

Contributors and Correspondents.

DIARY IN THE EAST.

NAZARETH, TIBERIAS. (Continued.)

When I was able to look around me over the lake, the scene was most attractive. The boatmen took us well out into the lake, and in that way we had a fine view of the shores from north to south. The air, I fancy, might have been clearer had there not been a sirocco wind, but even with that, it was clear enough to make the distant shores appear wonderfully near, and a warm rose gradually at the head of the lake, appearing to rise from its very borders. Jafed was still a most prominent object. The hills on the east of the lake seemed to rise from the very shore, and there seemed to be several places where the incident of the swine rushing down into the lake from the hill on which they had been feeding, might very well have taken place. Near Tiberias too, the hills come close down to the lake, but as we went on northwards they gradually retired, leaving that plain of Gennesaret so celebrated by Josephus for its wonderful fertility. It is still as fertile as ever, but the inhabitants are availing who could cultivate it, and the streams that cross it no longer are utilized for its irrigation as in old days. At the southern extremity of the plain a wild glen runs inland to the south-west. In the perpendicular cliffs there still remain those caves of which Josephus speaks as the abodes of robbers, who could only be overcome by soldiers being let down from above by ropes to attack them. The glen now gets its name from the doves which build in the clefts of the rock, as Solomon sings of in his song of songs. We looked with much interest or poor little Mejdal, the ancient Magdala. It lies close to the lake at the south end of the plain of Gennesaret. We passed at some little distance, for it lies at the bottom of a little sort of bay which we were crossing, but there are no remains of antiquity of any interest. Our progress over the lake was very slow, and the heat became intense, till by the time we reached Tell-Hum, we felt quite unable to make any attempt to explore the ruins there. These are extensive and of great interest, especially those of a large synagogue. If the remains are really those of Capernaum, then how often must our Lord have spoken within those walls which now lie prostrate, covered with weeds and rubbish. In view of this, one piece of the ruins has a peculiar interest,—that is a frieze, or entablature, bearing on it the figure of the pot of manna that was preserved in the ark. If it was in this very synagogue that our Lord's discourse on the manna as a type of himself was delivered, then it is another instance of the way in which he made use of familiar external objects to add vividness to his teaching.

The ruins at Tell-Hum come to the very edge of the water. There is no pier or landing place of any kind, but the boat was easily brought up beside some of the old stones which lie in the very water, and thus we stepped ashore. But we just stepped into a wilderness of weeds nearly as tall as ourselves, swarming with mosquitos. As we pressed through this dense mass of rank vegetation, we were like to be suffocated with heat. The day was so far on that the sun was nearly vertical. There was not a single tree or shrub big enough to give us shade, nothing but weeds every where covering all the remains we had been so anxious to see, and making the work of hunting them out quite beyond our strength. There was one ruin close to the lake behind which we sat down for a little, while Mustapha made us some lemonade with water from the lake; there was no other, but the sun was so high in the heavens that it was only by sitting bolt upright against the old wall that we could get any shade at all. I had my thermometer with me, and found it marked 94° in the shade, but that does not give the least idea of the suffocating, exhausting feeling of that sirocco heat. We had not sat long when the boatmen came calling us to return, and none of us had any desire to linger in such a stifling place, where, instead of exploring ruins, our only desire had been to make ourselves as small as possible, so as to keep within the foot or two of shade which the old wall afforded. So we went back to the boat, and set out on our slow progress back to Tiberias. We felt rather sorry that we had not gone to Khan Minyeh, which is further south on the plain of Gennesaret, and where we could see there were beautiful trees beside the abundant water that flows down to the lake, but the fine ruins of Tell-Hum tempted us. One certain advantage there was in going so far north, we had a full view of the lake. The boatmen offered to land us at Khan Minyeh, but we did not care merely to land for a few minutes, and that was all they seemed inclined to allow us.

