

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER IN JERUSALEM.

(Continued.)

On the following day, Easter Even, we witnessed the truly remarkable spectacle of the coming of the Holy Fire, the one great blot, it seemed to us, on the observance of this holy season. Many people sleep in the church the whole of Good Friday night, and keep their places until three o'clock the following day, about which-time the whole ground floor, on every available inch of space, is covered with a surging crowd of Greek Christians, the great majority of whom are Russian peasants, each one carrying a candle, or a bundle of tapers unlighted. Not the floor only, but every gallery, and every stone, or beam where there is standing room, is alive with spectators, many of whom such as the Russian Consul, are present officially in special places reserved for them. Looking down from a gallery in the dome, the scene is a wild tumult of excited noise and gesticulation. The whole multitude are clapping their hands and shouting what sounds like "Salu il Messia, salu" in a recurring rhythmic chant, and a refrain, beginning "Yaihood, yaihood," was constantly repeated, being, as I understand, a call to the Jews, something in this strain, "O Jew, O Jew, Christ has come to save us: we are redeemed by His Blood, and the Jews are confounded"; while the "Hail, Messiah, hail," was repeated over and over again. Suddenly arose a wild, simultaneous shout and a clanging of bells, and at the same moment a flash of fire leapt out from a round hole in the wall of the chapel over the Holy Sepulchre. This was caught by those nearest to it, and amid a wild struggle impossible to describe, men and women fighting furiously for precedence, the fire ran from taper to taper, ropes were let down from the galleries drawing up bundles of lighted tapers, and in an incredibly short time, almost instantly, as it seemed in the excitement, the whole building from floor to ceiling was a twinkling blaze of light. The smoke rose in a dim cloud, and from the galleries the scene, veiled in smoke, with these thousands of lights twinkling through it, formed a most extraordinary spectacle. With the first flash of fire every bell inside and outside the Holy Sepulchre boomed, and clanged, and rattled, and so wild was the excitement that one Greek monk near me, dropping his wooden hammer, pulled off his shoe, and hammered the bell furiously. But the faces of the people were most wonderful. Dull, heavy, care-worn Russian peasants, as they put their hands in the flame of their bundle of tapers, and washed, as it were, their faces and breasts with it, seemed imbued with the most intense joy, their faces beaming with delight and satisfied happiness, for they believe that the fire descends straight from heaven, and is miraculously kindled in the Sepulchre, forgetful of the presence of the Greek and Armenian Patriarchs, who are locked therein. There is a reward of a guinea for the first who carries the fire to Bethlehem, and this race is always keenly contested. It is altogether a sad and painful spectacle.

The celebration of Easter in Jerusalem is performed by the Greek Church with great picturesqueness and beauty. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is open all night long, and very soon after midnight every various-coloured gold and silver lamp and every candle in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is lighted, surrounding the Chapel of the Sepulchre under the dome with twinkling gems of light. The huge tapers blazing before the chapel, and the numberless lamps hung and strung from pillars and galleries, fill the whole building with glory and beauty. The Greek service begins with a solemn procession of all the Greek choristers, monks, priests, and Bishops, before the Patriarch of Jerusalem, all vested with the utmost magnificence of the Eastern Church, the Patriarch's white vestments sparkling with gold and costly jewels. About one o'clock the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom is solemnly begun, and is continued with various

incidental observances until the day dawns over the city. It was a sight to be remembered for all one's life, that early celebration of the Resurrection morning. The beauty of the vestments, the solemnity of the service, the antiquity of the liturgy itself, the constant processions, the numberless lights, moving amid clouds of incense, round and round the Chapel of the Sepulchre, the strange and almost barbarous unmusical monotony of the Greek chant, broken occasionally, as in the *Credo*, by the strangely sweet and most plaintive music of the Russian choir, who assisted at the service by special permission, the Patriarch himself a most impressive figure, his grand features and long grey hair and beard lit up by the six candles that he carried, three in each hand, in curiously wrought candlesticks, with which lights he constantly blessed the people; and, strangest of all surroundings of such a scene, the double line of stolid Turkish soldiers, armed with rifles, and in full uniform, standing shoulder to shoulder from the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre to the altar steps of the Greek Central Chapel, keeping back by main force the packed mass of Russian pilgrims and spectators, that crowded every foot of standing room, and who, without this assistance from the authorities, would render the service absolutely impossible. Let others, if they will, visit the offence of the Holy Fire upon such a celebration as this. I could not help thinking that these unhappy excrescences will soon die and fall away from this glorious service, whose keynote, constantly recurring in the deep-toned voice of the Patriarch, made harmony with every Christian heart throughout the world.

