

British American Presbyterian

Vol. 4—No. 45.]

TORONTO, CANADA, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1875.

[Whole No. 201

Contributors and Correspondents.

DIARY IN THE EAST.

HAZARETH, TIBERIAS. (Continued.)

Some times we were looking north-east over the well wooded slope of Tabor to the Galilean hills, among which Safed continually stood forth crowning a long steep hill, and well deserving to be supposed to be the "city set on a hill," of Matthew v. We took nearly an hour to ascend Tabor, and were very glad to rest under the fine trees which we found near the convent on the summit. We were invited to enter and rest there, but much preferred the shade of the trees amid the grass and wild flowers, and with a lovely prospect before us. A little tip of Lebanon now peeped over the nearer mountains. I felt it quite an era in my life when thus I first got a glimpse of "that goodly mountain and Lebanon," which, like Moses, I had so longed to see. To see it first from Tabor too, was very delightful, here all alone we had Lebanon, Tabor, and Hermon together, and could recognize the beauty of the words in which the psalmist tells of God's power as seen in creation, "The north and the south, thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in Thy name." And as we think how in that same psalm the unchangeableness of God's covenant with David through David's son, and David's Lord is described, may we not look forward to some happy future day when these glorious "mountains and hills" shall indeed "break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands," when the curse is removed, which now weighs so heavily on the land of Israel, and the veil is taken away from the heart of Israel, and they turned to the Lord. We spent some hours on the summit of Tabor. The large saddle-bags carried by some of the horses contained abundance of ready cooked provisions, which we enjoyed leisurely. Then we wandered about examining the excavations, which have laid bare the large remains of an ancient church. There are still older remains of walls of large hewn stones. One old gateway we found quite deserved its Arabic title of *Bab-ul-Hawa*, "Gate of the Winds." It faces the east, and the strong sirocco wind blew through it so violently that we could hardly stand. But high as the wind was, it had no cool freshness in it, and we were glad to get out of the Gate of the Wind, and take shelter under the trees from both sun and wind. The view eastward from Tabor was quite a new scene to me, for it not only commands a long stretch of the Jordan valley, with the mountains of Gilead beyond, but also the hills around the Lake of Gennesaret. Only a small part of the lake itself is visible from Tabor, but from the position of the hills around it, its form can quite be traced, and as the portion visible lay glittering in the sun, I felt as if this view of itself was enough to reward me for any amount of fatigue.

The hills on the eastern side seemed much of the same character as those I had seen all the way from Korak on the south, bounding the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley, and their peculiar level outline cut into by deep gorges, showed how the plateau land of Bashan rises gradually beyond the deep declivity by which they break down to the deep chasm in which the Sea of Galilee lies.

Refreshed by our long rest, Mr. V. and I started to walk on down the mountain, leaving the others to follow with the horses. We wanted to have a better opportunity of examining the wild flowers, and obvious grasses, and trefoils. Some of the latter had most curious seed. The walk was very pleasant, and we went on until we were uncertain about the tradition sat under a magnificent tree till the others joined us. Black birds were singing most deliciously. It was the first time I had heard them in Palestine, and their sweet song added greatly to the charm of the scene. Soon the W.'s overtook us, and we mounted, and rode off along the foot of Tabor, which soon showed a much more precipitous side than that one which we had mounted. It was here quite thickly wooded, and there was an undergrowth of broom and other gay flowering shrubs. One of these may deserve the name of tree. My friends called it the mock orange. The flower is almost exactly like the orange flower, but has no scent, and the leaves are not nearly so solid as those of the orange tree and have a gray underside. The only drawback to this lovely scene was the heat, and multitude of flies which attacked the poor horses. Mine got desperate, and shook itself so violently every few minutes, that I felt as if I must be shaken off its back. Our track was a very good one, over undulating ground, with only hard and there a swampy bit left by the long continued rains. We only passed one village as far as I remember. The only thing at all worthy of remark on the way was the ruins of two very large Khans standing close together. They date from the sixteenth century, when

they were built for the use of the great caravans that were then wont to travel this, the great road between Egypt and Damascus. Travellers were more plentiful, and certainly much better cared for in Palestine in those days. Even now this place is the scene of a sort of weekly fair for the inhabitants of Tiberias, Nazareth, and the village between, but when we passed it there was not a creature to be seen. We stopped near the ruins to water our horses at an abundant spring, and then passed on our way. It is counted a five hour ride between Tabor and Tiberias, and we took all that to it from B. a pony being so slow.

