

Persians twelve hundred years ago. Moses, after conversation with the monks, described the rules of the order. Some invariably arise to hold a service at 2 A. M. They fast much of the time, and when they eat have little besides vegetables. Not a human being resides in the neighborhood; so these men, deprived of the loving smile of wife, mother, daughter, sister, live on year after year, grow old and die; but are fain to make friends with the animal creation, taming the wild birds, that fly over the hills, so that they come and eat from the hands. The monks appeared to be industrious; every spot of earth is cultivated; and the convent is famous for its fine figs which, owing to the heat of the sun, ripen earlier than in the vicinity of Jerusalem. In the night we heard the music, but did not rise to attend their service. The library is famous, but the key is kept by the patriarch, in Jerusalem, and the monks do not have access to it.

CHAPTER XLIX.

The Dead Sea, The Jordan, Jericho, and Bethany.

Wilderness of Engedi—Tomb of Moses—Beautiful Views—Peculiarities of the Dead Sea Explained—Pillars of Salt—The Jordan—Ancient Gilgal—Russian Pilgrims—Bethany—Tomb of Lazarus—Tower of David in Jerusalem.

At an early hour the next morning we began a ride of five hours to the Dead Sea. The way lay along the valley of the Kidron, several hundred feet precipitously beneath us. After a time we made the ascent, and on reaching the summit beheld the wilderness of Engedi stretched out before us. The heat was almost tropical, and more depressing than that of Egypt. Down the long slope we traveled, meeting occasionally a Bedouin who looked at us in a semi-savage way, and in sight upon the hills were three or four of these wanderers of the desert and the mountains. A mile and a half away to the left of the road rises the minaret of "Neby Musa, the Tomb of Moses." The Mohammedans pay no attention to the Bible narrative, and assign the tomb of the leader of Israel to this spot, to which they come annually in multitudes, but no Christian or Jew accompanies them.

As we proceeded wonderful views burst upon us. Moab, which we had seen from the summit of the Mount of Olives, now appeared much nearer; the long valley of the Jordan, the region in which is Mount Nebo, and the supposed peak of Pisgah were in plain sight. Without these views it would have been tiresome to ride so long with the Dead Sea apparently but a few hundred yards from us—an optical illusion, which was increased by the irregular surface of the country.

One pervaded with the prevalent ideas concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, on examining the Bible, would be astonished to find how little there is to support the notion that the Dead Sea was formed by the catastrophe that swallowed up those two cities, and that their ruins are submerged beneath its waters.

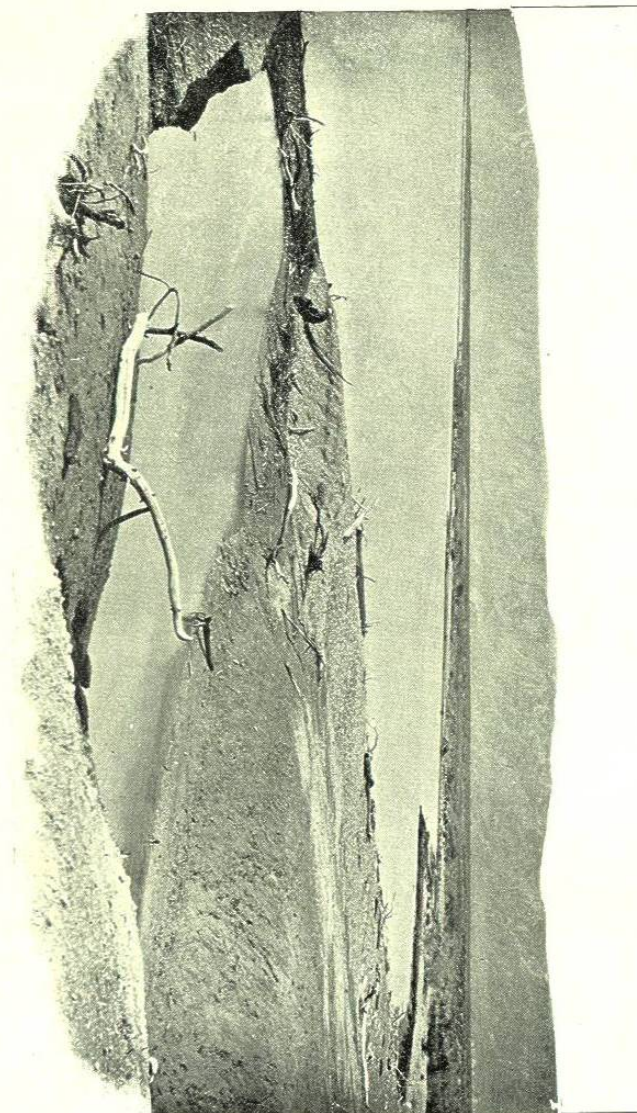
We could survey almost the entire length of the Dead Sea from the shore, but obtained still better views from the summits of the mountains. It is about forty-six miles long, and a little over ten miles wide. It is now known that the level of the Dead Sea is 1,293 feet below the surface of the Mediterranean, but up to sixty years ago no one knew that it was below it at all. The Dead Sea at its greatest depth is 1,310 feet. Since Jerusalem is 2,494 feet above the level of the Mediterranean, that city, not more than fifteen miles away, is 3,787 feet above where we stood.

