

F. Nigel Hepper

THE BSHARRÉ CEDARS OF LEBANON AS SEEN BY TRAVELLERS

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INTRODUCTION

Until the twentieth century all of the eye-witness accounts of the wild cedars of Lebanon appear to refer to the same clump at Bsharré in northern Lebanon, although there are several other remnant clumps elsewhere on this chain of mountains. This paper traces the history of exploration of the Bsharré cedars in chronological order from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century inclusive. Since it is impossible to deal with all of the travellers' accounts, a selection of the more interesting published reports has been made. Also, in order to save space the quotations have been pared down to the more relevant portions of the narratives; the early ones setting the cedars in their rugged environment.



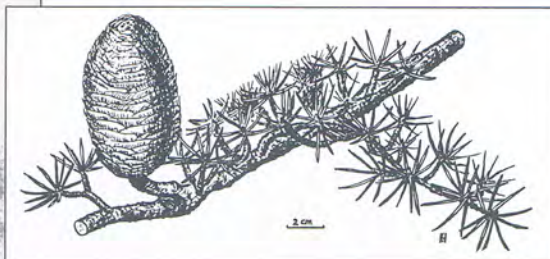
1 An ancient cedar in Lebanon (C. W. Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine*, London, 1883).

2 Cedar of Lebanon, *Cedrus libani*: shoot showing needle-leaf clusters and a cone. (Drawing by F. Nigel Hepper).

TRAVELLER'S ACCOUNTS OF THE CEDAR TREES 16th Century

The first European to publish an account of his visit to the Bsharré cedars was the Frenchman **Pierre Belon** (1517-1564) who travelled to the Lebanese mountains about 1550. He wrote:

"At a considerable height up the mountains the traveller arrives at the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, which is situated in the valley. Thence proceeding four miles up the mountain, he will arrive at the cedars; the Maronites or the monks acting as guides. The cedars stand in a valley, and not on top of the mountain; and they are supposed to amount to 28 in number, though it is difficult to count them, they being distant from each other a few paces. These the Archbishop of Damascus has endeavoured to prove to be the same that Solomon



planted with his own hands in the quincunx manner as they now stand. No other

tree grows in the valley in which they are situated and it is generally so covered with snow as to be only accessible in summer". [P. Belon, *De Arboribus Coniferis*. 1553, p.4, quoted by J. C. Loudon, *Arboretum and Fruticetum*. London, 1844, vol.4, p.2409].

In 1574 or 1575 the German **Leonhart Rauwolff** (1535-1596) also visited Mount Lebanon with others [K.H. Dannenfeldt, *Leonard Rauwolff, sixteenth century physician, botanist and traveler*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970]. After recruiting guides and enduring the tiring climb they *"saw nothing higher, but only a small hill before us, all covered with snow, at the bottom whereof the high cedar trees were standing... And, although this hill hath, in former ages, been quite covered with cedars, yet they are since so decreased, that I could tell no more but twenty-four that stood round about in a circle and two others, the branches whereof are quite decayed for age. I also went about this place to look for*

young ones, but could find none at all". Rauwolff then goes on to describe the tree in remarkable detail, especially when one considers that in the sixteenth century there was then no tradition of writing botanical handbooks (floras) as

we know them and the publication of herbals was only just resuming after a break of more than a thousand years: "*These trees are green all the year long; have strong stems, that are several fathoms about; and are as high as our fir-trees. They have very large twigs that bend the tree, and make it lean that way, which somewhat spoileth their straightness. Branches grow up straight, as also do the cones thereof, which are large and round, and extend themselves a great length, in so delicate and pleasant order and evenness, as if they were trimm'd, and made even with a great deal of diligence, so that at a distance, you may see the tops of them very even to one another. So that one may immediately see at a great distance, a great difference between these and other fir-trees. They are else very like unto the Larch-trees, chiefly in their leaves, which are so small, and close together; but stand further asunder upon small brown shoots, which in their length and bigness are like unto them of the Muscus terrestris.*" (J. Ray, editor, "*A collection of curious travels and voyages*", part 2, chap.12, pp.229-230. London, 1693).

