

GOLGOTHA OR CALVARY—"A PLACE OF A SKULL."

By J. M. TENZ.

THE traditional Calvary in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is ascended by 18 steps; below are chambers cut in the rock which are used for religious purposes. The rocky hill, when in its natural state, may have been a hillock of the form of a skull, or a skull of some warrior who fell in one of the sieges of Jerusalem may have been found in one of the clefts of the rock to give it that name, and may have led to the strange tradition that the skull of Adam was buried in Golgotha. Origen distinctly asserts that there was a Jewish tradition that the body of Adam was buried in that place—"Place of a Skull." There is no historical evidence to show that there was a public place of execution where Calvary is commonly fixed, nor would that rich man Joseph of Arimathæa have made his new sepulchre so near a place where criminals were put to death. The Roman Guard hurried Jesus away and nailed him to the Cross at the first convenient spot, as there was some fear of a popular insurrection. When they came to the place, called the place of a skull, there they crucified him. This place was near the city. Dr. Schulz states that he traced the remains of a wall, excluding Golgotha, and taking in the pool of Hezekiah. Some recent discoveries made by Dr. C. Schick and others also support this. Before the third, or Agrippa's, wall outside Calvary was built the gate in the second fortification on the east side of that place must have been the principal thoroughfare, as now at the Jaffa Gate, and many coming from the south, west, and north countries would have passed close by that little hill of 14 or 15 feet in height where the crucifixion is believed to have taken place. The gentle rising ground west and north from that hill, and the city wall on the east and south, would have given sufficient accommodation for the chief priests, scribes, elders, and people who stood beholding; and they that passed by reviled, wagging their heads and scoffing.

Now in that place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden and a new sepulchre, there laid they Jesus. The traditional sepulchre is about 149 feet from the chapel of Calvary, only little of the natural rock is visible within the tomb, the rest is covered on all sides with brown marble. A little distance further west are the so-called tombs of Joseph and Nicodemus. They are left in their natural state, and are decidedly Jewish, and must have been without the second or Nehemiah's wall, as none but David and the kings of Judah were allowed to be buried within the city of David. It was not till 10 years after the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour that Agrippa began the third north wall which enclosed Calvary and the tomb within the city.

Some time after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus, Adrian caused the ploughshare to pass over the ruins of the city

and temple, and built a new city and called it Aelia Capitolina. An edict was issued interdicting every Jew from entering it. Nor did the Christians escape persecution. A temple of Venus was erected on the site of Calvary and tomb to pollute the spot regarded as sacred by Christians. Yet Christians were in time permitted to settle themselves within the walls of the city, and Aelia soon became the seat of a bishopric. Amid all the changes and superstitions it is most unlikely that the sacred spot where the Redemption of the World was completed should be forgotten. The tradition of the site of Calvary and the tomb was anterior to the time attributed to the finding of the Cross by Helena, and the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by her son, Constantine.

I hope Dr. E. J. Bliss, who made important discoveries of the south wall of ancient Jerusalem, may have an opportunity to make further researches of the second or Nehemiah's north wall, which would decide the extent of the city in the time of our Lord.

There is another place outside the Damascus gate which of late years also received the name "Skull Hill." From the nearest road it takes about three or four minutes to ascend to the top of that hill. According to the Jewish tradition it was the place of stoning. The criminal was first cast down from the precipice of that hill, a height of about 50 feet, and if life was still left in him was then stoned to death. Near by is a tomb, believed by some to be the tomb of Christ. But when it was first discovered by the owner of that land and pointed out to Dr. C. Schick, it was full of bones and earth, and when cleared out the mark of a cross was found on the east rock-wall, and another on the north side of the chamber, which are still to be seen, no doubt dating from the crusading time. The entrance to this tomb is more than 2 feet above the ancient level of the rock-floor outside, so that the disciples would not have been required to stoop down to look in the tomb as stated in St. John xx, 4, 5. Where the garden is supposed to have been, large cisterns and walls of ancient buildings have been discovered, and on the rock-floor in the front of the entrance of the tomb is a long trough cut in the solid rock which appears to have been used as a drinking place for cattle. There is no sign that there was at any time a rolling or other stone before the entrance, as in some Jewish tombs, but that it was shut by a door. The arrangement of the interior is the same as that of several other Christian tombs in the vicinity and near St. Stephen's Church, which is now erected on the foundation of a former church of that name, where it is believed St. Stephen was stoned.
