

In grief or passion they do not strike palm upon palm, but the back of one hand is struck upon the palm of the other alternately. It answers very much to our wringing the hands, which it closely resembles. Both men and women may also be seen to strike their hands together violently in this way when any accident or sudden misfortune overtakes them, or when they are in any paroxysm of anger, terror, or grief. At such time, too, they beat with their hands upon their breasts, as in the case of the conscience-stricken tax-collector in the parable, and of the terrified multitude returning from the supernatural darkness of the crucifixion; and also upon their thigh, as alluded to by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.¹

This smiting the hands for grief or rage seems in Hebrew to be distinguished from the clapping for joy by the use of the plural "hands," in each passage in which the former is signified. An instance occurs in that graphic scene where Moab's king gives vent to his bitter disappointment and fury at being compelled to listen to a thrice-pronounced blessing on the Israel of God. "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together," that is, "he wrung his hands in uncontrollable wrath and dismay."² The violence and malignancy of Zion's foes are set forth under this figure—

"All that pass by clap their hands at thee,
They hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem,
[Saying], 'Is this the city that they call the perfection of beauty,
The joy of the whole earth?'
All thine enemies open their mouth against thee:
They hiss and gnash the teeth."³

Paxton, following Burder, however, explains all this otherwise. In such passages as I have shown to refer to the customary clapping of the hands for joy, he sees only an allusion to the practice of Oriental females paying respect to persons of high rank, by striking their fingers rapidly upon their cheek and lips, and at the same time making a shrill cry by quick

¹ Jer. xxxi. 19; Ezek. xxi. 12; Luke xviii. 13, xxiii. 48.

² Num. xxiv. 10, 11.

³ Lam. ii. 15, 16.