

OUR LORD'S HOUSE AT NAZARETH

By

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Very little, if any, material evidence survives in Palestine itself to tell us what the homes of the ordinary people were like in our Lord's day. Only the grander edifices, the palaces of Herod, etc., have left some remains which the archaeologist can investigate. However, written records do give us a certain amount of information: the New Testament in the first place, also many passages of the Old Testament (for the Jews were remarkably conservative in these matters) and some non-Biblical Jewish writings. The picture can be filled out to some extent from the age-old customs of present-day Palestine and Syria, for the Jews, originally a nomadic people, took over much of the material culture of the country in which they had settled. Still, uncertainty and difference of opinion will persist on many points of detail. In offering the reconstruction which follows, I can but hope that I have not departed too far or too frequently from the truth!

ORIENTAL SIMPLICITY

It is with the simple house of the ordinary working-class family in the villages of Palestine that we are here concerned — such a home as Jesus, Mary and Joseph might have lived in at Nazareth in Galilee — and not with the homes of the rich, nor even of the upper or well-to-do middle classes, such as those of many Pharisees and publicans which are mentioned in the Gospels. The modern reader, with his Western and European ideas of home life, will be impressed — perhaps a little repelled at first sight — by the utter simplicity of these ancient Oriental homes, a simplicity which still obtains today in many parts of the Near East. Such simplicity, however, was regarded as a virtue by devout Jews; for their laws, customs and best religious traditions stemmed from the nomadic period. Another point, which can scarcely be conveyed by the written word, is the brilliance of light and colour that characterizes the Oriental scene — not to speak of the noise, and, indeed, the pungent odours, that are a feature of life in an Eastern village!

THE VILLAGE

Our Palestinian home will be found always in a village. The villagers might work outside, in the fields, but long centuries of troubled existence had taught them to make their homes together in the protection and security of a community, in a village which would be surrounded by walls if it were of any size (e.g. the case of Naim in Galilee — Luke 7:12). Within the village, the houses are not laid out in neat rows along regular streets, but are scattered here and there on the level ground and on the hillside, according to the nature of the terrain, care being taken to secure good sound foundations for safety against the violent storms of winter (cf. Matt. 7 : 24). Each house has its regular rectangular 'courtyard' enclosing it (or several houses may open on the same courtyard), with narrow and irregular lanes and alleys dividing one property from the next. Consequently, it would be no use trying to locate a house by its number or name — it wouldn't have one! A particular house would be referred to by the name of its owner or tenant, e.g., 'the house of Simon bar Jonas', 'the house of Joseph, the Carpenter'.

THE COURTYARD

Approaching the house from the laneway, we have the 'courtyard', enclosed by a low wall or fence, entrance being by a wooden gate. If this were shut, we would have to knock till the householder appeared, just as St Peter did at the house of John Mark's mother in Jerusalem, after his escape from Herod's prison (Acts 12:13).

This courtyard varies in size: in richer homes it might be paved and even partly roofed in: in ordinary homes it is unpaved and a kind of cross between garden and backyard. There might be a shady fig-tree growing in one corner, or even a spreading vine against the walls, or supported by light trellis-work. To possess a shady fig-tree and vine of one's own was the desire of even the humblest Israelite. In Old Testament times, a period of peace and prosperity was described thus: 'And Juda and Israel dwelt without any fear, every one under his vine and under his fig-tree from Dan to Bersabee' (3 Kings 4:25). And before our Lord called him, the future apostle, Nathaniel, was 'under the fig-tree' (John 1:48), in all probability in the courtyard of his house in Cana of Galilee.