At length the blessing was given, and the Bishops, priest, and the guests of the Patriarch went with him to breakfast. I left the building in the early morning light with almost a sense of the unreality of the sleeping world around the waking Church. I returned to my house, climbed the steps to the housetop, and there stood entranced at a scene of wondrous beauty. The waning Paschal moon was sinking towards the western sky, lighting up the domes and minarets of the city with a quiet radiance. From one of the domes over the Holy Sepulchre flamed a huge fiery cross that had been burning since midnight. Half-way up the dim and rosy eastern sky glittered a glorious planet, while the long, purple ridge of Olivet was sharply outlined against the dim, golden dawn of that marvelously clear Syrian atmosphere. The city was intensely silent, and it seemed that, beyond the walls there, the women even now might be hurrying to the Sepulchre, to find it empty and the Lord arisen from the dead. Who can describe such times as these? They can be felt, but they cannot be imparted by word or pen.

At a later time on Easter Day, about eleven o'clock, the Patriarch, with the Bishop, priests, deacons, monks, and choristers, and visitors, passed in procession once more from the Patriarch's house through the streets, with lights and vestments, to the church. It was a wonderful sight to look down upon. The red, *les*-covered heads of the crowd looked almost like a huge flower bed in the court outside the church doors, as the solemn procession moved slowly through the midst, chanting the Litany of the Resurrection. People on the housetops had baskets of red rose petals, which they showered in handfuls upon the procession, and these floating down added to the charm of the picture. The celebration that follows is called the *Lepra tou exarrection*, from the custom of singing the Gospel, verse by verse, in different languages. Various priests were placed at different parts of the church, some on the screen over the high altar, one in a gallery, one on a high pillar, and so on. The first verse of the Gospel was sung in Greek. A bell sounded, the same verse was sung in Latin, the bell again, then the verse was sung in Spanish, German, French, &c., in as many languages as possible, all round and about

the church, to signify the spread of the Gospel throughout the world, and, last of all, an unlovely grumble announced that the verse was being read in English. I asked the Archimandrite afterwards why he did not sing his English verse. "Well," said he, "I thought that in the English Church you always read your services, and I wanted to do it properly." The effect was most peculiar.

The difficulty in describing these services is not to continue, but to cease. I write from the suburbs of the city, away from its bustle and noise; and I hope that the beautiful Spring flowers of these new Jerusalem gardens, the clusters of banksias, the bushes of darker roses, the scented wallflower and mignonette, the vines putting forth their young leaves, the orchards glorious with blossom, and the young wheatfields, edged with bushes of golden "broom," with all this beauty and fragrance of the new Jerusalem may be a harbinger of the more glorious future that is already dawning upon the Holy City of memories.—*Scottish Guardian*.

THE ASCENSION.

The Ascension of our Lord was in strict accord with the words by which he had been preparing his disciples to expect it. He had begun to speak of it as far back as the conversation recorded in the sixth chapter of John when he said, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven." This gave offense, and they thought it a hard saying. To their murmuring he replied, "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?"

As the time drew near, he spoke with greater distinctness: "I go to prepare a place for you. Whither I go ye know. Greater works than these shall ye do because I go to the Father. Ye have heard how I said, I go away and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father." And when their minds were bewildered, questioning what he could mean by the phrases, "a little while," and "I go to the Father," he said yet more plainly, "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again I leave the world and go to the Father."

Then on the eventful morning of the Resurrection, when Jesus showed himself to Mary in the garden and she was about to worship him, he said unto her, "I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and say unto my Father, and to my God and your God." So clear are these statements, that if the history of his life had closed with that interview, our conclusion would be that he had ascended to heaven with the body which had slept in the tomb.

But the Ascension is not a matter of inference, for a chosen few were permitted to behold it. The eleven were with Jesus. He had given them reason to expect his withdrawal. Before his crucifixion he had "been with them" by day and by night, in the crowded streets and on the seashore, and in the desert place. After his passion "he showed himself alive" for forty days, and as that period drew near to a close, he gave them commandment not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which they had heard from his lips, and which would be accomplished before many days; and then, as if they realized that he would not long tarry with them, they seized the opportunity to ask: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore