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Travels and adventures in Egypt, Arabia and Persia

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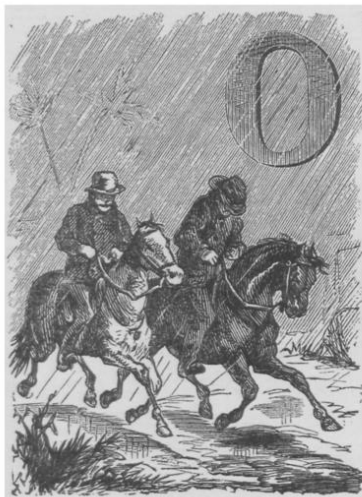
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Chapter VIII. Jerusalem, and our return to Jaffa

CHAPTER VIII.

JERUSALEM, AND OUR RETURN TO JAFFA.

Visit to the Mount of Olives—A View Unequalled in the Holy Land—The Stolen Footprint—Bethany—Tomb of Lazarus—House of Martha and Mary—The Identical Fig Tree—The Scene of the Last Supper—Armenian Convent—A Beautiful Missal—The Jews' Wailing Place—Farewell to Jerusalem—The Octroi Duty—Last View of the Holy City—A Dismal Ride—A Sinner on his way to Confession—I Assume the Rôle of a Preacher—He becomes humble and Penitent—Once More Entertained at the Gateway to the Plain—Human Nature Not Totally Depraved—The Russian Convent at Ramleh—Hospitality of the Monks—Morning Ride to Jaffa—The Decoration of the "Red Jerusalem Cross."



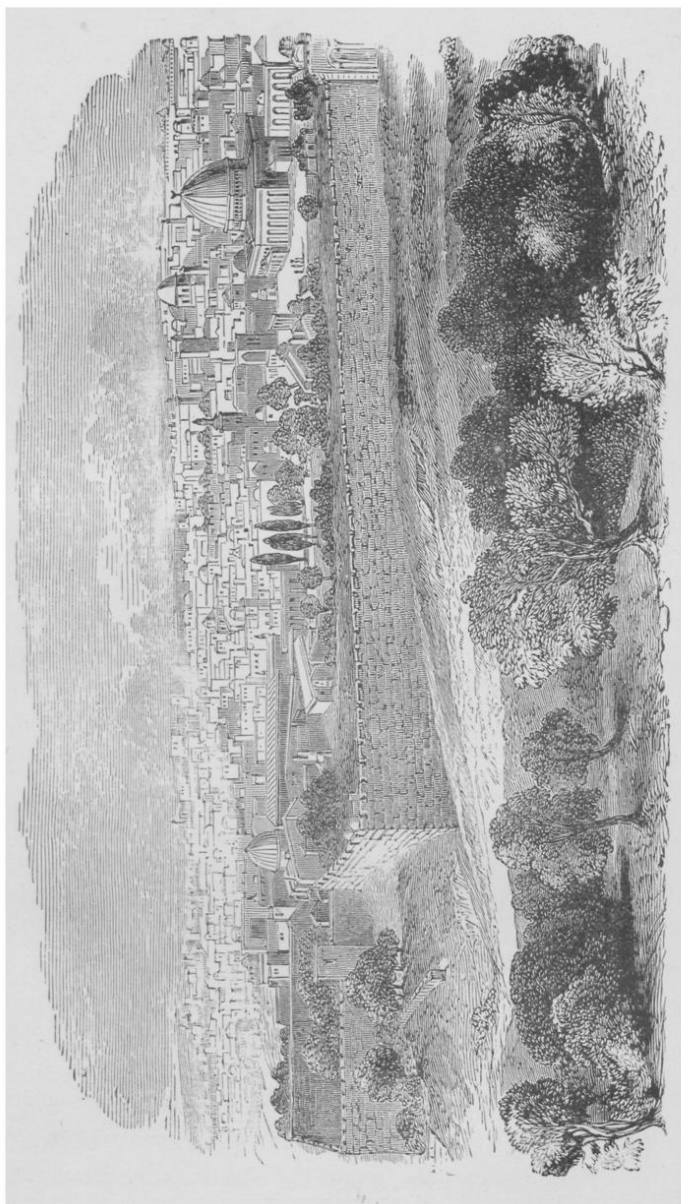
OUR visit to the Mount of Olives, and to the village of Bethany, was one of the pleasantest of our Jerusalem experiences. Leaving the city by the Damascus Gate, then turning to the right, we wind round the ancient walls, and descend the steep hill to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Our faith grows stronger as we leave behind us the foolish myths and absurd traditions of both Christian and Moslem, which meet us at every turn within the walls. We stop for a few moments to enter a small square enclosure which is called the "Garden of Gethsemane." If not the

