

ART. VI.—MODERN PALESTINE.

NO other country has drawn to itself so much of the world's debate as Palestine. Situated at the point of junction of two continents, it formed the connecting link between the civilizations of the ancient world, and down to our own time has retained its geographical and political importance, whilst it possesses an historical and religious interest which renders it altogether unique. The Rabbis held that Jerusalem is the centre of the earth, that the sacred rock was the nucleus around which the rest of the world was formed; that on Zion the first Adam was created, Noah offered sacrifice after coming out of the ark, Abraham offered his son Isaac, and in due course of time the altar of burnt-offering was erected, because, as they beautifully said, it was fit that the place of man's creation should be also the place of his redemption. In later times the Christians adopted a somewhat similar opinion, and with a slight transference of site still point out the centre of the earth under the dome of the Greek Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Nor have the Mohammedans been behind in ascribing to Jerusalem a mysterious and awful importance, affirming that the rock over which the great "Dome of the Rock" is built covers the "Well of Souls"—the "great abyss" of the Talmudic doctors. Many other fancies with reference to the land are to be found in Jewish writings, as that it is higher than all other lands; that it is so holy that whoever (of the chosen race) walks four cubits in it is assured of a part in "the world to come;" that to be buried in it is like being buried beneath the altar, and therefore an expiation;¹ that it even possesses a kind of divinity, because it is written (Levit. xxv. 38), "to give you the land of Canaan to be your God." Nor has the Christian Church been free from superstitious reverence for the soil of Palestine. As early as the fourth century dust and earth were brought thence and sold for enormous sums as remedies against evil spirits. The Campo Santo at Pisa was formed of fifty-three shiploads of earth from Mount Calvary, in order that the dead might repose in holy ground. Pilgrims still carry home with them bottles of the sacred water of the river Jordan; and it is a common custom, especially with Russian pilgrims, to dip shrouds in that stream and treasure them to be buried in.

Whether any of this mysterious sacredness attached to the land before the call of Abraham it is now impossible to decide;

¹ The Jews still carry away to foreign countries the earth of Palestine to put into the graves of their beloved ones.

but it is certain that from the period of the Israelitish conquest, which was accomplished by divine, supernatural aid, the interest with which the country has been regarded has never flagged, and that every great nation as it rose to power has desired to possess and rule over it. The Assyrian and the Babylonian, the Egyptian and the Persian, the Greek and the Roman, the Arab, the Frank, the Turk—all these have in turn invaded it; and in our own day it differs from every other country in this—that it is regarded as sacred by the followers of the three great monotheistic religions which have sprung from the Semitic race. Widely as the children of the promise have wandered from the faith taught them by inspired prophets and seers, they still cling with passionate fondness and reverence to the land of their fathers. Sad as the error of the deluded followers of Mohammed is, they have not forgotten to revere the land promised to him in whose faith they vainly profess to believe; and deplorably as the Church of Christ has in the course of its chequered history become corrupted, it has never ceased to regard with veneration the country in which the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, where our Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, taught and suffered and died for us.

This feeling with reference to Palestine is closely associated with the belief in a glorious future which the land is to enjoy. The pious Jew looks forward to the time when his people are to be restored to it, when their dismal wandering and homelessness are to be terminated, and Israel is to become prosperous and powerful. The devout Christian, to whom the way of God has been revealed more perfectly, shares the same belief, but with the conviction that it is the Kingdom of Christ which is to be established there; and whatever differences of opinion may exist with reference to the second coming of our Lord, all are presumably agreed that the Jews will eventually be led to believe in Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and Saviour, and that their restoration to the favour of God will be to the rest of mankind "as life from the dead." The appointment of an English Bishop to represent and preside over the labours of the Church in Jerusalem and adjacent countries shows how deep an interest is felt by English Churchmen in the spiritual regeneration of that part of the world; and now more than ever there will be a desire to investigate everything concerning the Holy Land, and especially the present condition and prospects of the country and its inhabitants.

