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## Contributors and Correspondents.

### DIARY IN THE EAST.

#### EXCURSIONS FROM NAZARETH.

After about a week of sirocco, a change in the wind to westward was most welcome. The weather was still hot, but the heat was not unpleasant now that the air was fresh. The effect of the dry sirocco heat is to parch everything up. I felt that I never before so fully entered into the meaning of those passages of Scripture that describe the rapid passing away of all the glory of man under the figure of the fading of grass and flowers. Day by day I saw this exemplified before my eyes. My attention was the more called to this from the fact that I wanted to dig up and take home with me to Scotland some roots of the splendid anemones, ranunculus, iris, and tulips, which made the hills around Nazareth so brilliant when I first got there.

I put off doing so till after my trip to Tiberias, and the consequence was that the week of sirocco had withered them off, and when I came to look for the flowers they were gone. So completely gone, leaves as well as blossoms, so withered up, that I could not tell where to look for the roots. The ground too, was dried to a hardness more resembling stone than earth. So must the Psalmist have seen the blossoms of his day fade, when he wrote, "As for man, his days are as grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and the sirocco, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more." Perhaps too, in his days, as now, the flowers of the field may have gone by the name of "grass," in common parlance. "Haseesh," grass, is the common word to apply to wild flowers of all kinds among the natives of Palestine. They are of small account with them, and when the doctor's wife and I were gathering the later kinds that still remained in bloom, she was supposed to be getting something from which her husband would concoct his potions. While on the subject of flowers, I may mention what also struck me much, both at Nazareth, on Carmel, and Lebanon. That was, that after the brilliant blossoms of spring were past, there remained on all these hills an abundant crop of low shrubby plants of the nature of thyme, sage, mint, etc., full of fragrance. They seemed to thrive on the dry arid hills, to which their grey-green foliage did not give much of brightness. They irresistibly reminded me of the simile applied to our Lord when he is called not only a tender plant, but also "a root out of a dry ground." It may be in pursuance of the simile that it is added "he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." When compared with the gorgeous colors of the blossoms that preceded them, these plants, "out of a dry ground," had indeed "no form nor comeliness." Seen from a distance they look almost like withered stumps, there was "no beauty" to make one desire them. But come in contact with them, then their attractiveness was soon discovered, brused them, and they emitted the richest fragrance. What fit emblems they seemed of him who, when looked on from the height of a Pharisee's spiritual pride, was but the "carpenter's son," of an insignificant village of rude Galilee; but of whom the heaven-taught faith of the poor woman said, "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." (And is it not so still? Those who look from afar at Jesus of Nazareth see "no beauty in him," while every poor, heavy-laden sinner, who draws near to him in lowly faith, finds him "farther than the children of men," and touching him whom "it pleased the Lord to bruise" for his people's sin, finds a fragrance flow forth as of "myrrh, aloes, and cassia," for, as they touch him, they hear him breathe forth the blessed words, "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace." And then they go away bearing with them some of his own life, his own fragrance, so that he delights in them and says, "the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.")

On April 18th Dr. Vartan managed to spare a little time from his work, and took Mrs. V. and myself for a ride to Sefurieh, one hour from Nazareth, where there are some interesting remains of antiquity. Before setting out he warned us to hide away any watch, chain or glittering ornament we might be wearing, lest it should prove too sore a temptation to any of the inhabitants of Sefurieh. Their reputation was far from good at that time, as there had been several cases of robbery and murder in their neighbourhood lately, of which they got the credit.

Having Dr. Vartan with us, I felt a great protection. He is known in all the districts as "the Hakim," or doctor, and I suspect his company was in that way better than a guard of soldiers. On our way to Sefurieh we passed over the heights

to the north of Nazareth for some distance, and had a very fine view in all directions. We went first to the fountain of Sefurieh, celebrated in the history of the crusaders as the gathering place for their armies on the way to their terrible defeat at Hattin. It was also Saladin's place of encampment. It would always be an attractive place for such purposes, from the abundance of the water, which rises from the ground in six or seven places bubbling up in full freshness, and flowing off in a little stream which we had to ford.

