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## SINAI AND THE WILDERNESS.



SINCE more or less peril attends the long journey over the traditional route of the Israelites from the "Land of Goshen" to the "Mount of God," the first care should be to secure an honest and braved dragoman.

My trust was placed in Mohammed Achmed Effendi Hedayah of Alexandria. We left Cairo one morning in February and rode through the land of Goshen by rail. We arrived at Suez before dark, and took up our quarters in a street as curious as the Mouskee in Cairo. Our coming had been heralded by our body-servant Abdullah, who preceded us to take care of our camp equipage and to secure a boat for our passage across the Red Sea.

The sail was a lovely one of about two hours, including a halt at quarantine. Our camels awaited us at the Asiatic quay, and in an hour they had carried us to the "Wells of Moses." Only a small spring of brackish water was found at the foot of a palm, but, said our devout dragoman, "it is the very place where the Israelites first encamped." Moses here sang the song of deliverance, and here Miriam's sweet tones led the hearts of the Israelites away from their tribulations.

What an event in my life it was, that first night in the desert! Everything looked larger and farther off than usual, except the stars, which seemed to come down into the clear atmosphere like incandescent lights inside their globes. The pages of a new, great volume were turned over before me, presenting all the strange, vague images of the Arabian Nights' Entertainment with lifelike realism.

The Bedouin attendants had arranged their camels on the ground in semicircular groups. Against the inward-turned haunches of the beasts our camp luggage was placed for protection from marauders. In the center of each semicircle a fire of brush and twigs had been kindled. Around these fires the more idle of the swarthy fellows squatted, and toasted their bare shins while they spun their wondrous tales and waited for their evening meal of barley cakes to bake in the hot ashes. A few of the more industrious pounded beans in stone mortars for camel fodder. This weird night-scene was made to look all the more picturesque by the red glare caught upon the faces of the Arabs, and by the twinkling high-lights which played from one awkward, protruding camel-joint to another.

We dined at 6 o'clock p. m. Our first meal in the desert was like that which followed at the end of each day—soup, boiled chicken, mutton, beans, potatoes, lettuce, bread and butter, rice pudding, oranges, nuts, figs, mandarins, and Mocha coffee. Of course as the days went on the supply of delicacies became exhausted, but we always had food enough to satisfy our enormous appetites. Breakfast consisted of meat, potatoes, oatmeal, fruit, and coffee. At noon a halt was always made, a small tent pitched, and a cold lunch partaken of chicken, eggs, fruit, and tea sufficient to sustain life until a new camp was reached at the close of the day.

Our tents were supplied with Persian rugs, an iron bedstead, a small table, and a metal pitcher and basin.

Our first sleep under cover of the tent was undisturbed until daybreak, when the growling of the camels caused us to abandon all hope of further rest. An early start was made. When our caravan rose from the desert I could see the net result of Hedayah's care and tact



and enterprise. There were seventeen camels and twenty-one attendants.

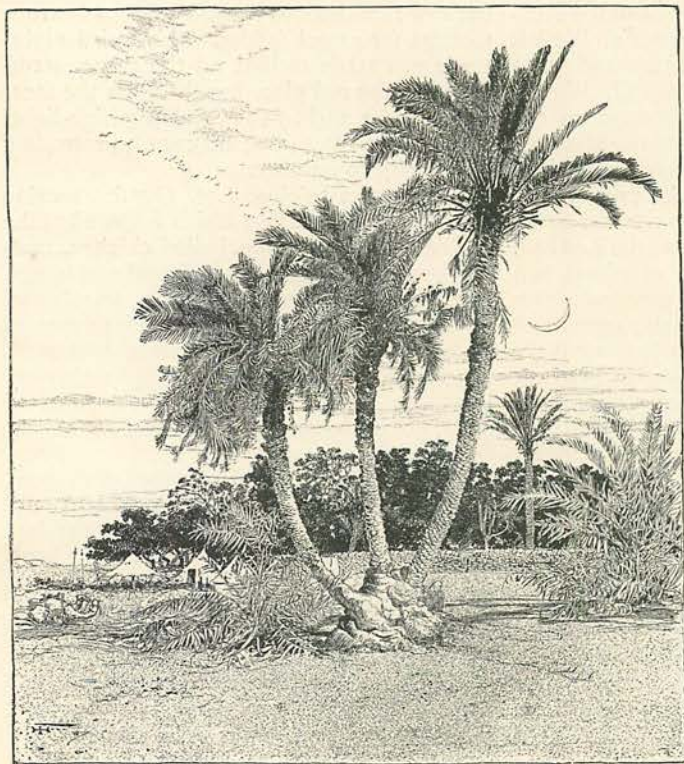
When I first saw the camels, one foreleg of each was bent up and a strong cord tied around the joint, so that the beasts, thus hobbled, could not stray out of sight. When all was made ready for the march, these bands were loosened. Upon the camels' humps were tied our tents and tent poles; casks of water, padlocked to prevent the camel drivers from stealing the scanty fluid; great boxes of provisions; sacks of charcoal and a sheet-iron stove; crates of oranges and hampers with eggs and cooking-utensils; coops of live chickens, pigeons, and turkeys; beds and bedding; and twenty solid leather trunks of photographic plates. In the caravan went two live sheep to provide fresh mutton when wanted. Six riding-camels brought up the rear. These last were saddled for the four "howadji," Hedayah, and Abdullah, whenever, tired of walking, we chose to mount them. Each camel was attended by its driver, who was usually its owner also, and took good care that it was not overtaxed.

Every night all this "outfit" had to be taken apart, assorted, and shaped into the conveniences of camp. Every morning it had to be loaded for the day's travel amidst the growls of the camels, the screeches of the

Bedouins, and the earnest commands of our dragoman. I never could decide which was the best camel or who the least profane of the Arabs. If I fixed upon one as my good camel, the next morning I would find him protesting against every pound placed upon his ugly hump. If I ventured to call Ali or Yusef my good boy, the next time we broke up camp I would find them trying to sneak off with a light load. Moreover, it cost me fifteen days of anxious watching to find the rooster whose crowing awakened me before light every morning. Each morning on hearing him outside my tent I quickly peered through the door and detected him. Abdullah was thereupon ordered to "off with his head" for the coming lunch. The next morning a cheerful voice greeted me as usual. Not until fifteen premature and unjust executions had been perpetrated was the correct chanticleer caught. He was the last of his company, and died because he could not take a hint.

The first day of travel was one of rare pleasures and surprises. Instead of having to plow knee-deep through desert sand, as I had anticipated, there was a gravelly bottom to travel upon. The air was clear and fresh, but the sun was merciless and the heat reflected from below was intense. Nearly all day the blue sea was in sight. The mirage lifted long groves of tall palm-trees, which seemed to beckon us to a welcome shade; but when we diverged a little from the track to see if they were real, the delusion disappeared and only the mountains of Tih, far over on the Egyptian side, were seen.

The second night we encamped at Wady Sürdür, where the bitter wells of Marah were visited. Only by digging in the sand could we find even salt water. But at Elim, "where were twelve wells of water and three-score and ten palm-trees," we found abundance of fresh water and a lovely spot upon which to pitch our tents for the third night. During the day we met a caravan of fifty Russian pilgrims returning to Suez from Mount Sinai. All but three were women, and all were mounted upon camels. They came from St. Petersburg. Halting,



THE WELLS OF MOSES.



they saluted us and commended us for our "holy zeal in undertaking the dangerous and difficult pilgrimage to the Mount of God."

They were in charge of a number of Bedouins, headed by Sheik Mousa, the king of all the Bedouins in the Sinai peninsula. He had been engaged as our escort and now joined us. How noble and patriarchal he looked seated upon his fleet dromedary! He was my ideal of a Bedouin chief. For forty-five days we were together, and I found him as kind and true as he had been represented to me. He came to our lunch tent at noon to plan for the journey, and after the usual time-absorbing salute had been made a presentation ceremony followed.

A rich scarlet robe of silk, lined with green, had been brought from Cairo as a gift to the Arab king, and it fell to my lot to make the presentation speech. At the close I was requested by the king first to try on the royal robe that he might for himself see how it looked. I was a little taller than he, and if the robe fitted me nicely, it would do for him. I assented, whereupon he promised me a brother's protection through the tribes of his kingdom, and agreed to intercede with the sheik at Akabah for our safe conduct to Petra.