17th Century

The **Rev. Edward Pocock** (1604-1691) left no account of the cedars but he is worth mentioning as the cedar growing at Old Rectory in Childrey near Wantage, Oxfordshire, is probably the oldest one in England. In 1629 he was appointed chaplain to the English ('Turkey') merchants based at Aleppo, and afterwards he became chaplain to the embassy at Constantinople. Pocock was an Arabist and orientalist who collected manuscripts (which are now in the Bodleian Library). His biographer, Leonard Twells [L.Twells, *The lives of Dr Edward Pocock and Dr Zachern Pearce*. London, 1816, 1:4], wrote that "*for travel and exploration he had no taste, but his observation of eastern manners and natural history served him in good stead as a commen-*

tator on the Old Testament". If he did not like travel, yet was interested in natural history, how could he have acquired seeds of the cedar? His biography says nothing of field excursions, but there may be one clue: in 1634 Aleppo was hit by a severe outbreak of plague forcing the merchants two days journey away where they "*dwelt in tents on the mountains*". Perhaps these were the Lebanese, Syrian or Turkish mountains where the cedars grew, and while Pocock visited his scattered parishioners dwelling in tents he acquired some cedar cones. Although the cedars would have been at a much higher elevation, surely he could not have resisted seeing the cedars that are so frequently mentioned in the Bible and collecting a few seeds later to grow in his Rectory at Childrey and at Wilton House?

In 1695 **Rev. Henry Maundrell** (1665-1701) took the same post that Pocock had held. He kept a diary of his travels to Jerusalem with 14 residents of Aleppo from 26 February to about 20 May 1697, returning over Mt. Lebanon [H. Maundrell, *A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter A.D. 1697*, reprinted Beirut: Khayats 1963, p.191; also 6th ed. Oxford, 1740, p.142]: "*Sunday, May 9 The noble [cedar] trees grow amongst the snow near the highest part of Lebanon; and are remarkable as well as for their own age and largeness, as for those frequent allusions made to them in the word of God. Here are some of them very old, and of prodigious bulk; and others younger of a smaller size. Of the former I could reckon up only sixteen; and the latter are very numerous. I measured one of the largest, and found it twelve yards six inches in girth, and yet sound; and thirty seven yards in the spread of its boughs. At about five or six yards from the ground, it was divided into five limbs, each of which was equal to a great tree.*

"After about half an hour spent surveying this place, the clouds began to thicken, and to fly along upon the ground; which so obscur'd the road, that my guide was very much at a loss to find our way back again. We rambled about for seven hours thus bewildered, which gave me no small fear of being forc'd to spend one night more on Libanus". Fortunately, they arrived safely at the Convent of Canobine and received a kind reception. There is no evidence that he collected cedar seeds, nor had

he opportunity to sow any since he died of fever in Aleppo in 1701.

Like most travellers the Frenchman **Jean de Thévenot** was fascinated by the number of the great trees - usually

known as 'monarchs' or 'patriarchs' - among the Bsharré cedars in 1655 [J. de Thévenot, *Voyage du Levant*, part 1, p.221, 443 (1664)]: *"It is a Fobbery to say, that if one reckon the Cedars of Mount Lebanon twice, he shall have a different number; for in all, great and small, there is neither more or less than twenty three of them"*. **Laurent d'Arvieux** in 1660 counted 20 trees. In 1722 **Jean de La Roque** also found 20 trees [De La Roque, J., *Voyage de Syrie et du Mont Liban*, quoted in *Gentleman's Magazine* 2nd series vol.4 p. 578].

18th Century



3 Dr Richard Pococke who collected seeds of wild cedar of Lebanon for cultivation at Highclere Castle, England, in 1738.

During **Dr Richard Pococke's** extensive travels in the Near East from 1737 to 1744 he visited Mount Lebanon and collected cedar seeds in 1738. He published the following impressions of his encounter with the cedars [R. Pococke, *Observations on Palestine or the Holy Land, Syria, Mesopotamia, Cyprus and Candia*, Vol.2 p.104-105, 1745, London: W. Bowyer]:

"They form a grove about a mile in circumference, which consists of some large cedars that are near

to one another, a great number of young cedars and some pines. The great cedars, at some distance, look very like large spreading oaks; the bodies of the trees are short, dividing at the bottom into three or four limbs, some of which growing up together for about ten feet, appear something like thick Gothic columns, which seem to be composed of seven pillars; higher up they begin to spread horizontally: one that had the rounded body, tho' not the largest, measured twenty four feet in circumference, and another with a sort of triple body, as described above, and of a triangular figure, measured twelve feet on each side. The young cedars are not easily known from pines; I observe they bear a greater quantity of fruit than the larger ones. The wood does not differ from white deal in appearance, nor does it seem to be harder; it has a fine smell, but not so fragrant as the juniper of America which is commonly called cedar; and it also falls short of it in beauty; I took a piece of the wood from a great tree that was blown down by the wind, and left there to rot; there are fifteen large ones standing. The Christians of several denominations near this place come here to celebrate the festival of the transfiguration, and have built altars against several of the large trees, on which they administer the sacrament. These trees are about half a mile to the north of the road to which we returned..." Seeds he collected were sown at Highclere Castle in southern England in 1739 [F. N. Hepper, *The Cultivation of the Cedar of Lebanon in European Parks and Gardens from the 17th to the 19th century. Arboricultural Journal*, Vol. 25, pt. 3, 2001 (in press)].

19TH CENTURY

4 J. L. Burckhardt, the great explorer of Petra and Abu Simbel, from an etching made by Angela Clarke in Cambridge from a London portrait by Slater (K. Sim, *Desert Traveller*, London, 1969).



John Lewis Burckhardt (1784-1817) was one of those determined explorers who did much more than most of his contemporaries. He was born in Lausanne and died in Cairo: in between he was the first European of modern times to

visit Petra and Abu Simbel, under the auspices of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa. He was a copious writer about his travels, including his visit to Lebanon in 1810:

"I proceeded to the right towards the Cedars, which are visible from the top of the mountain, standing half an hour from the direct line of the route to Bshirrai, at the foot of the steep declivities of the higher division of the mountain. They stand on uneven ground, and form a small wood. Of the oldest and best looking trees, I counted eleven or twelve; twenty-five very large ones; about fifty of middling size; and more than three hundred smaller and young ones. The oldest trees are distinguished by having foliage and small branches at the top only, and by four or five or even seven trunks springing from one base; the branches and foliage of the others were lower, but I saw none whose leaves touched the ground, like those at Kew Gardens. The trunks of the old trees are covered with the names of travellers and other persons who have visited them: I saw a date of the seventeenth century. The trunks of the oldest trees seem to be quite dead; the wood is of a gray tint; I took off a piece of one of them; but it was afterwards stolen..." [J. L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*, p.19, London: Murray, 1822].

Sir John Macdonald Kinneir (1782-1830), who travelled from Bagdad to Constantinople, counted 400 or 500 cedars when he visited the grove in 1813 [J.M. Kinneir, *Travels in Asia Minor* etc in 1813-14, quoted by J. C. Loudon, *ibid.* vol.4, p. 2410].

John Madox wrote that on 7 December 1822 he *"came to the large and lofty Cedars of Lebanon, and just as we arrived a fall of snow began. We were an hour and a quarter coming to them from Bshirrai. We rode into the forest of trees, for such it appears, there being between five and six hundred. They stand upon hillocks, some in a valley at*

the foot of the higher part of the mountain, and a few scattered about the lower parts of it. The snow increasing, and the mountain becoming enveloped in fog, we got under one of the largest trees, and until all the guides arrived, I endeavoured, under the shelter of its branches, as the others had done before me, to cut my name: a place was prepared with an adze, but I found the tree too hard to yield to my knife, and I could only inscribe my name and date in ink... I desired a fire to be made, and dinner to be prepared under another tree...cut my name on it finding it would yield to my knife, and seeing the names of Messrs. B. Barker, Fisk and King, and of several others whom I know. This tree measured twenty-seven feet in circumference a little way from the ground...At about four it cleared up a little, and I prepared to return to Bshirrai, but previously to this went to see the largest of the Cedars, which is on the northern hillock, a little on the side of the mountain, and which I found to be thirty-nine to forty feet in circumference. This has three very large stems and seven large branches, with various smaller ones. I dated and began five letters under the largest tree, the snow falling part of the time. Three guides preceding me, I now made the best of my way back to the village, and was welcomed back by the ladies of Bshirrai".

[J. Madox, *Excursions in the Holy Land, Egypt, Nubia, Syria* etc. London, 1834, vol.2, pp. 101-105].



