

PALESTINE.

FROM BEYROUT TO TYRE.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY REV. L. B. PLATT, AT THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, APRIL 30, 1882.

How I got the idea I don't know, whether from the writings of eastern travellers or from the old Testament or whether I only imagined it, but somehow I did get the impression that about one-half the life-time of Oriental people was spent in salutations—making bows, throwing their arms about each other's necks, kissing and dropping tears down the back of each other's coat collars, then retiring a few paces to sit down and look at each other and then going at it again. I supposed that was the way they invariably passed each other on the street, and being desirous to conform to the customs of the country I tried to prepare myself for it. And I only hoped that I would have an easy and pleasant subject to begin on.

You can imagine then to what a pitch of nervous excitement I was wrought up, when I saw my first Arab coming down the road and knew I had got to meet him and salute him. He was on foot, I was on horseback. My first thought was to get off my horse and prostrate myself on the ground at full length, and I supposed of course that he would do the same, and then I thought the plan would be that we should crawl toward each other on our hands and knees until we bumped heads together and then rise up and embrace and weep. But then it occurred to me that probably I had better wait and watch him and see what he did and then do the same. And so I did. He came nearer—a genuine Arab and no mistake. It was time for him to begin and my suspense was getting awful, because he didn't. He came right on, and I said, "Well, I don't care. It don't make any difference to me. I want to be polite, but if you don't get down in the dirt first, we'll have to dispense with the ceremony, that's all, I'm not at all particular about it." But he came on. He was right in front of my horse now, and I had my eye on him—I thought now it's got to come. I was looking for a clean place on his face to get in a kiss, when without raising his head and scarcely lifting his eyes from the ground, he said, "Good morning!" in plain English and passed on. I was glad that I had waited. But, of course, this was not the usual manner of salutation. The ordinary manner was this, bowing with the hand touching the forehead and the heart. Sometimes it would be in this way, touching first the forehead, then the mouth, then the heart and finally the knee and the foot and the ground. And this is said to be the interpretation of it, placing the hand to the brow, "I honor you;" to the lips, "I praise you;" to the heart, "I love you;" to the knee, foot and ground, "I am your servant."

But, as we might naturally suspect, it means no more usually than our own salutations, when, for instance, two persons pass hastily on the street and say, "How do you do?" and never think of waiting for an answer, or that absurd custom which compels a man to address another whom he has never known or for whom he has no affection or respect as "My dear sir," and to subscribe himself "Yours truly," or "Your obedient servant." There seems to be a necessity for a certain amount of polite and comparatively innocent hypocrisy, to act as a kind of lubricating oil upon the running gear of society and make it work easily and harmoniously. There is something of it even in those who are most strictly honest and despise it most; they can't help it. But in Oriental countries they don't want to help it, they love it, they practice it and develop it into the most refined inconsistencies.

The missionaries will tell you that when they hire a servant and ask how much wages he wants, his answer will be almost invariably, "Oh, nothing at all. It would give me the greatest pleasure to do anything you command me."

"Well, but I want to hire you by the month."

"Oh, never mind, I shall be fully repaid by the extreme felicity it will give me to be of any, even the most insignificant, service to you."

And a man will say that when he hasn't got a copper in his pocket nor a roof over his head, nor a shirt on his back, and apparently with the ut-

most sincerity. And you say to yourself, well, I have read about instances of personal attachment and unselfish love; but, really I never expected to see anything like this. Your heart warms toward that man. You say "I'm going to hire him and pay him double wages if it ruins me. Such generosity is too scarce in this sinful world to let it go unrewarded. But you find out before long that that was just what he thought you would do, and what he meant when he said he wanted nothing, was that he expected you to pay him the regular rate of wages at least and he would get as much more out of you as he could. And if you should take him at his word, no one would be more surprised or could feel himself more grievously wronged, more deliberately and diabolically defrauded than he.

We rested a few days in Beyrout, attended service on the Sabbath in the Arab church, belonging to the Presbyterian mission, and listened attentively to a sermon in Arabic by Dr. Jessup. Now the Arabic is a very peculiar language. The French people have a favorite saying like this, "the English language for business; the Italian for love, the French for ladies; and the German for horses." But however that may be, the Arabic is best adapted to and can only be accurately spoken by anyone who is suffering with the hiccoughs or in the preliminary stages of sea-sickness. About every third word seems to catch on the palate and hang fire; the Arab opens his mouth wide—so that you can look in and watch the process—then he hitches up his shoulders convulsively, throws his head forward and usually gets rid of it and seems to feel better. I asked our servant one day to hand me my over (hiccough) coat, with the Arabic pronunciation and although it was hard to make him understand any English he picked that overcoat right up and gave it to me. The missionaries complain that it is an exceedingly difficult language to master. In fact they never hope to arrive at that state of perfection where they can successfully imitate the native. They want to but they can't, and perhaps it is just as well.

