

field of the Shepherds is about a mile from Bethlehem. An ancient writer, Daniel the Igomene, speaks of it as follows: "On going in an eastern direction from this locality (meaning the site of 'St. Joseph's house') at a little more than a verst (a Russian measure of 1166 yards) from the place of our Saviour's birth, at the foot of the mountain we find the spot where the angels announced this great mystery to the shepherds. Here there is to be seen a cavern surmounted by a church consecrated to St. Joseph, the spouse of Mary. Formerly, there was a beautiful convent likewise, but it is now in ruins. Around about this site one sees a fertile field, where the harvest is abundant, and which produces a plentiful crop of olives. It is called *Agia Pimena*, i.e., the Holy Pastures." After stating that most of the ancient writers agree upon the site just mentioned, Frère Lievin says: "Furthermore, it seems impossible to me that Bethlehem, which has always been inhabited by Catholics, and which has been able to preserve unto this day its primitive church, built by St. Helen, should have lost the true and correct tradition on this point."

Our party can, then, rest secure in the undisturbed assurance that it saw the veritable "Field of the Shepherds." Bethlehem is noted for more modern attractions, however, principal among which are the many, many stores where objects of vertu and of devotion are sold at a wonderfully low rate. *Exempli gratia*, for a dozen of beautiful mother-of-pearl rosaries, which would retail in New York, etc., at not less than fifty cents a pair, I paid only six cents a piece, and I was given to understand, afterwards, that I had been overcharged! Then, there are cute little pictures for sale, representing our Saviour in the manger, surrounded with a wreath of real flowers, grown in Bethlehem and said to have been laid in the "Crib." It is certainly well worth one's while to visit these booths and stores, even if one does not intend to buy; for they are most interesting. The people of Bethlehem are not mean artists, by any means, being quite skilful in carving and in all kinds of fancy work. But anyone who can get out of their clutches without leaving some of his cash in their hands must certainly be

a prodigy. And now I will inflict on you a description, in part, of the Basilica, which, as you will remember, I spared you in my last letter.

This superb edifice was, says Frère Lievin, one of the most beautiful jewels which the Franciscans possessed in the Orient. But now, unfortunately, it is held by the Greek and Armenian schismatics, who make use of the "choir" (sanctuary) and transept as a parish church. The "naves" (aisles), sad to say, have been converted into market stalls and into a place of rendezvous for loiterers. This grand church is situated at the extreme east of Bethlehem, and without the ancient enclosure of that city. Many buildings, which hide it in a measure from view, have risen up around it. On one side, for example, is the Franciscan monastery, which stands on a high terrace dominating the valley called by the Turks "Ouadi Djemel." On the other side are the Greek and Armenian monasteries, which serve largely to hide the noble structure. Only the pointed gable of the roof, in fact, is visible from all sides. Of the three doors which formerly led into the atrium or vestibule, the middle one alone is now to be seen, the two side entrances having disappeared under later alterations. Even the main door is greatly obstructed on the outside by vast buttresses; whilst on the inside it is all walled up, save a narrow space which resembles a ventilator or "air-hole" more than a place of ingress. The vestibule runs the entire width of the body of the church, and rises to the beginning of the lower or side-roofs. It is dark, and without adornment, being divided by partitions into three compartments, and leads into the church proper by one sole door. On passing through this a magnificent spectacle bursts upon the eye. With a glance, one takes in the five spacious aisles of thirty-five yards in length, formed by four rows of splendid columns (each a monolith) of a reddish hue, veined with white. These columns, which appear to be marble, are crowned by Corinthian capitals. At the farther extremity of the aisles—if by an act of the imagination we suppress for the moment the partition walls running across the building, which mightly