

LECTURE.

SYRIA AND THE HOLY LAND.

Being a Lecture delivered by Gregor M. Wortabet, Esq., at the Temperance Hall, Halifax, N. S., September 9, 1856.

SECOND LECTURE.

[As on the last evening, the hall was filled to overflowing long before the hour for the lecture, and many were obliged to leave the building, being unable to find even comfortable standing room.]

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen—

I am happy to be once more among you. I am glad to see so many here, and sorry to learn that a number have been obliged to leave for want of room. I really feel flattered by your kind attention. Last night it was only natural that there should be a large audience. A Syrian from the Holy Land was to lecture in Halifax for the first time, and from the novelty of the thing, many would be induced to come. But it is highly gratifying to my feelings that after that novelty had ceased, so large an audience is again here. I hope that I may be able to tell you something which will repay you for your trouble in coming. I am no orator; I simply relate facts. I leave eloquence to other hands, and there are gentlemen on the platform who are much better skilled in the art than I am. I am anxious to make you love Syria in her associations—to love her as the temple of the Christian faith. Everything which shows the Christian religion to be true is important to us. It makes our faith rise from a worldly to a heavenly point of view. Then we can say "Thy will be done." Which is the happier, the Christian or the Infidel? Where is the truest happiness? We all long for happiness. Yonder young man is working day and night. You ask him why he works so hard? He tells you he is striving to make a fortune, so as to be able to retire from business, and be happy. He amasses a fortune and still he is not happy.—He says now he must get married, in order to become happy. He gets married, and still he is not satisfied. So he goes on continually striving after happiness, but never attaining it. I have traversed the civilized globe, and I have found that everywhere men seek after the shadow, but miss the substance. In order to be happy, we must live for others, not for ourselves. There is a pleasure in making others happy. I can prove this to you by every day occurrences. Take the smoker. He will not perhaps give a beggar a penny to get a loaf of bread, but he will willingly pay you sixpence for a cigar, to smoke with you. Take the drinker. He will spend 4s. or 5s. for a bottle of wine, to enjoy the pleasure of drinking it with a companion. No man can be happy, who lives for himself alone. God knew this principle in our nature, when he took the rib from Adam's side. Look at the miser. He goes about with a ragged coat, and a careworn anxious look, piling money upon money. Is he happy? With all his money he can only breakfast, dine, and go to bed, and so can I. He must have a great idea of happiness! Even children cannot be happy living for themselves alone. Poor little Jane is sick. She is fond of flowers, but cannot go out to pick any herself. Little John makes a bouquet for her, and she is quite delighted with it. Is not little John happy now? Take another illustration. A little boy gets a penny to buy candy. The candy after it is once eaten cannot be reproduced, besides it may spoil his teeth, and make him ill. But suppose he goes and puts his candy money in the Missionary box, then his candy will be reproduced over, and over again, and ten times sweeter. You say, what can a penny do? One penny cannot do much, but a heap of pennies may be enough to pay the passage of a Missionary to a foreign land. After some years a Syrian comes forth, who, with many others, has been converted through the instrumentality of that Missionary, and who has been educated in a school established by him. He says to you, sir, I am your penny. If it had not been for your individual penny, there would not have been the collected pennies, and had it not been for them, the Missionary would not have gone to my country and I should not have become a Christian. There then is the little boy's candy reproduced ten times sweeter. The man must be devoid of all feeling who would not be made happy by seeing the good that his penny has thus done. But we are not done with the penny yet. After ten years more, when the little boy has become a man of thirty, another Syrian comes forth, and explains as the former one did, that he is also the fruit of his penny. Again ten years later another is brought to your notice, and at last after the little boy has left this world, he finds his penny again beyond the grave.

A band of Syrians approach their Almighty Father. They say, here is the man that sent money to Syria to teach us to him we owe all our christianity. Then the little boy hears the heavenly greeting: "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Last night I endeavoured to prove the reality of Christianity, by prescribing the present condition of Syria, and its towns, and showing how remarkably the prophecies with reference to them have been fulfilled. To night I shall with the same view direct your attention to the Man-

ners and Customs of its inhabitants. The best book on Syria is the Bible.

