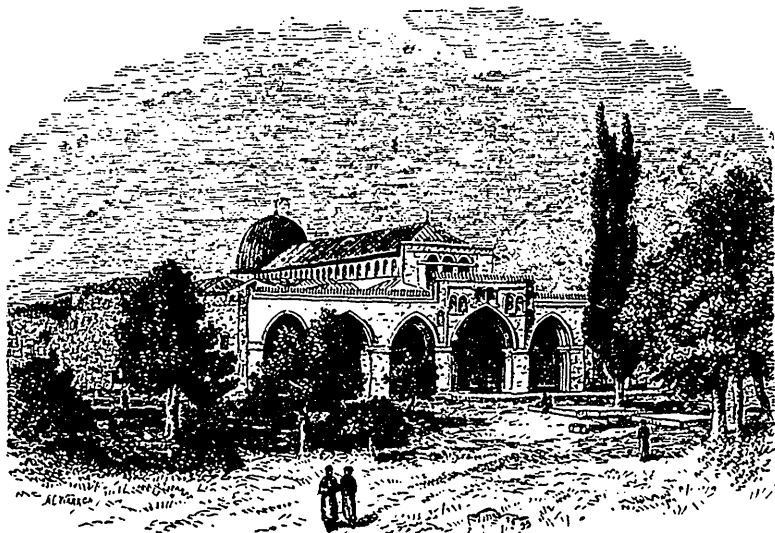


surrounded by elegant arcades and paved with fine slabs which can only be trodden, as well as the mosques, by shoeless feet. The rather meagre verdure and ragged and melancholy cypresses with which the area abounds give it a sombre and impressive character.

The Mosque of Omar, as it is often, but improperly, called, is a large and handsome octagon, covered externally with beautiful porcelain tiles and marble slabs. A frieze of interwoven characters, expressing passages from the Koran run around the building.

The origin of this building is obscure, but it is probably of Moslem structure, dating from about the year 687. The interior



MOSQUE EL-AKSA.

is 174 feet in diameter and has two concentric rows of piers and columns. The latter are of different heights and colours, having been taken from older buildings, some of them probably from the Temple of Jupiter built on this spot. One of the capitals is even said to bear a cross. In a broad blue band above the arches are ancient Cufic inscriptions in gold. They consist of verses from the Koran having reference to Christ, affirming that "the Messiah Jesus is the son of Mary, the Ambassador of God and His Word."

The dome, which dates from 1022, is nearly 100 feet high, and is richly adorned in blue and gold. The stained glass windows have an intense and marvellous richness of colour. They gleam