

PLEASANT HOURS

PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

Vol. XVI.]

TORONTO, JANUARY 11, 1896.

[No. 2.]

The Junior's Friend.

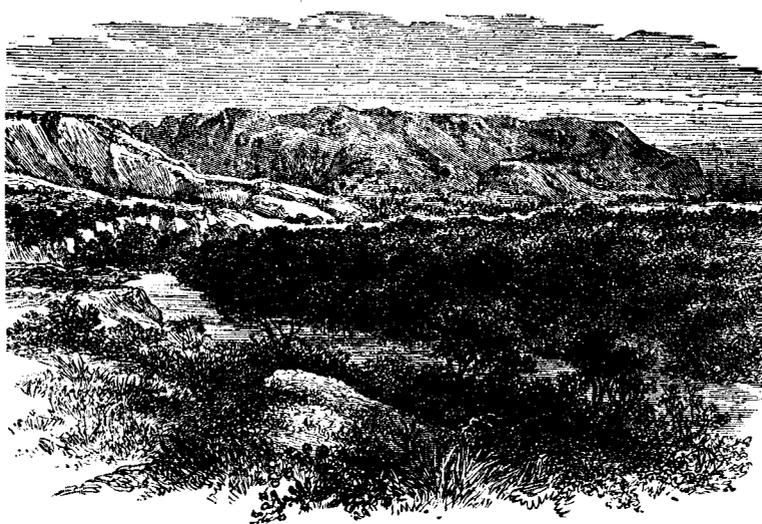
Jesus was once despised and low
A stranger and distressed,
Without a home to which to go,
A pillow where to rest.

Now on a high, majestic seat,
He reigns above the sky,
And angels worship at his feet,
Or at his bidding fly.

Once he was crowned with prickly thorns,
And scoffed at in his pain;
Now glorious love his head adorns,
And he will ever reign.

But what a condescending King,
Who, though he reigns on high,
Is pleased when little children sing,
And listens to their cry!

He views them from his heavenly home,
He watches all their ways,
And stoops to notice for his own
The youngest child that prays.



THE JORDAN VALLEY.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

BY THE EDITOR.

EVERY year many thousands of Russian pilgrims visit the river Jordan that they may bathe in its sacred waters at the spot where it was supposed that our Lord was baptized.

The road all the way from Jerusalem is thronged with Russian pilgrims of the Greek Church on their way to the Jordan. They are a very picturesque, but shabby and dishevelled-looking crowd, in all degrees of raggedness. Most of them trudge along, sweltering beneath sheepskin cloaks, like Bryan O'Flynn's, "with the woolly side in." They wear long, unkempt, square-cut hair and shaggy beards, and carry bamboo staves from the Jordan or palm branches in their hands.

The women are generally mounted on the backs of much-enduring donkeys, crouched on their bedding with, it may be, one or two children. They often wear a fur-lined cloak and top-boots, and ride with short stirrups, bringing their knees almost to their chins. In the sweltering heat they ineffectually try to ward off the sun's rays by a palm branch or the corner of a shawl stretched out on a bamboo cane. The village priest trudges along with his parishioners, dressed in black gown and all black hat, whose rim is at the top instead of at the bottom. Some of these foot-worn and weary pilgrims carry heavy bags on their shoulders. They all wear sad and weary faces, and ceremoniously salute the how-adgi with humble obeisance. This pilgrimage is

THE EVENT OF A LIFETIME.

The rustic inhabitants of some village in the remote Caucasus or Greek Islands, save their money for years and, with the village priest, make the pilgrimage to the sacred places, carrying with them the long, white shroud in which they bathe in the Jordan, and which they carry to their distant homes to be their final winding-sheet.

While the Russian pilgrims are said to number nine-tenths of the whole, yet there are many others, Cypriotes, Levantines,

Abyssinians, Copst, Syrians Armenians—adherents of the ancient Christian sects of the East. We saw at the Jordan a tall, handsome Abyssinian woman, weary and way-worn, who had got separated from her companions and was anxiously inquiring the way to the convent. It made us think of Mary returning from Jerusalem, and missing the young Christ amid the great multitude of pilgrims.

A VISIT TO THE JORDAN.

