

Political and General Miscellany.

From the Jewish Intelligencer.

VISIT TO THE MOSQUE OF OMAR, JERUSALEM.

The Duke and Duchess of Brabant (son and daughter-in-law of the King of Belgium) arrived at Jerusalem on the 30th of March. Their chief object seems to have been to visit the church of the Holy Sepulchre. Every preparation was made for their reception. The tops of the houses bordering the line of their route were crowded with a mass of spectators, in all the picturesque variety of Eastern costume. Processions of Mahometans moved to and fro, preceded by red and green banners, amidst the din of kettle-drums and tambourines, and the loud and continued shouts of "Allah." Fanatical dervishes rushed frantically through the assembled crowd, lacerating themselves with their usual instruments of cruelty. Then came a long and imposing procession of Roman Catholic priests and monks, preceded by a huge veiled crucifix, and chanted as they walked before the royal party. It was in this way that they visited the church of the Holy Sepulchre; but we are more concerned in giving the following account concerning their visit to the mosque of Omar.

Saturday, the last and the most exciting day of the Passion Week, when the multiplicity of the puerilities of the Eastern churches terminate with the scene of the holy fire, will be remembered for an event of a nature and character by no means of mean importance; this being no less than the throwing open of the mosque of Omar publicly, for the first time, to a body of some three hundred Christians, who made their entry into the sacred enclosure, not in disguise, but with their colors flying as Christians.

It is a long time since a crown prince and princess have visited the Holy City, and those who have lately done so were entitled, from their connections with the most respectable monarchies of Europe, to some particular favor. This has been shown them by the Porte, by causing a firman to await the royal party on their arrival, to allow them with their suite to visit the sacred mosque; a favor which has been extended, by the liberality of our new governor, to as many of the European residents and travellers, even to native Christians, as could lay a claim to some respectability.

Four o'clock in the afternoon of the said Saturday was the time that had been fixed for all such whose names had previously been recommended and registered, to be assembled at the Governor's house, which commands one of the private entrances into the area of the said mosque. The place of rendezvous, as one might have expected, was filled quickly, almost to inconvenience, with a crowd of fashionable European ladies and gentlemen. When the general impatience had been relieved, the necessary arrangements and precautions were completed by stationing military outposts, at short intervals, within the area of the mosque, to overcome the fanatical spirits that might hover about the place. To prevent confusion, as well as to circumscribe the crowd which was continually swelling by new-comers, tickets of admission were issued, which had to be delivered into the hands of an officer at the entrance of the area.

It is not altogether unusual to find, that both the interest as well as the curiosity about objects that have been lying under the *ban of restriction* suffer considerable diminution when the restriction is removed. But this has been in no wise the case in the present instance. One and the other feeling of interest continued to deepen every step you took, and this was

strengthened still further by the sense of the past history, and the future prospects of the place, which, notwithstanding its present degraded position, shall one day be established in the top of the mountain, and exalted above the hills.

Our way on entering the arena lay across a belt of turf ground, between three and four hundred yards in width, with a tree here and there, environing all round the elevated platform on which the famous mosque of Omar, or, as it is more properly called, the mosque of the El Sakharah, which is believed to occupy the site of the temple, is situated. On our reaching the stair by which we had to ascend the said platform, we were ordered to put off our shoes, as the ground on which we were about to enter, we were reminded, was esteemed holy ground; this was the sole and only mark of reverence which the place extorted, or which the crowd of Christian visitors were willing to bestow.

The preliminary measure relating to putting off our shoes thus being taken, we ascended the said platform by the stair, consisting of twenty-four steps; the upper step of which was spanned over by four lofty triumphal kind of arches, joining one to another, from whence you obtained a most lively picture of the whole. The platform itself is a square of some three or four thousand feet in dimensions, and perfectly even, and is paved with large slabs of compact native limestone, all worn smooth and polished by time; aided, most likely, by the feet of those thousands of the house of Israel who used aforesaid to come up hither to the solemn feasts.

On the centre of the platform, which is slightly elevated above the rest, stood the pride of the Mahometan world, the magnificent mosque of the Sakharah, whose polished marble walls, set in variegated frameworks, and beautifully stained glass windows of varied colors, reflected innumerable rays of light on the polished marble pavement, by which the foremost ground of the mosque was covered. Even the melancholy sight of the celebrated inscription in the Arabic characters, which encircles the base of the dome, evincing that "*the place of our sanctuary*," was in the hands of aliens, did not detract ought from the general effect and interest which the sight awakened in the breast.

With feelings somewhat tinged with melancholy admiration, we entered within the walls of the Sakharah, where one naturally desired, but in vain for a quiet corner where he could have escaped for a few moments the restless bustle of an inquisitive crowd. The current of example dragged one, in spite of oneself, to matters which at best lie at the surface; and in company with the others, one was obliged to busy oneself with them in inspecting the marble pillars; recounting, admiring, and remarking on the beauty of the stained glass windows; on the taste displayed in the gilding of the panelled ceilings, with the delicacy of the carved work of the lofty pulpits, with the sharpness of the angles of the pentagonal form of the building, which last is as perfect within as it is without; and anon one was called upon to interpret the grave nonsense of a Mahometan guide, about the venerated and marvellous objects which the place embraces within its wide and sacred bosom commencing with the suspended rock under the centre of the dome, and closing with the locked up marble slab, which leaves the united impression of the angel Gabriel's foot and Mahomet's hand.

In the midst of these frivolities, something occurred which tended to arrest the attention of many, if not of all. A dervish, who seemed to have been neglected from being secured under lock and key, at the time when the rest of his order were ordered to be so