We people of the East are strange people, bashful people. We live much within doors, and few see much of us, except those of our own country. Very few travellers have written correctly of us because they are not admitted into our private circles. We are very fond of old ways. Our customs are just the same now, as they were in Bible times 3000 years ago, and therefore the Bible is the best book on Syria. Some of our customs are amusing, laughable, and interesting. They are altogether different from yours. You take off your hat on entering a drawing-room,—we take off our shoes. This is a custom that comes to us from olden times. Moses was told to take off his shoes on approaching the burning bush. Taking the hat off with us on entering a room would be considered the same as taking off one's coat with you.

The people of Syria may be divided into two great classes. The Bedonins, and the Ishmaelites of the olden times. They inhabit the wilds of Syria, and form a peculiar and highly distinct race. The Bedonin will rob you on the principle that you have robbed him before.—But still the Bedonin is the soul of honor and chivalry. For a description of his character read *Antar* by Hamilton. If you reach the Bedonin's tent and put your hand upon the pole, you are safe,—your life is secure. The Bedonin's are well made and exceedingly handsome, tall, erect and noble looking, with an eagle eye that will look you straight down.—Their food is simply milk and Indian corn.—The Men are constantly away in the desert in search of plunder. The women remain home to take care of the tents. When I first came to America some four or five years ago, I was prepared to adopt the idea that your Indians are the lost ten tribes. But when I visited Minnesota and Iowa and went among the Indians there I felt that there was no fiction greater than the ideas that they were Jews. I saw at once from their customs and manners that they were downright Bedonins.

We know the habit of the Jew. He settles down to make money. Does the Indians do so? No; but like his brother Bedonin in Syria, he loves to rove. You cannot make him settle down in one spot. He has nothing in common with the Jew, except hands and feet, a head and a pair of eyes. He lives in a wigwam, the Bedonin in a tent. The Indian calls the white man pale face, and considers him cowardly; so the Bedonin calls us townsmen a band of women, and regards us as low, mean, powerless people. Go into an Indians wigwam, and the first thing he presents you is the pipe of peace. The Bedonin does the same when you enter his tent. These two nations are also alike in the treatment of their children.—When the Indian child is born, it is strapped tight to a straight board. The mother carries it in this way on her back; and at the same time a load on her head. The Bedonin mother does the same thing and nowhere except among these two nations have I seen this custom. Their lives, habits, and manners are similar. Look also at the Indians features. He has the same eagle eye and commanding look which distinguishes the Bedonin. I speak particularly of the Indian of the interior, some 2000 miles from the sea coast. I do not say that all the Indians are Ishmaelites. Some in South America and some in the United States I am convinced are not. You will ask me how they came over to America. Look at the last three verses of the ninth chapter of I. Kings and you will find that Solomon had a navy of ships at Ezion-geber. You will see in the following chapter that his ships made a voyage once in three years. Again in speaking of Tyrie, the Word of the Lord says "Thy rowers have brought the into great waters, the East wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas." Observe that waters is in the plural. The easterly wind would carry them direct to Gibraltar, and from thence across the Atlantic to America. Historians say that the Indians came by Behrings Straits. I do not believe this, because very few Indian remains are found near Behrings Straits. In fact, the majority of such remains is to be found further south than this place. As to the story of their coming over in a vessel which was driven far out of her course by a storm, and wrecked you may believe it, but I do not. It must have been after dinner talk.—As I remarked last evening, arts was practised in Syria in ancient times, which are now unknown to the world. Why may we not have had as perfect a knowledge of navigation as of the other arts, which we know formerly existed among us? The majestic columns of Petra, and the magnificent temples of Baalbec, remain to prove our knowledge of Architecture, and this country with its ancient inhabitants remains to prove our acquaintance with navigation. I am satisfied that both the Atlantic and Pacific were well known in Bible times.

