

The Place of the Crucifixion.

REV. JOHN R. THURSTON.

WHITINSVILLE, MASS.

THE considerations presented in this paper are suggested by the Gospel narratives.

Every traveller in the Holy Land who has an eye for distances, and remembers the statements of the Word as to the events which occurred in the sacred places he visits, is frequently impressed with the fact that those who prepared the enclosures of these places did not study the records and seek to satisfy their requirements as to space. I was first reminded of this in the walled enclosure of Gethsemane. Here is a space 50 × 60 ft. Does this satisfy the record? 1. Jesus entered into the garden. This implies that he went some little distance from the entrance. 2. He said, "Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder." This implies some distance further from the entrance. 3. After he had gone to this spot he said to Peter, James, and John, whom he had taken with him, *Tarry ye here* and watch with me, and he went a *little further* and fell on his face and prayed. Luke tells us he was withdrawn from them "about a stone's cast," and kneeled down and prayed. Here is a still further removal from the entrance of the garden. It is impossible to satisfy these statements within a space 50 × 60 ft., especially Luke's statement of "about a stone's cast." The garden must have been larger than the space enclosed. It is the more surprising that the Franciscans, who built the present enclosing wall, should not have made the place larger, as they owned land enough at the south to satisfy all the conditions of the narrative. We may presume that they simply enclosed the space within the old wooden paling fence which we still have in some of our photographs.

In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre I was reminded of the same disregard of what the records require.

You are surprised at the smallness of the chapel of the sepulchre, 6 ft. 2 in. × 6 ft., and very low. In all the tombs you visit about the city you see nothing so diminutive as this. The narrative tells us that this was a tomb which Joseph had hewn in the rock, as we

must suppose, for a family tomb. That he should make one so much smaller than all others which we find is not at all within the bounds of probability.

Again, we are surprised to find it so near the place of the crucifixion, only about 100 ft. distant. Now there is a strong probability against Joseph's choosing a site for a family tomb so near a place of public execution, to say nothing of his having a garden, as John says, laid out and enclosed with a stone wall so near a place which must have been profane to a reverent Jew.

Again, Luke tells us that when they laid the body of the Lord in the tomb, "the women also which came with him from Galilee *followed after* and *beheld* the sepulchre and how they laid him." Now, if the sepulchre and the place of the crucifixion are as near as represented in the church, there would be no need that the women *follow after* to see the sepulchre, for they could see it without so doing, especially since the place pointed out as the spot from which they beheld the anointing of the body is between the place of the crucifixion and the sepulchre, in fact nearer to the sepulchre than to the cross, only about forty feet distant from it.

But I wish to apply this same test of the narratives to the question of the *place* of the crucifixion and burial of our Lord, to ask if the place assigned by so long tradition can be the true site. Is it possible to reconcile it with the terms of the Gospels?

With many the question has seemed to turn on the possibility that the traditional place can be without the second wall. If, as Dr. Robinson (i. 410, ed. of 1856) suggests, this wall went in a straight line from Hippicus to Antonia, then the traditional site would be outside the wall. But this leaves Hezekiah's Pool outside the wall also, which we cannot believe. Besides, this is in express contradiction to Josephus, who says (*Jewish War*, v. 4, 2) that this wall *encircled* the northern part of the city and reached as far as the tower of Antonia. For these reasons we must conclude that this wall did not go straight from Hippicus to Antonia.

Some have felt that if there were evidence of a reëntering angle in the wall which would leave the traditional site outside, this would relieve the difficulty as to the place. Striking evidence of the strength of this feeling came to me from the change in the opinion of Dr. Conrad Schick as to the true site. He has been a resident of Jerusalem for more than forty years, and a most diligent student of its topography. He said that for many years he had held that the mound just north of the city, near Jeremiah's grotto, was the true

