



Stories About Disease and Death

Selections and comments by **Kai Kjær-Hansen**

The following stories about disease and death are from the period 1818–1840. They start in the year when the first Protestant Bible-man visited Jerusalem, and end with the last death within the framework of the Jerusalem mission *before* a new beginning was made in 1842 with the arrival in Jerusalem of Bishop Michael Solomon Alexander.

With a few exceptions, the missionaries in question were either attached to the *London Jews Society* (LJS), founded in 1809, or the Boston based *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM), founded in 1810. Also included are a couple of stories about local, non-Protestant persons, in order to give an impression of how the Protestant missionaries viewed the deaths and eternity of these people.

It Is a Most Sickly Season

In November 1839, the LJS missionary in Jerusalem, John Nicolayson, wrote: "It is a most sickly season" (see below, no. 10). There were many of these in the Levant in the 19th century, and many died in the wake of such sickly seasons. Not just among Protestant missionaries, of course; quite a few explorers, pilgrims, and travelers also succumbed in such sickly seasons. These had an agenda which they pursued – often at the risk of their lives. The Protestant missionaries also had an agenda, their "calling." Their survival was secondary to the calling which they were convinced God had given them.

Naturally, these sickly seasons also made inroads into the local population. This can be inferred from, for example, the census of the Jewish population that Moses Montefiore caused to be done during his second visit to Palestine in 1839. Without many details (but with a reference to Sherman Lieber's summaries) here are some highlights:

- 9 percent of the population was 0–4 years old, indicating that newborn infants ran the highest risk of dying.
- Most Jewish children died before reaching age 10.
- 15 percent of the Jewish population was under 10 years old.

- In Jerusalem, three out of ten Jewish children (29 percent) did not have a living father.
- In Jerusalem, 49 percent of Jewish women were widows.
- Only one of ten Jews in Eretz Israel was over 60 years of age.
- Two out of three Jews living in Eretz Israel were under 40 years old.
- The estimated annual population deficit was 40 per 1,000 Jews – the death rate was 80 per 1,000 Jews while the birth rate was 40 per 1,000.¹

The high mortality rate for newborn infants was one of the reasons for the slow increase of the Jewish population in 19th century Palestine. Add to this deaths caused by disease; in Lieber's words:

In Palestine, the disregard of filth and the neglect of proper sanitation methods were detrimental to health. With no sewage and garbage disposal, rubbish, debris, excrement, and dead animals accumulated in the town streets. Drinking polluted water spread dysentery and cholera. Jewish immigrants who had yet to adjust to the country and develop immunities were easy prey for the pernicious "ague" – chills, fever, and sweating – that was rampant, recurring, and debilitating. Contributing to poor health conditions were crowded housing quarters – damp "dens of filth" with little light, fresh air, or ventilation. Inadequate clothing and lack of heating in the frigid winters also damaged the health of the Jewish population, as did malnutrition. Persons who died from a disease might have survived had they been adequately nourished. This is especially true of children under 5 years of age, whose cause of death today in many underdeveloped countries is listed as malnutrition.²

The Selection of Stories About Disease and Death

The stories collected here are framed by historical notes, to give the reader an impression of how disease at times hampered the work of the mission and how death reduced the not-very-high number of missionaries. These stories about disease and death are taken from sources that are not easily accessible today.³ The selection comprises different genres, such as notes or letters from the critically ill or dying person to family and friends, descriptions of the disease and death by the persons surrounding the patient, and subsequent reflections.

The missionaries' illnesses and deaths help to shed light on their lives

1 Sherman Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 333–339. Lieber mentions that in 1839–1840 there were nearly 7,500 Jews in Eretz Israel.

2 Lieber, 340.

3 The texts have been taken from published sources. The varying forms of names and places have been retained. Sometimes dates have been inserted in square brackets. Only evident misprints are corrected, without a *sic*. In a few places an indentation, not in the sources, has been made. The sub-headlines in the texts are mine.



and the history of the mission. But the purpose of telling these stories in this issue of *Mishkan* is not primarily to tell the history of the mission. It is rather to bring the reader into an existential encounter with these missionaries and their families – their thoughts, reflections, and pain – when the fever was rising: *was it a sickness unto death, or would the fever go down?* Or when, inexorably, death had occurred: *how do the bereaved, and the mission, go on?*

The close contact between the patient and the person nursing him or her makes for moving reading. There is physical closeness and care, even when the feverish patient is delirious. He or she alternates between fear and hope, depending on whether the fever is going up or down. They pray together, read the Scriptures, and talk about eternity, where there is no more sin. For some of these pious missionaries Psalm 51, with David's confession of sin, has become *the* Psalm in their hour of death, as it was also in their lives. They are pious in their hour of death, but their acknowledgment and confession of sin prevents them from looking like saints.

At times the talk is about ordinary, everyday things, like wind and weather; good memories are recalled; or the dying person discusses with a Jewish doctor the meaning of the plural name of God (Elohim)! In some selections the widow or widower goes on, after the description of disease and death, to talk about the "business" of the mission.

The missionaries themselves, their spouses⁴, and their children are convinced that the deceased is now "with Jesus." They are not so convinced when it comes to people from the Greek Orthodox Church, even people they have known well, which can be seen from the following example: When the Greek Orthodox priest Papas Ysa is on his deathbed (see no. 6), he, according to John Nicolayson, "plainly and explicitly declares that Christ is his only hope and all his salvation," and yet Nicolayson finds it hard to declare the deceased Papas Ysa "with Jesus." Would that we could ask Nicolayson the critical question, *what does he still lack?*

Eulogies and obituaries written in the hour of death, or shortly thereafter, have to be taken as "subjective" truth. This goes for the deceased as well as the bereaved. The deceased cannot comment and must "accept" that what is said in a eulogy, or in the hour of death, is not an adequate description of a person. A person's eulogy cannot replace historical research about that person's life. If we content ourselves with the eulogy, we shall not get the right picture of the person in question.

My task has been to collect these stories about disease and death. We have asked a number of people to comment on and interact with these texts about missionaries of an earlier period and their attitude to disease and death in an area where there were many sickly seasons.

Have they something to say to us? And if yes, what?

4 In this period the spouses are women; they are referred to as "wife," not "missionary," even if they do missionary work among women and children.

1. Christoph Burckhardt

Died in Aleppo, August 14, 1818

The Swiss Christoph Burckhardt came to Malta on January 5, 1818, supported by the wealthy English banker and politician Henry Drummond. Having got his instructions there, he worked as a Bible-man in Egypt. In May he stayed in Jerusalem for approximately ten days as the first Protestant Bible-man. He traveled north and arrived at Aleppo, where a fatal fever, then raging in the neighborhood, put an end to his life. He was buried on August 14, 1818. He spent seven months as a traveling Bible-man in the Levant.⁵

The Englishman James Connor came to Malta on January 4, 1818, sent out by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), so he must have met Burckhardt there. Connor fell ill shortly thereafter. After recuperating in various places he settled in Constantinople. His only major journey as a Bible-man took place from October 31, 1819 to October 13, 1820, when he arrived back in Constantinople. He served as a Bible-Man in Jerusalem from March 6 to April 19, 1820. Then he also traveled north, to Aleppo.⁶

In June 1820 Connor, in Aleppo, reflected on Burckhardt's death and on the fact that, so far, he himself is still alive.

At Burckhardt's Grave

*By James Connor, Aleppo, June 26, 1820.*⁷

I have visited the grave of Burckhardt with mingled feelings

“I have received from the hands of the French Chancellor here, the effects of poor Burckhardt; and, among other things, a Case of Bibles and Testaments. These I shall leave in Aleppo: the private effects I shall send to Malta.

I have visited the grave of Burckhardt, with mingled feelings of sorrow and gratitude – sorrow, at the loss sustained by the Church of Christ by his death – gratitude, at the reflection that I have come out uninjured from that ordeal of fatigue and privations, to which he most probably fell a victim. *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!* A large unscribed stone marks the grave of our departed friend. Before I leave Aleppo, I shall cause some short memorial to be engraved thereon.”

5 On Burckhardt in Jerusalem, see *Mishkan*, no. 42 (2005), 57–67.

6 On Connor in Jerusalem, see *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 62–75. Connor's description of his journey is in William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean* (London: CMS, 2nd edition, 1822), 413–454.

7 Connor in Jowett, 453. Cf. British and Foreign Bible Society, *Seventeenth Report* (1821), 63.

Connor Hands On the Baton

Having survived his almost twelve-month journey as a Bible-man, Connor returned to Constantinople. He knew that two American missionaries, Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk, had come to Smyrna and intended to go to Syria, Palestine and Jerusalem. In the beginning of December 1820, he handed them a "letter of introduction" to key persons he had met.

In mid-February 1821, Connor returned to London, having escaped the sickly Levant. Both American missionaries died at an early age, as we will now see.

2. Levi Parsons

Died in Alexandria, February 10, 1822

Levi Parsons had been sent out by ABCFM to work in Jerusalem. He arrived at Smyrna on January 15, 1820 with his friend and colleague Pliny Fisk. After language studies there and at Scio, Parsons left for Jerusalem, where he arrived on February 17, 1821. After approximately three months' work as a Bible-man, he left Jerusalem on May 7, 1821, in good health and with the intention to return.

On the journey to Smyrna he fell ill and was close to dying. On December 3 he was reunited with Pliny Fisk in Smyrna, but he did not regain his health. On January 8, 1822, they both set out for Alexandria in the hope that a sea voyage and a milder climate would encourage healing. They intended to go to Jerusalem.⁸

Levi Parsons' journey – and life – ended in Alexandria.

First let us hear what he said about his disease, writing from the island of Syra in the Aegean Sea in September, 1821, then what he wrote in his journal, on his deathbed in Alexandria, in the beginning of 1822. Pliny Fisk stood by him all during this time, and he has also something to say.

Parsons' Illness at the Island of Syra, September 1821

*By Levi Parsons, Syra, November 7, 1821, to his Board.*⁹

The solemn moment of exchanging worlds had not arrived

“Dear Sir,

From the 5th of Sept. to the 1st of Oct. I have no correct recollection of any thing which was said to me, or of any thing which was administered for my recovery. My mind was greatly confused, and for some days remained in a state of the most distressing derangement. Three physicians visited me every day, and the result of one of their consultations was, that my life must terminate within 24 hours. About the first of Oct. the fever abated, and I awoke as from a long dream. It was not the dream of death. I opened my eyes, but it was not in eternity. The solemn moment of exchanging worlds, had not arrived. I yet tabernacle in the flesh; – and if it may be to contribute a little for the promotion of the Gospel among the heathen; if it may be for the everlasting happiness of one sinner; what occasion shall I have to rejoice!

⁸ On Parsons in Jerusalem, see *Mishkan*, no. 48 (2006), 73–85. Parsons' brother-in-law, Daniel O. Morton, published *Memoir of Rev. Levi Parsons, Late Missionary to Palestine* (Poultney, Vt: Smith & Shute, 1824). Reprint Arno Press, New York, 1977.

⁹ *Missionary Herald* (1822), 111.

For a month past I have been gaining strength, though, in consequence of frequent colds, I am still confined to my room.

If my health will permit, I design to sail for Smyrna by the first opportunity. Vessels are frequently passing from Smyrna to Cyprus, or Jaffa. I am not without a strong hope of arriving at Jerusalem before Christmas. The time from Christmas to the Passover affords high advantages for obtaining and diffusing religious information.”

