

## Letters from Palestine.

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*Written for the Review.*

A SABBATH IN DAMASCUS.

*(Continued from last week.)*

On the Saturday evening of our visit it was thought advisable, in order to make as much as possible of the coming Sabbath, to visit one of the missionaries and secure his help in preparing a programme for the day. Accordingly a cab was secured to the residence of Dr. Smith, to whom the writer had a letter of introduction. On his advice it was arranged to attend the Arabic service at the Irish Mission early in the morning, and afterwards the service in English at the same place. Sabbath morning rose with floating clouds that dimmed the sun and threatened frequent showers. The streets were as muddy as badly paved streets could possibly be. As it would be an unpleasant task to walk to church through so much slush and a hopeless one to find it by streets with countless turnings, it was thought advisable to hire a conveyance, thinking that doing so would not in the circumstances, be a transgression of the Sabbath law. Accordingly after breakfast we entered a cab, and by the help of two or three interpreters gave instruction to drive to the Irish Mission, which these men mindful of the past and slow to follow the progress of events still called the American Mission. When we reached the church the congregation had not yet gathered. Two or three native Christians, however, stood about the entrance ready to give a most cordial welcome to any who might drop in and to explain in an intelligent way and in very good English the different departments of the work. Soon the people began to appear, and before the service began the church was comfortably filled, and before it was far advanced, not only was almost every sitting of the two hundred and fifty or three hundred occupied, but also the standing room at the door. It was the first service in connection with a Foreign Mission Station which we ever had the privilege of attending, and it was certainly enjoyable. Not that a word of it was understood, but the sight of a place of worship filled with those who had been gathered in from false systems of religion was both affecting and strengthening. Moreover they seemed to enjoy the service so much, singing evidently with all the heart, and listening to the discourse with marked attention. The Orientals are, so far as has been yet seen, wretchedly poor singers. We have since heard them on the waters of Galilee, on the plains of Philistia, and on the mountains of Judea and Ephraim, and it has always been the same grating noise like the creaking of a disorderly gate or the rasping of an old saw. The shock will not soon be forgotten which was received on the sea of Galilee, when told that a jolly tar who had been entertaining the company with song was at the moment singing his second melody. The change had not been noticed, and the hope was, therefore, being entertained that there was only one song of the sort in the language. With the knowledge now had of the people, we can explain the singing of that native Christian congregation only by saying that Christianity had improved their gift of song as it had improved their every other natural grace.

Later on was held the service in English. The attendance in comparison with that of the morning was small. It was composed of the English speaking Christian workers in connection with the different missionary organizations in the city and a few of the native Christians who understand English. The preacher for the occasion was Rev. Mr. Stuart, one of the ordained missionaries. Mr. Stuart is a young man, and his sermon might be taken as evidence, if any were needed, that some of the best talent in the church is now engaged in Foreign Mission work.

In the afternoon we accepted an invitation to lunch at Dr. Smith's home. It was an enjoyable visit, the place proving as it did a very oasis of Christian intercourse in the midst of a large unsympathetic non-Christian population. Mrs. Dr. Smith was then only a few weeks out from Glasgow. She will soon prove a strong acquisition to the Mission. Her beautiful Christian womanhood will ever make the home of Dr. Smith a happy illustration of the refining and elevating power of Christian truth when allowed to exert itself in the daily life.

Later on the party returned to the hotel, not venturing to attend evening service in so strange a place, and cherishing the hope that what had been seen and heard through the earlier part of the day would in its own time bear some fruit.

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## NOTES ON BEYROUT.

Beyrout, otherwise known as Beyrouth, Beirut, Boirout, and Berytus, is a city of growing significance. In Bible story it has little prominence, not even the name occurring unless the Berothai of 2 Sam. viii. 8., and the Berothah of Ezekiel xlvii. 10, can be

identified with it. It has, however, in recent times become so prominently associated with the history of Palestine and the Lebanon, that they who desire to gain an intelligent knowledge of the 'Holy Land' as it appears to-day with the different influences that are moulding its history should learn something of Beyrout and its history. Nor should it be forgotten that while possibly unmentioned in scripture it was within the limits of the 'Promised Land,' and was doubtless at times actually under Israelite sway, (2 Sam. viii. 8.)

