fact that Ephron immediately names 400 shekels of silver as the value of the field, which sum Abram willingly pays down.

Similarly in Chron. 21, when David seeks the threshing floor on Mt. Moriah as a place of sacrifice, Ornan makes answer, "Take it to thee and let my Lord the King do that which is good in his eyes. Lo, I give the oxen also for burnt offerings and the threshing instruments for wood and the wheat for a meat offering, I give it all." But David knew well that this outburst of beautiful sentiments meant no sudden generosity on Ornan's part, and his words were no more to be taken literally than is the offer of the high-born Spaniard who to-day places his home and his servants, his horses and his purse at the disposal of the passing guest. Thus we read that David (in verse 25) gave to Ornan for the place 600 shekels of gold by weight. The matter was only one of buying and selling, though clothed in the hyperbolic language of Eastern courtesy. Again in St. Luke's Gospel, chapter 10, verse 4, "Salute no man by the way," we have a passage frequently misunderstood by Western people, whose idea of saluting a friend is limited to a passing nod or hasty clasp of the hand. But it is very different in the East. When an Oriental espies a friend in the street or the market place

or Sok, he hurries up to him and embraces him, not once but many times, his hand moving successively to his head and his heart in token that all these are at the other's service. Then the two sit down, and half an hour at the least will be occupied in purely ceremonious speeches and questionings. It was because his business required haste that the Master said to the disciples, "Salute no man by the way." These meaningless compliments were entirely out of place with men who were the servants of Him Who bade men everywhere, "repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Another injunction of our Lord's to His disciples "not to take two coats" is perplexing to the Western mind, and yet is full of meaning to any one acquainted with life in the East.



THE CATHEDRAL AT METZ

Although Metz was under constant bombardment by the Allies, the Cathedral was not their target, as was customary with the Germans. (The tower is 387 feet high.)

The ordinary man's dress in Palestine from time immemorial has consisted of two garments, an inner garment, a long sort of shirt confined at the waist with a girdle, and an outer garment, the Abyah, a mantle usually of coarse material. But upon occasions of ceremony or rejoicing, between these two garments a coat is worn, often of rich material and of many colours. This coat distinguishes the master from the workman, the man of toil from the holiday maker. It was then because they were upon a serious errand, "about their Master's business," that our Lord said to His disciples, that they should wear no coat of ceremony to distinguish them from the men of toil all around them.

Amongst the Bedouin tribes to the East of Jordan, the wearing of this second coat marks out the Chief of the tribe. And for one of his sons to be thus singled out above the rest would be a sure sign that he was to be made one day the chief of the tribe. Thus, the fierce anger and jealousy occasioned amongst the sons of Jacob by the gift of this coat of colours to the youngest son, Joseph, becomes easily understood.

This coat again was the dress of ceremony and would always be worn at such a festivity as

a marriage feast. Indeed, even to the present time an Arab chief has been known to present rich robes to all his guests for them to wear on such an occasion. To reject such a gift and to appear unadorned at such a festival would be to offer the host an insult of the grossest sort, so that the man in our Lord's parable well merited the stern words of condemnation, "Bind his hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth," the high rank of the host on this occasion rendering the insult the more marked.

In the Holy Land many of the incidents connected with the wedding festival are of great antiquity. Still the maidens come forth to meet the bride and groom with timbrels and dances. One incident in particular is of very great antiquity and is most significant. In some parts of the country still the bridegroom on first entering the bride's chamber finds her veiled and seated in the centre of the room. It is usual then for him to walk around her three times and then to lift the veil and throw it over his shoulder in token that he now assumes full responsibility for the bride's comfort and support. A wonderfully significant act recalling, as it does, the passage in Isaiah 9:6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder." Another

expression in the Book of Isaiah 52:10 is almost meaningless without some explanation. "The Lord hath made bare His holy arm." Here again some knowledge of Bedawy dress is essential to a full appreciation of its significance. The Bedawy wears a long flowing inner garment with pointed sleeves that sweep the ground as he walks, and even on horseback would be very much in the way. When preparing for battle the Bedawy warrior knots the two ends and flinging them over his shoulder leaves the whole arm bare for the use of his weapons of war.

The dress of the women in the East is likewise full of interest to the Bible student. Whilst the man's inner garment is white the woman's is blue or blue with coloured insertions. The man's mantle is striped brown and white, the woman has her cloak of similar material and shape, only red and black. The man will wear on his head a silk shawl or Kuffyeh, the woman will wear her veil.

The women of the town wear a veil of thin gauze, but her sister in the country wears a veil of heavy towelling. It was a veil of this sort that Ruth, the Moabitess, wore, and in which she bore home six measures of barley. Ruth 3:15.

No article of apparel is of more importance than the girdle, which is worn by both sexes alike. It serves the purpose of hooks and eyes and buttons, which are unknown in the East. The girdle, too, is the pocket of the Eastern's dress, where the Scribe may keep his inkhorn, the shepherd his sling, the merchant his scrip or purse. The girdle of the countryman is of leather, John the Baptist had "a leathern girdle about his loins." Elijah, too, "girded up his loins to run before Ahab to Jezreel." The wealthy townsman will have his girdle made of rich silk and with its voluminous folds it becomes a chief part of his attire. We remember St. Peter's injunction to the early Christians to be girded with humility, literally with the apron that was the badge of a slave, rather than with the more showy silken girdle of pride and vain glory, (1 Peter 5:5, R.V.)

In conclusion, let us endeavour to remove certain difficulties which are to be found in three very familiar passages of Scripture. How many

(Continued on page 803.)

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