It is proposed to give in this article a rapid sketch (1) of the climate and productions of Palestine as observed in recent years; (2) of its inhabitants; (3) of the existing state of the Mohammedan, the Jewish, and the Christian religions as re-

presented there; and (4) of the philanthropic, educational, and evangelistic work being carried on by Protestant agencies.

I. *Climate and Productions.*—It has often been asserted, but never proved, that the climate of Palestine has undergone a great change within the historical period. That the fruitful and delightful land, flowing with milk and honey, promised to the Israelites can be the parched, barren, and unfruitful country which modern Palestine is so often represented to be is deemed incredible, except on the supposition that great climatic changes have occurred in it. But we must not judge of an Eastern country from a Western standpoint. The Holy Land is neither so richly timbered nor so green and well watered as England (for instance); but it is equally fertile, and when properly cultivated yields returns not inferior to those of the most favoured countries of Europe. Of course, all the land is not equally productive, nor is it all adapted for the growth of the same crops; and one cause of the apparent barrenness of the soil, as shown by the pitifully scanty and lean ears of wheat and barley which the tourist observes in riding over the mountain-paths, is that owing to bad government and want of roads there is so little intercommunication that villages in the hills, in order to be independent of their neighbours, try to grow their own corn in spots where figs, vines, and olives ought to be planted, instead of raising those products for which their land is suited, and exchanging them for the breadstuffs grown in the plains.

But it is said the rains are less copious than in the old time, that the "latter rain" has been withholden or diminished, and that consequently the land has become more dry and barren. There is no proof of these statements. The rainfall of Palestine does not depend upon local circumstances, but upon its situation and its surroundings, and there is nothing to show that these have changed in any important particular; whilst statements as to the former productions of the country, and scattered notices of its physical conditions, customs, and diseases, tend to show that the heat and the cold, the rain and the snow, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, are much the same now as they have ever been. It is, indeed, probable that before the country had been denuded of its forests, and when many more palms, sycamores, figs, and other fruit-trees existed, summer showers may have been less unfrequent than they are now.

The rainfall at Jerusalem, on a mean of twenty-two years, is 22 inches annually,¹ which falls on 52 days extending over a

¹ In the British Isles during 1885 rain fell on 239 days, and the total amount was 36 inches.

period of six months, from November to April inclusive ; a very little also falling during the months of October (.514 inch) and May (.199 inch). Probably this is about the average for the whole of Palestine, excluding Lebanon, where the amount is greater and the rainy season is extended over a somewhat longer period. In the times and manner of its falling, and in its amount, the rain seems to be now what it was in Biblical and early post-Biblical times. In Ezra x. 13 we read that there was a great rain when the people were assembled in the ninth month, which corresponded to our December ; and the Mishna ordains that if rain has not fallen before the third of Marcheshvan (the end of October), it is to be prayed for ; and if by the first of Kisleu (middle of November) none has fallen, fasts are to be observed. From Joel ii. 23 we learn that the "latter" rain fell in the first month, Nisan (or April), which is still the month for the last rains of the season. The "early" rains, called in the Bible *yoreh* or *moreh*, moistens the soil, which had become hard and dry from the long drought, and fits it for the reception of the seed ; so that it is the signal for the commencement of ploughing. During the latter part of summer, after the treading out of the corn is completed, the peasants feed and tend their oxen carefully, so as to get them into condition for the hard labour of ploughing ; and as soon as a moderate amount of rain has fallen, this operation commences. In good seasons, October or November is the month for the early rains ; but it sometimes happens that they are delayed until December or even January, and sowing and ploughing have to be delayed accordingly. Corn, or at least barley, sown as late as the beginning of February may produce a good crop if the subsequent fall of rain is sufficient, four months being enough for its growth and ripening.¹ Although oxen are usually employed for ploughing, camels, mules, horses, and donkeys are also pressed into this service ; and the writer has even seen a donkey and a woman harnessed to the same plough. The season for ploughing is generally very bright, as the operation cannot be carried on when heavy rain is falling ; and a more cheery sight can hardly be witnessed than one of the large plains of the country covered with ploughs as far as the eye can reach, whilst the melodious call of the peasants to their animals gives an additional charm to the scene. As many as eighty or a hundred ploughs at work may sometimes be counted from a spot somewhat elevated. The ancient Oriental plough, guided with one hand whilst the other hand is employed in managing the cattle by means of a long and heavy goad, is still in use, and is said to be more

¹ John iv. 35.

suitable for the light soil of the country than the European plough, the deeper furrow of which causes the earth to dry too quickly. The great number of stones in many cornfields gives an idea of slovenly farming to those accustomed to the neatly kept fields of the West; but it is believed that stones left on the surface are useful in preventing evaporation, and thus retaining moisture in the soil. The yield is exceedingly good in the best lands, as those of the great plains of Esdraelon and El Buttauf, some parts of the plains of Sharon and Philistia, many upland plains, and the low, undulating hills (*shephelah*) which intervene between the mountains and the western plain. No manure is used except that dropped by sheep and goats or horned cattle which are turned out after the harvest has been gathered in; and it seems surprising that, after so many centuries of such lax cultivation, so much fertility should still be retained. But the soil is naturally, in many places, one of the most fruitful in the world; the population has for ages been scanty, so that lands often lie fallow; and the peasants well understand the necessity of rotating their crops. Yet many localities have been impoverished by the continuance of the existing system, and many a deserted village no doubt owes its forlorn condition to the exhaustion of its lands. Wherever manuring has been adopted the yield has been largely increased; and as the population becomes larger steps will have to be taken to maintain fertility and restore it where it has been lost. An impediment of no small importance is the custom of using dung for fuel. This is a very ancient custom, and one most injurious to the land, which is thus deprived of the only means by which its continued fruitfulness can be secured. In Egypt, which is fertilized by yearly inundation, the manure may be burned without injury to the crops; but elsewhere there must be a return to the soil of the saline and other matters which are taken from it. What the peasants in the plains would do for fuel if dung were not used is not easy to decide, but with improved means of communication there would be no great difficulty in bringing wood from the hills; and the cultivation of wood for fuel must soon engage the attention of the Government. In ancient times, and even to a comparatively recent date, there was much pinewood on the hills which was employed for this purpose; but the pines of the hills, like the sycamores of the vale and the palms of the Jordan Valley, have disappeared under the blighting influence of bad government and the devastation of repeated and almost constant wars.

When the corn is sown the peasants rest themselves and their cattle awhile, and watch the downpour of the heavy

winter rain, upon which so much of the prosperity of the coming year depends. In a good season this falls during January and February and the beginning of March, and is neither very scanty nor too copious. If too little falls, or the intervals between the periods of rain are too long, the corn is poor and weak; and if too much falls there is too great a growth of straw. Observations during a long series of years have shown that wheat is cheapest after a season of moderate rainfall. Other winter and spring crops are *dhourrha*, which is a kind of millet (*Sorghum vulgare*), the chick-pea (kirsenny), lentils, beans, and peas. For all of these an adequate supply of spring or latter rains is necessary. This should fall at intervals during the latter half of March and the month of April; and if a little falls in the early part of May, it is of advantage to the crops on the higher hills. When the previous part of the season has been favourable, the harvest may be said to depend entirely on a sufficiency of the late rains; but a favourable latter rain cannot save the harvest if the corn has previously been extensively shrivelled by a long continuance of dry weather or easterly winds, nor will the most promising harvest prove satisfactory unless a sufficiency of rain fall late in the season.

Hardly less important than wheat and barley in some parts of the country are the summer crops of sesame and tobacco. Gourds, cucumbers and melons, grapes, olives, figs and pomegranates, oranges, lemons and citrons, and in the neighbourhood of large towns tomatoes, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflowers, leeks, onions, bamia, the eggplant, artichokes; also apricots, peaches, apples, pears, *zaroor* (which is the berry of a kind of hawthorn), and other fruits, employ the care of the husbandman, and contribute to the welfare and enjoyment of the people. The vine has been known in Palestine from very ancient times, and is still largely cultivated. The grapes are mostly white, large, fleshy, and not so juicy or delicate flavoured as those grown in Europe. The bunches are often very large. It is very common to see them from 12 to 18 inches long, and the present writer measured one upon his own terrace 24 inches in length. They are eaten in their fresh state, forming an important article of diet during their season, or dried into raisins, used for wine, and boiled down until the juice becomes thick like treacle, when it is strained and largely used as food. Grapes are also preserved as a kind of jam, to be eaten in the winter months, and the young unripe grapes are boiled and sweetened for food. Vine leaves, too, are made use of as an article of diet, rice and meat being rolled up in them and boiled. Although Mohammedans will not touch wine, they are the great grape-growers of the Hebron district,

which has so long been famous for the abundance, beauty, and productiveness of its vines. Very good native wine is made both by Germans and Syrians; that made by Jews is not usually so good, being thick, sweet, and astringent. During the season beautiful grapes may be bought for a halfpenny or a penny a pound, and excellent wine may be made for three-pence a bottle. Mutton and goat's flesh are the only meats used by the natives in the south; but of late years beef has been consumed by Jews and Europeans, and pork by the German settlers. There is a strong prejudice amongst the natives of the cities against beef, probably because it has never been a custom of the country to eat it, and there is always a suspicion that the animal was diseased or it would not have been killed. Camel's flesh is sometimes consumed by the peasantry, but it is coarse, as also is that of the buffalo. Fowls and eggs are an important production of the villages, the peasant women bringing them to market every morning. The fowls are small and often tough, but if fed on good food for a few days become plump and tender. The eggs also are small and less rich in flavour than an English egg, but are both larger and better than those of Egypt. A fowl can be purchased for a shilling or eighteenpence. Eggs cost from a farthing to three farthings apiece, according to season and weather. If very heavy rain or snow is falling the women cannot get to market, and fowl's eggs and other produce which they bring become dear.

Harvesting begins in April in some parts, but in the hills not until May. The barley is ready before the wheat, and both are allowed to ripen before being gathered. A sickle is generally employed to cut the corn, and the reaper will often protect himself with a leathern apron. On a few farms which have been purchased by capitalists, reaping-machines have been in use of late years. Early morning is the time for cutting the corn, when the dew is still upon it. After the sun has become high, the work is abandoned till next day. The threshing-floor seems to be exactly what it was in ancient times. The same operations of treading out the corn by animals, and of dragging over it a rough roller or a flat board with sharp stones or pieces of iron on its under surface and a man standing upon it,¹ are still employed. The flail is only used for lentils, spelt, and peas. Gleaning by the poor is common; and it is said that corners of the fields are left unharvested, as by the ancient Jews.

It is when the corn is gathered in that the troubles of the

¹ "Behold I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth" (Isaiah xli. 15). The instrument is still called by the Arabic equivalent for the name employed by the prophet.

peasant begin. He may not remove it, or any part of it, from the threshing-floor until the tax-collectors have viewed it, estimated its amount, and taken the tithe; and as their visit for this purpose is often delayed, the proprietor suffers greatly from the depredations of birds, mice, and ants,¹ which carry off immense quantities of the grain. The tithes are frequently sold by the Turkish Government to the highest bidder, and the purchaser of course finds his interest in estimating the crop as high as possible, so that disputes are of constant occurrence. When the Government collects them for itself, the adjustment of this important matter is always an affair of many words and much "bribery and corruption." Perhaps the poor peasant loves to have it so, for the excitement of endeavouring to cheat the Government is a pleasant change from the monotony of his existence; and if the result of the quarrelling be that he is made to pay more than he ought—*Naseeb!* it is destiny; God is great, and Mohammed is the apostle of God. The world will still go on though he and his children almost starve, and he may have better luck next year! It is said, and is probably true, that the villagers as a rule would rather suffer the loss entailed in entertaining the officers during the days the dispute is going on than pay at once the lawful demand. A sheep is slaughtered, rice and butter are purchased, endless pipes of tobacco and cups of coffee are consumed, the gossip of the whole countryside is discussed, and mysterious monetary transactions of a delicate nature take place before an agreement can be arrived at.