Baking Bread

OUTDOOR LIFE

For, with the Palestinian, his courtyard is at least as important as the house itself. Much of the ordinary life of the family is passed here, especially during the summer months (end of April to the beginning of October). Here the householder will be found, squatting on the ground or seated on a low stool in the shade; if times were troubled, his sword or weapon would be near at hand — like the 'strong man armed', of whom our Lord spoke in his parable, who 'keepeth his court', and so 'those things are in peace which he possesseth' (Luke 11:21). Here he will meet and converse with his neighbours and visitors. His wife, together with the other women of the house, or her relatives or neighbours, might be seen seated on the ground nearer the house, engaged in some household task, e.g. grinding corn with the hand-mill. This consisted of two heavy stones, cylindrical in shape, fitting one over the other, with maybe a wooden handle fitted to the uppermost. The grain was poured in between the stones (often through a hole in the upper one), ground by rotation, and the meal caught on a skin or cloth spread underneath. This was a task that generally demanded 'two pairs of hands' — hence our Lord's words about 'two women grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left' (Matt. 24 : 41). Grinding corn (barley, wheat or millet) for making the daily supply of loaves was, in fact, the woman's first task in the morning. Either in the court or in the house (or even on the roof!), the meal would be kneaded with leaven in a shallow bowl of wood or earthenware, and the loaves, round and flat, then baked on a metal sheet which had been heated by placing it over a fire of charcoal or dung.

WORK AND PLAY

In the courtyard, too, we might see the children playing, and perhaps a few chickens picking for grain or scraps of food. In good weather, the animals would be outdoors too; the family ass, with maybe one or two sheep and goats. Sheds for storing fuel and maybe fruit and grain will be found — where they exist — attached to the courtyard, and not, as with ourselves, to the house. In the courtyard, too, either along the wall, or attached to the house and with a protective awning, would be the workshop, that is, if our house should belong to a carpenter, potter, tanner, smith, stone-mason or other craftsman. If our householder were a carpenter, we would find him sitting on the ground (for he would not use a work-bench), and maybe deftly holding a wooden plank between his feet, and boring holes in it by means of a 'bow and drill' — a vertical drill attached to a transverse bowstring in such a manner that it could be rotated simply by moving the bow to and fro. Close at hand, or in his belt, is his adze, a handy tool, which would often do duty for hammer, chisel and plane, too. Nearby, or hanging on the wall, there would be small handsaws, heavy stones for hammering, sandstone for planing, iron knives and so on. Products of his labour would be visible, in the form of wooden doorposts and small window frames, roof-beams, simple low stools and tables, wooden yokes for oxen, perhaps wheels, and the simple one-handed Palestinian plough. Coffins, as we understand them, he would not make, for the Jews did not use them for burial purposes.

THE HOUSE

And now, let us take a look at the house itself. It is a small, compact, square structure. Perhaps what strikes one most at first glance is the absence of windows: there may be just one narrow aperture (you could hardly call it a window), high up on the wall — there is no danger of outsiders peering in and disturbing the Oriental's much-valued domestic privacy (that is to say, when he is in his 'chamber', with his 'door shut', (cf. Matt. 6: 6). The roof is flat, not gabled, like our modern houses, and there is no chimney.

Coming closer, we see that the walls are built, according to the locality, either of stones, small and unpolished, or

of mud-brick, and coated frequently with mud plaster, to keep out the heavy winter rains: here and there the plaster has peeled, to reveal the stone or brick beneath. Sometimes the walls are little better than layers of mud plaster — in which case it is not hard to see how thieves by night could 'break through and steal' (Matt. 6: 20), by simply boring a convenient hole.