We found many of the inhabitants of Sefurieh bringing donkeys laden with water jars to be filled, and women carrying them on their heads, though Sefurieh is a mile from the fountain. We were at a fault about the track through the thicket and the stream near the spring, and at first had some difficulty in getting any one to attend to our calls for guidance. They eventually did not care to be troubled with strangers, but when Dr. Vartan was recognized they were very civil to us. The village itself is a very tumble-down looking place. Old pillars, and other remains of antiquity are lying about here and there, or inserted in the modern walls. There are some fine architectural remains of an ancient church. It dates from the times of the Crusaders, and was built in honor of the reputed parents of the Virgin Mary, who were said to have lived in Sefurieh. The most interesting remains in Sefurieh are those of a castle, which crowns the hill on the side of which the village stands. A square tower, to the top of which we mounted, commands a wide prospect around. The lower part of the building is supposed to be of Jewish workmanship, and consists of large hewn stones.

Sefurieh was a place of great strength in old days, the strongest city of Galilee in the times of the Romans, and is often spoken of by Josephus in his history. The old stones were interesting to look on, especially with the thought that this was one of the towns of Galilee where, no doubt, our Lord was often seen when he "went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people."

At some little distance from Sefurieh we again dismounted to inspect the large vault-like remains of an old Roman aqueduct. Evidently the place must have been of vast importance in old days than it is now, since such great works were made for conveying water to it. Our ride home in the cool of the evening was very pleasant.

April 29th Dr. Vartan and I started off at 4 a.m. for a long expedition to Beisan, the Beth-shean of Scripture. It was a lovely morning when we rode through Nazareth, and down the steep hill to the plain of Esdraelon. Cuckoos were calling, and larks and blackbirds singing. The sun had just risen when we reached the plain, and appearing from behind Mount Tabor in full brilliance was a beautiful sight. Every thing was pleasant. I had a most excellent horse, and, as Dr. V.'s was also good, we got on at good speed over the plain. The track was in the best possible state for galloping, sufficiently dry to be firm, yet not dusty. The owner of my horse accompanied us on horseback as guide and escort, armed as usual. We rode across the plain to near the western end of little Hermon, and passed round its southern side. The form and elevation of little Hermon rather reminded me of the Pentland hills near Edinburgh. As we rode along the western side of the hill we had a wide prospect across the plain to the range of Carmel westward, and the hills of Samaria southward. The plain itself is a wide picture of desolation, rich of soil to the last degree, but its richness only seen by the luxuriant growth of weeds and wild flowers, except here and there where there were a few patches of cultivation. Great numbers of storks were stalking about, and did not seem much afraid of us. After riding between two and three hours we turned the south-western extremity of little Hermon, and rode through the village of Solem, the ancient Shalim. It is a more comfortable looking village than many I saw, but still does not look as if any of its inhabitants were people likely to be able to build prophet's chambers. There were some flourishing gardens with their usual hedge of prickly pear. We were now at the entrance to the branch of the plain of Esdraelon which, running eastward, divides little Hermon from Mount Gilboa, and which must have been the scene of the great battle of Gideon and of Saul. Turning our course directly south-east we crossed over to the foot of Mount Gilboa, just where the fountain of Jez-eel flows out from a little cave at the foot of the hill. On our way we had a good view of the miserable little village of Zerim-Jezreel, with its one square tower looking solid amid the hovels around it. It stands considerably higher than the fountain, and at a considerable distance from it, on a spur of Mount Gilboa. The name of Mount Gilboa had somehow made me expect one prominent hill like Tabor, but in reality it is a long ridge running east and west, and much steeper and more rugged than little Hermon. A small village is perched at the very top, and is inhabited by a sect of most fanatical Moslems, who will not suffer any Christian to settle among them, or even to enter their village.

(To be continued.)

A CLERGYMAN announced as the plan of his sermon:—1. To prove the purposes of God. 2. The free agency of man. 3. To reconcile the two. Having thus secured the careful attention of his hearers, whilst he proved to their satisfaction the first two points, he said:—"We will leave the third point till we are wiser than we now are."

## NEW YORK LETTER.

The city of New York is still without snow. A little fell lately, but it quickly disappeared. And one moves up and down her streets with comparative comfort.

