

barren and rocky hills, interesting only from their historic associations. Here David fled from Absalom, first weeping all the way up Olivet, and, when down in these valleys, Shimei ran along on the hill-tops cursing and throwing stones at the humbled king. Here, too, Christ had often walked, and long before he took his last journey to Jerusalem, after healing blind Bartimeus outside the gates of Jericho, he had become familiar with all the road, and knew just where was the inn to which the good Samaritan took the poor man who had fallen among thieves. From the fact that our Lord mentions name and places in this parable, we may safely regard it as historical. At any rate, here was the dangerous road, at many points of which robbers might still hide behind the rocks and waylay unsuspecting travelers. Here, too, about half way on our journey, are the remains of the traditional inn. Old ruins, containing stones as old as Solomon's day, together with the only cistern on the entire road, stand at the top of a hill, and are pointed out as the place where the wounded man was cared for over night by the Samaritan himself, and left only for a time with a promise of the return of his benefactor. Here we spread our lunch and read our Lord's parable. The place is now called the Hadrur Khan.

After lunch we passed the brook Cherith, where Elijah hid and was fed by ravens. Already its bed was nearly dry, though scarce a month had passed since the "latter" rains. At length we reached the brow of the last hill, and stood overlooking the Plain of Jericho. We knew that the line of green in the distance marked the winding course of the Jordan, while the blue waters of the Dead Sea appeared almost at our feet. "How far to the Dead Sea, Solomon?" "Two hours and a half, sir." Distance in this country is still reckoned as in our

Saviour's time, less in miles than in the number of hours it takes to compass it. Olivet lies only a Sabbath-day's journey from Jerusalem, while Jericho, eighteen miles distant, is fully six hours away. The Dead Sea was still fully eight miles distant. Immediately in our front was the Jericho of our Lord's time. Off some four miles to the left was the Jericho where Rahab dwelt, and whose walls fell down at the sound of Joshua's trumpets. Between the two is modern Jericho, a wretched place overgrown with thorns, and having the meanest-looking houses and people we have seen, save in Egypt.

We kept to the left to see the site of old Jericho. Near it rises the highest peak in the vicinity, which has accordingly been chosen as the exceeding high mountain where Satan took our Lord to tempt him. It is now honey-combed with hermits' cells, and up near its summit stands a monastery, where, later in the evening, the shining light seen from our tent told of human inmates where one might expect only owls or jackals. Having no faith in the tradition which makes Quarantana the scene of Christ's temptation, we did not stop to climb it, but hurried on to Elisha's Spring, a delightful fountain, the only one to be found here, and probably the one whose waters Elisha healed with salt. The water is now excellent, and could be utilized for irrigating all this plain. As it is, however, the wheat, which is already ripening under the great heat of this low Jordan valley, is almost concealed by the thorn-bushes. The wretched inhabitants are so liable to the predatory incursions of their Ishmaelite brethren from across the Jordan that no care is used to secure more of a harvest than is enough for present uses. What with Turkish rule and Bedouin invasions, the people of Jericho seem under a great curse.

No buildings, but only ruins, mark the site of the

old city, nor even that of Christ's day, where Herod had a palace. An ancient ruin marks the site of the house of Zaccheus, but we found neither sycamore-tree nor palm in the once famous "City of Palms."

But here we are at our tents. The American flag tells our nationality. We enter to find a carpeted floor, iron bedsteads, with camp-stools and center-table, and the cloth already spread for our evening repast. Would you know our bill-of-fare? Soup, boiled chicken, roast mutton, potatoes, pickles from England, apricot marmalade from France; not to mention rice pudding, oranges, nuts; while all was served on china dishes, with silver forks and spoons, the fragrant coffee from tiny cups and from a silver tea-set. Even our Arab waiter spoke French, while our excellent cook prided himself on his English.

The cloth removed, we busy ourselves in making these notes of our day's journey. A guard of a couple of soldiers from the village watches our tents while we sleep. Each village is held responsible for any robberies committed within its bounds. Some whole towns have been sold out, including every horse, camel, and donkey, to pay for thefts on travelers. This has been found the best guarantee of safe travel, and each village protects itself in this way. Thus, with our horses and mules all tethered to a rope about our tent, and our guard talking, or humming low tunes over the camp-fire, we read together the twenty-third Psalm, and commit ourselves to God's tender mercies for the night. Ere sunset our sheik, who guards us, had removed his outer garments, and bathed his hands and feet, and turned toward Mecca to pray.

We rest well, notwithstanding the greater heat of this low Jordan valley, and the rumors which reach our tent of probable danger on the morrow, and the necessity of an early start, so as to join

another party on the same road, and thus have a double guard. The Bedouins from the Moab hills are replenishing their wardrobes. In the past few days they have stripped a couple of Arabs, who were compelled to seek clothing in a monastery. That at least was the story which the monks believed. Two blacks were found killed also, so it was said.