All the cultivated land in Palestine is theoretically the property of the Sultan. From time immemorial each village has held lands which it has the right to cultivate on payment of a Government-tax of four in a thousand of its estimated value in lieu of rent. These lands are the common property of the villagers, who meet together every year to arrange what portion each is to plough and sow, and with what crops, and what portion is to be left fallow. The produce is the private

¹ The truth of the statement of Agur the son of Jakeh (Prov. xxx. 25), that the ants "prepare their meat in summer," has been called in question; but it is nevertheless in accordance with fact, like many other statements of Holy Scripture upon which doubt has been thrown. There is no commoner sight in Palestine than columns of ants marching to and fro between their nests and a supply of corn or other seeds which they have found, and laying in a supply for future use. When this harvesting is over, they employ themselves in dressing the seeds which they have stored, and carrying the husks outside their nests. All over the country, in suitable situations, the position of the habitations of these industrious creatures is indicated by a circular or semicircular heap of husks of grain which they have thrown out. Whether, as Pliny states, they destroy the *radicle* of the seed, so as to prevent germination, I am not able to say.

property of the cultivator. A village may sell its lands as if they were freehold property; but by a recent edict, no single individual is permitted to purchase more than one-third of the lands of any village. This restriction, however, may be evaded by purchasing the several thirds in different names; a course which has of late years been rather freely adopted by capitalists and some colonizing societies. If the lands are sold, the villagers either migrate to another locality or remain and earn a living as hired farm-labourers. If, as sometimes happens, a village, whose population has dwindled, possesses more land than it can cultivate, the superfluous portion may either lie untilled or be let to another village or to private cultivators, the rent being one-fifth of the produce. Besides the communal lands belonging to the villages, there are others which belong to individuals, who possess the same rights in them as the villagers have in the communal lands—that is, the right of cultivation, of letting, and of sale. By an old common law of the country, the Sultan has the right to take possession of any lands which are left uncultivated for three successive years (they are called “arâdy mahlooly” = loose lands), and to dispose of them as he chooses; but in practice this right is seldom or never exercised, unless in remote districts where there are few or no inhabitants. The dwelling-houses of the peasants are usually their own freeholds. Until recently every man had a right to erect a house with its courtyard in his own village, and this was regarded as his own freehold; but by an old law, now again in force, such erections can only be made by Government permission; and the space upon which they stand is taxed in compensation for the tithes which would have been charged upon its produce had it been cultivated. The olive, fig, and other fruit-trees of a village, and the vines, are always private property; but the land upon which they grow frequently belongs to others; so that the land may be sold without the trees, and the trees without the land.¹ The owner of the land is not permitted to uproot or injure the trees.

All produce of the soil is liable for the Government tithe, except certain garden produce in the neighbourhood of large towns where the difficulty of estimating and collecting the tenths has led to a different arrangement. At Jaffa, for instance, the beautiful and productive orange-gardens pay a

¹ Abraham had asked the sons of Heth for the possession of a burying-place, and lest it should be afterwards asserted that he had only purchased the land and the right to bury in it, a clause was inserted in the deed of conveyance which specifically stated that he had bought not only the cave of Machpelah and the field, but also *all the trees that were in the field* (Gen. xxiii. 24). So ancient are Oriental customs!

Government-tax of eight per thousand on their estimated value (instead of four), and their produce is free from tithes.