They seemed almost as much oppressed by the heat as ourselves, putting up the sail as a shade from the sun, and constantly stopping their rowing to drink water from the lake. Mustapha employed himself in telling them stories, some of which, I was told, were wonderful Mohammedan versions of Old Testament history. We

heard hymns as we glided lazily on, and at other times lay dreaming of all the wonders which the lake has beheld. No sound was heard except those that proceeded from our boat. There was not another craft to be seen on all the sea. In fact, there are only two or three boats in existence on it. One or two large water fowl lighted down at some distance from us, but that was the only sign of life until we again neared Tiberias. There it seemed as if half the children of the town had betaken themselves to the lake. I rather envied them, they looked so cool and comfortable in the clear fresh water. Our dark vaulted room felt delightful when we got in from the glare and heat. We had a refreshing meal of tea with some excellent fish from the lake, and then felt equal to sailing forth again. This time we got our horses, and rode a little way south along the shore of the lake to the celebrated hot springs of Tiberias. The worst of the heat was now past, and we did enjoy our ride exceedingly. We went in to see the bath room, where people of all kinds go in together to the hot sulphurous water, higgledy, piggledy. There was no one in the bath, which is a large circular tank, with a platform all round. It looked nicer than I had expected. Fresh water had just been let in, and would stand to cool during the night, being too hot for any one to enter it as it comes from the spring. We saw one of the springs in the open air near the bath-house, and found the water so hot that we could not hold our hand in it above a moment. It looked nice and clear, but tasted most abominable, reminding me of the Dead Sea water. We wandered about the beach for some time picking up shells, and refreshing ourselves by wading in the lake. Here, as every where near the lake, the soil seemed rich to the last degree, as proved by the rank luxuriant growth of weeds and wild flowers. We got back to the town just before night closed in. I just escaped a rather unpleasant scene with my horse.

Ever since I had left Nazareth it had distinguished itself at intervals by the loudest and most defiant neighing when in the neighbourhood of one of the other horses. One of the men evidently thought this defiant conduct might be the preliminary demonstration before a fight, and not only warned me against coming too near the others, but offered to exchange steeds with me. I had been inclined to thank it all nonsense, but this evening found it was quite the reverse. Happily I was off my horse before the fray began, for such a scene of jumping, kicking, biting, and screeching as there was in the narrow lane outside the Jewesses' court. After that I took the man's offer of exchanging with him, and he, on my horse, kept at a respectable distance from every one else all the way back to Nazareth. I was the gainer by the exchange, having a very nice gentle mare which cantered along delightfully, just whining now and then to its foal if it thought it was falling too far behind. I used to wonder at the tiny foals that were kept running after their mothers for long journeys. I have even seen one held by the rider in front of him across the saddle when it was too weak to follow on its own feet.

We intended to make an early start for Nazareth next morning, so wished to have supper and retire early. But this was not so easy as we expected. Mr. V.'s presence in Tiberias had got to be known, and as the Hakim's (doctor's) wife, she was a person of importance whom several people wished to visit. A messenger came to announce some of these visitors; then the people arrived themselves in full dress. Such fancy I not only gay-colored dresses and sort of veils of embroidered muslin or lace, but quantities of jewelry. I fancy they could not be real, but they glittered all the same on neck and arms, and in the hair. One man came alone. He was a Moslem in government employment in Tiberias.

He had been a patient of Dr. V.'s for some serious malady in the throat, and much benefited by his treatment. He still spoke with a very peculiar voice, and was very anxious to know if Dr. V. would not himself come soon to Tiberias. He was in hopes of further advice perfecting his cure, but found it difficult to get a way to Nazareth, besides hardly having strength for the twelve hour's ride there and back. We were very glad when all our visitors left us. The women lingered a long time, sitting staring at us with nothing to say, or merely repeating over and over again the same enquiries as to the health of ourselves and our friends.

At last we were left free to lie down on our divans, and try for sleep; but it was easier to try for it than to get it. My friends were not much better off than myself this night. We thought we must have brought in a large population in our skirts from the boat to add to the native inhabitants, certainly the abundance and liveliness of the insect tribes was something horrible.

Then it was too hot to shut the wooden shutter of the window, and in the court outside a native family sat and talked till late in the night, and after they were gone, a horse and mule that were picketed there, nuzzled their provender and stamped their feet continually. On the other side the natives in the Lewan kept up a lively conversation till quite late. To add to our troubles, we had in a provision of milk for our breakfast, some cats in the courts must have scented it out, and came pouncing down over Mrs. V. and me as we lay on our divan on their way to the milk. Then we had to rise and strike a light, and hunt them out. This happened at short intervals all the night through, so that what with noises, and what with fighting for the milk, I really can hardly say I slept at all.

(To be continued.)

CHRISTMAS.

Were the question, "What is Christmas?" put to any one, he would get no great credit for his intelligence who could not readily, and as he thought, rightly reply, that Christmas is a day observed in commemoration of the birth of Christ, which took place on the 25th of December, 1875 years ago. But were another question put, "Are you sure that Christ was born on that day, and in that month, and in that year?" this might not be so easily answered. Permit me, however, to attempt it.

THE YEAR.

While eastern has long accepted, and seems to have settled the matter, that our Lord was born 1875 years ago, yet we do not go far in the inquiry till we find some holding that he was born A.D. nothing, and others holding as firmly that he was born in A.D. one, while a marginal note in the New Testament informs us that Jesus was born in "the fourth year, before the common account called Anno Domino," so that from this it would appear that our A.D. 1875 should be A.D. 1879. It appears that the fixing of the date of our present A.D. did not take place till the 6th century, and although generally established in the 8th century, yet it was not until the 15th century that it had become universal throughout Christendom.

If we look at Matthew, we learn that Jesus was born in the reign of Herod the Great, and elsewhere we ascertain that Herod died in the year of Rome, or A.U.C. 750, just before the passover, and about two years after the birth of our Lord. If so, then our Lord would be born about A.U.C. 748. Further, Luke informs us that John Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberias, and that at that time "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age." Now, seeing that Augustus died A.U.C. 707, the fifteenth year of Tiberias, who succeeded him, would be A.U.C. 782, deducting therefrom the thirty years of Christ's life, and the two or three years in which Tiberias was associated with Augustus in the Empire ere the latter died, we have A.U.C. 749, the year in which Christ was born. Again, in John we read, "Forty-six years was this temple in building." Now Herod began to build the temple in A.U.C. 782, adding thereto the "forty-six years," we have A.U.C. 778, and deducting therefrom the "about thirty years of age" of our Saviour, we have again A.U.C. 748 as the year of his birth. In addition to all this, the Latin Fathers make the death of Christ to have taken place A.U.C. 782, and if we deduct therefrom the thirty-three and a half or thirty-four years of our Lord's life and ministry, we come again to A.U.C. 748. Thus, from independent data presented by Matthew, Luke, John, and the Latin Fathers, it would appear that our Lord was born A.U.C. 748, and since our Anno Domino corresponds with the Roman A.U.C. 753, we are forced to the conclusion that our Lord was born, not 1875, but 1879, or it may be rather 1880 years ago.

THE MONTH.

While it is said that not less than 186 different opinions have been given concerning the year of Christ's birth, we are told that it has been placed by learned men and Christian sects in every month of the year, and that among the early churches the festival of the nativity was held by some in January, and by others in April or May. The reason for placing it in December seems to have arisen from an erroneous idea that Zecharias was high priest, and that when the angel appeared to him in the temple it was on the day of atonement, and as the day of atonement was in September, John would be born in the following June, and Jesus six months later, and in December; but Zecharias was only an ordinary priest, and was then offering the daily incense in the outer sanctuary. Now, while we have little or anything more substantial than this for placing our Lord's nativity in December, we have not a little against. We know that the Roman taxing was very unpopular among the Jews, and it is far more likely that the authorities would increase this unpopularity, by compelling each to travel to his own city at such a season of the year, being about the height of the cold and rainy season in Judea. It is far more probable that this would take place in the autumn, which was a favorite season for journeying and visiting among the Jews, after their crops had been gathered in, and the pressure of their agricultural toils were over. Besides this, it was contrary to all custom that in December shepherds should be in the fields watching their flocks by night, for while this was the case in the summer months, the flocks were all brought home not later than October, ere the cold and rainy season commenced. Upon the whole, December is one of the most unlikely months, or all the year in which to fix our Lord's nativity, and that in view of all, September has a claim above every other month, a claim which with the information we at present have, cannot easily be set aside.

THE DAY.

