

ARTICLE VIII.

THE CEDARS OF LEBANON.

Editorial Correspondence. Letter of Rev. S. H. Calhoun.

* * * THE region of the Cedars (ten hours ride south-east from Tripoli), is not far from 7000 feet above the level of the sea, and is surrounded on the north, east, and south by a still higher range of mountains. It is open towards the west, and looks down upon a vast mass of rugged mountains, and beyond them to "the great and wide sea." The scenery is most majestic and impressive.

The soil in which the Cedars grow, is of a limestone quality, and so exceedingly rough and stony, as to be entirely unfit for the plough. The whole region around is covered deep with snow, usually from early in December to the middle of April. On the higher summits, we yet [early in July] see many banks, and in some places it never disappears. But though the snow is so abundant, it would appear that the cold is not so intense, as for instance, in New England, where you have less snow than here. You perhaps know that very little rain falls in Syria from April to November, but the amount that falls in the other half of the year is probably nearly or quite as great as the aggregate of your rain and snow for the year. This region around the Cedars is too cold for rain, and hence almost the entire discharge from the clouds is in the form of snow, while at the same time, as far as I can judge, from the reports of the people inhabiting the nearest village, the ice is far less than with you, thus indicating a less degree of cold.

The Cedars are few in number. I have been counting them to-day, and find them to be about four hundred. Our actual count was three hundred and ninety-three. The double trees mentioned hereafter are counted as single trees. I should think that not more than a dozen are less than a foot in diameter. Many of them are two feet, a less number three feet and even four and five feet in diameter. Several of them are from six to ten feet. One that I measured this morning is forty feet in circumference, say two feet above the ground. A little higher it sends forth five immense branches, each from three to five feet in diameter, which shoot up almost perpendicularly, thus, in reality constituting five trees of great size. Many of the cedars are double and a few even triple and quadruple; that is, from one root apparently there grow up two or more trees, united, as one for a few feet, and then separated by a slight divergency, thus forming independent trunks straight and beautiful.

As to the age of these trees, I do not know that history says much. In a chip two inches thick I have counted to-day sixty circles; which I believe you who know better about such matters would make equal to sixty years. A tree of six feet in diameter according to this calculation would be nearly 1100 years old. But as the chip alluded to indicates a very

flourishing growth, and as the yearly increment becomes less, as the tree increases in age and size, it is quite probable that a tree of six feet in diameter may be 2000 years old. At this rate the giant tree mentioned above has probably breasted the tempests of more than 4000 winters; thus making its origin nearly contemporary with the flood. Travellers have been in the habit of cutting their names on these larger trees. One date I find as far back as 1678, at which time, as appears, the circumference of the tree must have been nearly as great as at present. From such data as these we must inevitably refer their origin to a remote antiquity.

The ground occupied by this grove of cedars is not far from 210 yards in diameter in every direction. Twelve of them, the largest and oldest, present to the eye little of symmetry or beauty. The storms and tempests of so many ages, have sadly broken and disfigured their once wide-spread branches, and bowed down their lofty heads. Their majesty in ruins is now their greatest charm. None of the works of man which I have seen, not even the ruins of Baalbec, which are but a few hours distant from the Cedars, so impress and awe my mind. One connects them with the Great Creator above. "The trees of the Lord are full of sap,—the Cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted," Ps. 104: 16. The remainder of the grove consists in general of straight and well-formed trees which reach a height of from seventy to a hundred feet, with wide-spreading and nearly horizontal branches, which gradually diminish in length towards the top. I may also mention a fact which has much interested me. There are two trees of great size, standing about twelve feet apart. A large and high branch of the one has extended itself to the other, and has become most firmly united to it by growth, the bark completely covering the seam. And, what is still more remarkable, the taller tree now apparently depends on that strong arm for its very existence; for, in consequence of an extensive defect near the ground, the vast superincumbent weight would evidently soon prostrate it, were it not so kindly protected by its more aged and stronger companion.

These trees are called by the people the "Cedars of the Lord," thus distinguishing them from other trees of the same kind, which are found in other parts of Lebanon. They are held in most superstitious veneration. A current tradition is, that our Saviour and the eleven apostles on visiting the place, struck their walking staves into the ground, and thence sprung forth the twelve larger trees. No person in all the region would venture to burn a fragment of this holy wood. They tell of some daring individual who ventured to use a little of it in boiling his milk, and immediately he found to his consternation, that his milk had been turned into blood. The inhabitants of one of the higher villages pass the Cedars, and go to a considerable distance beyond, over high and rugged eminences, to obtain their scanty winter stock of wood, not venturing to gather even the smallest branches of these venerable trees. It were well if all superstitions were as useful as this; for to it is owing the preservation of this beautiful grove which the traveller delights to visit.

P. S. *July 26th.* I have just returned from a visit to this remarkable spot with Mr. Calhoun, and can fully subscribe to all he has said about it.

I might add a few items of information. We found among a host of others carved on the trees, the names of Kirby and Mangles, the great travellers; of Isaac Bird, the veteran missionary, who is yet spared to you in America, and later still, of Dr. Eli Smith. These two latter names were very appropriately on the same tree and near to each other.

There is a church (Maronite, I believe), in the midst of the grove. It is rather dilapidated, though a comparatively recent structure, probably from the effects of frost. A priest holds service there on feast days, and is sure to be on hand when there are visitors. Before you leave, he hands you a blank book in which visitors have for years past recorded their names with such comments on such matters as they choose. Some praise the hospitality of the priest, others enlarge on the beauties of the Cedars, but execrate the roads over which it is necessary to go to get to them (they are certainly bad enough, the best of them), while one or two unfortunate individuals seem to have been no better pleased with the Cedars than with the roads, declaring that they were not paid for their trouble. Most make no comment at all. In our case, after we had recorded our names in this book, he presented us with a paper evidently recently written by some Englishman, purporting to be a subscription for repairing the church and surrounding the grove with a stone wall. It will probably be some time before either is done.

At our last meal he brought us some apples, plums, and honey, I presume as a hint that he in turn expected a "backshish," a present, in more current material from us. We saw a hollow in one of the larger trees near the church, in which he sleeps when he chooses to stay rather than to go to the nearest village, an hour distant.

The cones come to maturity only once in two years. This year they are ripe, and we brought away a large number of beautiful ones, chiefly from the oldest tree. The older the tree, the smaller its cones. When the cones fall off they are eaten by the goats, large numbers of which are pastured in the region on the scanty herbage. This is one reason that the trees are not propagated. Not a single young tree is anywhere to be seen.

The weather during our stay of two days was quite cool, though in the middle of July. Woollen clothes and a Bay State shawl were none too thick clothing. At night the thermometer must have fallen nearly to 40°. Our muleteers had to make a fire in order to be comfortable.

One of our greatest inconveniences was the want of a spring or stream of water near at hand; and the muleteers complained much because of the distance they were obliged to take their animals to water. We were able to get plenty of goat's milk from the neighboring flocks; while for meat and fruit we were obliged to send to the nearest village.

No traveller to Syria should fail of visiting the Cedars of Lebanon, both on account of their traditional associations, and their intrinsic grandeur and beauty.

E. A.