The word Palestine always brought to my mind a vague suggestion of a country as large as the United States. I do not know why, but such was the case. I suppose it was because I could not conceive of a small country having so large a history. . . . One gets large impressions in boyhood, sometimes, which he has to fight against all his life.¹

So wrote Mark Twain about the impress of Palestine on his imagination. It is fitting to begin with Twain, for the 1867 trip of the S.S. Quaker City, a trip sponsored by Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Congregational Church and reported by Twain in dispatches to the New York World, inaugurated organized tourism to Palestine. It is not insignificant that the first packaged tour of the Holy Land was conducted by one of America's premier Protestant churches and reported by its greatest author.

In the unmistakable voice of Mark Twain comes a truth about Palestine, the "Holy Land" that is central to understanding the views of Protestant Americans who traveled there.² During their lives they had got “large impressions” about Palestine that both created expectations about what they would see and structured their interpretations and understandings of what they did see.

The fact that Americans would tour Palestine in the period from 1867 to 1914 tells us much about the significance of the Holy Land in the American Protestant mind. In 1867 Palestine was a veritable backwater within the Ottoman Empire. It had little to commend it to travelers except its religious significance. Unlike Greece and Egypt, both of which received far more American visitors, it

¹Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad, or, the New Pilgrim's Progress, Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker City's Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. 392.

had few visible classical sites. Palestine was neither a center of trade nor of government, but was part
of the Ottoman province of Syria and administered by the pashas of Acre (Acco) and Damascus. By the
end of the eighteenth century Jerusalem had dropped so far from European consciousness that the
major English language geography text of the time, Pinkerton's *Modern Geography*, mentioned it not at
all, while discussing Aleppo and Damascus in great detail.

Even by the standards of the late nineteenth century, travel was difficult. There were no
railroads in the region until the 1890s, roads were poor, and wheeled conveyances nearly unknown.
Water was scarce even in Jerusalem, and its quality questionable. Cholera, malaria, and dysentery
were common and illness often was induced by fatigue, thirst, and heat.

Similarly the safety of travelers was not to be taken for granted. During normal times travelers
generally could be assured of their safety within the larger towns and upon the main roads. Political and
religious animosities could flare up at any time, however, endangering the lives of “Franks.”3 As late as
1860 a massive anti-Christian uprising occurred throughout Syria during which hundreds of Arab
Christians were massacred. Palestine was spared only through the intervention of a local Bedouin
leader who, to gain European support in his local struggle against the Ottoman government, offered to
protect the local Christians. This prevented the violence from sweeping into Palestine until combined
European and Ottoman military force restored peace to the region.

Such events attest to the weakness of Ottoman control in Palestine. Constrained by threats
from imperial Russia, a massive foreign debt, administrative corruption, and European intrigues, the
Ottomans were hard pressed to ensure the region's stability. The Bedouin proved particularly
intractable to pacification, and the Ottoman tax system provided little incentive for them to trade herding
and raiding for farming. Although the growing involvement of the European states in the affairs of
Palestine following the Crimean War improved security for travelers, robbery and brigandage remained

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3 Western Christians were denominated “Franks”, a term dating from the Crusader period and the Frankish Kingdom, by
Arab Muslims until well into the twentieth century.
common. In 1869 the first tour of Palestine organized by Thomas Cook & Son (the famous Cook's tours) was robbed while camped outside the walls of Jerusalem. As late as 1898 the Baedeker's guide to Syria & Palestine informed travelers that weapons, while unnecessary on the main roads, proved “indispensable on the others, as weapons, conspicuously carried, add a great deal to the importance with which the ‘Frank’ is regarded by the natives.”4 The guide continues by informing the reader that in certain areas the local Bedouin need to be “hired” to act as escorts and that in the more unsafe areas, like Nablus, soldiers should be obtained from the local commandant to guard the tents.

