

# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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## EASTERN PLOUGHING.

ONE of the most familiar sights in Egypt, at that time of the year when most tourists visit the land, is that of the fellahs, or farmers, preparing the soil for sowing seed. The implements of their husbandry are exceedingly simple. No modern improvements have as yet found their way into use.

### "COULTERS AND MATTOCKS."

There must have been a somewhat curious state of things among God's chosen people, for we read, (1 Sam. xiii. 19-21) "Now, there was no smith found through all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulters, and his axe, and his mattock." Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

The "share" was a mere shoe of iron placed upon the point of that rude straight piece of wood, which pierced the soil. I think the word "coulters" must be an inaccurate rendering. It is too modern an invention altogether for the Hebrews. Perhaps a spade is here intended. They have nothing that answers to our coulters on their ploughs. "Mattocks" we saw everywhere. They are a rough sort of axe for cutting the blocks of fallow-ground into convenient pieces. The soil becomes as hard as the clay-bed of a brick-kiln.

The "goads" seemed to have a double use. They were shod at both ends with iron. One was pointed, and was employed to urge the animals ahead. They dug it into the flanks of the poor creatures with a most cruel sort of jab every now and then, as if to occupy the time. The other end was flattened into a diminutive sort of shovel, and they sometimes employed it to scrape off the clogs of earth from the ploughshare, to help it run more easily.

With a staff of heavy wood, often six or seven feet long, it is plain that a goad like this might in an exigency become a most formidable weapon. No wonder the Philistines felt jealous

of it, for we read that Shamgar slew six hundred of their warriors at one time, "with an ox-goad."

### "TWELVE YOKE OF OXEN."

I have known a bright teacher's class quite demoralized, when they

to put the men on the same field, drawing parallel furrows, a long line of labourers, moving in the same direction, each coming in the other's wake. Elisha was the twelfth man, driving the twelfth plough.

A most significant act was that, by

by the railway from Alexandria to Cairo, yoked together in the furrows, and driving a miserable beam-point into the tough earth just to tear up the surface of the shallow soil, a camel and a cow. And if one ever expects on this mixed-up planet to behold a mis-match, let him see that first. The long-eared, dun-colored cow, short in the legs, and appearing all the more lengthened along the back, into an ugliness inexpressible, seemed fairly subdued by the towering presence of her mate,—that tall, gaunt, humpbacked camel, his homely nose as usual superciliously stretched out far in advance of him, as if disdainfully stretching out his mortifying associations. These two were fastened to the ends of a yoke full ten feet long, a mere straight pole, slanting up like an inclined plane from the lowly beast to the lofty. They could not keep step. Each, I am sure, was ashamed of the other. At any rate, both of them were quite illtempered, and the man increased their savageness with a continuous punch of his goad. Without exception, this was the most incongruous, the most ill-adapted, the most inefficient, the most ludicrous, and least antic ploughing-team I ever saw.

But we recalled the commandment of the law and the precept of the gospel, and so gained an illustration of its moral meaning. Moses said, "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together." And Paul said, "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." I understand this last passage to catch its figure from the first, and to have the same general sense. God meant to teach his ancient people the power and use of keen, careful, discrimination. They must not confound things which were intended to be separate, nor link into one those which were intended to contrast. And the aim of this was to instruct them in deciding between holiness and sin.



EASTERN PLOUGHING.

read that the prophet Elisha was found in the field "ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before." They understood this verse to say, that he had the entire drove hitched to his one plough. Not so at all; even the text gives a different hint—"and he with the twelfth." The custom in the east is

which he made known his entire and permanent surrender to the Divine command. He killed his oxen, and boiled the meat with his plough, yoke, and goad, in order to make a final feast for the people. He gave up his past life in a direct consecration.

We saw once, in a little plain close

A boy stood an umbrella, with a cord tied to it, in a public doorway. Within a quarter of an hour eleven persons thought that umbrella was theirs, and carried it with them to the length of the string. Then they suddenly dropped it, and went off without once looking after it.