
Missionary inquiry to Israel in 1839 and its consequences¹

JOHN W. KEDDIE

1. Background: Scottish Presbyterian interest in Jewish mission and evangelism

When Jews first arrived in Scotland is a disputed point. Possibly it was on the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 under an edict of King Edward I. Jews never did seem to settle in Scotland in great numbers. In 1656 Cromwell gave permission for the re-establishment of a Jewish community in England, though as Jews have done through much of their history, they experienced a fair amount of opprobrium. Of course, it was not easy in a country with strong Christian Churches for those who positively denied that Jesus was Messiah or refused to acknowledge his divinity. Notwithstanding having the oracles of God and the history and traditions of the deeds of God through Old Testament times, the followers of Judaism gave no place to the Person of God's Son as Messiah and Saviour. Their forefathers had taken him and had him crucified as a blasphemer who claimed to be God. Yet a Jewish community was established in Scotland before the end of the eighteenth century and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* records that 'relations between Jews and non-Jews in Scotland have always been harmonious.'²

There is no history in Scotland of the persecution of Jews, which is not to say that there has not been irrational prejudice. The Presbyterian and Reformed Scots, knowledgeable of their Old Testament, were conscious of the debt owed to the children of Abraham who had received the law, the covenants and the promises. The incarnate Christ 'came to his own'. Whilst their rejection of Christ and what they inflicted on him was indeed grievous, that was not, at least generally, seen to be incompatible with an appreciation that they were after all the ancient people of God. As much as any poor lost or apostate Gentile souls, they needed to be faced up with the gospel of a gracious God and Saviour through whom alone there is any peace with God, and of course, true understanding of the Old Testament itself and its claims.

¹ Address originally given to the Free Church School in Theology, Larbert, 4th September 2018.

² John S. Ross, *Time for Favour: Scottish Missions to the Jews, 1838-1852* (Tentmaker Publications: Stoke-on-Trent, 2011), p. 25 (hereinafter, Ross (2011)).

It may be an irony that in the Scottish context Christians were at least for the greater part free from intolerance of Jews because they had learned to respect the teaching and moral principles of the Old Testament!³ One Jewish writer argued that 'if any nation may justly claim to be fully conversant with and closely attached to the Bible as the Jewish people, then that nation must certainly be the Scots.'⁴ 'This deep sense of kinship', comments John Ross in his excellent and informative *Time for Favour*, a thorough study of Scottish missions to the Jews (1838-1852), 'created concern for the spiritual welfare of Jewish people, which in time fuelled enthusiastic support for Jewish mission.'⁵

In some respects, the scene was set by the reception given by the Scottish Presbyterian Church to the Westminster Standards in the 1640s. The 1645 *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* encouraged prayer for 'the conversion of the Jews'. The *Larger Catechism*, too, (Q191) speaks specifically of the Jews being evangelized ('called'). There was acknowledgement of indebtedness to the Jews in that both the Old and New Testaments were penned almost entirely by Hebrew authors (humanly speaking that is). The human ancestry of Jesus was Jewish. The Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses, the older covenants of promise, were Hebrew. Spiritually, Scottish Presbyterians saw themselves as true children of Abraham. The faith was based upon the law and the prophets. A great deal of sympathy was created by the thought of the blindness of the Jews in the face of the truth that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, was the once and for all sacrifice for sin, and satisfied the demand of God's law and justice on behalf of believers.

It may be noted that another influence in the sympathy in the Scottish Reformed Church towards Jewish mission work lay in the use in sung praise of the Psalms. These were used more or less exclusively in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches from the Reformation to the end of the nineteenth century. It is understandable that it should give the psalm singers a 'fellow feeling' with the Old Testament saints and their worship. By contrast, in his 'Christianising' of the psalms Isaac Watts was to claim that he had 'led the Psalmist of Israel into the Church of Christ without anything of the Jew about him.'⁶ In addition to this, the traditional conscientiousness in the Scottish Reformed Church in maintaining the moral law and especially the Sabbath institution provided some commonalty between Scots and Jews, at least outwardly.

As to Jewish mission or evangelism, there always seemed to be in Scotland a post-Reformation concern for Jewish evangelism. No doubt reasons varied. For some, the Bible teaching was clear. Whilst Paul was especially set apart as missionary to the Gentiles, he still had the conviction that the gospel first be taken to the Jews (Romans 1:16). His policy where he travelled was to seek out the synagogues of the Jews in the first instance (e.g. Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1; 18:4). This was motive enough for exercised Christians

³ Ross (2011), p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

to seek the conversion of the Jews. Others have had belief of the widespread future ingathering of the Jews in terms of prophetic expectations, based largely on an interpretation of Paul's teaching in Romans 11. It is only fair to say that opinions have varied among Reformed theologians on that matter, some supportive (e.g. Jonathan Edwards,⁷ whose writings were so popular and influential in Scotland) and others who have not held that view (e.g. William Hendriksen⁸). That, however, is not a matter we will deal with here.

One early pioneer of Jewish evangelism was Cambuslang-born Claudius Buchanan (1766-1814) who at one point was appointed a chaplain in India (1797-1808). His work and writings stimulated interest in overseas mission work which among other things included work among the Jews at Cochin (Kochi) on the south-west coast of India. Buchanan was one of a group of evangelical ministers and men who founded the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews* (LSPCJ) in 1809. This was the agency both for specifically Jewish mission work and a link in the chain which led to a concern in the Church of Scotland in the late 1830s to pursue Jewish mission work.