While one might argue that travelers and guidebooks exaggerated the magnitude of hardship and risk in order to heighten the sense of the exotic and the dangerous, the fact remains that tour groups were attacked and robbed, travelers died of illnesses and injuries contracted along the way, and most suffered from the physical hardship of the travel. In this regard it is important to recall that these travelers were not soldiers, explorers, or pilgrims. They were middle-class American tourists. Many were unaccustomed to the physical demands of such travel, where men and women, young and old were required to spend hours on horse-back in blazing heat under difficult conditions.5

What drove them to endure these hardships was nothing more than the region's religious significance. This was enough, however. The Holy Land had permeated the American psyche from its beginning. This can be seen, as Moshe Davis has argued, in the importance of the Hebrew language


5 This article is not the place to unpack the complex issue of pilgrimage and the question of whether these travelers were to some extent engaged in a pilgrimage. Although there are definitely issues of pilgrimage involved, the more immediate issue is that of tourism and its relationship to American culture and religion. While little attention has been given to American tourists abroad during the nineteenth century some has been directed to domestic tourism of the time. See for example John F. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). There is a growing literature on European tourism, especially English tourism, and its role in the expansion of European culture and colonial rule. See for example James Buzard, The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to “Culture”, 1800-1918 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London: Routledge, 1992). For an attempt to develop a theory of tourism see Dean McCannell, Empty Meeting Grounds: Tourist Papers (London: Routledge, 1992). See also Eric Leed, The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
for the early colonists, the prominence of Biblical names--both geographical and personal--and the use
of biblical metaphors among the American Puritans and revolutionaries to describe their activities in this
“new Zion.”

While it may be argued that many of these Americans were interested in a spiritualized
Palestine, later Americans were very much interested in the physical Palestine. The Holy Land held a
favored place in the nineteenth century American popular imagination, especially the religious
imagination. Late nineteenth century Protestant America popularized the Bible. Sunday Schools,
revivals, Bible conferences, and the Chautauqua Assembly, once described as “no other than a gigantic
Palestine class,” brought the biblical narratives to the people as living history. To complete one's
knowledge of the Bible required a familiarity with the land of Israel. As Philip Schaff, the pre-eminent
American Church historian of the day, wrote:

Palestine has not been inaptly termed “the fifth Gospel.” It is the framework in which the
canonical Gospels are set. I would advise every theological student who can afford it,
to complete his Biblical education by a visit to the Holy Land. It will be of more practical
use to him in his pulpit labors than the lectures of the professors in Oxford or
Cambridge, in Berlin or Leipzig, valuable as these may be.

As Protestants, these travelers were drawn to Palestine because of its religious significance.

But they did not travel to religious sites out of a sense of religious duty, or to participate ritually in the re-


7 Leon Vincent, John Heyl Vincent: A Biographical Sketch (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925) p. 91. For some suggestions as to why this became such a dominant theme see Robert Handy, “Sources for Understanding American Christian Attitudes toward the Holy Land, 1800-1950,” in Davis, Eyes, pp. 41-42, 47, and passim. “The emergence of evolutionary, naturalistic, historical, and critical thinking posed problems for those reared in the certainties of older views of traditional biblical and doctrinal authority,” pp. 41-42. It is the goal of the larger project of which this paper is a part to determine the adequacy of such suggestions.

enactment of religious events. They went to see the “facts,” facts that would demonstrate the truth of their beliefs. The accumulation of such facts was felt to be increasingly necessary in the late nineteenth century as biblical criticism, evolutionary theory, scientific archaeology, and rampant infidelity seemed to threaten the very bases of Christian, or at least Protestant, belief. These travelers were convinced that the land would prove the book, a belief buttressed by the results of Edward Robinson’s archeological researches in the 1830s and 1850s. During that time Robinson, professor of biblical literature at Union Theological Seminary in New York, had verified that local place-names often retained the identification of ancient sites mentioned in the Bible, thereby demonstrating, to some degree, the veracity of the biblical narratives. To a great extent the explosion of travel to Palestine by American Protestants during the late nineteenth century, while made possible by technological and economic changes, was driven by arguments about biblical and religious truth.

This desire to validate the truth of religion, rooted in their Protestant religiosity, both Christocentric and biblocentric, created an image of the Holy Land for which Americans travelers searched and which they found. As Mark Twain noted:


10 The dominance of Scottish Common Sense realism in nineteenth century Protestantism is quite significant here. Its propositional theory of knowledge, its Baconianism, and its assumption that unmediated facts could be translated directly into knowledge served to buttress the claims that the “facts” on the ground in Palestine verified the truth of the biblical narratives. Given the intellectual position of Princeton Seminary in the late nineteenth century and that the three travelers discussed in detail in this paper (see below) are Presbyterian or Reform, this element takes on a particularly significant role. For discussions of this see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Ante-bellum American Religious Thought (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); and Mark Noll, The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).


