

so, Christian. The streets are few, and like all Eastern cities, narrow and dirty—very narrow and very dirty, indeed. Many of the people are out of doors. As we pass along, we see some small, rude shops or dens, in which various articles are exposed for sale. We look in other rooms, and find men at work sitting on the ground, turning beads for rosaries. The work is done rapidly, and great quantities of these are made. Also, crosses and medals are carved from the mother of pearl shell.

As every one who goes to the Holy Land make some purchases of these articles, there is quite a brisk trade at Easter time, when the pilgrims most resort to the shrines. These beads, medals and crosses are taken to Jerusalem and blessed, in the most Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, and are thus held in just estimation among the holy things of earth. A cross made in Bethlehem, where Christ was born, and blessed in the most Holy Sepulchre where he was buried, and from which he rose triumphant over death, is surely a precious thing for any Christian to have. The scraps of pearls which are left in the manufacture of crosses and medals, and have been thrown out as refuse, sparkle and glisten in the bright sunshine, reminding one of the city above, whose gates are pearl. But the place where Christ was born is so holy that not even pearls are too precious to pave its streets.

The grotto or cave in which Christ was born is covered by a large church. Of this spot, as being the very place where the infant God was born, there never has been a doubt. The identification of it goes back to the very next century after the Ascension of Christ. The church was built by St. Helena, the mother of the first Christian Emperor, Constantine the Great, and it is the oldest place erected for Christian worship in the world. It was solidly and well built and even now bids fair to last when many of the slight structures of modern times shall have fallen into ruin. It is fifteen hundred years old; in length one hundred and twenty feet, the breadth being one hundred and ten. There are four rows of large marble columns, taken, probably, from the porches of the temple in Jerusalem. Each row contains twelve columns, each one being of a single stone, twenty feet

high, and thirty inches in diameter; they are smooth, and have handsome capitals of the Corinthian order. The roof of the church was originally of the cedars of Lebanon, but was repaired about four hundred years ago with oak. The columns were once richly ornamented, and the walls were inlaid with mosaics; these are nearly all gone, and whitewash is in their stead. The sanctuary was very beautiful, and yet retains much of the adornment of better days; but we can only see the top of the altar screen as we stand in the body of the church, for a large wall now runs entirely across the upper end of the nave, dividing it from the sanctuary. In consequence of this, the whole church looks desolate, empty, and cold. There are some cheap and mean glass lamps, a few ostrich eggs, and other trifling objects in the way of decoration, but the whole of this once beautiful and magnificent interior is desolate and neglected. Being common property of the Latins, Greeks, and Armenians, it receives care from none; or, rather, the jealousies of the Christians prevent any attempt at restoration. The stone pavement is broken and irregular. The main door of entrance from the village has been partly walled up, so that one can only enter by stooping low. This was done a long time since, to hinder the Turks from riding in on horses, mules and camels; and the barrier against this sort of desecration is effectual enough.

The sanctuary of the church is directly over the spot where our Lord was born; and was once, as it should be, rich and gorgeous as loving devotion could make it—a brave sight in the day of its perfection. Raised six feet above the level of the floor of the body of the church, it is nearly square, and is large enough to accommodate the congregation who gather there. This sanctuary is in the possession of the Greeks and Armenians; for they being richer than the Latins, have bought from the Turks the largest share in all the holy places in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

The church with its sanctuary described above, is over the crypt, or grotto, which is the glory of Bethelhem, the place where Christ was born. It is reached by a flight of steps on each side of the great sanctuary, about thirteen in number, much worn by thousands of