

LETTER XXXII.

BETHEL, SHILOH, AND CITIES OF SAMARIA.

OUR last view of Jerusalem was on the morning of April 13, as we were on our way to Samaria and Galilee. It was from Gibeah of Saul, where occurred the terrible tragedy recorded in the last three chapters of Judges. Nothing but ruins now mark the site of this stronghold of the Benjamites. Its summit commands the finest view in all Judea, Neby Samuel alone excepted. It was a good point from which to see the Holy City for the last time. From it we could see Mizpeh, Ramah, and Bethel, as well as the Moab hills and the mysterious sea at their foot, with the green of the winding Jordan in its white, neglected plain.

After some three hours' ride over the hills we stopped for lunch at El-Bireh, the traditional place where Joseph and Mary first missed Jesus, to find him later with the doctors in the temple. "They, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." Considering that the journey was on foot, and begun in the evening, they might very well have gone this far, supposing that Jesus was somewhere in the company that were talking so eagerly of their recent visit to Jerusalem. At any rate, a tradition locating that event here secured for the place special recognition by the crusaders, who erected a fine church in the town. It is now

attractive even in its ruins, one of the many buildings which they erected everywhere throughout Palestine on the traditional spot of any event in our Lord's life. Like most of the towns of the country, it is now simply a farmers' village, as all the tillers of the soil live in villages for protection. What with repeated change of government and much bad government, rendering human life and property unsafe, the Christians have long since left the land to the Turks. These old churches are often slightly changed and turned into mosques, and sometimes building-material is taken from them for the construction of fences, walls, or houses. Many have thus been destroyed.

We continued our journey to find our tents pitched for us at Bethel. It was between Bethel and Ai where Abram pitched his tent in his first journeyings in the land, and built an altar unto the Lord. His altar and his tent always went up together. Here he returned from Egypt when the famine was ended. These hills hardly afforded enough grass for the growing flocks of himself and Lot for the herdsmen not to strive together over the best fields. From this hill, as we ourselves found, it was easy for Lot to lift up his eyes and behold all the Plain of Jordan, which he chose for his possession. His mistake was in finally going too far south and pitching his tent nigh to Sodom. Here weary Jacob, fleeing from a home which he made forever unhappy by his deceit, came at sunset, and taking one of these stones for his pillow, as the natives do to this day, he lay down in that place to sleep, when the vision of the ladder let down from heaven made him so conscious of God's presence that he awoke, saying, "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Here he took his pillow of stone, and anointing it with oil, set it up for a pillar,

and gave the place its name, Bethel, the "house of God." Here, too, Jeroboam set up one of the two calves of gold, lest the people should go to Jerusalem to worship and be won over to his rival.

Another old church in ruins, one built probably by the crusaders, stands on a hill between Bethel and Ai. The hill where Abram erected his altar is probably more to the east, as from there we got our best view of the Jordan valley and the Dead Sea. At our feet lay the site of Ai, with different ravines where Joshua's troops might have waited in ambush the moment to rush into and fire the unguarded city; while, after their victory, from this very summit they could have looked upon their distant camp at Gilgal, where the hosts of Israel awaited their safe return and the tidings of the battle. The present town of Bethel, or Betein, as the Arabs now call it, is uninviting, but it has a fine fig orchard in the suburbs, whose fragrance was most grateful after our day's ride.

A slight digression from the more traveled road enabled us the following morning to visit Shiloh, where Joshua set up the Ark of the Lord and divided to the twelve tribes their inheritance. Here the child Samuel heard the voice of God calling him to learn the terrible tidings of the downfall of the house of Eli. From here the ark was taken out to the battle with the Philistines, to be captured by them, and never to be set up again in Shiloh. The place is a mass of ruins now, save two buildings of a date not earlier than the Christian era. Some still discern, as they suppose, the level platform where the tabernacle once rested. The only place that looks like it is now a field of bearded wheat. In short, wheat is grown amid all these old ruins, the stones often being arranged in terraces to keep the little remaining soil from washing down in the valley.

Whoever visits Judea simply gets a very imperfect view of Palestine. Even the Plain of Sharon, the Valley of Eschol, and the fertile hills about Bethlehem, do not relieve the general barrenness of the country. It is not strange that when Jacob dwelt in Hebron his sons drove the cattle northward to feed near Shechem and Dothan. Ephraim had a favored portion in Samaria. Manasseh's was only less so. Well might it pass into a proverb, "God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." The line was well marked, as we entered upon the largest fig orchards and olive-groves just after leaving Bethel that we had seen in Palestine. These continued until we struck the plains, where for miles the eye rested upon the new-plowed land or the waving grain. Of course there were barren limestone hills in sight occasionally, and sometimes we had to cross them, but the general view was of green fields, and this, too, although the latter rain has been very scant.