I am sure, from the tenor of books I have read [about Palestine], that many who visited this land in years gone by, were Presbyterians, and came seeking evidences in support of their particular creed; they found a Presbyterian Palestine, and they had already made up their minds to find no other, though possibly they did not know it, being blinded by their zeal. Others were Baptists, seeking Baptist evidences and a Baptist Palestine. Others were Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, seeking evidences endorsing their several creeds, and a Catholic, a Methodist, an Episcopalian Palestine. Honest as these men's intentions may have been, they were full of partialities and prejudices, they entered the country with their verdicts already prepared, and they could no more write dispassionately about it than they could about their own wives and children.¹³

To illustrate how American Protestant travelers interpreted the Holy Land this article will examine the travel writings of three major figures of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestantism. Although not average or even typical American Protestants, these men represent the three major theological strands within late nineteenth century American Protestantism. Philip Schaff who visited Palestine in 1876-877 was Professor of Biblical Learning at Union Theological Seminary and the founding father of church history in America. Born in Switzerland, Schaff lived for fifty years in the United States and was thoroughly American in his cultural outlook. Although committed to the basic truth of the biblical narratives, Schaff was moderate in his views on the nature of scripture, feeling that neither literalism nor rationalism were adequate to understanding biblical truth. Schaff also was an early proponent of ecumenism, not only among Protestants but with Catholics as well. This is interesting fact given his responses to Catholic ceremonies in Palestine.

Thomas DeWitt Talmage, who visited Palestine in 1889, was a different personality entirely. A Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian minister, Talmage pastored one of the largest churches in the United States--Central Presbyterian in Brooklyn, New York. An ardent defender of traditional religious views, he was an outspoken opponent of Darwinism and higher biblical criticism. Not a particularly deep thinker, Talmage, despite his pulpit success was once tried by the Brooklyn Presbytery for “using improper methods of preaching which tend to bring religion into contempt.” Despite this tendency to antagonize his more staid and confessionally aware colleagues, Talmage spoke vividly and convincingly

¹³ Twain, *Innocents*, p. 413.
to his Brooklyn congregation and for many others who were uncomfortable with the growing challenges to their view of traditional religion.

Henry Van Dyke differed greatly from those two men. A Presbyterian clergyman and professor of English literature at Princeton, Van Dyke was a convinced modernist and rationalist who gave little credence to miracle stories or supernaturalism. Despite this, Van Dyke was no religious pluralist and was completely convinced of the superiority of Protestant Christianity and Anglo-American culture, as were Schaff and Talmage.

Despite vast differences in temperament and theology, the three men exhibit tremendous agreement in describing their trips to the Holy Land. This agreement tells much about the shared understanding of American Protestants despite variations in theology and personality. They know the superiority of Protestantism both as a religion and as the basis for political, social, and technological advance. Additionally, they are unquestionably American in their attitudes toward cultural and material progress and comfortably equate American, or at least Anglo-American values both with Protestantism and social and moral progress.

By the late nineteenth century, books by those few Americans who earlier had traveled to Palestine—missionaries, scholars, and explorers—were popular reading. For example, *The Land and The Book*, by William M. Thomson, a long time missionary in Jerusalem, sold over one hundred thousand copies.¹⁴ This tradition of writing was continued by the American tourists who followed after 1867. Despite the large number of people writing about the country and its sites, few say anything distinctive, as will be borne out later. One last quotation of Twain’s directed to an earlier generation of Palestine books illustrates this fact.