This ceremony ended, a still more picturesque scene followed — the discussion of the journey to be taken. With his fingers Mousa drew upon the sand a map of the pear-shaped Sinai peninsula. A depression at the right was the Red Sea. A similar one on the left served for the Gulf of Akabah. An English walnut served to mark the locality of Mount Sinai, and the oases were indicated by chicken-bones. An egg-shell served for Akabah and an orange-peel stood for Petra, while bits of stones served to show where tribes of Bedouins were probably encamped. Winding lines were drawn in the sand to represent the

wadies which led from one place to the other, the sand which rose at each side of the royal finger serving to mark the chains of mountains over which we must travel. Then the whole map, thus laid out, was discussed, and the chances of escape from unfriendly tribes were considered. The map I could readily



THE WELLS OF ELIM.

understand, and the eloquent gestures of my two companions — for such they became — were not hard to interpret. It was finally decided to follow the coast where practicable, and at other times to keep to the wadies nearest to the sea.

After the consultation closed we moved on through Wady Gharandel to Elim. Each hour the country about us grew more and more picturesque. The red light of the setting sun shone upon some rocky cliffs in the distance near the sea, until, the sun gone, the Arabian moon changed them into silvery profiles. At about 8 p. m. we found our tents at Elim, with those of another American party pitched near them.

The hills about Elim are several hundred feet high. The oasis seems charming to one after having traveled over the dead desert for

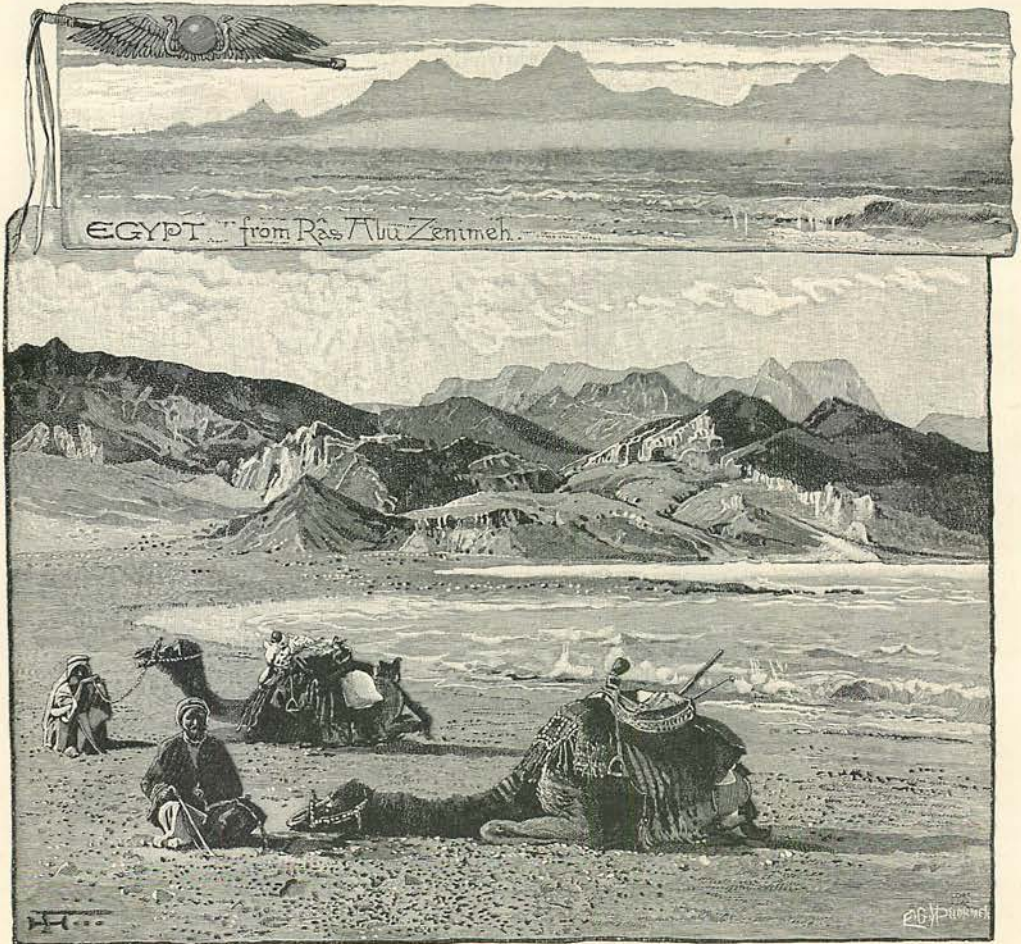


several days. Groves of palm, acacia, juniper, tamarisk, and colocynth abound; and among the wells is one living, bubbling spring, from which we drank and took a fresh supply of "sweet water."

Here and there tiny wild-flowers were found. At every turn in the wady the hills grew more shapely, and lovelier in color. Elim is a lovely spot, the clear waters and shade-giving palms of which delight the desert traveler. On the

like an immense wall, a great mountain range arose, and cast a grateful shadow over our pathway. It led us directly to the gorgeous colored side of Jebel Taiyibeh, whose cones and cliffs were built up of strata running diagonally from the sea, of brown, amber, orange, red, purple, white, gray, marl green, and black.

How glorious was the sight of so much water once more! We could not drink it, but it was cool and clean, and we could enjoy a



BY THE RED SEA.

way to the sea, south and east, two rivals to "the true Elim" were found. The first is but a flat, damp spot, scarcely worth mentioning; the second is a somewhat extensive oasis, and has a tiny stream running through it out into the wady and thence to the sea. But our unanimous vote accorded with tradition in believing that all the honors of Elim belong to the first oasis.

Now came a series of surprises. As we broke through the grove of palms, suddenly,

bath in it. It united its hoarse bass notes with the plaintive treble of the tiny stream which near by gave up its individuality to the waves. Here the mountains seemed to halt and draw back. Passing them, we turned to the left and followed down the coast. Beyond a long line of naked peaks we caught the first glimpse of Mount Serbal. Over the sea, we could once more make out the Egyptian hills, just as the murmuring Israelites saw them when moving along this very shore.





BEDOUIN TYPES.

That night we also "encamped by the Red Sea," in "the very place," we were assured, "where the children of Israel encamped after leaving Elim." An extensive plateau is here, bounded on three sides by picturesque hills and on the west by the Red Sea. It is an enchanting spot. The colored hills resemble long rows of towers with pointed roofs, one tier reaching above another, while the peaks on the Egyptian side seemed then like faint gray clouds. It is truly a desert place compared with Elim. It proved much less friendly in its treatment of the stranger, for twice during the night it sent airy emissaries ashore to pull out my tent-pins from the conniving sand and to tumble my tent down upon my head.

Next morning the camera caught the choicest of the curious rock-pictures. Nature had been in a freakish mood — it was one of those efforts of hers which defy pen, palette, and photography. Sometimes the elevations seemed like the heaped-up refuse of a foundry; at other times as if the entire circuit had been undermined and thrown back by the searcher for gems as he delved into the mysteries of the mountain. The spaces between gave the shadows a chance to help bring out the admirable forms into bold relief. Sometimes the mountains fairly stepped into the sea, or had tumbled down great masses from their steep inclines to make it rougher for the pilgrim. The sea, too, presented some fine studies in iridescence. One moment the glistening water lies as calm and placid as a lake of ice; suddenly it is all in a quiver, and its broad expanse becomes broken up into belts of the most striking colors.

Towards midday we began to move in an easterly direction and our path ascended. Frequently we climbed to what resembled the crater of a volcano. Grouped together below was usually found a varied collection of forms



PEDDLING IBEX HEADS.



like spires, pinnacles, domes, and stalagmites of color reminding one of the scene within the awful throat of Mount Vesuvius.

Towards night the old-time Egyptian copper mines of Māghāra, in Wady Keneh, were reached. The ruins of an old temple near by bear the cartouches of Rameses II.

