Report on the condition of affairs in Palestine during the year 1895.

Quarantine and Health.

The rigid quarantine that has been enforced against all Syrian ports since the first week in October and that which different sections have established against each other, has been a greater calamity to the country than can be described in words.

With the exception of scarlatina which prevailed in the early summer, Palestine has been during the past year unusually healthy. There had been some Cholera in Aleppo far north and in the Red Sea ports far south of us, but such precautions were taken in Egypt in the case of the Mecca Pilgrims that there is no cause of alarm from that source. Certain of these pilgrims however, returning by way of the Desert, introduced the disease into Damascus. Allowing these filthy pilgrims to enter Damascus without the most careful inspection was an act of criminal negligence, still it was done and the natural consequences followed. Cholera has not prevailed there extensively and not a single case has occurred in any other part of the country. It is now (end of December) practically extinct, but the quarantine still continues to the great detrimment of travel and commerce.

A quarantine station was established at Jericho to intercept any persons coming from the north by the route East of the Jordan, another at Sinjil six hours north of Jerusalem on the road to Nablous (Shechem) and Nazareth, and another at Ras el Ain two hours north of Jaffa. To intercept all the coast wise travel from the north. The station at Ras el Ain was near a vast marsh and fully half of the people who have been confined there not one had been within sixty miles

of Damascus, the only infected district, nor had they seen any person who had been in Damascus. However every person entered the station sound and well, while half the entire number came away with health impaired and suffering from fever which, in several cases, nearly proved fatal.

Among the number confined at this place was our Vice-Consul and his wife, and when their time had expired the Vice-Consul wanted to pay his dues ~~which~~ he did in silver. The officials had him place the money on a rock and they directed water to be poured over it to cleanse it lest by it they might be infected with cholera. The same officials did not hesitate however to accept from the Vice Consul a package of cigarettes which he had been carrying in his pocket. A physician from Jerusalem went to the station to see a friend who was confined there and although he did not enter the tent he was seen to shake hands with his friend, and he was at once compelled to enter the quarantine and serve his time with the rest.

Such instances could be multiplied, but it is not necessary for those that I have mentioned will serve to indicate the unreasonable methods by which quarantine is conducted in this country.

As Germans, and English, as well as Americans were confined at this place, the consuls of the two nations with myself called on the Governor to request, not that quarantine be remitted or made more favorable for our respective subjects than for others, but that the time they had spent in reaching Ras el Ain, three, four, or five days as the case might be, be counted off from the prescribed ten days, especially as they had not been near any infected person or near any infected district. We were kindly received but our request was not granted.

Quarantine as now managed is such a shock to the business interests of the country that one would think the government would be interested to modify it in ways which might easily be done, so that travel, commerce, mails, business of all kinds need not come to a stand still.

Severe quarantine in the autumn and early winter months generally means the loss to the people of Jaffa alone of 300,000 to 500,000 dollars in their orange crop. This year, however English vessels have come every week and taken loads of oranges to England, such steamers making of course no quarantine.

The shipments are not so large as usual, but this outlet for their orange crop is regarded by the people as a special Providence.

Apart from the injury to commerce, the shutting out of travellers during so many months, for we do not expect the quarantine to be removed for some weeks yet, means cutting off from the people a source of income amounting to several hundred thousand dollars. Not less than five thousand persons, - and I have taken pains to enumerate the different classes interested and think that probably the number ought to be increased to any point up to 10,000 persons, are dependent upon travellers for a large part of their living, and hundreds of individuals and families are now suffering because this supply of ready money has failed.

I am aware that to state this fact in this general way does not make the impression it would could I go into details and speak at length of individual cases of suffering.

The ability of the people of this country to endure oppression, hardships of many kinds, and even suffering, is a fact with which I have long been familiar, but the events of the past few months have forced it anew upon my notice and I speak of it with admiration. The poor Jews of Palestine stir all Europe and America for funds for their relief, while thousands of the natives who are just as poor, suffer in silence.

Fuel

The question of a supply of fuel is becoming more serious every year and consequently a more important one in a commercial aspect.

