

OCCUPATIONS AND INDUSTRIES IN BIBLE LANDS. III.

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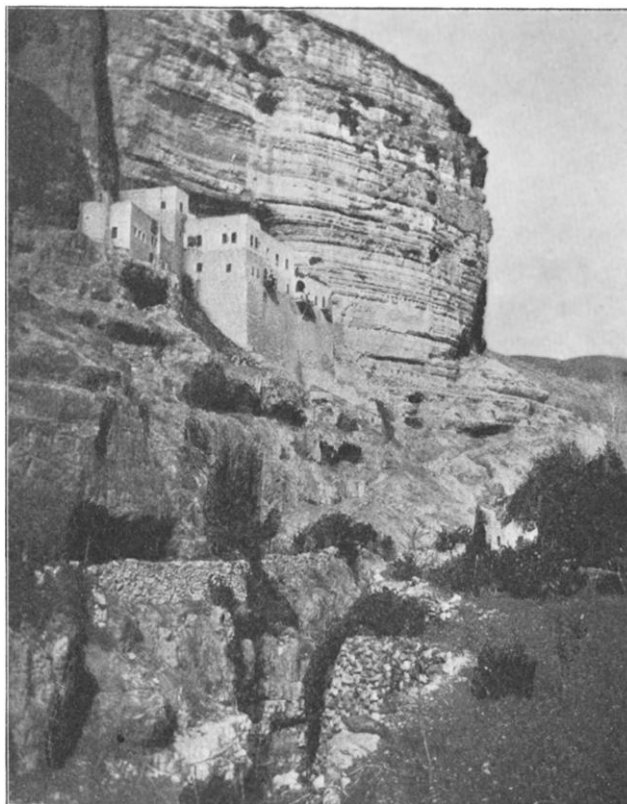
THE earliest forms of dwelling in Palestine appear to have been caves, in some cases of natural formation, but more usually largely artificial. The softer layers of the limestone rock, which is plentiful all over the country, largely lend themselves to such work. In the cliffs near Beit Jebrin, Jericho, Safed, and other places there are remains of the most complicated and elaborate dwellings. Today, with the exception of certain cave-monasteries in the *Wady Kelt* near Jericho, few are inhabited. Houses built against cliffs not unfrequently have a cave as a back chamber. Such was the traditional birthplace of our Lord.

The most ancient of used dwellings are the tents of the *bedouin*, which probably appear today much as they did when they were the homes of the patriarchs and of early Israel.¹ The *bedouin* tent is made of goat's hair woven in long strips, and is a very different kind of construction from what our western ideas associate with the word "tent." It looks a shapeless mass, produced by an enormous black or dark-brown blanket thrown over a number of poles, the number of which varies with the wealth and position of the inhabitants. The *sheikh* may have from nine to two dozen poles to his single tent; the poorest, but two or three. The poles are usually grouped in three rows, and thus the larger tents may readily be divided into three parts—a right-hand side for the men, a left for the women, and a center for guests.

The encampment consists of a number—from three or four up to many hundred—tents arrayed in a circle or a semicircle, or in long parallel rows. The tribe or subtribe moves gradually nearer and nearer to the water supplies as the verdure on the

¹ Numb. 24 : 5.

uplands gradually dries away. The large tribes—the typical *bedouin*—emerge every spring from Arabia, and each division year by year with the greatest regularity migrates to the same camping-grounds. Those familiar with their habits know exactly



Photograph by E. J. G.

A CLIFF MONASTERY IN THE WADY KELT

in what district to find any given tribe each summer. The unexpected blackening of the distant plains or valleys by the incursion of a tribe is always a sign, up to quite lately a much-dreaded one, of some unusual occurrence in their ordinary grounds: either the locusts have come, or the springs have dried, or may be some hostile tribe has beaten them off and destroyed their herbage. Several times, though not in recent years, the inhabitants of the

higher ground around have viewed with dismay the valley of Jezreel and plain of Esdraelon swarming with the black tents of the *Beni-Sakkar* or the '*Aneezeh*. When they have passed over



Photograph by E. J. G.

BOATMEN AND BEDOUIN ON THE UPPER JORDAN

the country it is as bare as if the locusts had been over it. Such incursions are similar to those of the Midianites of old.²

Smaller tribes winter in Palestine, their winter quarters being usually a protected valley near springs; and when the place has been deserted, it is known by the circles of stones, marking former positions of the tents, and the long heaps of bowlders.

