

# Strange Scriptures

That Perplex the Western Mind

Clarified in the Light of Customs and Conditions in Bible Lands

by

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## CHAPTER TWO

### WOMEN

**“Who Can Find a Virtuous Woman?”** (Proverbs 31:10).

LET us look into some native homes and see if Solomon's estimation of the Bible Lands' woman holds good today.

**“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.”**

The husband in most cases, does not feel very sure that, **“she will do him good and not evil,”** so he sets a jealous watch over her, and places every valuable he owns under lock and key.

Two things are responsible — bad education, and lack of love.

The girl is kept in ignorance, and married while still a child without regard to the affections of her heart. How can a husband expect to trust in a wife so ignorant and one obtained in such a manner?

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**A Contentious Woman** (Proverbs 27:15, 16).

**“A continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike,”** said Solomon.

**“Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.”**

The force of this proverb is well understood in all its details in Palestine. Such rains as they have thoroughly soak through the flat roofs of those homes, and the water descends in numberless leaks all over the room.

This continual dropping — tuk, tuk, all day and all night, is the most annoying thing in the world, unless it is the ceaseless clatter of a contentious woman.

Let me describe a quarrel I heard part of, and these people would rather quarrel than eat, about anything or mere nothing.

A quarrel started between two neighbor women about a chicken one owned. It lasted fourteen hours. Through all this long period, the “**contentious woman**” ceased not to scream, scold, curse her enemy in a very original way, and so loud that the whole neighborhood could understand every word.

She would run into the room where her victim was, then rush out again, run around the court like a maniac, tear off her veil and tarbouch, tear her hair, pound her chest, screaming as loud as she could all the time. She would stop and get her old shoes and throw them at her victim, all the time trembling like a leaf. Nothing could stop her, until finally she became run down like a clock.

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### **The Ointment of the Right Hand** (Proverbs 27:16).

This refers to a very common custom still frequent these days. The odors of their perfumes is so very powerful that the very street where the people walk is scented. Such ointment cannot be hidden. The right hand, being the most honorable, is used in anointing and cannot be hidden in the bosom, as all the salutations and endless gestures are made with the right hand.

These people will tell you that the right hand belongs to God and the left hand to the devil, so they are exceedingly careful to use the right hand. I terribly offended a native by waving my left hand to her, as I would do at home.

**“The ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself.”**

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### **Two Women at the Mill** (Matthew 24:41).

Usually two women sit facing each other at the mill, both holding the handle by which the upper is turned round on the “nether” millstone.

One of the women whose right hand is disengaged, throws in the grain as needed through the hole in the upper stone. Both women keep their hold on the handle, and pull to, or push from, as two men do with a crosscut saw. Men never grind at the mill. It is very fatiguing work, and only slaves or the lowest servants, or the wives are ever set at grinding.

This grinding at the mill was often imposed upon captives taken in war. In this way Samson was horribly abused by the Philistines, made to grind at the mill like a slave or a woman.

The mill is the most interesting and also important piece of furniture in an Eastern home. Indeed, the grinding of the millstone is the sweetest music to the Oriental; it means there is food in the home, and not famine. It is indeed an evil day when the **“sound of the grinding is low”** (Ecclesiastes 12:4).

Only enough corn is ground for one day's needs, so the mill is in daily use.

The peasant women are modest and wear long robes or dresses which touch the ground as they walk. They always keep their hair covered, but when grinding at home where no man sees them, they remove the veil, uncovering the hair, and bare a greater part of the right leg. Isaiah 47:2 says: **“Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare thy leg, uncover the thigh.”**

Jeremiah 25:10 says, **“I will take away from thee all that would bring joy and happiness and comfort to a village. I will take from thee the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the candle.”**

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**“Graven on the Palms of My Hands”** (Isaiah 49:16).

**“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”**

This is another Scripture reference more easily understood in the light of the East, where tattooing is very common and useful in countries where comparatively few people have learned to read or write.

Isaiah has a beautiful picture in his mind, a picture of a mother and her son, her boy far away. Neither mother nor son know one letter from another, and yet the mother longs for some token to remind her of her absent boy. She has only one means at hand and she takes advantage of that. She goes to a man who tattoos and has something pricked on the palm of her hand that will constantly remind her of the son she loves and longs to see. It will never wash off or wear away, but will remain on her palm as long as her life lasts, where she can see it as she goes about her work.

Isaiah represents the Lord as speaking to Israel first, but to us also.

**“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her body? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”**

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**Thou Wast Not Swaddled at All** (Ezekiel 16:4).

**“Thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all.”**

Only an outcast and neglected baby would be treated like that. Back in Bible days the new babies were well rubbed with coarse salt, to **“make them strong”**; then their arms and legs were bound tightly to their bodies to **“make them straight.”** They were kept bound or swaddled up to forty days.

**“And Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger”** (Luke 2:7).

A great many of the native babies are swaddled today as in Old Testament times, and as the Christ child was swaddled.

**“Thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all.”**

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**Weaning of a Child** (I Samuel 1:24).

Hannah brings Samuel to Eli. **“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her . . . and brought him into the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young.”**

It appears strange to us to read of Samuel's mother taking her child to Eli for service in the temple as soon as she weaned him. However, in that country children, and especially boys, are not weaned until they are three, four and often even seven years of age.

So we see that Hannah did not bring a small baby to the temple for the aged prophet to take care of, but a lad of several years of age.

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**Lost Coin** (Luke 15:8).

**“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?”**

When a Bethlehem woman marries, her bridegroom gives her a wedding gift of ten pieces of silver which she wears on a chain hanging from her curious helmet, with a central pendant. She prizes this gift very much and guards it carefully, because any carelessness on her part would be regarded by her husband as lack of affection and respect for him.

He could even think she had purchased a lover with the lost money and he could, and very likely would, divorce her. These coins were held sacred by the Jews and could not be taken for a debt. The wife could use this money only in case of need in widowhood.

The lost coin of Christ's parable was probably one of this chain of ten pieces of silver. We can understand the woman's concern and anxiety when she lost the silver and why she rejoiced and called in her neighbors to rejoice with her when she found it.

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**“And She Painted Her Face”** Making Her Eyes With Paint (Hebrew). (II Kings 9:30).

The ladies of the Bible Lands have always had the same mode of making themselves beautiful. They **“paint”** or rather blacken their eyelids and brows with kohl and prolong the application in a decreasing pencil, so as to lengthen the eye in appearance to make it almond shape.

The custom of painting is very, very ancient, for painted eyes, faces, fingernails and toe nails are found on the mummies in the very oldest of the Egyptian tombs. They applied to the cheeks colored paints of different shades. The powder from which kohl is made is collected from burning almond shells, or frankincense, and is very black.

The powder is kept in metal containers, and is applied to the eyes by a small probe made of wood, ivory or silver, which they call meel, while they call the whole apparatus mukhuly. A very large number of paint jars of metal and alabaster of all sizes and shapes have been removed from the very oldest tombs in Egypt, so after all cosmetics are not so very modern, but are as old as the desire of the human heart to be beautiful, which means as old as the human race itself.

Painting does not appear, however, to have been by any means universal among the Hebrews.

The notices of it are few; and in each instance it seems to have been unworthy of a woman of high character. Thus Jezebel **“put her eyes in painting”** (II Kings 9:30, margin). Jeremiah says of the harlot city, **“Though thou rentest thy face with painting”** (Jeremiah 4:30); and Ezekiel again makes it a characteristic of a harlot (Ezekiel 23:40). The paint was moistened with oil, and kept in small jars made of horn.

**“And she painted her face.”**

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