At first the LSPCJ included Presbyterians. Indeed, there were auxiliaries established in various Scottish cities. However, there was a reconstruction in 1815 leading to that Society becoming an Anglican organization. One issue, for example, was the refusal of the Anglicans to accept the baptism of Jewish converts other than by a bishop. As a consequence, in 1818 the 'alternative' *Edinburgh Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews* (ESPCJ) was founded. Monies were raised in order to support mission work overseas, two continental missionaries being appointed in 1820. The Edinburgh and Glasgow societies jointly employed a Jewish Christian for work in these cities.⁹ In the 1830s, however, there was a growing concern that Scottish support for Jewish mission work among the Jews should be channelled through the Church rather than through non-denominational societies.¹⁰

A leader and pioneer in the promotion of such missionary interest in the Church of Scotland was a Presbyterian elder, Robert Wodrow (1793-1843). He was committed both to prayer for the conversion of the Israel and to practical engagement in taking the good news of salvation through Christ the Messiah to them personally. It was Wodrow in 1838 who moved a *Memorial* in the General Assembly of the Kirk that led directly to the establishment of the Committee for the Conversion of the Jews.¹¹ As a result a large Committee – of 80 – was appointed by the 1838 Assembly. The focus of the work contemplated was 'to collect information respecting the Jews, their numbers, condition, and character, – what means have hitherto been employed by the Christian Church for their spiritual good and with what success ... at home or abroad, for the advancement of the cause ...'. This would determine where such work would be concentrated, making all due allowance for political and other social factors which might impact on the effectiveness of the work. This was thought

⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *History of Redemption* (Edinburgh, 1774).

⁸ W. Hendriksen, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, 1968).

⁹ Ross (2011), p. 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58. See Act VIII, Sess. 9, May 26, 1838 – Act on the Conversion of the Jews.

to be 'the first Act ... in which any Christian Church *as a church* has expressed her deep interest in and her earnest resolution to promote their salvation.' It should be noted that Wodrow was also responsible for writing the letter from the Church of Scotland 'To the Children of Israel in all lands of their Dispersion, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sendeth peace.' The letter was signed by Robert Gordon (Moderator), and sent to all known Jewish communities throughout the world.¹²

2. 'Commission of Inquiry to the Jews' appointed by the Church of Scotland

(1) *The Concern for Jewish mission work*

The seriousness of the Church in Scotland in Jewish evangelism in 1838 may be gauged by the organization of lectures on the subject by various ministers. One such series of lectures took place in the winter of 1838/39. These were subsequently published under the title *A Course of Lectures on the Jews by Ministers of the Established Church in Glasgow* (1839).¹³ Of this book one writer has commented that 'Towering above every other reason for engaging in mission to the Jewish people, gratitude to Israel emerges as the pivot upon which the whole project turned.'¹⁴ A similar lecture series was held the following winter (1839/40) in Edinburgh. These were published in 1842.¹⁵ In an introductory 'Statement' Dr Alexander Black, Professor of Divinity at Marischal College, Aberdeen was to write that:

The obligations under which we are to the Jews are such that we can never sufficiently repay. We are indebted to them, as the chosen people of God, for all the spiritual privileges that we enjoy by the possession of the records of Divine Revelation ... it is but equitable that we should consider what we can do for the descendants of those to whose ancestors we owe so much; and, as the greatest boon that we have the means of conferring upon them, is our duty to take every measure that can give promise of success to impart to them the blessings of the Gospel, that, through our mercy, they may also obtain mercy.¹⁶

It is perhaps not insignificant in this missionary venture that it occurred at a time of spiritual awakening in the Church in the third decade of the nineteenth century under the leadership of Andrew Mitchell Thompson and Thomas Chalmers. These men lent their considerable weight in various ways to Jewish mission, and Thomson was especially influential through his editorship of *The Christian Instructor*, before his lamented passing in 1831.

For anything to be done practically in such mission work, funds were required. In the event substantial funds were forthcoming on appeal. Meantime,

¹² For the complete text of this letter, see Ross (2011), pp. 297-308.

¹³ This included lectures by, among others, John Duncan and Patrick Fairbairn.

¹⁴ Ross (2011), p. 69.

¹⁵ Among the lecturers were Andrew A. Bonar, Charles J. Brown, Alexander Moody Stuart, and Robert S. Candlish.

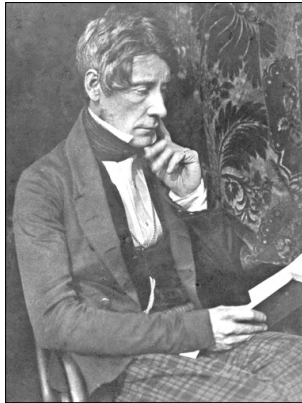
¹⁶ Alexander Black, 'Statement Submitted to the Committee of the General Assembly on the Conversion of the Jews,' in *The Conversion of the Jews: A Series of Lectures Delivered in Edinburgh by Ministers of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1842), pp. vi-vii.

in discussions about where to locate and plant Jewish missions, various centres were proposed. India was considered. Aden was also considered as it was in an area in which, it was said, there was a Yemenite Jewish community of some 200,000 souls. This was strongly supported by Alexander Keith who, like Black, was one of the men eventually chosen for the 'Mission of Inquiry'. Though a Jewish mission was subsequently established by the (post-Disruption) Church of Scotland in 1845 in India (Cochin), there never was such a Church Jewish mission from Scotland to Aden, though a short-lived mission to Arabs (Muslims) was established there by the Free Church in 1886 under the Hon. Ion Keith-Falconer (1856-1887).

With many European locations suggested, besides the obvious field in Palestine and the Middle East, it was decided to await a Report of a deputation commissioned to inquire about potential sites for such work in Europe and Palestine. Thus, the 'Mission of Inquiry' was approved and was 'launched', literally, by a group of four men setting sail from Dover on 12th April 1839.

(2) *The Deputation*

Originally the men proposed were Robert Wodrow and Dr Alexander Black, together with Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M'Cheyne. At the last



'Rabbi' Duncan.

minute, however, Wodrow had to pull out on account of ill-health. His place was taken by Dr Alexander Keith, minister of St Cyrus since 1816 and the author of a remarkable best-seller of the day, *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion Derived from the Literal Fulfilment of Prophecy; Particularly Illustrated by the History of the Jews, and the Discoveries of Recent Travellers* (first published in 1823 [21826] this book went through a multiplicity of editions and printings and is still available from digital print-to-order websites).



