

THREE MONTHS' WORK AMONG PILGRIMS IN THE HOLY LAND.

The following is a report of the experiences of Mr. W. Lethaby, who was engaged during the spring in distributing Scriptures among the pilgrims of many nations flocking to the Holy Land :—

"With one preliminary sentence of heartfelt gratitude to God for having been permitted to share in the work of Bible distribution among the Pilgrims, and for health and strength and a measure of grace in its execution, I would proceed to details of the commencement, progress, and close of that work during the spring of 1884.

"On Saturday, February 16, the Rev. J. R. L. Hall informed me of the Rev. T. Wolters' wish with respect to myself ; and on Wednesday following I had reached Jerusalem and received from him instructions to engage for three months in the gratuitous distribution, to the pilgrims visiting the Holy Places, of a Gospel to each as far as might be acceptable and desirable, and also to sell to those who wished it a single copy, in plain binding, of the sacred volume at half-price ; it being also requested that a record be kept of all that was done, for satisfaction in the present and guidance in the future.

"On the same day I drew from the Bible Depot in Jerusalem my first supply of Gospels in six languages—Arabic, Armenian, Armeno-Turkish, Modern-Greek, Greco-Turkish and Russian ; subsequently I made the acquaintance of some Abyssinians, and have been able to circulate among them a few Amharic Portions also, which had been on the shelves for years. It was not without some trepidation that I first accosted a Russian pilgrim, and asked if he would please read to me Matthew xi. 28. Finding he could do it, I knew that I was quite safe in my first presentation, and so my work was begun. At the latter end of February comparatively few pilgrims had arrived ; but their paucity allowed of the individual and isolated action, which has been almost always preferable. Thus on one of my first days a Russian and his wife were very grateful recipients, and evidently told others of my object. By the end of the month I had found that the Tomb of the Virgin was one principal gathering-place for pilgrims, and scattering place for a distributor ; but I also realized afterwards that the time of their greatest numbers was not that of my greatest success, as amongst a dozen or more there would probably be one emissary of evil, who would declaim against the Gospel as Protestant books, and so deter others from accepting them, if even he or she did not cause the destruction of a copy or copies (though this end was very rarely attained). I therefore found by experience that the most satisfactory method was to watch from a distance until larger groups were broken up, and so to personally address half a score rather than get rid of twenty copies to as many people.

"On the last day of February I gave away to those returning from the Tomb of the Virgin a large number, but on the next day, preparing for the same course, learned the lesson as to crowds to which I have referred. Yet during the early days of March, Armenians generally were disposed to receive. In one case I regret to say, a priest came to a man, asked for the 'St. John' I had just given him, and to his evident regret, tore it up before his eyes. This was the first case of destruction I had seen, and I was quite able to make him and the bystanders understand that another Eye observed the deed. But it was on March 13 that the greatest 'scene' occurred. I had been distributing outside St. Stephen's Gate to Russians and Armenians for some time, when a couple of ecclesiastical striplings of the latter church came along and declaimed to some Russian women that the books were Protestant and devilish. For a minute or two their tale was disbelieved, but one being snatched from a woman's hand it was torn up at once, and then more than one followed the bad example. I, of course, at once refrained from giving to any extent under such circumstances, but stood my ground, simply proclaiming and reiterating