The approach to Shechem was through a long, broad plain, in a fine state of cultivation. There were no fences, for every man had his own landmark, and now, as in Moses's time, cursed is he that removeth his neighbor's landmark. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim stood facing each other across an arm of the valley extending toward the west. Here, since on our way from Jerusalem to Galilee, we, like our Lord, must needs go through Samaria, and in our path, as in his, was Jacob's Well. It is a cistern cut in the rock, and usually at this time of the year has water, but the slight latter rain has left it empty. Of course, from what I have already said about sacred buildings, one was erected on that spot where, above all others in the land, one may feel that he is where Christ once was—at the well's mouth. The extensive foundation-walls of the building are still standing, and

part of the arch which covered the well. I climbed down into this to reach the mouth of the well, but some one had rolled a large stone so as to interfere with a good view of the interior. A pebble dropped in it showed considerable depth, but no water.

This well is probably the best authenticated spot in Palestine. "And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, . . . and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent." This well is recognized centuries afterward (John iv.), as the one of which "Jacob drank, and his cattle." It is the only well in all that part of the country. Shechem is by far the best watered city in the land. Springs gush out at different points, and water may be had on almost any street. There is no need of wells. The very fact that one exists is proof of such a state of things as led Jacob to dig it. A stranger in the land, he would not be dependent upon the uncertain hospitalities of the people for so necessary a thing as water, although it abounded in the town less than two miles distant. He dug a well for himself, and he dug it deep, so that the supply of water might be ample. Even now it is over seventy-five feet deep, after it has been partly filled by the stones and rubbish collected through centuries.

Here, at the mouth of the well, Jesus sat at noonday, thirsty and weary from his long journey. While his disciples went on into the town to buy meat, a woman of Samaria came down to draw water. Perhaps she lived near the well in a village where one now stands, nearer the well than the fine springs of the city. There gushed forth from our Saviour's lips that well of living water of which the world has never ceased to drink. The woman is perplexed about the differences between the Jews and the Samaritans. Pointing to Mount Gerizim, at whose base they were standing, she said, "Our

fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Then was revealed the great truth that worship does not depend on mere places, but that whether at Gerizim's base or its summit, whether in the temple or when it was destroyed, from the desert or the dungeon, wherever man prayed in spirit and in truth, the Divine Spirit heard and blessed. No wonder as he dwelt upon this great theme he said to his astonished disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of!"

A rectangular stone building not far distant marks the supposed resting-place of Joseph's bones. This was the parcel of ground which Jacob gave to his son Joseph, and at Shechem, and most probably here in this field, Joseph's embalmed body, which had so long remained to his descendants in Egypt a proof of his faith in their deliverance, and which was borne all through their forty years in the wilderness, was finally buried after Joshua ceased from his wars. The place is held in great esteem by both Moslems and Christians, and while the building is modern, the gift of an English consul, and the tomb, diagonally placed within, has doubtless been much repaired, yet the general locality is unmistakable. Not far from Jacob's Well rests Joseph, the beloved and affectionate son and the greatest statesman of his time.

From these interesting places we rode up through the valley to old Shechem, now called Nablus. On either side towered the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, while we were in the very plain where, after the battle of Ai, the hosts of Israel were assembled to hear the blessings and cursings. We passed through the gates of the city, our horses walking

with great difficulty on the smooth stones of the paved street, until we reached our tents, which had been pitched in a beautiful situation west of the city walls. Here, in this old town, and now the second city of Palestine, we were to spend the Sabbath, "dwelling in tents," as our father Jacob had done before us.

Our Sabbath service will never be forgotten. Climbing the lofty height of Mount Gerizim, we saw the site of the old Samaritan temple, the rival of the temple at Jerusalem. Here, too, in later years, a Christian church had been built. All were in ruins now, the only edifice standing being a Mohammedan welly, or domed tomb, from the top of which we looked down upon the great valley through which we had passed on the day before. The fields, some newly plowed, some in vegetables, and some in grain, appeared like so many different strips of carpet spread upon the ground. When our Lord sat at Jacob's Well and looked out upon them they were white unto the harvest. Toward the south-west stretched the Plain of Sharon, while that white line of sand and shells denoted that the blue beyond was the Mediterranean. Far above Mount Ebal, Hermon lifted its snow-crowned head, dim with perpetual dews. On the east lay the unmistakable Jordan valley.