Since Thanksgiving Day, with its pantomimic processions, (a reproduction of the Lord of Misrule of past days), its roast turkey, and its religious services—of which services many of our ministers take advantage, not to scold the people, but to correct morals, to set municipal and State law right, as well as to give reasons for thankfulness—little of general interest has occurred. But prospectively much is expected, if we may judge from the displays in Broadway, and elsewhere, in view of the Christmas holidays.

Dark times is in every body's mouth. Ruinous sacrifices are being made, if we can believe the merchant's bills that are scattered about on every hand, but go to Broadway on one of our sunny days, and the spread (that is the word here used) not only of broad cloth and cigars, but of silks, seal skin jackets, and all the other of cactera that go to make up a fashionable life: or turn your steps to the Fifth Avenue and meet the endless string of carriages with their coachmen and funkey (as we were wont to call them) in their uniform and robes, and one will be convinced that though Boss Tweed has fled he has not taken all the money with him.

And yet after all times are dull, and many walk the streets of New York too proud to beg and too poor to be, as they are, idle.

But sad and dull as things are, they are not without their compensations in a direction that will gladden every true man and Christian heart. For the heart of New York, if it does not beat as fast, beats more in unison with justice and truth. In matters political good men are coming to the front, while men of inflation find not wind enough to fill their sails. The votes of the people at their last elections were more than ever in favour of law and justice, as well as of the common schools and the Bible in them. So much was this the case that not a few were astonished and taught a lesson that is not likely to be forgotten. In this city beyond all question the Catholic vote commands a majority, but one made up of such materials that like objects without cohesion requires a band to be tied around them. If the minority have not numbers they have strength; not the strength of one or two fused into a mass, but each man a power in himself, giving more than he receives.

From such facts, and such a state of things, the friends of the Bible, as of law and order, have much reason to be encouraged, while it is manifest that the enemy does not fail to take note of the matter, and is quietly preparing for the issue. And we would not be astonished to find that before long they have altered their tactics or put a new plank in their platform.

As an indication of the current of affairs, it is gratifying to note the fact that the "Commissioners of Emigration" have resolved not to land an emigrant "on Sunday." So that the vessels that come into our Saturday are obliged to keep their emigrants till Monday morning. For, while a vast number look upon the Sabbath as of small account, yet the conventionalities that rise out of its existence are of such a nature as to make themselves felt to such a degree that the authorities have seen the alternative of abolishing the Sabbath, or supporting and defending it. But behind all there is a power that rules events, and step by step closes in upon evil, and opens and supports the way of good. And the good contemplated and to be gained will ooze out at many more points than the one at which its name and nature are declared.

The President's message is another matter of much interest, and is producing a profound satisfaction among the thoughtful portion of the community. The message is common property and need not be discussed here. The clause in respect of every voter cannot fail to produce good as well as great results. If it passes into law, it will not fail to cut off a large number of men, that are really, after all, for such purposes, mere chattels, and at the same time it will call into play a vast number of forces that will bring to the surface men of character and mind, that must before long produce very great and beneficial results. It is only to be regretted that the date suggested for such a measure is so distant. But perhaps after all, all things considered, it may be soon enough. Meanwhile the heaven will do its work upon the lump, and by the time appointed it may be as good and wholesome bread to the whole community.

The idea of annexation, in a political sense, is not much talked about by the better class of the people here, but the appropriating feeling of claiming whatever is good among you for ourselves is markedly seen in matters religious. The Rev. F. H. Marling is about to be installed as minister of a Presbyterian congregation here. And I suppose, some little paper with you, to produce a sensation, and perhaps to compensate for their loss in Toronto, had circulated the notion that Dr. Ormiston of this city is about to be called as Mr. Marling's successor. But I think we are safe in saying that they have gone beyond the record.

We may not close without alluding to the fact that not a few of your Canadian ministers have been of late in this city, attracted

no doubt by the fame of Moody and Sankey, who are at present, as you know, in Philadelphia, but who are expected to be in New York in February.

