

from whose windows pour floods of light,—the whole forming a not unworthy environment to the last resting place of Christ's mortal body on earth.

A further idea of the vastness of the mighty building I am describing will be conveyed by the mention that there are no less than fifteen chapels (some of them of great size) as also many other apartments, under its roof and even below its ground surface. Of the latter class, the "Oratory of St. Helen" is an example. This is a subterranean structure adjacent to and communicating with the dry cistern in which our Saviour's cross was concealed by the Jews soon after His crucifixion, and where it was discovered through the efforts of that valiant woman about the year 327. This oratory, once a small but handsome church, erected by the pious empress whose name it bears, was, in fact, the nucleus of the grand temple afterwards raised by her imperial son, and which in the course of ages came to be called indifferently "the Basilica of Constantine, of St. Helen of the Resurrection and of the Holy Sepulchre"—the last being the title by which it is most commonly known in our day. I may add in explanation of the underground character of the oratory I have just spoken of, that its superior walls were destroyed, in common with those of three companion chapels covering other shrines within the area of the great basilica, when the latter itself fell beneath the ruthless assault of the Persians under the leadership of their King, Chosroes II. Fifteen years after this deplorable event, Providence marvellously ordained that the wife of the royal leader of these "vandals," herself a Christian should restore these four minor edifices, which she did under the direction of the Monk Modestus, later bishop of Jerusalem; but they were again razed to the ground in 1010 by the Caliph Hhakem, fit-

tingly surnamed the "Nero of Egypt." Other restorations followed from time to time,—the one relating to the oratory in question now consisting of a well-lighted dome rising from that portion of its ruined walls which extends into the courtyard of the present basilica, and whose elevation corresponds to the level of the ground surface. But, hastening back to the great church of the Holy Sepulchre, I may say that it is a little city in itself; for representatives of no less than five different people dwell, by night as well as by day, within its precincts. Thus, just inside the portals are the apartments occupied by the Ottoman military guard, of which I will remark that those of its members who are temporarily off duty lounge on comfortable divans in full view of visitors, smoking their "chibouks" or "nargillies," and sipping the traditional "Turkish coffee," chatting meanwhile with the perfect unconcern which is a second nature to the Asiatic. Think of this profanation amid surroundings so holy! Next, the Franciscan religious who serve the few sanctuaries still left to them within the basilica by the gradually increasing usurpations of their schismatic rivals, have their dormitory, library, kitchen, refectory and guestroom in another portion of the building. Finally, there are the Greek, the Syrian, Armenian, Coptic and Abyssinian clergy not in communion with the Holy See, all of whom have separate little households under its roof.

But this hurried sketch of the great basilica must suffice, and in my next letter I shall pass to the description of those incomparably sacred shrines, namely Mount Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre, which have made it the center of Christian love and devotion throughout the world.

(To be continued.)