

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY FROM ROME TO JERUSALEM.¹

(Continued from Q.S., 1925, p. 206.)

Having emerged from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, we passed through the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is half in ruins and hilly and sparsely inhabited, seeming to lament the sin committed within her. She has often been destroyed and sacked. In a certain spot we saw the prison where Peter was confined by Herod and liberated by the angel; it is now a public gaol. Then [we saw] the Gate of Golgotha, through which Christ passed on His way to Calvary; it is enclosed in the ancient wall behind the city. There, too, is the house of Dives. We visited the house of Veronica, who gave her veil to Jesus Christ on His way to Calvary; the spot where they compelled him of Cyrene to carry the Cross; and the place of the Spasm, where the Virgin saw her Son passing with the Cross. We saw the house of Pilate, having still an arch with a window, from which Pilate shewed Jesus to the populace after his flagellation and crowned Him with the Crown of Thorns, saying "*Ecce Homo.*" Then, above the house of Herod, [we saw] the house of S. Anne, where the Virgin was born. For a time there was here a monastery and church, but now there is a mosque. There is also to be seen the Gate of S. Stephen, through which S. Stephen passed when he was being taken to be stoned outside the city, in the direction of the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Near the Temple of Solomon² we saw the Pool of the Sheep,³ which had formerly five porches, but has now neither porches nor water. It is a place somewhat large and deep, and it cannot have been but with difficulty that the paralytic was

¹ Translated from the 16th century Latin Manuscript in his possession by H. C. Luke, B.Litt, M.A. Sometime Assistant Governor of Jerusalem.

² *i.e.*, the Dome of the Rock. It received the name *Templum Salomonis* from the Crusaders.

³ *Piscina Probatica*, the Pool of Bethesda.

able to climb down to the moving of the water. There are also to be seen other of the Gates of the Temple, among them the Gate which is called Beautiful, where Peter cured that lame man, saying, "Silver and gold have I none, etc." (Acts iii). From the aforementioned Gates can be seen the atrium or square of the Temple, but not the interior, for the Moors have here their principal mosque and do not allow Christians to enter.

This Gate, which is called Beautiful, is within the city, not overlooking the Valley of Jehoshaphat as do the Golden Gate and the Gate of S. Stephen. We were able to see the house where was born John the Evangelist, and where is now the church of the Georgians. Here you may see the gate of iron, formerly affixed to the old wall within the city, through which S. Peter passed when he was liberated from prison. We saw the house of S. Luke, which was once a church but is now a mosque; the house of S. Mark, which is a church belonging to the Syrians¹; the house and monastery where S. James the Great was beheaded by order of Herod. The latter belongs to the Armenians, and the very spot of the beheading is shown there.²

On the way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem are other places worthy of note. Descending Mount Zion, one passes the site of the house of Bathsheba and, beside it, a large pool, which King David could see from his palace higher up, as is related in 2 Kings xi.³ Thence ascending a slope, one comes in sight of the house of Evil Counsel, where the priests and the Pharisees conspired that Christ might assuredly die. This place is distant from Jerusalem almost one mile. Continuing from here along the road we passed a terebinth, whose leaves resemble those of the almond tree. Beneath this tree, they say, the Virgin was in the habit of resting on her way to and from Bethlehem. Continuing on our way we saw, on the right, the spot where the star appeared to the Magi, so that they rejoiced greatly, together with the well and the three holy water stoups. This place is distant from Jerusalem about two miles.

¹ The Church and Monastery of the Jacobite ("Syrian Orthodox") Bishopric of Jerusalem still occupy the reputed site of the house of S. Mark.

² According to ancient tradition, S. James the Great was beheaded in the year 44 by order of Herod Agrippa I. The Church of S. James, including the Chapel of the Beheading, remains the cathedral of the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem.

i.e. 2 Samuel xi.

