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Religious.

The Holy Land—Palestine, and the Holy Sepulchre.

The cradle of Christianity has ever been full of the deepest interest. In an historical point of view it surpasses almost every other. That land which has been pressed by angels' feet, and over the highways of which the Saviour of mankind walked, has commanded the attention of the great and good of all ages and countries. The places where the Son of God sat and talked with the people—men, women and children—and told them in wondrous words, such as never man spake, of the great salvation sent from heaven, must always be associated with the best thoughts and feelings of believers in the Lord Jesus. Fierce wars have raged amongst the nations of Europe and Asia from the time of the Peter the hermit to the Crimean war, on points relating more or less to this comparatively small portion of the Turkish Empire. Whilst this has been the case the land itself has lain in almost the same state as when the "kingdom of heaven" was but as "a grain of mustard seed." Its branches have now spread out through the world, and the leaves of the Tree of Life first planted there are for the healing of the nations. The present condition of that land offers attractions for the princes of royal blood and of literature. The learned, the pious, and the superstitious alike make pilgrimages to it, but with different objects in view.

We learn from a late English paper that a society is proposed for exploring the Holy Land for Biblical explanation. A long paper has recently appeared in *The Times*, explanatory of the views and objects of the projectors, with names attached, literary and theological, or otherwise distinguished, which we all respect, such as the Bishop of London, Dean Stanley, and the Rev. Samuel Marten, of Westminster, the Dukes of Argyll and Devonshire, Sir Morton Peto, and many others of the highest standing, as forming the committee. They propose to raise a fund for the thorough examination of the country. They believe that if "the same intelligence, zeal, knowledge, and outlay were applied to the exploration of Palestine that have been recently brought to bear on Harlicanassus, Carthage, Cyrene, . . . the result would be an enormous accession to our knowledge of the successive inhabitants of Syria—Canaanite, Israelite, Roman, and, in consequence, a flood of light over both Old and New Testaments." They propose to employ competent persons to examine the following points:—1. The Archaeology. 2. Manners and Customs. 3. Topography. 4. Geology. 5. Natural Sciences—Botany, Zoology, Meteorology. After all that has been done on these points they think that a vast deal of information may be obtained, and verified by unquestionable authority; that facilities of various kinds are now offered unknown hitherto; and, moreover, that Western civilisation is making such rapid advances in the East, that, if the attempt be long delayed much that is now illustrative of the Scriptures will have passed irrevocably away.

Not only is this an exceedingly interesting circumstance respecting Palestine, but another one has just occurred. The Empress Eugenie has addressed a circular to the Queen-Sovereigns of Europe, respecting the church of the Holy Sepulchre, supposed to be the place of the Lord's burial, as follows:

"Travellers who visit the Holy Land are astonished at the degradation which the dome that covers and shelters the Holy Sepulchre has presented for many years. They ask how it is that the Christian Powers have not hastened to put an end to a state of things afflicting to the faithful of all communities. The reason, it must be said, is, that on this land, stained with the blood of the Redeemer, which has been the cradle of the religion of