A Palestinian Carpenter

THE ROOF

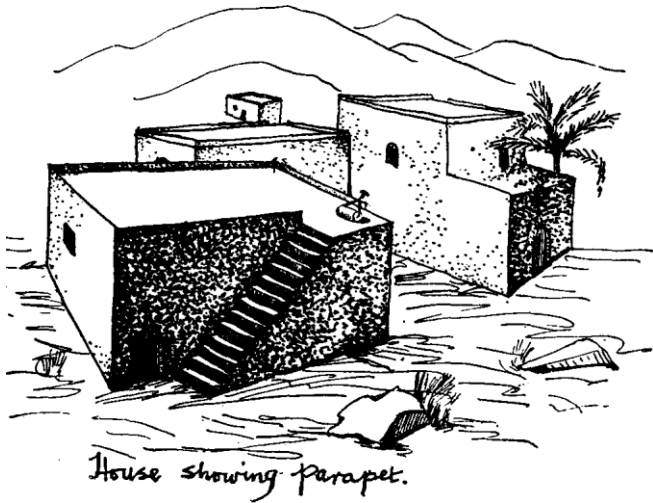
Before entering the house, let us first ascend the steps outside up to the roof, just as did the four men carrying the paralytic at Capharnaum, who could not get in by the door into the house where Jesus was preaching, and so carried the invalid on to the roof and let him down through the ceiling in front of the Master (Matt. 9:1-8). When we reach the roof-top, we see how this was possible. It is not a tiled roof, as we know it, with attic or loft between it and the ceiling; but just a flat surface of clay or marl, supported in turn by sycamore planks laid across the walls. The single-storied house lies beneath, and it would not be difficult to bore a hole through. However, the roof is quite waterproof; in fact, during the winter time, after every heavy shower of rain, it is rolled to keep it firm. We might even see the cylindrical stone roller, used for the purpose, reposing in a corner. Around the roof, for safety's sake, as the law prescribed (Deut. 22 : 8), is a low parapet, with some form of gutter for carrying off the rain. In the court below, there might be a cistern for storing this winter rain: for in Palestine, where practically no rain falls during the five summer months, great use is made of cisterns for storing water. Old disused cisterns might be the 'pits' our Lord speaks of, into which the unfortunate blind man, and even the ox or sheep, might fall (Matt. 15:14 and 12:11).

If the house were built up against a hillside (as are many at Nazareth) it would be possible to pass through an opening in the parapet straight on to the hill at the back. In this way, a man descending the hill might pass right over the roofs of his neighbours' homes in order to reach his own at the bottom. By this way, too, animals (especially the sturdy ox) might be led on to the roof for the purpose of treading out or threshing the corn at harvest-time. In fact, a Palestinian rooftop served many purposes. Like the courtyard, it might be used for weaving, grinding corn, even baking bread. It was regularly used — where we would prefer the back-yard — for drying clothes, and drying fruit, flax and grain. During the summer months the family might often sleep there: and at the Feast of Tabernacles in September, which commemorated the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, they actually lived for a week in leafy booths set up either on the roof or in the court. The roof was a pleasant place for walking and conversing in the cool of the evening: it is quite likely that our Lord conversed with Nicodemus, who came to him 'by night' (John 3 : 2), on one of the tree-shaded rooftops of Jerusalem. Another saying of our Lord's, which shows how much rooftops were used, occurs in his warnings regarding the 'last days' — 'he that is on the housetop let him not come down to take anything out of his house' (Matt. 24:17), i.e., let him descend by the outside steps, and make haste to flee.

From the housetops, messages, warnings, greetings could be shouted across the village: 'that which you hear in the ear', said Christ, 'shall be preached on the housetops' (Matt. 10: 27). It was customary on Friday evening at 6 p.m., when the Sabbath rest began, to sound a trumpet from one of the housetops of the village to warn labourers in the field to cease work. Lastly, the rooftop might also be used by pious Israelites for private prayer — as, for instance, by St Peter at midday in the house of Simon the Tanner at Joppa on the Palestinian coast (Acts 10:9). The Jews prayed

standing (cf. Mark 11:25), arms outstretched, eyes lifted up to heaven.

On the roof of a more well-to-do home there might be an 'upper room' or guest chamber, such as was used by our Lord and his disciples for celebrating the Last Supper in Jerusalem, or by St Peter at Lydda, where he raised the widow to life (Acts 9:37).

