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NATURAL HISTORY of some VEGETABLE PRODUCTIONS of JUDEA.

[From the *Abbe Mariti's Travels into Syria and Palestine.*]

OF all the productions of Jericho, the most common is the plant balm, which, it is said, is peculiar to Judea; but this is contradicted by some travellers. I myself was convinced by ocular demonstration, that it is found in great abundance in the neighbourhood of Mecca and Medina; and we read in Josephus that it was generally believed at Jericho, that it was brought to Jerusalem by the Queen of Sheba: an opinion which appears more than probable, when we consider that it grows without cultivation in Arabia, while in Palestine it requires the greatest care to prevent it from degenerating.

The Romans cultivated it after the destruction of Jerusalem, till the time when the Egyptians, masters of that country, transported it to Babylon.

This plant rises to the height of the pomegranate tree, to which it has a great resemblance both in its long branches and flowers. Its leaves, which are small, are of a beautiful green colour, and much like those of rue. The wood is red and gummy. It bears a small white flower of an agreeable odour; and its fruit is a small nut, covered with a dry and brown pellicle, which contains a kernel; and sometimes a second nut, full of a sharp, bitter, yellow liquor.

In the months of June, July, and August, the Arabs make a slight incision in it, from which there distils a kind of viscous juice.

Naturalists observe, that it would have been dangerous to make this incision in the plants of Palestine with any thing of iron or of steel. A sharp flint, or a piece

of a bone or glass, was used therefore for this purpose; and, beside this, it was necessary that the incision should not penetrate deeper than the bark. If it reached the wood, the shrub was in great danger of withering; but a bill might be employed for lopping the branches. The juice extracted from this plant is called opobalsamum, its fruit carpo balsamum, and its wood xilo-balsamum. The opobalsamum is the most perfect part. It is white when it comes from the tree; it then becomes green, and afterward of a gold colour; but as it grows old it is a little tarnished, and in the end assumes the appearance of honey. Its smell though strong, is agreeable; and it thickens like the turpentine of Cyprus. The opobalsamum which comes to us from Arabia, is often mixed with this turpentine, according to the accounts which I had from the natives. A great deal of it is annually transported to Europe; and yet the plants furnish only a very small quantity in the country. It is adulterated by the haggis, or Turkish pilgrims, on their return from Mecca.

People are sometimes deceived even on the spot, where the inhabitants sell for opo balsamum a juice extracted by the force of fire from the branches, the wood, and the fruit of the shrub, which is much inferior to that extracted by incisions.

However, by pouring it into a basin of water, one may easily know whether the balm be without mixture. When pure, it turns yellow, dissolves, and unites with the water; afterward disengages itself from it; and, rising to the surface, becomes as white as milk. On the contrary