And among others we have observed that the Rev. John McAlpine of St. Mary's, has been lecturing with much acceptance and credit to himself, in Jane street Presbyterian Church. A Scotchman however, he lectured to perhaps the purest Scotch congregation in the city. We saw also that he is to preach to the same people before his return to Canada.

New York, Dec. 13, 1875.

## Westminster Confession.

FROM THE BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

SIR,—I have observed that recently much of the correspondence in your paper has been engaged in discussing the merits of the Westminster Confession. This has excited a good deal of surprise in this section of the church. Upon the general document, as the exponent of Scriptural doctrine, the Union so happily effected in Montreal was based. Various points were earnestly discussed during the negotiations preceding this union, but at the time when it was effected, the greatest unanimity with regard to the basis seemed to prevail. Scarcely, however, had the union been consummated, when the "Confession" was spoken of as a burden too heavy to bear, or as a fetter that hindered the development of the united church, and tied down too strongly her youthful energies. It is not creditable to the intelligence of any one to subscribe a basis so seriously defective. If these defects were felt to exist at the time of the union by those who now complain, it is not easy to reconcile their consistency with other actions. Had the feelings with regard to the "Confession" which have since been manifested appeared before the union, it is doubtful if that auspicious event would have taken place. It is a reflection upon the intelligence of the whole body to have united upon a basis so seriously defective as the Westminster Confession is, by some parties, represented to be. But it is said the "Confession" is only a subordinate standard, that the Holy Scriptures are the supreme standard. While this is true, the "Confession" was taken as a faithful exponent of what the Presbyterian Church believes to be the doctrine of the Divine Word, and it is too soon for consistency to say that it is.

It is, however, quite evident from the correspondence, that there is an under current of opposition to all creeds in general, and to the Westminster Confession in particular. It is to be hoped that this feeling is not as wide spread as appearances would seem to indicate. It is very probable that there are many who take this view, who would be the first to shrink from the consequences to which it leads, could they distinctly see them.

There is nothing more plausible to an unsophisticated mind, than to hold up the Holy Scriptures as the only standard to which it should be required to subscribe, and that all other standards are mere human productions, and consequently not only unreliable, but unnecessary. The Holy Scriptures must be our supreme standard in all matters relating to faith and morals. To the law and to the testimony must be our appeal. But do not all denominations calling themselves Christian, no matter how much of pernicious error may mingle in their belief, profess to take the Scriptures to be the supreme standard of their faith? There is reason to suspect a man who refuses to subscribe to any confession or creed, and who says that the Scriptures are his creed. We cannot tell what he believes. He may be sound in the faith, or he may hold the most deadly error. At first sight it appears to be the best test that could be given of a man's orthodoxy, yet, strange as it may appear, it is the most unreliable. This does not proceed from any defect in the Divine Word, but from the weakness and deceitfulness of the human heart. This test gives no clue to what the man's belief really is, because sects calling themselves Christians, yet holding the most pernicious error, profess to take the Holy Scriptures to be the supreme standard of their faith.

The purity of the church imperatively demands that a document be drawn up, such as the Westminster Confession, expressive of the sense in which the Church understands the Scriptures. This document must be proved by the Word of God. When a church adopts it as her own, we know what she believes. How can two walk together except they be agreed? How can there be peace and harmony in a church in which antagonistic doctrines are held and taught? All subscribing the same confession have a common bond to bind them together in peace and harmony.

When the Westminster Confession was first drawn up, the church was torn in pieces by parties, some of them holding the most deadly errors. Regard for the divine glory and the salvation of perishing souls, led, I may say, constrained, godly and learned men at that time, to meet and draw up the Westminster Confession, expressive of what they believe to be the doctrines and teachings of the Holy Scriptures. It is not too much to say of the body of men who met on that occasion, that, taken as a whole, for piety, learning, intelligence, and ability, they have never been excelled, and it is doubtful if ever equalled, by any other body of men met for a similar purpose. Eternity alone will reveal the influence which that venerable document has exercised in preserving the purity of the Christian Church. The reasons which necessitated the Westminster Confession of Faith then, exists at the present day, with equal, if not greater, force.

