

Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Tirol

Travels and adventures in Egypt, Arabia and Persia

Fogg, William Perry

London [u.a.], [1875]

Chapter VII. The holy city

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOLY CITY.

Biblical Lore not my Specialty—Cleanliness next to Godliness—Topography of the Holy City—The Best of it Under Ground—The Holy Places mostly Pious Frauds—The Small Area Within the Walls—A Bird's Eye View—Pool of Hezekiah—Tower of David—Hospital of St. John—The Greek Hospice—Church of the Holy Sepulcher—The Turkish Guards—The Holy Sepulcher—An Affecting Scene—The "Center of the World"—Sword and Spurs of Godfrey de Bouillon—Via Dolorosa—St. Veronica—The Mosque of Omar—Mahometan Traditions—"Pillars of Proof"—The Test Not Conclusive—The Golden Gate—A Relic of the Mosque.



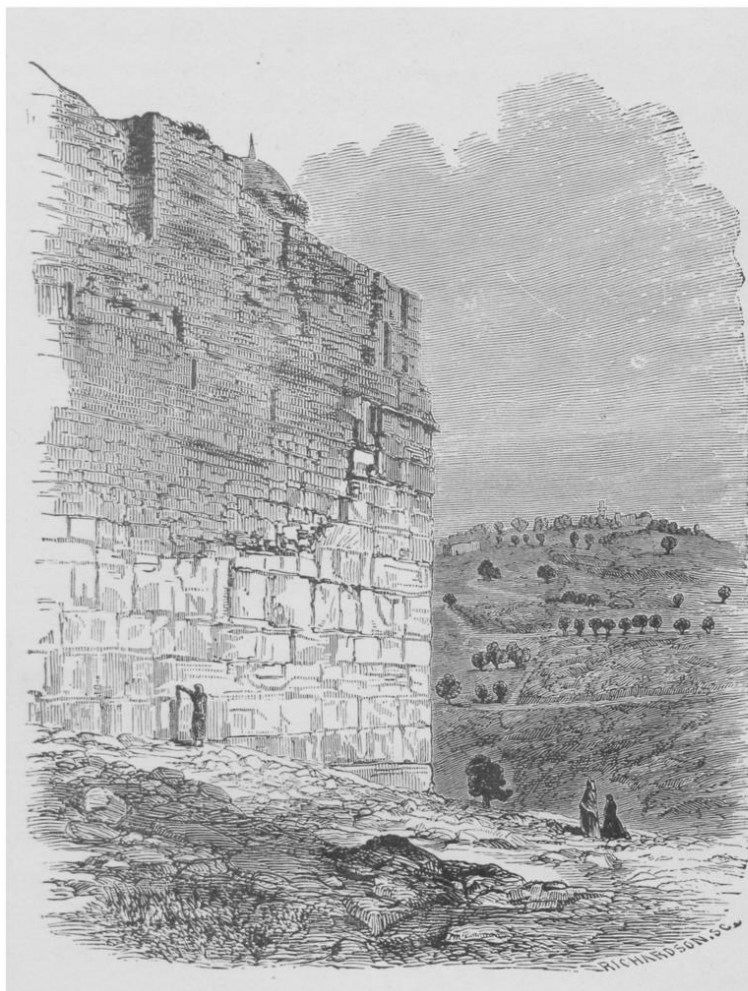
UR good Bishop said at dinner to-day, when I proposed to refer to him as authority on some question of Biblical history: "Ah, sir, you ought to be as well posted on the subject as myself." I could only say in reply that scriptural lore was not my *specialite*—and I feel my utter incompetence to describe, from the religiously sentimental point of view, places and localities which reason

and plain common sense teach me are only "pious frauds," invented to excite the religious enthusiasm of ignorant people. So I trust I shall not be thought irreverent when I attempt to describe, in a matter-of-fact way, what I saw

in Jerusalem, as I would the strange scenes in any less holy city.

If "cleanliness is next to godliness," surely this place is far away from either. In fact, holiness must, according to my experience, when applied to sacred cities, be in inverse ratio to cleanliness. Rome is bad; Benares, the holy city of the Hindoos, is a degree worse; Jerusalem a little more so; and Mecca, by many millions considered so holy that no "dog of a Christian" can obtain admittance, must be a paradise of squalor and filth. The theory of the "rose by any other name," etc., does not hold good, for odors, not always of "Araby, the blest," are wonderfully sweetened by the name and sentimental associations of pious pilgrims. There is the less excuse for Jerusalem, as it is built on uneven ground, and being surrounded on three sides by deep ravines, there is every facility for drainage. One would suppose that the heavy rains, which are frequent here during the spring, would carry off a portion of the "unpleasantness," but my experience in rainy weather shows that then the deep mud only becomes the more sticky, the rough and uneven pavements more dangerously slippery, and the stench almost intolerable.