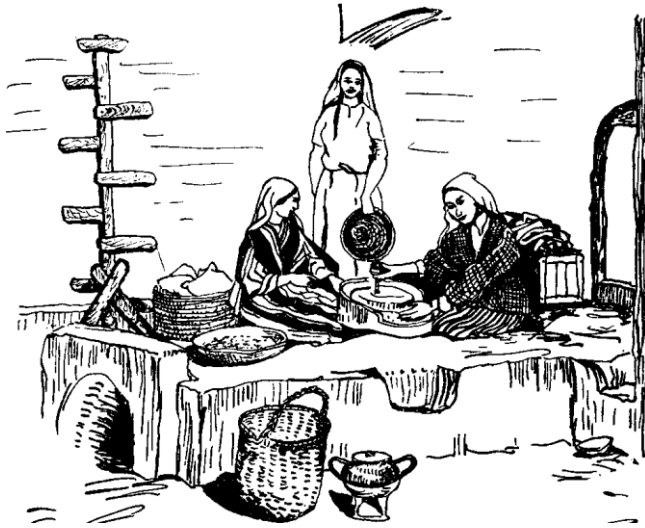


Now let us descend and enter the house. The door is of wood, with a stone threshold beneath, wooden doorposts at the sides, and a prominent wooden lintel above — on this was smeared the blood of the Paschal Lamb at the Feast of the Pasch (March/April) each year, in commemoration of the deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 12 : 22 ff.). On the doorposts at the side there might be seen affixed a small wooden or metal box, containing the 'Mezuzah', a little scroll inscribed with the text, Deut. 6: 4-9. This was the great daily prayer of the Israelites ('Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength ...'). It was quoted by our Lord, in answer to the lawyer's question as to which was the greatest commandment in the Law (Mark 12 : 29-31). Pious Jews also wore similar scrolls ('phylacteries') on their foreheads and left arms, containing the same or like texts: the Pharisees were guilty of ostentation in this matter (Matt. 23 : 5). During the daytime, the door was kept open to admit light and air. However, should it be night-time, or bad weather, it will be necessary to knock loud and long to secure admittance, for the door would be held fast by a bar of wood or iron inside — there was no such thing as a latch-key (though keys of wood or iron, very large ones, were used and kept on the inside!). Scripture contains many allusions to entering one's house and 'shutting the door on oneself and on one's children': Christ illustrated the efficacy of prayer by the comparison, 'knock, and it shall be opened to you' (Matt. 7 : 7), and by the parable of the troublesome friend who came knocking by night at his friend's door to borrow three loaves (Luke 11:5-6). Only if the householder 'knows you' (not like the foolish virgins in the parable — Matt. 25 : 12), will he open the door to you.

The door is opened and reveals a somewhat dark and rather stuffy interior. The single opening high up on the wall — you can hardly call it a window — sheds but a feeble light through its wooden lattice-work (glass was not yet in use for windows). If we want to examine the house in detail, we shall have to light a lamp — like the woman in our Lord's parable, who lost her silver coin ('groat, i.e. drachma, worth about 2s 6d) and diligently swept the house till she found it. Though, maybe, our host will be waiting for us, with lamp in hand — a small clay lamp, very much like the Aladdin's lamp' of pantomime, with handle at one end, spout with wick at the other, and hole in the top for replenishing with olive oil: like the wise Virgins of the parable, he might also have, attached to his wrist, a little clay vessel containing a reserve supply of oil (cf. Matt. 25 : 4).

INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE

If we can trust the traditional interior lay-out of the poor homes of Palestine, our house will have two divisions or levels (you can hardly call them rooms as there is no dividing wall). The lower level near the door serves as stable for the animals, at least in bad weather; the upper level, a foot and a half higher and reached by a step, is where the family lodges and sleeps. The floor in each case is of clay, stamped hard, or mud plaster: there might be flags in better homes.



Women grinding with hand-mill. Interior of house showing two levels of floor.