Foreigners may now enjoy the privilege of owning land, provided that, in respect of that land, they accept the position of Ottoman subjects—that is to say, that in any legal questions arising in connection with it, foreign consuls are not to interfere, and judgment is to be given in accordance with the law and custom of the country. This privilege, which is a dangerous one for the Turks, has been somewhat largely taken advantage of, and a great many foreigners are now owners of houses and cultivated lands. Before the law came into operation it was customary for foreigners to purchase land through another person, an Ottoman subject, who entered into a private agreement with the real purchaser. In this way all the property of the numerous missions of the French, Russians, Germans, and English were held. The Turks (like the Russians) have a strong objection to foreign *societies* or corporations becoming owners of land, especially of arable land, and endeavour all they can to prevent it. The Jewish and German colonies which have recently been founded are looked upon with much disfavour, because the colonists are all subjects of some foreign power; and the Turks, not without reason, fear that political complications may arise should their respective Governments ever claim a right of interference in the difficulties and disputes which so often occur in connection with these undertakings. This is the chief reason why it is so difficult for such settlers to obtain permission to build houses for themselves to live in; and the strong objection which has been shown of late to the erection of hospitals and schools is due more to the fear of foreign influence than to religious zeal or intolerance. It is a singular spectacle to observe the French and Russians making use of the zeal of their respective Churches to further their own political ends in Palestine, and the Turks availing themselves of Mohammedan intolerance to counteract them.

The mean temperature of Jerusalem is 62·8° Fahr. The coldest month is February, when the mean temperature is 47·9°. It rises month by month until August, when it is 76·1°, and then falls month by month until the following February. Frost usually occurs on five or six nights in the course of the winter, and snow fell in fourteen seasons out of twenty-two. The time for snow is the end of December, January, February, and the early part of March. In 1870 there was a heavy fall of snow on the 7th and 8th of April—a very remarkable and extraordinary occurrence. For the most part the snow is in small quantity, and soon melts. The deepest snowfall registered was in December, 1879, when it

measured seventeen inches where there was no drift. The drifts are sometimes many feet deep. Although the mean temperature is highest in August, the hottest days do not always occur in that month. In May and September the temperature sometimes rises to 100° Fahr. or higher. It was at the time of harvest, the month of May, that the Shunamite's son, being with the reapers, cried to his father, "My head, my head," and died in a few hours, doubtless of sunstroke. Travelling at this season is fatiguing and hazardous both to man and beast. Even the natives prefer to make their journeys by night during the summer season. The mean daily range of temperature is 23·3° Fahr. in the summer and autumn, and 15·7° Fahr. in winter and spring. The great difference between the day and night temperature, especially in the hill districts, is no doubt one of the chief causes of the prevalence of fevers, dysentery, and other diseases. Even in summer it is necessary to put on extra clothing after sunset. The Arab never goes from home without his cloak. The best season for a tour in Palestine for those who are tolerably hardy is the month of March, when the whole country is beautifully green and bedecked with innumerable wildflowers. But the roads are sometimes at that period swampy in the plains, and rivers and streams difficult to cross, and many will prefer to travel in April. From the middle of November to the third week in December is also a pleasant time, as ploughing is then going on, and the absence of thistles and other wild weeds makes the exploration of ruins easier. There is no period of the year when Jerusalem may not be visited and short excursions made from it with pleasure and safety, provided ordinary precautions are taken, and the traveller is not so pressed for time that he cannot wait until a day or two of rain or exceptional heat have passed. But the Jordan Valley should be avoided between May and November.

THOMAS CHAPLIN, M.D.

(To be continued.)

Reviews.

Rational Aspects of some Revealed Truths. By EDWARD B. OTTLEY, M.A., Minister of Quebec Chapel (lately the Principal of Salisbury Diocesan Theological College). Rivingtons. 1887.

MR. OTTLEY undertook a difficult task in 1883, to deliver in two days a course of devotional lectures in defence of the main positions of Christianity. For such an endeavour could hardly lead to more than a summary of well-known arguments. But, to do Mr. Ottley justice, he