

Judas Iscariot came with the rabble and the Roman soldiers to seize his divine Master. From Gethsemani we went to visit the "Tomb of the Blessed Virgin," enclosed by the ancient Basilica of the Assumption, on passing which in the early morning we had heard the plaintive strains of the Russo-Greek liturgy,—a chant so skilfully devised, that one would imagine it accompanied by the organ; though, in reality, the music which so charmed us on this occasion was the product of the human voice alone. Women (i. e. "nuns" or "*deaconesses*") however, are permitted to participate in it; a privilege not accorded to the gentler sex, as far as I know, in other branches of the "orthodox" communion. On descending the forty-eight marble steps leading to the floor of the Basilica, which is far below the surface of the ground outside the building, a Russian ecclesiastic dealt out wax tapers to us in order to enable us the better to see the sacred shrine we had come to venerate, and then conducted us to the same. * This stands about a yard above the stone flagging, and is a grave-like opening chiselled out of the living rock. It is covered by an aedicule of inconsiderable proportions that is furnished with an altar, and is entered by apertures so low that one must incline profoundly in order to pass through them. The Franciscans—the legitimate guardians of the Holy Land—officiated in this sanctuary until the year 1757, when the Schismatics took entire possession of it. And now the non-Catholic Greeks, Armenians, Copts and Syrians perform their ecclesiastical functions there, but the "Latins" are altogether excluded. Even the Mussulmans, who, it would appear, hold

the Mother of Christ in reverence, have their place of prayer within the walls of this Christian church—to the south of the aedicule!

You will likely recall here Catharine Emmerich's "revelation" to the effect that the immaculate body of Our Blessed Lady was laid to rest near the city of Ephesus, and wonder how it can be reconciled with the tradition that Jerusalem was the place where this hallowed interment occurred. I cannot enumerate here the numerous authorities quoted in favor of the former opinion by the Lazarist Father of Smyrna, to whose interesting brochure on this subject I refer elsewhere in this letter, nor can I think of reproducing the arguments he adduces in support of it. Suffice it to say that among the ancient ecclesiastical writers quoted by him in favor of Ephesus figure the names of men held in veneration throughout Christendom for learning and sanctity. "The existence of the tomb at Jerusalem," he says, "is not necessarily an indication of its having been occupied by the mortal remains of the Mother of God. Many mausoleums," he continues, "are known to have been erected, and tombs to have been prepared, prior to the decease of those for whom they were intended, but which remained vacant, or became the last earthly resting place of others. Witness, for example, those of Absalom in the valley of Josaphat, and of Joseph of Arimathea;—the latter now the Holy Sepulchre," etc. [If you have any inclination to pursue this question further, I counsel you to procure the work mentioned above, in which you will find an abundance of information connected therewith, together with much else that is interesting and instructive].

Leaving the Basilica of the Assumption, we returned to "Casa Nova" via the same route by which we had come, and taking an early dinner, were ready for our journey to Bethany, Jericho, the Dead Sea and the Jordan, a little after the hour originally set for it.

(TO BE CONTINUED).

* NOTE.—This service always entails a *halksheesh*, which is the only "Open Sesame" in the Orient.