The first certain traces of the festival of the nativity, are found about the end of

the second century, and the earliest writer that alludes to it is Clement of Alexandria, who wrote about the middle of the third century, and who, even at that early period, spoke with supreme and scornful contempt of any one attempting to fix the day, or even the year. About this time the Western Church fixed the day, and established the festival, but it was not until the end of the fourth century that the festival was observed by the Eastern Church, and then not on the 25th of December, but on the 6th of January. Among the causes that led to the fixing on the former period, perhaps the most powerful was, that almost all the heathen nations regarded the winter solstice as a most important point of the year, as the beginning of the renewed life, and activity of the power of nature and of the gods. All this was probably regarded as emblematical of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness on the darkness of this world, and causing the day spring from on high to visit our race. In view of all then, we find that while there is no certainty either in regard to the day, or the month, or the year of our Lord's nativity, there is very much that it was not on the 25th day of December, 1875. Truth thus compels us to say, that, in regard to the birth day of our Lord, what was said in regard to the burial-place of Moses, "no man knoweth of it unto this day." D. Glenmorris.

WESTERN CORRESPONDENCE.

(From our own Correspondent.)

Your correspondent spent a few weeks in the Maritime Provinces lately. It is nearly two years since he spent as long a time in that region. He had the privilege of spending more or less time in the following places:—St. John, Truro, Halifax, New Glasgow and Charlottetown. Of the hospitalities he received at the hands of the brethren, and the friendships renewed, this is not the place to speak—suffice it to say that pleasant recollections will ever linger of the intercourse had during that time.

As regards the first named city, your readers will remember that some months ago I gave an account of the success that crowns the labours of Dr. Waters, whom the easterners noticed to leave Ontario, and go down by the sea. What was then said was based on correspondence, I am now able to confirm that account from observation, together with enquiries pushed on the spot. The congregation continues to grow both in numbers and in social position. I cannot speak from observation of the work of Mr. McCrae, who was settled in New St. Stephen's Church some time after Dr. Waters was in St. David's, but I heard on all sides golden opinions of the high character of that brother's preaching, and of the growth that goes on under his care.

Truro is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, settlements of Presbyterianism in the seaboard Provinces. The centenary of the establishment of a congregation there was celebrated a few years ago. The melancholy restlessness and love of change so prevalent on this side of the border has not yet been manifested in Truro, for in all that time but three pastors have ministered to the original congregation, and the third one, the Rev. Dr. McCullough, judging from appearances, may be there many years yet. During the disunionency not less than half a dozen congregations have been set off from the original stock, and yet the stock shows no marks of decay. It is hardly a year since the full half of the families with more than half of the wealth were sent forth on the most cordial terms to form a new charge, which, from the very first, takes standing in the front rank. There are now three congregations in the town, and these are flanked closely by four others which, in the surrounding country, are dotted down at distances of from two to seven miles.

Of Halifax your correspondent did not see a great deal, his visit there being short. Here, as elsewhere, the union works in the best manner. One of your western men occupies a commanding position here as well as in St. John. Your readers know to whom I refer—Dr. Burns, late of Montreal.

In New Glasgow I came into contact with the revival which about a year ago or more, was so largely experienced in the eastern part of the Province. One of the respected pastors of the town narrated to me incident after incident during much of an afternoon, of the solemn and blessed time. Now he told me of a backslider who was quickened again, now of a careless one that was aroused, now of a sceptic that was thoroughly cured of his doubts, and made to glory in the cross in spite of its shame, now of a drunkard that was made sober because of his having received Jesus into his soul, and now of a scoffer who learned to pray instead of to scorn. In no spot in all Canada perhaps was politics more rampant and bitter; yet politics in the offensive aspect was put into the background by the times of refreshing that came from the presence of the Lord. I cannot now recall the numbers that were added to the communion, but they were very large. I was present at a union prayer-meeting of the different congregations. The subject of prayer and address was the renewal of the good work, and the deep solemnity that pervaded the meeting, the agonizing in prayer, the humble confession, and the trust, will not soon be forgotten. One could not but feel that it was good to be there. LEUNAS
Detroit, December 13th, 1875.

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN SWITZERLAND.