The fuel of the farms throughout the country (reference is not made to the peasants in their villages who use dung largely for fuel) consists of wood and charcoal lime kilns and public bake ovens consume chiefly small bushes and shrubs which grow abundantly on the hillsides, and which could not be used in a house.

Native families do most of their cooking with charcoal and a large majority of them have no fire except in a brazier which in the coldest weather is lighted and left standing in the middle of the room.

European families, public houses and institutions, which require a proper fire during all the cold weather, burn roots of trees that are dug from the ground. There is scarcely a family in Jerusalem that burns what is known in America as wood, that is trunks and limbs of trees cut into proper size. The term "wood" in this country refers to the roots of trees. This fuel is brought to market full of sap and loaded with dirt and small stones as taken from the ground and sold at an average price, this year (1895), of $2.00 for 600 pounds, - all wood being sold by weight. -- The price increases and the supply grows less year by year, and every year it must be brought from a greater distance.

The law passed some years since against the destruction of olive trees is still in force, and although every year a considerable number of such trees are cut down the price of olive wood is so high as to place it beyond the reach of most purchasers. The trees that are cut down are taken largely by olive-wood workers.

Oil cake, or the refuse from oil presses, which burns well, is only a limited quantity, and the attempts to use kerosene for heating purposes do not seem to be successful. Steamers which though at Jaffa have of course their own supply of coal, and coal is used to some extent in flouring mills, although the largest flouring mill in Jerusalem uses wood altogether.

An attempt has been made this year by a certain

merchant in the city, to introduce coal in the shape of pressed blocks of coal dust and tar, the blocks weighing 5 kilos or about twelve pounds each, this being found at present the most convenient form. The supply comes from Belgium. The duty on it at Jaffa is 8 per cent. It is sold here, delivered at the house, at 80 francs ($15.40) for 100 kilos which is one French ton. Four hundred tons have already been imported, which has been taken chiefly by convents, religous institutions, some public houses and a few private families.

It is estimated by those who have used it that one ton of coal (cost 80 frs.) is equal to two and a half tons of wood (cost 100 francs.)

Recently an order has been issued by the government relating to the use of wood in Mills, that after three months from the date of the order, that time being considered sufficient for mills to make other arrangements, no more wood must be used, the chief reason given being the fact that it is becoming scarce everywhere and correspondingly high in price.

Rainfall and Crops.

Good crops depend not only upon the actual amount of rain but quite as much upon the distribution of it over the rainy season. If the "early" rains are withheld till December, plowing is hindered and the next crop is likely to be small. The early rains may fall during October and early in November, the proper time for them, and as soon as the ground is soft the plowing begins and the seed is sown. The crops however will not mature unless the "later rains" fall in their proper season also, which is the first part of April. During the winter of 1890-1891 there was an ample supply of rain, but the latter rains were withheld entirely so that the yield of wheat & barley was far less than that of the year previous. Hence a proper distribution of the rainfall is essential as the amount of it in order to insure good harvest.

The present year rain fell in October and early in

November so that a great deal of the plowing is already done and in some sections seed has been sown.

Taxes.

The manner of assessing and collecting taxes has sufficient interest to merit our attention. In former times it was customary to farm out the taxes for each district as Hebron, Jaffa, Nablous &c., to one responsible person who in turn would sub-let the same to a number of individuals each receiving a certain section or a certain number of villages. The principal tax farmer generally had nothing to do with the actual collecting of the taxes, but served only as a middle man between the Government and the smaller tax farmers. He managed always, however to make of it a profitable business.

Some years since this method was changed entirely and the Government levied a certain amount upon each village according to its size and the amount of land under cultivation. This method continued about five years, and has recently been superceeded by a revival of the more ancient plan with the difference that now the Government becomes practically its own bribee and instead of renting a certain district to a certain rich man to sub-let to others, it deals directly with the smaller tax farmers. One such person may have three, five, or ten villages as the case may be, and the Government asks for bids: one man offers a certain sum, another a sum a little larger, and the government telegraphs to the highest bidder that if within three days no one appears to offer more he can have that section.