But it is argued that the very age of

this Confession must necessarily render it defective, and that all confessions should be remodelled every few years to harmonize with the progressive spirit of the age. This is the favourite argument of all those who are given to change. Can they have forgotten that the Bible is a much older book? But it is inspired. True. But does age impair the truth? Are not the doctrines of the Word of God the same now as when the "Confession" was made? Is not the truth of God the same now as then? The progressive spirit of the age may change, but God's truth never does. Is it not absurd to talk of making God's truth harmonize with the progressive spirit of the age? This bazaar of old age is an idle fancy, conjured up to frighten the ignorant. We are not to reject a system because it is old, nor venerate it merely because it is holy with years. Superficiality, it cannot be denied, is one of the characteristics of the present age, notwithstanding all its boasted learning and progress. No further proof of this is required, than the readiness with which the wildest theories are accepted as verities. Conclusions are jumped at, without taking the trouble to investigate their accuracy, or requiring evidence to prove that they are legitimate.

It is maintained that travel in eastern countries, and a better acquaintance with Bible lands, have thrown so much light on the Holy Scriptures, that the "Confession" being made before this light was enjoyed, must of course be defective. Valuable as has been the information derived from these sources in modern times, it has not led to the discovery of any new doctrine in the Divine Word. It has added the better understanding of certain passages, and thrown light on eastern customs and manners, but it has not changed the doctrines of the gospel. The new views, which many professed to have obtained, will be found on examination not to be altogether new. The errors abounding in the church are not new. They are old errors resuscitated with a new face. "They have already been of old time, which was before us."

It is further agreed that the Holy Scriptures being the supreme standard, of the church, men ought to exercise their own judgment, and form their own opinions from the Word of God, independently of human confessions. This is true. And no church has ever stood up more firmly for the right of private judgment than the Presbyterian Church, or urged more strongly upon her members the duty of studying the Word of God. And it has long been her boast that she admits nothing into her belief unwarranted by the Divine Word, and nothing in her modes of worship for which she could not find authority from the same divine source. In regard to this latter matter it is to be feared that the gold is becoming dim, and the most fine gold change. The man who subscribes a creed without examining whether it is in accordance with the Word of God, cannot be very particular what he believes. Those who do not believe the "Confession" to be in accordance with the Divine Word should not subscribe it. No one is compelled to do so against his will. It is voluntary on the part of every one. If a man subscribes it, he should submit to its teachings. When a man subscribes to it, and then turns round and finds fault with it, it is evident that the defect is in himself, and not in the "Confession." Admitting that a man may change his views after subscribing to it, he should not insist on remaining in the church whose doctrines he does not believe; common honesty should lead him to connect himself with those whose views sympathize with his own.

Allow one man to differ from the standards of the church in one doctrine, another man may claim an equal right to differ from them in some other doctrine. What follows? Universal confusion. Error will be taught openly and authoritatively alongside of truth, as we see among the Congregational Churches of New England, and we may as well fling our standards to the winds. Contenting for the faith be; comes a thing of the past.

It is contrary to the constitution of the Presbyterian Church, as well as opposed to the genius of Presbyterianism, to allow what she regards to be error, to be taught within her pale. The whole church is under the supervision of Presbyteries, and Synods, etc., and which are bound by the most solemn obligations, to see that nothing is taught contrary to what she believes to be the doctrines of God's Word, and of which she believes the Westminster Confession to be a faithful exponent. Responsibility to her great Head, love for the souls entrusted to her care, will not permit her to allow what she believes to be error, to be taught to those who are looking to her for guidance in spiritual things. The responsibility does not rest only on him who teaches error, but on the whole church which tolerates it.

Errorists in all ages have denounced creeds and confessions. These show to the world that they really do believe, the very thing which they do not want the world to know. These tie them down to a particular belief, and prevents them changing chameleon like to catch the popular breath from whatever quarter it comes. When a man has entered the path of error, his course is generally onward in it. Progression in that path and apparent consistency requires that creeds and confessions be flung aside.

In these trying times, when so many are given to change, it will be wise for the Presbyterian Church to take heed to the apostolic exhortation, "Thimotee, beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as such as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."—PUNTSUKOS, Nova Scotia.