THE STABLE

There are many allusions in the words of Christ which suggest that even the poorest families possessed one or two animals to supply their domestic needs: 'What man among you that hath one sheep ... ?' (Matt. 12:11); 'Doth not every one of you, on the Sabbath, loose his ox or his ass from the manger and lead them to water ?' (Luke 13:15). This manger, contrary to some popular representations of the Crib of Bethlehem, was usually of stone, set into, or alongside, the wall. There the animals were tethered: the ass, trusty and honoured beast of burden in Biblical lands, and sheep and goats, useful for their wool or hair and for milk. Sheep are of a peculiar Palestinian variety, with prominent 'fat' tail (which was specifically designated as the choice portion of the victim in the Temple sacrifices — or, if the animal were killed for food, would supply an abundance of fat for cooking purposes). Cow or ox, if they were kept, would be very lean specimens compared with our well-built animals. Still, the ox was a useful draught animal for farm work: it was, and still is, used where we would use the horse — horses were not used by the common people: they were costly both to purchase and to feed, and, for purposes of transport, were not as surefooted or as reliable as the ass on the difficult and stony paths of Palestine. Fodder for the animals, which is found in the mangers, and perhaps also stored in a heap in the corner, or out in the court, consisted of chopped straw, mixed with chaff, mown grass and barley (hay, as we understand it, was not made by the Palestinians).

However, if—as was frequently the case in Bethlehem and Nazareth — the house were built along a rocky hillside, there might be a cave or grotto adjoining, on the same level, or somewhat lower, with a separate entrance from the hillside. This might be used as a stable—though it was also used for storage, and, indeed, very frequently for human habitation, as part of the home.

The idea of animals sharing the same roofs with human beings may be somewhat repugnant to our modern ways of thinking, but the Oriental has no such inhibitions. We have only to recall our Lord's parable of the Good Shepherd, or Nathan's parable of the poor man's ewe lamb (2 Kings 12:1-4), to realize the intimacy that exists between the Palestinian and his animals. Pigs, however, were not kept; they were reckoned very unclean animals in the Mosaic Law. The poor Prodigal in our Lord's parable touched the very depths of shame when, in a 'far country', he was sent out to feed swine (Luke 15:15).

THE LIVING ROOM

Ascending the step, then, we come to the family 'living-room' — in some cases, there might be a light, movable partition of fabric or lattice-work separating this from the stable. Here, or at the door, if the animals were stabled in a cave, there would be no door-mat for wiping our shoes — instead, the light sandals, which are the footwear of these warm countries (stockings or socks are not worn), would be removed on entering and left near the door. If the host were there, he would approach with a shallow earthenware vessel containing water for washing the feet, covered as they would be with the dust of the Palestinian lanes. In many homes in our Lord's day, one or more large, red, two-

handled water pots were kept handy near the door for this purpose: they also served for the numerous ritual purifications — of one's person and of vessels — which the devout Jew performed on returning from the market, before meals, etc. In the more pretentious surroundings of the marriage feast of Cana, there were six of these water pots, each with a capacity of 20 to 25 gallons. It was the duty of the women of the house to keep these replenished — going and returning morning and evening to and from the village well with the smaller vessels poised gracefully on their heads. Of course, where fresh water was not required, the cistern would supply the need, if there was one.



Interior of house showing storage and cave stable.

Here, then, before us, is the Family's living-quarters: one room, no larger than the average room in a modern house, which does duty for parlour, living room, kitchen and bedroom — no corridors, no dividing walls or interior rooms, no interior stairs or 'landing', just the one storey with no 'upstairs'! However, it was possible, by means of movable curtains or partitions of the kind mentioned above, to divide up the room, as in the nomads' tents of old. These would be 'inner chambers' of which our Lord speaks, to which a person retires for prayer, for privacy, or to hide (cf. Matt. 6: 6 and 24 : 26; Luke 12: 3). Even so, the poor man's home contained but the one 'mansion' or dwelling-place : by contrast, our Lord told his apostles after the Last Supper, in heaven, in his Father's house. 'there are many mansions' (John 14 : 2).