5 J.S.Buckingham who visited the cedars in 1824 (portrait in his *Among Arab Tribes*, London, 1825)

James Silk Buckingham (1786-1855) went to sea at the age of 10 and was taken prisoner by the French on his

third voyage; he later travelled to and from India through various countries. In 1818 he founded the out-spoken *Calcutta Journal* which was suppressed by the authorities in 1823. On 26 April 1824 (?) he reached the Bsharré cedars which he described in

some detail [J. S. Buckingham, *Travels among Arab Tribes*. London: Longmans, 1825, p. 475-476]: *"There are, I should think, about 200 in number, all fresh and green. They look on approaching them like a grove of firs, but on coming nearer are found to be in general*

much larger, although the foliage still keeps its resemblance. There are about twenty that are very large, and among them several from ten to twelve feet in diameter at the trunk, with branches of a corresponding size, each of them like large trees extending outward from the parent stock, and overshadowing a considerable space of ground". He settled in England and from 1832 to 1837 he was MP for Sheffield.

In 1812 **William John Bankes** (d.1855) of Kingston Lacy in Dorset, went with **Thomas Legh** on an extended tour of Egypt and the Near East, returning via Turkey. At Aleppo in 1816 they met up with two friends who were both naval captains on tour: **Charles Leonard Irby** (1789-1845), and his brother-in-law **J. Mangles** (1786-1867). Unfortunately, they thought little of the cedars compared with their anticipation of seeing them. [C. L. Irby & J. Mangles, *Travels in Egypt, Nubia, Syria & Asia Minor during the years 1817 & 1818*, pp.208-212, Murray 1823; reprinted Darf Publishers 1985].

In June 1816 **Bankes** asked **Lady Hester Stanhope**, who lived in Lebanon, to send cones and seeds back to England. She told her doctor, **Charles Meryon**, to send them to Latakia, which he did, and they and most of the other things reached Kingston Lacy. Bankes's mother sowed her son's cedar seeds and grew many of them successfully (Hepper, *ibid.* 2001). Incidentally, **Charles Meryon** himself had seen the cedars during a cursory visit en route from Baalbek to Tripoli. Meryon and Lady Hester Stanhope stayed at Ehden for a few days in November 1815, and Meryon on his own went to see the cedars which he considered were *"no better than the trees growing at Warwick Castle"* ! [C.L.Meryon, *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope*, vol. 3 pp. 35-36, London, 1846; J. Watney, *Travels in Araby of Lady Hester Stanhope*, p. 200 London: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975].

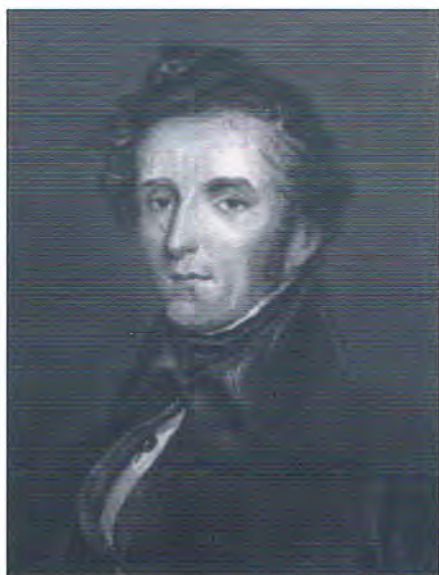
The traveller **Sir Frederick Henniker** (1793-1825) was severely wounded on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and left stark naked in a real-life parallel to the parable of the Good Samaritan. However, he recovered sufficiently to ascend Mount Lebanon in 1820: *"We stopped at the cedars of Lebanon; a clump of trees considerable only from their name: seven of them are strongly stamped with antiquity, the largest in girth is 18 1/2 feet, the others appear like young fir trees. This grove was, till of late years, the annual resort of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon, for religious purposes, and, like the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Temple of Venus, the scene of the greatest debaucher"*.

[F. Henniker, *Notes during a visit to Egypt, Nubia, the Oasis, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem*, p.303, London: Murray 1823].