²Judg. 6 : 4, 5.

piled above the last resting-places of members of the tribe. The wealth of the *bedouin* is in their camels and horses, their sheep and goats; their occupations are with their flocks; their recreations are fighting and pilfering. Thieves and robbers they are by instinct. The only redeeming virtues in their character are those of hospitality and, under certain conditions, absolute fidelity to their promises. The former I have already referred to: a guest who has eaten with them must be protected from all harm. This protection, of course, only applies to the particular tribe with which the guest has lodged, but he will be escorted in peace to neighboring friendly tribes. With respect to fidelity to their pledges it may be said that their oath, when given under certain forms, cannot be broken; a tribe breaking its word under these conditions would run risk of extermination by other tribes. To the northeast of Damascus there is a large tribe of *bedouin* known as the *Saleeby* tribe. These people have for many centuries been unlike all other *bedouin* in that no member of the tribe is allowed to ride a horse. Tradition states that this is a perpetual punishment for some act of infidelity in the far past. Instead of horses they ride white asses, and have devoted so much care and attention to the breeding of these beasts that now the finest white asses³ in the East come from them. The neighboring tribes insist on their carrying out their old customs, but in return they all agree not to raid them, as they consider without horses the tribe is unable fairly to protect itself. A few years ago a *bedouin* tribe from the south of Moab did raid these people, but in doing so called forth the unanimous disapproval of the other tribes, which finally compelled them to return all their booty.

The *bedouin* are the most conservative race under the sun; their habits and traditions have been unchanged for millenniums. Their religion, though nominally Moslem, is probably much as it was long years before Mahommed or Christ or Moses—a superstitious paganism. The *bedowy* has touched all the civilizations of the East. Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Syrians, Persians, Romans, Greeks, the great Arab and Turkish

³ White asses seem to have been admired in antiquity as they are today (Judg. 5:10).

empires, have all passed him by, but have left him utterly unaffected. Today he stolidly views from the borders of his great home—the desert—the “iron horse” from Damascus carrying away the grain of the Hauran, as he has witnessed the hosts of Egypt, the great roads of Rome, and the great Græco-Roman civilization, each in turn, appear and dissolve on the same spot.

At present the power of the *bedouin* is under a cloud. The Turks, very wisely from their point of view, have done all they could to make life difficult for them as nomads, and all they could to induce them to take to a stationary life. When a “son of the desert” takes to living in stone houses, as many have done in the Hauran, where ruined cities wait ready at hand for them, he is the object of scorn to his fellows and a fresh subject for oppressive taxation to the Turks. In the Huleh valley a kind of compromise has been effected; here *bedouin* have taken to a more or less fixed life in tents made, not of goat’s or camel’s hair, but of plaited reeds. They cannot leave, as instinct would impel them, because their cattle are buffaloes that wallow in the marshes, and their occupation is largely plaiting mats, etc., from the reeds around them.

These seminomadic tribes naturally lead us up to the fixed population—the country folk and townsmen. The village of the *jellah* is little, if at all, superior in comfort to the camp of the *bedowy*. From earliest times the villages have been erected on high ground,⁴ on the sloped hillside, or, in flat districts, on the highest available knolls. Most of the so-called *tells* in the country are the sites of old towns or villages. They are found to consist of a foundation of rock or earth slightly above the general level of the plain, and above that the accumulated débris of a long series of buildings, each successive set being built on the ruins of the former. The choice of the site seems often to have been somewhat arbitrary, but when once adopted is seldom changed. Many villages today are undoubtedly on precisely the same spots as in Bible times. The strange thing is that oftentimes villages are far away from the water supply, which, in

⁴ Hence, perhaps, 1 Kings 20:23. The Syrian possessions were largely in the great plain of Damascus.

a land where every drop of water has to be carried by hand in earthen pots or in goat skins, seems inconvenient enough to suggest a change. Not a few villages I know of are over a mile from the regular supply of water; in the case of some of these there is evidence that in olden times there were aqueducts to



Photograph by E. J. G.

A HOUSE OUTSIDE JERUSALEM

bring water from the source directly; but today, as for centuries past, all must be done by manual labor.

The village dwelling is still, as a rule, a most primitive building. Many houses consist of nothing but four walls built of rough unhewn stones, held together with layers of a cement which is little more than mud, and roofed with rough logs covered in with brushwood and a thick layer of mud. The floor is of mud, stamped hard. Whole villages, in spite of the examples of near neighbors, refuse to adopt so simple an improvement as a chimney; and the inhabitants are content that from year to year all the suffocating fumes from their wood fires should pour out of their front door!