We encamped that night in a deep valley the surroundings of which reminded me of those of Crawford Notch, only the mountains were bare of all foliage, and there was no lake nor any tumbling cascade.

During the next day we passed through the "Written Valley," where Sinaitic inscriptions are found plentifully upon the rocks. In other respects the surrounding mountains are less interesting than those already passed on the way.

A small land-slide came tumbling down on the left. It was started by a line of sheep and goats which stood, with an amused sort of look, watching our caravan. Their shepherdess attempted to hide from our sight, but persuasive backsheesh induced her to submit to the ordeal of the camera. She refused to remove her face-veil, but permitted a full view of her trinkets. While posing her I made the following inventory of her neck and head gear. On the top of her head four trousers-buttons were united by cords in the form of a Greek cross. Near each temple was an iron harness ring, one and one-quarter inch in diameter and one-eighth inch thick, tied to the lower combination. From these rings down to the edges of the face-veil ran two pieces of iron and brass jack-chain. From the rear button, over the part in the hair, a cord ran backwards. Bunches of beads hung from the cords at her temples, and a lot of beads with a silver disk as large as a Bland dollar hung from each ear. Three bracelets of turquoise and amber graced each arm, and from one of them dangled a brass navy button. There were rings on her fingers and thumbs. Nineteen dazzling necklaces hung around her neck—some of turquoise, some of amber, while some were of silver, and one was made up of the iron ferules from the sticks of tourists' umbrellas.

Mount Serbal was often seen during this afternoon. Before night we came to "the rock struck by Moses," as recorded in Exodus xvii. 6, and referred to so graphically in Numbers xx. 7-11. The rock is isolated. It is 20 feet wide by 12 feet high. A deep cut runs down its side—"the mark of Moses' rod"—whence flowed the waters of Meribah and Massah. The mountains on all sides appeared more and more impressive as we climbed the steep pass which led us to the oasis of Pharan, or Wady Feiran. Above all others we saw the jagged peaks of the giant

Jebel Serbal—different in form and in color from its neighbors.

Here we came to a steep, narrow defile, and our carefully stepping camels were made more careful by the quick, sharp cries of their drivers—"Ooah! edock! hutta!" ("Look out! step carefully!") which admonition seemed to be repeated to us by the echoing peaks as though warning us not to approach. But the odor of apricot, orange, peach, and cherry persuaded us upward and onward. Soon we arrived at the oasis and heard the song of a tiny brook, and soon saw small gardens and rude stone houses. A lad met us and gave us some cherries which tasted like apples. The lovely bulbuls were flitting among the trees, and regaled us with their sweet, wild notes, and for the first time we heard the plaintive bleat of a baby camel. Our baggage camels had arrived before us and our tents had been pitched near the stream. My own tent door opened upon the wide, steep Wady Áleyát, which is lined by lofty peaks of gneiss, the varied colors and eccentric shapes of which reminded me of the fantastic trickery of the kaleidoscope.

We were among the relics of the ancient city of Pharan, or Paran, and could see monastic ruins on nearly every mountain incline. Carefully irrigated palm groves, rice fields, and fruit orchards abounded, and all were in their spring-time glory. We saw a Bedouin gathering manna. We could see the very crags upon which the sentinels stood, whence, in olden times, when danger approached, they gave the alarm to their fellow-townsmen below. It was here that Mr. George Ebers placed the scene of his charming romance "Homo Sum."

In front of my tent, at the right, I could see the battle-field where Israel contested with Amalek for possession of the very stream which was singing to me at that moment. In the distance the five points of majestic Serbal rose far above the intervening mountains. I was "pitched in Rephidim," and remained four days. The points of interest there are almost as numerous as they are at Mount Sinai.

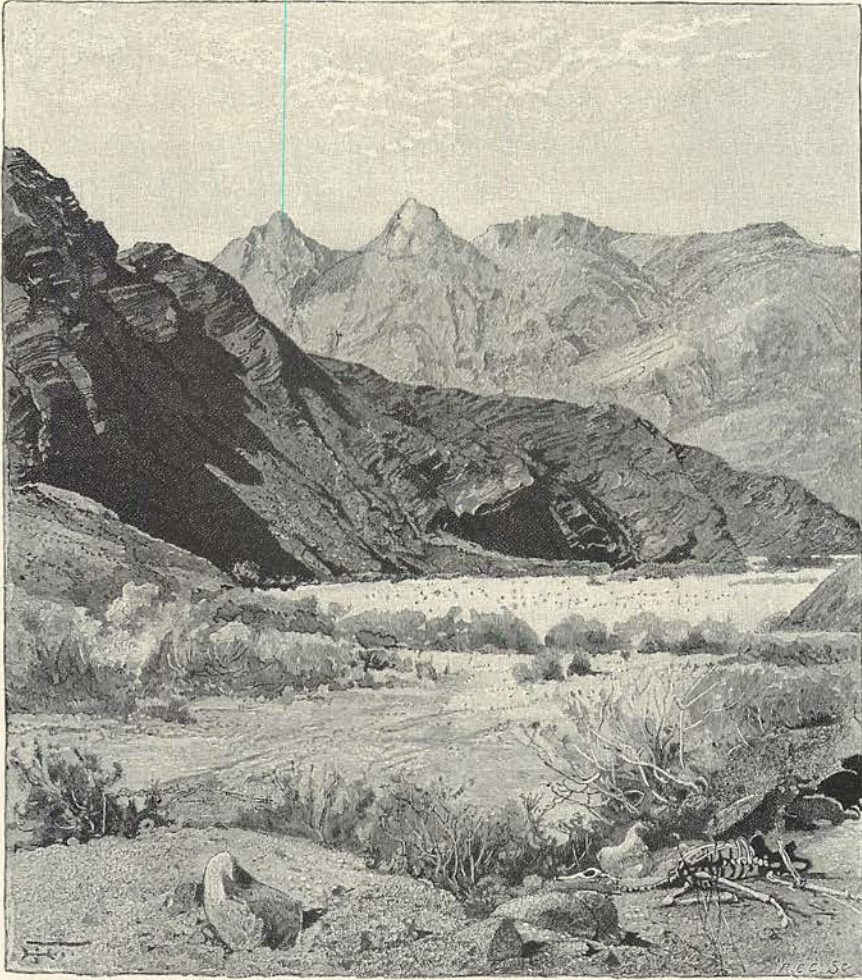
The ruined houses of ancient Pharan are all built closely together, and are of unquarried stone, except the doorways. Here dwelt the persecuted Christians and those who came here to shun the temptations of the world by hiding from them.

Near by, in the face of a neighboring jebel, or mountain, are the caves of the anchorites. In each of these numerous narrow excavations, sheltered only by the low stone roof, once dwelt, year after year, a man whose only bed was of dried herbs, and whose only garment was a sheepskin. Men who had grown tired of



the world came here to carry out their own independence and particular mode of penance without subjection to any other authority than their own conscience. Almost every rock has been an altar or has echoed the amens of an anchorite. From the fertile plateau an

summit of the mountain affords a magnificent view of the surrounding country. The wadies which encircle it are as level as a race-course. Joshua and Amalek could have pursued one another endlessly there but for the uplifted hands of Moses.



WADY FEIRAN, SITE OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND AMALEK.