Literature is very prolific in descriptions of the Holy Land. It is said that more than two hundred books have already been written, and the number is increasing every year. The original city, as it existed in the time of our Saviour, is admitted by all authorities to be from forty to sixty feet beneath the present streets and buildings, so that we may say of Jerusalem, as we are wont to do of Virginia, that "the best part of it is under ground." A glance at history will show the reason for this. The same generation that witnessed the crucifixion saw Jerusalem utterly destroyed by Titus, after a siege, when, according to Josephus, over a million were killed, and one hundred



EAST END OF SOUTH WALL.

From a photograph by F. Graham.

thousand taken prisoners. Of the magnificent temple "not one stone was left above another," the walls were razed to the ground, and for many years desolation reigned supreme. Six centuries later it was besieged and captured by the Saracens; four hundred years after, at the breaking up of the empire of the brave and chivalric Saladin, it became the prey of the fierce Turks. For nearly a century it was the scene of a most obstinate and bloody struggle between the warriors of the Crescent and the Cross. During these many wars and sieges, its walls and buildings were repeatedly turned to heaps of rubbish. Upon this accumulated debris, modern Jerusalem is built. Unlike Cairo, Delhi, and many other Eastern cities, its original site is unchanged through all these vicissitudes, for the walls now, as two thousand years ago, are built along the brink of the deep valleys that bound the city on the east, south, and west. Outside the walls, nature has left clear and distinct landmarks that can never be effaced. The valley of Jehoshaphat, the brook Kedron, the Hill of Evil Counsel, and above all the Mount of Olives, are essentially the same to-day as when described in Holy Writ. Within the walls, which are from thirty to forty feet in height, built mostly by the Crusaders, and fortified after the style of the Middle Ages by towers and turrets, there are but two localities in which one can put faith—Mount Zion, and Mount Moriah where the mosque of Omar now stands upon the site of the temple of Solomon.

The area enclosed by the walls seems to the visitor but very small, it being but one mile long by about three-fourths of a mile in width. Nor could it have been much larger at the time of its greatest prosperity. It is hard to understand how it could possibly have contained so large a population as given by Josephus and other historians. Perhaps oriental hyperbole has magnified these estimates.

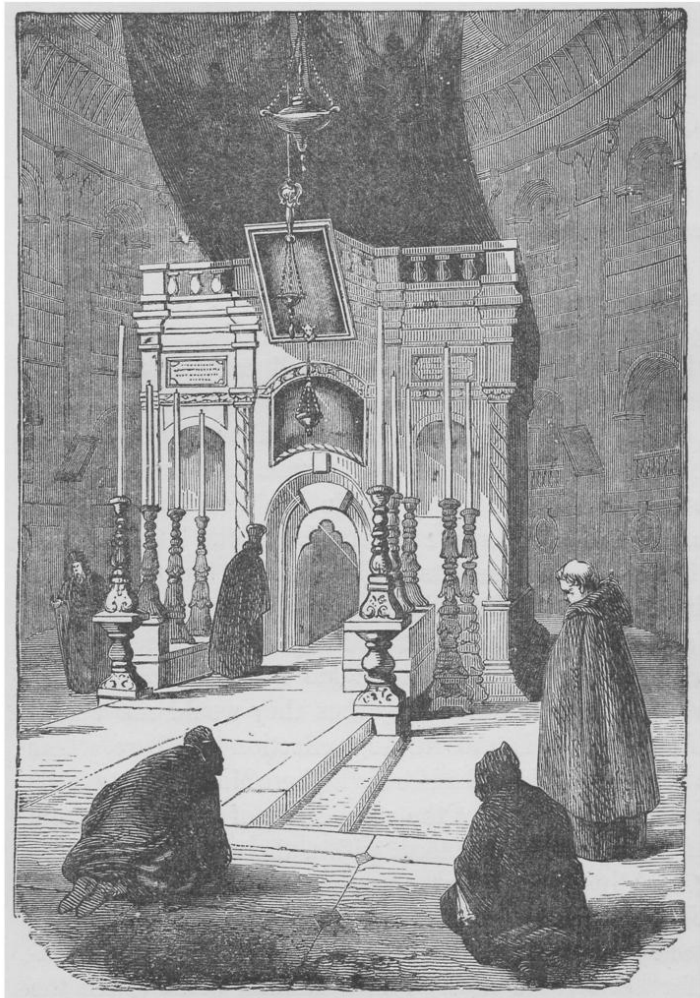
The experience of King David in taking a census, was not encouraging to his successors. The present population is not far from 20,000, of whom about one-third are Mahometans, and the balance nearly equally divided between Jews and Christians of the various sects, the Greek Church predominating. The Turkish Governor, or "Pasha of Jerusalem," is appointed by the Sultan, but must be confirmed, under a recent arrangement, by the representatives at Constantinople, of the great Christian powers of Europe.