I can almost tell in set phrase what they [his traveling companions] will say when they see Tabor, Nazareth, Jericho, and Jerusalem—*because I have the books they will “smouch” their ideas from*. These authors write pictures and frame rhapsodies, and

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lesser men follow and see with the author’s eyes instead of their own, and speak with his tongue. What the pilgrims said at Cesarea Philippi surprised me with its wisdom. I found it afterward in Robinson. What they said [at] Gennesaret . . . charmed me with its grace. I find it in Mr. Thompson’s Land and the Book. They have spoken often . . . of how they mean to lay their weary heads upon a stone at Bethel, as Jacob did . . . It was very pretty. But I have recognized the weary head . . . They borrowed the idea—and the words—and the construction—and the punctuation—from Grimes.\textsuperscript{15}

This inability to see with one’s own eyes was not limited to Twain’s pilgrims. It was the veritable lot of all who came, as Talmage wrote, to that “land where the most stupendous scenes of all time and all eternity were enacted.”\textsuperscript{16}

Schaff, Talmage, and Van Dyke traveled to Palestine because of their religious beliefs. Despite the differences between Schaff’s irenic, evangelical ecumenism, Van Dyke’s unabashed modernism, and Talmage’s militant evangelicalism, all three shared basic understandings about religion and culture. These understandings, however, were filled with tensions and ambiguities in relation to Palestine and its people, as well as to its religious sites. Although nearly all American travelers were convinced of the basic truth of the biblical narratives, as Protestants they equally were dismissive of the “ecclesiastical traditions” surrounding the numerous religious sites. A visit to Palestine served, therefore, not only to validate their belief in biblical truth but also in Protestant superiority. Co-extensive with this, the trip and the resulting contact with different peoples and faith also confirmed their belief in western cultural superiority or, more precisely Anglo-American cultural superiority, a superiority resulting directly from true religion, namely Protestantism.

Given the significance of such a trip, travel to the Holy Land was not to be undertaken as merely a pleasure excursion. It was linked to deep religious feeling and required sufficient preparation. As the


Baedeker’s guidebook to Palestine and Syria (1912) put it, “Jerusalem, the centre of the three great religions of the world, is not at all a town for amusement, for everything in it has a religious tinge . . . .”17 The religious motivation was summed up succinctly by Henry Van Dyke, “I greatly desired to live for a little while in the country of Jesus, hoping to learn more of the meaning of His life in the land where it was spent, and lost, and forever saved.”

Who would not go to Palestine?
To look upon that little stage where the drama of humanity has centered in such unforgettable scenes; to trace the rugged paths and ancient highways along which so many heroic and pathetic figures have travelled; above all, to see with the eyes as well as with the heart

“Those holy fields
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which, nineteen hundred years ago, were nail’d
For our advantage on the bitter cross”--
for the sake of these things who would not travel far and endure many hardships?18

But what would one see, and how would one understand it? As Philip Schaff asked, “What is the benefit of traveling in the East?” Answering his own question he wrote,

[I]t is an inestimable advantage to see with one's own eyes the birthplaces of the authors of the Sacred Writings, and their surroundings, and to be able to speak from personal observation and experience. Manners and customs are so stationary in the East, that you are transferred as by magic to the age of the apostles, the prophets and the patriarchs. A flood of light is thrown on the meaning of innumerable passages which appear strange at a distance, but quite natural on the spot.19

But this realization, this awareness could come about only if one approached the trip with the appropriate attitude and sufficient knowledge. “The benefit of travel depends upon the disposition and


preparation of the traveler. . . . The more knowledge we carry with us the more we shall bring back. Multitudes of travelers return as ignorant and as empty as they start."\textsuperscript{20}

In order to supply travelers with the necessary knowledge, the Presbyterian clergyman John Fulton wrote a book of over 700 pages designed to help the Christian (read Protestant) see the Holy-land as it should be seen.\textsuperscript{21} Organized “along the lines of our Saviour's journeys,” this book provided travelers with an understanding of the scriptural import of every town and site, a knowledge of geography and history, as well as a familiarity with and a skepticism of the “superstitious traditions” attached to many of the holy places.

The end result of such an informed visit could only be for the good, since “no honest man can visit the Holy Land and remain an infidel.”\textsuperscript{22} The land was adequate to demonstrate the truth of biblical narrative, and these travelers use their experiences in Palestine as occasions for extended illustrations on the biblical stories. The desolation and loneliness of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho provides an opportunity for reflection on the parable of the “good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), a man carrying his bed-roll in Joppa engenders a reflection on Jesus curing the paralyzed man, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (Mark 2:1-14, Luke 5:17-28), the women of Bethlehem with their traditional head covering remind these travelers of Ruth who held out her veil to Boaz who filled it with six-measures of barley (Ruth 3:15).\textsuperscript{23} Underlying this, however, was an assumption about the unchanging nature of life in the area. Unlike the tremendous technological and intellectual progress of Gilded Age America, life in Palestine was understood as being “stationary,” to use Schaff's word, and contemporary life, therefore, could be used to illuminate the Bible.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{22}Talmage, p.7.

