

## THE LORD'S LAND.

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Abraham's Oak.—Hebron.

AFTER visiting Abraham's Oak, of which, with the above sketch, the reader will not require any further description, we entered Hebron on its northern side, and passing along its principal street between the solid stone houses (the narrow street reeking with filth), went into a glass factory, where are manufactured rings of various colours, which are used as ornaments by the native women. Thence we strolled through the Bazaar, which, to us so long in solitude, was doubly attractive because of the stir and business which seemed to be going on. From the Bazaar we passed up a narrow street directly in the rear, or at the north end, of the celebrated mosque which covers the Cave of Machpelah, the burial-place of the patriarchs. (See Gen. xlix. 29, 30, 31.) We turned around the enclosure to the east side, whence, from a slope near the wall, we could look into an open yard between the exterior wall and the mosque. Here was pointed out the tomb of Esau—wholly apocryphal, of course. Returning through this narrow and filthy passage, we came back through the Bazaar, and thence approached by another street the main entrance on the west and south. We could go no nearer than the steps leading into the open court. No infidels or Christians are allowed to pass beyond the threshold. We had to be content with putting our hands through a hole in the wall near the south-west corner and touching the sacred rock of the cave, and gazing at the massive, perfect masonry of the solid Jewish wall, built, as is supposed, in the days of Solomon. From the sedulous care with which this shrine has been guarded through so many ages, it is not improbable that when its vaults shall be opened at least the embalmed body of Jacob will be found. There is a peculiar interest in being so near the spot where the undecayed body of even one of God's ancient worthies may lie.

Emerging from the town at the south-west, we passed again the great southern pool. It is a large basin or reservoir of water of one hundred and thirty feet by fifty feet, inclosed in solid limestone masonry. On the east side is a row of bath-houses, accessible to all the population, distinct and regular hours being fixed for the men and women. At the northern end there is another reservoir not quite so large, but the southern one is probably that which gave to Hebron its first importance. A great natural spring fixes a location in these countries with a precision which scarcely any other one feature does. Ecce, then, with an assurance very satisfactory, I could imagine Abraham moving about around this spacious fountain, as a favourite permanent camping ground. From his first lighting upon the spot he dwelt in friendly relations with the proprietors of the soil, Mamre, Aner, and Eschol; thence he sallied forth with the armed servants of his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and discomfited Chedorlaomer and his confederates; thence from the brow of the adjoining hill he besought God for Sodom and Gomorrah, and afterward, when his petition availed only for Lot's safety, he saw thence the smoke of the doomed cities rising up like the "smoke of a furnace;" here he was when Sarah died, and in the cave of the field secured by purchase to him and his pos-

terity for ever he buried her out of his sight; and here, too, he was when he gave up the ghost and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years; and here his sons, Isaac and Ishmael—the brothers long estranged reconciled at the father's grave—"buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre."

April 14.—At half-past seven this morning we were in the saddle, our faces towards Jerusalem. I had become so used to the slow, long, and measured tread of the camel, that I really found the short, quick step of the horse disagreeable. My pony was a rough goer; he had a hard trot, hard gallop, and a slow walk. We followed up the Valley of Eshcol nearly to the point where the road turns to Abraham's Oak, and bearing directly north, left the ruins of Rama on the right. We then turned eastward to visit Jonah's Tomb (Noby Yumas), which stands on a high hill, behind which is the little village of Hallul. Josh. xv. 58. Three hours more brought us to the ruins of Jedur, the Gedor of Joshua xv. 58. Vast heaps of broken stones lie around, and the adjacent fields are under cultivation. This valley sweeps eastward under the names of el Arub, or Jehar, and el Shar, through the Wilderness of Judea, and terminates in the vicinity of Engedi. It was often traversed by David and his men. From this onward there was nothing but an irksome monotony of rugged hills till we descended suddenly upon Solomon's Pools, situated in a beautiful little valley, now called el Burak—"Valley of the Tanks." Across the field to the west, at the base of the mountain, is a little house covering the entrance to the springs of water, whence is the principal supply of the pools. Having no torches, we lighted pieces of brush, and descended into the vaulted cave about twenty-five steps down. The size of the cave is fifteen by eight paces. The water issues from the side of the hill in a channel at least six inches wide, is caught in two reservoirs, and is passed thence underground about three hundred yards to a point near the north-west corner of the upper pool, where it is divided, part running into a vault twenty-five feet by five, and thence into the upper pool, the other part being conducted around the north side of the successive pools, and below them, till it flows into the main aqueduct, which ends at Jerusalem. By this method it was sought to accomplish the double purpose of obtaining a fresh supply of water directly from the fountain-head, and also keeping the reservoirs filled from the overflow, so as to have on hand a perpetual reserve. The construction of these reservoirs is usually attributed to Solomon, though there is no decisive proof that he built them. Their extent, massiveness, and boldness of conception furnish reasonable ground for ascribing their formation to his long, peaceful, and magnificent reign.

Instead of keeping the direct road over the hill to Jerusalem, we followed the Wady el Burak by the line of the aqueduct to Bethlehem. The valley grows narrower and deeper as it descends, and is irrigated by streams from the pools. Our route was above the little village Urta, believed to be the ancient Etham, which sits nestled on the hill side. On rising the next hill, Bethlehem all at once stood before us, perched on a shoulder of the mountain along which we should have travelled had we gone directly from the pools to Jerusalem. Bethlehem seemed, in its clear outlines and its white, flat houses, like an old friend, so familiar had pictures made it to me from my youth. Crossing the head of a valley which slopes to the eastward, known as the Valley of the Shepherds, we mounted the hill, and wheeling suddenly to the right, entered, amid new and old buildings, the main street, and stopped not until, having gone the whole length of its narrow, slippery pavement, we dismounted in the open area in front of the Church and Convent of the Nativity. We immediately went into the Latin Convent of St. Francis, and were courteously received by a monk, who, after refreshing his guests with lemonade, conducted us through the series of buildings which cluster over the supposed place of the Nativity. Passing through a great hall we entered the Latin Chapel of St. Catharine, where services were being conducted; then into the Greek Chapel, by far the most imposing, where also services were being held; then into the Armenian, where no service was going on. Through a door on the left of the Greek Chapel we descended by a few steps into the cave beneath it, a low, narrow, vaulted room, thirty-eight feet long by eleven feet wide, lighted with burning lamps. This is the Chapel of the Nativity. Just to the left on entering, we were pointed to the *apostol*, a vaulted recess being with sixteen silver lamps, almost wholly destitute of ornament, with a marble floor, in the centre of which is a silver star, with a hole