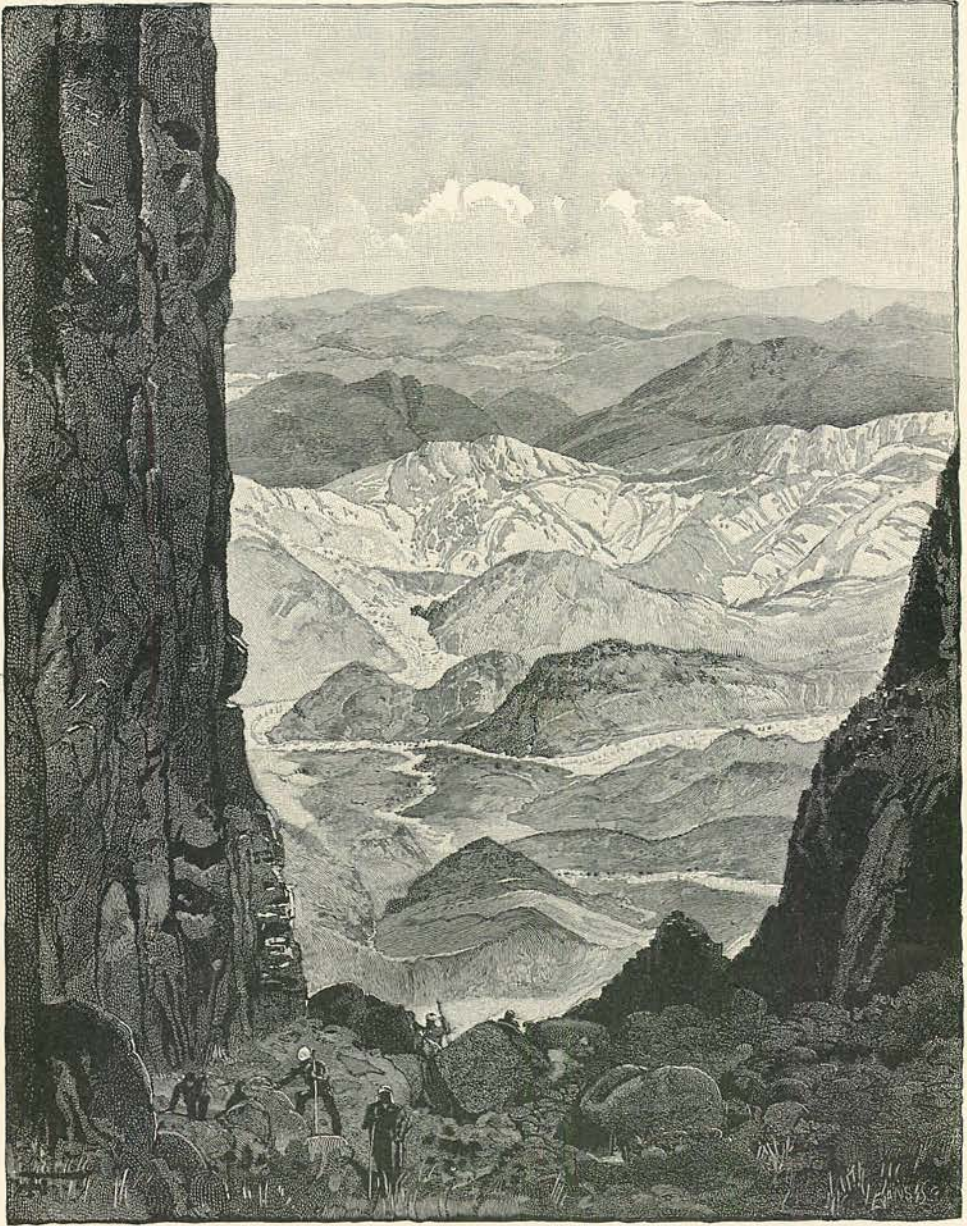
isolated hillock rises which, seen from a height, looks like an island in the oasis. On its top are the ruins of a church and of the "Oratorium." Lining the pathway leading to the church are several ruined chapels. This island, so to speak, is Jebel El Meharret—the "Mountain of Moses."

Here Moses was stationed during the battle of Rephidim, and prayed for the success of Joshua against Amalek, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands. On all sides are remains of the walls constructed by the citizens of Pharan to fortify themselves against the attacks of the marauding Saracens. The

The whole battle could be witnessed by the great commander, no matter at which side of the mountain the skirmishes took place. The largest space, and therefore the most probable place, is on the side towards Mount Serbal. Close by, still full of life and health and good cheer, is "the innocent cause of the war," the lovely brook which waters the palm groves and gardens of Wady Feiran.

The climb to the highest peak of Mount Serbal is avoided by many tourists because they do not believe it is the true Sinai, or because it is too laborious. We started up the wady on camels, at 5:40 A. M. The nearly





THE ASCENT OF MOUNT SERBAL.

full moon was still shining, and bathed with a tender radiance the rugged cliffs. Two hours of slow winding and climbing over the porphyry-strewn path brought us to a deep ravine between two of the five peaks of the noble mountain. There we dismounted and continued the ascent on foot.

The ascent grew more and more difficult — sometimes almost perpendicular. After much hard work a crag was mastered that looked from below as though it reached the clouds; but

beyond it was disclosed another height more difficult to gain and more dangerous than the first. Finally a narrowing of the gorge was reached, and we turned about to obtain a backward view. We could then overlook many of the points referred to, and see the whole line of the Wady Áleyát, up which we came on our camels. Beyond are hundreds of peaks, over whose granite shapes narrow lines of red porphyry creep like enormous serpents. At the left was a bare perpendicular cliff, fully



three thousand feet high, with not an inch friendly enough to offer a foothold. The sight was appalling. We now turned to our work again and clambered on, sometimes on all fours, resting wherever a hospitable rock offered us shade. Frequently we found small quantities of ice and snow, and made some iced tea.

At last the summit of the highest peak was gained. So clear was the atmosphere that we could overlook almost the whole of the Sinai peninsula. On the one side was the sea where Pharaoh's host wrestled with the returning waves. On the other, Solomon had sailed his fleets. On the south side the "Mountain of the Law" stood forth, and I know not how far one could see through the clear atmosphere beyond. There seemed to be hundreds of mountains in view sleeping at our feet. Among them crept the light serpentine wadies innumerable, including those we had traveled during our journey from Suez and the ones we must follow to reach Mount Sinai and Akabah. It was down towards the south where Moses lost his way.

To me the most expansive view seemed to be towards the west, where the line of the Red Sea glistened like a silver cord bordered by the mountains beyond, and fringed more roughly by a line on this side. We saw the two caravan routes which led through deep and stony gorges to the sea, and through which pilgrims for thousands of years had come to worship God; they were sometimes followed by natives of the peninsula who came to sacrifice to *their* gods—the sun, moon, and stars—upon the very peak where my camera was placed. Upon the same height great beacon-fires were often kindled to guide and warn the mariners of both seas. It is still called "El Madhawwa" (light-house) by the Arabs. Sinitic inscriptions are plentiful upon the rocks.

Grand as the views are, they did not impress me as much as those obtained at the base of the perpendicular cliff during the ascent. Several hours were occupied with resting, work, and observation, and then, reluctantly, the perilous descent was undertaken. Sometimes a rock was started that would crash and split into a thousand pieces as it rolled. Hedayah called it "a good Roman road," but our attendants were nearer right when they named it "the road of the sweater." Just as we reached our waiting camels at the base, the sun was again playing upon the five points of Serbal. Then the light went out; the wady grew cool. With delight we hailed the rising moon, for then our sure-footed camels stepped with more confidence and we felt safer.

Next day, at 7:30 A. M., we broke camp at Wady Feiran. The gardens and groves of

the oasis continued for over a mile. A fellah was seen irrigating the land with an Egyptian shadoof. Flocks of sheep and goats were numerous. Frequently the Sinai group could be seen for a moment, though far to the south. The day was so hot that we did not venture to pitch our lunch tent at noon. We ate and rested beneath the shadow of a great rock, much to the amazement of a Bedouin shepherdess who watched us on the sly.

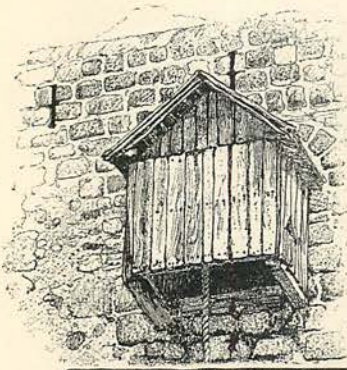
Early in the afternoon we reached two perpendicular cliffs about sixty feet high and only a few feet apart. They form the "Gate of Sinai." About 6 P. M. we arrived at a point in Wady Hawá where we expected to find our tents ready for the night, but no tents were to be seen. Abdullah had misunderstood his master, and had camped in a more distant wady with a similar name. We were not lost, but our tents were, and it took three hours of tired riding to discover our camp.