\textsuperscript{23}See for example Talmage, pp. 9, 53; Schaff, pp. 304-305, 224-225; Van Dyke, pp. 88, 135-136. Such illustrations could be multiplied indefinitely.
Perhaps no more succinct summation of this function of visiting Palestine has been given than that provided by Philip Schaff. Entering Palestine from Egypt, as did the Hebrews, Schaff commented that a “visit to the Sinaitic Peninsula goes far to strengthen one's faith in the truthfulness of the Mosaic narrative against the attacks of skeptical critics who have never been there.”

While traveling in the Holy Land demonstrated to American Protestants the validity of the biblical stories, it did not encourage them to accept all the local “superstitions” regarding biblical events. Commenting on the experience of being in Sinai, Schaff writes that the region is “replete with silly legends which disturb the gravity of a Protestant traveler, and yet show the deep local impression of the Mosaic events.”

The silly legends and ecclesiastical traditions that most disturbed these men were those surrounding the sites of Jesus' birth and passion, the Church of the Nativity and Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Their responses to these two locales says much about their relationship to the Holy Land and its inhabitants. While Bethlehem received much praise when compared to the “degradation” of the surrounding Muslim towns, the weaknesses of its versions of Christianity were obvious. Satisfied to visit the locale of the Savior's birth, nearly all the travelers vented their hostility at the behavior and rituals of the various Catholics who shared the sites.

It is impossible to approach this place without a feeling of deep emotion, springing out of these high and holy associations. The legends and puerilities of monastic tradition may safely be disregarded; it is enough to know that this is Bethlehem where Jesus the redeemer was born.

All found the array of lamps, altars, and ornaments bewildering. Although (rhetorically) willing to grant the possibility that grotto under the Church of the Nativity may have been the true place of Jesus' birth, they remained skeptical. And while the impression of the place might turn the mind to the “power

24 Schaff, p. 196.
26 Schaff, p. 222.
and beauty of the simple Scripture account of that Christ-child,”27 the present state of the grotto provided “little suggestion of the lonely night when Joseph found a humble refuge here for his young bride to wait in darkness, pain and hope for her hour to come.”28

But it was about the center of the world, the navel of the universe, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher itself that these men most directly voiced their skepticism at Catholic claims.

Talsmage is the most extreme. He ignores the Church of the Holy Sepulcher completely. When he tells his guide to take him to the site of Golgotha Talsmage means the rise above Jeremiah's Grotto, not the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.29 He visits it not at all, and is vehement in his rejection of its claims to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion and entombment.

While Empress Helena, eighty years of age and imposed upon by having three crosses exhumed before her dim eyes, as though they were the three crosses of the Bible story, selected another site as Calvary, all recent travellers agree that the one I point out to you was, without doubt, the scene of the most terrific and overwhelming tragedy this planet ever witnessed.30

Henry Van Dyke is only somewhat less rigid. He does visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher twice, the second time only at the insistence of a traveling companion. There, he finds little to his taste. The Chapel of the Crucifixion he describes as “a little room, close, obscure, crowded with lamps and icons and candelabra, encrusted with ornaments of gold and silver, full of strange odours and glimmerings of mystic light.” It leaves him unsatisfied, claustrophobic, and “thirsty for the open air, the

28Van Dyke, pp. 91-92.
29Talsmage was among those Protestants, especially Anglicans, who accepted the identification of the site above Jeremiah's Grotto as the location of Calvary and the Garden Tomb as the place of Jesus' burial. This locale, also known as "Gordon's Calvary" or "Gordon's Tomb" after the British general Charles George Gordon who had claimed that that site, a skull shaped rise outside the present city walls, was the true location of both Golgotha and Jesus' tomb.
30Talsmage, p. 39.
blue sky, the pure sunlight, the tranquility of large and silent spaces.” He flees in search of such openness. But to where? To the “cool, clean, quiet German [Protestant] Church of the Redeemer.”

Schaff, who attended both the Latin and Greek celebrations of Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, takes on the issue directly.