I will now speak of the Townspeople. I am a townsman myself. Our national character has suffered much by our mixing with foreigners. We have learned from them duplicity in trade. For instance a French or Austrian merchant sends a cargo of merchandize to Syria amounting in value to £1000. His agent takes a false invoice, in which the goods are to be worth only £500, shews this to the custom

house officer, and pays duties on the latter amount only. The Syrian merchant, in order to compete successfully with the foreigner, is obliged to practise the same deception. This duplicity is then, you see, a foreign addition to our character, and by no means a creditable one. Notwithstanding this defect, the Syrian is hospitable, generous, and agreeable. He takes as much pains to be polite, and to make himself pleasing to the old man of eighty, as to the young girl of eighteen. He is as agreeable with the one as he is loving with the other.—There are no hotels in Syria except at Damascus or Jerusalem. When you enter a town you knock at the first door you come to, and then walk in. The servant comes to meet you, and then goes to inform her master of your arrival. The master comes and welcomes you, telling you that his house is yours. You then take off your shoes. In Syria we wear morocco slippers—not such shoes as I wear here, which are like yours. The servant then washes your feet, and wipes them in true Abrahamic style. A pipe is then handed to you. You are not asked whether you smoke or not, it is assumed you do, as smoking is the rule, and not smoking the exception. You may then make yourself perfectly at home in the house. You may stay one two or three days as you please, but you are expected to stay three days. If you then receive a further invitation from the master of the house you may stay three days more and so on, three additional days for every time that the invitation is renewed. The rooms in Syrian houses are large and spacious, and there are separate saloons for women, as they never sit in the same room with men. When you enter a room you find the people sitting all around the walls. It would never do for us to sit in the centre of the room as you do, for as our rooms are always full of smoke, if persons were sitting in the middle of the room, you would be apt to break the neck of a pipe, or perhaps the neck of some person. The seat of honor is directly opposite the door, and every new comer is pressed to take that place.

The host sits near the door. You are not introduced as you are here.—Mr So and so. Mr So and So,—but the host takes you in his arms and kisses you, as much as to say, I take you into my confidence, the person sitting next him does the same, and so on, until you reach the top of the room, where you sit down, take your pipe, and smoke in company with the rest. I do not like this custom very much myself.—When I returned home after my first visit to America, I was kissed all over my face until my cheeks were really sore.

If a Syrian meets a friend on the street, he places his right hand on his head, then on his forehead, then kisses the tips of his fingers, and then bows, which means I sincerely love respect and esteem you. Young Syria has abbreviated this process and merely kisses his hand. After smoking, a servant brings you coffee, as strong as jalap, without sugar or milk, in a cup as small as one of your egg cups. Such coffee as yours would be nothing but dirty water to us. Then iced sherbert (which is just iced lemonade) is brought in on a silver salver.—Having partaken of this, you talk, laugh, and so on, and after one more kiss away you go. Our manner of living and our houses, are altogether different from yours. We are all such great smokers, that we would be smothered in your houses, as there is no convenient way of getting the smoke out of them. Our houses are built in the form of a quadrangle. There is a square room in each corner, with hall rooms between them. The roofs of the houses are flat. We often spend our evenings, and sometimes the whole night there. You read in the Bible of praying on the house-tops.—That is not at all an uncommon thing in Syria.

We recline on rich ottomans. We eastern people are fond of lounging. I like it myself, I do not fancy being stuck up bolt upright on a chair like an Egyptian mummy. We cannot live upon roast beef as you do. The heat fairly makes roast beef of ourselves. They laugh at me at my hotel here for living on vegetables.—We take one meal between 11 and 12 o'clock in the morning, something like your luncheon—a cold chicken with abundance of vegetables of all kinds. We dine at half-past seven on a warm dish made up of meat, minced with vegetables. There is one dish which I am very fond of. I will describe it to you, and if any of you will take the trouble to make it, I will be happy to dine with you. Take a vegetable marrow, scrape out the inside until it is quite thin, fill it with rice and mutton cut into small pieces, and well seasoned with herbs, pepper, and salt, then lay on the top a cauliflower leaf or something of the kind, and let it boil in a saucepan for 2 hours. We never eat meat by itself, but always mix a large quantity of vegetables with it. On this diet we attain to a great age. Old men of 110, 120, and even 130 years, are not at all uncommon in Syria.