Another instance of the disregard for comfort and sweet fresh air is seen in that most prominent object in all villages, the village "dung hill,"⁵ on which are piled, from generation to generation, dust, dirt, and rubbish of all kinds. When a wind arises, from this heap are blown clouds of irritating ashes and dust. The "dung hill" is usually at the very entrance of the village, just where the poor beggars — the blind and maimed — collect for alms.⁶ Here, too, Job in his affliction probably sat.⁷

A house a little above the meanest will have an unglazed window closed by a primitive wooden shutter; also a hole in the roof to act as a chimney, and two or three alcoves in the wall.

One of these last is specially characteristic. It is a deep alcove on one side of the room, about six feet long and six or seven high, in which are stored, during the day, the mattresses⁸ and bed-covers, known as *lehafs*, used for sleeping in at night. Another small alcove may be for a lamp. The floor may be roughly cemented and raised, except around the door, where a square is left, at the level of the outside, to receive the slippers.

At one side of the room there often are a number of tall clay vats for holding the annual supply of grain for the family. Into each of these the grain is poured at the top, and let out as required through a small hole near the floor.

A village house of a more ambitious kind will have a courtyard closed by a great front door large enough to admit the horses and cattle. Into the court all the rooms, both of men and animals, open. There may be, too, a *lewan*, or covered part of the court, fitted with divans for the entertainment of visitors; but in such a house the courtyard will probably be more or less perfectly paved. There will also be an upper room approached by a staircase, either inside or outside the court; such an upper room, known in Arabic as the *manzal*, may be a small, simple chamber for a guest,⁹ or, as is often the case, one of the best

⁵ Luke 14:35. The word *zebale* in Arabic, though meaning "dung," means all kinds of dust and dirt and rubbish — all that is useless. (See Phil. 3:8.)

⁶ Ps. 113:7; Lam. 4:5.

⁸ The "bed" of Matt. 9:2.

⁷ See Job 2:8; 42:6.

⁹ 2 Kings 4:10.

rooms¹⁰ in the house. In any case it is usually the room most free for the use of strangers, and on a journey I have frequently had it put at my disposal. "In my father's house are many mansions"¹¹ probably means many such guest-rooms; room, therefore, for all who shall come.



Photograph by E. J. G.

COURTYARD OF A HOUSE IN SHUNEM

In districts where stone is scarce walls and houses are frequently built entirely of great blocks of dried mud which are molded between boards, or, as is the case in other districts, of small, sun-baked bricks built into a light framework of wood.

In towns where larger rooms and houses are required the style of building varies greatly, according to the materials readiest at hand. The general arrangement of a court, with the chief rooms around it and the smaller and less important rooms up above, is common to all. In places like Damascus, where long tree trunks, usually of poplar, are plentiful, broad and lofty

¹⁰ Mark 14: 14, 15.

¹¹ John 14: 2.

rooms are made. The lower story is generally of stone, the upper of wooden supports filled in with sun-dried brick. The court and *lewan* are usually well paved, often with marble, and contain a fountain and trees. The roofs are, as in the villages, of mud. In Jerusalem, on the other hand, among all the older buildings, the houses are built almost entirely of stone, on account of the absence of wood. The walls are built of great strength, with massive corner buttresses to support the heavy stone domes which form the roof. The characteristic feature of Jerusalem within the walls is the numerous small domes over all the houses. The roof is on its upper surface frequently cemented — a proceeding all the more desirable as it is the collecting-ground for the water supply of the inhabitants beneath it.

With the arrival of building materials from Europe — iron beams, wooden rafters, tiles, etc.—the style of the building in the larger towns is fast changing. The most prominent change is the covering-in of the central court to form a large hall into which the rooms all open. With these recent developments we are not, however, here much concerned; the more primitive types are to us more interesting.

The ordinary village house is so loosely constructed that it is a common thing for a thief today, when unable to gain access by means of the door or windows, to pull out a few stones and their mud-like cement; or, if the house is of mud, simply to scrape away the mud until he makes a hole large enough to creep through. An English friend of mine living in a small town in Galilee had all her valuables stolen in this way when she was away for a few days. “Where thieves dig through and steal”¹² is thus a vivid reality.

As mentioned before, the upper surface of the roof is usually of mud. During the summer it becomes dry and cracked from the long drought, and the grass¹³ and flowers, which during the rains spring up in places, and often even cover the roof, are withered and blown away. After the earliest showers every householder must go up to his roof and roll the mud again and again with the little stone rollers kept on the roof from year to year for

¹² Matt. 6 : 20 ; 24 : 43 ; see also 2 Tim. 3 : 6.