Two American missionaries, **Rev. Pliny Fisk** and **Rev. J. King**, visited the Bsharré cedars before 1822 and noted that they *"stand upon five or six gentle elevations, and occupy a spot of ground three-fourths of a mile in circumference. A person may walk round it in fifteen minutes. The largest of the trees is about forty feet in circumference. Six or eight others are also very large, several of them nearly of the size of the largest. But each one is manifestly one or more trees, which have grown together, and now form one. They generally separate a few feet from the ground into the original trees. The handsomest and tallest were those of two and three feet in diameter. In these the body is straight, the branches almost horizontal, forming a beautiful cone, and casting a goodly shade"*. Fisk counted 389 trees, but King numbered 321 plus saplings. Fisk also wrote

"I know not why travellers have so long and so generally given twenty-eight, twenty, fifteen, five, as the number of the cedars. It is true that of those of superior size and antiquity there are not a great number; but then there is a regular gradation in size, from the largest down to the merest sapling."

[P. Fisk, P., *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk, A. M., late Missionary to Palestine*, p.327, Boston, 1828; see J. Kitto, *The Land of Promise*, pp.cccv,ccciv, London,1841)



6 A. de Lamartine, French poet and traveller, who visited the cedars in 1833 (the title-page of the English edition of his *Travels in the Holy Land*, London, 1840).

In April 1833 the French poet **Alphonse de Lamartine** estimated that there were only seven trees “*contemporary with the biblical times*” [A. de Lamartine, *Travels in the Holy Land*, 1837, vol. 2, p. 609]. It was during this visit that he carved his name on a tree that was remarked on by subsequent travellers! His compatriot **Eugène Melchior de Vogüé** agreed there were “*six ou huit énorme troncs, pelés, écorchés, décimés par la foudre et mutilés, s’il faut en croire la tradition, le souvenir vivant des âges bibliques*” [E. M. de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos*, Paris 1876, p. 50].

The intrepid Austrian lady, **Madame Ida Pfeiffer** (1797-1858) left Vienna in March 1842 for an extensive tour of the Holy Land. Joining up with Count Zichy at Damascus, they spent an hour or so amongst the Bsharré cedars where she saw “*twenty very aged, and five peculiarly large and fine specimens, which are said to have existed in the time of Solomon*” [I. Pfeiffer, *Visit to the Holy Land*, London 1862, p. 197].

William Rae Wilson's own account of his visit in 1820 to the cedars is so furnished with Scriptural references that his actual impressions of the trees are difficult to extract: “*The few of these trees which still remain, stand on a piece of uneven ground, and are fifteen feet in height, twisted together, and it is a curious fact, that instead of spreading out their branches with a natural irregularity, they confine themselves into a uniform pyramidal cone. The cedar tree is unrivalled in grandeur in the vegetable kingdom*” and “*during part of the time I visited it, torrents and volumes of*

clouds rolled along, not only excluding from view every surrounding object, but the very earth beneath, and threatening to envelop the whole mountain in complete darkness...” [W. R. Wilson, *Travels in the Holy Land*, London, vol.2, pp.104-107, ed.3, 1831].

Lord Lindsay (1812-1880) and **William Ramsay** travelled in the Levant during 1837-38. In Lebanon they gazed at the vast ridge above Kadisha, the Sacred River of Lebanon, and “*As we entered the grove, the air was quite perfumed with their odour, the 'smell of Lebanon', so celebrated by the pen of inspiration. We halted under one of the largest trees, inscribed with De La Borde's name on one side, and De La Martine's [Lamartine] on the other. But do not think that we were sacrilegious enough to wound these glorious trees; there are few English names comparatively, I am happy to say - I would soon have cut my name on the wall of a church*”.

“*Several generations of cedars, all growing promiscuously together, compose this beautiful grove. The younger ones are very numerous, - the second-rate would form a noble wood of themselves, were even the patriarchal dynasty quite extinct, - one of them, by no means the largest, measures nineteen and a quarter feet in circumference, and, in repeated instances, two, three, and four large trunks springing from a single root, - but they have all a fresher appearance than the patriarchs, and straighter stems - straight as young palms trees. Of the giants, there are seven standing very near each other, all on the same hill, - three more, a little further on, nearly in line with them, - and, in a second walk of discovery, after my companions had lain down to rest, I had the pleasure of detecting two others low down on the northern edge of the grove - twelve therefore, in all, of which the ninth from the south is the smallest, but even that bears the tokens of antiquity coeval with its brethren*”. [Lord Lindsay, *Letters from Egypt, Edom and the Holy Land*, London vol.2, pp. 206-213 (1838)].

