

Selections.

THE TOMB OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

On quitting Jerusalem by St. Stephen's Gate on the east side of the city, one descends through a ravine into the depths of the valley of Josaphat, having to the right and left the Mussulman cemetery. After passing the bed of the torrent Cedron, which is always dry, you perceive on your left the facade of the Church of the Assumption, which is built at the foot of the Mount of Olives and at some little distance from the grotto where Our Lord sweated blood on the eve of His Passion. Forty-eight steps, which the feet of thousands have nearly worn away, conduct to a dark and vast chamber cut out of the living rock, and, like that of her Divine Son, covered with white marble, so that pilgrims may not commit any act of vandalism by carrying off fragments thereof. One may repeat of this tomb what Chateaubriand said of the Holy Sepulchre, that "it will have nothing to yield upon Judgment day," for tradition says that the body of Mary was assumed into heaven three days after her death. St. Helena built here a noble church in honor of Our Lady; but the builders, following the bad example of the architects of the Holy Sepulchre, isolated the tomb from the rock, leaving only just the block on which was the tomb itself intact. The walls of the church have all been cut out of the solid mountain, and it is large, but damp and dark. This church contains the tomb of Melisinda, the wife of Baldwin II, and mother of Baldwin IV. Kings of Jerusalem. This princess conducted the affairs of the Kingdom for thirty years as regent. Her tomb is to the right on entering the sacred edifice, and it is reported that the vaults below contain also the tombs of Joachim, St. Anne and St. Joseph. But this is probably an error, founded on the well known fact that the Jews usually choose one burial-place for all the members of their family. Arculp, who visited the tomb in the seventh century, mentions a church above the ground, probably built by St. Helena. It was round, like the London Temple. In the year 1100, Geoffrey de Boulogne established here a convent of Benedictines, but in 1263 Queen Joan of Naples signed a treaty with the sultan, whereby the church passed into the hands of the Franciscans. In the seventeenth century the Greek schismatics obtained possession of it; but in 1666, Count La Haye, French Ambassador to the Sublime Port, caused the Franciscans

to be restored as guardians of the sanctuary. In 1757 the Count de Vergennes obtained from Turkey a firman whereby the rights of the Franciscans were clearly defined; and since that period, as at the Holy Sepulchre, the Greeks and Latins have shared the spot between them. Some authors seem to think that the Holy Virgin died at Ephesus, but this opinion is only founded on a chance phrase inserted in a synodal letter addressed by the Fathers of the Council, A. D. 471, to the clergy and people of the city of Ephesus, which contains this unfinished phrase: "The heresy of the Nestorians was condemned in the town where John the theologian, and Mary the Mother of God—". But the Fathers of the Council did not say that Mary died here, but seem only to have wished to call attention to the great respect paid to her at Ephesus, as is easily proved by Father Russell, a monk of the Holy Land, in his work "On the Dogmatic Definition of the Assumption of Mary Most Holy."

Tradition says that she died at Jerusalem, in the Cenaculum, on Mount Zion, and not at Ephesus. Dionysius the Areopagite, a contemporary of the Virgin, thus expresses himself in the book of "Divine Names," (Book I, chap. II,) in speaking to Timothy on the subject of the death of Mary: "You remember that when we were assembled near our pontiffs (the disciples,) and filled with the Holy Ghost, with many of our holy brethren we revered that holy body which was the asylum of the Author of life; James, the brother-cousin of the Lord, and Peter, the great ornament and principal column of theology, were with us. After contemplating this holy body, all the pontiffs praised the goodness of the Lord, and Gerotides more than all the rest." Saint Meliton of Sardis, who wrote towards the year 170, says in his book *De Transitu Virginis*, that the Mother of God died in Jerusalem. Polygerates, Bishop of Ephesus, who lived in the third century, affirms also that the Blessed Virgin died at Jerusalem; and Juvenal, Bishop of the city, in reply to a letter addressed by the Empress Pulcheria on the subject of the tomb, answered that princess thus:

"We have an ancient and very true tradition that Mary most holy died in Jerusalem, and was buried in the valley of Jehosaphat—and that all the Apostles were miraculously gathered together around her death-bed, having been summoned from all parts of the world for that purpose, for they were greatly dispersed upon its face." St. Gregory of Tours also wrote, in