NOTE FROM THE REV. J. NIEL.

A letter from the Rev. J. Niel, incumbent of Christ Church, Jerusalem, says:—"I have been so fortunate as to make some interesting discoveries in Tiberias two weeks ago. It should certainly be thoroughly explored. We found the ruins of the ancient city extending from the castle in the north to about a mile beyond the baths on the south—that is, for about two miles and a quarter, and extending most of the way from the shore to the abrupt hills which rise parallel to it." Mr. Niel has also forwarded copies of certain inscriptions which he has found in Galilee and elsewhere. It will be well for travellers to be careful how they purchase so-called ancient inscriptions, as the "carving of inscriptions in ancient character" has become a new and successful branch of industry in Jerusalem.

NOTE ON THE HAMATH INSCRIPTIONS.

BY HYDE CLARKE.

THE Hamath inscriptions excite great interest, and as they will soon be in the hands of scholars, I think it may be useful to publish the results of a cursory examination. This I do, because while in some quarters it is believed these will prove to be ancient and valuable inscriptions, yet in others they are pronounced by men of high authority not to be inscriptions at all, but vagaries of ornamentation. It is likewise doubtful if, on the supposition that they are inscriptions, the characters are ideographs, syllabics, or letters.

My inspection has been, as stated, a cursory one of the copies in the hands of Captain R. F. Burton, and of the small portions printed by Mr. Wilson in the Journal of the American Palestine Fund. The results are consequently open to verification, but they are already sufficient to throw some light on the questions mooted. Thus it appears that the matter consists of recurrent symbols, and that it is presumably composed of characters. I estimated the number of characters at upwards of 500, but they may be found to be more, when the opportunity of careful analysis is obtained.

Of one of these types I found thirty-three examples, of one twenty-one, of two eighteen, and of others the proportions which would appear in an alphabet. Other reasons support this view.

Although there is a figure something like a man with a club and two hands, the bulk of the inscriptions are not ideographs or hieroglyphs, but characters. There appear to be double letters, and possibly ligatures and abbreviations, but so far as can be at present judged the characters are rather alphabetic than syllabic, though some may be found to be so. The hands are found in Himyaritic.

On examining the most frequent characters, I am disposed to assign five as the vowel-aspirates of the old alphabets. Using the most

convenient type symbols for the characters which are not available, these would be represented thus:—

÷	equal to	א, A, ע,	i.e.,	A	vowel	Kh	aspirate.
׀	,,	ה	,,	E	,,	H	,,
⊖	,,	ו	,,	Oo	,,	Y	,,
U	,,	ו, U, V, O	,,	U	,,	V, F, Ph.	,,
O	,,	ע, O	,,	O	,,	W, Hw	,,

ס is probably S.

ע appears to be D.

Other common forms include ׀׀, ׀׀׀, ך, ן, ם, ץ, ⊥,]. These are sufficient to show elements of an alphabet, but many of them conform to the characters of the Himyaritic inscriptions, in which, as translated by Dr. M. Levy, I recognise as identical ע, ן, ב, ך, ך, ש, ש, ך, &c. The mode of writing is different in Hamath. The alphabet is in actual use in Abyssinia.

÷ thus gives us the type of א. This is not really connected with A, but is another type to be recognised in Aramaic, Italic, Palmyrene, and square Hebrew. ÷ is the analogue of א. If this be so, the א of the latter square alphabet has been borrowed from a source more ancient than A in the Phœnician and other alphabets. In Himyaritic ׀ is a bar of division between words and ÷ sometimes assumes the same character.

⊖ appears as a new type, but is the analogue of the Phœnician, which has a corresponding form as in Greek, ε. It is the most frequent letter, occurring thirty-three times. This letter may also be recognised in Phœnician, Aramaic, Old Hellenic, Italic, and Palmyrene. It appears to possess a double form, one less frequent, in which a dot appears on each side of the bar.

U needs little comment; it occurs eighteen times. Its value is 100.

O occurs about ten times. Its value is perhaps 1,000.

The Hamath inscriptions confirm my former opinion that the alphabet as named by the Hebrews is not in its right order, and that the names are not the original names having the significations usually attributed to them, but are representatives of the ancient names, adopted to avoid idolatrous references. All the alphabets of the Hamath class are chiefly founded on the intersections of two crosses, still used by Rabbis, &c., as a secret alphabet.

The words or phrases appear to be read from top to bottom, and may then possibly return, as in boustrephedon and in Himyaritic.

The remains on comparison suggest that there are at least two inscriptions differing in character.

The inscriptions are of such antiquity that if on transliteration they do not conform to a Semitic rendering, I would suggest they should be tried for Georgian, the nearest representative of the Caucaso-Tibetan languages spoken in the region before the Semitic.