Extracts from Journal

*By Levi Parsons, Alexandria, January 15 – February 8, 1822.*¹⁰

Brother F. [Fisk] took me in his arms and, with ease, carried me up the stairs; so wasted is this dying body

“*Alexandria, Jan. 15.* Two men took me in my chair from the boat, and carried me safely to my room. So tender is my heavenly Father to provide for me.

Saturday, 19. My health greatly enfeebled. It seems that this shattered frame will no longer endure so great weakness. With brother F. I talk freely of finishing my work, and of meeting my final Judge, the Lord of Missions. Heaven looks desirable, to obtain the *perfect* image of God – to know more of the existence of God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – to see, without a glass, the exceeding love displayed on the cross – to observe the stations, orders, and employments of angels – to know how saints are employed in relation to this and other worlds – to see how God overrules sin – and why it is *through great tribulation* that he brings his children to glory – in a word, to see God in all his attributes, and his angels and saints in all their glory.

21. Find my strength exceedingly reduced. Desire to be in readiness to meet my summons from the world. Have but little expectation of *recovering strength before I go hence to be here no more*. My great desire is, to honor God and religion, even to the moment of closing my eyes. As this earthly tabernacle is dissolving, I pray God to build me up into a new, vigorous, spiritual man; then can I sing, with a dying voice, ‘O death where is thy sting?’ I *did* desire to slumber, till the resurrection, on the holy hill, Bethlehem, the birth place of our Savior. But I rejoice that the Lord has brought me to Egypt; and as to the future, may I say, ‘the will of the Lord be done.’

22. In view of my great weakness, and in consideration that all the means we could use, have not had their desired effect, we thought it our duty to set apart this day to prayer. We enjoyed a season for several prayers, and for much conversation respecting God as Physician and Parent. We read Ps. cvi, Isa. xxxviii, Sam. iii, and many precious hymns. We said, this day brings heaven near. May it hasten us towards our home.

¹⁰ *Missionary Herald* (1822), 318–319.

23. Rain most of the day – the cold very uncomfortable. I am subject to constant chills – keep my bed most of the day – find the nights refreshing, the days long. Brother F. reads to me much of the time. Our morning and evening devotions are always deeply affecting. Thus, while I descend to the banks of Jordan, I can gather a flower – I can see a ray of light, from beyond the swelling flood. My flesh is literally consumed like the smoke, but nothing is impossible with God. He can make these dry bones praise him in this world, or he can lay them aside, to raise from them a spiritual and glorious tabernacle, for his kingdom.

25. In the morning, read the account of the character and doom of unfaithful ministers, Ezek. xxxiii. Afterwards, we endeavored to confess our past unfaithfulness, and to supplicate, with many cries to God, for the entire class of the clergy in Asia, of every denomination. To be ever alive to this subject, it is necessary to contemplate, often, the wretchedness of blind leaders of the blind, and of their deluded followers, beyond the grave, in the fire that is never to be quenched.

*Sabbath 27.*¹¹ Early in the morning, read from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and prayed together for our American missionary brethren, and then for all faithful missionaries of every denomination, and for every missionary station, beginning at China, including India, Cape of Good Hope, Sierra Leone, Malta, Astrachan, &c. &c.

At 10 o'clock, brother F. went to the house of Mr. Lee, the English consul, to preach to a few Protestants, who seem to be grateful for his services. The distant prospect of the entire conversion of this city to God, is a rich compensation for many years of toil, and suffering.

28. Weather a little more moderate – Rest well during the nights. The Sabbath past was highly interesting – no interruptions – a little emblem of heaven. We read Isa. liii, and the chapters relating to the love, suffering, and death of Christ. Gained new encouragement to perseverance in our work. This morning, read from Corinthians concerning their superiority of *charity*, and our united prayers were, for a great increase of charity, in our *own* breasts, and throughout this world of sin.

30. Walked on the terrace of the house, and viewed the city. Brother F. took me in his arms, and, with ease, carried me up the stairs; so wasted is this dying body. I assured him it was my opinion, that he would take care of this dissolving body but a few days longer. Let me be waiting, and at last say, 'Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.' I am often very weary and sorrowful, but tears are not in heaven. O may I find the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

31. Weather very unfavorable – rain almost every day. – The Dr. informed brother F. that, in his opinion, I shall never again enjoy perfect health in this warm climate, and I am now too weak to change my situation. Why should I wish to be in any other hands, than in his who is able to save to the uttermost."¹¹

¹¹ In contemporary Christian sources, like here, "Sabbath" refers to Sunday and should not be confused with the Jewish Sabbath.



God is very kind to me in my sickness

“February 1. Awoke with great faintness, which continued for an hour. I tried to cast my burden on the Lord, and after a few hours he enabled me to do it. ‘Come unto me’, said the blessed Savior, ‘all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ – God is very kind to me in my sickness. My appetite and sleep are usually excellent, my mind calm in view of death, although I see heavenly things, as through a glass, darkly, my hope is, that as my outward man decays, my inward man will be renewed day by day.

Sabbath 3. Awoke with greater weakness than ever I was sensible of before. I fear I shall complain as my body decays. How much Christians that are in health, should pray for their brethren on a dying bed. I need many prayers to day. I cry out in my distress – I do sink under the rod – shall I ever see Jesus as he is? *Will* Jesus make my dying bed? Let me not doubt. I cry, with every breath, to him who is my only hope.

Read, prayed, and conversed with Antonio. I told him I expected to die, and my desire was, to meet him in heaven. He promised to read the Bible, and to pray every day. How dreadfully solemn to remain fixed between two worlds – between time and eternity – between a mortal and an immortal tabernacle! How dreadful, and at the same time, how pleasing, to rest with all the saints.

4. Monthly concert. Read, in the morning, Ps. lxxii, and 1 Chron. xxix, conversed respecting the last devotional attainments of David, and made one request to God, that we may attain to a measure of the same faith, before we pass to the clear light of eternal day. We remembered to pray for the three churches in Boston, which give their monthly contribution for the support of this mission, and for all our missionary brethren; and last evening, we thought of our duty to all the colleges in America. On this evening, we could only raise our cries to God for kings, princes, presidents, governors, all in civil and all in ecclesiastical authority, that they may *all* praise our God. Let every thing praise God.

5. Weather more favorable. Walked in the public street a few moments – appetite good, but feet swollen to an extraordinary size – strength not sensibly improved. Wrote to brother and sister M. Conversed, in the morning, with our Jewish doctor, respecting the Hebrew plural name of God. He replied, ‘merely an idiom of the language.’

6. Thermometer at 60°¹² – rainy – cannot therefore walk abroad. Read, for our devotions, morning and evening, a chapter of Exodus, respecting the plagues sent on Pharaoh.

7. Rainy. Walked in my room – wrote to my uncle L. of G.¹³ Mr. Glidden¹⁴ visited me.

8. Weather as yesterday. Remain very weak. Last night we conversed

12 60° Fahrenheit = 16° Celsius.

13 Uncle Lyman of Goshen, Massachusetts.

14 Mr. Glidden (Gliddon) was the American consul at Alexandria.

on the high Christian attainment of submission and quietness. God says, when we make an improper inquiry: *'Be still, children, be still.'*"

Parsons' Sickness and Death

By *Pliny Fisk, Alexandria, February 10, 1822; to Jeremiah Evarts, Esq.*¹⁵

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him

"Very dear Sir,

I have written to you twice, since we arrived at this place. In my last I stated the opinion of the physician, that brother Parsons would probably never enjoy perfect health in this climate; though he said, without hesitation, that he would recover from his present weakness. So we all hoped and believed, though I apprehend brother Parsons had less hope of it, that any one who knew him.

His symptoms continued favorable, till day before yesterday; and our hopes were rather brightened. Then his diarrhoea returned, though not severely; and the physician said it would be easy to cure it. Yesterday it was worse, and he was weaker than I had ever seen him. My apprehensions respecting a fatal termination of his disorder, were greatly excited. He conversed on the subject with his usual serenity, referring the event continually to the will of God, as he has always been accustomed to do. Last evening, we spent a most precious hour in reading the Scriptures, prayer, and conversation. We read John 14th, and conversed some time about the 27th verse. 'Peace I leave with you,' &c. After conversing about an hour, I told him it was necessary that he should stop and take some rest. He replied, 'I feel as though I could converse two hours longer. You don't know how refreshing these seasons are to me.' He then fell asleep, and I sat down to write. I soon heard him saying in his sleep, – 'the goodness of God – growth in grace – fulfillment of the promises – so God is all in heaven, and all on earth.' – After sleeping a while, he awoke; and seemed about as usual at that hour. I proposed sitting by his side through the night; but he insisted on my going to bed; said he felt as though he should have a very quiet night; and as his attendant always slept near him, and awoke at the least word or motion, he urged me to retire to rest. About 11 o'clock I bid him good night, and wished that God might put underneath him the arms of everlasting mercy. He replied, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.'

I pressed his hand, and kissed his quivering lips, and spoke to him; but he gave me no answer

"These, my dear Sir, were the last words that I ever heard that beloved brother speak, – the last, that I shall hear him, until I hear him speak in the language of immortality. Twice, while I slept, he awoke, and told



¹⁵ *Missionary Herald* (1822), 218–219.

Antonio, his servant, that he had slept very quietly, and felt easy and well. At half past three Antonio heard him speak, or groan, and started up. He saw something was the matter, and called me. I was by the bed side in a moment. O what a heart-rending moment was that! He was gasping for breath, unable to speak, and apparently insensible to all around him. I stood by his side and attempted to revive him, but in vain. I sent in haste for the physician, but did not obtain him. Nor do I suppose it would have been of any use whatever, if he had come. It was evident, that he was dying. I attempted to commend his departing spirit to that Redeemer, on whom he had believed. I pressed his hand, and kissed his quivering lips, and spoke to him; but he gave me no answer, – not even a look, or a motion. He took no notice of me, or of any thing around him. His appointed time had arrived. He continued to breathe till a quarter past four. Then the muscles of his face were knit together, as if he was in pain. It was the dying struggle. It was the dissolution of the last ties that united soul and body. It was the soul breaking off its last fetters. His features then became placid again. His breath stopped. His pulse ceased to beat. His soul took its immortal flight.

After the first pang of separation, I stood pensive by the corpse, thinking of the scenes which were opening to his view. O what glories! O what glories!

I turned my thoughts to myself, and found my heart sink and faint. But I have not room here to describe the emotions, that agitated my breast.

A little while after, as there was no person with me who understood English, I read a chapter, and prayed in Greek with Antonio, and then we dressed the body for the grave.”

With a heart overflowing with grief

“Early in the forenoon, Mr. Lee, the Consul, called on me, and kindly offered to see that all necessary arrangements were made for the funeral. He said, that in this climate it was necessary to bury soon, to prevent putrefaction. On this account he thought it necessary that the funeral should be to-day. Four o’clock was accordingly appointed. All the English gentlemen resident in the place, six or seven in number, the captains of several English ships, and a great number of merchants, principally Maltese, attended the funeral. The consul walked with me next to the coffin, and the others, 60 or 70 in number, followed in procession to the Greek convent, where the few English who reside here, bury their dead. At the grave, I read some verses from Job xiv, Ps xxxix, 1 Cor. xv, and Rev. xxi, xxii, and then made a short address, and closed with prayer. We then committed the dust to its kindred dust, there to await the archangel’s trumpet.

To me the stroke seems almost insupportable. Sometimes my heart rebels; and sometimes I hope it acquiesces in the will of God. I desire your prayers, that I may not faint when the Lord rebukes me.

With a heart overflowing with grief, I subscribe, yours affectionately,
Pliny Fisk.”

The Board on Parsons' Death

By the editor of *Missionary Herald*, July 1822.¹⁶

... the language of this, or of any similar providence, is not that of discouragement

“This simple and affecting narrative of the closing scene to the labors of that faithful servant of Christ, whose early departure we are now called to mourn, will excite the liveliest emotions in the friends of Zion. Most tenderly will they sympathize with that beloved missionary, who was thus suddenly deprived of his true yoke-fellow, and left alone in a land of strangers; and with no less tenderness will they mingle their tears with those of the beloved parents, who, for reasons such as in this world we can seldom fully comprehend, have been called to this afflictive loss.

We would, however, remark, – that the language of this, or of any similar providence, is not that of discouragement. He, to whom all power in heaven and on earth is committed, has certainly more regard for Zion, and for the attempts, however feeble, which are made, in obedience to his command, to render her the joy of all lands, than the most holy of his saints can ever have; and will by no means suffer a permanent injury to befall her. In this truth, we find the common refuge of God's people, in every age when the Church has been afflicted.”

Life, Death, and Psalm 51

By *Pliny Fisk*, Alexandria, February 15, 1822.¹⁷

While on our mission, we have read the 51st Ps. oftener than any other part of Scripture

“Apprehensive, especially after our arrival at Alexandria, that his [Parsons'] sickness *might* terminate in our separation, I had begun to note down, on a separate piece of paper, some of his remarks. ...

Monday, Jan. 21. I desire to record it as one of the greatest mercies of my life, that I am permitted to enjoy the heavenly society, conversation, and prayers of brother Parsons. While at Smyrna, from Dec. 4, to Jan. 9, we enjoyed seasons of social prayer, morning and evening, and were allowed some most precious seasons on the Sabbath. I do not recollect that a single season of devotion passed, without some remarks from brother P., expressive of submission to the divine will, concern for the souls of men, love to our mission, gratitude for divine mercies, confidence in God, and love to the Savior. I scarcely read a verse of Scripture but it drew from him some heavenly remark. While on our mission, we have read the 51st Ps. oftener than any other part of Scripture, and he has often remarked, 'we cannot read that too often.' One day he said, 'I have often thought of

¹⁶ *Missionary Herald* (1822), 219.

¹⁷ *Missionary Herald* (1822), 320.



being on missionary ground, and too feeble to labor, as one of the greatest trials that could be laid upon me, and this is now the very thing with which God sees fit to try me.'

You and I have now lost each his most intimate fellow-laborer. May it lead us to a more entire reliance on Christ, that friend who is always with his servants, who *never* leaves, who *never* forsakes them.

Your brother in the Gospel,
Pliny Fisk. ”

30 and 33 Years Old

Pliny Fisk had buried his good friend and colleague, Levi Parsons, who had not yet turned 30. The next Protestant missionary in Palestine or Syria to be laid in a grave was Pliny Fisk. This happened a little over three years later – before Fisk turned 33.

3. Pliny Fisk

Died in Beirut, October 23, 1825

Pliny Fisk had arrived in the Levant together with Levy Parsons (see no. 2). After Parsons' death in February 1822, the young American Jonas King was taken on by ABCFM on a three-year contract. On September 26, 1825, Fisk and King parted in Beirut, and about one month later Fisk died.

From April 25, 1823 to May 9, 1825, Fisk (together with others) worked in Jerusalem as Bible-men three times, totaling a period of over eight months. Toward the end of 1824, a Bible Society Room was set up in Jerusalem. Fisk had been designated the leader of the effort to distribute Scriptures in and from Jerusalem.¹⁸ Things were to turn out quite differently.

On October 11, 1825, Fisk began to mention that he was ill. "In the evening, after uniting, as usual, in reading the Scriptures in Arabic, he said he felt himself too ill to make any remarks, and requested Mr. Goodell, (in whose family he was) to make a few. He, however, prayed in Arabic with his usual fervency, though not with his usual length," write the American missionaries Isaac Bird and William Goodell.¹⁹

The disease got worse. One evening Fisk asked that Psalm 51 be read, and he also wanted "to hear the hymn which he had formerly sung at the grave of Mr. Parsons."

Brother, thou art gone before us,
And thy saintly soul hath flown
Where tears are wiped from every eye,
And sorrow is unknown, &c. &c.²⁰

The recently arrived missionary Dr. George E. Dalton (see no. 4), sent out by LJS, was in Sour (Tyre), and not available as his wife Jane was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. On October 29 she gave birth to her second son, Henry. The story of his death will be told later (see no. 5).

Three days before his death, Fisk, who had not yet turned 33, dictated some moving letters, included below. But first, the account of Fisk's last hours as described by his colleagues in Beirut, Isaac Bird and William Goodell. We begin on the evening of October 21, 1825.

¹⁸ Cf. *Missionary Herald* (1825), 33.

¹⁹ Cf. Alvan Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, A.M.* (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1829), 306.

²⁰ Bond, 309.

Fisk's Last Twenty-four Hours

By Isaac Bird and William Goodell, Beirut, October 1825.²¹

... the hand of death seemed really upon him

“At six o'clock he had rapidly altered, and the hand of death seemed really upon him. We repaired to the throne of grace, commending his soul to him that gave it. He had inquired anxiously if the doctor had not come. He came at eight, but Mr. Fisk was insensible. He approached the bedside. 'Here is the doctor,' said we. He raised his eyes, fastened them a moment on the stranger, and sunk immediately into his former stupor. The physician, on learning what had been his symptoms, expressed little hope of saving him; but not to abandon him entirely, he ordered new mustard poultices to his feet, and warm wet cloths to his stomach, with frequent draughts of rice-water. One hour after, to our no small joy and encouragement came on a free perspiration, the paroxysm of fever was arrested, respiration more free, and the remainder of the night comparatively quiet.”

Our hope had not for many days been higher that he might yet survive

“*Saturday 22d.* He was able to return the morning salutation to those that came in. When the physician entered the room, he immediately recognised him, and conversed a little with him in Italian – passed the day quietly – said almost nothing – tongue palsied.

The sun had set, and no appearance of his usual paroxysm. His strength was such, that he could still raise himself on his elbow, and nearly leave his bed without assistance. Our hope had not for many days been higher that he might yet survive. The fever came on, however, at eight or nine o'clock, but so gently, that the physician repeatedly assured us he apprehended no danger from it. We therefore retired to rest, leaving him, for the first half of the night, in the hands of the physician and a single attendant. Scarcely had we closed our eyes in sleep, when we were awaked to be told, that all hope concerning him was fled. We hastened to his bedside, found him panting for breath, and evidently sinking into the arms of death. The physician immediately left him and retired to rest. We sat down, conversed, prayed, wept, and watched the progress of his dissolution; until at precisely three o'clock on the Lord's day morning, October 23, the tired wheels of nature ceased to move, and the soul, which had been so long waiting for deliverance, was quietly released.

It rose, like its great Deliverer, very early on the first day of the week, triumphant over death, and entered, as we believe, on that Sabbath, that *eternal rest* which remaineth for the people of God.”

²¹ Bond, 310–312.

His remains sweetly slumber in a garden connected with one of our houses

“As soon as the news of his death was heard, all the flags of the different consuls were seen at half-mast. His funeral was attended at four P.M. At his grave, a part of the chapter in Corinthians, respecting the resurrection, was read in Italian, and a prayer offered in English, in presence of a more numerous and orderly concourse of people than we have ever witnessed on a similar occasion. His remains sweetly slumber in a garden connected with one of our houses.”

Our house is left unto us desolate

“As for ourselves, we feel that we have lost our elder brother. Our house is left unto us desolate. To die, we doubt not, has been infinite gain to *him*, but to *us* the *loss* seems at present irreparable. He cheered us in the social circle, he reproved us when we erred, he strengthened us by his prayers, exhortations, and counsels. – The Board of Missions will feel the loss, perhaps, not less than we. Another servant, with talents like his for explaining and enforcing the doctrines of the Gospel, and who shall be able to preach fluently in most of the languages heard in this country, will not soon be found. But the Lord of the harvest has resources of which we know but little. To him let us still repair, and pray in hope.”

Farewell Letters from Fisk

*Dictated by Pliny Fisk, Beirut, October 20, 1825.*²²

To Jonas King, his fellow-worker

“My beloved brother King, – Little did we think, when we parted, that the first or nearly the first intelligence concerning me, would be the news of my death. Yet, at present, this is likely to be the case. I write you as from my dying bed. The Saviour whom I have so imperfectly served, I trust now grants me his aid; and to his faithful care I commit my immortal spirit. May *your* life be prolonged, and be made abundantly useful. Live a life of prayer. Let your conversation be in heaven. Labour abundantly for Christ. Whatever treatment you meet with, whatever difficulties you encounter, whatever vexations fall to your lot, and from whatever source, possess your soul in patience; yea, let patience have her perfect work. I think of you now in my dying moments, and remember many happy hours we have spent together. And I die in the glorious hope of meeting you where we shall be freed from all sin. Till that happy meeting, dear brother, farewell!

P. Fisk.”

²² Bond, 314–316.



To Daniel Temple, Malta

“My beloved brother Temple, – On the confines of eternity, as I suppose, I send you a last token of my love, and a last farewell. Viewing myself, as I now do, a dying man, the great and holy cause in which we are engaged, presents itself to my mind with indescribable importance. We have both had slight disappointments and troubles in our work, but they are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be, as we trust, revealed in us. At this solemn moment, I seem unable to recollect any thing that deserves the name of trial, disappointment, or sacrifice. The history of my life has been a history of mercies, and – of sins! My only hope is in the unmerited mercy of Christ. I trust that for sixteen or seventeen years, I have found his service pleasant, and him a faithful and gracious Master, though I have been constantly violating his laws, and wandering from his presence.

I wish you a long and useful life, and much communion with Christ. My kindest love to Mrs Temple. My prayer is, that you may long live and be happy together; and the Lord grant, that your children may be early sanctified by his grace, and live to occupy the places made vacant in this mission, by the calling of one and another of us to himself.²³

Your dying brother. P. Fisk.”

To his father

“My beloved aged Father, – I compose a few lines for you upon a sick, probably a dying bed. When you gave me up for this mission, you gave me up for life and death. You know to whom to look for consolation and support. The same God, who has comforted you so many years, under so many troubles, will comfort you under this. You know his consolations are neither few nor small. I leave these lines as a pledge to you, and my brothers and sisters, my nephews and nieces, that I love you all most dearly, though so long separated from you. I hope all, or nearly all our number, have been enabled to give themselves to Christ, and that we shall meet with our departed mother in heaven.”

Dalton at Fisk's Grave

By George E. Dalton, Beirut, November 24, 1825.²⁴

... but our sorrow is not without hope

“Nov. 24. – We felt much grief at the departure of Br. Fisk, whose face we are no more to behold in the flesh. I felt deeply that a brother was

²³ Mrs. Temple died at Malta on January 15, 1827, and shortly thereafter the Temples' two youngest children also died. In Daniel Temple's words: "Death has swept away, one after another, one half of my family ... I am sometimes sad: I am happy to say, however, that I am never disconsolate. You knew a little of my companion, and can therefore form some faint idea of what I and my two surviving little boys have lost." Cf. *Missionary Herald* (1827), 308.