I cannot say that I have been favorably impressed. I would gladly recognize piety and devotion to Christ even under the crude and distorted forms of superstition. But I could not restrain the feeling that this is not the worship “in spirit and in truth” which our Savior demands.

It is an amazing tax on our credulity that we should believe in the identity of these sites. The whole thing is overdone and thus almost undone. To be sure, millions of Catholics, Greek and Roman, have no more doubt about the genuineness of these localities than they have about the crucifixion and the resurrection itself, and deem it a profanation to call in question a tradition so old, venerable, and general. But a Protestant who puts his Bible above all the traditions of men, and the worship of God in spirit and truth above all ceremonies, has certainly a right to demand good reasons for all this. The Church has never claimed geographical and topographical infallibility, and it is no heresy to dissent from any of the monkish traditions concerning the holy places in Palestine.

While “monkish traditions” and “silly legends” disturbed the “gravity” of these Protestant travelers, it is most interesting to see what “silly legends” the Protestant traveler was himself wont to repeat, especially when such validated his view of reality. Perhaps most telling in this regard is the manner in which these men treat the towns of Hebron and Bethlehem, Nablus and Nazareth.

The opposition they devise between the corresponding pairs is shockingly formulaic. Hebron, a Muslim town, was revered by Muslims, Christians, and Jews as the home of the patriarchs and matriarchs and the location of their tombs. It was, however, particularly un-accommodating to Christians, and nearly every writer is compelled to comment upon the religious fanaticism of the local inhabitants. One may begin with the Baedeker's Guidebook to Palestine and Syria for 1898. "The
Muslims of Hebron (El Khalil) are notorious for their fanaticism, and the traveler should therefore avoid coming into collision with them. The children shout a well-known Arabic curse after the ‘Franks’, of which of course no notice should be taken.”

But what about these travelers? Schaff reports that Hebron has been for centuries “a hot-bed of Mohammedan insolence and fanaticism.” Henry Van Dyke writes that, “The modern town has about twenty thousand inhabitants, chiefly Mohammedans of a fanatical temper, and is incredibly dirty. Fulton, informs his readers that the local Muslims refuse to let Christians enter the Mosque covering the Tomb of the patriarchs and matriarchs and comments on the incredible filthiness of the town.

Upon coming to Bethlehem, however, these men see things much differently. Schaff observes:

We are not disappointed in our expectations. The scenes of nature harmonize better than the people with our faith, and yet they contrast favorably with their Moslem neighbors. We are saluted with smiles, and not with scowls, as in fanatical Hebron.

It has an air of industry, thrift, and comfort which are very rare in the East, though not equal, of course, to a town of the same size in Europe or the United States. . . . The inhabitants number about 5,000, and are nearly all Christians of the Greek Church.

The women of Bethlehem have the reputation of superior beauty, and rival in this respect their sisters in Nazareth. . . . Some of them may have crusaders' blood in their veins. It is a remarkable fact that the birthplace of Christ, and the home of his childhood and youth, though dilapidated and groaning under Turkish misrule, should bear witness to the superiority of Christian women over all other women.

Or, Van Dyke.

34 Baedeker's (1898), p. 134. In Arabic Hebron is referred to as El Khalil (the friend) after Abraham who was the friend of God.

35 Schaff, p. 211; Van Dyke, p. 99; Interestingly, Fulton, claims that the inhabitants on Nablus are known for an excessive politeness which makes business dealings with them quite protracted. His book is the only source where I have seen this. But it serves Fulton's purposes very well, for he wants to make sense of Abraham's haggling over the purchase of the tomb (Genesis 23:4-20) by appeal to the contemporary customs of the inhabitants. "The people are renowned for an excessive politeness which makes the purchase of the smallest article consume almost as much time as Abraham's purchase from Ephron long ago." Fulton, p. 147.

36 Schaff, pp. 222-224.
Riding through the narrow streets of the town [Bethlehem], which is inhabited almost entirely by Christians, we noted the tranquil good looks of the women, a distinct type, rather short of stature, round-faced, placid and kind of aspect. Not a few of them had blue eyes. They wore dark blue skirts, dark-red jackets, and a white veil over their heads, but not over their faces. . . . Such a dress, no doubt, was worn by the Virgin Mary, and such tranquil, friendly looks, I think were hers . . ..