FURNITURE

What will strike us, too, about the interior of the house, is the scarcity, almost absence, of furniture. There are no chairs, armchairs or sofa, no large table in the centre of the room — just, perhaps, one or two low, wooden stools, and, in the larger houses, maybe a low wooden table. There is no trace of lino, carpets or rugs on the floor — perhaps just a round straw mat, though frequently this was spread only at meal times. A lampstand of wood, clay or metal may be there, on which to rest our lamp, 'that it may shine to all that are in the house' (Matt. 5 :15) — or the lamp may be placed in a niche on the wall, or even suspended from the ceiling. Candlesticks are also used, or rather, brackets of clay or metal for holding the tallow candles: these are set on the floor or on a stand, 'that those who enter may see the light' (Luke 8:16). On Friday evening, at 6 p.m., a special lamp, the 'Sabbath Lamp', is ceremoniously lit by the woman of the house.

FIREPLACE

There is no fireplace or hearth in the modern sense. Instead, we see in the corner a small, portable, clay stove, with an opening at the front for fuel, perhaps a hole at the back for the draught, and a flat top on which the cooking pots can be placed. This is the 'oven' of which our Lord speaks, and into which is cast the dried 'grass of the field' (Matt. 6:30), and wood, sticks, etc. There is no chimney; what smoke there is is left to find its own way out through chinks in the

wall! However, cooking was often done outside, so this is not so bad as it seems! For warmth in winter, an earthenware or metal pan, containing hot charcoal, was used: this is the 'coal' mentioned in the Gospels (e.g. the brazier at which Peter warmed himself in the courtyard of the High Priest — Mark 14 : 54 — coal, as we have it, was unknown). The same charcoal pan, with suitable covering, could be used for keeping food warm: this had to be done — if a hot meal was required — once a week, on the Sabbath day, when it was forbidden to cook or even to light a fire. Food might also be kept warm in a straw-lined box, somewhat like our hay-box.



Pottery
First
Century

1. Beaker.
2. 'Fish-plate'
3. Ewer
4. Water-jar. 5. Megarian bowl.



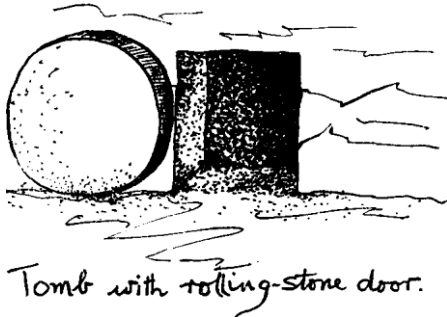
CHEST AND RECESSES

There was, of course, no mantelpiece and no clock. Palestinians regulated their day by the sun, counting 12 hours (four periods) in the day (6 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and 12 (four watches) in the night (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.). Shelves or bookcases, in our sense, were unknown — the 'book', as we understand it, was not yet invented (the invention was apparently the work of early Christians, in the second century A.D.). Writing was done, with reed pen and ink, on long strips of papyrus (a writing material made from the stalk of the papyrus reed) or animal skins, specially prepared and treated. The papyrus or skin was rolled up in the form of a scroll which was opened and read horizontally, not vertically. The family might possess, among its treasures, a few such scrolls (almost certainly they would be books of the Old Testament), stored away, with other valuables, in the brightly coloured wooded chest in a corner of the room. In wealthier homes, such as that of the priest Zachary near Jerusalem, there would be waxed tablets of wood for writing purposes (cf. Luke 1: 63). In the same 'treasure chest' were kept the feast-day clothes, and other valuables pertaining to the woman's dowry and hereditary family property; e.g., precious materials and fabrics, vases of alabaster, maybe a locket or box of gold or silver, objects of metal, and perhaps a few coins. Such belongings, however carefully treasured, were liable — in these simple homes, before the days of 'moth-balls' and anti-rust devices — to deterioration through the attacks of moths and corrosion, as our Lord warned in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Heap not up to yourselves treasures on earth ... where rust and moth consumeth, and where thieves break in and steal' (Matt. 6 :19). Thieves who could 'break in' through the walls of the house would find little difficulty in breaking open the wooden chest.