In visiting a strange city it is always a good plan, first to climb to some high point from which a general view of the locality can be had. The "house top" of the Mediterranean hotel, situated upon Mt. Zion, is a capital standpoint, and commands a beautiful view of the whole city and the surrounding hills. At your feet is the "Pool of Hezekiah," a reservoir perhaps 200 feet square, half full of muddy water. The Tower of David overlooks this pool, as in olden time. Before you, but a little to the left, is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which is supposed to cover the site of Calvary. It is difficult to believe that this location was the scene of the crucifixion and burial of our Lord. For if this spot was formerly outside the walls, it would diminish the area of the ancient city by at least one-third. Adjoining it is an open space, where once stood the splendid hospital of the Knights of St. John. Directly in front, looking towards the east, is a large square enclosure, in the center of which is the beautiful Mosque of Omar, on Mt. Moriah. Beyond, and across the valley of Jehoshaphat, rises the Mount of Olives, the summit crowned by a Turkish mosque, and the Greek "Church of the Ascension," the sides dotted with olive trees and Moslem tombs. Around the side of Olivet, to the right, you can trace the road to Bethany, so often trod by Jesus and his disciples. Scattered about within the walls are

twenty convents and churches of the various Christian sects, while to the left, on the Jaffa road, is the immense Greek Hospice, with accommodations for several thousand pilgrims within its enclosure.

Our first visit is to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the central point of attraction to all devout pilgrims. We enter from the street a long crooked and steep passage, pass under a low archway, designed, it is said, to prevent its desecration by Turks riding in on horseback, to a square, open court, thronged by sellers of relics consisting of beads, olive wood, and mother-of-pearl crucifixes, to be carried away by pilgrims to all parts of the world. The front of the church is not very impressive, though its doorways and windows are most elaborately carved; it shows the marks of time on its crumbling walls. Near the doors, both outside and within, are Turkish soldiers in semi-European uniform, and armed with the latest pattern of breech-loading muskets. They conduct themselves with a dignity befitting the rulers of the country, and it must be said to their credit, that neither here nor elsewhere in Syria has any one ever asked me for *baksheesh*, though I will not go so far as to say that they would not accept it if offered. It is a mortifying reflection that here, where the Christian religion had its birth, these Mahometan guards are required to prevent the rival sects of Christians from shedding each other's blood, within the walls of the building held by them as the most sacred on earth.

Just inside the doors is a flat marble slab called the "stone of unction," on which the Lord's body was anointed for burial, and near by is a circular stone where the Virgin Mary stood during the anointment. We pass a little farther on and stand beneath the great dome, in front of a building about fifteen feet square, embellished



THE HOLY SEPULCHRE.

with all that wealth and superstition can supply. Outside and within are scores of lamps of gold and silver—the gifts of kings and queens—kept constantly burning. It is divided into two apartments, the inner one, about six feet by seven, containing the white marble sarcophagus in which they believe the body of the Saviour was laid. There is a constant stream of pilgrims, many of whom have come thousands of miles, and they are admitted three or four at a time within the sacred precincts, crawling on bended knees, kissing the marble floor and the tomb, and often with the tears streaming from their eyes. It is a scene hard to look upon unmoved; but with me it was rather pity for these poor, ignorant creatures, than reverence for the spot to them the holiest upon earth.