R. M. M'Cheyne
(1813-1843).

Of the men selected, two are well known still in Reformed circles – Bonar and M'Cheyne. Both were to celebrate their birthdays on the trip – Bonar his 29th and M'Cheyne his 26th. The other men are lesser known and were older. Black was the eldest at 50 and Keith was just a couple of years younger. *Alexander Black* was the outstanding linguist and academic of the party. He had been born in 1789, the year of the French Revolution and the rise to power in France of Napoleon Bonaparte. A native of Aberdeen, he was ordained at Tarves in 1818 and served that congregation until he was appointed Professor of Divinity at Marischal College, Aberdeen, in 1832. Though he wrote nothing of any note, by reputation he was an extremely competent linguist. Thomas Guthrie said of John ('Rabbi') Duncan and Alexander Black that they were so proficient in so many languages ancient and modern that they could talk their way to the Great Wall of China. Alexander Keith wrote of Black that he 'was the strength of our mission – a man of vast erudition and a profound theologian,

who spoke nineteen languages and wrote twelve.¹⁷ Black's linguistic ability was to be a boon for the Mission of Inquiry. *Keith* himself, as we have indicated, was a late replacement for Robert Wodrow. He was the least competent in languages of the mission and could not converse articulately in Hebrew (unlike Wodrow). He was the son of a minister (George Skene Keith) of the parish of Keith Hall, Aberdeenshire. He had been born in 1791, the same year as the birth of Michael Faraday and the death of John Wesley. Keith, who had aristocratic connections, was a prolific author especially on the matter of the fulfilment of prophecy. It was his *Evidences of Prophecy* and his passion for all things Jewish that told in his filling the gap left by Wodrow's indisposition.

Andrew Bonar and *Robert Murray M'Cheyne* are famous and there is no need to elaborate on their suitability for the Mission of Inquiry. They were young men of distinctly evangelical spirit and were competent in languages, not least Hebrew. It is owing to them and their *Narrative* of the trip that the whole venture became so well known. The *Narrative* became one of the best-known travel books ever published (for the greater part written by Bonar), besides being an acclaimed source of statistical, historical, geographical, and social information about the Jewish communities in the Middle East and Europe at the time. The story was first published in 1842 and went through multiple editions throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁸

So, let us turn to the experiences of the deputation which left these shores in April 1839. Robert Buchanan later was to sum up the whole venture well: 'In that year, the venerable Dr Keith, the modern apostle of the circumcision, accompanied by the heavenly-minded M'Cheyne, and his other estimable colleagues, were sent forth to gather tidings of God's ancient people, and to bear to them the unwonted news that the national Christian church of an ancient kingdom had turned her heart towards them.'¹⁹

3. Experiences of the deputation to inquire about prospective centres for Jewish evangelism

(1) *The Account of the Journey*

For the details of the journey of the intrepid inquirers we are almost entirely dependent on the notebooks, and subsequent *Narrative* of Bonar and M'Cheyne. One recent historian has written that 'little or nothing of Dr Black's and Dr Keith's researches are to be found in print ... no letter or report containing their thoughts on the suitability of Pesth as a mission station was ever published in its pages [i.e. *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record*].'²⁰ It is an irony that the work in Pesth was providentially down to the travels of Black and Keith in

¹⁷ David Brown, *Life of the Late John Duncan, LL.D.* (Edinburgh, 21872), p. 303; cf. W. Ewing (ed.), *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1914), Vol. 1, p. 49.

¹⁸ Happily, it remains in print through an edition produced by Christian Focus in 1996, edited and introduced by Allan Harman under the title *Mission of Discovery* (paperback, 440pp), but without the original maps and illustrations. The original may be obtained as a free ebook from Google.

¹⁹ Robert Buchanan, *The Ten Years' Conflict*, (2 vols., Glasgow, 1858), Vol. 1, p. 326. This is in the chapter on 'The Fruits of Evangelical Ascendancy' (p. 297ff).

²⁰ Ross (2011), p. 185.

their homeward journey and the ‘accident’ of illnesses that detained them on their way. As Bonar himself later wrote, with reference to an unfortunate fall of Dr Black from his camel in Egypt, that ‘but for that fall, our fathers in the deputation [a lovely description of the older men] would not have sailed up the Danube on their way to Vienna, and Pesth would not have been visited.’²¹ It was said that ‘Dr Black’s fall from the camel was the first step towards Pesth.’²²

The travelogue compiled by Bonar and M’Cheyne is entitled *A Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839* (first published in 1842).²³ Several things come over strongly in the *Narrative*:

(1) It is written in an engaging and ‘popular’ vein, recounting incidents and observations in a realistic anecdotal way.

(2) It is laced through with Scripture references, so much so that the *Home and Foreign Missionary Record* recommended that people read the *Narrative* with an open Bible in front of them!

(3) It is full of objective presentation of facts and statistics, balanced by ‘personal impressions, observations and passionate opinions’.²⁴

(4) There are perceptive comments on Jewish religious beliefs and practices, with a ‘sympathy for what they perceived to be the Jewish people’s inestimable loss of their own spiritual destiny [heritage]’.²⁵

(5) There is a clear compassion for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. For Bonar and M’Cheyne the material poverty of the Jews in Jerusalem symbolised their spiritual condition: ‘if we could have looked upon their precious souls, their temporal misery would have appeared but a faint emblem of the spiritual death that reigns within.’ This is followed by a wonderful note of compassion:

May we never lose the feelings of intense compassion toward Israel, which these few days spent in Jerusalem awakened; and never rest till all the faithful of the church of our fathers have the same flame kindled in their hearts!²⁶

(6) There are clear convictions of truth evident, not least in the nature of the gospel and its claims on sinners including the ancient people. There is notable care over the Sabbath, too. They were clearly disgusted, for example, by what they found in Paris soon after they began their southward push: ‘We soon found that buying and selling, and every sort of amusement, were the chief occupations of the people of France on the holy Sabbath.’²⁷

(7) They were zealous to spread the word, and not just among Jews, for they took with them evangelistic books and tracts for distribution. One incident in

²¹ Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne* (Edinburgh & London, 1892 [11844]), p. 92.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²³ Within a few years more than 30,000 copies were in print, in addition to French and Dutch translations and an American edition.

²⁴ Ross (2011), p. 198.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁶ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 165.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

France exemplified this: ‘Driving away from Bar-sur-Aube (near Troyes on the way south to Dijon) in the coach, the Scottish ministers threw leaflets in French out the window to people on the streets and in the fields. Bonar and M’Cheyne started this but they were joined by Dr. Black who, in throwing tracts to those in the fields, said: “Voilà! Un petit livre pour vos enfans!” (“Here, a little book for your children!”)’²⁸ Naturally they did not just throw tracts (booklets) at people but also handed them out when any opportunity presented itself.

(8) The intrepid travellers also showed an impressive variety of languages: French, Italian, Latin, German, Yiddish, Romanian, and of course Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek. Their felicity in such things is staggering by any standard. For example, in Dijon on their journey out, M’Cheyne in a letter refers to a conversation between Dr Black and a priest: “Dr. Black and he immediately entered on discussion in French ... I tried to prolong the conversation in Latin.”²⁹ We might be conversant with computer languages and texting in a sort of text-speak English, but by the standards of these men our culture is somewhat impoverished these days.³⁰

(2) *The Journey – Scotland to Palestine*

As to the route taken: from Glasgow Black, Keith, and Bonar made their way down the west coast route to London where they met M’Cheyne who had set off from Leith on the east coast route. After a pause in London they finally set off from Dover on April 12th for France. Arriving in Boulogne a few hours later they made their way to Paris, in due time wending their way through Troyes, Dijon, and Lyons heading for Marseilles from where they were due to take a boat for Malta on the 21st. In the event they did not make it in time and re-routed to Italy for an alternative service to Malta. But that took them into some difficulties, not least with Roman Catholic authorities. But all along wherever they stopped efforts were made to contact Jews and obtain information about Jewish populations and witness to Jews in the various places and areas they passed through. They were not slow to use the tracts, booklets, and Scriptures to engage people about their souls. Sometimes their spirits were buoyed, at other times they frustratingly encountered suspicion, opposition, and obstruction to their progress. This happened in Italy. At Leghorn (Livorno) to where they had travelled via Genoa, they immediately started to distribute tracts to the men who handled their luggage and other bystanders. This attracted the attention of customs officials and Drs Black and Keith were marched off to the police authorities. Subjected to a gruelling interrogation, they were told their books would be sent for evaluation to the censors in Florence. Whilst waiting the decision of the censors, the men met with Jewish leaders. There was a significant Jewish community in Leghorn, perhaps some 10,000 souls. Ross comments that the rapport between the

²⁸ *Familiar Letters by the Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne, containing an account of his travels as one of the deputation sent out by the Church of Scotland on a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews in 1839 (edited by his father)* (New York, 1848), p. 28. See also *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 13.

²⁹ *Familiar Letters*, p. 30. This is available as a free ebook through Google.

³⁰ We can only be very sketchy in considering the journeys of these men. There is no substitute for obtaining a copy of the *Narrative* and savouring all the rich – and edifying – details of the experiences and observations of the account.

travellers and the Jews in Leghorn was enhanced by the harsh treatment they received. The Jews seemed to recognise that these Protestants were equally the enemy of the prevailing Catholicism as were the Jews. When the censors' decision came back, the tracts were returned but not the copies of Alexander Keith's *Evidences of Prophecy*, on grounds apparently of containing views at odds with Roman Catholic dogma. The travellers observed the unusual providence 'that, in seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel, we should meet with treatment at the hand of the oppressors, fitted to awaken in us the cry, "How long, O Lord!" (Psalm 89:46; Revelation 6:10).'³¹

The deputation finally set off from Leghorn on 3rd May, sailing to Malta via Civitavecchia. They sailed from Malta to Alexandria via the Greek Island of Syra (Syros), arriving in Egypt on 13th May. It was not that their mission began here, of course, but they were certainly faced with a whole new social experience which would be in more ways than one a real eye-opener. At any rate the party headed for the Holy Land more-or-less along the coast through the delta of the River Nile. Among other things they confronted Islam which had come to dominate pretty well the whole of North Africa and large areas of the Middle East.

It should be borne in mind that there were dangers both from thieves and robbers, and also diseases. The party happened to set out on their trip as a plague was affecting many parts of the Middle East. That was true of Alexandria. Besides this they were coming in contact with unfamiliar cultures and animals, and therefore with alien bugs and bacteria and food and water. For this they were essentially unprepared: no inoculations or any such remedies. The truth is that they went out not knowing where they were going or what they were facing, even in Europe which in many places was also rent with social and political unrest. But then they were men of strong faith in Christ and therefore reliance upon him in all their trials and uncertainties. Basically, I think what these men faced and endured is beyond belief, by our modern standards. No motor vehicles; no public conveniences; roughing it in tents was the order of the day, at least in the Middle East; no universally respected Sabbath rest, even in European countries through which they travelled. These were tough experiences through which really only Andrew Bonar, for the greater part (he experienced sickness a times), came through relatively unscathed. It appears to have been especially hard on the older men, though in the event they soldiered on admirably.

It is amusing now to read of their experience of the pampering of a 'Turkish Bath' before they ventured into the desert regions. Described entertainingly by M'Cheyne we are told how they disrobed, had towels wrapped around their waists and heads (turbans). They were laid on their backs and soaped and scrubbed with a rough glove of camel hair. This was followed by a shower of warm water. Their heads were massaged, and finger joints flexed till they cracked, and their feet were scraped. What alarmed them most, however, was expressed by M'Cheyne in this way: that they entrusted themselves to 'Mahometans with shaved heads and black skins'. M'Cheyne took a spiritual lesson from the occasion from John 13:10, 'Jesus saith to him,

³¹ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 41.

He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.’ Comments John Ross: ‘It perhaps seems rather odd that M’Cheyne, who with his companions thought he was needlessly exposing himself to moral danger by gazing appreciatively at the French countryside, could nevertheless draw a beautiful lesson from the decadent surroundings of a Turkish bath house.’³²

It was while they were crossing the delta of the Nile, ten days into their journey, that the accident occurred of Dr Black falling from his camel. One unfamiliar feature of the travels was the sheer heat experienced. It was often over 90° in the shade.³³ Riding in this way into the sun produced an ‘irresistible drowsiness’ which seems to have overcome Dr Black. The others rushed to his aid and did what they could, but he soon recovered, well enough the following evening (the Sabbath) to preach before an interesting congregation comprising the Governor (seated on ‘our best carpet in the corner’ of the tent), themselves, and Bedouins gathered around the tent door. Black, incidentally, spoke in Italian, one of their appointed helpers, one Ibraim, acting as interpreter.³⁴ Although the fall from the camel was not in fact the decisive incident in Black’s later early withdrawal from the Holy Land it had shown some vulnerability in the face of trying conditions. The roughing-it aspect was clearly a factor. Although they often had local help, the travellers had a fair bit of physical work to put in as they went along, something for which Drs Black and Keith very likely felt ill-equipped or ill-suited.

The party came towards the border into Palestine at El Arish on 30th May. The following day they were in the Promised Land. On their first Lord’s day in Palestine (June 2nd) they gladly sang together in one of their tents the strains of Psalm 76:

In Judah’s land God is well known, his name’s in Isr’el great:
In Salem is his tabernacle, in Zion is his seat.

(PSALM 76:1, *Scottish Metrical Psalms*)³⁵

After a few days’ delay whilst camels were obtained, the party then began the trek towards Jerusalem which they finally reached on 7th June after a long weary ride of seven hours. ‘Mr M’Cheyne,’ the *Narrative* tells us, ‘dismounting from his camel, hurried forward on foot over the rocky footpath, till he gained the point where the city of the Lord comes first in sight. Soon, all of us were on the spot, silent, buried in thought, and wistfully gazing on the wondrous scene where the Redeemer died ... At that moment we were impressed chiefly by the fact that we were now among “the mountains that are around Jerusalem” (Psalm 125:2), and half unconscious that it was true, we repeated inwardly the words, “Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.”’³⁶

Their first night in Jerusalem (8th June) was spent on the stone floor of apartments in Mount Acra. ‘We spread our mats on the cool stone-floor,’

³² Ross (2011), pp. 130-1.

³³ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

wrote Bonar, 'hoping for a night of calm repose, but our rest was broken and uncomfortable in the extreme, our rooms being infested with vermin, a kind of trial which travellers in the East must make up their mind frequently to undergo.'³⁷ The party were not impressed with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, reputedly built on the site of Calvary and the tomb. Wrote M'Cheyne: 'Calvary is the only place about Jerusalem which yielded nothing but pain and disappointment ... my heart sickened at the view.' The Christianity witnessed there was, to the deputation, a far cry from the truth of the gospel they knew and loved.

Notwithstanding the presence of the plague, the party risked visiting the Jewish Quarter. It was reckoned that there were around 5000 Jews living in Jerusalem at that time, though only eighty or so in the Jewish Quarter. They sought to engage with them, as they did with all Jews they met, not only to be witnesses for Christ, but to gather information about the whereabouts and concentration of Jews throughout Palestine. They visited the *Kotel*, or Western or Wailing Wall where there are stones from the original Herodian Temple. Their last day in Jerusalem was 18th June. They left with this thought: 'May we never lose the feelings of intense compassion towards Israel, which these few days spent in Jerusalem awakened; and never rest till all the faithful of the church of our fathers have the same flame kindled in their hearts!'³⁸

Moving north from Jerusalem the travellers arrived at Sychar. Andrew Bonar was especially keen to see the famous Jacob's Well. The well was covered with a low arched stone structure. As he stooped to enter his pocket Bible fell from his breast pocket and disappeared down the well with a splash. The little Jewish boy accompanying him was not hopeful: 'Ah, the well is deep.' These were the same words the Samaritan woman had used speaking to Jesus 1800 years earlier. Bonar gave it up as lost. However, four years later a missionary (Dr John Wilson) passing that way en route to India persuaded – paid – a young Samaritan named Yakub to be lowered 75 feet by rope to try to recover the Bible (of which he had read in the *Narrative*). Behold, it was recovered, water damaged, but it was brought back to Scotland where it now forms part of a collection in New College, Edinburgh.³⁹

Continuing through Samaria the party headed for Haifa, having found no Jewish communities in the hills of Samaria. Haifa was under quarantine on account of the plague and they were detained there for a fortnight. From Haifa they sailed to Beirut (Beyrouth). Taking stock of their journey at Beirut, they decided to go back to Galilee to inquire about the presence of Jews in Tiberias (1200) and Safed (2000). However, at Beirut it was agreed that Dr Black, who had 'felt the climate of Syria and the rude manner of the travelling too much for his bodily strength',⁴⁰ should proceed homeward via Constantinople (Istanbul) and that Dr Keith should accompany him. They set sail 3 o'clock on July 7, after a forenoon service in a 'commodious room' in which Dr Black preached on Romans 5:1.⁴¹ The return visit of Bonar and

³⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 177; Ross (2011), p. 143.

⁴⁰ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 209.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 210.

M'Cheyne in the days that followed confirmed to them the suitability of Tiberias and Safed as possible locations for Jewish mission work. Palestine at that time, however, was greatly troubled by 'marauding Bedouin', making it rather unsafe for any missionary community. A couple of years later Bonar and M'Cheyne were forced to admit this.⁴² Free Church Jewish mission work was, however, established later both at Tiberias (1884) and Safed (1895).

