



Excerpt from *Palestine Explored* by James Neil

One of the characteristic sights of Palestine, shortly after the harvest has been gathered in, is the measuring out of wheat and barley, which sometimes takes place in the corn-market, but more frequently in the courtyard of the purchaser's house. All families at this time, which is during July and August, lay up in store the wheat that will be required to provide bread for the use of the household throughout the ensuing year, and also barley sufficient for their horses, mules, and asses during the same period. Samples are procured either from the farmer or merchant, and when approved the whole quantity ordered is delivered to the purchaser bound up in sacks. A professional measurer is always present on these occasions, and in the presence of the seller and buyer, or their representatives, duly proceeds to ascertain the contents of each sack. This is done by meting out the grain in a circular wooden measure in the shape of our own bushel measure, but less deep, called in Arabic a *timneh*. The measurer seats himself cross-legged on the ground, and proceeds to shovel the wheat or barley, as the case may be, into the *timneh* with both his hands until it is partly full. Next he seizes the measure, and shakes it strongly from side to side, by means of two or three rapid half turns without raising it from the ground, in order that the grain may settle into a smaller space. This quick shaking together of the corn is a striking part of the process, and is very effective in forcing it to occupy less room. He then fills it further, and repeats the shaking from side to side, going over the same thing again and again until it is full up to the brim. As soon as this is the case, he gently but firmly presses upon it with his hands, so as to drive it into a yet smaller space. Finally, having first made a slight hollow on the top, he takes some more handfuls of grain, and very skillfully constructs a cone of corn upon the flat surface of the *timneh*, which he has now filled. He continues carefully to build up this cone until no more grain can possibly be held, and that which he adds begins to flow over and run down. Upon this the measure is considered to be of full weight, and is emptied into the purchaser's sack. This is the universal method by which grain is now meted out, and the price is always quoted at so much per *timneh*.

These professional measurers are often dishonest, taking bribes from seller or buyer, and in this case are very skilful in cheating either party as it suits their purpose. If it is to their interest to do so, while apparently going through the ordinary process, they can so contrive as to bring the contents of the measure to half a *rotte*, or three pounds, less than the proper quantity, involving a loss to the purchaser

of over six per cent. On the other hand, their dishonesty more commonly favours the merchants and townspeople, who buy from the poor *fellaheen*, the peasants. The cunning of the measurers in this way is said to be brought to the highest degree at *Nablous*, the ancient Shechem. If one of them is that town is bribed by the buyer of wheat, not only does he bring his measure to take up the largest possible quantity, but in raising it up after it is flowing over, he secretly lifts up with the hand supporting the bottom of the measure a considerable quantity of grain, which is so swiftly and adroitly done as to escape the observation of the *fellahh* who is selling it.

I have taken means carefully to ascertain the capacity of the Palestine *timneh*. It is true, different kinds of wheat differ in weight. The following measures give the contents in the case of the best quality. A *timneh* filled up to the brim, without being shaken or pressed, weighs six rattles and one-sixth, or just thirty-seven pounds. The same *timneh*, not only filled to the top but running over, that is, piled up above in the shape of a cone, also without being pressed and shaken, weighs seven rattles and one-third, or forty-four pounds. When, however, the measure in question is not only filled till it flows over, but is, at the same time, shaken together and pressed down, it holds just eight rattles, or forty-eight pounds.

No doubt it is to this simple and familiar custom that our Blessed Lord alludes, when He speaks under an allegory of the recompense of those liberal souls who shall assuredly themselves be made fat. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom [that is, into the capacious natural pocket formed by that part of the loose Eastern shirt which is above the girdle]. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." The above facts lend far more power and definiteness to our Savior's graphic illustration than we should at first sight have supposed it to contain. There is no less than eleven pounds' difference in weight between a "measure" filled to the brim as we should fill it here, and one such as I have described filled according to the bountiful method of Bible lands, when it is "pressed down, shaken together, running over." In this latter case no less than about 30 per cent is added to its worth! Thus largely shall they be rewarded who have learned to imitate the example of their God and Savior in the divine art of generous giving!