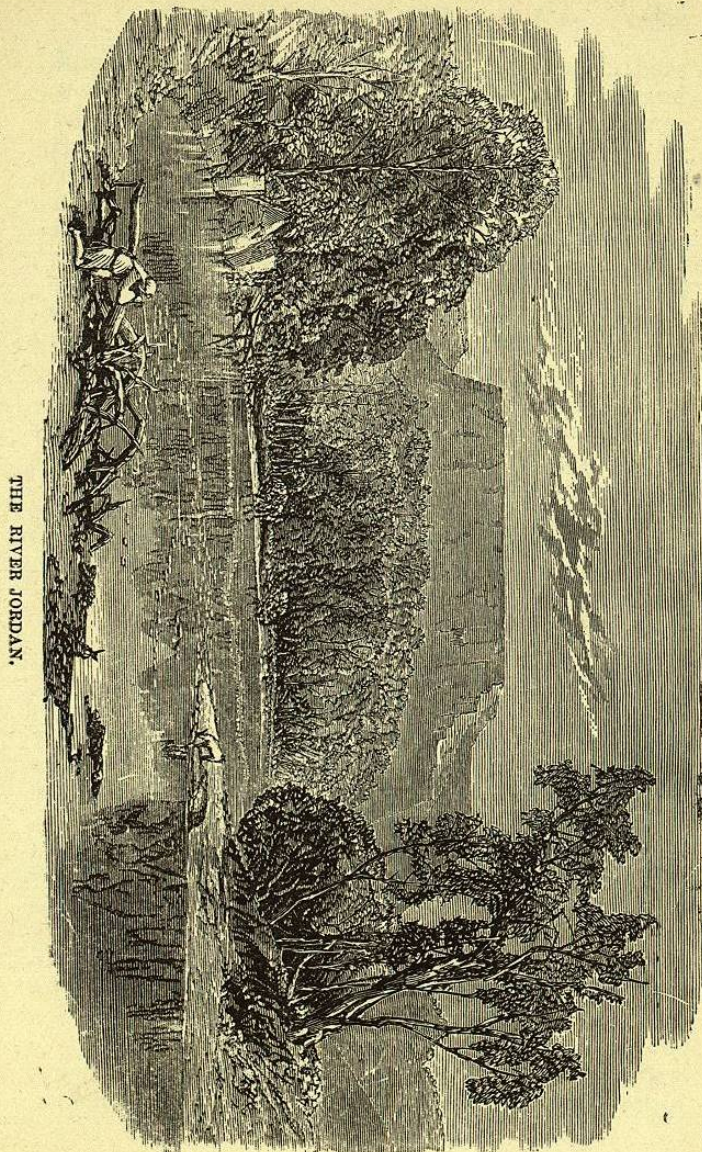
We knew that such rumors were generally incident to travel near the Jordan, and felt no apprehension. Most of the attacks are made upon the natives, and foreigners have little to fear. But while we were enjoying our breakfast of eggs and mutton-chops, the sides of our tent were being taken down and packed upon the mules, ready for an early start. Seven mules and donkeys, laden with baggage and provisions, started under guard by a shorter route to our camping-ground at Mar Saba, while we galloped away toward the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Of course we saw no Bedouins, and spilled no blood nor lost any. Our sheik "bagged" a couple of partridges, about the size of ours, only of lighter plumage; but with this exception we saw nothing worth firing at during the day. In fact, we often rode far in advance of our guard, at times completely losing sight of him, as he turned aside to start some game. Still all the consuls advise a guard for this part of the tour, and it is every dragoman's duty to procure one.

It was more than an hour's ride from our camp to the Jordan. Distance is as deceptive here as in California or Egypt. The river seemed near enough the night before to gallop down for a bath and back in half an hour. Some trees off to our left mark the site of Gilgal, where the twelve stones taken from the bed of the Jordan were set up in the day the Israelites crossed, and where Joshua made his headquarters in the first part of the conquest of

Canaan. The place appears to lie in a direct line from the traditional crossing of the Jordan to the site of old Jericho. All this plain needs only water to make it blossom. A canal tapping the Jordan some distance up, and leading off enough to the west to overcome the great depression toward the river, could be made to irrigate the whole country for miles. As it is, the less the people have to tempt the Bedouins the better.

The water of the river did not appear until we stood on the steep banks and looked directly down upon its swift current. The Jordan, where we saw it at several points during the day, is not over one hundred and fifty feet wide, and hardly that. At certain seasons it doubtless overflows its banks. At any time it is a dangerous stream, on account of its depth and rapid current, and to the Israelites first seeing it "at the time of harvest, when it overflows all its banks," after forty years of travel in the desert, only two of them ever having seen a river, it doubtless appeared a large stream. It is, moreover, the only stream of any size for hundreds of miles east of the Nile, and the only river known to thousands of people. The absence of running water in Palestine is one of the most noticeable facts. The Jordan, therefore, though relatively small to us, was properly styled a river in Palestine, and would be called such in most parts of America.