We were all beginning to feel very tired when, on going up a long gentle slope, Mrs. V. proposed to me to have a canter to the top. She had been at Tiberias before, and knew what awaited us when we surmounted this slope, but did not tell me about it. In that way I had a most delightful surprise. The slope was so gentle that it did not at all prepare me for finding the ground suddenly sink down almost from my horse's feet in a steep declivity, at the foot of which lay Tiberias, while the lake of Galilee was all at once spread out before me, deep down amid the mountains that embosom it. It was near sunset, and I only wish I could convey to my readers some idea of the beauty of the scene under that lovely evening light, and with the last rays of the sinking sun striking on Hermon's snowy crest, and on the mountains on the eastern side of the lake. I was quite unprepared for so much beauty to add to the sacred interest of that lake, on the shores of which our Lord so often wrought his wonderful works, and "spoke as never man spake" in the hearing of the multitudes that crowded around him. There was the lake in the same form of beauty on which our Lord must so often have looked, there were the hills on which he passed whole nights in prayer, there were the waters on which he had walked, when in their wildest storm they owned him their Maker, and obeyed the slightest word of the man Christ Jesus. But where are all the populous cities that studied the margin of the sea, and sent out their thousands to follow the Lord from place to place? Gone, all gone with the exception of this poor little town of Tiberias, and the wretched little hamlet of Medjeh, which still marks the abode of Mary of Magdala. The very sites of most of the great cities where our Lord taught and worked miracles is a matter of doubt, and the endless disputes as to the ruins supposed to represent Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, do but the more strikingly evidence the fullness of the wrath of the words of Jesus, when he spoke of the destruction awaiting those highly favoured, but impudent cities.

After feasting our eyes for some time on the view, we descended the steep road to Tiberias. The town surrounded by walls and shaded by a few palm trees and towers looks well from above, but it is a miserable place. The walls are broken down in many places, partly by earthquakes, which are not unusual in Tiberias. The streets are narrow lanes of poor-looking houses. We rode through them to the convent, where we hoped to stay. It is situated close to the lake, and is said to be clean, at least by comparison with the other houses of Tiberias. As soon as we rode into the convent court, we began to fear there was little hope for us. It is but a small building, and the number of horses picketed in the court showed that a large party was already established there. After waiting a little, a monk came to the door, and politely expressed his regret at the utter impossibility of receiving us into the convent, which was already so full that he did not know what to do with all the travellers in it.

As we had no tents there was now no alternative for us but to go to the house of a Jewess who receives travellers. The first look of things in her house was much better than we expected. Entering a little court, we passed through the sort of large room without a front wall which is so common in northern Palestine, and is called a *Lowan*. We were then taken into a large vaulted room, which, though rather cellar-like, felt delightfully cool in comparison with the outer air, which was almost like the breath of a furnace. The only furniture was one very small table and a huge water-jar, which made me think of the huge water-jars of the feast at Caesarea Phila.

Opposite the door there was one large window without glass, which opened on another court, which was on a much higher level than our room, so that the inhabitants of the court could sit outside their doors and inspect us at their leisure. Below the window was a broad divan with cushions, which served for seat by day and bed by night. Another small room of much the same nature was also put at our disposal. Our servants and some of the people of the house slept outside our door in the open *Lowan*, the roof of which would keep off the heavy dew, while the open side admitted any air that was to be had. After supper we consulted about what was to be done next day. Our plan had been to ride round the shores of the lake examining the ruins of cities here and there, and going on to Safed, stay the night there, and go back to Nazareth on the third day. And the weather being cooler, or at least had there not been sirocco, we could easily have managed this interesting trip, but after our day's experience of the sirocco, we felt it would be impossible to attempt it, especially with such a wretched beast to ride as B. had. The next plan was to get a boat and go in it to Tell-Ham, where are the ruins believed to be Capernaum. In this way we could see the lake without the fatigue of riding. We sent for some fishermen who had a boat they were willing to hire out. Their demands at first were very exorbitant, but they came down a little, and we

engaged them. They wished us to start quite early, as there was then most likelihood of a favorable breeze to help us on our way.

