

It was the smells of Jaffa that seemed so pronounced, these first days of August, 1970; good ones and rotten ones, the smell of orange blossom and also of decaying rubbish. The heat was intense; I enjoyed the Glasgow sunshine, but this Middle Eastern sun was definitely to be avoided, if possible. The Jaffa world seemed to wake up very early. Lorries, buses and cars changing gear outside my bedroom window, the paraffin man ringing his bell, children laughing and shouting and always the reassuring chimes of St. Anthony's bells ringing out across Yefet Street.

So, after interviews, a medical, meeting with the Revd.W.R.Y. Marshall, the Middle East and Europe Secretary and dinner, in Edinburgh, with Miss Rosie, Headmistress of Tabeetha School, here I was, ready to start teaching. It had been a long, long journey to Jaffa, not only in terms of miles. It actually began one winter's evening in 1969 in Jordanhill Church, Glasgow. My minister, the Revd.Dr. Michael Orr preached from St. Luke chapter 12 and took his text from verse 4 'Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required.' What had this to do with me? I had a wonderful teaching job, which I so enjoyed and a busy social life. Why should I give it all up? The call of God was so insistent that I could do no other and so it was to Jaffa that I came.

It was exciting entering Tabeetha for the first time. After the grime and dust of Yefet Street, it was amazing to walk into this oasis of order and tranquillity. (The children had not yet arrived!) The grass was green (!) and well cut and in the playground orange trees, along with oleander, frangipani and jacarandas grew. The children were forbidden to climb the palm trees!

Here one walked with history. Miss Jane Walker-Arnott, the daughter of the Regius Professor of Botany at Glasgow University, first visited Jaffa in 1858 and was appalled by the conditions in which some of the girls lived. With the help of friends, she opened Tabeetha Mission School on 16 March 1863, with fourteen girls; Christian, Jewish and Moslem. The school continued to grow and so a new building was planned. It was opened on 1 November 1875, one of the contributors being Mr Thomas Cook, who was a good friend to the school. The day to day work of the school continued with the teaching being mainly in Arabic, with some of the older pupils being taught English. "Emphasis was on domestic training to prepare the girls to make "good "marriages and on encouraging the more capable girls to train as teachers in their turn." ('May you live to be 120' by Isobel Goodwin) In 1911 this remarkable, God fearing woman died in Jaffa. The work continued under the leadership of Miss Lilian Bain and then Miss Jean Rosie who was my Headmistress.

The first months were quite hard. (The night before I left home my father said it would be hard, but I did not realise then just how hard these three years would be.) I was used to teaching 41 Infants in Glasgow, and now I had only about 25, but what a difference language, or the lack of it, can make! However, discipline was good and most of the children in my Primary 4 were quite keen to learn. There was, however, a lack of classroom material for games, but magazines from home were torn apart and put to various uses, necessity being the mother of invention. Every morning each class had prayers in their own room; sometimes I read a few verses from the New Testament

or else from the Old Testament.(It never ceased to amaze me that here I was in the very place where the cedars arrived from Lebanon to be carted to Jerusalem to build the Temple and where Peter had his vision.) Sometimes I took Junior prayers on a Friday afternoon and was conscious of the differing religious persuasions of, not only the pupils but also the staff.It was an enormous privilege.

Each session there were Parents' Evenings. Then the school hall would ring with so many different tongues! These were interesting encounters with fascinating people; some were local, others came from distant shores, but our point of contact was the education and well being of their children.The Festivals, both Christian and Jewish were celebrated, thus creating a spirit of tolerance one with the other. Sports' Day was another first, thoroughly enjoyed by all. How the African children could run!

There was now a need for a kindergarten and Miss Rosie asked me to set it up and begin with about 16 children. Here indeed was a challenge! I was given 50 lira for equipment. I thought longingly of all the puzzles, games, books etc. which we had in the Infant Department in the school in Glasgow. However, it was amazing what I was able to invent! I did discover that sellotape did not stick posters and notices on to the walls; it maybe had something to do with the humidity. With those very small children, language became difficult. However I was able to send for a senior pupil from the child's country and he/she would translate and all would be well, until the next time.

The local staff were a great support and strength.I valued their friendship and advice. (They, too, would translate telephone bills etc!) Our Deputy Headmistress died very suddenly and, the following day,was buried in the little cemetery in Jaffa overlooking the Mediterranean. So many Jewish and Moslem friends joined us in this solemn Christian service.Then, shortly afterwards, three of us were injured in a very nasty car accident. The hospital staff were very efficient, though quite different from home.

Have the original purposes been fulfilled? It is now the end of the year 2008 and children are still being taught at the Church of Scotland's Tabeetha School. Today's children are living in a world where we still have to learn "to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." This they are learning in a wee, old school in downtown Jaffa.

Looking back, what was God up to? In His loving kindness, He has provided these qualities, about which Micah wrote, in former pupils now scattered all over the world. In addition, Miss Duncan returned home to be married to the Revd. Hugh Kerr, our Minister in Tiberias!