On the right, off the road, we saw the house of the Prophet Habakkuk, whom an angel brought here from Babylon by the hair—that same angel that brought food to Daniel when he was in the lions' den. On the left we saw the house where was born the Prophet Elijah ; it is now a monastery of the Greeks.¹ On the left, behind the road, is the house of the Patriarch Jacob, and beyond it, on the right, alongside the road, we saw the Tomb of Rachel raised above the ground. Here there is a mosque, and the place is distant from Bethlehem about one mile.² Close by is the Field of Chick-peas, with stones resembling chick-peas.³ From Jerusalem to Bethlehem is a distance of five miles of rough and stony road, although on both sides there are olives, almond trees and figs, also vineyards, stony, as is all the country around Jerusalem, which is both mountainous and rocky. [Thus], from Gaza, from Ramah and from the southern parts, from Samaria, and from elsewhere corn has to be brought to Jerusalem,⁴ for the fields about Jerusalem are not so fruitful as are those elsewhere.

In Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, which is the " House of Bread " ⁵ and is built on a small eminence, barren, rocky and arid, almost all the houses are in ruins. It is inhabited by Moors, and by 200 Christians huddled together and very poor. The monastery and church of Bethlehem are on one side [of the town] ; in former days these were very rich. The church is all adorned with mosaics depicting scenes from history ; but everything is now in ruins except those holy places which are underground. The upper church, which surmounts the site of the Nativity, was of surpassing beauty : it has four orders of columns, 52 in all, of a reddish marble. The pavement was all of the finest marble, but the Turks have removed it

¹ This is the well-known Orthodox monastery of Mar Elias.

² Even now the Tomb of Rachel is venerated alike by Jews and Moslems, between whom its ownership is divided.

³ This field is still known as the " Field of Peas," its exceptionally pebbly character having given rise to the following legend : One day, as a man was sowing chick-peas here, Christ, passing by, asked him what he was sowing. " Stones," was the reply. " Then, friend," answered Jesus, " thou shalt reap stones." And when the sower came to gather his crop, he found nothing but little round stones the size of his chick-peas.

⁴ Still the case.

⁵ The author gives the older Hebrew derivation. The modern Arabic signification is rather " House of Meat."

to the Temple of Solomon, where is their mosque. The entire church is roofed with lead. Below the choir of this great church is the spot where Jesus Christ was born, a place 18 paces in length and 9 in breadth. We descended from the upper church by two flights of stairs, one on either side [of the choir]. By the one on the left, which has sixteen marble steps, the three Magi passed to adore Jesus Christ; the other door leads to the spot where Jesus was circumcized. At the head of this underground grotto, behind the two above-mentioned doors and flights of stairs, is the spot where Christ was born. Beneath an altar, which is all of marble, there has been hollowed out a circular hole, at the bottom of which is a piece of serpentine. At one time this hole was encased in silver with a star, [the outline of] whose rays can still be seen traced on the rock.

The width of this hole is one hand's breadth, and it indicates the very spot where Christ was born. Over the altar of this chapel are [represented] the Virgin and Son with S. Joseph, while behind a net is [depicted the scene of] the Nativity. On the front of the altar are inscribed the words: "*Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus nasci dignus est.*"¹ To the right of this chapel and almost entirely beneath the grotto is the manger, where the Virgin laid the babe Jesus. The manger is completely covered with rich marbles, and on one of them has been impressed, as can be seen quite clearly, the image of some hermit; they say that it is S. Jerome, who, consumed with love for Christ and with devotion to these holy places, has thus reappeared. The manger is in the lower part of the cave, which cave is hollowed out of the live rock; and the rock, which rises from the floor to a height higher than a man can reach, forms a

¹ The author's account of the Church of the Nativity is particularly valuable as giving a detailed description of its condition at a period when it was at the lowest ebb of its fortunes. Some forty years previous to his pilgrimage (namely, in 1517), Palestine had passed from the rule of the tolerant Mamelukes to that of the Turks, and the position of the Christians in the land at the time of his visit was a very precarious one, although it was to improve appreciably in the following century. So it is not to be wondered at that he speaks of the church above ground, together with the fine mosaics (now only partially preserved) with which the Emperor Manuel Comnenus embellished the basilica, as being in a ruinous state. The leaden roof, to which he refers, was given by King Edward IV, but was stripped by the Turks at the end of the 17th century to be converted into bullets. The silver star was replaced in 1717, together with the inscription in a slightly altered form; it now reads: "*Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.*"