(3) *The Journey – Europe*

Bonar and M'Cheyne duly made their way back to Beirut, arriving on July 20th. The next steamer for Smyrna (Izmir, then in Asia Minor, now in Turkey) was not till the following week (28th), though M'Cheyne had picked up a fever whilst waiting in Beirut. He was still suffering at Smyrna and remained there until well enough to go on to Constantinople. Meantime, on Saturday 17th August, Bonar, accompanied by a Christian converted Jew, Erasmus Calman, who had assisted them since their visits to Tiberias and Safed, sailed for Constantinople. There was LSPCJ work among the considerable Jewish community there. It was reckoned that there might be as many as 80,000 Jews in Constantinople and the surrounding villages. It was clear to Bonar that this was a real possibility for Jewish mission work, though there would be problems because the Ottoman government gave the Jewish community official recognition and therefore the oppression or persecution of the Christians was a serious threat.⁴³ On 26th August another steamer arrived from Smyrna with M'Cheyne on board. A few hours later they sailed for the River Danube by way of the Black Sea. This took them into Walachia and Moldavia (modern Romania and Moldova, though the greater part of the old Moldavia is now part of Romania) west of the Black Sea. Black and Keith had passed that way but had headed west from Bucharest along the Danube towards Buda/Pesth⁴⁴ and Vienna. Bonar and M'Cheyne chose to go north from Bucharest towards Jassy (Iasi) through Moldavia. Again, in this part of their travels these men were faced with a quarantine situation. It was a 1000-mile long European anti-bubonic plague *cordon*. Ross has commented that 'boarding the steamer, they had mistakenly thought they had left behind the East and its privations, and had come entirely unprepared for the primitive condition that now confronted them in the quarantine camp.'⁴⁵ So, they were forced to disembark and spend a week at Galatz (Galati) in quarantine. They were confined to 'a large enclosure of wood with many wooden cottages in the centre, one of which was to be our place of confinement for a week ... We found the benefit', Bonar stated with some resignation, 'of being inured to the rude life of those who dwell in tents.'⁴⁶ This shows some of the hardships that they had to endure on their trip.

After the period of their quarantine, the British Vice-Consul in Galatz provided a carriage to take them to Jassy (pronounced *Yahsh*) from Bucharest (some miles west of Galatz). Bonar and M'Cheyne came to place great

⁴² Ross (2011), p. 147.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴⁴ Budapest was not formed as a single municipality until 1873.

⁴⁵ Ross (2011), p. 152.

⁴⁶ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 314.

importance on Jassy, devoting many pages of their *Narrative* to an account of the burgeoning Jewish community there. It accounted for around 50% of the total population of the city.⁴⁷ However, there too they faced potential problems through the presence of the Greek Orthodox Church. It was said that if they 'succeeded in converting to evangelical faith a single Orthodox Christian, that act would be fatal to the mission and every door would immediately be shut to Protestant missionaries.'⁴⁸

From Walachia and Moldavia Bonar and M'Cheyne passed through Austria or Austrian Poland as it was then. The Bible tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. Think of the experiences of these men in Austria. There was of course the quarantine situation with its fumigation, etc. But the medical concerns were only one thing. More serious was the clear attempt to eliminate evangelical Christianity. 'The government's religious intolerance', comments John Ross, 'made them feel extremely unwelcome, and left them with the opinion that the Austrian empire was a realm where ignorance and superstition led souls to hell in peaceful unresisting compliance.'⁴⁹ There were physical dangers, too, as Murray M'Cheyne found out near Zloczow (modern Poland). On a quietly spent Lord's day he went a walk and at one quiet spot sat down to read, only to be set upon by two shepherds bent on robbery. There followed a physical struggle for a quarter of an hour, after which the would-be robbers ran off and an exhausted M'Cheyne had just about strength enough to return to his colleagues. That was on October 6th. Five days later they were at Cracow (Krakow, modern Poland). They were impressed with Krakow as a potential centre for evangelical and Jewish missionary work. At that time there were 22,000 Jews in a population of some 49,000.⁵⁰ Again, though, there was potential for antagonism from the Roman Catholic authorities. Crossing from Austria to Prussia they arrived a Posen (Poznan, modern Poland) where there were apparently 73,000 Jews.⁵¹ The city seemed to offer great opportunities for Jewish work. It was already the location for schools established and supported by the Edinburgh Ladies Association on behalf of Jewish Females. The only other stop the travellers made was in Berlin from where they hurried homewards via Hamburg and arrived in London on November 6th, in all an adventure of six months. As the *Narrative* makes clear, the trip was a kaleidoscope of ever-changing scenes and experiences, of interesting people met with, and of opportunities for sharing the gospel with Jews and others, with the development of friendships along the way. It was, indeed, the trip of a lifetime during which careful records were kept apropos the purpose of their Mission of Inquiry to identify possible locations for Jewish mission work in the Middle East and Europe.

(4) *The Journey – What happened to Drs Black and Keith?*

To all intents and purposes Drs Black and Keith were simply going to be heading home through Europe, all the while 'making inquiries into the condition of

⁴⁷ Ross (2011), p. 152.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁵⁰ *Mission of Discovery* (1996), p. 406.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

the Jews in all the most important places through which that route would take them.⁵² As it was, after reaching Bucharest these men followed the River Danube through Budapest. The illness of Dr Keith detained him at Pesth till the following spring, whilst Dr Black's detained him at Vienna for some months. They both arrived home very much later than the younger men. However, their travels were not in vain and in many respects were more crucial and lasting than the others, though precious little is known precisely of their inquiries.

Providentially it turned on the illnesses of the Scottish ministers and a productive friendship between Dr Keith and a 42-year old Archduchess, Maria Dorothea Luise Wilhelmine Caroline of Württemberg (1797-1855), wife of the Archduke Joseph, Palatine of Hungary. Maria Dorothea, a Lutheran, had been turned back to the Bible by the death of her son two years earlier. It was in the Bible that she 'met with Jesus'. In those days the city of Buda was on the west bank of the Danube and the city of Pesth on the east. As yet there was no bridge over the Danube between the cities, though one had been designed and was beginning to get under way.⁵³ Arriving at Pesth as they waited for a passage to Vienna, Black and Keith realised that this was a more promising city for Jewish mission work than any others they had visited. Keith was to recall of their inquiries in Pesth that –



Archduchess Maria Dorothea.

thus enfeebled [i.e. by the fever], we had to grope our way as strangers in a strange city, and to gather our information, as unostentatiously as we could, from Rabbis, Professors, Protestant clergymen, etc. Going thus from house to house to complete our enquiries, I was seized, while passing along the street, with faintness and sickness, and had to retreat into a court. There I lay for some time before I was able to return to the hotel, on reaching which I was speedily prostrated by an attack which had some of the symptoms of cholera.⁵⁴

The problem was that the Roman Catholic religion held sway and was intolerant of other 'faiths'. From where would help come to establish a mission in relatively safe conditions? The answer was, the Archduchess Maria Dorothea who lived in an impressive palace on the Buda side of the Danube. She had a heart for the gospel to be taken to the 100,000 or so inhabitants of Hungary's capital. Meantime the Scotsmen had fallen ill with typhoid fever picked up from the sewage in the Danube which became hazardous for summer travellers. Keith's condition was particularly bad and it looked for a while that there was little hope for a recovery. But recover he did. The deputation had taken letters of introduction to facilitate appointments with people of influence. This came to the attention of Maria Dorothea who had recently received a copy of Keith's *Evidences of Prophecy* from her husband.

