

erected for convents and other religious purposes, that Bethlehem has almost a modern look. As we rode through its narrow streets we saw no Ruths, but an ancient Jew in turban, long robe, and flowing beard, quite answered to my idea of Boaz. We rode to the convent adjoining the church of the Nativity, where rather a jolly looking monk furnished us an excellent lunch. He then took us into the venerable church that covered the subterranean chamber in which tradition has always held that our blessed Lord was born. The chamber is probably a remnant of an ancient khan, once belonging to the family of Jesse and of King David. I expected to be shocked by a sham mockery when I entered the church, but a feeling of genuine faith in the locality came over me as I descended into the rocky chamber and read, around the silver star, the famous inscription in Latin, "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary." The three-fold argument for the authentication of this site is drawn from unbroken tradition, from the fact that Bethlehem has never been overthrown in sieges, and from the other fact that the learned St. Jerome (in the fourth century) was so sure of the site that he came and spent his long, laborious life in the cavern close by the birth place of our Lord. I entered with deep interest the cave in which this devout scholar meditated and prayed and wrought the Vulgate translation of God's Word.

At two o'clock, under a broiling sun, our cavalcade of ten horses and mules filed out of Bethlehem and headed for the wilderness of Judea

—one of the dreariest wilderness on the globe. For an hour we rode among barley fields. I noticed how close the grain grew to the path, and how easy it was for the sower's grain to "fall on the highway." I also saw several plats of angry thorns, which would "choke" any seed which may fall among them.

Our afternoon's march over the bleak, treeless and brown mountains of the wilderness was incessantly tiresome until we came in sight of the Dead Sea. It lay two thousand feet below us—a mirror of silver, set among the violet mountains of Moab. More precipitous descents over rocks and sand brought us, by sundown, to the two towers of the most unique monastery on the globe. The famous Convent of *Mar Saba* is worth a journey to Palestine. For thirteen centuries that wonderful structure has hung against the walls of the deep, awful gorge of the Kildron. It is a colossal swallows' nest of stone, built to the height of three hundred feet against the precipice, and inhabited by sixty monks of the Greek Church—genuine Manicheans and followers of St. Saba and St. John of Damascus. No woman's foot has ever entered the Convent's walls. Instead of woman's society they make love to the birds, who come and feed off the monks' hands. Every evening they toss meat down to the wild jackals in the gorge below. At sunset I climbed over the extraordinary building—was shown into the rather handsome church, and into the chapel or cave of St. Nicholas, which contains the ghastly skulls of the monks who were slaughtered by Chosroes and his