The credit of resolving most of the doubts and difficulties and dissipating many of the superstitions formerly connected with this abyss belongs to the United States, which in 1848 authorized an exploring expedition commanded by Lieutenant Lynch. He conveyed two metal boats from Acre to the Sea of Tiberias, and in them his party went down the Jordan, and spent twenty-two days cruising around the Dead Sea.

In his report Lieutenant Lynch says that during a storm the heavy waters, nearly a sixth heavier than that of the ocean, "lashed the sides of his boats like hammers," but the subsidence after the storm was much more rapid than of the waves in other waters.

By the facts which they established it is easy to explain most of the peculiarities which before were perplexing. As the whole volume of the water of the Jordan, estimated at six million tons daily, is poured into it, and the sea has no outlet, the evaporation is extraordinarily rapid, and leaves the water full of mineral substances, especially salt, which is dissolved from the bank. About a quarter of the bulk of the sea consists of minerals, half being salt, which is extracted and sold in the markets of Jerusalem and elsewhere. The same process has been going on for ages at the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

The ancient conceit that it is death to swim in the Dead Sea has been exploded. Dr. Robinson could swim nowhere else in salt or fresh water, but here found no difficulty in swimming or floating. A more modern fancy, that it is impossible to sink therein, has been dissipated by the experience of many travelers. Professor Henry M. Harman, a man of gigantic proportions, states in his *Egypt and the Holy Land* that he found no difficulty



The Dead Sea.

in sinking. Travelers often bathe in the Dead Sea, and Dr. Bancroft imitated the Mohammedan custom of washing his feet in its waters, but I was content to immerse my hands. The water left a peculiarly oily feeling. It is not true that the Dead Sea is the saltiest water in the world. According to the scale given by Stanley, the purest of all water is rain water; then fresh-water lakes, the Baltic Sea, Sea of Azov; then the ocean, then the Mediterranean, then the Caspian and Aral, then the Dead Sea, and last the Lakes of Elton and Urumia.

The Dead Sea contains neither shells nor coral, and fish placed in it soon die, though it is alleged that some inferior organizations can be found. The representation that birds die if they attempt to fly over it is incorrect. Snipe, partridges, ducks, and nightingales live along its shores. The sides of the basin being perpendicular, the heat of the sun is almost unendurable, and there are few flowers or trees.