¹³ Ps. 129 : 6 ; Isa. 37 : 27.

that express purpose. If properly made—that is, of the right kind of clayey mud mixed with chopped straw, of proper thickness, and well rolled—a mud roof is not a bad protection from even the heaviest rains. The mud must, however, be renewed from time to time, as the clayey elements which make it an efficient covering are gradually removed by repeated soakings over several winters.

The roof is the place for enjoying the fresh air, especially in the cool of the evening; the narrow streets of an eastern city make a flat roof almost a sanitary necessity. It is also the drying ground for the washed grain and flax,¹⁴ for the clothes of the housewife, the washerwoman, and the dyer. It is frequently, though far from invariably, protected by a parapet;¹⁵ accidents not infrequently occur through neglect of this simple precaution. In towns and villages built on the sides of a hill the roofs of the houses below frequently form verandas, or even approaches, for the houses in the tier above. In cities where houses are closely compacted the roofs join together so that from one's own roof one can frequently see into several neighboring courts. Today Moslem women not uncommonly wash themselves by bathing¹⁶ in the open tank in the center of their court, relying on the privacy of their house.

In case of disorder in the streets, a fire, or any such occurrence, escape over the roofs¹⁷ would be the natural and safest way. I have myself scrambled over the roofs of several houses to witness the putting out of a fire in a neighboring house, the streets being blocked by soldiers and people.

The breaking up of the roof by the bearers of the paralyzed man¹⁸ in all probability does not mean the removal of part of the covering of any dwelling-room. If we may judge by today, a dwelling-room would have been an unsuitable place for the Master's teaching, and to try to make a hole through such a roof as we see in most Galilean villages would end in deluging the people below with dried mud. Almost certainly our Lord would be teaching in the shaded courtyard of the house, which was, as

¹⁴ Josh. 2 : 6.¹⁶ 2 Sam. 11 : 2.¹⁸ Mark 2 : 4.¹⁵ Deut. 22 : 8.¹⁷ Mark 13 : 15.

it often is today, protected in part by a light roof of tiles or boards. These could be easily removed and the man lowered into the court in the midst of the people. In a house, arranged as today, the natural and suitable position for the Master would be the *lewan*, the covering of which may well have been of a light description and readily removable. In the summer months the roof is a common sleeping-place. In many of the villages rough booths, made of branches of trees with their leaves, are constructed on the roofs of all the houses, and to these the inhabitants ascend from their hot, stifling rooms below, to pass the night. They are very similar to the booths which the Jews make today in their courtyards, in which to celebrate their Feast of Tabernacles.¹⁹ Booths of the same kind are ordinarily made during the fruit harvest in vineyards and melon and cucumber gardens.²⁰ Richer people, near cities for example, build little summer houses,²¹ called by the Turks *kiosks*, in a cool garden for that purpose; there are many such in the valleys around Damascus.

The windows of a real eastern house open chiefly into the courtyard, but usually there are one or more windows over the door, by which persons in the street can be observed. Among the Jews of Damascus today these windows are very popular. It is common, especially in Moslem houses, for this window to be built out, so that a view can be obtained both up and down the street, but in order to hide the inhabitants from the passers-by they are always covered with a close wooden lattice work.²²

The mode of seeking admission to a house is always by knocking;²³ bells are unknown. Every man except the owner must invariably knock at a Moslem's house, and not enter until he has permission. This is necessary to give the ladies of the house time to veil themselves. The common knockers are quite light rings hanging on the doors, and are struck repeatedly by the palm of the hand.

¹⁹ Lev. 23:42; Neh. 8:14.

²⁰ Isa. 1:8. In a very few days such a "lodge" or "cottage" begins to fall to pieces and presents a spectacle of ruin and desolation.

²¹ Judg. 3:20.

²² Judg. 5:28; Cant. 2:9.

²³ Luke 11:9.

There are three prominent disturbing noises at night in an oriental community. The first is knocking, which seems at times to go on all night. This is especially the case at Ramadan, the great Moslem "fast," when feasting continues until the small hours of the morning and breakfast must be eaten before sunrise, because between sunrise and sunset no food may be taken. The second noise is that of the pariah dogs,²⁴ which bark in both villages and towns on the slightest disturbance, or if unsatisfied with food. Lastly, in many villages the weary traveler is wakened long before the faintest streak of light by the low, continuous rumbling of the hand-mills for grinding corn,²⁵ worked by the diligent housewives in the rooms below—a sign at once of peace and prosperity.