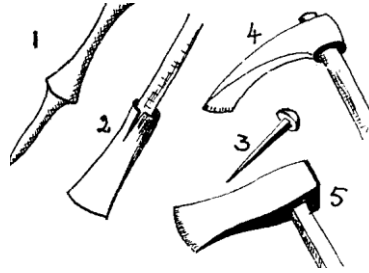
Where we would use pantry, cupboards, lockers, chests of drawers, wardrobes, etc., the Palestinian stored his simple household goods in corners, and on recesses and ledges around the walls. On ledges and recesses we would see pots and vessels of clay for holding grain, fruit, oil, and maybe wine (though these might be kept, in some cases, in the courtyard). There, too, or hanging from the walls, were the various cooking utensils — vessels of various shapes and sizes, of clay, wood or metal: cauldrons, hooks, ladles, goatskins (for churning butter by the simple process of shaking to and fro), water-skins, small sieves, spare lamps. In the corner, propped up against the wall, was a short-handled wooden broom, with head of rush or straw — such as was used by the woman in the parable, who diligently swept her house in search of the lost goat (Luke 15:8).

BEDS

We shall already have noticed the complete absence of 'beds' in the modern sense. However, if we look closely in one of the corners or on one of the ledges, we shall see the neatly-rolled straw mats and coloured coverlets, on which the Palestinian slept at night. These were unrolled and stretched on the floor at night, rolled up and stored away again by day — a useful economy of floor-space in a one-roomed house! These portable mats or pallets were the 'beds' which the paralytics, whom our Lord healed, took up and carried away (Matt. 9:6 and John 5:11). In some homes in our Lord's day, the whole family slept together on the floor, with perhaps one large mat and coverlet for all — as in the parable, where the householder answers the friend who comes begging bread at midnight, by saying, 'Trouble me not, the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed' (Luke 11:7). On the other hand, there might be some division of the room by light partitions or curtains into two 'bedrooms'. The ordinary people, it seems, slept fully clothed.



Tomb with rolling-stone door.



Palestinian Tools: 1. Awl; 2. Chisel; 3. Nail; 4. Iron Adze; 5. Bronze Axe.



Woman Spinning

HAND-LOOM

Tucked away in corners we might see tools belonging to the man, if he were a craftsman, and the woman's simple wooden distaff. She might even now be there at her task, seated on the floor or on a low stool. First she takes her bale of home-grown wool, beats it to rid it of foreign matter, combs it with a wooden comb, then deftly spins it on her distaff. In front of her, set up on the floor, is the hand-loom, consisting simply of two vertical pieces of wood and a cross-piece at the top. The 'warp' threads, varying in thickness, material and spacing, according to the nature of the article woven, are suspended from the cross-piece, and the horizontal 'woof' threads are then woven in with the aid of a wooden shuttle, and pressed down with a comb or baton. The family clothes, of wool, goat's hair and sometimes linen, are woven on this loom, and also mats, coverlets, curtains and textiles of various kinds. By using threads dyed with various colours (and the Palestinians have always been adept at dyeing), very colourful garments could be produced — head-veil, tunic, girdle and cloak for the man, long veil, sash and shawl for the woman.

WALLS

Of course, there was no wallpaper on the walls, just a simple plaster coating. Nor were there any mirrors — hand looking-glasses of burnished metal (which gave a somewhat imperfect reflection) were used in those days, but they would hardly be found in the homes of the common people. It is to them that St Paul refers when he speaks of faith as 'seeing through a glass in a dark manner' (1 Cor. 13:12). Nor would we find pictures or representations of any kind, still less religious pictures or statues, on the walls. The Mosaic Law, in the 'First Commandment' (Ex. 20:4) and elsewhere, strictly forbade the making of any representation of God (on account of the danger of idol-worship), and so rigidly was this law interpreted in our Lord's day that the Jews did not make or use any representation of a living being, be it man or animal, even for merely decorative purposes. Coins of the period, including those minted by the Roman authorities in Palestine, show no portrait of the Emperor or ruler, or of any man or animal: but just innocent symbols, religious or profane, such as palm-branch, citron, candlestick, chalice, lyre, trumpet, etc. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor during our Lord's public life, was compelled, because of the violent popular opposition, to remove the images of the Emperor from the Roman military standards which he had introduced into Jerusalem.