The same type of parallelism exists between Nablus and Nazareth. Starting with Schaff:

[T]he Christian women of Nazareth are more beautiful in person, more cleanly in attire, and more courteous in manner than any in Palestine, with the exception of their sisters in Bethlehem, where nearly the whole population is Christian. They certainly contrast favorably with the ignorance and degradation of women in purely Mohammedan villages. Catholics trace the exceptional superiority of the women in these two places to the influence of the Virgin Mary, who is to them the perfection of physical as well as moral beauty and grace. But we prefer to go to the primary source of the Christian religion which everywhere develops true womanhood.

Talmage:

Grand old village is Nazareth, even putting aside its sacred associations. First of all, it is clean; and that can be said for few of the Oriental villages. Its neighboring town of Nablous is the filthiest town I ever saw, although its chief industry is the manufacture of soap.

Van Dyke:

It seems as if it were mainly the echo of the cursing of Ebal that greets us as we ride around the fierce little Mohammedan city of Nablus on Friday afternoon, passing through the open and dilapidated cemeteries where the veiled women are walking and gossiping away their holiday. The looks of the inhabitants are surly and hostile. The children shout mocking ditties at us, reviling the “Nazarenes.” We will not ask our dragoman to translate the words that we catch now and then; it is easy to guess that they are not “fit to print.”

[Nazareth] is distinctly the most attractive little city that we have seen in Palestine. . . . The Nazarene women are generally good looking, and free and dignified in their bearing. The children, fairer in complexion than is common in Syria . . . . I do not mean to say that Nazareth appears to us an earthly paradise; only that it shines by contrast with places like Hebron and Jericho and Nablus . . ..

37 Van Dyke, pp. 88-89; Fulton in describing Bethlehem is equally quick to point out that, “The beauty of the women is renowned, and their virtue is as celebrated as their beauty.” Fulton, p. 133.
38 Schaff, p. 324.
39 Talmage, p. 126.
40 Van Dyke, p. 206; Baedeker also makes it a point to mention the beauty of the women of Nazareth.
Whether the writers experienced the reality they describe, or interpreted the reality they experienced within the context of what they knew had to be the case, the result is the same. Nazareth and Bethlehem are superior to neighboring towns because they are inhabited by Christians, and most importantly because they are Christian their women are beautiful and the cities are clean(er).

For all of these travelers the greatest problem with Palestine is the fact that it is not governed by Christians, especially Protestant Christians. If it were, then all of its filth, disease, and ignorance would disappear. The very unchanging nature of the country which is useful in validating the veracity of the Bible, is also the basis for condemnation. The absence of social and technological progress is proof to these men of the region's religious and cultural inferiority.

Talmage, upon landing at Joppa with its notoriously dangerous port, reflects on how the dangers could be eliminated and why they are not.

Strange that with a few blasts of powder like that which shattered our American Hell Gate, those rocks have not been uprooted and the way cleared, so that great ships, instead of anchoring far out from land, might sweep up to the wharf for passengers and freight. But you must remember that the land is under the Turk, and what the Turk touches he withers. Mohammedanism is against easy wharves, against steamers, against rail-trains, against printing presses, against civilization. Darkness is always opposed to light. The owl hates the morn. "Leave those rocks where they are," practically cries the Turkish Government; "we want no people of other religions and other habits to land there; if the salt seas wash over them, let it be a warning to other invaders; away with your nineteenth century, with its free thought and its modern inventions." That Turkish Government ought to be blotted from the face of the earth, and it will be.  

Later he is moved to remark that,

Let the Turk be driven out and the American, or Englishman, or Scotchman, go in, and Mohammedanism withdraw its idolatries, and pure Christianity build its altars, and the irrigation of which Solomon's pools was only a suggestion, will make all that land from Dan to Beersheba . . . fertile, and aromatic and resplendent. . . .