Viscount Castlereagh wrote in his diary for 8 August 1846: “*We saw the cedars afar off, looking like a small round speck, or clump, upon the surface of the mountain. Almost all day they were in view, till gradually they were developed, and their shapes and stately figures appeared more*

seem bounded.

About six o'clock we found ourselves among their giant stems. A peculiar stillness reigns all over the spot. The breeze does not seem to stir the branches, which appear almost motionless. By the roots of an enormous patriarch of the grove, we have pitched our tent, and are preparing for the rest, after a long hard day's journey.

August 9th.- There are about two hundred and fifty trees in all, occupying a knoll, which, taking the irregularities of surface into account, covers about six or seven acres. There are one or two stragglers, but at no great distance from the clump, and these do not break the line of demarcation I have before alluded to. The Lebanon range here is bleak and bare, and there is no cultivation higher than the cedars nor are there any trees visible, except these princes of the mountain, eternal Emirs whom no change of dynasty, no worldly events can affect. They own no sultan except the Omnipotent, who bade them grow and flourish upon the spot that he appointed. They owe no thanks to man, for man defaces and destroys them in his wantonness. They scatter their seeds to the winds of heaven, which under Almighty Providence bear them harmless to some favourable spot, where other scions rising under the giant branches of the elder ones, perpetuate the race of the trees of Jéhovah. They seem everlasting memorials of the greatness of God's earthly temple;... Such were the thoughts of those who sat under the gnarled branches of these mighty chiefs of the forest of fallen Lebanon... Some of the trees bear the names upon their bark of Laborde, Burckardt, and Lamartine, with several others. The cedar of Lamartine was measured, and we found it to be above twenty-four feet in girth. There are not above seven or eight of these magnates, but a goodly supply of smaller ones surround them, and there seems no chance at present of the race dying away or being destroyed."

[Viscount Castlereagh, *Diary of a journey to Damascus*, 2: 266-273, London, Henry Colburn, 1847].

clearly before us. It is singular to behold this spot, small in extent and quite isolated, covered with these magnificent trees. The hills are bare all round them, nor is there any deviation from the line of demarcation, by which they



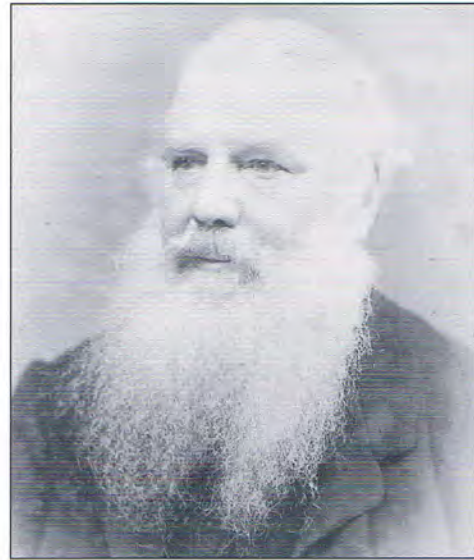
7 Dr Joseph Dalton Hooker, who carried out the first scientific study of the cedars in 1860. (Courtesy The Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew).

In 1860 **Joseph Dalton Hooker** (1817-1911), son of the then Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and who himself became Director on the death of his father in 1865, was invited to join a trip to Syria and Palestine, with another botanist **Daniel Hanbury** (1825-1875). Others in the party were **Commander Arthur L. Mansell** who was in charge of HM survey ship *Firefly*, and **Le Gray** who appears to have been a photographer; **J. Washington** and **J. Hawkey** were also included. From Beirut the group headed for the usual clump of cedars beyond Bsharré. They reached them on September 29 and estimated that there were nearly 400 trees in nine groups. "*The largest is 40 ft in girth and others are also very large, but all the largest are very old. One large dead old tree is cast down and I have had a dried part of it. The smallest one is about 27 inches in girth*". The branch is now nowhere to be found at Kew, but there is a dried specimen of a leafy twig bearing male cones collected by Hooker and Hanbury in the Herbarium. They did not state that they had collected any seeds. This expedition to the cedars is regarded as the first one of a scientific nature [J. D. Hooker, *On the Cedars of Lebanon, Taurus, Algeria, and India*, *Natural History Review*, 2:11-18, 1862; R. Desmond, *Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, RBG Kew*, 1999; Badr el-Hage, *The first scientific mission in 1860 to the cedars of Mount Lebanon*, *Archaeology and History in Lebanon* 12:69-81, Beirut, 2000].