Such modern amenities as the piano or radio were, of course, unknown then; but the family might possess a few simple musical instruments — double reed pipes (such as the children used in the market-places — Luke 7 : 32), and maybe the zither, a kind of harp, cymbals and the primitive viol. These were used especially on occasions of festivity, e.g. at wedding feasts, or of mourning, e.g. at funerals, but they also served to brighten many a dull evening in the home or courtyard, when folk-songs and stories, for which Easterners have always been renowned, were sung and told.

`Water laid on', for bath, sink and basin, was a luxury unknown to these simple homes (though found in Greek and Roman houses) — water had to be carried from well and cistern for one's household needs.

From the ceiling we might see hanging the woollen cradle for the baby of the family. When Mother went out, cradle and baby could be slung over her shoulders, without interfering with the water-pot neatly poised on her head!

MEALS

When meal-time came round (the principal meal being taken in the evening), a round straw mat was placed on the floor, and around it the family squatted down. In more pretentious homes, the food-tray might be placed on a low stool, or there might be a low table, with stools around for the diners (in the richer homes of Pharisee and publican, where our Lord sometimes dined, and also in the large 'guest-chamber' of the Last Supper, the Greco-Roman fashion was followed, with the guests reclining on three-legged divans or couches about a curved table).

The food was brought in on one or more large shallow earthenware vessels — there was no tablecloth — and, after the customary ablutions, the head of the family pronounced a simple grace or `blessing'. Each helped himself with his fingers from the common dish — there were no knives, forks or spoons — and the householder might even reach tasty morsels to the invited guest! There were no serviettes, plates or saucers — though there might be 'sop-dishes' for personal use: these contained water and seasoning of various kinds (salt and herbs, e.g. mint, aniseed, cummin, etc., such as the Pharisees wished to tithe — Matt. 23 : 33), into which morsels could be dipped before eating (as our Lord did for Judas at the Last Supper — John 13 : 26). Glass vessels and metal pots were not in use.

Bread, home-baked, of barley or wheat, was the staple food. Fish was plentiful and cheap (especially in Galilee) and eggs were a common article of diet (cf. Luke 11:11 — If the son ask his father for a fish, will he reach him a serpent? Or, if he ask him for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion?). Meat was not, perhaps, eaten daily, but just on the Sabbath and festive occasions. When they did eat it, the Jews preferred the young and tender animal—lamb, kid or calf. Small birds, pigeons or sparrows (two of which could be bought for the equivalent of two pence, cf. Matt. 10: 29) were eaten by the common people—pork, of course, never! Olive oil, milk and butter were used, the latter rather as an ingredient in cooking than to spread on bread. Curds, made from soured milk, were then, as now, a favourite dish, and cheese too. Honey could be used instead of sugar, and there was an abundance of fruit: olives, grapes, figs, dates, pomegranates maybe, and almonds and walnuts. For vegetables, there were onions, leeks and garlic, coarse peas and beans, lentils, cucumber and marrow — potatoes were unknown, and likewise rice, semolina, etc., and even porridge. For drink, besides fresh water, there might be locally-made wine and milk: wooden or clay cups would be used. Tea and coffee were then unheard of, and so were many other modern tea-table delicacies — jam, iced cake and so on (though small, plain honey-cakes were made).

CONCLUSION

Such, allowing for the inevitable uncertainties, is the picture of a Palestinian home in our Lord's day. Life was simple, healthy and frugal. If the home was lacking in most of our modern comforts and conveniences, it was compact and very largely self-supporting: the family provided its own bread and flour, eggs, fruit, vegetables, milk and butter, meat and oil; it found its own fuel and fodder for the animals, and wove its own garments and materials. Other needs could be mostly met by the immediate community of the village or locality. It was from home-life such as this that our Lord drew many of the illustrations for his teaching, many of his parables — for it was in a home like this that he chose to spend the thirty years of his 'Hidden Life', subject to Mary and Joseph, and growing in wisdom, age and grace with God and men (Luke 2 : 51-52).