The following is an abstract of a letter by the Rev. Gidon Draper, D.D., in the Northern Christian Advocate:

"The National Church of Geneva, consists of fifteen pastors in the city, sixteen in the country, and twenty-five without charges. The churches are but thinly attended, except on festival days, when a popular preacher occupies the pulpit. A sort of circuit system of filling the pulpits is observed, and hence the most different doctrines may be heard from the same pulpit, according to the party to which the preacher may happen to belong. For there, as in many other state churches, the utmost diversity of belief obtains from undisciplined materialism to the strictest Calvinism. No certain sound accordingly is given. The church has liberty that may be called licence. The supreme power is lodged in the consistory, an elective body of thirty-one members. At present the rationalistic party has a majority, and a keen struggle is being waged between it and the evangelical party. Should the rationalistic party prevail and attempt to impose by its authority anything contrary to the conscience of the opposing party, it is believed there would be secession at once. But as every young clergyman in Geneva is evangelical, it is hoped that this action will prevail. The National Church, through the better portion of its members, displays a good deal of activity in benevolent and Christian work. It is manifested chiefly in the following ways: Meetings and Sunday-schools in halls as well as churches; in Bible and Tract Societies; missionary meetings; an organization for the sanctification of the Sabbath; affording pecuniary assistance in sustaining religious services by their brethren scattered throughout Germany, France, and Italy. This church sustains a theological school in Geneva, having five professors—two of whom are evangelical—and attended by forty-five students. All the cantons are in religious matters independent of each other, and each has its own theological institution. In the Canton de Vaud there is a Confession of Faith still retained, and accordingly the church is not to the same degree tainted with Rationalism. One of the most hopeful signs is the increased boldness of evangelical men, not only to declare their sentiments, but to do the work to which God has called them. To meet the attacks of the rational, so-called liberal party, an Evangelical National Union has been formed, whose work is providing preaching in a city and country, familiar meetings by laymen, the publication of religious reading, lectures, catechetical instruction, and infant Sunday-schools. A general meeting of the unions in the various cantons was held lately in the city of Bern. Five countries were represented, and eighty delegates were present. This general union is energetically striving to stem the tide of Rationalism in the State Church, and if there should come a separation of Church and State, there will be an organization from which there can arise a church purer and stronger than the semi-political, semi-liberal one that has gone before.

Dr. Campbell's Case Again.

EDITOR BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

SIR,—I read a long letter in your interesting paper of the 26th November, from a "Lay Presbyterian," who undertakes to defend those who are at variance with the Westminster Confession of Faith. I have no desire to enter into controversy—I merely write to correct several mistakes in regard to facts. He says that the Rev. John Campbell, of the Row, was deposed for preaching the doctrine that "Christ had taken away the sins of the world." This was not the case; he preached the doctrine of universal forgiveness—just what is preached by the Unitarians and Universalists of the present day—and not only so, but he countenanced his followers in their wild manifestations—speaking with tongues, prophesying, and declaring that the latter times had arrived when all these gifts, including miracles, should be bestowed upon the church of God. Mr. Campbell's piety was surely no argument for preaching and upholding doctrines subversive of Scripture truth, as understood by our great Reformers, and by Christians of all denominations throughout the world, embodied in the standards of the Church of Scotland, which Mr. Campbell had solemnly vowed to maintain and uphold. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland were perfectly right in deposing him. It was a stern necessity. The Rev. J. Alex. Scott (not Thomas), and the celebrated Edward Irving were also deposed for upholding similar views. The "Row heresy," as it was then called, spread far and wide, so that the ministers took it up. The Rev. Dr. Andrew Thompson, minister of St. George's Church, Edinburgh, leader of the Evangelical party in the church at that time, preached a series of sermons to crowded audiences, against the dangerous doctrine of universal pardon, which were afterwards published, and did much towards arresting the spread of heresy.

In these days of plausible infidelity and false views on religious subjects, it becomes Christians to "hold fast the form of sound words," and to see to it that they are not led away by that spurious liberality so often met with, that if a man is "holy," it does not signify what doctrines he holds. It would be well for every one to ponder this text, so needful in the present day. "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."—Jer. vi. 16.
I am, yours, respectfully,
J. O.
New York, D. e. 14th, 1875.