The congregation consisting entirely of Arabs, was by far the brightest assemblage of people that we had seen in Asia. Business men with ideas, women unveiled, with expressive countenances and an air of freedom, altogether unlike the blank, meaningless faces and slavish bearing of the Mohammedan women. They sat, not on the floor, but in pews, opened their bibles and followed the minister in his reading, sang our own hymns translated into Arabic and were so well dressed and respectable that, with our travel-worn clothing, we were glad enough to slip unnoticed into a back seat and a quiet obscurity. In the afternoon memorial services were held in the same church in honor of Pres. Garfield. The sermon was preached by Dr. Eddy, one of the missionaries, and you might have gone the world around and not found another such an audience as was assembled that day out of all peoples under the whole heavens—Europe and the old grey-headed nations of the Orient. Here an Englishman, there a Frenchman, an Italian, a Greek, a Jew, an Arab, a German, an Egyptian, a Russian, sitting side by side in their varied costumes, not half of them understanding a word that was spoken, but all with one purpose to do honor to a man who, by the simple record of an honest and noble life and its calm, heroic and most glorious ending had touched a chord in the human heart that never failed to vibrate with generous sympathy wherever the story was told and the name of Garfield was spoken. And at the same time to show sympathy with a nation, which in its brief career of but a few days as compared with the older nations of the world, has startled them all into wonder and admiration and I think I can say with entire truthfulness, so far as my own experience, has gained for itself already the highest place in the esteem and affections of the whole brotherhood of nations as the youngest and brightest and most promising child of the family.

Next morning we started again on our journey. We parted company with our former Dragoman and employed another with the melodious name of Nejem Abu Khatir, which means, if I remember rightly, the star of Bethlehem or the sword of Bunker Hill or something similar.

He was over fifty years old, had been in all parts of the world, spoke English quite fluently and cared for us with all the kindness and solicitude of a father. He was a Syrian and a Roman Catholic, although so entirely free from superstition and religious formalism that we told him one day that he was more of a Protestant than a Catholic and he answered that perhaps he was. He didn't know that it made any great difference so long as he was a Christian. And a Christian he certainly was. I shall always remember with gratitude and admiration the calm gravity of his manner, his unruffled temper, in all the annoyances and hardships of that long journey—his faithfulness beyond the letter of the contract, his keen judgment and sober wit and substantial character, and if Nejem Abu Khatir is a fair specimen of his race, there is more to hope for in the future of the Syrian people than of any other race in the whole Orient, who seem to have no solid basis of honesty and truthfulness in their natures, no quick and sensitive discernment of right and wrong, no Anglo-Saxon love of the fair thing, no natural-born abhorrence of a lie.

Our road led southward along the shore of the Mediterranean, through the coast of Tyre and Sidon. We rode all day between high bluffs of black, barren rocks and the waves of the sea, tumbling and foaming at our horses feet. We passed the tomb of Jonah and selected the identical rock jutting out into the water, upon which he was so unceremoniously landed without gang-plank or baggage. It was the most convenient place we could find where the whale might approach the shore, discharge his cargo and back water out into the open sea without being stranded, while Jonah clinging hold by the slimy sea-weeds might have pulled himself along over the slippery surface of the rock, until he gained a footing on the beach and started home, the possessor of a rare nautical experience, but not disposed to brag of it. He was buried according to tradition on that very shore, and a large mausoleum of mud with its white-washed dome still marks the spot. This however is only one of his burial places. His summer resort. He has another in the interior at Nazareth where he spends most of his time. And now we came in sight of what was once the magnificent metropolis of Sidon. It was a beautiful sight, rising up out of the bosom of the water, a pyramid of white houses, pinnacled with towers glistening with sunset glory floating in a sea of blue, breaking about it in ripples of flashing gold. The moon was changing places with the sun, imperceptibly and with almost undiminished lustre as we approached the city gate and rode through the principal street to the convent of the Franciscans. We lifted the great iron knocker and let it fall heavily against the iron gate. It was a sound such as only the door of a convent full of the living dead of this world can give forth,—hollow, dismal, sepulchral, awful, as if a graveyard were uncovered and the buried dead knocking on the lids of their coffins to get out. I had never been inside of a convent, but I had read of horrible things and imagined still more horrible that might be done within them, and no cry or sound ever come to the world outside, and when that knocker fell and started the dead echoes, I remembered and believed them all. Presently the gates were swung back by an invisible hand and we rode into the court yard. There was only a dull glimmer of light here and there in the cells of the Monks, and no sound but the heavy jamming of the iron gates behind us, and the pushing of a rusty bolt that seemed to growl, "We've got you now!" Then a lantern appeared on the porch above, and a voice spoke in Arabic, "Are you French?" "No." "Are you Catholics?" "No." There was a moment's dreadful suspense, and opportunity to think on all our past sins as they were fast shown up to us in the prospective light of a stake and a chain and a blazing pile of fagots. And then our Dragoman said in an undertone to us, "They don't like it because you are not Catholics." "Well, what are they going to do about it?" "I don't know, we'll see." A young man came with a lantern and the Dragoman said, "You go with him while I look after the horses." We followed him up a