8 Dean A.P. Stanley who accompanied the Prince of Wales on his travels in Egypt and the Levant in 1862 (From a post-card courtesy Paul Davies).

In the spring of 1862 the **Rev. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley** (1815-1881), Dean of Westminster, accompanied **Albert Edward, Prince of Wales**, the future Edward VII on a grand tour of the Near East, including Mt Lebanon: “*The cedars grow on that portion of the moraine which immediately borders this stream, and nowhere else. And thus the spot becomes a centre of life to the wilderness in the midst of which it stands... The Maronites long guarded them, under penalties of excommunication; and honour them as 'the Twelve Apostles'- 'the Friends of Solomon'. The sanctuary, which was a rude altar, is now a rude wooden chapel, they greatly frequent on the festival which the Oriental Church treats as the Feast of all 'high Mountains', the Feast of the Transfiguration*”. [A. P. Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, 9th edition pp. 307-310, London, John Murray, 1864]. Cedar seeds were gathered for planting at Osborne House in the Isle of Wight (27) [Hepper, *ibid.* 2001).



9 Canon Henry B. Tristram, who contributed the natural history volume for the *Survey of Western Palestine* published by the Palestine Exploration Fund. (Photo by Maull & Fox, 1890s, courtesy PEF).

A keen traveller and ornithologist was **the Rev. Henry Barker Tristram** (1822-1906), as well as being a canon of Durham Cathedral. On 16 June 1864, after a long journey through the Holy Land, Tristram with the botanist **Benjamin Thompson Lowne** (fl.c.1865) and the rest of his party, were crossing the Bekaa valley heading for Beirut, when they diverted from the direct route to see the cedars at Bsharré. As they surmounted the snowy pass they were rewarded by “*one of those sudden panoramas which only such an elevation could afford [that] burst upon us by surprise. For many miles the Mediterranean coast was stretched from Beirut northwards...All was brown and bare, save one dark spot, where stood a clump of trees, the famous cedar-grove. Viewed from above, the effect of that is much more remarkable than when, as is generally the case, it is approached from below...As we looked down upon the trees, we could just discern beyond them a thread of cultivation, which gradually expands as it descends, and links them, standing on 'the edge of Lebanon, with man and with civilization. A few separate trees stood out from the mass, but the general appearance of the grove was of a thick clump, as though it had been a fragment of some ancient forest*”. Two hours later, having descended from the pass, they reached the trees. They delighted in the songs of the birds and cicadae “*but the charm of solitude was no longer here, for a rude Maronite chapel has been erected in the centre of the grove, and the priest had collected around him many of the goat-herds of the neighbouring villages, who spend the*

summer under the rude shelter of the huts. We picketed our horses under one of the ancient patriarchs of the forest... The trees are not too close, they are entirely confined to the grove. Though the patriarchs are of enormous girth they are no higher than the younger trees, many of which reach a circumference of eighteen feet. In the top-most boughs ravens, hooded crows, kestrels, hobbys and wood-owls were secreted in abundance, but so lofty are the trees that the birds were out of reach of ordinary shot...

"We had a long ride from the cedars to Hazrun". On the way "just above Ehden, towards B'sherreh, stands another clump of ancient cedars, which, though fine old trees, have, from their comparatively smaller size, been neither noticed nor recorded by travellers. [This is now designated the National Nature Reserve Horsh Ehden - FNH]. They are probably a relic of the ancient forests, which may have extended along the edge of the valley".

The following day, June 17, they left Kadisha and climbed to the bare shoulder of Lebanon to reach El Hadith. They met a couple of men carrying firewood that included cedar of Lebanon, which was spotted by botanist Lowne. They asked where it grew and were shown scattered trees on the bare hillside between El Hadith and Niha, together with old junipers and pines. [This is in the Tannourine area indicated on the map p. 7]. More cedars were found an hour's journey further on after crossing the next ridge near the stream that feeds the Duweir River. These trees clung to the steep slopes, or were gnarled and twisted on bare hill tops, while others were sheltered in the recesses of the dell. Lowne climbed a tree and collected a cone. *"The largest tree might be 15 or 18 ft in circumference, but none we saw approached the patriarchs of the grove, either in size or magnificence. Still, there was cedar enough here to have rebuilt Solomon's Temple. We have now discovered it in two mountain valleys, growing, too, in every variety of situation".* [H. B. Tristram, *The Land of Israel*. London, 1865].