⁵² Ibid., p. 209.

⁵³ The first bridge to span the Danube between Buda and Pest was begun in 1839. It was a suspension bridge designed by the English engineer William Tierney Clark in 1839, after Count István Széchenyi's initiative in the same year. The construction, begun in 1840, was supervised locally by Scottish engineer Adam Clark. It opened in 1849.

⁵⁴ *Life of John Duncan* (1872), p. 303.

She visited Keith as he was recovering and even contributed to nursing him back to health. In due time a friendship developed leading to a Jewish mission in Pesth. Keith questioned the legality of such a venture. ‘She stated bluntly that should the Church of Scotland see fit to begin the work, she would place herself between the mission and whatever official threats might harass it.’⁵⁵ Keith was later to write: ‘In that feeling, involved as it was with many coincidences, which it was not man that directed and over-ruled, lay the key whereby a door was to be opened for the Jewish mission at Pesth, though no one knew it, or thought of it then.’⁵⁶

Keith and Black gradually recovered. Early in November Black, who was keen to return home as soon as possible, travelled on to Vienna but was not thought fit enough to return immediately. He did eventually return via Frankfurt and Rotterdam, but arrived home after Bonar and M’Cheyne. As for Keith, so ill had he been that it was thought prudent for someone to go out and accompany him back from Pesth. His son, George, then a medical student in Edinburgh, went out to be with his father. Father and son remained in Pesth until the winter was passed, returning to London via Munich and Brussels and Antwerp, arriving home in April of 1840. Maria Dorothea sent them away with a large hamper of food. The hamper contained a silver spoon with the Archducal crest. It remains in a collection in New College, Edinburgh. Thus ended the commission of the deputation charged to inquire about the Jews and to suggest possible locations for mission work. What they reported back certainly gave the Church much to ponder.

4. The consequences – the outcome of the work and its fruit⁵⁷

The consequences of this ‘Mission of Inquiry’ were far-reaching. Decisions were not easily made, however. There were two issues to be faced, relating (1) to *personnel*; and (2) to *locations*.

(1) *Personnel*

As to *personnel*, Robert Wodrow in 1840 drew to the attention of the Committee the willingness of one recognised Hebraist to offer himself for the work somewhere. Rev. John Duncan (1796-1870), then the minister of Milton Church in Glasgow was the man in question. This offer was readily accepted, and on 16th May 1841 he was publicly designated to his new, as yet unspecified, work. He was not, however, the first active missionary on the ground. That privilege fell to a probationer who was ordained to the work on 11th March 1841 (by Dr Robert S. Candlish). This was Daniel Edward (1815-1896), a native of Edinburgh. John Ross has correctly stated that ‘although less will be remembered [of Edward] by posterity than Duncan, it was Edward who was the true pioneer of the General Assembly’s mission to the Jews.’⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ross (2011), p. 176.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ It would take another article to do justice to the nature and effectiveness of those missions which arose as a consequence of the Mission of Inquiry.

⁵⁸ Ross (2011), p. 206.



Corner of the Disruption picture showing Adolph Saphir (the young boy) at John Duncan's knee. To his left is Alexander Black and to his right (behind Rabbi Duncan's hand) is Alexander Keith. (The book in front shows a map of Palestine).



Andrew A. Bonar in old age. Bonar is in the picture on the left, third from the right behind Black (holding his work on M'Cheyne).

(2) Locations

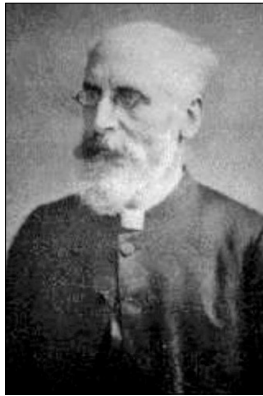
As to *locations*, though there was some concern in the Committee charged with this work to locate in Palestine, in 1841 it was eventually decided that mission centres should be located in Jassy (Iasi) then in Moldavia, now Romania, and in Pesth, Hungary. Edward was appointed to work in Jassy along with a converted German Jew, Hermann Philip. Pesth would be John Duncan's designated station. He would be accompanied by the Revs. William O. Allan (1812-1885) and Robert Smith (1816-1894) (both of whom were ordained in 1842). They were joined by a former businessman who was an enthusiast for Jewish mission work, William Wingate (1808-1899) (ordained in Pesth in 1843).⁵⁹ When the Disruption occurred in the Church of Scotland in 1843, all these missionaries threw in their lot by conviction with the emergent Free Church of Scotland and continued with the various spheres of labour among the Jews. It was the Disruption of May 1843 that brought an end to John Duncan's work in Pesth as he was elected to the Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament in the Free Church College in Edinburgh by the first Free Church Assembly.



Aberdeen Presbytery: Alexander Black is on the right (a D. O. Hill picture on which the Disruption painting of him is based).

The Free Church of Scotland, which took over all the Jewish mission work of the Church of Scotland, must have been one of the most mission-conscious Churches of the nineteenth century or any century, certainly so far as Jewish mission work was concerned. Besides the missions in Pesth and Jassy, missions to the Jews were also established in Constantinople (1845), Breslau (1852), Amsterdam (1862), and in addition Tiberias (1884) and Safed (1895) in the Holy Land. Many Jews were converted through the labours

⁵⁹ Allan married a step-daughter of John Duncan and Wingate married his daughter (by his first wife), Annie.