The peasants hardly know which system, the old or modified as present, or the method of taxing by villages, is the most burdensome. Either system is attended with unnecessary cost and hardships for money enough must be raised not only to satisfy the government but also to make the tax farmer rich, for every person in the Empire knows that such an office as it has been from time immemorial a lucrative one.

This year when the yield in general is less by one third than last year, the tax remains the same. When the peasants protest the tax-farmers reply "your crops are less to be sure but then you get a better price & hence can afford to pay as high a tax as last year."

Improvements and Sanitary matters

During the year 1895 repairs and additions were made to thirty old houses and sixty new houses were built. Most of the new houses are outside the town and they are built in a more spacious way than was formerly done or than could be done within the walls. This remark does not apply to Jewish houses which are built in clusters, are very small, generally of two rooms each, and many of them are constructed of the cheapest materials, mere shells that will scarcely protect the occupants from the weather.

Considerable work has been done on the Bethlehem and Hebron carriage road so that it is in a fair condition. The carriage road to Jericho (twenty miles) is progressing slowly with no immediate prospect of its being completed.

Since the re-paving of the streets of Jerusalem was undertaken about eight years ago, it is easier to keep them clean in as much as a smooth stone pavement can be more readily swept than a rubble pavement. Very little effort however is made in this direction and the filth in some parts of the town is simply abominable. After the cholera appeared in Damascus a more vigorous attempt was made at sweeping and removing the most objectionable filth; but this was only a spasm and the relapse has already taken place. As always heretofore, the sanitary condition of this city is still in a bad way.

Jaffa and Jerusalem Railroad.

At the very end of November negociations which had been going on for a long time were completed, and the French company purchased land for a railway station about three quarters of a mile south of Jerusalem. The amount of land was 28.000 square metres and the price paid 120.000 francs; that is about seven cents for the round sum of twenty four thousand dollars. The first

plan was to have the station much nearer the city, near an old Turkish burying ground, but the Moslems made such objections as to render this impracticable. The position chosen will necessitate a street railway, "tramway", and no less than four different parties are now in Constantinople trying to obtain the right, "Firman", to lay such a track. Land owners in the vicinity of the site selected for the station say that the price paid is very low; on the other hand disinterested parties say it is exhorbitant. The depot site once fixed as it now is, no doubt that land in that neighborhood will rise in value, certainly in the price demanded.

For some time past construction trains have passed at a very slow rate of speed between Jaffa and Ramleh a distance of twelve miles, and they now come up nearly to Artouf about twelve miles further near the point where the road enters the mountain. The most difficult part of the road is yet to be built. With all loose earth work and much of the road on the plain is of this character, the heavy winter rains make havoc, and as the rainy season has just set in probably much that is now looked upon as "completed road" will have to be remade next spring. The obstacles in the way of railroad construction in this country are many and some of the most serious ones are due to the unfriendliness of the Government to any such project. In time perhaps not as soon as its friends claim the road will be completed, and communication with Jaffa will certainly be easier than it is at present. There is to my mind no evidence that its completion will make any marked change in the business of Palestine, or bring about a new era of prosperity for this country as has been so ardently predicted.

Revenue

The income of the Province of Palestine or this Pashalik amounted the last year to something

over half a million dollars, divided as follows:

Public Revenue	Tithes	246,202,76	
	Land tax	168,313,66	
	Sheep & goats	38,645,54	
	Military tax	26,470,04	
	Shop tax	10,239,00	$489,871,00
Municipal revenue	Carriage road from Jerusalem to Jaffa	11,250,00	
	Gate tax	12,500,00	
	Education & public works	3,027,00	
	Miscellaneous Municipalities	8,333,00	35,110,00
			$524,981,00

Under "tithes" is included wheat, barley, durra, olives, and all kinds of crops. The military tax is paid by Christians and Jews who are then exempt from military service. Within the walls of Jerusalem property is exempt from taxation and the "shop tax", the tax upon the income of any place of business, is likewise not paid in the city, but it is levied upon shops and places of business outside the city and in all other towns. The tax which every loaded animal, camel, mule, or donkey that enters Jerusalem is required to pay is called the "gate tax" and the sum is devoted to paving the streets and for some other internal improvements or needs.