We reached Nagb Hawá the next afternoon. (A nagb is a rough mountain pass, filled with rocky débris driven down by the torrents from the steep inclines on either side.) No one who has climbed it will ever complain that "Jordan is a hard road to travel." Moreover, he will acknowledge that one of the greatest blessings accorded the murmuring children of Israel was that "their shoes waxed not old upon their feet." Frequently, while ascending this nagb, it was more comfortable for us to dismount and walk. It was more merciful to the camels too. The ascent of Mount Serbal was scarcely more difficult. At times the way seemed almost past finding out, and a "dead-lock" occurred. Trees had grown up among the rocks so as to form an impregnable wall in places. To flank these was the only way to advance.

At one point we found a tiny spring among the juniper bushes. There we quenched our thirst, lunched, and photographed the welcome little "fountain." Then the camels came, and drank the spring dry. Some of the camel drivers were indignant that we did not allow the camels to have all the water. Long before emerging from the nagb, while climbing its last ascent, the isolated group of mountains called the "true Sinai" loomed up in the distance.

It does not seem high, because it was yet half hidden from our view by the intervening hill. As soon as this hill was mastered the plain of El Raha, or "Plain of Assemblage," came into full view, with the Sinai range at its southern extreme. The combination was satisfying—convincing. Here was the one great feature the want of which prevented Mount Serbal from contesting for the honors of Sinai. There is no plain in the vicinity of

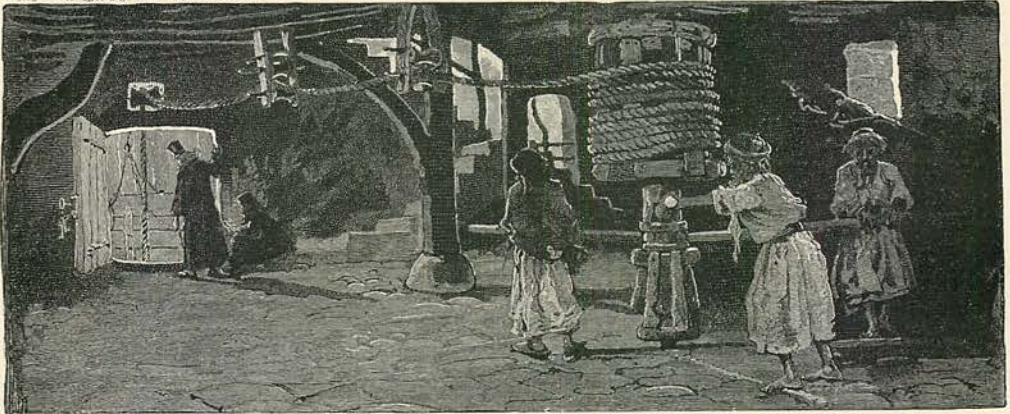




Serbal extensive enough to accommodate an assemblage as large as Moses led. But here is a vast plateau of sufficient extent, and, as we shall presently see when we view it from Mount Sinai summit, so lo-

driver, sat down beside me. He hardly seemed to understand my actions, and at last interrupted my reverie by exclaiming, as he pointed to the lofty group, "Jebel Mousa—Tayeeb!" ("Mountain of Moses—good!") He also revered it, for he was a Mohammedan.

What impresses the American traveler most sensibly here is the fact that although mountains abound, and stream-beds are more plenty than in our own White Hills, a cascade or a waterfall is never heard. When the rains fall, the water rolls down these bare, rough diagonals uninterrupted, and empties into the wadies,



WORKING THE ELEVATOR.



THE WAY INTO THE CONVENT IN TIME OF TROUBLE.

cated that Moses could overlook it all when he read the Law. This must be the "true Sinai,"—the very mountain upon which the glory of the Lord rested in the sight of the people. When facing its awful, stately grandeur, I felt as if I had come to the end of the world. How many pilgrims had come from all parts of the earth to this very spot to reverence, to sacrifice, and to worship!

I dismounted to contemplate the sublime panorama, and Elishuel, my camel

which in turn impetuously roll the torrents into the sea with great speed, before the parched earth has time to absorb more than a mere surface supply.

What a surprise, then, when, arrived at the highest ridge of the vast plateau of Er Raha, to see a bright oasis full of trees laden with the rich blossoms of spring, backed by the strange, contrasting, gloomy walls of the Convent of Saint Catherine. No location could be more charming—in the narrowing valley, nestled at the feet of the closely protecting mountains. Upon the highest ramparts are set both the cannon and the cross. It was both castle and convent we were approaching. More than once the inmates have been obliged to defend themselves against the marauder. At one time every monk was massacred. Since then more care has been exercised. We were obliged to prove our friendship before we could gain admittance. We could not even encamp in the neighborhood until our credentials were examined and approved.

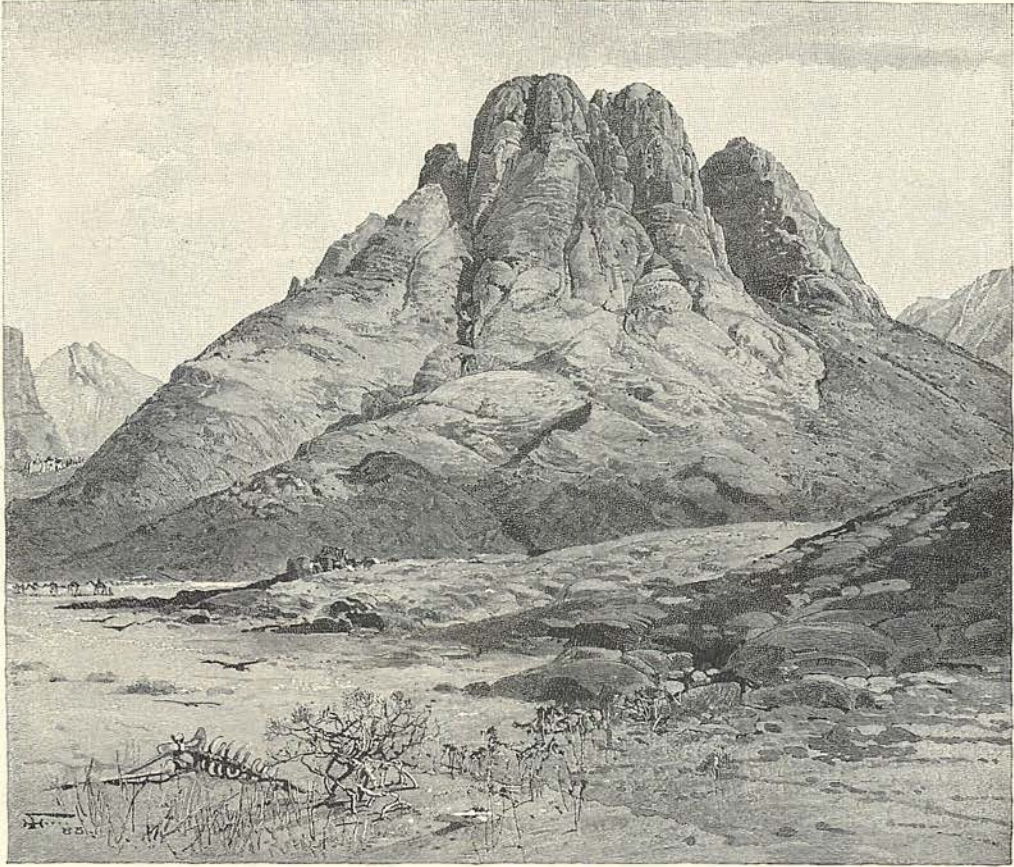
Arriving at the convent wall we sent up a shout to the top. In the course of time the voice of a monk sent down a squeaky response. To a point near the top of the wall a tiny structure shaped like a dog-kennel is attached. From this a small rope was let down, to which



we attached our firman, or letter of introduction, obtained at the branch institution at Suez. This was hauled up slowly and soon answered by a great noise in the aerial kennel. Then a thick cable was lowered to us and we

and pounded upon by mallets to call the devout monks to prayer.

At the left of the campanile is a Mohammedan mosque, suffered here to pacify the Bedouins, but not used. Under the curious roofs



RAS-SUFSAFEH, FROM THE PLAIN OF ASSEMBLAGE.

were asked to "Get in and come up." But the low gate in the wall was swung open at that moment, and we chose to enter the convent by it rather than to go up by cable.