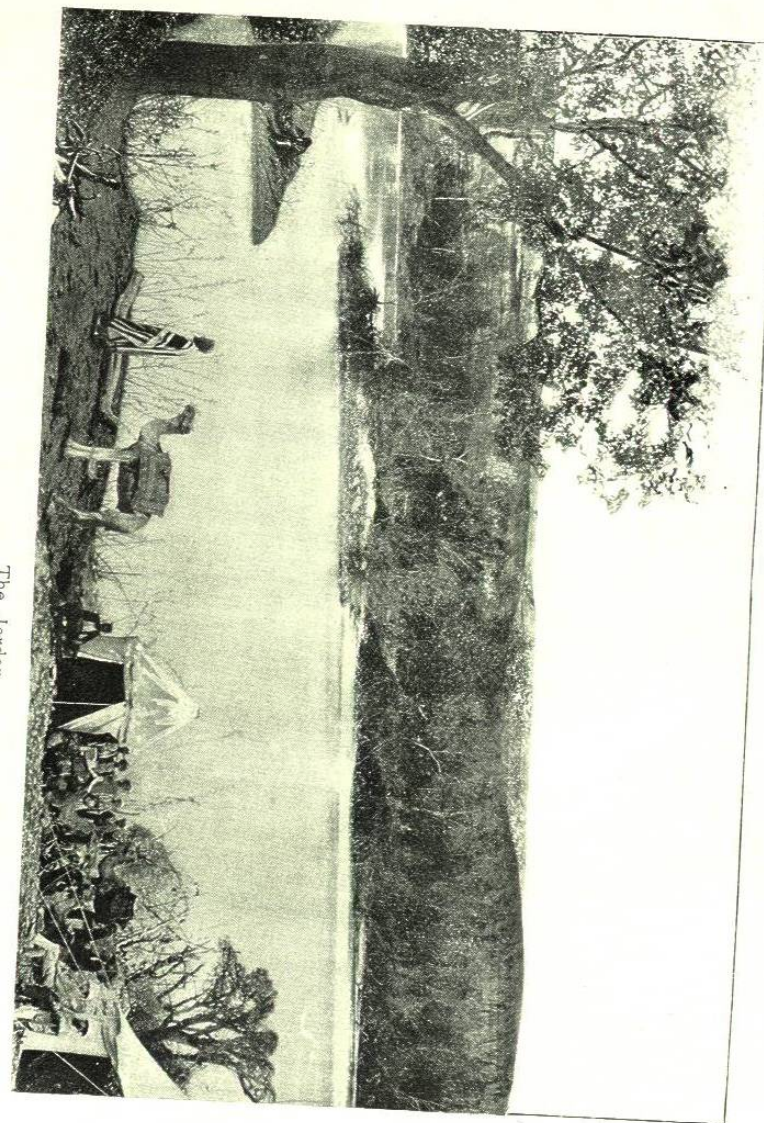
The wildness of the region, the desolation of the shores, the greenish hue of the water contrasting with the blue of the more distant prospect, made a picture in viewing which one might easily oscillate between sensations of loneliness and misery and of brightness and beauty. Isolate the sea from its gloomy surroundings and it would rival the most beautiful lake in the world. The silver sheen in the morning light as we had seen it for hours in our early ride from the convent was transformed in the middle of the day into burnished gold; but, because of their peculiar juxtaposition, not the slightest reflection from the surrounding mountains was depicted upon the waters.

Along the shores are numerous pillars of salt; in fact, they are continually forming in different grotesque shapes. Lieutenant Lynch says: "Everything stated in the Bible about the Dead Sea and the Jordan we believe to be fully verified by our observations. The inference from the Bible, that this entire chasm was a plain, sunk and overwhelmed by the wrath of God, seems to be sustained by the extraordinary character of our soundings. The bottom of the sea consists of two submerged plains, an elevated and a depressed one; the former thirteen and the latter thirteen hundred feet below the surface." I also believe all that the Bible affirms concerning the destruc-

tion of Sodom and Gomorrah; but know of no passage which either asserts or intimates that the Dead Sea was formed by the catastrophe which overwhelmed the Cities of the Plain. The probable and generally accepted hypothesis is that these cities stood in the plain of the Jordan, on the north of the Dead Sea; that the valley is a part of a prehistoric upheaval and depression; and that the sea and the Jordan are what they were when the first inhabitants of the world gazed upon them.

Having remained on the shore, listening to the reminiscences of Moses and endeavoring to identify the mountains, until sufficiently rested, we remounted and began a fatiguing journey across the plains to the Jordan. The mounds and little hills for a considerable distance from the water, incrustated with pure salt, are white and dazzling. The river was easily identified by the foliage along its shores, illustrating many biblical references. A grove of trees was pointed out by Moses as a famous bathing place for pilgrims. We could perceive the reason for the scriptural figure, the "swellings of Jordan," for the current is so rapid as to make it dangerous to bathe or attempt to swim. Many have there been drowned as a result of recklessness, among them the brother of a distinguished American college president, then a young man of twenty-one, who, disregarding caution, leaped into the river.