²⁴ *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 27.

gone, and heard the history of all his sickness and his last words, with feelings I cannot describe. In the evening, taking my little boy in my arms, I walked to visit the resting place of the earthly remains of this dearly beloved brother, whose grave is visible from the windows of the house we now inhabit. I often look for it, and think how soon may my last earthly remains be laid besides his. It is intended to remove his body, as soon as a burying-ground is purchased for the English. His loss is deeply felt by us all; every thing associates him with us, but our sorrow is not without hope; sin and sorrow affect him now no more, and this is another proof of the power of God, in keeping his chosen ones unto salvation; his work was done, and we also shall only live whilst the Lord has need of our services; then rest, the same sweet rest, shall be our's."

Fisk and Dalton

Dr. Dalton had looked forward to working with Fisk in Jerusalem. They had agreed that it would be unwise for the Dalton family to live in Jerusalem without a fellow worker. After Fisk died, Dalton received information from the LJS that a replacement was on his way. He therefore applied for and obtained a residence permit in Jerusalem, and arrived late in 1825 in order to make the final practical arrangements for the family to settle there with John Nicolayson as a fellow worker.

But, as we shall now see, Dr. Dalton died, leaving Nicolayson as the only LJS missionary in Palestine.



4. George E. Dalton

Died in Jerusalem, January 25, 1826

Dr. George E. Dalton and his wife, Jane, together with their newborn son George W., arrived in Beirut on January 6, 1825, as emissaries for LJS. According to the plan, Dalton was to work as a doctor in Jerusalem. On December 24, 1825, he arrived alone in Jerusalem in order to make the final preparations for his family's transfer to this place. Before that he had obtained a residence permit for the family.

On December 21, 1825, John Nicolayson came to Beirut. He had also been sent out by LJS to work among the Jews in Jerusalem. He arrived in Jerusalem as early as January 3, 1826. LJS's staff of missionaries had now doubled!

On January 4, 1826, they left Jerusalem together to visit Bethlehem. But the next day Dalton was seized with fever, "perhaps in consequence of having drunk more than he ought of the springs we found on the road," writes Nicolayson. The fever abated on January 8, and the rain ceased so that they could leave Bethlehem and reach Jerusalem that same day with Dalton "riding on horseback ... and thus we reached home, and have come within reach of means, which, by the Lord's blessing, will soon, I hope, restore this valuable servant of the Lord to his missionary labours." But this fever was to be a sickness unto death for Dr. Dalton.²⁵

When Nicolayson first arrived in Jerusalem, Dalton came from a sick call to a Greek Orthodox bishop. We will begin the story of Dalton's last days here, and let Nicolayson go on to describe the course of events from January 14 until Dalton's burial on January 26, 1826.

Dalton's Last Journal Entry

*By George E. Dalton, Jerusalem, January 3, 1826.*²⁶

**... a companion has been sent to supply
the place of my dear departed brother Fisk**

“Whilst with him [the bishop], news came to me of a 'new Englishman' from Beyrout, having arrived at Mar Michael.²⁷ It rejoiced my heart to find my fellow-labourer Mr. Nicolayson the person. O Lord, how great are thy mercies; dwelling here alone, a companion has been sent to supply

²⁵ *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 141.

²⁶ *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 73.

²⁷ Mar Michael is Greek Orthodox convent where most of the 1820s Bible-men lived while in Jerusalem; the so-called "Bible Society Room" established by Pliny Fisk was also there.

the place of my dear departed brother Fisk, and bring intelligence from my near and dear ties of health, preservation, and peace! ”

Dalton's Last Days

By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, January 14–26, 1826.²⁸

He also spoke of getting to Jaffa

“Jan. 14. – The Doctor is again more feverish and weaker to-day. What may be the will of God respecting him, I know not; but should it be (as appears not improbable) to take him away from us, it would be a hard, though, doubtless, a necessary lesson for me, to rely more exclusively upon the Lord himself for every assistance needed: for, as I am generally apt to lean upon every apparent support, so I had particularly promised myself much from the assistance, counsel, and advice, of this my dear fellow-labourer.

Jan. 15. – Sunday. The Doctor was nearly the same as yesterday. This is as much a day of visiting among the Greeks as any other day, which made it a very comfortless Sabbath to me, having no opportunity of attending a public worship performed according to the doctrines and in the spirit of the Gospel, and my private readings and meditations being constantly interrupted by visitors, whose mutual conversations I could not understand or join in.

Jan. 16. – The Doctor continued the same as yesterday. In the afternoon he spoke rather confusedly about making his will, and as if he thought that we had been trying to prevent his doing it, though it had not so much as been mentioned before. He also spoke of getting to Jaffa, and going from thence by sea to Beyrout, which I fear would be quite impracticable at present.

Jan. 17. – In the forenoon he was rather worse than yesterday, but towards evening a very considerable change took place: the fever seemed to have left him, and as this is a time of crisis, being the thirteenth day, we hope his recovery may be dated from this time; and though it naturally will be slow, as we are here deprived of many of the means which might accelerate it, yet I trust it will be sure, as we shall be able to proceed more according to his own directions, as his strength increases, and thus shall not be so much dependent upon the physician, whose knowledge and skill is not to be estimated very highly, though he is the best we could find here. May the Lord's name be blessed for this good hope!

Jan. 18. – The Doctor was as yesterday. Though I trust he is recovering, he is too weak to engage in conversation. ”

This is my home!

“Jan. 19. – He seemed to be relapsing again, and was exceedingly weak during the night, when the fever rose higher than it ever had been be-



²⁸ *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 142–144.

fore; and his nerves were attacked in a peculiar manner, which seemed to make every thing appear difficult and painful to him, and deprived him of all rest. At half past four o'clock he suddenly said, 'I believe I am near my home.' When I asked him, 'What home do you mean?' he pointed upwards, and said, 'This is my home!' I then asked him whether he actually thought the Lord would take him home soon? His answer was, 'I cannot speak positively, but I feel as one dying.' A little after, he added, 'I am at perfect peace with God, and feel no difficulty in committing my dear wife, and the little ones the Lord has given us, into his hands.' He then desired me to remember him affectionately to the Missionary brethren and sisters in Beyrout.

I asked him whether he had any particulars to mention respecting the mission in this country, or the cause in general? To which he replied, 'Tell the Committee that the friends of the cause in England have too high an opinion of what has been done here, for as to the establishing of a mission in Jerusalem, or any other place in the country, nothing has been done as yet.' Some time after, he said, 'As to burial, I had rather be buried among the Greeks.' All this he spoke with considerable difficulty, but with perfect presence of mind.

Jan. 20. – In the morning my valued friend Dr. Dalton seemed to recover some little strength again, so that there is still hope. His strength continued to increase in the afternoon and evening, so that he repeatedly said, 'The Lord's name be praised;' adding, 'He makes all things better than we apprehend.' We removed my bed into his room, that I might attend on him in the night, whenever he wanted any thing. The first part of the night he spent in great restlessness and delirium; but the latter part in stammering and singing praise to the Lord his Redeemer, but in accents so broken, that I could understand no more than these few words: 'Praised be the Lord for his infinite mercy;' and a little after, 'Lift up your heads, ye gates.'

Jan. 21. – In the course of the day he seemed a little better, but towards night the fever and the weakness increased.

Jan. 22. – A little better again in the day than he was in the night.

Jan. 23. – In the night he was very delirious and very weak. The fever has been increasing for the last two or three days. To-day we applied blisters to both his legs. I dread the coming night. The Lord help us!

Jan. 24. – In consequence of the blisters we had applied, he enjoyed some rest in the night, so that he is considerably better to-day, and we again entertain hope. Feeling himself so much better to-night, as I had sat up several nights with him, he desired me to go to bed, which I did, leaving his servant with him. ”

When I came in I found him in dreadful convulsions

“*Jan. 25.* – Wednesday. In the night, before twelve o'clock, he was suddenly taken with violent spasms in his right side. He desired his servant to call me; but again said, 'No, let him rest, perhaps it may go off.' At two o'clock he sent the servant to call me. When I came in I found him

in dreadful convulsions. I immediately asked him whether he was able to think of any medicine that might afford him relief? He then ordered us to rub his right arm with opodeldoc,²⁹ which gave him some relief. About four o'clock the spasms gradually subsided, and a state of insensibility, resembling sleep, succeeded. About five o'clock I left him, apparently sleeping, and when in about three hours I entered the room, I found him in the same state. We immediately sent for the physician, who soon came and applied several remedies, but all in vain. Though he did not speak, and seemed entirely insensible, yet when I asked him whether he knew me, he answered, 'I do:' and a little afterwards he spoke some words which I did not understand, but the last of them was, 'die.' We sent for another physician, but all was in vain, and at one o'clock, P.M. he breathed his last. He had anticipated death without the least fear, and was entirely resigned to the will of his Master; so he died in an easy frame, and I felt assured that his blessed and happy spirit has found its rest in the Lord Jesus, and has joined the multitude of those who have been saved through the blood of the Lamb, and through the mercy of the God of their salvation.

The Greek priests, who have shown us great kindness during the illness of my dear deceased brother, have kindly offered a place in their burial-ground for the interment of his remains.

In the evening I wrote to Beyrout, to inform them of his decease, intending to send a courier with my letter to-morrow. ”

The place of interment is on Mount Zion

“*Jan. 26.* – In order to bury the remains of my dear departed brother, it was necessary to have the usual license from the Cadi;³⁰ but he not being here at present, in consequence of the recent disturbances, which have produced a sort of temporary anarchy, his agents demanded five hundred piastres³¹ before granting the licence. I told them in reply to this extravagant demand, that as Englishmen we were exempted from all payment of the kind, but that if they chose to insist upon a payment, I would give them whatever they wished, provided they gave me a receipt for it, and chose to take the consequences. This had the desired effect. The licence was granted, and we proceeded to the burial.

The Greeks, like all other Orientals, bury without a coffin, but the Doctor's servant, who is a carpenter, having seen the coffin which was made for Mr. Fisk in Beyrout, made one for the body of the departed brother, and thus we followed the English custom in this particular.

The bishops having desired the Greek Christians to follow the corpse

29 According to Wikipedia: "The Pharmacopoeia of the United States (U.S.P.) gives a recipe for opodeldoc that contains: Powdered soap, 60 grams; Camphor, 45 grams; Oil of rosemary, 10 milliliters; Alcohol, 700 milliliters; Water, enough to make 1000 milliliters."