Gerizim was one pulpit and Ebal the other. While I remained to read the blessings, Mr. Sampson passed over to Ebal to read the curses, and Bishop Marvin went down to listen in the plain below, where the hosts of Israel had stood. The two readers were fully a mile apart, and hardly distinguishable from the rocks on which they stood, and yet as they read the curses and the blessings of the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of Deuteronomy, not only did Bishop Marvin hear every word with wonderful distinctness, but *they could hear and*

understand each other, save when an occasional gust of wind swept away a word. This is, perhaps, the grandest auditorium in the world, and with such an auditory as listened, and responded "Amen" when the Levites read the blessings and curses, history cannot show a more imposing spectacle. How these hills reëchoed every word that was spoken, as if to add yet other voices to the solemn tones of the tribe of Levi! The lesson ended, one of us proclaimed, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," while the other responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Then the two voices on the mountain sides and the one in the valley below sung "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." Meeting again in the valley, we returned to our tents, remarking upon this most wonderful whispering-gallery of God's own making. It was this place, unknown to him save by tradition or the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, that Moses selected for the great drama in which Israel should have set before them the evil and the good.

We climbed Mount Ebal after lunch, getting a magnificent view of the city and valley. It is really higher than Gerizim, but lacks the local historic associations and remains of edifices. Even to this day Gerizim is the sacred mountain of the Samaritans. A congregation of them, the only one in the world, meets regularly in Nablus. They always turn toward Gerizim when they pray. Annually they dwell for a fortnight in tents upon its summit, slaying at the end of that time the paschal lamb, and in all respects keeping the passover. They were arranging to go into tents the day after we left. Stanley calls them "the oldest and smallest sect in the world." They only number some fifty families, and these all dwell at Nablus.

We attended one of their services, our Sabbath there being the time of the new moon. The high-priest is not over forty years old, and is a fine-looking man. He was in his bare feet, and dressed wholly in white. Nearly all the congregation, of perhaps sixty men and children, were barefooted, many washing their feet at the door after removing their sandals. The worship consisted mostly of a responsive chant, in which all the people united with great spirit. This was interspersed with frequent bowings toward Gerizim. The service was concluded by the high-priest bringing out an old copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch, followed by a prolonged chant. They have two of these old rolls, one of which they claim to have been written by an immediate descendant of Aaron. This one is wrapped in a peculiarly rich covering, and when held up before the people they all rush forward to kiss it. There being no such demonstration that evening, we concluded that the copy held up was the more recent one. We were permitted to see the old copy privately, as a very special favor, on the payment of backshish. The high-priest is a descendant of the tribe of Levi, and the office is hereditary in his family. The people generally have the noble features which, doubtless, originally belonged to the descendants of Abraham. The service was at 5 p.m., so that the hands of the synagogue clock pointed to the eleventh hour of the day.

We also attended the Baptist Mission, in charge of a native preacher, El Karey, a converted Arab, who tells us that he was baptized in the Pool of Siloam. His congregation filled the upper room, where the service was held. Men, women, and children were all seated on the straw matting on the floor. They listened with marked attention to his wonderfully distinct enunciation. They also joined heartily in the singing, which was very good of its

kind; but it is hard to fancy the minor key of all the music of the East. The preacher appears to command much respect, and to be doing a good work, in which he is doubtless greatly assisted by his wife, a lady from Liverpool.

The Christians are called Nasara, and call themselves such. What since our Lord's day has been used as a term of reproach was cast at us also as we walked through the streets. Jesus of Nazareth is still rejected in the land of his nativity, and the Nazarenes are few. The Mohammedans profess to accept all that is good in Christianity. Christ is honored, but second to Mohammed, as are all the patriarchs. Every patriarch's tomb is a Moslem place of worship. But woe to all who revere Moses, and the prophets, and Jesus, more than their great prophet. Not the least of the many curses of this land is the Mohammedan supremacy, which God in judgment permits. The bitterness of the Moslems is only apparent at times, but there is much smothered hate, which will burst out at every opportunity. As we passed one of their burying-grounds, where the women had assembled to weep, we saw one shaking her fist violently and invoking curses on us.

When our tents were struck early on Monday morning we heard plaintive cries, and found that some ten or more lepers had been waiting around us asking for alms. Some of these had been greater sufferers from the malady than any we had seen elsewhere. Not only the fingers, but in one case the whole hand had been consumed.

The valley through which we passed at first on our way to Samaria contained the finest trees that we have seen in Palestine. The gray olive-tree and the green fig-tree had grown to great size. The gnarled trunk of the olive had not infrequently burst open, while the interior was often filled with

the loose stones gathered from the fields. The fig grows here to the size of large apple-trees. The fruit begins to appear before the tree puts forth its leaves, so that our Lord might expect figs on any tree in leaf. That the time for *ripe* figs had not come when he sought for fruit on the barren fig-tree near Bethany did not lessen the force of his sermon against false appearances.