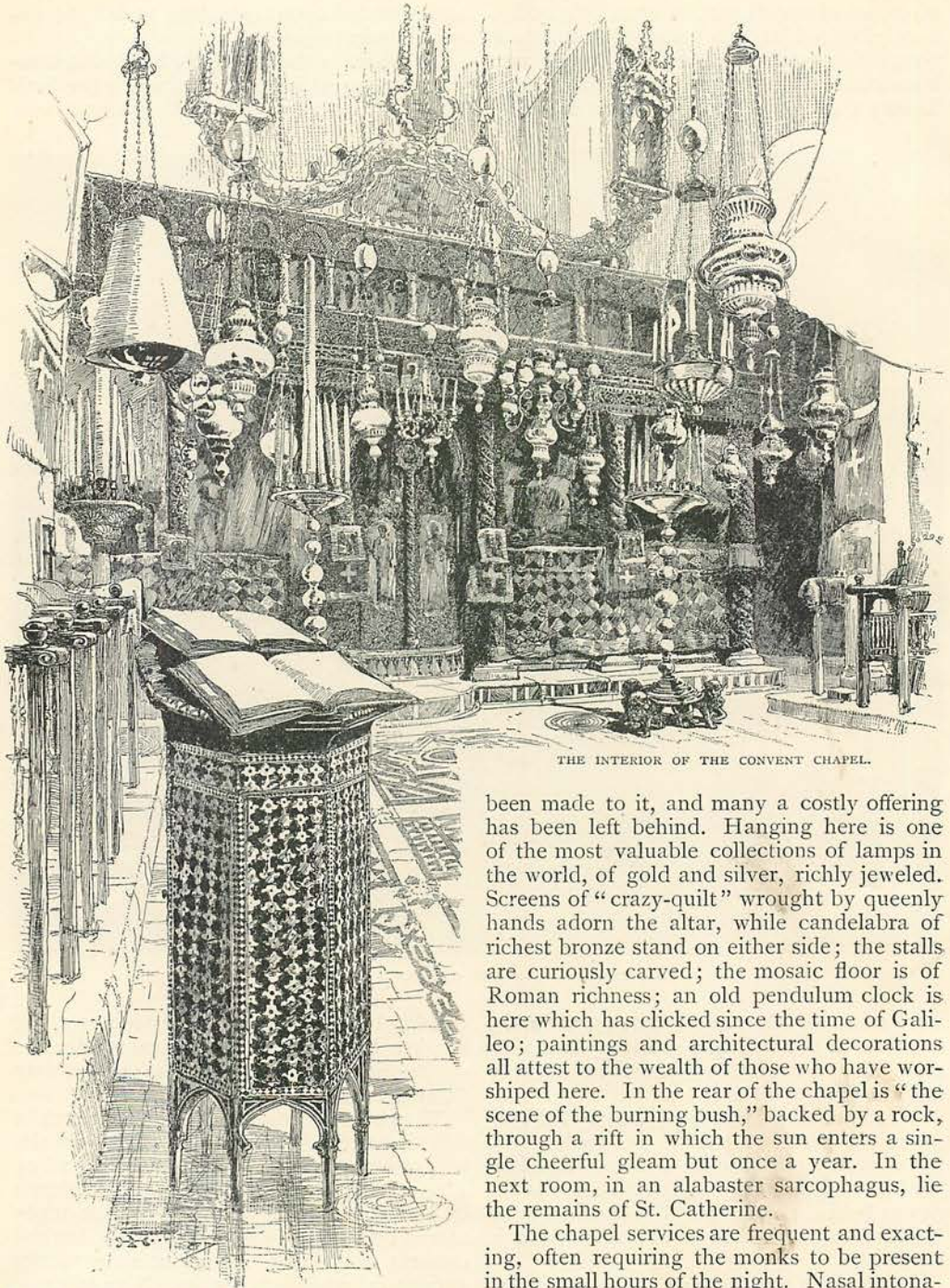
When we arrived at the quarters of the superior we saw that the cable was not let down hand over hand, but that a clumsy windlass, worked and turned by Bedouin serfs, was the power behind the throne. The combination is believed to be the first passenger elevator in the world.

From the veranda near the "lift" a fine view of the convent buildings outside the walls was had. On the right is the chapel, with its lead roof, built more than 1300 years ago. Near it is a modern campanile, reminding one of Venice. Several bells hang in it, but their ringing irritates the Bedouins, so beams of hard, sonorous wood are swung from ropes

of other buildings are the living-rooms of the monks. From the several verandas open the dormitories. A waggish sort of uncertainty prevails in the architecture.

The plain of Er Raha lies on the north in full view from the superior's piazza. On the left, or west, is the "Mount of God and of Moses." It seems as though no semblance of humanity should remain in a place made sacred by so many holy associations, but the convent is inhabited by about sixty monks varying in grades of sanctity. Nine of them yielded to our camera. A beardless youth afforded us considerable amusement. Repeatedly he came to me, with tears in his eyes, and begged for some recipe to make his beard grow. He said that he would not be allowed to read chapel service until he had a beard; that nearly all the monks but him had beards,





THE INTERIOR OF THE CONVENT CHAPEL.

been made to it, and many a costly offering has been left behind. Hanging here is one of the most valuable collections of lamps in the world, of gold and silver, richly jeweled. Screens of "crazy-quilt" wrought by queenly hands adorn the altar, while candelabra of richest bronze stand on either side; the stalls are curiously carved; the mosaic floor is of Roman richness; an old pendulum clock is here which has clicked since the time of Galileo; paintings and architectural decorations all attest to the wealth of those who have worshiped here. In the rear of the chapel is "the scene of the burning bush," backed by a rock, through a rift in which the sun enters a single cheerful gleam but once a year. In the next room, in an alabaster sarcophagus, lie the remains of St. Catherine.

The chapel services are frequent and exacting, often requiring the monks to be present in the small hours of the night. Nasal intonations, uneasy undulations, and incense-swinging make up the cheerless performance.

but God withheld the boon from him. It looked to me like a case of soap and water; but I desired to be charitable, and suggested a remedy, for which he gave me his benediction.

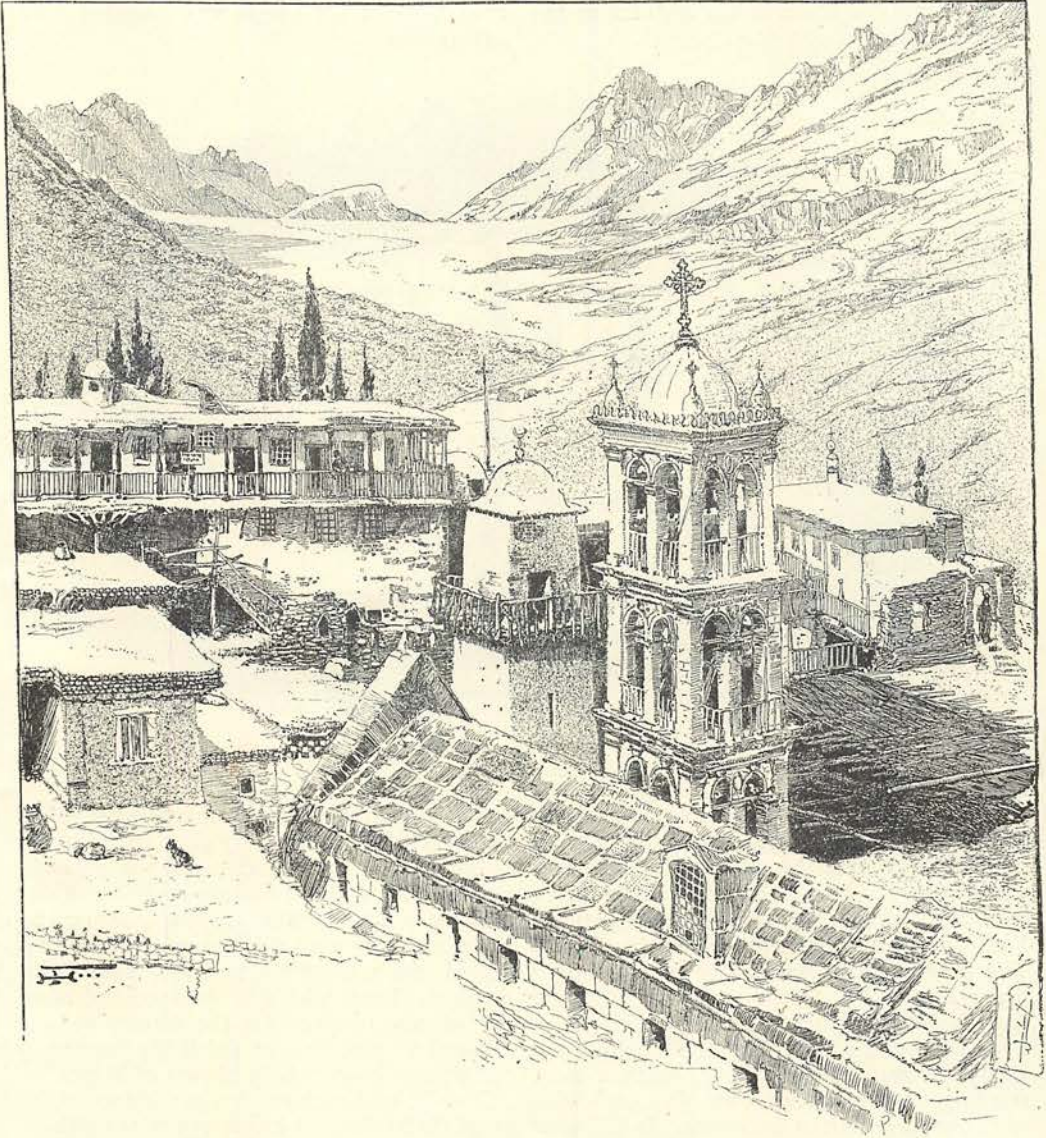
Few places are more interesting than the interior of the chapel of the convent. Ever since the time of Justinian royal pilgrimages have

Many valuable books and manuscript copies of the Scriptures are in the convent library. The superior has been very chary of these since Tischendorf got away the manuscript of the Codex Sinaiticus. I found a copy of



the famous "Book of the Gospels," dating from the time of Theodosius II., A. D. 766. The whole work was written in Greek letters with gold on parchment. The cover was of metal. Colored portraits of the apostles em-

The next thing to do was to ascend Mount Sinai. There are three or four routes, all of which are full of interest. We were led by one of the monks. The fraternity had constructed a rude stone stairway part of the distance,



PLAIN OF ASSEMBLAGE, FROM THE CONVENT.

bellished it, with backgrounds of burnished gold. I asked the privilege of photographing some of the pages, but the superior said, "I cannot allow it to go out of my hands."

"Very well, then," I said; "bring it out into the light of the court and hold it in your hands while I photograph it."

He generously assented to this, and I thus secured two pages of the precious Codex Aureus.

which out of respect for them we followed. The morning was glorious. We started early, that we might have the help of the clear, cool, sweet air in climbing the heights before the merciless Asiatic sun had so shortened the shadows as to deprive us of any protection by them.

After twenty minutes the old "Shrive Gate" was reached. Here in former days the pilgrims partook of the sacrament, received ab-



solution, and a certificate of church standing which enabled them to pass the second gate unchallenged. This shrive service was rendered for many years by an old monk whose devotion won for him the name of "Saint Stephen." His skeleton is preserved prominent among the bones of his brethren in the crypt near the garden gate.

party, during my stay in the neighborhood, preferred, "for the sake of novelty," to live in the convent rather than in tents. When they made their departure they assured me that they had had plenty of novelty, including a startling abundance that seemed to prove that the good work of the Virgin was intended for a former time.



"THE BOOK OF THE GOSPELS," KEPT IN THE CONVENT.

The crags and peaks which now came into view ahead and on every side were all the more impressive because the sun had not yet penetrated the shadows. In one shady place we found a small spring called "Jethro's Well," but not believed to be the "true" well. The monks have arranged so many "holy" places convenient to their convent that one may have the privilege of making a selection.

At this point I turned and looked down the gorge we had been climbing, when a most startling view rewarded me. On each side were the dark walls of the ravine. In full view below was the monastery, and the mountains east covered with the glory of the morning sun. The coloring was superb. I could not reproduce it by my art, but I caught the light and shade.

In a quarter of an hour the "Chapel of the Virgin" was reached. It is a small, homely structure of granite, and was erected by the grateful monks in honor of the occasion when the Virgin relieved the convent perpetually from a plague of fleas. Another American

The second gateway was reached just as the god of day flamed his ruddy glow up the ravine at our left. It scarcely changed the gray old stones of the massive gateway, but through its arch we saw a wondrous display of shape and color. At this gate the ancient pilgrim presented the credentials received from Saint Stephen. Then, with sins absolved and heart full of new resolves for the future, he was allowed to pass and to finish his journey to the summit of the "holy Mount of Moses."

Two little chapels erected in memory of the prophets Elisha and Elijah are next reached. In one the grotto where Elijah hid after he had slain the priests of Baal is shown. Near at hand is a depression in a rock, in shape resembling a camel's track. "It is the foot-mark of the camel of Mohammed, made when ascending to heaven with his master on his back."

Climbing on amidst the natural glories which surrounded us, we came to the "true well of Jethro." A tiny oasis surrounded it, where some flocks of sheep and goats were grazing. These made a realistic picture, and called to





THE ASCENT OF MOUNT SINAI.

mind the Bible story of the gallant young fugitive from Pharaonic justice who came here and drove away the Arab shepherds that annoyed the daughters of Jethro while they were watering their flocks. And here it must have been that Moses wooed Zipporah and won her Arab heart. Surely it was a charming trysting-place for patriarchal lovers, and even now is the beauty-spot of the climb, kept fresh and lovely as it is by the perennial snows of the sacred mountain.

Only the rugged beauties of nature allured during the next half-hour. The hardest climbing of all followed, for the blazing sun was full upon us at the left.

At last the summit of Jebel Mousa, the "Mount of God and of Moses," was reached, and we could look beyond.

In the Sinaitic group there are three points which are claimed to be the true spot where Moses met Jehovah and received the tablets of the Law. These are the summits of "Jebel Mousa," "Jebel Katherina," and "Jebel Sufsafeh." On the summit of Jebel Mousa is a rude chapel and a rudermosque, both of stone. Neither would afford much protection to a traveler during a mountain storm. Any one of the three caves under the rocks shown as "the true cave where Moses hid when Jehovah passed by" would be safer. One of these caves is triangular in shape, and is located near the chapel.

The summit of Jebel Mousa is 7359 feet above sea level, and 2360 feet higher than the convent. It requires 3000 steps to reach it. Jebel Katherina is 8526 feet high, and more alpine in its character than its rivals. From all of them the views are glorious. But the view from Jebel Mousa is disappointing, for the same reason that Jebel Serbal's outlook is — there

The Shrine Gate





THE CONVENT, FROM MOUNT SINAI.

is no plain in sight where Israel could have had room to assemble. The view from Jebel Katharina is alike unsatisfactory. Let us make an observation from the summit of Jebel Sufsafeh. To obtain it we retraced our steps as far as Jethro's Well and then entered a wady to the left. Two small ravines were crossed when a third and deeper one was found, wherein a rude chapel stands, partly shaded by a small willow-tree. From this tree the peak we are about to ascend takes its name — Ras es Sufsafeh (the "Mount of the Willow"). Climbing the steep and rocky gorge ascending from the tree, we gained the summit of Sufsafeh. From that standpoint one mighty prospect of barren peaks is presented, bounded only by the desert and the seas; and there, at the foot of the

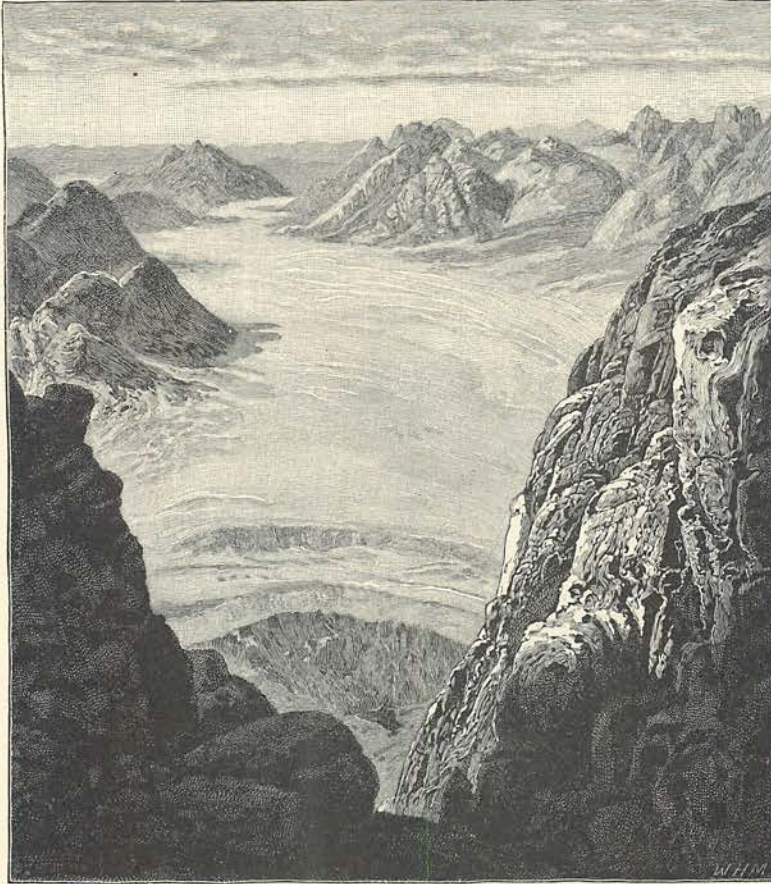
mountain, lies a vast plateau — the plain of Er Raha. It must be the "Plain of Assemblage," and it must be that this is the "Mount of God and of Moses."

I could hear the voices of the natives living in the tiny oasis at the base, more than a mile away.

The beauty of the scene is very great. No accessories of snow or river or foliage are there, and none are needed — nor distance — to "lend enchantment to the view." Would that I could picture what I saw! The rugged "Rock of Moses" lay at my feet, as black as the shadow at its side. Across the plain, on each side, the crag-crowned mountains were glowing with streams of ruby color. Nature seemed preparing for some great spectacle.



The "Pass of the Winds."



PLAIN OF ASSEMBLAGE, FROM THE ROCK OF MOSES.

The horizon was submerged in a molten sea of flame, while the sea, now blue, now green, now golden, now as red as blood, was all in a tremor. Now gray veils of misty fabric began to rise from the shadowed plain, moving to and fro like specters. Then the solid amethyst of the western sky was rent, and stripes of turquoise were discovered between. There was not a sound. Quickly, as though by the deft turning of some mighty wheel, the glorious coloring disappeared. Not even the sea could be discerned. The lights went out. The metamorphosis was hastened, the after-glow was shortened, by the prompt appearance of the pale Arabian moon. Its soft light seemed to have no influence over the deeper hollows and shadows, for the blackness of night, now spread over them, was too closely set for such gentle persuasion.

But the glorious peaks about us were clothed in a new attire. Catching the mellow light as it arose, half their height was submerged by the fog. Like a sea of silver it caught the light, and reminded me of a tented field, or of toss-

ing mounds of snow as I have seen them from Mount Washington in winter. Who wonders at the wild fancies of a people whose home is amidst such scenes?

How reluctantly I gave up my seat on the "Rock of Moses!" Again and again I turned to look upon the glories surrounding, and then descended to my tent.

An after-visit was made to the willow-tree; and then, instead of descending by the monks' stone stairway, we followed the gorge down the side of *Jebel Sufsafeh* opposite to the one from which we saw the "Plain of Assemblage."

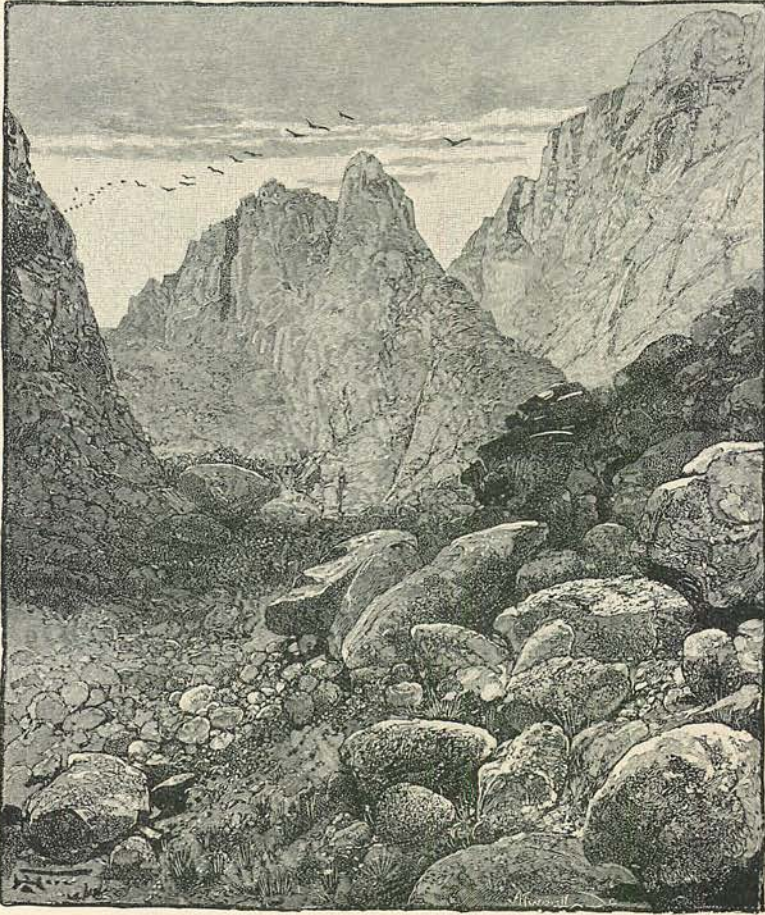
Then I secured an isolated view of the summit of *Jebel Sufsafeh* from its eastern side. This proved a prize. On the right of the foreground a great mass of rocky debris was caught, which had thundered down from the steep inclines, no one could tell me when. The monks say, "when the golden calf was broken." To the left, beneath a pile of huge rocks, is the largest spring in the Sinai district. It is also called "Jethro's Well." I found its brink fringed with a growth of maidenhair fern as



green and lovely as any I had ever gathered in the Colosseum or in the White Mountains.

In the distance is Jebel Sufsafeh. Between the two peaks is "the very ravine down which Moses and Joshua were picking their way

"Hill of the Golden Calf," is located. Without a single trumpet-blast to warn them, the noisy idolaters were destroyed by the torrents which came down, or were buried under the confusion of rocks which followed.



RAS-SUFSAFEH, FROM AARON'S HILL.

when they heard the shouts of the worshipers of the golden calf come up from the base of the mountain." Joshua, soldier that he was, declared they were as the sounds of war. Moses, with a clearer knowledge of humanity, knew better, and was so overcome that he dashed the tablets of the Law upon the rocks.

The monks aver that it was at the very spring I have described that this scene of just and mighty wrath took place. Here the forked lightning flashed from the hands of Jehovah. It tore open the earth, twisted and turned the veins of steel-hard diorite as though they were but ribbons of green, fissured the great cliffs of granite and poured into them from the bursted arteries of rough, red porphyry, and sent the streams boiling and seething like hot lava to the base, where "Aaron's Hill," or the

The monks tell us further that "Moses and Joshua were directed by Jehovah to stay beneath the great rocks which cover 'Jethro's Well' until his mighty wrath had subsided, and that since then the supply of water has not failed." To all of these places the ages of monks have had abundance of time to fasten some tradition. "Aaron's Hill" is also revered by the Bedouins, who come once a year to the little chapel on its summit to sacrifice a camel.

The Sinai mountains and their wild surroundings seem to be just as the Book describes them—as the Great Architect constructed them. No change appears to have taken place since the followers of Moses made their departure for the Promised Land.