brotherhood, of peace and concord, pitiful rivalries exist between the different communions, and that in course of time these rivalries have become serious dissensions. Formerly the Latins rebuilt the dome, and ornamented it with inscriptions and emblems which recalled the kind of precedence they then possessed in the enjoyment of this monument. This dome was burned in 1808, and circumstances having given the Greeks a preponderance in Palestine, they profited by it to reconstruct the church, to the exclusion of the Latins. In their turn they applied themselves to covering the monument with inscriptions and images borrowed from their language and liturgy. At present, Greeks and Latins confront each other. One party demands the reconstruction of the dome, as it existed before 1808; the others demand the reconstruction favouring their claim of possession or of vested rights. Two great Powers, France and Russia, animated by the most honourable sentiments, have sought to put an end to these deplorable manifestations. The first endeavour to come to an understanding amongst themselves, then with Turkey; and on September 5th, 1864, a protocol was signed at Constantinople, establishing the accord of the three Governments, and indicating the conditions agreed to with a view of carrying out in common the reconstruction of the dome. But when they proceeded to execute the project, when the architects had prepared their plans, and it was necessary to interpret some slightly dubious clauses of the protocol of the 5th of September, new discussions arose under the influence of local rivalries. Nothing was done, and all was once more left in uncertainty. During this time the ruin of the dome became more and more imminent, the personal safety of the pilgrims who came to pray at the Holy Sepulchre was endangered, and the evil increased until it became a scandal. How could an end be put to this condition of affairs? It was a pious princess, St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine—who at the commencement of the fourth century caused the Pagan temple built above the grotto of the Holy Sepulchre to be demolished, and on the same spot raised, for the first time, the sanctuary destined to cover the tomb of Jesus Christ. Why should not the princesses of all Christian countries, animating themselves with this glorious memory, come to an agreement to carry out at last, under conditions worthy of themselves and of Christianity, the work in which the efforts of diplomacy have not hitherto been able to succeed? Who would refuse to listen to their voice, when, placing themselves beyond the region of politics, strangers to all contentions of ideas, they would speak in the name of piety and of Christian charity, and would address an appeal to the faithful throughout the whole world, on a subject which ought to be equally dear to all? But in order that the work should completely respond to the spirit of Christian conciliation which has inspired it, the simple reconstruction of the dome should not be the only object aimed at. It would be advisable, after having obtained the consent of the Sublime Porte, to entirely rebuild the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on a new plan, and on a larger scale, so that it might afford accommodation for all communions. Thus, for example, there should be on one side a chapel, and even a nave, consecrated to the use of the Latins, and on the other a nave and a chapel reserved for the use of the Greeks. The principal nave should be open to all, and the access of the faithful to the Holy Sepulchre, at present so difficult, giving rise to frequent disturbances, would be freed from all hindrances. The majesty of the new sanctuary should be as much as possible equal that of the sacred associations which are recalled by these sacred places. For these reasons a competition might be opened in which the architects and artists of all countries should be invited to take part, and an international jury might select from among the designs sent by them that which, in a purely artistic point of view, might be deemed the most worthy of so great an idea. As to the funds necessary for commencing and completing without delay the new Church of the Holy Sepulchre, they could be furnished by a universal subscription, at the head of which all the Christian princesses would no doubt vie with each other in inscribing their names."

We have but little sympathy with this reverence for the so-called holy places. The circular is of interest merely as a matter relating to the European courts. Religiously we deem it of very small moment. The future of Palestine has long been a subject of much research and enquiry. The predictions of Holy Writ with respect to it have occupied many able minds, but without coming to any very definite conclusions. It is a common notion that at some period, not far distant, the Jews will again dwell there and become a nation. Whether these opinions are of any value, and worthy of credence, remains for future years to determine.

Missionary Intelligence.

TURKEY.—The measures recently taken by the Porte against the missionaries in Constantinople have directed attention to Christianity throughout the Empire, and caused some agitation. M. Ferrette, of Damascus, states that there, and in other places, the effect was the reverse of what was anticipated. "The Mohammedans would have turned Protestants en masse, and thousands would have done so, had they found missionaries willing to receive them." Persecution, however, is more common. The Rev. H. Jessop writes from Beyrout:—"Two Mohammedans have become Christians in Damascus, and one of them has been brought to Beyrout in chains, and is now confined in the barracks here, exposed to insult and suffering. Chains are on his neck, and he will probably be speedily put out of the way. No one is allowed to see him. It reminds me of the old days of Pagan Rome in her persecution and hatred of Christians. These cases of converted Moslems are multiplying all over the East. There are forty in one part of this empire inquiring in secret."

FRANCE.—The work of evangelisation, under the direction of the French Methodist Conference, is now greatly impeded by financial difficulties. It has been found necessary to abandon the mission in Corsica, where the Wesleyan agent was the only Protestant minister, and the day-school under his superintendence the only Protestant school, and where, after much persecution and opposition, the privilege of liberty of worship had at length been accorded. Other reductions have been made; and various efforts put forth to supplement deficiencies. But the position of some of the brethren, restricted from secular pursuits, is painful in the extreme. "My wife and daughter," writes one, "wear their summer garments through the winter; I have my own cleaned and turned; we cannot renew our provision of linen, although that is necessary. We live chiefly on chestnuts, potatoes, and soup, and yet we cannot do otherwise than spend our money before we get it." And when that essential has been received, it has perhaps quarter by quarter been lowered in amount. It appears that there are only twenty-seven preachers, and that their circuits, in which the itinerant system is modified, as circumstances determine; are several of them far apart, and in impoverished and Roman Catholic districts.