The feet of pilgrims have worn numerous paths, and the scene was suggestive of striking incidents in Bible history. In this vicinity Lot saw the plain of the Jordan, and it was even as a garden of the Lord. Near here is probably the spot where the children of Israel, after their forty years' wanderings, came across dry-shod, "right over against Jordan." Nor was it far away that Elijah took his mantle, wrapped it together, and smote the waters, so that he and Elisha went over on dry ground. It was in this wilderness that John the Baptist preached, and to him went out great multitudes, as he cried, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Here he baptized them in the Jordan, they confessing their sins. Here, too, our Lord was baptized of John. There is a concurrence of traditions locating most of these events in the immediate neighborhood.



The Jordan.

A lofty and precipitous hill, which we saw for hours as we journeyed, has for eight centuries been celebrated as the scene of Christ's temptation and forty days' fast. We did not climb it, but could almost discern the caverns and hermitages. It was peculiarly adapted to anchorites, and from early ages they resorted thither, dwelling in solitude and imitating their Lord, without the reason for it that he had. Incredible stories are told of impossible fasts and almost miraculous longevity.

Thousands of Greek Christians resort to a certain place and bathe in the river, while the Latins go farther to the south. We bathed our feet in the Jordan, and refreshed ourselves under the shade of the oleanders and other flowering bushes and trees; after luncheon, beginning the journey to Jericho, making our way across the plain to the modern town of Reha. This is the site of ancient Gilgal and modern Jericho.

Here the Israelites pitched their camp, set up the twelve stones, and celebrated their first passover in the Promised Land; and here were circumcised the children born in the wilderness; Saul was made king, and Elisha received Naaman the Syrian.

The village is a wretched place, full of thieves and vermin, and infamous for all kinds of iniquities. There is nothing left of ancient Jericho. We spent the night in a decent hotel, recently erected, resembling the ordinary two-story frame buildings in this country.

At sunset the landscape was magnificent; the waste of mountains over which we had traveled, the Dead Sea, the plain, and the range of mountains beyond us, being gloriously illuminated.

From Jericho we began the journey to Jerusalem, a route famous many years ago for difficulty and danger; but a Wallachian princess, having met with an accident, gave a thousand pounds for the making of a new road, that the pilgrims from her country might not fall over the precipices. Therefore the road is now perfectly safe for pedestrians and for horses. Carriages, however, of the usual sort, could not traverse it, though we saw a queer-shaped vehicle dragged slowly along. Even this could not have been done by any temporary expedient until these changes were made.

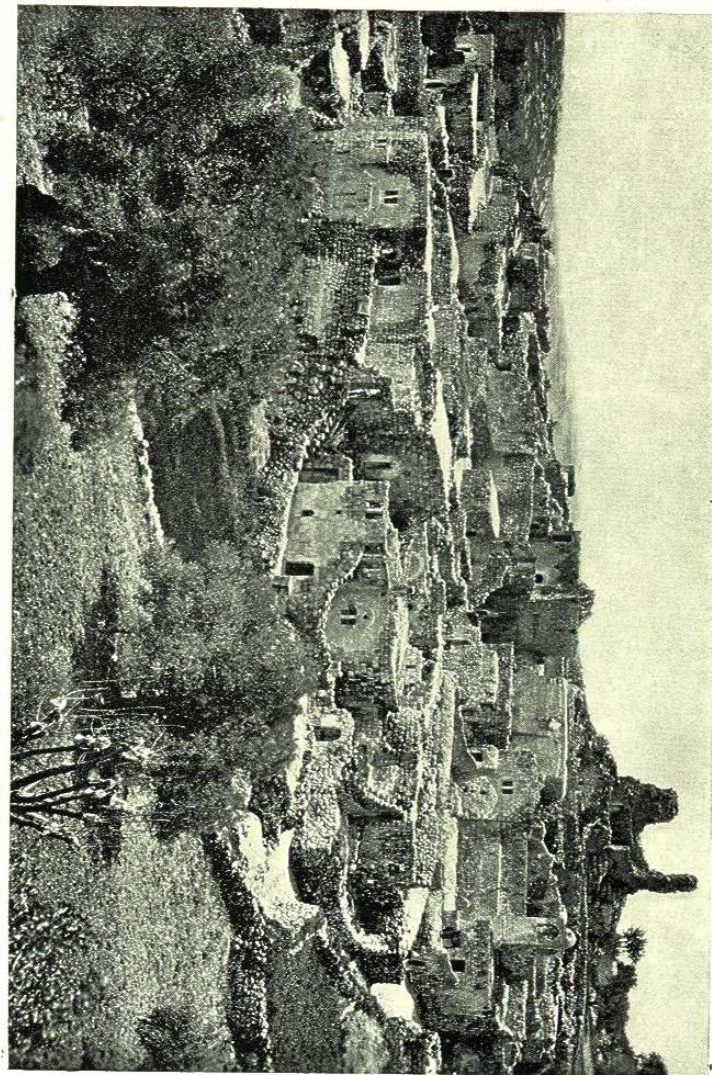
We rode for two or three hours, meeting tourists going from Jerusalem, and falling in with several hundreds of Russian pilgrims who had been down to bathe in the Jordan, and were toiling back to the sacred city. They were dressed in the extremely hot and uncomfortable attire of Russia, and were frequently overcome by the heat so as to fall upon the ground and breathe like panting animals. At the khan where we took dinner they were lying about like hod carriers, at the rest hour, on the hottest days of summer.