Having thus arranged for the next day we retired early, and all slept well but myself. The small jumpers whose kind is said to reside in Tiberias, were much too numerous and lively to let me rest, so that when it was time to get up, I had hardly begun to sleep. But I was thankful that the others had been better off. We did not get off till near 8 a.m., which was a pity, for the little breeze which there was at first soon died away, and then we had to depend on the ears, which the men used but lazily. The boat was a good sized one, undecked, except a little bit at either end. On this little corner at the stern we sat or reclined, and as I lay there (half-sick with the smell of fish after my sleepless night), I could not but think how the Lord, on this same lake, lay "asleep on a pillow" in "the humber part of the ship," when the great storm of wind arose, and the terrified disciples awoke him with their cry for help. It was easy to believe in the possibility of such sudden storms on the lake of Galilee. The mountains that hem it in are cut here and there by deep gullies, down which the winds must sweep in sudden squalls that will raise the sea at once. Even the slight breeze which we had in starting caused a considerable swell, and as we were carried to the boat by the men, it was a rough considerable waves that broke on the shore. Just as we were embarking, some fishermen were drawing a net to shore full of fishes. It was a most interesting sight, reminding us of the wonderful draught of fishes drawn from this same lake, when the Lord dropped the fisherman of Galilee, whom he thus gave a symbolic proof of his power to make them "fishers of men."

(To be continued.)

The Westminster Confession.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN. Sir,—In reply to your correspondents in your issue of December 10, permit me as briefly as possible to reply to their objections, and define more clearly a position which they do not seem fully to comprehend.

It is true, as one of your correspondents observes, that the recent union of Presbyterians took place on the basis of the then existing standards of both branches of the church, the Westminster Confession being included among its subordinate standards. This being the position of both branches of the church previously, there could be no objection to their uniting on these terms. But the fact that union was accomplished on the basis on which we formally stood, does not at all, on Presbyterian principles, bind us down forever to maintain intact every jot and tittle of these subordinate standards, should it become the mind of the church generally, that it would be more in conformity with the teachings of our ultimate standard—the Word of God—to revise them, or alter our relations towards them. It is quite competent for our Canadian Presbyterian Church to do this, in a constitutional manner at any time, and that it should do so is what we plead for, who desire that our ministers and office-bearers should be freed from the undue pressure of the "traditions of men." And in thus seeking for a greater measure of Christian liberty, with which Christ has made us "free," we are not "disloyal" to our church, but are seeking its good, as we regard it. To do otherwise would be disloyalty to higher principles, to conscience, and to God. They who seek the reform of a church in any particular by constitutional means, are no more disloyal than were, for instance, the American subjects who sought abolition of slavery in opposition to what was then the constitution of the United States.

I should like to know in precisely what light your correspondents regard the Westminster Confession. They do not, surely, regard it as inspired. Do they consider that its antiquity gives it a character of semi-inspiration, or semi-infallibility? If so, the decrees of the Council of Constantine have a still greater claim on our reverence. On what principle are the Westminster Divines of 1649 to be considered more authoritative interpreters of Scripture than the present ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Canada?—that we should be committed for all time to their views on all points of speculative theology? Your correspondents give no good reasons for this, nor can they. They may possibly have heard or read the address given by the present Moderator of our General Assembly at the consummation of union, the very time when one of your correspondents thinks we had all bound ourselves irrevocably to every iota of our subordinate standards. Let me recall to his mind a portion of that address: "Not as though I had attained either were already perfect, as it was the feeling of Paul, even when he had become such an one as 'Paul the aged,' and so it is the feeling of every believer, so should it be the feeling of every church in regard to itself. No church is entitled at one and the same time, to disclaim infallibility theoretically, and claim it practically. We justly revere the men of Westminster in 1649, but they were not inspired prophets more than we, and no larger union will be accomplished if we hold in regard of them, or other churches in regard of their founders, that every part and parcel of what they established is as little to be touched or altered as the words of evangelists or apostles, or indeed, as if they had all been written down in some New Testament Book of Leviticus." It is on these principles, so clearly laid down at the very threshold of the union, that we ask for a relaxation of the rigidity of the Confession.

As to the question whether the Bible

needs any special interpreter, whether it be "the Word," as Roman Catholics say, or "the Confession," as your correspondents say, I appeal to the Confession itself: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all, yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed of salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some places of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, by a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."

The "Confession" here makes a strong distinction between the clear and essential truths of the gospel, and those which are not "alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all." Let the church be as distinct as it chooses in regard to the former; but surely it is not unreasonable to ask that it should not force upon us dogmatic statements which all Presbyterians cannot accept, in regard to the latter. The maxim—"In necessary things unity, in unnecessary things liberty,—in all things charity,"—should surely be as much a maxim of each individual church, as it is of evangelical Christianity. As I said in my last letter, the church has an undoubted right to maintain purity of teaching in all the essential doctrines of Christianity, but on St. Paul's principles of Christian liberty, and on the "Confession's" principles that "God alone is Lord of the conscience," she has not a right to bind down the consciences of her ministers or people to every point of a complicated dogmatic system, embracing much that is speculative and non-essential.

As one of your correspondents appears anxious that I should specify some of the statements of the "Confession," which many of us regard as "doubtful" (I did not say "false"), I will "specify" three—not for the sake of provoking an endless controversy on matters regarding which the greatest theologians have differed—but simply to show what I meant by saying that we consider that the "Confession's" dogmatics and draws conclusions in regard to points on which it would be far better reverently to accept the simple words of Scripture, etc. (The word "similar" in my former letter was a typographical error, and should have read "simple.") Many Presbyterians, in common with the great majority of evangelical Christians, cannot, and do not, accept the dogma known as the "reprobated imperium," which I think all modern commentators agree, is not to be found in the Bible. They do not believe that He who "willeth not the death of a sinner," and who "will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth," has "forsook and to everlasting death, dishonour, and wrath, any of those whom we are elsewhere told He will have to be saved." I think I am safe in asserting that not one-tenth of our ministers hold any such belief, which virtually makes the will of God the source of evil and misery, and I, for one, have never met with any Presbyterian who did. There are also many Presbyterians who, also in common with the great majority of their Christian brethren, believe that, as Scripture tells us—Christ "died for all," "tasted death for every man,"—and not as the "Confession" tells us, that some were "passed by"—ordained to dishonour and wrath—"left included in the redeeming love of God. And believing these things, we do regard the dogmas of the "Confession" on these points as "conveying dishonouring conceptions of God." Furthermore, the greater number of Presbyterians hold the principles of religious liberty to their fullest extent, and do not believe that, as the "Confession" tells us, it is "the duty" of the civil magistrate to "take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemous and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed." Were any "civil magistrate" to interfere in regard to the administration of the ordinances in any Presbyterian Church—even were it to support the most "orthodox" and approved modes of worship—what a storm of indignation would be aroused! Yet, the above is the distinct teaching of the "Confession," which your correspondents would have us humiliate in all points, or leave the church!

The question is not whether some Presbyterians do or do not believe in all the clauses of the "Confession," but whether those who do should seek to force the consciences of those who do not, or ungenerously tell them that they may leave a Church which they love because they cannot adhere to its Confession in all speculative and non-essential points,—touching matters "too high" for any human mind to sound. The non-enforcement of these clauses would not prevent any one who thinks them in conformity with Scripture from believing them as fully as he chose. We ask no authoritative deliverance of our belief regarding them. We simply ask that they may be left open questions, being decidedly non-essential. Are any of our Presbyterian brethren really prepared to say to us: "You may be earnest and devout followers of Christ, sincere believers in the Presbyterian form of Church government, heartily united with us in all the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel,—but unless you are prepared to accept with us certain human opinions regarding speculative and inscrutable matters, we will disown you and unchurch you—send you forth to wander in to other Churches, or to form a church for yourselves!" This may be the voice of a few. It will not, I am confident, be the voice of our church generally,—to whom, surely, the consciences and followings of their living brethren should be dearer than the maintenance intact of any

human document, however ancient and venerable! This "forming of new Churches" on account of differences in minor points, has been the curse of our Protestant Christendom, or its greatest weakness in the eyes of both Roman Catholics and skeptics, and it is directly opposed to the spirit and teaching of both Christ and His Apostles.