We knew by the many terraced hills when we were approaching Samaria, where Ahab lived in such splendor and Elijah pronounced the curse of a three years' famine upon the land. Here rose the round hill which Ahab's father had bought of Shemer for two talents of silver, naming it for its original owner. Here the son, even more wicked than the father, erected a temple to Baal, and brought to share his palace the notorious Jezebel, who helped him to merit the epitaph of having done "more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." Outside the gate sat the poor lepers, who, wandering in despair to the Syrian camp, found it deserted, and brought such crowds from the city to gather the spoil that the lord, on whose hand the king leaned, and who had so sneeringly answered Elisha's prediction of plenty, was trodden upon in the gate and died. Of all parts of Palestine one would suppose that this well-watered section would be the last to be smitten with famine; yet Ahab sent his cattle everywhere to find water when Elijah's prayer sealed the heavens for three years and a half; and in Elisha's day the king clothed himself in sackcloth as he heard the women wailing over the children which they had eaten in their ravenous hunger. All these hills are terraced, as they doubtless were even in the day when Naaman came with horses and chariot seeking a cure of his leprosy from the prophet that was in Samaria. They are now green with waving wheat, and all the

plain gives promise of a large harvest. The absence of the latter rain, lamented in other parts of the country, is not seriously felt here.

This beautiful site for a city was presented by Augustus to Herod, who made it notable for its splendid temple and portico, which he erected in honor of the emperor. Rows of columns still standing in different parts of the town give some idea of what the place once was. Herod seems to have been the Shah Jehan of Syria, the royal builder whose taste equaled his large ambition. Some of these columns, now standing without their capitals, are the still splendid remains of the great buildings of his reign. The tradition that John the Baptist was buried here seems not improbable, as it was here, perhaps, in an hour of revelry, that Herod gave the order which he would fain have recalled—that John the Baptist's head should be brought in a charger. An old church, now largely in ruins, marks the supposed site of his burial. As usual, a Moslem place of prayer has supplanted the Christian's worshiping-place. The whole town has the usual decayed look of the average farmers' village in Palestine. Broken columns and beautiful capitals of the old buildings which were once the city's pride may be found now forming part of the walls of the miserable houses or half buried in the ground.

Our day's ride led by Dothan, which, like Shechem, is surrounded by large plains suitable for grazing. Here Joseph's brethren might very naturally have come after leaving Shechem, and here, where the Ishmaelites would naturally pass from Gilead, in order to strike the caravan route from Damascus to Egypt, Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver. The few ruins of Dothan stand on a hill overlooking the plain where, doubtless, Jacob's sons tended their flocks.

To-day we passed Jezreel and Shunem, both only

farmers' villages now, and remarkable for nothing unless it be a lemon-grove in the outskirts of Shunem. The hovels of Shunem are the worst that we have seen in the country. The Shunammite woman, who so kindly furnished Elisha with a prophet's chamber, must have been sorely cramped for room if she lived in a house no larger than the present average in the town. No one can enter without stooping, and any one entering would regret doing so for the rest of the day. Jezreel is larger, but attractive only for its history. Here was located Naboth's vineyard, and on these mountains of Gilboa, where the town stands, fell Saul and Jonathan. Here, too, the dogs picked Jezebel's bones. But Gilboa will be ever associated with David's lament: "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; how are the mighty fallen!" His noble heart found good words for his greatest enemy.

Jezreel overlooks the beautiful plain which separates Samaria from Galilee.

Nazareth, April 17, 1877.

LETTER XXXIII.

NAZARETH AND THE MOUNTAINS.

WE entered Galilee through the great Plain of Esdraelon. Leaving Jenin early on the morning of April 17, we reached Nazareth about 2 P.M. the same day. A heavy fog shut out all but a limited vision for the first few hours of the day, and we expected to have but an imperfect view of the great rival of the Plain of Sharon. We could see well-cultivated fields on each side of our path, and we knew that far to our left rose Mount Carmel, and that near us the hills too dimly seen were the mountains of Gilboa; but it was not until the following day, from the summit of Mount Tabor, that we saw the full extent of this wonderful plain, with Carmel and Little Hermon as landmarks in the expanse. Not only was the plain interesting for its landscape, less beautiful in itself than relatively as compared with any other, at least in this part of Palestine, its surface carpeted with flowers or waving with bearded wheat, with here and there a winter lake not yet absorbed by the summer heat, shining like silver in the green fields, while over all drifted the shadows from the passing clouds, defying any painter's skill to transfer their varied tints to the canvas—all this was pleasing—but the more so when we remembered that we were on the great battle-field of the country. Here Barak had defeated Sisera, while Deborah, watching the battle