41 Talmage, pp. 9-10.
42 Talmage, p. 85.
Schaff shares Talmage's opinion. “The Moslems, who look down with ignorant and stupid contempt upon Christians and their religion, rule and ruin the land . . .” “Mohammedan fanaticism works only destruction, and the Turkish government ruins the countries over which it rules.”43 There is hope, however. And while we are filled with mingled feelings of pity and indignation at the melancholy condition of the native population and religion under the corrupt despotism of the Turks, we are inspired with the hope of a new Jerusalem that is gradually springing up by the pious and benevolent efforts of foreigners, who labor for the revival of Bible Christianity in this Bible land.44

By this, Schaff means the Protestant missionaries in Palestine. For if Christianity is superior to other religions and the west superior to the east, even more significant is the fact that Protestant Christianity is superior to the Roman, Greek, and Eastern versions they found in Palestine. Nothing illustrates the tension and ambiguity experienced by American travelers to the Holy Land better than the encounter with non-Protestant Christians. Their opinions of the Ottomans and the Arab Muslims have been well illustrated, but what of Palestine’s native Christians. It is perhaps telling that in his book Schaff, when writing about the various communities in Jerusalem, devotes one page to the Catholic and Eastern churches, three pages to the Jewish community, none to Muslims, and six pages to the Protestant community. This at a time when out of a population of 36,000, barely 1,000 were Protestant, nearly all of whom were foreign nationals.45

But Christianity in its Protestant form, was the wave of the future for Palestine, for, although Protestants formed “the smallest of the Christian communities,” they seemed “to be respected by the

43 Schaff, pp. 233, 293.
44 Schaff, p. 234.
45 Schaff, p. 237.
Mohammedans, who abhor the other Christians as idolaters." In this regard even Baedeker's seems to concur.

The native Christians of all sects are by no means equal to their task, the bitter war which rages among them is carried on with very foul weapons, and the contempt with which the orthodox Jews and Mohammedans look down on the Christians is only too well deserved.

The displacement of these eastern Christians by the Protestants, whose missionaries were undoing centuries of superstition, fatalism, and oppression, would transform the entire region. It would return it to a glory better than what it had once known.

Another crusade is needed to start for Jerusalem, a crusade in this nineteenth century greater than all those of the past centuries put together. A crusade in which you and I will march. A crusade without weapons of death, but only the Sword of the Spirit. A crusade that will make not a single wound, nor start one tear of distress, nor incendiarize one homestead. A crusade of Gospel Peace! And the Cross again be lifted on Calvary, not as once an instrument of pain, but a signal of invitation, and the Mosque of Omar shall give place to a Church of Christ, and Mount Zion, become the dwelling place not of David, but of David's Lord, and Jerusalem, purified of all its idolatries, and taking back the Christ she once cast out, shall be made a worthy type of that heavenly city which Paul styled "the mother of us all . . ."

Obviously the relationship of these men to Palestine, to the Holy Land and its people, was complex and tension ridden. They traveled to the region out of respect and awe for its religious associations and history. But they were limited in what they could consider as valid and valuable sites. Convinced of the basic truth of the Bible, they looked askance at the tendency of local Christians, Jews, and Muslims to identify the location of every biblical event with precision, and to supply supporting


47 Baedeker's (1912), p. 33.

48 See Schaff, pp. 243-248, 258. Schaff also suggests that something else might aid Palestine. "The Mormons would do a good service both to America and to Turkey if they were to emigrate to the Sinaitic Peninsula and the shores of the Dead Sea, and teach their Ishmaelite cousins a lesson of American Industry and thrift."; Van Dyke, pp. 85, 226-230, 242-243.

49 Talmage, p. 50.
materials if possible. Their tendency to see everything in the most physical way possible, served only to
convince these men of the childish and superstitious nature of the local religions. Yet here was the bind.
Although committed, they thought, to a religion of the word and of the spirit they were forced by events
to seek out material evidences to defend their religious beliefs against the onslaughts of scientific and
intellectual progress.

Gleeful about using the presumed slow-changing nature of Palestine as the basis for
demonstrating biblical veracity, they simultaneously saw the absence of progress as the pre-eminent
illustration of the depravity of the Ottomans, Islam, and eastern Christianity. Yet it was in reaction to this
same progress, or certain elements of it, that sent most American travelers to Palestine and which made
the trip possible for most of them. Locked as they were in assumptions about the superiority of
Protestantism as a religion and the superiority of Anglo-American culture—a direct result of that
Protestantism—these men could not but interpret their encounter with Palestine and its people in the
manner in which they did. Given the popularity of these travel books, of which these three are small
portion, they helped to create an understanding of the Middle East that influenced American views and
understandings of the region up to the present.