

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF TRAVEL.

BY ISAAC ERRETT.

After lunching at the fountain we proceeded to Bethany, now known as el-Azeriyeh. It is on the eastern slope of Olivet, and not at all imposing in appearance. The ground about it is rocky, though in ancient times it was probably terraced and cultivated, and abounded in olive and fig trees. Within a short distance is a cluster of houses called Bethphage. We were shown the house of Simon the leper, and the remains of the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The latter was a small house such as a poor or small family would be apt to live in. We descended also to what is called the tomb of Lazarus, but we had not sufficient confidence in the identity of the spot to share in the enthusiasm with which some of the very credulous of our party regarded it. We were more concerned with touching and beautiful memories of the peaceful home in which our Lord found a retreat from the angry noises and tumult of Jerusalem; where Mary sat at his feet, and Martha busied herself with the rites of hospitality; where Jesus wept over the griefs of these pious sisters and raised their brother Lazarus from the dead; whence, through this resurrection, a thunderbolt darted to Jerusalem smiting the corrupt rulers with dismay, and filling the city with a strange excitement; and whence, also, Jesus proceeded on his journey to Jerusalem from Perœa, where the multitudes met him in the way and conducted him in triumph to Jerusalem, crying "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah!" We thought, too, of the solemn pause on the way, where Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and bewailed the unbelief of her doomed population, and of that supreme moment when the risen Jesus led his disciples, after his resurrection, as far as to Bethany, and blessed them, and in their presence ascended on high to sit upon his heavenly throne and reign over earth and heaven. It has always seemed to us as if, among his last farewells, would be those to Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The whole rude scene around us was thronging with sacred and loving suggestions of His presence.

Then we rose to the crest of Olivet, and caught that view of Jerusalem which we would rather have had at first. The whole city lay before us, and we could readily trace its main divisions and leading objects. We may almost certainly fix upon the spot from which Jesus beheld the city and wept over it. From the minaret at the village of Tur, on the summit, a splendid view is obtained of Jerusalem and its environs.

Descending the mount—which, indeed, is nothing more than a ridge—we come to the garden of Gethsemane at its base. This, if not the actual site of Gethsemane, must be very near it. There are still some very old olive trees—three of them with three trunks or main branches each. These are called the Tree of the Agony, the Tree where Judas betrayed his Master with a kiss, and the tree under which the three disciples slept. All this is, of course, fanciful. Olive trees live to be a thousand years old. Indeed, however often the branches and trunks may die down, the roots still live, and a new and vigorous life may again shoot forth. It is not impossible, therefore, that these trees are, at the roots, the same as those in the shade of which our Lord prostrated himself in his agony, but it is not probable. But under some such trees as these, and somewhere near here, that remarkable agony took place.

In Gethsemane the tears flowed unbidden, and it was difficult to suppress an overwhelming gush of emotion. The venerable olive trees, the moonlight and shadow deep down here under the lofty walls and frowning battlements of Jerusalem—the Man of Sorrows in his baptism of suffering—the

sleeping disciples, the piercing cry, the bloody sweat, the approaching mob with Judas at their head: all this came before us, and the "strong cryings and tears" of the lone Sufferer, as billow after billow of despair rolled over him and submerged him, the strong angel that came down to fan him with his wings and nerve him with courage, appeared as if it were going on before our eyes, and we entered into "the fellowship of his sufferings" as never before. We were compelled to turn away to hide our emotion. Blessed Jesus! how thy pure heart was wrung with anguish for sins not thine own! How chill the shadow of death that here passed over Thee! How terrible the temptations which Satan made to swoop with tempest-power over Thee! How fearful the battle that was fought with the powers of darkness, and how glorious the victory won! and all this that, through thy dread sacrifice, the world that scorned Thee might be redeemed! Mighty strife—glorious victory! The "Leader and Commander" who here faced the terrors of death and hell that he might open the way through the thickest darkness and mightiest opposition for the redemption of guilty man, and bear him out of darkness into light, out of death into life, and would not be driven back even by the terrors and shame of the cross as it cast its terrible shadow over His spirit—what do we not owe to Him? how can we even speak his praise as we ought? We plucked a few twigs of the olive trees by permission, and turned away from the garden with chastened heart.

Our visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, while it was interesting, was disappointing and provoking. It was not that here we were pointed with all assurance to the spot where our Lord was crucified, buried and rose again; for however erroneous this judgment may be, it is not without plausible arguments in its support, and is approved by many men of learning who have given to the question much patient investigation.