roof over the manger. Here, close to the manger, stood the ox and the ass. A little beyond the manger, and towards the right-hand flight of stairs, is an altar where the Virgin Mary is believed to have displayed Jesus Christ to the adoration of the Magi. At the back of this chapel there is an opening through which, it is said, she appeared when the Magi discovered the star.¹ The entire chapel is lined with marble, and in it our friars have many lamps, to wit, eight, while the Syrians have two. The place belongs to our friars. Similarly situated underground, beneath the aforementioned principal church, are the wells in which lie the Holy Innocents. There, too, are the sepultures of S. Jerome and of his companion S. Eusebius. Close by are the tombs of SS. Paula and Eustochium, while a little farther, but outside the area covered by the church, is the place where S. Jerome translated the Holy Scriptures.² The monastery of S. Jerome, together with his church, is also here, but it is almost in ruins and is reduced to mere rooms and habitations.³ The blessed Jerome was in the habit of doing penance in the vast desert beyond the Jordan and the Dead Sea.

Outside Bethlehem we visited the place where the angel announced to the shepherds that Christ was born. At one time a large church stood here, but it has been entirely destroyed. There is now in this place an underground chapel.⁴ The place is surrounded by olive-yards and vineyards belonging to the Hagarenes.⁵ It is distant

¹ Curiously enough, our pilgrim says nothing of the tradition invented in the 15th century, according to which the star fell into this hole, and was visible thereafter to none but virgins.

² The tradition that S. Jerome compiled his famous version of the Bible, the Vulgate, in this grotto is a very ancient one. The great Church Father died at Bethlehem in 420, but his remains were subsequently transferred to the Church of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome. The account of the tombs of the Roman lady S. Paula and her daughter Eustochium, is interesting as being one of the earliest references to the tombs being shewn in this particular spot.

³ Between the years 386 and 389, S. Paula founded here a monastery, presided over by S. Jerome, and a convent presided over by herself. These buildings subsequently passed from the possession of the Latins to that of the Orthodox, fell, as our pilgrim says, into ruin, and were finally demolished by the Orthodox in 1826.

⁴ This chapel, which is reached by 21 steps, is still shewn, and contains traces of a mosaic pavement and other mediæval fragments. Beside it are the ruins of what was probably the church referred to, known in the Middle Ages as the *Church of Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

⁵ *i.e.*, Bedouins.

from Bethlehem about a mile, and half way to it lies the village of Bethzaur (Beit Sahur).¹ Farther to the south-east and in the direction of the Dead Sea, there appears the mountain and site of the vineyard of Engedi, where was produced the balsam of Solomon.² No balsam comes from there now; it is only to be found in these days in Cairo of Egypt. In the opposite direction, as far . . . as is the vineyard of Engedi from the city of Bethlehem, is that other one in Galilee where Judith slew Holofernes.³

Furthermore, we saw the cave where the Virgin remained for some time, giving suck to the infant Jesus. This place is an underground cavern and contains an altar. Mothers who have no milk are in the habit of using fragments of rock and earth from this grotto.⁴ Close by is the church marking the spot where S. Joseph was warned to flee with Mary into Egypt for fear of Herod. About a mile from Bethlehem is the site of the Monastery of SS. Paula and Eustochium, standing on a bare and rocky little hill.⁵

(To be continued.)

¹ So far as I know, this is the earliest reference in Western literature to Beit Sahur, which is again mentioned by John Wormbser in 1591, and is referred to by the Franciscan Jean Boucher in 1610 as "Bethahour."

² *cf.* Song of Solomon, i, 14.

³ The text is here very obscure. Can the author be confusing Bethulia, the scene of the story of Judith, now generally identified either with Mithilieh or the neighbouring Sânu in Samaria, with the Bethlehem of Zabulon in Galilee (Joshua, xix, 15)?

⁴ To this day little cakes, mixed with powdered rock from the Milk Grotto, are sought after by mothers who have difficulty in nursing their children, and are even given to animals.

⁵ According to Latin tradition, the site of this convent is placed adjacent to the Church of the Nativity. This evidence to the contrary is noteworthy.