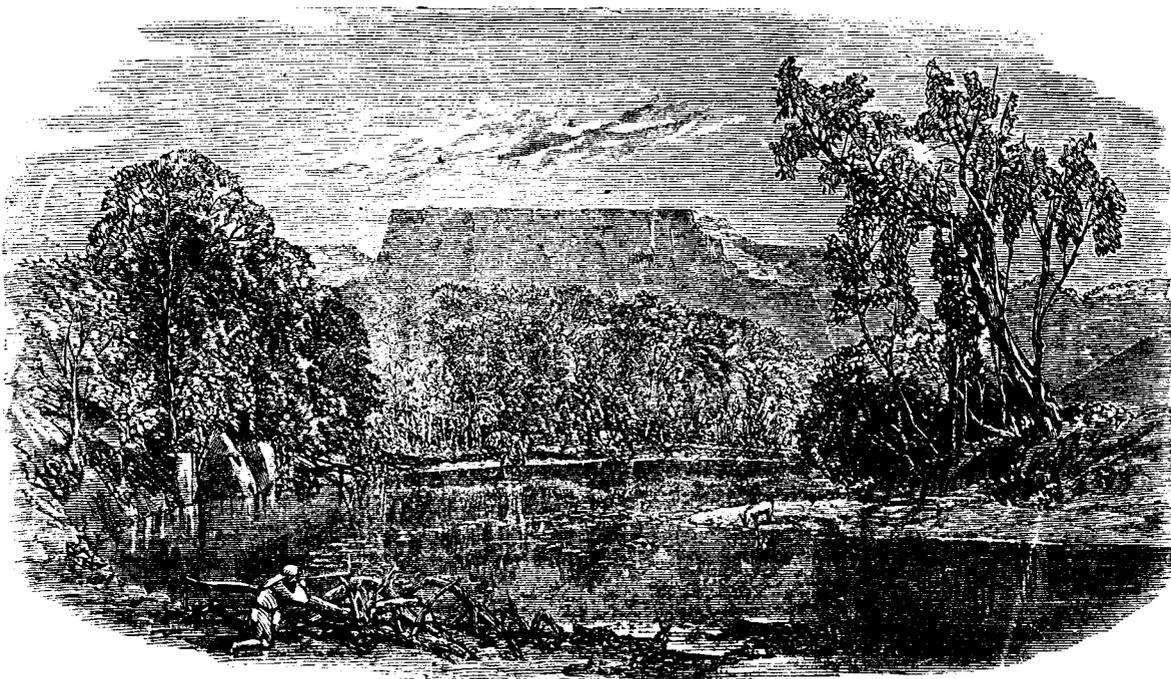
After a bath in the Dead Sea we remounted our horses for the ride to the Jordan. We passed a couple of ruined monasteries, in a grotto beneath one of which John the Baptist is said to have dwelt; and another, with dilapidated vaults and ruined arcades, still bears the name, "Castle of the Jews." We were soon riding through the dense thickets of willows and canes which bordered the sacred stream. Its swift, turbid flow rushed past, steadily wasting away the steep clay banks which rise like cliffs. Its many windings greatly increase its length. The distance from its source to its mouth, in a straight line, is about 136 miles. From Tiberias to the Dead Sea is only about 64 miles, but

the windings of the river make the distance nearly 200 miles. From its rapid fall it derives its name "the Descender," its mouth being 3,000 feet below its source. It is exceedingly turbid, and we understood better after seeing it the contempt of Naaman for its muddy stream.

THE JORDAN VALLEY

at Jericho is about eight miles wide. Within this valley is a narrower one, less than a mile in width, and depressed about fifty feet below the level of the plain, with a dense thicket bordering the stream, once infested with lions (Jer. 49. 19). It has generally been crossed by fording, although David and Barzillai were conveyed across it in a ferry-boat (2 Sam. 19. 19-31). The legend of St. Christopher and the child Jesus is attached to the Jordan. The large cut on this page shows the traditional site where it is believed that our Lord was baptized.

For many centuries pilgrims have come by the thousands to the sacred stream for bathing and baptism. Royal baptisms in Europe have generally been in Jordan water. Each of us brought home some of it boiled down and sealed in glass vessels



ON THE JORDAN.—TRADITIONAL SCENE OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.

bearing Russian religious reliefs. My friend, Mr. Read, I hear, has baptized about half a hundred babies with his quantum. We sat by the river and sang, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand," "Jesus, Lover of my soul," and Mr. Read recited "On Nebo's Lonely Mountain." While Judge Carman, that persistent "Canaanite," went into the thicket with his jack-knife looking for souvenirs, I slowly walked with Madame along the dry and solid-seeming surface of the bank, but soon found myself sinking to my ankles in the soft mud.

At the base of the hill of Jericho is the "Fountain of Elisha," by which Jericho was formerly supplied with water. It flows into an ancient basin of hewn stone, still in pretty good repair, thirteen yards long by eleven wide, from which ran a well-built aqueduct. The temperature of the water is 84° Fahr. This, it is claimed, is the water which Elisha healed with salt, and where he made the axe-head to swim (2 Kings 2. 19-22).

Wishing.

ONE day a handsome hickory-nut
At the top of a waving tree,
Remarked, "I'd like to live in a shell,
Like a clam beneath the sea."

And just at that time a clam observed,
'Way down in the tossing sea,
'I'd love to dwell in a hickory-nut
At the top of a lofty tree."

Thus both of them wished and wished
Till they turned green, yellow, and blue,
And that, in truth, is just about what
Mere wishing is likely to do.

LOVE FOR MOTHER.

WHEN gruff old Dr. Johnson was fifty years old, he wrote to his aged mother as if he were still her wayward but loving boy: "You have been the best mother, and, I believe, the best woman in the world. I thank you for all your indulgence to me, and beg forgiveness for all I have done ill, and of all I have omitted to do well." John Quincy Adams did not part with his mother until he was nearly, or quite, as old as this; yet his cry even then was: "O God, could she have been spared yet a little longer! . . . Without her the world seems to me like a solitude." When President Nott, of Union College, was more than ninety years old, and had been for half a century a college president, as strength and sense failed him in his dying hours, the memory of his mother's tenderness was fresh and potent; and he could be hushed to needed sleep by a gentle patting on the shoulder, and the singing to him of the old-time lullabies, as if his mother were still sitting by his bedside in loving ministry, as she had been well-nigh a hundred years before. The true son never grows old to a true mother.

THE Christian's hardest battles with the devil are often fought at the door of his closet.