INDIA.—Our Baptist brethren at Delhi report several baptisms, both among Europeans and natives, and that the mission has made solid progress during the year. Every evening the Gospel is preached in four places in the city, and a central school has been commenced in the market-place. The building was formerly the Government College. Fifty children at once entered on the opening of it. Mr. Supper, of the same society, has been fully occupied in journeying through the districts around Dacca, preaching everywhere the Word. The reception he has met with, he says, "has never been better." Several inquirers have presented themselves, who will probably be soon baptized.

WEST AFRICA.—From Abbeokuta we have intelligence of a most destructive fire, attended with considerable loss of property and life. One of the Wesleyan Mission chapels has been destroyed, and one of the churches of the Church Mission Society also fell a prey to the flames. —*Freeman.*

The Mission to the Shans.

The Journal of Mr. Bixby of his second tour to Shanland, contains some accounts which are full of interest. We copy a portion from the *Missionary Magazine*:

Toungoo, Nov. 21, 1864.—To-morrow, if the Lord will, I go forth once more to the borders of Shanland to sow and to reap. I regret that I must go on foot and alone, that is, without any English-speaking companion.

Last year I worked four ponies with great advantage, mounting upon them the native preachers, and riding rapidly with them from settlement to settlement, sometimes forty miles in a day, and found it beneficial to health, while it was a great saving of time.

Our pony was sold to get money to meet an urgent demand, and the others died, one after another, in the rains, apparently from fever, possibly from the effect of last year's hard service.

Now I have no ponies, nor have I any money to purchase with; but we have the same hard road to travel. Starting as I do one month earlier than I did last year, with a large mountainous region newly opened to me, the work of the season must be far more extensive and exhaustive than it was last dry season. It is hard work to traverse on foot vast plains alternating with sand and mud—to climb high hills in the hot sun, to cross deep, rapid streams and ravines—to thread one's way through deep jungles—to follow the wild man's trail—now in a bed of burning sand—now in the bed of a cold mountain's stream—to sleep night after night in forests infested with robbers, bears, tigers, wild hogs and serpents, and to feed on mountain fare. It is a work from which the flesh shrinks, and a "fleshy mind" recoils, but to which the "love of Christ" goes forth with courage and joy.

The Lord Jesus said to the seventy, "Behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves." Did he send them forth single-handed? No; they went into every city and place "two and two." The wisdom of such a procedure does not seem to be fully understood by those who live and move in civilized lands.

Very little dependence can be put upon natives in times of peril.

But I am here alone. God gives me the work to do, and He will take care of me.

23.—Left early in the morning.—Found much difficulty in crossing muddy creeks and marshy plains, took off my clothes and went through, native fashion. Reached Karen Khyoung at ten o'clock and remained until twelve. The people generally came in. This is an interesting field, surrounded by several small Shan settlements, and several large Burmese villages. The chief and many of the villages are Burmanized Bghais; were worshippers of Guadama when I first went among them last year, but now they are building a chapel. Government has granted fifty teak logs, and with some help from me they will be able to build a teak zayat, which I trust will become a centre of light to a numerous population. They want a teacher, but I have nobody to give them at present. Karen Khyoung, however, may be numbered among the out-stations of the Shan Mission, and a resident teacher will, I trust, be found for them soon.

These mountains are all inhabited by tribes as wild and diversified as the hills upon which they reside. First come the Bghais, then the Geokhos and Sankos, then the Broes and Harshwes, who live on the great mountain range; then on the east side come the Padoguns, Red Kurens, and the various Shan tribes. The wildest and most savage of all I have yet seen are the Brees, whose greatest luxury is the fresh blood of beasts. The "way" to the heart of the Shan country lies through these various wild, untutored tribes. God helping me I will quickly take them in passing, and make them the means of a more extended and wide-spread evangelization.

There is no material in this country so favourable for the work of raising up teachers and preachers, as these robust mountain men. They have never come under the blighting curse of idolatry. They are not the subjects of any deeply ingrained superstition. They are confiding, docile, and very fond of study when once their minds have been touched. They have been in a measure preserved by their very remarkable traditions, which seem