30 Muslim judge.

31 One twentieth of Nicolayson's annual salary of 100 pounds sterling. One pound sterling was approximately 100 piastres. A Jewish family in Jerusalem needed 400–500 piastres annually for rent and cost of living. In 1839 an adult Jew received 21 piastres from Montefiore, the equivalent of one month's income; cf. Lieber, 336.



to the grave, in honour of the deceased and the English nation, in general, there were, notwithstanding the bad weather, about fifty persons who attended. The Superior of Mar Michael, Papas Yoel, Papas Ysa, Papas Cesare,³² and another priest, honoured us with their presence also. The place of interment is on Mount Zion.³³”

Nicolayson’s Situation Without Dalton

*By John Nicolayson, Beirut, March 13, 1826; to his committee.*³⁴

... **the Mission here is quite in its infancy**

“How I must find myself situated at present, as it concerns the great work before me, you will easily perceive, if you consider the peculiar difficulties which attend it in this country, by reason of the unsettled state of things, and from a number of other causes. For you will remember that the Mission here is quite in its infancy, (if indeed so much may be said of it) and likewise, that I was sent out here without receiving any particular instructions from the Committee, being directed to confer with those who were here before me, on the manner and plan of proceeding.”

Working in the Vineyard of the Lord

About his first meeting with Dalton, Nicolayson wrote on January 3, 1826 that he “had the joy of seeing and saluting this dear brother in the Lord, with whom I hope, through the grace of God, to spend many happy days in labouring jointly with him in the vineyard of the Lord. The rest of the day was spent in conversation as to the nature and importance of our work, and upon various subjects connected with it; and we concluded with reading the Scriptures, and with prayer.”³⁵

These hopes of “happy days” were not fulfilled. With Dalton’s death in 1826, LJS’s staff of missionaries in Palestine was reduced from two to one. The young Nicolayson attached himself to the American missionaries in Beirut, where Jane Dalton and her two young boys were living.

Less than six months after her husband’s death, Mrs. Dalton buried their youngest son. Nicolayson was also present.

32 Local Greek Orthodox priests in Jerusalem with whom the Bible-men in Jerusalem had good contact in the 1820s; see no. 6.

33 The Greek cemetery is near the so-called David’s sepulcher.

34 *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 25–26.

35 *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 140.

5. Mrs. Dalton's Little Henry

Died in Beirut, July 18, 1826

During the Daltons' journey to Syria and Palestine, Jane Dalton had given birth to their first son, George W., in the autumn of 1824 at Malta.³⁶ The couple's second son, Henry, was born at Sour (Tyre) on October 29, 1825.³⁷

Jane Dalton had not been present when her husband, Dr. George E. Dalton, was buried in Jerusalem on January 26, 1826 (see no. 4). Less than six months later she buried her son Henry in Beirut. John Nicolayson was present at both burials.

Little Henry's Death and Burial

*By John Nicolayson, Beirut, July 18, 1826.*³⁸

To-day we buried his mortal remains near those of Mr. Fisk

“Mrs. Dalton's little Henry was unwell yesterday, but no danger was apprehended. At half past twelve in the night, her servant came to call Mr. Bird,³⁹ saying, the child was very sick. In half an hour Mr. B. returned, and told me that the child was dead when he arrived there. To-day we buried his mortal remains near those of Mr. Fisk. We assembled at Mrs. Dalton's soon after five o'clock in the afternoon, where we had some conversations upon death and eternity in Arabic, with those natives who attended. Mr. Goodell⁴⁰ then read a portion of the Gospel in English, and I concluded with a prayer for the afflicted mother, and for a blessing upon all present. At the grave, Mr. Bird made a short address in Arabic, to the persons around.”

Not the Last Time

Jane Dalton did not have the strength to return to Ireland right away with her remaining son, George, but stayed with the American missionaries in Beirut. In March 1828 she married John Nicolayson. They had two daughters together, and together they had to bury the youngest, Jane Dorothy, in Jerusalem in 1839 (see no. 10).

³⁶ *Jewish Expositor* (1825), 155.

³⁷ *Jewish Expositor* (1826), 115.

³⁸ *Jewish Expositor* (1827), 468.

³⁹ Isaac Bird, sent out by ABCFM.

⁴⁰ William Goodell, sent out by ABCFM.

6. Papas Ysa

Died in Jerusalem, June 10, 1834

John Nicolayson's first visit to Jerusalem took place in early January 1826. Due to the changed political situation it was not possible for him to settle there with his family until the autumn of 1833. It had been agreed with the American missionaries that they should also send a family to Jerusalem. This turned out to be William W. M. Thomson and his wife Eliza, who had come to Beirut on February 26, 1833. The Thomson family, with their newborn son William, came to Jerusalem on April 24, 1834 (see no. 8).

The city they came to was, in Nicolayson's words, struck by "God's four sore punishments, earthquake, war, pestilence, and (in part) famine"⁴¹ over the next few months.

All in Nicolayson's household were ill, but they recovered, at least initially. Many people in Jerusalem died, among them Papas Ysa (Isa) Petros and his son. Papas Ysa was a learned Greek Orthodox priest who since the early 1820s had had close contacts with the various Protestant missionaries in Jerusalem; he also translated some writings into Arabic for them.

The following account by William Thomson was written *after* Mrs. Thomson's death (see second paragraph).

Ravages of War and Disease in Jerusalem

*By William W. M. Thomson, Jerusalem, July, 1834.*⁴²

He was the most learned and ingenious man I have found in the country

“There have been many deaths in this city since the war commenced. Amongst these the mission will feel deeply the loss of Papas Isa Petros and his son. The former, the Greek priest so friendly to our brethren Parsons and Fisk, has always been ready to assist us in translations, and in every other way in his power. Immediately before the rebellion, he had made all the preparatory arrangements to explore some twenty villages of Greek Christians in the mountains between this and Nazareth. He was to ascertain the number of families, the number of children, whether there was any school, any church, or any books, and how many could read; whether they had a teacher, etc. He was to return his statistics to me, when he would pursue what farther measures in reference to schools and

41 *Jewish Intelligence* (1834), 199. The “war” was a peasant rebellion during which the fellahin (peasants) forced their way into Jerusalem.

42 *Missionary Herald* (1835), 91–92.

the distribution of books I should see proper to sustain. I was surprised to find so many villages of Christians, where we thought there were none, and was greatly interested in the plan. He was the most learned and ingenious man I have found in the country; and Mr. Bird says he does not know of any one that can supply his place as a translator.

When the Fellahs entered the city he labored hard, burying his chests; he then walled up his door to keep the Fellahs out; but death entered in another way, and this very work was the cause of it. Alas no cheering light shines from the tomb. His only son, a fine young man and the teacher of our school, followed him to the grave in a few days,⁴³ leaving an only sister about thirteen years of age. Her father had taught her to read, and wished her educated for a teacher. Mrs. Thomson had resolved to do it, along with Miria,⁴⁴ whom we brought from Beyroot for the same purpose; and we thus hoped in two years to have two active and efficient native helpers in the most difficult work of female education. But God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts.

The plague has made fearful ravages in the convents. Twenty out of the forty-four monks and friars in the Latin convent, died with it. All the rest fled, leaving their convent entirely desolate.”

Papas Ysa's Death

*By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, June 9–11, 1834.*⁴⁵

We have lost a kind friend and an experienced counsellor

“Yesterday Papas Ysa's son called, to tell me that his father is very ill and has been so ever since the rebels entered town. I called and found him in a high fever. He seemed to recognise me; but when they bid him to tell me what he had been wanting to speak to me about, he had nothing to say. To my inquiries respecting the state of his soul, he gave me the same general only half-satisfactory answers that he always used to give: he did, however, plainly and explicitly declare that Christ is his only hope and all his salvation. May he soon find this verified in fact, for he is evidently hastening towards eternity!

June 10. – Spent a good deal of the day with Papas Ysa. He seems to be going very fast. The medicines used will not take effect. The root of his disease seems to have been fright and fatigue occasioned by the late troubles. On returning home I found our friend the English priest there; and learning from him that there is a military physician residing at the Casa Nova, we went together in search of him, to get him to see Papas Ysa, but we found him gone to the convent. Thither we followed him, but found him gone to the hospital. My friend promised to bring him on his

43 According to Nicolayson, Papas Ysa's son, Butrus, died on July 12, 1834. Cf. *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 221.

44 Daughter of Jacob Aga, former Armenian patriarch.

45 *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 208.



return, if not too late. Towards evening he did so, and he ordered blisters for his legs. I sent Mr. Thomson's servant to put them on, and he thinks there are some symptoms of returning hope. The medicines had begun to take effect. I feel a good deal indisposed myself. An European officer in the Pasha's⁴⁶ employ brought us a letter from Mr. Thomson, and kindly offered to forward letters for us to Jaffa and Beyroot. Accordingly we wrote some hasty lines to assure our brethren and friends of our safety.

June 11. – Papas Ysa is no more on earth. About ten o'clock last night he breathed his last. Thus another link between us and the people in this country is snapped. But it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight! We have lost a kind friend and an experienced counsellor; his family their main support. Continue to feel indisposed; Mrs. Thomson also. It is indeed a wonder that we have hitherto enjoyed so good health under these circumstances: Many are suffering, and some dying, in consequence of the troubles. The owner of my house has brought a mason to inspect it, who assures me that, if thoroughly repaired in time, it will be perfectly safe. He is to set about it to-morrow. ”

Is Papas “Jesus” “with Jesus”?

“Ysa” is the Arabic name for Jesus. Nicolayson hoped, but was seemingly not convinced, that Papas “Jesus” was now “with Jesus” – a conviction which, in the hour of death, was always expressed about the Protestant missionaries, their spouses, and their children.

On February 24, 1835, Nicolayson wrote this about Papas Yoel's death, with reference to information from other Greek Orthodox persons in Jerusalem: “I learnt from them that my old friend Papas Yoel (once Superior of St. Michael) died a month or two ago. He had heard much of the truths of the Gospel; he had seen many of the errors of the Church in which he was a minister. O might I but hope that ere death seized him he had laid firm hold on the former, and seriously abandoned the latter!”⁴⁷

I wonder whether there were not also “errors” among the Protestant missionaries in the Holy Land in the 19th century.

⁴⁶ Turkish governor.

⁴⁷ *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 15.

7. A Lad from Beirut

Died in Jaffa, February 1835

In February 1835 John Nicolayson was informed that “a lad” in his service had died in Jaffa. This made Nicolayson reflect on whether the gospel had made it from the lad’s head to his heart. Nicolayson also explains the belief of some that, in the hour of death, all – Christians, Jews, and Moslems – are declared true sons of their respective religious communities.

Death and the Matter of Course System

By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, February 24, 1835.⁴⁸

Has all this gone for nothing, by reaching his head only?

“I received letters from Jaffa, announcing the death of a lad from Beyrout, who had been in my service before, and was again returning to my employ. He had been taught to read, read the Scriptures much for himself last winter, besides hearing them read and expounded by me every evening; had been remarkably reformed in his conduct, and entirely abandoned, while with me, his former dishonesty, and seemed to have some perception of the all-important distinction so universally overlooked in this country, between mere external, so-called religious exercises, and that worship in spirit and in truth which alone can be accepted of that God who is a pure Spirit. Has all this gone for nothing, by reaching his head only, or did he recur to it in true earnest, and apply it to his heart when he saw death approaching? This also remains to be seen in that day. Those who write about him pursue the matter of course system, so prevalent in this country, in all its deadening influences.”

All this is a matter of course

“Shall I explain what I mean by this system? Having mentioned it, perhaps I ought. Moreover, the real religious and moral condition of – I may say – all the inhabitants of these countries, Christians, Jews, Moslems, Druses, &c., can scarcely be better illustrated. I shall, therefore, add a few specimens of this system. A man sins – confesseth to a priest – is absolved; – sins again – is laid on his death bed – sends for a priest. If death appears certain, (not till then,) the last rites of his Church are administered to him. He dies – his body is buried – his soul passes its period in purgatory, (or, in the rounds of metempsychosis, if he be a Jew,) – then finally is saved, (having, of course, been at bottom a true son of the church, or synagogue, or mosque,) and all this as a matter of course. Thus passes

⁴⁸ *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 15–16.

one generation after another into eternity, without one effectual stirring thought on its consequences, or one earnest appropriate exertion for the necessary and proper preparation! ”

Back to the Missionaries, 1834

Papas Ysa and his son succumbed in the sickly season (no. 6). The missionaries in Jerusalem held out – but only until July 22.

8. Eliza N. Thomson

Died in Jerusalem, July 22, 1834

The Thomson family arrived in Jerusalem on April 24, 1834, and stayed in Nicolayson's house. On May 20, the very day the peasant rebellion began, William Thomson went to Jaffa in order to bring the family's furniture up to Jerusalem. He was not able to get back until July 12. Though all those in Nicolayson's house had been ill, the sickness had not been unto death. The month of June had been cold, and Mrs. Thomson had "enjoyed excellent health until about the close of it."

On his return to Jerusalem, Thomson found his wife "suffering intensely from violent ophthalmia ... and she was in a high inflammatory fever."⁴⁹

This sickness was unto death. Here is William Thomson's story about his last five days with Eliza.

Mrs. Thomson's Last Five Days

By William W. M. Thomson, Jerusalem, July 16–20, 1834.⁵⁰

I knew not what was the matter, and I knew not what to do

"Thursday, 16th, Mrs. Thomson spent a restless night. The case which had before appeared a plain one, now became, to me, utterly mysterious. I knew not what was the matter, and I knew not what to do. The action of the heart was still very distressing, and I endeavored merely to allay the violence of such symptoms as appeared. On Friday evening we heard of an Italian physician among the troops, whom we sent for, and who came the next morning. But he did not pretend to understand the case and recommended no new course of treatment.**"**

The blood of atonement was her only hope

"My dear wife, at an early stage of her disease, was convinced that she would not recover. The thought never alarmed her. She had for many weeks been in the higher, clearer regions of faith, ready to depart at any time. We often conversed on the subject, and she gave the most consoling assurance, that for a considerable time before her sickness she had enjoyed greater nearness to God in prayer, and greater comfort with regard to her interest in the blood and love of the Savior, than ever before. Sometimes she remarked, that, owing to her great bodily sufferings, it was difficult to compose her thoughts to meditation and prayer, and that her faith appeared at times very weak; but she was always distinct,

49 Thomson's Journal, *Missionary Herald* (1835), 44, 53.

50 *Missionary Herald* (1835), 52–53.

clear, and decisive in declaring her confidence in her Savior. The blood of atonement was her only hope; and she repeatedly remarked that it was a ground of hope, that would not, and did not fail in the hour of death.”

She spoke of the dear babe with visible emotion

“We spent much of Sabbath night, the 20th, in this kind of conversation, and in prayer. She also gave directions with regard to some small temporal affairs; left messages for her near friends; spoke of the dear babe with visible emotion, but was enabled to resign him to ‘Him who gave’. She had cherished the hope of laboring longer to educate and bring to the knowledge of the truth some of the degraded daughters of Jerusalem; but the Lord knew best, and to his will she cheerfully submitted. I was astonished at the composure with which she was enabled to make all these arrangements preparatory to her upward and everlasting flight. Being somewhat exhausted she fell into a quiet sleep, and awoke in the morning with all her symptoms greatly mitigated – her pulse nearly natural, the heat abated, accompanied with a sensation of general comfort.”

And just as the sun set, she silently fell asleep in Jesus

“At one o’clock she was seized with an alarming chill, which yielded to applications and passed off with an irregular fever. Our friends were much encouraged, but I was sure that she could not survive another such attack, and therefore directed all my efforts to prevent its return, and succeeded through that day and till noon of Tuesday. During the morning of the latter day she was uncommonly well and strong. About one o’clock I was sent for to dinner. She assured me she had no tendency to chill whatever, and leaving Miria⁵¹ alone with her, I went below. On returning, in about five minutes, I noticed a change indicating the return of the chill. She thought not, but I immediately used every effort to prevent it, but without avail. It came on violently, and in half an hour her reason, for the first time, became disturbed, and my fears became a painful certainty that the hour of her departure was at hand. I called Mr. Nicolayson, and he and I labored to restore circulation in the extremities; but all our efforts were utterly powerless. For several hours she suffered greatly. I continued to repeat to her those texts of Scripture which I knew afforded her particular comfort; and at times she appeared for a moment to recollect, and would reply, ‘Oh yes, it is so, it is so’, or words to that effect. Once, in a moment of comparative quiet, I asked her if she remembered Sabbath night; and whether she felt now as she did then? She seemed to recall the scene and said, ‘Yes, I remember it, and my feelings are the same’. She knew me to the very last moment, and the only connected sentence which she spoke after her situation became manifest, was just before she died. Looking me steadfastly in the face she said, ‘Native, native, native

51 See note 44 above.

land – you remember when we travelled west, that wild young man and his wife who came on board the boat, and you talked with him a great deal, and he became very serious. Oh I thought it was such an opportunity'. This she repeated several times. 'It was such an opportunity, and he left us much impressed'. The next word was on some other subject. After this she requested to be laid upon her side. We then kneeled down and commended her departing spirit to God. And just as the sun set, she silently fell asleep in Jesus without a struggle or a groan. Her last end was perfect peace.

When she ceased to breathe I gently closed her eyes, prepared the body for the burial, and then sat down and watched by the dear remains until the day dawned.”

Strangers carried her to the grave

“We were apprehensive that we should not be allowed to bury in any of the grave-yards, but God prepared the way for us. The Greek bishop not only gave permission, but took the whole charge of preparing the grave himself. Those who know what difficulty has generally been experienced on this subject in these countries, will not fail to notice the good providence of God in this. When all was ready we read and talked of that day when that which was now sown in corruption should be raised in incorruption – ‘dishonor’ should be changed to ‘glory’ – ‘weakness’ ‘raised in power’ – when this ‘natural body’ should become ‘spiritual’, like unto Christ’s glorified body.

Strangers carried her to the grave, followed by myself, Mr. Nicolayson, Elias, a Christian brother, and two or three others, the only Franks⁵² in the place. Her sleeping dust awaits in hope the joyful morning of the resurrection, on the top of Zion, near the sepulchre of David, and by the grave of Dr. Dalton, an English missionary and former husband of Mrs. Nicolayson.”

The Lord had ... written my dear little babe motherless in a strange land

“I have been in the ‘strait’ which Paul mentions; nevertheless, if to ‘abide in the flesh be more needful’, I trust the grace of God will enable me cheerfully to wait all the days of my appointed time, till my change come. – The Lord had put out the light in my dwelling, laid my earthly hopes in the dust, and written my dear little babe motherless in a strange land. But it is the Lord that had done it – the same Lord who eighteen hundred years ago shed his blood in this very place to redeem our souls from death; and I have no doubt that the same love has directed all these afflicting dispensations.”

52 In this context the word is used about foreigners, Westerners.



On the Confines of Eternity

By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, August 13 – September 1, 1834.⁵³

I have been on the confines of eternity; and what a privilege!

“Aug. 13. – Mrs. N. [Nicolayson] has of late appeared so well that I really thought she was fast recovering, but to-day she has had a return of the fever, followed by ague.

Aug. 16. – Yesterday we made a new trial of quinine, and it appears this time to have taken effect, she feels so much better. About sun-set I received notice that the Commander of the United States squadron, lately arrived at Jaffa, was coming up here with his family, and about sixty of his officers. As I expected they would have a letter for me, I went to the gate and found them there, inquiring for me. I obtained one of the Greek convents for the officers, and invited Commodore Patterson and family to my house, notwithstanding Mrs. N.'s illness.

Sept. 1 – Since the above date I have not been able to use a pen, but now, through the rich goodness and wise providence of my God, I am recovering fast. I have been on the confines of eternity; and what a privilege! I desire to record my most unfeigned gratitude to the Father of mercies, not only for my recovery, but rather for the invaluable experience made in the sickness. O, how very precious has the Redeemer appeared to my soul, as my only and all-sufficient hope in view of eternity, brought so near! May I live the rest of my days entirely to him, and in him! The means made use of by Providence for my recovery were the kind attentions of two of the physicians of the Delaware, whose kindness I shall never forget. Mrs. N. began to recover before I was taken down. She has since had a new attack of fever, but we are now favoured with the medical aid of Dr. Dodge, who, together with Mr. Thomson, arrived on the 30th ult. [August], the very day that Dr. Baltzen, of the Delaware, left me, having just seen me pass the crisis safely that night. It was not till after my recovery that I learnt that my disease had been a typhus. It was, of course, attended with delirium, though not constant, and has brought on an extraordinary debility, though it did not continue severe for more than ten or twelve days.”

Assistance on the Way

William W. M. Thomson left Jerusalem with his “motherless babe,” William, and continued his ministry as a missionary in Beirut. On August 30, 1834, he went back to Jerusalem for a short time, and introduced Dr. Dodge to the work there.⁵⁴ An American missionary family, the Whitings, were also on their way as reinforcements for the Protestant mission in Jerusalem.

As we shall now see, the next person to be buried in Jerusalem was Dr. Dodge.

⁵³ *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 287.

⁵⁴ *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 287.

9. Asa Dodge

Died in Jerusalem, January 28, 1835

Following Mrs. Thomson's death on July 22, 1834 (see above), Thomson left Jerusalem with his young child. The Americans decided to station the Dodge⁵⁵ and Whiting⁵⁶ families in Jerusalem. And in the autumn of 1834, E. Scott Calman – “an Israelite who believes in Jesus as Messiah” – was, after a visit to Baghdad, back in Jerusalem, where he decided to stay.⁵⁷ On November 1, 1834, Nicolayson wrote optimistically, “Rather late this evening our brethren from Beyrout, Mr. Whiting and Dr. Dodge, with their families, arrived. Thus our little band is complete. May we have grace to strengthen each other's hands both in praying to, and acting for the Lord our Redeemer!”⁵⁸

But disease was still in the air in Jerusalem. Nicolayson took his family to Beirut, and from there they planned to sail to England for a vacation. In Beirut, Mrs. Bird was seriously ill, so Dr. Dodge was sent for. Nicolayson and Dodge were back in Jerusalem by January 3, 1835.⁵⁹ They both became seriously ill; Dodge died, while Nicolayson recovered. During the time of Nicolayson's illness, Mrs. Nicolayson and her children were waiting for passage on a ship to England; she feared that her husband had died in Jerusalem.

On January 13, 1835, Nicolayson called on someone in the Jewish Quarter. On his way home he visited Dr. Dodge. We begin Nicolayson's story here.

Nicolayson's Illness and Dodge's Death

*By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, January 13 and February 5, 1835.*⁶⁰

**He will probably precede me into eternity,
but we may soon meet again**

“All this time I had had a slight ague upon me; our two hours were gone, and we returned home.⁶¹ Having to pass by Dr. Dodge's house, and knowing that he was ill yesterday [= January 12], I thought I must see him. The walk, and particularly the ascent of the stairs, exhausted me very

55 Dr. Asa Dodge and wife Martha had arrived in Beirut together with the Thomsons on February 24, 1833; cf. *Missionary Herald* (1833), 441.

56 George B. Whiting and wife Matilda had arrived in Beirut on May 18, 1830; cf. *Missionary Herald* (1830), 373.

57 *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 295; cf. (1835), 177.

58 *Jewish Intelligence* (1835), 292–293.

59 *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 3.

60 *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 10–11.

61 After a visit in the Jewish Quarter on January 13, 1835.

much, but I am thankful that I saw my brother, for it will perhaps prove the last time here below. I scarcely spoke to him, but I saw him, noticed his labour under the fever, and the flush of it in his cheeks, and thought of death and eternity. I reached home, and soon laid down with the same kind of fever, but not so violent. He will probably precede me into eternity, but we may soon meet again.”

**Such a disease allows no further time
to prepare for death and eternity**

“Feb. 5. – Since the above date [January 13] I have not been able to write. I have now again to record my gratitude to a tender and gracious God and Father for having been made partaker of his paternal chastisement, and again restored to praise him in the land of the living. The same disease that was sent to our dear, now departed, Brother Dodge, to call him into that ‘inheritance among saints in light,’ for which he had, visibly to us of late, been rendered meet, has in my case proved only another message to set my house in order, and an admonition to labour while the day lasts. ... This sickness has completely reduced my strength. It was in both our cases typhus, and of course attended with much delirium. Such a disease allows no further time to prepare for death and eternity, if this be not done before, as we have the consolation to know it was in the case of our deceased brother. As, however, during my sickness, I had, perhaps daily, short intervals in which I was free from delirious wanderings of mind, I had eternity brought nigh and clearly opened to my view, and the blessedness of faith in a risen Redeemer who has brought life and immortality to light! I was enabled to look at it calmly, and with a happy anticipation of its being, sooner or later, my blessed inheritance in Him. My fellow-sufferer, however, appeared much in advance of me, and I therefore never forgot, at such times, to inquire after him; yet I did not actually learn his death till the 31st, when my fever was quite over. I remember that on the 29th I asked Br. Whiting about him, and he, instead of a direct answer, said, I presume you would not be much surprised if you were to hear that our brother had entered into his rest. I should not, I replied, for I expect it. But the thought of separation so affected me, that I could not help giving free vent to my tears. I perceived that Br. Whiting did the same, and no wonder, for he knew that to be fact already which at that moment I only anticipated. Our brother had already departed the day before [= January 28]. He was truly a man of God, and having of late made rapid strides in preparation for eternity, (though we thought not of it,) he had become peculiarly endeared to all of us. With regard to the loss the Mission here has thus again sustained, we are, I trust, all enabled to say, ‘It is the Lord – the Lord of the work – let him do what seemeth good unto him.’ May we be as docile, as I trust we are submissive, to such dispensations! for we feel we have much to learn from them. ... Last Lord’s-day [= February 1] I was already able to get over to Br. Whiting’s for worship, though not without great exhaustion. It was a solemn and truly affecting season; we spend much of it in conversation. Death and eter-

nity, life and immortality through Christ, was our theme. Next Monday (first in the month) [= February 2] was our monthly prayer-meeting; and I got over with rather less fatigue. (It is in the same house.) We missed our dear departed brother in our little assembly, and it was again a searching and trying but blessed season to us.”

Reflections on Dodge’s Death

*By George B. Whiting, Jerusalem, February 3, 1835.*⁶²

**... his body now sleeps on Mount Zion,
by the side of Dr. Dalton and Mrs. Thomson**

“It is natural to regret that his [Dodge’s] health was so exposed on that journey, and to wish that he had been more careful and taken proper rest and medicine immediately after his arrival at home. The weather was, at that time, remarkably cold and wet; and one day, soon after he reached home, he spent several hours in a cold uncomfortable room, arranging his medicines, and putting up medicine for some sick persons at Ramla, whom he had seen on his return from Beyroot. But let us not look too much at these second causes. When I think of the incalculable loss which our mission, and especially this infant branch of it, has sustained; when I look at these perishing souls, who are no longer to have the benefit of his prayers, his instructions, his holy example, and his medical services; or at his bereaved partner and orphan child; or think of my own personal loss; my mind finds little repose until I look beyond means, and resolve it all into the holy will of God. His work was done; and it was the will of Christ that his dear servant should be with him, where he is, and behold his glory. Even so, Lord Jesus, for so it seemed good in thy sight. Here is a resting place for the afflicted soul. Here, blessed be God, we have found consolation in our sorrow. And here all who knew and loved our departed friend, will find consolation.

... After a few months labor in that city of sacred recollections, he was called to his rest, and his body now sleeps on Mount Zion, by the side of Dr. Dalton and Mrs. Thomson.”

Mrs. Nicolayson’s Fear and Trembling

*By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, February 8, 1835.*⁶³

**[Mrs. Nicolayson] ... thinking me either
still suffering or already in eternity**

“To-day a messenger arrived from Mrs. Nicolayson, who has not yet sailed. Such had been the impression made by Mr. W.’s [Whiting’s] letters, that they fully expected to hear of the death of either or both of us. Mrs.

⁶² *Missionary Herald* (1835), 458.

⁶³ *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 11.



N., therefore, though she says expressly that under all her apprehensions and feelings she had been much strengthened from on high, ventured to write to Br. Whiting only, thinking me either still suffering or already in eternity. Thank God I shall be able to write in reply myself. She wanted to know if she should come here, sending George⁶⁴ alone with Captain Hays. There is no need of this, and her own health needs a visit to her native country.”

The Reduced “Little Band” in Jerusalem

With Dr. Dodge’s death, the number of Protestant missionaries in Jerusalem was reduced once more. Calman was frequently ill, and he was transported from Jerusalem to Beirut in critical condition at the end of April 1835.⁶⁵ Jane Nicolayson was on her way to England with her three children. In the spring of 1835, only John Nicolayson and the Whiting family remained in Jerusalem. The “little band,” referred to so optimistically on November 1, 1834, has now been more than halved.

64 William E. and Jane Dalton’s eldest son; see no. 5.

65 *Jewish Intelligence* (1836), 127–131.

10. Jane Dorothy Nicolayson

Died in Jerusalem, November 1, 1839

Jane Dalton, the widow of Dr. George E. Dalton, had buried the couple's son Henry in July 1826 in Beirut (see above). In March 1828 she married John Nicolayson. Due to political unrest in the area, Malta became their base from May 1828 to March 1832. The couple's first daughter, Mary Elisabeth,⁶⁶ was born there, on April 6, 1830. She died on January 22, 1855, during a stay in Ireland with her mother. She had not yet turned 25.⁶⁷ The couple's second daughter, Jane Dorothy, was born around December 1, 1831.⁶⁸

John Nicolayson began to keep Church Records in Jerusalem in connection with the first baptisms he performed. Under "Baptisms" are entered, on April 14, 1839, the first four baptisms: Simeon Rosenthal, his wife, and two children. Under "Deaths and Burials" the first entry is for his own daughter; she died on November 1, 1839. Jane Dorothy was also the first to be buried in the newly bought American graveyard on Zion, on November 2.

In the weeks before Jane Dorothy's death, Nicolayson was sorting out the business of the title-deed for the property in Jerusalem, earlier bought in the name of Signor Hohannes. On October 24, 1839, he wrote, "When this shall be done, I shall then feel a heavy weight of responsibility taken off me, as the title will then be duly and legally secured to the trustees. Indeed I do now already rejoice in its being so far settled, and feel that I am bound to render unfeigned thanks to the Father of all mercies, in which I am sure you will heartily join me as soon as this reaches you."⁶⁹

But Jane Dorothy's death laid another burden on Nicolayson. Her death made him reflect on a possible successor; it could easily have been him who had died. Mary Elisabeth was also taken ill. It was "a most sickly season" in Jerusalem.

Jane Dorothy's Death and Nicolayson's Reflections

*By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, November 2, 1839.*⁷⁰

May her ashes rest in peace till the coming of the Lord!

“It has pleased our heavenly Father to take our youngest beloved

66 Nicknamed Betsy.

67 Cf. Nicolayson's letter no. 431, February 1855, in Conrad Schick Library, Jerusalem.

68 Cf. *Church Records* (Conrad Schick Library, Jerusalem), which Nicolayson began to keep in 1839. In other sources her birth day is given as "in November" or December 2, 1831.

69 *Jewish Intelligence* (1840), 11.

70 *Jewish Intelligence* (1840), 11–12.

daughter, Jane Dorothy, to himself, almost quite unexpectedly to us. On Tuesday last [October 29] (this is Saturday,) she was in perfect health; Wednesday morning she began to complain, and begged to be put to bed; on Thursday she continued feverish, and rather delirious; on Friday morning she seemed so much better that the doctor said she might get up. But she preferred to stay in bed, and, indeed, from the first seemed herself to feel the severity of the disease, which entirely escaped our notice. The doctor, however, attended her very assiduously. Yesterday afternoon her mother began to think the complaint more serious, and asked the doctor if there was danger. He hesitated to say so, and she came over to me in my study to bring me (at near five o'clock) the first news and idea of danger in the case. I went and found her almost gone. She did not know me, nor speak at all. Soon some very severe spasms followed one another at short intervals. We prayed the Lord to shorten her struggle, and we were heard. At six the last spasm, which reached the heart, was over. She then breathed so gently and calmly that we scarcely perceived when her young spirit took its departure from the body, – 'to be,' we doubt not, 'with the Lord who bought her.'"

A beautiful rainbow came into view

"We have now (five p.m.) just returned from burying her in peace, the first in the new burial-ground of the Americans just finished. May her ashes rest in peace till the coming of our Lord!

A beautiful rainbow came into view just as we came out of the cemetery; and that silent token of God's covenant of peace to the earth, brought thoughts of rich consolation to our minds, reminding us sweetly of that other covenant ordered in all things and sure, the divinely appointed token of which she had received in her infancy."

I now return to the subject of this letter

"I now return to the subject of this letter. On the 24th of October, the purchase of the whole was made in my own name; the title-deed, duly drawn up, sealed, and attested, was brought me on the next day. It was not however till the 28th that I was able to get the registration made in the Consulate, an attested copy of which, together with the literal translation of the original Arabic title-deed, I transmit by this same post.

I trust that the declaration or deposition made by me before the Consul, and in the presence of the undersigned witnesses, and entered in the Consular Register, will be found sufficient to secure in law the title to the trustees, and satisfactory to themselves and the Committee. It was framed with reference to the power of attorney.

The translation of the title-deed is, of course, of no validity, and I send it chiefly as a matter of curiosity. It has puzzled me a good deal to make it out, but I believe it is correct – certainly for substance. I must yet add that I have, of course, received and hold in my keeping all the several title-deeds by which Signor Hohannes held the several premises bought

in his name at different times, and also some previous documents, one of which goes back at least 150 years.”

Had the Lord been pleased to call me instead of my child ...