place, and he had often said to his wife at eventide, "Come let us go out to Calvary," with no doubt he was to go to the very spot where the Lord died. But recently he had found an old corner of a wall in excavations which were being made for building purposes, which might be the corner of the reëntering angle in the second wall, and its position and the direction of the few feet of walls going out from the corner would, if carried out, leave the Church of the Holy Sepulchre without the wall, and his opinion of years was shaken by this discovery. We (Professor Ewell and I) went to see the recently discovered possible corner of a wall, but its structure did not seem substantial enough for this, and the direction of the small parts of the wall still preserved, if continued, would do no more than just leave the Church of the Holy Sepulchre outside. But even admitting that the place may have been without the second wall, we should recall the suggestion of Dr. Robinson (vol. i., p. 411), "that the existence of populous suburbs on this part is strongly at variance with the probability that here should have been a place of execution with a garden and a sepulchre." (We should remember that only twelve years after Agrippa built the third wall to enclose this section, because this so large a populated district was, as Josephus says, "naked," unprotected, and he carried his wall very far north to enclose all the population.) "The tombs of the ancients," Dr. Robinson adds, "were not usually in the cities, nor among their habitations, and excepting those of the kings on Zion, there is little evidence that sepulchres existed on Zion." It is strange the force of this has not been seen and felt to be decisive against the traditional site. The improbability that a place of execution would be continued in use, and Joseph would build a garden and a tomb in the midst of the crowded streets of a populous suburb, is so great as to amount almost to an impossibility.

But let us consider the argument from the conditions implied by the narrative. It should be remembered that all admit that the traditional site must have been very near the city walls and in the midst of the streets and houses of a populous suburb. Now, can we fit the narrative into these conditions?

1. The incident of putting the cross on Simon. We are told that as they *came out* (*i.e.* from the city), they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, *coming out of the country*. They could not know he was coming out of the country, unless they were themselves close to the gate, or without it, and beyond any suburb with streets and houses. They must be where there was no possibility of his coming out from some side street to warrant their knowing that he was

coming out of the country. Now, what we are told took place before he reached Calvary must have taken place after this, being out of the city, and there was not the room or time for it if they were going only to the traditional site a few rods away.

2. The wailing of the Jewish women and Christ's address to them. This could not have been within the narrow streets of the city or a suburb, with the officers and soldiers immediately around the prisoner. In streets eight or ten feet wide, a company of soldiers and prisoners, some twenty, does not leave space for the people to come around them for conversation. It is only as they get outside the gate to the open space, as at the Damascus gate, that a crowd could so come near to them as to see and converse with the prisoner, neither could it have been done in the narrow streets of a suburb. Nor, if there had been no houses in the place of the traditional site, would the short distance to it give time for this occurrence.

3. After the crucifixion, it is said that "they that *passed by* reviled him." This looks as if the cross was near some thoroughfare, along which many passed on their way to and from the city. There were but two such on the side of the city on which all agree Calvary must have been, one that going to Joppa, and one to the north. There was none leading from the gate near the traditional site. Besides, the impression of the narrative is of large numbers, and of room for many spectators, and of open space.

The women who accompanied him from Galilee, and his acquaintance stood "afar off," and yet they could behold him, as they could not have done in a crowded suburb, such as surrounded the traditional site.

4. The narrative of the Resurrection suggests the same removal of the cross and the tomb from among the dwellings of men.

(1) There was a great earthquake, for the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door. While we may not suppose it was an earthquake of wide extent, we must suppose some shaking of the vicinity. Now such a shaking as this would arouse attention in a crowded suburb, while it might not do this several rods away from dwellings. But we see no evidence of any such commotion, none came to the tomb save friends and those whom they called, and these came not attracted by anything that had occurred there, as an unusual noise, or gathering, which, even in the early morning, would attract a crowd. But only a few came, which could be only because the tomb was away from the city and from population.

(2) The impression from what is said of the going and coming of the disciples between the tomb and the city, is of persons going some distance, greater than that between the traditional site and the city. Also the impression is that they go and come unobserved, as could not be in a crowded suburb. We are told that the women did run "to bring his disciples word, and as they went Jesus met them, saying 'All hail,' and they held him by the feet and worshipped him." The impression is that this was not done in some street, but away from dwellings and the city.

So the account of Peter and John going *forth*, implies that they went out of the city, and John so outran Peter that he reached the tomb some little time before Peter. All this implies a distance from the city greater than that of the traditional site.

So the interview of the Lord with Mary at the Tomb suggests the quiet and privacy of a garden removed from the vicinage of houses and streets.

These various considerations have a cumulative force, and seem to forbid the acceptance of the traditional site. They are to my own mind convincing that this cannot be the place where our Lord was crucified.

If it is asked "Where, then?" we may not speak positively, but may simply say that the conditions are all consistent with the mound just above Jeremiah's grotto, which lies about 400 paces northeast from the Damascus gate, and is near by the great northern road to Nablus, in the midst of tombs, and in a locality which there is no reason to believe has ever been occupied by dwellings.