10 Sir Richard Burton, the explorer and diplomat, who visited the cedars in 1870. (Photo from I. Burton, *The inner life of Syria, Palestine and the Holy Land*, vol. 2, London, 1875).

The famous traveller and diplomat, **Sir Richard Burton** (1821-1890), was scornful of both the cedars and Tristram's comments about them: *"The day after our arrival at the Cedars (Saturday 30 July 1870) was idly spent in prospecting the valley, and in counting the clump: superstition says that this is impossible, and perhaps it is difficult to the uninitiated in such matters of woodcraft. I fear it will be considered bad taste to confess that none of us fell into the usual ecstasies before these exaggerated Christmas trees, which look from afar like the corner of a fir plantation, and which when near prove so mean and ragged that an English country gentleman would refuse them admittance to his park. Indeed many a churchyard at home has yews which surpass 'Arz Lib-n' in appearance, and which are probably of older date. [Count Constantin Francois de] Volney [Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte 1783-5, Paris, 1787, vol. 1, p.177] is still correct in attesting "these cedars, so boasted, resemble many other wonders; they support their reputation very indifferently on a close inspection". It is now emphatically incorrect that:*

*"The mountain cedar looks as fair
As those in royal gardens bred,"*

"As a rule, Cedars of the Libanus are badly-clad, ill-conditioned, and homely growth; essentially unpicturesque, except, perhaps, when viewed from above. Especially these. All the elders are worried

like Cornish cheese-wrings, hacked and stripped, planed into tablets, shorn of branches, stained with fire, chiefly by the 'natives'; we found them burning their lime and boiling their coffee with the spoils of the 'Lord's trees'. There is an old

*man, entitled Wakilel Arz, but, as usual, this 'guardian of the cedars' - a Custos sadly wanting custodes - is the first to abet for a consideration, all who would see 'Lebanon hewed down'. [R. Burton & C.F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, *Unexplored Syria*, pp.99-102, London: Tinsley Brothers, 2 vols., 1872].*

Finally, it should be noted that many other travellers to Lebanon have expressed concern about the fate of the cedars, especially those at Bsharré. For example, in 1879 **S. R. Oliver** [S. R. Oliver, *Gardener's Chronicle* 12:204, 1879] wrote:

"At present for want of protection against the goats and thoughtless tourists, the present grove is dwindling away, and another generation will exclaim against our supineness in thus allowing a relic of the past to die out prematurely. For a small sum of money a stone wall might be built, enclosing the area of the cedar grove sufficiently well against goats... It would be easy to build such a wall so as not to be an eyesore or disfigurement, by taking advantage of the sinuities of the numerous small valleys which permeate the vicinity. I am sure that many travellers would contribute small donations should a subscription list be opened for such a purpose."

Elwes and Henry [H. J. Elwes & A. Henry, *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*. London, 1908, vol.1, p. 456] when quoting this passage add a footnote: "Rustem Pasha informed Sir W. Thiselton Dyer [then Director of Kew] *"that he had built a wall to protect the young cedars from grazing, but at a later period this was broken down"*. I was told during my visit in 1996 and by others since that after Sir Joseph Hooker's visit in 1860 Queen Victoria was so concerned about what Hooker had told her about the cedars that she herself had paid for the

wall to be built. However, I have not come across any documentary confirmation of this. A wall in good condition about 2m high is still around the grove and in 1996 I actually had to climb over it, choosing an easier spot near a stream, on the advice of the caretaker who had locked the gate owing to repairs being done to the path!

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11 The northern portion of the cedar of Lebanon grove at Bsharré showing the protective wall. The bare mountainsides rise to the east. (Photograph taken by F. Nigel Hepper, 1996).



Aerial view of the Bsharré Cedars.
(Photograph taken by the French army *circa* 1930.
Private collection Philippe Jabre).