It may be of sufficient interest to mention that Jerusalem has within and without the walls one hundred and thirty five places where liquor is sold and all pay a tax, those within the walls not coming under the exemption rule mentioned above. The tax this year amounted to $2.292. which is not reckoned in the foregoing amount but is sent directly to Constantinople.

Prices Current

Articles of common consumption vary in prices at

different seasons of the year and likewise according to the quality of the goods.

Wheat	$0.60 to $1.08	per measure of 48 pounds.	
Barley	48 " 80	" "	36 "
Durra	56 " 68	" "	42 "
Beans	3 1/8 cts " to 4 2/3	cents per pound	
Peas	2 1/3 " to 4	" "	"
Flour Russian	4 2/3 " " 6 2/3	" "	"
" "	2 1/3 " " 3 1/3	" "	"
" Sifted	3 1/3 " " 4 1/6	" "	"
Potatoes	1 1/3 " " 2 1/3	" "	"
Onions	1 " " 2 1/3	" "	"
Soap	8 " " 10	" "	"
Sesame Oil	66 2/3 " " 80	"	per gallon
Olive Oil	53 1/3 " " 66 2/3	" "	"
Wine	37 1/2 " " 96	" "	"
Grapes for wine	1 " 1 1/2	" "	pound
" " Table	1 " 2	" "	"

The amount of grapes brought into the city this season was about 42.000 lbs: the Latin and Greek Convents taking each 2.100 lbs, other monasteries 1800 lbs., public houses and wine shops 15,000 lbs. private families for wine 12.000 lbs. and for sale in the markets 9.000 lbs.

The importation of flour from Russia (Odessa) has ceased owing to shortness of the wheat crop in that country. But the condition of things in Russia does not for some reason, seriously effect the price of wheat in Palestine.

General Remarks.

Potatoes which have been imported chiefly from France are being raised now to a considerable extent in the German and Jewish colonies on the Plain of Sharon.

In some of these colonies and in the neighborhood of Jaffa Indian Corn is being cultivated with very satisfactory results, the price the past season reaching as high as $1.25 per bushel.

The shipment of oranges from Jaffa for the month

of November just past was 15,000 cases against 21,000 for the corresponding month in 1890. The yield this year is good, the difference being accounted for by the quarantine which disarranges everything.

The papers which are inclosed from our Consular Agent Mr. E. Hardegg show the Imports at Jaffa to have amounted during the past year to $1.578.425. the Exports to $1.454.700.

The Condition of the Jews was fully stated in my report of October 3. 1891. The order forbidding their immigration, issued early in July, is still in force, and it has had a most salutary effect upon all land transactions, prices for which had previously been crowded up to an abnormal and indeed to a ruinous figure

U. S. Consulate,
Jerusalem, Syria
December 3. 1891.

(S.) S. Merrill,
U. S. Consul

No 19.

United States Consulate
Jerusalem, Syria
December 21. 1891.

Hon. William F. Wharton
Assistant Secretary of State
Washington, D. C.

Sir

Agreeably to permission granted in your despatch No 9 dated October 17, 1891. David Feinstein of Jerusalem, has been appointed Second Dragoman in this Consulate. He has served since October first in that capacity and will be compensated during the present fiscal year as directed in despatch above referred to.

I remain respectfully

U. S. Consul

Names of persons employed at the United States Consulate Jerusalem December 31. 1891.

Name	Place	Rank	Of what country, religion or subject	Date of appointment
Herbert E. Clark	Jerusalem	Vice Consul	American	August 23. 1887
Gabriel A. Tarazi	"	Dragoman	Turkish	July 11. 1888
David Feinstein	"	2nd "	English	October 1. 1891
Asad Kassas	"	Guard	Turkish	April 1 1875
Mohammed Abbas	"	"	"	July 1 1889

Jaffa Agency

Ernest Hardegg	Jaffa	Consular Agent	Germany	October 27. 1891
Jacob El Mussa	"	Dragoman	Turkey	December 15. 1891
Hassan G. Lorandi	"	"	"	October 19. 1887
Ali Mohammed Bennet	"	Guard	Turk	Jan 1883