identical spot, it must be very near the site of the Garden where our Saviour passed the night of agony. Here are six olive trees said to be fifteen hundred years old ; certainly the oldest, most gnarly and knotted specimens I ever saw of this long-lived tree, and their being here gives an air of genuineness to the place. This valley has from time immemorial been the great burial place of the Jews, and there are now in the city many very old and wealthy descendants of Abraham, who have come from distant foreign lands, that their bones may be laid in the tombs of their forefathers.

Here we see the quaint and antique tombs ascribed by tradition to Absalom and Zachariah. In olden times every man passing by, cast a pebble at the former, and it is now half buried in loose stones. The day was quite warm and pleasant, and we passed many parties of both Jewish and Moslem women and children out for a walk. One party we noticed, were kneeling and throwing flowers over a recent tomb, perhaps of some near relative, and we make a detour, that we may not disturb their grief. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

We reach the summit of the Mount of Olives, and from the tower of the mosque we enjoy a view unequalled in beauty in all the Holy Land. For the first time we seem to be in a land sacred to holy memories. Before us lies the "City of our Lord," the bright sun gilding alike the domes of mosques and temples. In the foreground we see women drawing water from a well, and balancing, on their heads, the jars in form identical with those used three thousand years ago. A long train of camels are slowly winding along the road from the South, their attendants wearing the same loose, flowing robes as in the time of the patriarchs.

In the far distance on our left, are the Mountains of Moab, and the Dead Sea, that looks like a vast lake of



JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

molten lead. We trace the Jordan, like a silver thread, through a green valley amid the sterile rocky mountains. Though more than twenty miles away by the road, it seems scarcely half that distance in a straight line. It is over four thousand feet below the point on which we stand. Descending from the tower, we merely glance into the church at the rock on which a large indentation is shown as the foot-print of our Saviour, from whence he made the Ascension. They say there were originally two prints, but the Moslems stole one of them. Such nonsense is not in harmony with the scene, and we hurry away.

Following a rough foot-path over the hills, a half hour's walk brings us to the village of Bethany, now a half deserted collection of mud-colored huts, surrounded by groves of almond, fig, and olive trees. An old Arab, who has watched our coming, leads the way and conducts us to what is supposed to be the tomb of Lazarus. He lights tapers, and each taking one, we follow him down steep, dark, winding steps to a cave twenty feet or more below the ground. A very short stay was enough, and with a glance at the so-called house of Mary and Martha, and the identical fig tree which Jesus cursed, we leave the village, followed by a crowd of Arab children screaming for *bak-sheesh*.

We return to Jerusalem along the main road, around the south side of the Mount of Olives, probably the same pathway by which our Saviour rode on that humblest of animals, while the people strewed the way with garments and branches of palm.

Another day was spent in making a circuit of the walls, in visiting the "Tombs of the Kings" and the "House of David" on Mount Zion, beneath which is his tomb. A large upper room in this building, which is outside the walls, is shown as the scene of the "Last Supper," and

where Christ appeared to the Apostles after the Resurrection. The Mahometans are in possession of this place, and hold it very sacred, as they consider David one of their prophets. The Armenian convent is close by but within the walls, and was the "House of Caiaphas," the High Priest. It is very rich in decorations of gold and silver, and claims among its relics the stone which closed the door of the Holy Sepulcher, and the rock on which the cock crew when Peter denied his master! Far more interesting to me was a most beautifully illuminated missal I there saw. Every page of the parchment was decorated with coloured illustrations on the margin, and it must have been a labor of love for many years to the old monks, who ages ago have turned to dust; rubies, sapphires, and diamonds glistened on the covers, and the heavy clasps were of solid gold. The gray-bearded old monk watched it with jealous care while it was in my hands, and seemed relieved when he returned it to its case of rich velvet, and replaced it on the altar. As we left the church, he sprinkled us with holy water and gave us his blessing.