Our marriage customs are the most amusing and interesting of all. We are still the people of 3000 years ago—still the same as in Bible times. Look at Isaac's marriage. Abraham said to his servant, go and take a wife for my son, I depend upon your taste in the matter.—Persons are married in a similar way now in Syria. Marriage in Syria is the great epoch in a young man's life. If a boy wants a pair of shoes, his father tells him wait my son until you get married, and so with almost everything else

that he asks for, and thus the young man is very anxious to get married, as he is to have everything then. You say how is he to get married, when he never sees a female? The young people have nothing to do with bringing it about. The father or mother manages the affair. Young men are married at the age of fifteen or sixteen and girls at thirteen. My mother was married when she was eleven, and I was born before she was fourteen. At eighteen she was a widow with four small children. The climate allows these early marriages. Marriages are brought about in this way: The mother sees a young girl who pleases her, and she says to her husband, husband, husband, I think so and so would make a nice wife for our John. Well, says the husband, do you see a female? My mother was married. Happy, oh, she will do well enough to hand him his pipe. Very well then, says he, you go and see her mother, and I will see her father. He accordingly calls on the father, and after a good deal of preliminary conversation, tells the father that he has a very fine daughter, whom he would like to have the honor of getting for his son. If the proposal be agreeable the father replies, sir, the honor is on my head, I shall be proud of an alliance with your house. And now the young people are just as much married, as if the ceremony had actually been performed, although they know nothing about it. They are now betrothed. Some time after the clergyman comes to the house of the father of the young man. The father tells the son to bring a pipe for the clergyman. This is nothing uncommon, as it is always done when a visitor enters the house. But when the clergyman puts his hand on the young man's head, and blesses him, he then suspects what is going on. He knows now that he is betrothed, but whether his future bride is black or white, short or tall, whether she has false teeth or no teeth he cannot tell, he only knows that he is going to be married, as besides having received the blessing his father has given the clergyman the diamond, bracelet, and necklace for his future bride. Her father says to her, Jane bring a pipe. She does so, and the clergyman on taking it, blesses her. Still this does not excite her suspicion, as it is very common for the clergyman to bless the girls; but when he puts the bracelet on her arm, and the necklace on her neck, she then knows that she is betrothed, but as to whether her future husband has woolly hair or straight hair, arms or no arms, a nose or no nose, she is utterly ignorant. You will remember that when Abraham's servant selected Rebecca as a wife for Isaac, he gave her jewels. The poor bridegroom has never yet seen his wife, and cannot for some time yet. The period of betrothal varies from three to twelve months, but three months is the usual period. Next comes the marriage. This occupies four days—from Thursday until Monday. If the Syrians saw your marriages here which are completed in five minutes, they would be astonished. They would say, well, these people do everything by steam, they even get married by steam. Ten years ago a marriage used to occupy fourteen days, but young Syria has shortened the period. Any one, knowing that a marriage is about to be celebrated, may enter the house of the father of the bridegroom. He goes in and finds the house full of people eating and drinking. No invitation or preparation is required, except that you must have your best clothes on—you must have the wedding garment. You find some fifteen or twenty men with long grey beards, carrying round trays of sweetmeets. You refuse to take anything, as you say that you have already eaten enough, but you are pressed to eat, and must eat, as they tell you, the more you eat and drink, the more you show your love to the bridal pair.—So the guests continue eating from Thursday afternoon until Sunday evening. The bridegroom's father, as soon as it becomes dark, says now friends, we must go to church. Marriages are always celebrated at night. A taper is then given to certain of the guests as an invitation to witness the marriage ceremony and the others quietly take their leave. Remember the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.—The bridegroom and his party then leave through the archway. They arrive at the church. The bridegroom does not even yet see the bride, for she is veiled from head to foot. You will remember that Rebecca veiled herself when she met Isaac. Even after the marriage ceremony the bridegroom does not immediately see his wife. The bride and bridegroom are then paraded through every street in town, the bride's party going one way and the bridegroom's another, until they arrive at the house of the bridegroom's father. A little before midnight the cry is heard, the bridegroom cometh, and exactly at that hour the door is shut. Those who are out then must remain out, and those who are within remain in. (The Lecturer here gave a humorous description of a marriage at Tripoli, in which he himself took part as one of the groomsmen. He graphically described the anxiety of the bridegroom to see his wife, his nervousness and trepidation on being told by the mischievous young men among his party, that the bride was old ugly &c. However, the bride turned out to be a very pretty girl.)

The Syrians are all nominal Christians and Mahometans. They are very indolent and ignorant. You will scarcely find five among a hundred who can read. Even with my own, remembrance, when a letter came to Beyrout the