

We first read of it, Gen. xxxv : 19, in connection with the death of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, the story of which is told so touchingly by the patriarch, in Gen. xlviii : 7, when blessing the sons of Joseph : "As for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath ; and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath." Rachel's tomb is there to this day. The small building, with a dome, which encloses it, is comparatively modern, but the identity of the burial place is undisputed. We passed it on our right hand, a little way from Bethlehem, and entered deeply into Jacob's sorrow.

Bethlehem, too, was the scene of the beautiful story of Ruth and Naomi, and also of Boaz and Ruth, the ancestors of our blessed Lord. There David, their illustrious great-grandson, was born, and in its neighboring fields tended his father's sheep, and probably wrote the twenty-third psalm ; there, too, was the home of Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel, sons of David's sister Zeruiah, and chiefs of his mighty men (1 Chron. ii : 16) ; and there, Asahel, slain by Abner, was buried.

It is, however, the fact of its having been the birth-place of Jesus,

"Great David's greater Son."

that invests Bethlehem with the unique and absorbing interest that it possesses for the Christian traveller. We entered the little town through a long, narrow street, terminating in a square with the name of "Place de la Nativité," on the near side of which are a number of shops, in which a brisk traffic is carried on in relics and mementoes of the place, in mother-of-pearl, and olive wood ; while on the farther side stands the venerable, but not impressive pile of buildings known as the Church of the Nativity. The nave of the church is probably the oldest ornament of Christian architecture in the world, having been erected by the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, A. D. 327. Three convents adjoin the building—Latin, Greek and Armenian ; but the nave is the common property of all Christians. It is somewhat in need of repair, but it has been a noble building. Some of its marble columns are believed to have once formed a part of the temple in Jerusalem.

The "Grotto of the Nativity" is a cave in the rock, to which we descend by about thirty steps, and is incased with marble, and lighted with gold and silver lamps, which are always kept burning. On one side of this grotto, which one enters with an almost oppressive sense of its sacredness, there is a recess, on the pavement of which, inserted in the marble, is a silver star with fourteen rays,

and on this star is engraved, in capital letters, the legend—

"HIC, DE VIRGINE MARIA, JESUS CHRISTUS
NATUS EST."

which, being interpreted, is, Here, of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ was born. That this is the true site of the inn of our Saviour's nativity there is no reasonable doubt, for there is evidence of its having been known as such 200 years before the Empress Helena built the church upon it. The stable, in the manger of which the infant Jesus was laid, was probably the lower story of the Khan, or inn, that being a common arrangement in Palestine in the present day.

I will not trouble my readers with a description of the numerous commemorative chapels and altars connected with the church, such as the Altar of the Magi, the Altar of the Innocents, etc. One could not help looking, however, with a good deal of interest into the chapel, or cell, of St. Jerome, in which he spent 30 years studying, and, as Dean Stanley says, sending forth "a flood of treatises, letters and commentaries, to terrify, exasperate and enlighten the Western world," and where he translated the Holy Scriptures into the Vulgate, for, with some glaring defects, his Latin version was a grand work, placing, as it did, the Word of Life within the reach of a very large proportion of the people of his day. But we did wish his monkish notions had not doomed him to labor in so sacred a cause in such a black hole.

From St. Jerome's gloomy chamber we went to the well of Bethlehem, and drank of the water for which David so longed (2 Sam. xxiii : 13-17) and yet magnanimously refused to drink of it when obtained at so great a risk ; thence we went to view the plains of Bethlehem, a little to the east of the town, where the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, and over which the "great multitude of the heavenly host" chanted the song of the Nativity. It is impossible to describe the thoughts and emotions which rushed through me as I tried to imagine that scene. What a chorus was that ! The opening chorus of the great oratorio of the Messiah ! The first act of the divine tragedy of human redemption ! Here the Divine Lord, the Creator of all, stooped to become a helpless babe, the Holy One allied Himself with our sinful humanity ! These terraced hills heard the heavenly music, and re-echoed the song of salvation ! These fields reflected back the brightness of the celestial glory ! Blessed are the eyes that saw, and the ears that heard these wonders ; Yet even more blessed are we that now enjoy the fuller unfoldings of the divine plan, for "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they."

Ottawa.

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