At the "Jews' Wailing Place," in front of some large stones built into the outside wall of the Mosque of Omar and which are supposed to be part of the foundations of Solomon's Temple, is a very affecting scene every Friday afternoon. Here they congregate, young and old, and utter the most plaintive cries and lamentations. The stones are worn away with their kisses, and they mourn as if their hearts would break.

I shall not attempt here to describe the curious scenes that I witnessed three years ago, during "Holy Week," the procession on "Palm Sunday," and the "washing of feet" by the high church dignitaries. I then made a most

interesting excursion to the Jordan, the Dead Sea, and to Bethlehem.

Our present trip was limited to two weeks, and we were obliged to hurry back to Egypt to join the steamer for our voyage to Persia and Bagdad.

The sky was overcast with clouds, and every appearance indicated a dreary, drizzly journey before us, when my friend F—— and I said farewell to the pleasant companions of our pilgrimage, and mounted our horses to return to Jaffa. As we passed under the heavy archway of the Jaffa gate, we noticed that the Turkish soldiers levied an *octroi* duty, in kind, upon all the country products brought into the city for sale. Every market-man



THE OCTROI DUTY AT THE JAFFA GATE.

was relieved of a part of his load, seemingly at the discretion of the guards. Beside them were piles of fuel, vegetables of all kinds, eggs, and poultry. Whether these were sold for the benefit of the government or appropriated

for the use of the guards, we were unable to ascertain. Our dragoman, Hassan, had been sent forward in advance with the pack-mule, and we slowly ascended the heights that overlook Jerusalem on the north, past the Russian convent, and several neat and well built dwellings.

As we reached a point where a bend in the road would hide the city from our view, we halted for a few minutes and turned in our saddles to take one last look at the Holy City. The impression left on my mind by this second visit to the holy places, was one of sadness, relieved only by our one day's excursion to Olivet and Bethany.

Slowly and without exchanging a word, we turned our horses' heads towards the sea, buttoned our overcoats more closely against the chilly wind, and cold penetrating rain that beat in our faces, and with loosened rein allowed our beasts to pick their way along the stony road down the steep hill. For the first hour we were constantly meeting donkeys laden with twigs and roots for fuel, and men, women, and even half grown children plodding along under heavy burdens towards the city. As we passed them they invariably looked up at us with faces sad and weary, as if life had to them no happiness in the present, and no bright hope in the future. The steadily falling rain was making the road more muddy at every step, but we gradually threw off our depression, determined to take a "Mark Tapley" view of the situation, and be as "jolly" and cheerful as we could under the most adverse circumstances.

Two hours after leaving Jerusalem we descried a solitary traveler approaching us on horseback, and as he drew near, we recognized our rascally host of a few days before at Bab-el-Waud. He was dressed in his best gaberdine, over which he wore a striped *abbah* of goat's hair, which is almost impervious to water. It was the Jewish Sunday,

and he was evidently on his way to Jerusalem to worship. We stopped our horses and confronted him with a salutation more emphatic than complimentary. In a few plain words we reminded him of his dishonesty, and intimated that if he was now about to square up the weekly account of his iniquities, the best proof his sincerity and repentance would be to make restitution of his ill-gotten gains. As he glanced at our faces and saw that we were in earnest, his *nonchalance* deserted him and he looked as humble as became a great sinner going to confession. He assented to our proposal, and wrote some words in Hebrew upon a dirty scrap of paper, which he said was an order to his brother, whom he had left at the inn, to give us a lunch free of charge. His meekness and seeming penitence disarmed our resentment, and we allowed him to proceed on his journey, a sadder and I trust a happier man for this one burden of transgression lifted off his conscience.