The eye being satisfied with seeing, we hastened to enjoy a bath. Our dragoman felt called upon to warn us repeatedly against the current, which was stronger than any thing I had ever experienced. The best swimmers hesitated to venture far into the stream. The snows of Hermon had reached a proper temperature after passing through the Sea of Galilee, and the bath was quite refreshing. We had hoped to see the Greek pilgrims bathe, but the Russians have not ventured much into Turkish



THE RIVER JORDAN.

dominions during the threatened war, and there were none. Some years there are several thousand who start for the Jordan immediately after Easter Sunday in Jerusalem. They bathe on the following Tuesday morning at day-break, their white bathing-dress, with its black cross, being sacredly preserved for their winding-sheet. Some few Europeans came while we were there, to see, to bathe, and to take home some of the turbid water of the Jordan. The Greek pilgrim is a far more enthusiastic person. He comes with shouts, and returns with praises.

The Jordan is fordable in August, and perhaps at this very point where we found the water so deep and the current so strong. Its fall is nearly three thousand feet in the less than one hundred and fifty miles which separates its mouth from its source, and its name fitly signifies the "Descender." Where we were the banks were lined with willows and other trees, although higher up the oleander abounds. Where there were no trees its banks are continually crumbling, and we found it prudent not to venture too near. It would appear to have changed its bed frequently in the last century. Yet this insignificant river, with its shifting channel, cannot be equaled as an historic stream. Its waters ceased before the feet of the priests that bore the ark, and divided at the stroke of Elijah's mantle. They bore the royal ferry-boat of David, and laved the feet of Jesus, as he often crossed at some of the numerous fords. It was at Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John baptized and multitudes flocked to his ministry, fording the river in their zeal. It stands in Christian thought and song the type of that darker, swifter stream which all must cross at last to enter the promised land of endless joy.

In about an hour after leaving the ford of the Jordan we were at the blue waters of the Dead Sea. They seemed hardly less near from the summit of

Olivet than when we were within a mile of them. Rapid evaporation covers the sea with a haze, which obscures the surface largely, unless you are considerably above it. There it stretched, a motionless mass, shut in after twenty miles by the thickening haze under the hot morning sun. The water was very clear, and without a ripple. We tasted it, and immediately called for fresh water. We doubt whether it can dissolve any more salt. We all plunged in for a bath, and immediately began to experience strange sensations. One got a drop of water in his eye, and it seemed to be put out. Another took some up his nose, and declared that it was on fire. All lay down in it, or rather on it, for they could not sink, and floated like logs. Others lifted their feet from the bottom, and standing motionless for a few seconds, toppled over backward. Others tried a sitting posture, but the center of gravity did not suit, and the feet came to the surface again. It was impossible to sink, but it was difficult to swim. The sluggish water yielded reluctantly before the swimmer's stroke, while his feet could not be induced to stay under water long enough to serve as propellers.

No form of animal life could be seen—none has been found. Even insect life seems impossible in these salt-waters. Here they lie, one thousand two hundred and ninety-three feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and while six million tons of water are poured in daily, yet the level of the sea is constantly diminishing. The saltiness of the water would appear to be greatest toward the lower end of the sea, where heaps of salt are formed along its banks for several miles. These hills have very fantastic shapes. One of considerable size, resembling a woman in flight, is called Lot's Wife. A piece broken off is rapidly replaced by the dewe and great evaporation. A piece which I have from

a friend is crystallized, and requires a considerable blow to fracture it.

Our road from the Dead Sea toward Bethlehem leads up and over the steepest and roughest mountains. We do not dare trust ourselves on even our sure-footed horses, but at times lead them after us over the smooth rocks. The *strata* of dark rocks which appear now and then have a peculiar dip and bend, there being hardly any shape which they do not take. The hills are barren, and without tree, or shrub, or grass. Snails have tried to live here, but have given it up, and their shells are scattered like snow-flakes, and have bleached in the sun. We ride on for miles under a vertical sun, and long for "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." It is all in vain; and we stop to spread our carpet and lunch on the top of a rock in the broiling sun. We eat it in haste, as the Israelites ate the passover, and hurry on to our tents, which we know will give us shelter and a resting-place. Surely the most refreshing sentence Christ ever spoke to the people of this scorched and thirsty land was, "He that believeth on me shall never thirst."

But yonder are the towers of the monastery of Mar Saba, and unless the Bedouins have attacked the baggage-train, somewhere near there our tents are pitched. Yes! there is the snowy canvas, and above waves the flag of welcome. We throw the reins to the muleteers and rush to the basins of cool water on our camp-stools. The salt-crystals from our Dead Sea bath are washed from our faces, and we forget our discomforts in the fine breeze that fans us while we stretch out for a nap, with "blessings on the man who invented sleep."

In the Hill Country of Judea, April 10, 1877.