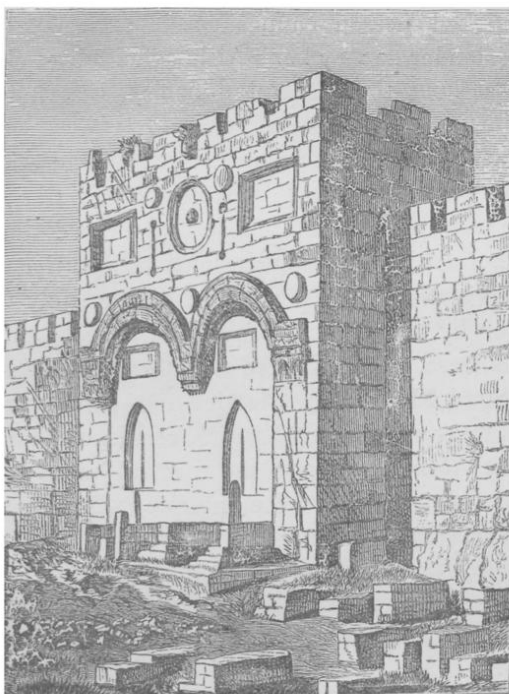
The church covers a large area and is divided between the Armenians (native Christians), the Latins (Roman Catholics), and the Greeks (or Russians). The latter control the spot called "Calvary," where Helena, the mother of Constantine, discovered the three crosses hid beneath a rock. Here you are shown the holes in which the crosses were fixed, and the fissure in the rock caused by the earthquake. In the center of the richly decorated Byzantine Chapel adjoining, is a small pillar which they call "the center of the world,"—from this spot they say the earth was taken from which God created Adam. It would require too much space to describe half the "sacred places"—over forty in number—which are located within this church. I will only mention the spots where Mary Magdalene and the mother of Christ stood during the crucifixion, and where Christ appeared to them; the tombs of Joseph, Nicodemus, and Adam; the pillar of flagellation, etc. I took in my hand the sword and spurs of Godfrey de Bouillon, the first Christian king of Jerusalem—doubtless genuine relics, and still used in the ceremony of investing

the Knights of St. John. During all the time we were in the church, services were being held in many different chapels, and processions of priests and devotees were passing to and fro, bearing candles and burning incense.

Leaving the church, we walked through the "Via Dolorosa," where our Saviour bore the cross on His way to Calvary, under the arch of "Ecce Homo," past the house of Pilate and the "Hall of Judgment," and the spot where St. Veronica offered the handkerchief for wiping His face. Upon it is impressed the picture of the Lord's face in blood, and it is now one of the most sacred relics in St. Peter's at Rome.

The Mosque of Omar, to the Mahometan the most sacred place in the world except Mecca, was formerly very difficult of access to all but the "true believer," and permits can now only be obtained from the Governor at the request of the foreign Consuls. When I was here before, these cost twenty francs each, but the price is now reduced to five. Our shoes had to be replaced by slippers, in obedience to the injunction, "take thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." The enclosure is one thousand five hundred by one thousand feet, planted with cyprus and palm trees, and surrounded by a high wall. Upon a broad marble platform in the center, stands one of the most beautiful of mosques. It is built upon the foundation walls of Solomon's temple, and covers the "holy of holies." The building is octagonal in form, about sixty feet each side, supporting an elegant dome. In the center, under a canopy of the richest silks, is an irregular stone, nearly fifty feet in diameter, called the "rock of prophecy," which the Mussulman believes to have fallen from heaven. When the prophets fled for safety to other lands, this rock was about to follow, but the angel Gabriel seized it in his mighty hand and held it fast!

until Mahomet arrived, who fixed it eternally on its present site. The print of the angel's hands and of the prophet's foot as he ascended from it to heaven, are shown upon the stone. Beneath it is a cave, about eighteen feet in size, where Mahomet rested after his flight from Mecca to



THE GOLDEN GATE.

Jerusalem in a single night. It is believed that this rock is immovably suspended in the air, quite independent of the pillars under it, which are only there in case of accident! Every prayer uttered in the cave beneath will be granted. At the bottom is a deep well, where, they say, are all the souls of the departed waiting the resurrection.

Another mosque, within the same enclosure, was once a

Christian church during the occupancy of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. It contains the "tombs of the sons of Aaron," the "foot prints of Christ," and the "pillars of proof,"—two marble columns standing side by side, with a space of but nine inches between them. Through this space a good man may pass regardless of his size, but a wicked person cannot possibly squeeze through, however slender he may be. Although I have twice passed through without the slightest difficulty, I shall not set up for a saint.

On one side of the enclosure we see the interior of the beautiful "Golden Gate," through which Christ passed when he triumphantly entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is now walled up, as the Moslems believe that when the Christians again obtain possession of the Holy City, they will enter by this gate. Many other curious places were shown us here, which I have not space to describe. The good-natured Sheik who attended our party through the grounds, was very civil and polite, and in consideration of some extra *baksheesh* gave me a small piece of the tile lining of the interior of the mosque, which I shall add to my collection of relics.