flight of stairs through a long passage, across a roof, down under an archway into a great dark stone chamber, and then he went off with the light and left us in utter darkness and profound meditation. We tried to joke about it at first, and with some little difficulty started a laugh, but it was weak, and when the walls gave it back to us it fell so dismally dead that we dared not try it again. And then fancies born of that dungeon darkness and death-stillness came rushing—they put on wings and flew. I was carried back to those happy days of my childhood when I could stay home from church on condition that I would look over the pictures in Fox's Book of Martyrs. And they all came back to me. John Rogers in the blazing barrel with his wife and ten children looking on. I counted them over again in imagination as I used to every Sunday, to see if they were all there. Martyrs in every conceivable form to suit the most fastidious, fried, roasted, boiled, stewed, scalloped and fricassed, until appetite was blunted of its edge and taste became dyspeptic, and unless I could have my martyr served upon a gridiron over a slow fire turned often and properly sauced with red hot liquid lead. I didn't care for him. But now that it seemed to be getting a personal matter and the prospect was that I might be the martyr I was not so particular. I could have been satisfied with much less in the way of flavoring. I think we must have sat there ten minutes, when presently we heard the shuffle of approaching footsteps and saw the glimmer of a candle, the door opened, and there stood in it what seemed to be the very Father of all Inquisitors. He held up the candle and glanced under it with keen black eyes,—an old, withered, white-headed Monk, with the crucifix hanging at his waist. Then another came in and a young man who was with me said—"gracious! I believe these fellows are getting ready to roast us." But the appearance of the last Monk was more comforting. He was the picture of jollity and good living, and as he came toward us smiling and extending his hand and jabbering away, first in Arabic, then in Italian, and then in broken French asked where we had come from and said we were welcome, we began to feel greatly relieved, we thought we were all right now, until he asked the question "Are you Catholics?" I pretended that I couldn't understand him for a moment, and then my Puritan blood got up and I said, "No sir I ain't!" "Are you a Protestant?" "Yes sir!" His countenance fell. He looked troubled, and I thought now we are in for it. He said presently, "Protestants are you? Well I am sorry, but—never mind, we won't talk about that, I'm glad to see you!" And he was. There was no hypocrisy about it. He sat down beside us and told us of his 20 or 30 years experience in the convent, that he was a musician and had made an organ himself, and if we would stay over to-morrow we might hear him play it in the chapel. It was Saint somebody's day, and they were going to have a grand celebration, and the old man was as pleased over it as a boy with his first willow whistle. Then he invited us out to supper and sat down at the table with us, talking all the time. Sometimes we understood him and sometimes we didn't, but it made no difference with him. He was just as happy in either case. When we managed to comprehend his mixture of three parts, Italian, to one of French he laughed over it, and when we were puzzled to get his idea, he laughed the harder.

It was a rough board table without any cloth, the plates were tin, the spoons pewter and the knives and forks rusty iron, but the meal was hearty, and the Monks kept filling our plates and urging us to have more, and when we had eaten all we could hold, told us we hadn't eaten anything. And then the bell rang for prayers and the Monks went to the chapel and left us in care of a servant who showed us our rooms for the night, or rather our prison cells, with no article of furniture in them but a clean white bed, a crucifix and a looking glass about the size of a silver dollar. And there we lay down and slept as securely and soundly as in our own beds at home, until the convent bell broke in upon the night with the call to morning prayers, and we got up and started off again on the road to Tyre. It was a desolate sea-

(Continued on Sixth page.)

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