

THE HOLY LAND—NAZARETH AND MOUNT CARMEL.

BY HARRIET MARTINEAU.

We passed the night of the 14th of April in our tents, just outside the town of Jenin. Our dragoman had warned us of the thievish character of the people of this neighborhood, so that we had an eye to such of our property as was lying about while the tents were preparing. The Governor called, had coffee, and appointed four guards; so that we supposed ourselves free from robbery. But in the morning the best mule was gone; and the four guards declared themselves wholly unable to say when, how, and by whom the animal was set loose from its fastenings and carried off. Our departure was delayed; the Governor was sent for; and a pretended inquiry was made; and this gave me opportunity to walk about for an hour after breakfast—through the little town, through an orange grove where every tree was white with blossoms; and up a neighbouring hill whence I saw, to my surprise, a snowy mountain peak to the Northeast. This was the summit of Gebel Sheikh—the mountain which closes the north end of the valley of the Jordan, and then joins on to the range of Antilibanus. From my point of view, I could see, too, the beautiful plain of Esdraelon which we were to traverse this day; and the hills to the north which enclosed Nazareth, where we hoped to sleep this night: and to the west, some tokens of the rise of a line of hills which we should soon see swelling into Mount Carmel, where we were to go to-morrow. What a prospect lay before both eye and mind!

Our dragoman told us we might make ourselves easy about our mule, as he had no doubt it was in some stable in the town. We should be asked to leave a muleteer behind, and in a day or two the animal would be delivered to him, with the demand of a few piastres for the trouble of finding the mule on the mountains. It is probable that the matter stood exactly so, for the muleteer followed in two days with the beast, having paid fourteen piastres for the trouble of finding it!

Thus far we have travelled only among valleys: and to-day we heartily enjoy our ride over the rich plain of Esdraelon. It was fertile and flowery from end to end; and the young partridges ran under the very feet of my horse. Small birds flitted in multitudes on every side; and the tall cranes stood among the high grass. The Carmel range grew upon the sight as we had expected; and the blue hills of Galilee closed in the view northward. Little Mount Hermon rose on our sight, and on his north acclivity lay the village of Nain. A round hill, dropped over with old oaks, was Mount Tabor. Villages were well placed on such rising grounds as there were amid the planes; and our track lay, broad, level, and green, among rows of tall artichokes and patches of rich cultivation.

When about two-thirds of the way over, we crossed the great caravan track from Egypt to Damascus. We had been to Egypt; and we were going to Damascus; but we did not follow this track. We held on northward to the Galilean hills.

We entered upon these hills about an hour before we reached Nazareth, winding up and down, and around the base of one, and the shoulder of another, sometimes among scattered wood, sometimes over stony tracts, and always in sight of many goats. After mounting a very steep pass, and coming to a well, and winding round a hill once more, we came suddenly in sight of pretty Nazareth. Its basin of fertility is charming—its little plain, full of gardens and groves and fields, surrounded, as it seems, completely by hills.—The town is in fact a poor one; but built of stone, and covering a good deal of ground, and extending a little way up the western slope, it looks well from above.

Here, then, we had before our eyes the scenery amid which Jesus grew up. Its character cannot have changed very much since his day. A fertile basin among the everlasting hills, and a primitive little town which they protect, must bear the same aspect from age to age. The great addition is the convent and church of the Latin monks; but these buildings do not stand out offensively to the eye; but mingle well with the flat-roofed stone houses of the town. In this convent we had to take up our abode. We angled to pitch our tents on the green below the

town: but there was apprehension of rain, and it was thought better to go under the convent roof, which is truly a hospitable one.

I do not know what it is about the service of this church which is so affecting to strangers: but I observe that all travellers speak of the strong emotions excited here. Few believe that the places under the church are what they are said to be. Few believe that the little caves shown by the monks are the kitchen and sitting room of the parent of Jesus; and that the spots marked out by two granite pillars are those where Mary and the Angel stood at the time of the annunciation. I do not at all believe that these places were thus consecrated; yet I have seldom been so moved as I was this afternoon in the church of the annunciation at Nazareth. We were at least in the place of residence of Jesus, and saw what he saw every day;—the hollows of the valleys, the outlines of the hills, the streams in their courses, and the wild flowers which everywhere on the slopes spread under foot. We were in the place which he called home. Entering the church with these impressions on our minds, we were saluted with a chaunt from a full choir;—a chaunt sonorous, swelling, and exact;—the best music, incomparably, that I heard abroad. It told upon our very hearts. Of course we visited the rocky recesses below the church, which are called the abode of Joseph and Mary; and saw no reason to suppose that, while citizens of Nazareth, they lived in a grotto, rather than a house.

We were shown, too, a portrait of Jesus, which the monks believe to have been copied from an original taken in his lifetime!—as if there had been portrait painting of that kind in those days! and as if the Jews would have considered it lawful if there had! Such ignorance on the part of the monks prevents our relying on any traditions given by them; and I will, therefore, say nothing of the other places pointed out as sacred by them. Nazareth itself is sacred enough; and it is merely offensive to one's feelings to speak of some of the strange stories the monks tell, and really believe, about Jesus and his family, exhibiting what they declare to be the scenes of his life and daily actions.

The next day, the uppermost feeling throughout was of delight at the thought of the natural beauty amid which Jesus was reared. From the heights above the town we looked down into dells full of verdure; and abroad over the rich plain we had crossed the day before, and over toward Carmel, where we were going to-day. We rode among the hills for two hours, observing that clumps of forest trees became more frequent, and that the scenery was changing its character; and then we entered upon a tract which was so like the outskirts of an English nobleman's park that I could hardly believe we were in the Holy Land. Rich grasses covered up the slopes and levels, and clumps of ilex wooded every recess. We wound along under these clumps, and along the glades of the scattered forest, and upon broken banks, and then again through reaches of chequer-shade. And how could we help thinking at every step who had once been here before us?

We were almost sorry to leave these park-like hills, though we were descending into the plain of Zebulon, and Carmel was before us, and we were about to cross the old river Kishon which Elijah knew so well when he lived in this region: and the blue sea was in sight; that sea from which Elijah's servant saw the cloud arise which was no bigger than a man's hand.

We rode at the foot of Carmel, keeping the river Kishon for the most part on the right hand. There could not be a finer place of assemblage than this plain for the children of Israel and the worshippers of the sun (Baal) when Elijah summoned them to meet. From the foot of Mount Carmel which stands out boldly into the sea, the beach stretches northward in a fine sweep of fifteen miles to Acra, and the old Tyro. The plain of Zebulon, thus enclosed between the Galilean hills, Carmel, and the sea, held the assembled multitude on that great day. The worship of the sun was very imposing in all the countries where it existed. We have all heard of it as the worship of Apollo in Greece. I saw mighty temples to the same god, under the name of Ra, in Egypt and Nubia; and under the name of Baal at Baalbec—a few days journey from this place at the foot