“I have now only to add the most urgent motive I can think of for a competent fellow-labourer soon joining me.⁷¹ It is this: ‘In the midst of life, we are in death.’ This has been most touchingly and tenderly impressed upon me just at this time. Had the Lord been pleased to call me instead of my child, into whose hands would all this property of the mission, and their documents for it have gone? If there be no successor appointed me by the Committee, registered as such in the Consulate,⁷² and duly qualified for the task, all must take the usual law-course. It is, therefore, as indispensable to the interests of the Society, and the prosperity of the mission and the undertaking, as to my quiet of mind, and relief from distressing anxiety that some such person come out soon, and that he come out duly appointed by the Committee my successor, so that I may have him immediately recognized as such by the Consul – have him make on his behalf and his heirs the same declaration I have made in the Consulate, and have him there also registered as my lawful substitute and successor. I shall then do all in my power to qualify him for this, by making him perfectly familiar with the whole state of things here, from the first to the last, my present manner of conducting affairs, and my plans for the future; and then I shall feel that I have, ‘set my house in order,’ and am ready for my Lord’s call.”

I am not in any way under the influence of melancholy

“I am, thank God, in perfect, nay, unusually good health. I am not in any way under the influence of melancholy, or depression of spirit – quite the contrary – but I write ‘the words of truth and soberness;’ it is madness not to be every moment ready to ‘depart home and be with the Lord.’ I have little or no earthly affairs of my own to order, but I feel those of the Society and mission to be mine, and to rest upon me alone, so long as there is not one ready to take my place. Neither do I urge this, because I am tired of my work, or overwhelmed by it. Blessed be God, my strength is as my day – it is easy and delightful. Besides, I am just now most kindly aided by the Rev. Mr. L.,⁷³ a most excellent young clergyman now here, who took the rather painful duty of the burial service for me, and also preached for me in English yesterday (this is Nov. 4,) and assisted me in ad-

71 In 1839 Nicolayson had four young assistants to help him, but none of them were considered competent to be his successor. G. W. Pieritz and A. Levi had arrived early in July 1838, W. A. Gerstmann and M. P. Bergheim in the beginning of December 1838; cf. *Jewish Intelligence* (1839), 155–156.

72 The first British Vice-Consul in Jerusalem, William T. Young, had arrived on March 16, 1839. Cf. *Jewish Intelligence* (1839), 174.

73 In *Church Records* Nicolayson identifies “L” as “Rev. Edward Leighton, an English Clergyman here on a visit.”



ministering the Lord's Supper, at which we had eighteen communicants. He intends to stay here for some time, and will continue to aid me.”

Reflections on a Duly Appointed Successor

By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, November 5, 1839.⁷⁴

**I will not leave the vessel in which I am embarked,
because I believe the Lord is on board
– even though he should seem to be asleep**

“I join you in leaving it in God's hand. Still, what I have said in my last on the subject of a duly appointed successor will abide in all its strength. In speaking of a successor, however, let me not be understood to mean that I think of quitting my station, otherwise than by the Committee's act, or that of death, unless indeed such a one should be found, as I should feel fully justified in exchanging position with, and become his second, which I should, in that case, most willingly do. So long as I can get a rope to hold to, and have a hand to hold it by, I will not leave the vessel in which I have embarked, because I believe the Lord is on board – even though he should seem to be asleep. It is in view of the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of death, that I plead for a duly appointed successor. Though I endeavour to keep everything in the best and plainest order I can think of, still much confusion might ensue in the affairs of the mission, were not a duly appointed and properly initiated successor on the spot whenever I shall realize the hope of David, of going to my child, who will not return to me, – or rather to the Lord who bought us both and all. Nor, let me again say, is this an effect of melancholy or despondency? I have known what melancholy is, and I do, thank God, know what freeness from that bondage is. I enjoy, blessed be His name, a calm but deep serenity, and even cheerfulness. While things not seen are my delight, the things that are seen are a present duty to me; and every duty, rightly understood, is a privilege.”

**Whether this illness be unto death or not we know not
... It is a most sickly season**

“PS. Nov. 6. – Our only remaining daughter is taken this morning with the same disease as her poor sister, which is quite prevalent in the city at present. Whether this illness be unto death or not we know not. In either event we trust it will prove for the glory of God. We hope she has more strength of constitution, and may perhaps pass through it safely. The Lord only knows. You will feel with me that it is exceedingly distressing to me, that even in time of illness I am obliged to attend to the distracting calls of business, and thus leave all the weight of it on Mrs. N. You will see that this affords an additional reason for sending me an assistant soon.

⁷⁴ *Jewish Intelligence* (1840), 13–14.

Moreover, though in perfect health I feel that death is ever at hand, and I do wish I had one to succeed me in that case.

P.S. Nov. 7. – I am happy to add that our dear girl soon became much better yesterday; and this morning, after a good night, she appears still more so.

Mr. Pieritz was a little indisposed yesterday, and is still so this morning.

Last night about sunset they seized workmen to send to Acre. Ours got timely notice, and retreated to my house before leaving the premises, where they have spent the night. Being a holiday to-day they have dispersed to hide as they can best, and I cannot tell whether any of them might have left the premises before the notice came, and thus have been taken; I think not, however.

It is reported that the plague broke out here yesterday among some Jews come from Hebron, where it had continued. An inspector of quarantine has just arrived at Jaffa from Beyrout, who is to examine all this district; thus we may look out for the plague of quarantine again.

P.S. Nov. 7, *Evening*. – Mr. Pieritz, I am sorry to add, is a good deal indisposed; though I hope not dangerously. It is a most sickly season.”

Sickness and Personal Conflict

As mentioned above, Nicolayson had four assistants in 1839, all of Jewish descent. The next year they had all left Jerusalem. This reduction was caused not only by sickness.

The young Alexander Levi left Jerusalem in the autumn of 1839 because of poor health. The next to leave, in early 1839, was Albert Gerstmann. This was not due to bad health. In 1839, Pieritz accused Gerstmann of misconduct in very severe terms. He constantly lied, according to Pieritz.⁷⁵ Gerstmann continued as an LJS missionary in Constantinople, where he died on May 23, 1841. Nicolayson, who took Pieritz's side in the conflict, arrived in Constantinople two days after Gerstmann's death.

So they were in no way “saints”; even among Protestant missionaries there were “errors” (cf. no. 6). How, then, did Nicolayson describe the deceased Gerstmann? He did it diplomatically by referring to others: “He had died on Saturday evening the 23d instant [May 1841], and been buried on the Sunday. He had appeared to be in good health and spirits on the Wednesday, was taken ill on the Thursday; no idea of danger was entertained on Saturday towards evening, except by himself. By midnight his soul was in eternity. He had the best and kindest attendance, both medical and spiritual, from Christian friends, who loved him as a Christian, and speak most affectionately and satisfactorily of him also as a Missionary.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The correspondence between the conflicting parties can be seen in *Letters and Communications to The London Society (1837–1840)*, Conrad Schick Library, Jerusalem; see e.g. pp. 382–408.

⁷⁶ *Jewish Intelligence* (1841), 280.



In the autumn of 1840 the two remaining assistants, Pieritz and Bergheim, left Jerusalem, not because of disease but due to conflict.

But before then there was another burial in Jerusalem, the last to be mentioned in this series of stories about disease and death in 1818–1840.

11. William Curry Hillier

Died in Jerusalem, August 8, 1840

In October 1839, John Nicolayson received the title deed of the plot of land he had acquired in Jerusalem (see no. 10). In mid-December they began digging the foundations for a building where temporary services could be held until Christ Church, which was dedicated in 1849, could be built.⁷⁷

In order to relieve Nicolayson, LJS sent William Curry Hillier to Jerusalem as the architect for the construction work. He arrived on July 7, 1840 and died on August 8, the same year. He would serve as architect for less than a month, since he was already taken ill on August 3.

LJS's comment on this was, "... it has pleased God to remove him when his service seemed most needful."⁷⁸

Hillier's Last Sunday

*By John Nicolayson, Jerusalem, August 31, 1840.*⁷⁹

In the afternoon his delirium took the usual turn

“On Saturday evening [August 7, 1840] he was so ill that we scarcely hoped he would get through the night, but on Sunday morning he seemed a little better, though very delirious. In the afternoon his delirium took the usual turn (when fatal) of a full persuasion that his life was attempted by those about him. Mr. Young⁸⁰ and I were sent for, and it was only by our giving him a solemn promise not to leave him for a moment that we could induce him to stay quiet in the house. He then wished us to join in reading a portion of Scripture and in prayer. He bid me read the 27th Psalm; after which I prayed, till he stopped me and then prayed himself with a very strong voice and tolerably coherently. I sat alone with him a long while, and by yielding to his impressions, and endeavouring to lead him to different trains of thought, succeeded in quieting him very much, though the delirium never forsook him, but now took a less distressing turn. In the evening we were obliged to watch him very closely, as he would every now and then start out of bed. I would then catch him in my arms, and he would say, ‘Well, I thought we were to go;’ to which I would reply, ‘Not till I tell you;’ and he would lie down again, apparently satisfied, but only for a moment. Gradually the exertions he made

⁷⁷ *Jewish Intelligence* (1841), 36–43.

⁷⁸ *Jewish Intelligence* (1840), 358.

⁷⁹ *Jewish Intelligence* (1840), 359.

⁸⁰ The British Vice-Consul in Jerusalem.

of this kind, became more and more violent and frequent, so that at last we were obliged to have one of the carpenters to help me to keep him in the bed, and under cover. After a tremendous exertion of this kind, about half-past ten o'clock, he sank back and never stirred more, breathed slower and slower, and heavier and heavier, for about ten minutes, till at last he died away so peaceably and quietly, that, though I watched him very closely, I could scarcely tell when his released spirit left the earthly tabernacle, now completely exhausted. When I thought this was the case, I commended it to Him who had redeemed it, in a single sentence pronounced aloud, which brought the others into the room, with Mr. Young, who had kindly stayed with us.

I immediately set the carpenters to work, who, early in the forenoon of Monday, had finished the most decent coffin any has ever been buried in this place. The grave (in the American burial-ground, close to our dear Jane)⁸¹ was not finished till about noon, when we buried him in due order, all the Americans attending, and in perfect peace.”

In Perfect Peace – But ...

Nicolayson buried Hillier “in perfect peace” on August 9, 1840. But really there was not much “peace” for Nicolayson in those days. There was the war between Egypt and Turkey and its allies, among them England, which put an end to Egypt’s rule over Palestine as early as the spring of 1840. Another problem was the conflict, not to say “war,” between Pieritz and Bergheim on the one side and Nicolayson on the other, in the summer of 1840.⁸² That story will not be told here. But on September 19, 1840, Pieritz and Bergheim left Jerusalem. Bergheim returned to Jerusalem in the autumn of 1841; later he established himself as a banker there.

The burial of Hillier “in perfect peace” was not directly proportional to the peace, or lack thereof, among the Protestant missionaries in Jerusalem in the summer of 1840.

They needed, like Parsons and Fisk, Psalm 51 – in life and in death (see no. 2).

On January 21, 1842, Bishop Alexander and other missionaries came to Jerusalem, inaugurating a new era in the Jerusalem mission’s history, which we cannot cover here. Disease and death continued. One of the first things Alexander did was to bury his infant daughter on February 4, 1842. In Nicolayson’s words in *Church Records*: “The above infant was this day deposited in a temporary vault in my Garden till we obtain a Burial-Ground of our own.” Bishop Alexander himself died during a journey to Egypt, on November 22, 1845. He was to serve less than four years as a bishop in Jerusalem.

Why, God?

⁸¹ See no. 10.

⁸² Cf. *Letters and Communications to The London Society (1837–1840)*, pp. 589–660.