A few hours later we descended the last of the Judean hills and halted at the "gateway of the plain." The brother came out from the Inn and we presented the paper with some misgivings that we had been *sold*. He read it, then courteously invited us to dismount, and in a short time placed before us a very fair lunch. As we rose from the table he presented the identical box of cigars. To test his sincerity I took out my purse and offered to pay for them, but he refused any compensation. We shook hands quite cordially at parting, and rode away with a far better opinion of human nature than before—for our former experience at that place had indicated that it is sometimes almost totally depraved.

After leaving the hills, our ride across the alluvial plain was very disagreeable. The rain was incessant, and the road knee deep in mud. We were glad to reach Ramleh

before dark, and passing by the hotel of the would-be American Consul, we sought the Russian Convent, where we were kindly welcomed. I had stopped here one night three years before, and to my surprise I found I was recognized by the priests and their wives. The clergy of the Greek Church are permitted to marry, and the presence of women and children seemed quite inconsistent with our usual associations of a convent or monastery.

During this visit to the Holy Land, I have been saluted by several hotel keepers and dragomen, with evident marks of surprise, both at Jaffa and Jerusalem. These people have a wonderful faculty of remembering faces. If any of them swindled me before, I have long ago forgiven them, and brought back with me no malice. This time I have been treated with especial kindness and attention, for they seem to think that I shall hereafter be a regular visitor at intervals of two or three years.

The ground floor of the convent was a stable, where our jaded horses were well cared for, and we climbed by an outside stairway to the apartments above, where we were shown to a chamber plainly but comfortably furnished. After changing our rain-soaked garments we were summoned to a substantial supper, served on English blue delf ware of the old fashioned "willow pattern." Everything was scrupulously neat and clean, and we were the only guests. The building, like all in this country, is of stone, with thick walls, arched ceilings, and no wood work except the doors and window frames. During the rainy season, these vaulted, cell-like rooms must be dark and damp, but in summer they are cool and agreeable. At Ramleh there are two convents, the Russian (or Greek) and the Latin (or Roman Catholic), both of which, for two months in spring are crowded by pilgrims, mostly of the poorer classes, from Europe. The pilgrimage culminates during

"holy week," when there are frequently ten thousand Europeans in and around Jerusalem. These two months embrace the only proper time to travel in Palestine. Before the middle of March the weather is unsettled, and too cold and rainy for tent life. Later than the fifteenth of May it is usually too hot for comfort.

After our fatiguing ride we retired early, and although the beds were hard, and our doors and windows without fastenings, we slept as soundly and as securely as in the most luxuriously furnished modern hotel.

The next morning our kind hosts gave us an early breakfast, and accepted with profuse thanks the money we offered for our entertainment. At these convents the poorer class of pilgrims are fed and lodged free of charge, but travelers, like ourselves, are expected to pay whatever amount they please, or if they go away without paying at all, no fault is found.

Our morning ride of twelve miles to Jaffa, with a bright sun and clear sky, was in strong contrast with yesterday's experience, and when we reached the town we were glad to see the smoke of an "Austrian Lloyd" steamer approaching from the eastward, on which we were to embark for Port Said.

There are three lines of steamers along the Southern coast of the Mediterranean,—the "*Messageries Maritimes*," the "*Austrian Lloyd*," and the Russian. They touch at nearly every port, and are all comfortable and well-appointed. But the French line is usually preferred, the steamers being larger and the service more efficient.

The "true believer" who makes a second pilgrimage to Mecca, is entitled to certain rights and privileges among the followers of the Prophet. But what honors properly belong to one who has made a second pilgrimage to Jerusalem, I have been unable to ascertain—perhaps the case

has no precedent—so I shall claim the distinction of having the end of my trunk decorated with a Red Jerusalem Cross. As the founder of this new Order, I hold myself ready to bestow the decoration upon all Americans who may show themselves entitled to it.