We have said that there is much that is plausible, especially in ancient tradition, in favor of this as the site of the crucifixion. Our dragoman, unusually well informed on the whole question, is decidedly in favor of this site, although not ecclesiastically connected with any of the sects that hold the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in possession. He is a Protestant. His theory is, that each of the divisions of Jerusalem—Moriah, Zion, Akra, etc.—had its own wall; that at this point, where these walls approached each other, there was an open space outside all the walls, and therefore *without the city*, where Jesus was crucified, and he promised to prove this to us if he could gain access to a spot immediately adjoining the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the remains of one of the ancient walls could be seen turning at this very spot, and leaving the site now occupied by this church, *outside the wall*. Through the courtesy of the American Consul, Mr. Gilman, and the Russian officials, he secured permission for us to visit this spot—a privilege, he gave us to understand, accorded to but few. We found there the unquestionable remains of a very ancient wall, bearing the marks of Phœnician masonry. But, on examination, we discovered that the outer facing of the wall was on the wrong side—on the *inner* side, if this was indeed the outer wall of any division of the city. The remains looked as if there might have been a tower here, and these stones a part of the inner wall of the tower. It did not appear to us to warrant the conclusion our learned dragoman and others drew from it.

The New Testament may almost be said to cast contempt on times and places; at least, it attaches very slight importance to them. The very year of the birth of Jesus, and the month and the day; the precise spot of the nativity, the home in which He was reared, the precise place of His baptism, the mounts of temptation and transfiguration, the place

of His trial and condemnation, of His crucifixion and resurrection, are all dealt with by the sacred writers vaguely. May we not conclude that it was divinely intended that men should not be encouraged to waste on *times and places* that devotion which is rather due to Him whose person and work are so clearly set forth, and to the truth and righteousness he taught? We think so.

We are especially interested in visiting the Haram esh Sheriff, whose walls enclose the site of the Temple of Solomon. We were disappointed in the Mosque of Omar. It is not at all so imposing as we had supposed. Yet this Dome of the Rock possesses peculiar interest. Here, it is said, Ornan had his threshing-floor; here Abraham offered up Isaac; here David interceded in behalf of his plagues-stricken people, and here was builded the Temple of the Lord. The Haram is enclosed by a wall 1,601 feet long on the west, 1,530 on the east, 1,024 on the north, and 922 on the south. The octagonal building known as Omar's Mosque, or the Dome of the Rock, 68 feet long on each of its sides. The Dome is 98 feet high and 66 feet in diameter. The pavement is of marble mosaic. That which most attracts attention is the Sacred Rock immediately beneath the dome. It rises above the marble pavement from one foot to nearly five feet, and is about 60 feet long and 45 wide. The Mohammedans find no necessity to cover up this rock, as the church of the Holy Sepulchre covers up the rock of the crucifixion and resurrection. It is simply railed in, for no detection of imposition is feared. There is a circular opening communicating with a cave below. Descending to the cave below, we are informed that when Mohammed ascended to heaven from here, the rock started to follow him, but it was held back by the angel Gabriel, and the prints of his fingers are still shown in the rock! The guide points out to you the praying places of Abraham, Elijah, David Solomon and Mohammed. There is a slab in the center of the floor, covering the Well of Spirits, into which all spirits descend. You can see the footprint of Mohammed, hairs from his beard, a slab with three nails and a half standing in it—all that are left of the original nineteen, the rest having been driven by the devil into the stone! When what are left disappear, the end of the world will come! Let no Christian laugh at this nonsense until the sacred places of Christians are purged of shams, and frauds vastly more mischievous.

Leaving the mosque, El-Aksa, by the eastern door, we go to the south east corner of the Haram, where we descend by 32 steps to what is called the Cradle of Christ, where Simeon dwelt, and still lower down to what are called Solomon's Stables, where it is said he had his 40,000 stalls of horses (II. Ki. iv. 36). That they were afterwards used as stables by the Knights Templars is pretty certain; but that they were Solomon's stables is not so certain. The pillared and vaulted avenues may as likely have been for the storing of provisions. Going to the east wall of the Haram, one obtains a fine view, especially of the valley of Jehoshaphat. Proceeding northward, we come to the Golden Gate, or "Beautiful Gate," of the temple, where Peter and John healed the lame man (Acts iii), and soon you are shown the Throne of Solomon. Not to consume too much space in recording idle traditions, let us say that between the Dome of the Rock and El-Aksa is a marble fountain called El-Kas, or the Cup, beneath which are immense reservoirs, hewn in the solid rock, into which the water from the Pools of Solomon is said to have been conveyed.

I. E.

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THE sages and heroes of history are receding from us, and history contracts the records of their deeds into a narrow and narrower page. But time has no power over the name and deeds and words of Jesus Christ.—*W. E. Channing.*