In the larger towns western locks and keys are largely used, but for gardens and also in village houses primitive wooden keys, large enough to be carried over the proprietor's shoulder²⁶ at times, are still much used. The lock can be reached only from the inside of the door, and to introduce the key the hand with the wooden key must be put through a hole left for the purpose beside the lock; the hole²⁷ is large enough to introduce a considerable part of the arm. Doubtless in ancient times this was the universal form of lock and key.

In large houses a porter is kept at the door constantly; at night he occupies a small chamber just inside the entrance, to answer any summons. If the master of the house is expected back during the night, the porter²⁸ must always be ready quickly to open to him.

In Damascus, in some quarters at any rate, there is an ancient superstition that it is a most unlucky thing altogether to close up a door which has once been used; and so, if in the rearrangement of a house the inhabitants have to build up a street door, they always leave a small opening (about large enough to introduce a walking stick) directly from the street into the house. The hole is thus a perpetual reminder of the existence of a built-up door. This may explain Ezek. 8 : 7.

²⁴ Ps. 59 : 14, 15.

²⁶ Isa. 22 : 22.

²⁸ Mark 13 : 35.

²⁵ Jer. 25 : 10.

²⁷ Cant. 5 : 4.

In the common arrangement a room, especially one used for guests, has a raised part, which is carpeted and furnished, and a lower part, at which slippers are left and in which servants await their master's orders. The three sides of the room abutting on the raised part are furnished with a continuous low seat, covered with cushions, known as the *divan*. The place of honor is in the center of the *divan*, or, if the host is seated, at his right-hand side. Supposing the visitor is one greatly honored, the host and other visitors will receive him standing, show him to the place of honor, and none will sit down again unless asked to do so. Greetings are exchanged both on entrance and immediately on resuming the seat. The host will very probably continue to stand and serve his guests, and may, if he specially wishes to honor them, not seat himself until repeatedly pressed to do so. On the other hand, an inferior visiting a superior will just greet him with a bow and the usual Arabic greetings, followed, it may be, in the case of a governor or an ecclesiastic, by his kissing the official's hand and putting it to his forehead. The visitor will then retire to a remote part of the room, stand in a humble attitude—head bowed and hands together in front of chest—until invited to sit down. At this invitation he may seat himself on the floor or other humble place, or merely reply "*Ketheer-kheirak*" ("thank you") and not comply until pressed two or three times. When he does sit, he will take the least important seat on the *divan* near the door. If he is to be honored, he will be invited to "come up higher." A visitor who, by a false idea of importance, took too high a seat at first probably would have to make room for more honored guests on their arrival. In all this lies the germ of the idea of the "Friend, go up higher"²⁹ in our Lord's parable. In an official audience questions of etiquette are often observed with great care, and how a man is received will often tell him beforehand what subsequent treatment to expect. A subordinate on such an occasion will not make himself at ease before his superior, crossing his knees, etc., but will hide away his feet as much as possible. Needless to say, if he wants a favor, he must not try to hurry matters, but talk,

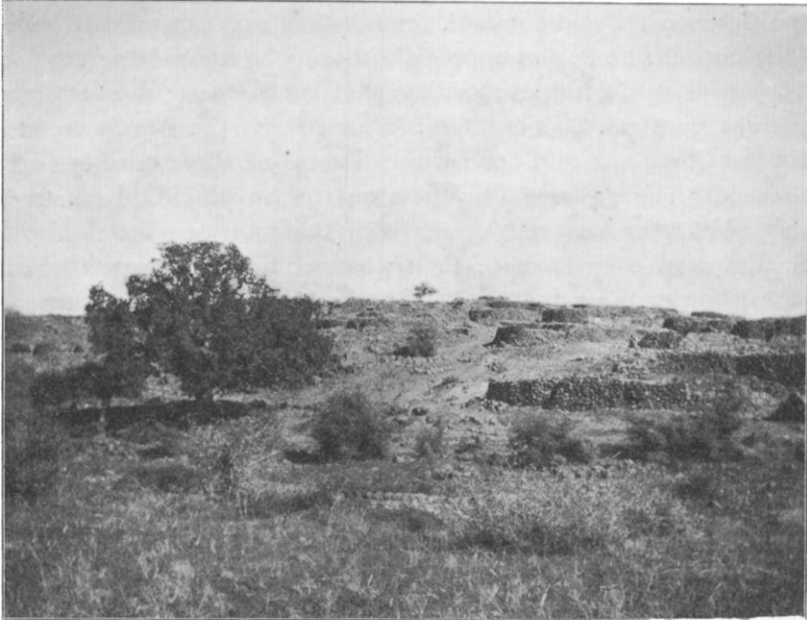
²⁹ Luke 14 : 10 ; Prov. 25 : 7.