Alfred Edersheim.

and prayers of these men, including some who became important ambassadors for Christ and his gospel, such as Alfred Edersheim (1823/24-1889) and Adolph Saphir (1831-1891) whose written works are still useful and appreciated right down to the present day.



Adolph Saphir.

Though the impact of Duncan was profound in frankly a more promising situation than Edward faced in his missionary labours,

he was only two years or so at Pesth whereas Edward devoted a lengthy ministry of 54 years (1841-1895) to Jewish mission work in various European locations (Jassy, Lemberg, and Breslau).⁶⁰ He was a thoroughly conservative churchman. To the 1852 General Assembly, with reference to the end of his work at Lemberg, before he moved on to Breslau (modern Wroclaw in Poland, then Germany), he wrote: 'the door has been kept longer open than I ever thought it would be; and now the Man of Sin has prevailed to get it closed more jealously than before.'⁶¹ Writing in 1862, Alexander Moody Stuart was to comment that

... his work is undervalued at home. Nothing in connection with our mission to the Jews ever so exceeded my hopes, as our mission station in Breslau. Mr Edward is ... a Scotchman with all our own Calvinistic theology ... a Hebrew of the Hebrews, with his whole heart bent on the conversion of the children of Israel.⁶²

More recently, Lionel Ritchie noted that 'Edward was a conservative of conservatives, for he remained utterly opposed to the tendencies of modern German biblical scholarship.'⁶³ Ritchie records that –

on a visit to Breslau in 1891 James Wells⁶⁴ witnessed Edward conduct an old-fashioned Scottish service without, of course, instrumental music. 'In a city worm-eaten with rationalism, and where few darken a church door, I saw a large hall filled with devout worshippers.'⁶⁵

Edward remains an unsung Scottish missionary hero.

On the first Friday of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh on 22nd May 1896, according to custom, the evening was given over to consideration of the Report of the Jewish Committee. That

⁶⁰ On Edward, see Lionel A. Ritchie's informative article, 'Daniel Edward (1815-1896) and the Free Church of Scotland mission to the Jews in Central Europe', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. 31 (2002), pp. 173-187.

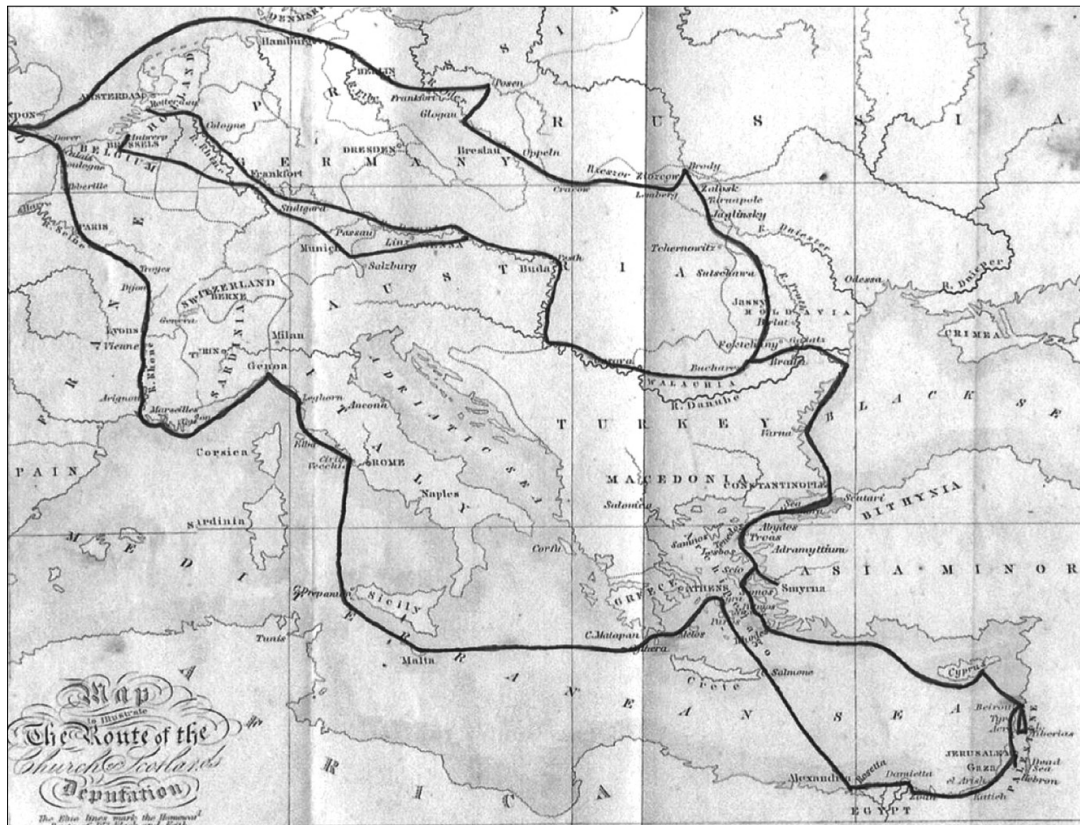
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶⁴ Rev. James Wells was Convener of the Committee for the Conversion of the Jews in the Free Church, 1890-1896. See Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, Vol. 1, pp. 64, 354.

⁶⁵ Ritchie, *op. cit.*, p. 186.



Map to illustrate the route of the Church of Scotland's Deputation.

particular evening an aged minister, who had devoted himself to the Jewish mission work since his ordination in 1841, 'tottered to the platform' to address the Assembly. This was Daniel Edward (1815-1896), now an octogenarian. Through ill-health, he had finally laid aside his work among the Jews in Breslau the previous year. His appearance was said to be 'picturesque and apostolical'.⁶⁶ He was greeted with a standing ovation. He gave a stirring address in response to which there was deafening applause. It was one of his final public acts in this world, as just three weeks later he passed to his eternal reward. But here was a missionary who was involved in the mission work amongst Jews from its inception, following the initial 'Mission of Inquiry to the Jews' in 1839 under the auspices of the Church of Scotland.

⁶⁶ *Free Church of Scotland Monthly*, (1896), pp. 185-6. Quoted in Ritchie, op. cit., p. 173.