Beyrout first comes into prominence about the beginning of the Christian era. It was then, it would appear, a flourishing town of considerable population and thoroughly Roman with its temples, theatres, baths, colonnades and porticos. It early felt the power of Christianity, and in the course of time became the seat of a bishopric and an important educational centre. All this with the natural advantages of its site and the beauty of its surroundings went to promise more even in the immediate future. But unhappily the promise was, for hundreds of years, to remain unfulfilled. In the sixth century a terrible calamity visited the city. A violent earthquake laid the growth of generations in ruins, and buried a large part of the inhabitants in the heap. In subsequent years the place partially recovered from its disastrous visitation, but not until the present generation did it attain to anything like its former greatness. During the last few decades the progress has been very rapid and the prospects are that at no distant day the promise of an earlier age may be largely fulfilled.

There are several circumstances that justify such an estimate of Beyrout's future. It is in the centre of a productive district. The western slopes of Lebanon, down to the sea coast, are quite resourceful. The mulberry flourishes, and already considerable silk is manufactured. Vineyards and oliveyards stretch in every direction and will, until the soil and climate change, be to the inhabitants an abundant source of food and revenue. On the lower levels oranges and lemons grow, the oranges of the Sidon district claiming, and not without cause, the supremacy of the east. Cereals also of different kinds will yield a large increase, but from the broken character of the land cannot be cultivated to such good advantage. The rocks may hide much mineral wealth, but of this the visitor hears nothing if there be anything to hear. In all this wealth, Beyrout, because of its location, will over share.

The Bay of St. George, along whose shore Beyrout stretches, makes the best harbor on the coast north of Port Said. The only seas that disturb its waters are those from the north west, and these to no dangerous extent. The Bay of Acre beneath mount Carmel affords considerable shelter, but it is more exposed than that of St. George—sometimes to the serious hurt of ships seeking its protection. This gives Beyrout an important advantage over Haifa and Acre situated on the more southerly bay, and will always secure its supremacy in the trade of the adjacent districts. Were there anchorage at Tyro and Sidon, these places would at least share with Beyrout in the local trade. In neither place, however, is there shelter even for the smaller craft. Either will, therefore, be prevented throughout the future from becoming a serious rival to its more fortunate neighbor.

Beyrout has also the prospect of commanding the trade of the farther east. It is at present the sea-port of Damascus, and through Damascus the volume of eastern trade flows. The prospect, consequently, is that its relation to the great Syrian capital will, in coming years, go to enrich Beyrout with a trade capable of almost indefinite expansion. There is one fact, however, that may well disturb the composure of those who view this prospect with glad serenity. That fact is that by the conformation of the interlying country, either Haifa or Acre, was intended by nature to be the sea-port of Damascus. It is true that either is farther removed from Damascus than Beyrout is, but the latter labors under the disadvantage that the only direct route connecting it with that trade centre lies over the Lebanon and into Lebanon which will ever prove themselves serious obstacles to transportation. For the present this natural disadvantage is more than counter-balanced by the connecting line of railway. But should the projected line between Acre and Damascus be completed, of which several miles were constructed a few years ago, the balance would turn in favor of Acre and Haifa. For freight, like water, naturally chooses a long course on lower levels in preference to a shorter course over higher levels. Beyrout will always have the advantage of a better harbor, but it is questionable that this would prove a barrier sufficiently large to prevent the current of trade from beginning to flow in its natural channel. The future growth of Beyrout, therefore, in some measure depends on the continued insolvency of the Acre and Damascus Railway Company.

*(Continued next issue.)*

Every public officer in Korea is now required to keep Sunday as a day of rest.