We passed another old khan which is the traditional scene of the parable of the good Samaritan.

Bethany is one of the points universally accepted. Its name—House of Poverty—is supposed to have been derived from its situation on the borders of the desert, though some claim that lepers formerly dwelt there. It was at Bethany that Simon the leper lived, in whose house the contents of the alabaster box were poured upon the head of the Saviour; and there resided Mary and Martha. The modern Arabic name of the place is derived from Lazarus. There are only forty or fifty miserable houses, and the inhabitants are Mohammedans. The place is picturesque because of the number of olive, mango, and fig trees interspersed among the buildings. The Tomb of Lazarus attracts the attention of visitors, and some recent travelers have been convinced that this is the genuine tomb. I did not see anything to suggest even presumption that it was the original place of burial of one who lived and died more than a thousand years ago.

But this is certain, that Christ must "have come up from Jericho by this route."

Having again enjoyed the view from the Mount of Olives, we descended its long slope to the valley of the Kidron, and on Saturday entered the city by St. Stephen's Gate. Moses acted strangely as we drew near the gate, and at last dismounted and asked us if we would have the kindness to lead his horse into the city. On asking the reason, he answered: "I am a Jew. For me to be seen entering on this day with a party of travelers would affect my standing among my people." To gratify him we led his horse into the city, while he, with an air of demure piety, entered on foot. To do this did not



Bethany.

disturb him, but to have others know that he did so—he was too “conscientious” for that.

The only point of importance in ancient Jerusalem not yet described is the Tower of David. It consists of five towers, formerly surrounded by a moat, and forms part of the citadel. Owing to its position it affords a comprehensive view. Mr. Gilman, the United States consul, thinks that the foundation was laid by the Jebusites, and that after David stormed the fortress he erected this tower. The ancient foundation, which rises to a height of thirty-nine feet, consists of stones of such size as to remind one of the Pyramids. In the various sieges to which Jerusalem has been exposed, the upper parts have often been destroyed and rebuilt.

Turkish soldiers were upon guard, and we were detained a considerable time before even the consul of the United States could secure admission to such points as he thought it desirable to show us. But the obstacles were finally overcome; we ascended to the summit, visited the interior of the citadel, and saw many evidences of the antiquity of the remains. If it were built by David, or even by Herod, of course it might have been standing when Christ was in Jerusalem.

Along the east side is Zion Street, which conducts us to Zion Gate on the apex of the ridge of Zion. Unquestionably we are now where David built his house, and where the tent was pitched for the Ark of God. Close by the gate is a building known as the Palace of Caiaphas, now a cemetery for Armenian patriarchs. Here tradition becomes ludicrous. They pretend to show the pillar on which the cock crew to warn Peter! That the tomb of David is near, there can be no reasonable doubt. Nehemiah says that the sepulcher of David was opposite a pool; and the supposed tomb of David stands opposite the Pool of Gihon. Peter says: “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.” Josephus also refers to it. Mohammedans and earlier Christians unite with the Jews in regarding the spot as identified; but though the tomb of David must have been in this vicinity, in regard to its exact site there is much ground for dispute.