Did I ever say that the Apostolic Confession of Faith in Christ did not "comprehend all the doctrines of a saving and sound creed?" On the contrary I maintained that it did. The words of St. Paul (to take one among many) of such eminently simple confessions)—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, or shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved,"—show clearly enough the apostolic idea of a "saving creed." But does this give any warrant for the idea that a "saving creed" must contain dogmatic statements as to the eternal purposes of God,—not revealed in Scripture, and concerning which the most devoted Christians have always differed, and must probably always continue to differ as long as we "see through a glass darkly?" Nothing is more remarkable in St. Paul's teaching than his defence of Christian liberty in regard to the minor matters which, even then, threatened to divide Christians, such as questions of "days," "meats," and even the most important one of circumcision, or uncircumcision. When you "wound the weak consciences" of your brethren, he says, "Ye 'sin against Christ.'" "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything, but a new creature." "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," says St. Paul! But in maintaining its present relations to the Confession, our church demands that its office-bearers shall "know" a great deal more—more many of us think, than, with our present light, can be known.

Undoubtedly, as one of your correspondents says, "there never was need of more faithful men and true" to stand on the watch-tower of the church. But this need is not to be supplied by a rigid formal adherence to a complicated "Confession," but by the anointing and teaching of the Spirit of Truth—making men indeed preachers of Christ, not of the "Confession." Men must be faithful, in the first place, by being true to themselves and their consciences, and if they are faithful and earnest preachers of the "Truth," as it is in Jesus, why should their Christian liberty in minor matters be "judged" by comparing them with the opinions of men who lived more than two centuries ago, and who were certainly influenced by the spirit of their age in regard to various matters—while the general consensus of the Church of Christ has decidedly changed.

As I have no wish to rest the views I have advocated on my own individual opinion merely, knowing by how many Presbyterians they are shared, permit me in conclusion to commend to your correspondents the following extract from a printed sermon by the Rev. G. M. Grant of Halifax, one of the ablest ministers of our Church, one of the most energetic leaders into union, and Moderator of one of the four uniting bodies. The sermon was preached in 1866, before the Synod of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and afterwards published by the request of the Synod for the benefit of its members:

"The Churches have been false to the very principles on which they were based—the rights of individual reason and conscience. 'Where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church,' said Ignatius. 'Where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace,' said Irenaeus. 'He that is good enough for Christ is good enough for me,' said Robert Hall. The churches have not thought so. The founders of each gave it a Confession of Faith and directory of worship, which, like every good constitution and Christianity itself, had both an historical and philosophical basis. Did they mean to put that in place of the Word of God? No! But does our reverence for the church of our fathers require us to stifle free thought and be satisfied with forms of sound words? That is asking us to be traitors to our fathers and unfaithful to the inspiration which God breathes into the souls of every generation of faithful men. Are we alone to have no freedom to criticise, to investigate in that domain in which 'our fathers' walked so freely, because they had faith that there was wisdom in God's Word sufficient for all the wants of the age? Or are we to be unreasonably told that if on any point our opinions become modified, we may leave the Church? What does such ecclesiastical terrorism mean? The 'bribery and corruption of the timid, the offer of a premium on dullness, a premium on indolence, a premium on dishonesty. It says 'abandon thought, all ye who enter here!' Its equivalent word in politics would be 'if any man thinks that the constitution or laws can be amended, let the ingrate renounce his citizenship!' That would be intolerable! It is equally intolerable when doctrinaires would rigorously apply it to the Church. Of old the Pharisees cast out of the Synagogue one whose eyes the Lord had opened, and Jesus met him and said, 'for judgment I am come into the world.' Verily that church is 'judged,' is unchurched, which is anxious to see true servants of the Lord go forth from it because they cannot pronounce perfectly all its shibboleths."

Yours, etc., A. LAY PRESBYTERIAN.

Miss Thompson, painter of the "Roll Call," is engaged upon a picture representing the return from the "Valley of Death."