when spoken to, on any subject suggested, showing no impatience, and only introducing what he wants when more or less directly invited to do so. I am, of course, speaking of native ways. Officials of various kinds have come to put up with what they must think our rude and barbarous ways of going straight to the point, and, what is worse, treating everyone else with careless indifference. But, be it said, though they may put up with this, they do not like it, and appreciate those who know better.

Towns, and often even villages, in Palestine are divided into various quarters. Thus there is a quarter for the Moslems, one for the Christians, and one for the Jews, if all three religions are present. There is also a business quarter, in which are situated the bazaars or covered streets with their curious little shops. Such a shop is little more than what would be with us a small shop front, without the glass, with the shop man sitting cross-legged, or on a low stool, among his goods. Goods of any one description are all to be bought on one special street or part of a street; this is after all a great convenience for the customer, as frequently but a small stock is kept in each shop. Buying and selling is taken very seriously by these easterns, and quick wits are at a premium. In all but the most inodernized places of business the old custom of bargaining is in vogue. "It is naught, it is naught,"³⁰ is a daily expression. If a man wants to buy some article very particularly, he will look at anything else handy first, asking the price, and even perhaps making a feint at buying. Then, taking up the article he wants carelessly enough and, if unbreakable, perhaps tossing it aside, he asks casually: "How much for that thing?" But the wary seller is on the watch, and, quickly divining that that is what his customer wants, he begins to praise it extravagantly, and then asks perhaps three or four times its value. The buyer hastens to decry the worth of the thing in question. "It is naught; look!" he says; "this is really a very inferior article." He may then perhaps offer about half what he intends eventually to give. The seller shows every sign of astonishment and distress at such audacity, and may thrust it into the man's hand saying, "Take it for nothing"—an offer

³⁰ Prov. 20 : 14.

of course never meant to be taken seriously. Then, though offering it for nothing, he quickly names a price considerably less than what he had first asked, but above the real value. The buyer now by experience knows pretty well what he will get it for, and, if he is in a hurry, he names a price intermediate between



Photograph by E. J. G.

RUIN HEAPS OF JULIAS

his first price and the seller's last one, at the same time saying that it is his last offer. If the seller believes him, he may at once begin tying up the article, meanwhile protesting that he and his wife and children will starve if he has to sell things like this. Finally, however, they part both inwardly content. Sometimes the seller is not sure that his customer has really made his last offer, and has finally to call him back or run after him to announce his acceptance. All this takes time, but, up to the present, time has been a cheap commodity in the East. For the ordinary necessities of life there is no very long bargaining as a rule. A religious Moslem will often tell you his last price with

the expression "*'ula dimpte*" ("on my conscience"), and then one may be almost certain he will except nothing lower.

In trade relationships, as a rule, the Moslem is the most honest and straightforward, and the Jew the most unreliable. Oppressed nations always appear to become crafty and deceptive—qualities which no doubt wear off under a few generations of fair dealing and social advantages.

Built, as many towns and villages are, of soft limestone and mud, it may readily be realized that when such collections of dwellings fall into decay their sites soon become but heaps of shapeless stones. Plants grow over them, dust accumulates around them, earthworms carry away the earth from below, and so at last the surface shows little indeed to mark the spot. Such are today the sites of many Bible scenes. Only when some permanent building, a castle or a colonnade, a synagogue or a church, marks the spot, can we appreciate with any sense of reality that we stand on historic ground. The solid houses of the Hauran, built of volcanic rock, in which the very rafters, shutters, and doors are stone, alone have to any great extent survived nature's leveling process. But upon these the mischievous *bedouin*, in pure wantonness, have wrought a destruction such as even wind and weather had failed to do.

Cities, nations, and languages have passed away in the East, and yet the customs remain very largely as they were in earliest historic times. This living commentary on the Bible cannot really be reduced to writing. A hundred small points of climate, scenery, and habit constantly reveal to the resident in the country some new meaning in Bible literature. A few of the more prominent of these are here mentioned in order to stimulate inquiry and deepen interest in "Occupations and Industries in Bible Lands."