



THE MIRACLE OF THE GREEK FIRE.

HOLY WEEK IN JERUSALEM, 1896.

THE bare but richly colored landscape—the rocky hills, the caravan tracks, the narrow, rushing river, the shaggy-coated shepherds with their flocks—on the railroad from Jaffa to Jerusalem was all that we expected; but the careful of tourists and the scene at the railroad station utterly spoiled the longed-for «first view.» I tried to arrange it so that we should stop at a station on the way, and take horses for the city, but without avail. Never shall I forget the baggage-master's deliberate fury. With the entire traveling public demanding its baggage,—sometimes with the wailings of native women,—he would cease his frantic work of assortment, and keep the world waiting while he stormed, raged, and imprecated. Then he would seize a trunk, and tug at it with the face of a madman, stopping everything now and again to declaim in shrill and spurring sentences, or dashing at a bag with contorted features and the rage of a Turkish soldier clutching an Armenian. On the whole, perhaps it was not unfortunate; if there was to be nothing about it but the modern, the diversion might as well be noisily complete.

It was not till the next morning that we felt the place. Starting from our hotel just inside the Jaffa Gate, near David's Tower, we went on donkeys around the city, devouring with eager eyes and hearts the landscape so strange and so familiar—past the Pool of Siloam, along the edge of the valley of Jehoshaphat over against Gethsemane, past the Golden Gate, till we came to the barren hilltop that some think is the true Calvary. The identification has no certainty—Dr. Bliss, the young archæologist who is tracing so skilfully the old walls, says that when you abandon tradition you are lost till there is something actual to lead you. And yet at least this is now more like Calvary than is the little chapel inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—this lonely hilltop, dismal and unperverted, with its native graves, uncared for, unwallled, strangely spotted with blood-red anemones. We were not sorry that for the time being it appealed to us as the

very scene of the immeasurable tragedy. Opening the New Testament, my eye caught a sentence from the well-known story, and I felt as if my heart were struck.

Anxious, dangerous, murderous now, all this part of Asia was a bloody country in the days of Moses, in the days of Christ; doubt, suspicion, and threat, murder in religion's name, are in the air now as they were of old. One day (our first Friday here), on the way to the Wailing-place of the Jews, an old Jewess was knocked down by a camel. The drivers grinned, and went on. There seemed little pity for the bemoaning old creature even among her own people. Another time I saw a woman run to a girl of about eight years, and drag her home, biting the tender flesh of the child's arm like a vicious dog. The traveler is entirely safe here if he or she knows and submits to the ways and regulations, and refrains from journeys that are for the time being pronounced dangerous. But when you ask what would happen if a Christian should visit the Mosque of Omar at certain sacred seasons, or if a Jew should enter the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the answer is not, «He would be put out,» but, «He would be killed.» The sad eyes of the Armenians here hide sorrows and anxieties that no one dares to tell.

Any of the sacred places themselves may be scenes of violence at any moment. Not long ago the Dalmatian cavass in charge of some Russian tourists who were visiting the Grotto at Bethlehem resented the interference of the sacristan monk who was clearing the way before the Latin procession, drew his revolver, and shot him dead on the spot; after that, firing four shots wildly at the procession, he wounded a priest in the arm and rib.

At the miracle of the Greek Fire in the Church of the Sepulcher there is always violence: in 1834, in a horrible panic, hundreds of pilgrims and others were crushed, beaten, or bayoneted to death.¹ In 1895, at this same ceremony, the Greek crowd pushed back the

¹ See a graphic account of this extraordinary catastrophe in «Visits to Monasteries in the Levant,» by the Hon. Robert Curzon, Jr. London: John Murray, 1849.

Armenian patriarch who was going into the Chapel of the Angels to take his usual part with the Greek patriarch. The bugle sounded, and the Turkish soldiers who are always present there to keep the peace came to the rescue. They themselves are said to have behaved well, but the rival Christian factions fought with desperation. No lives were lost, but injuries were inflicted, and the patriarch's miter was knocked from his head.

In the old days, as now, there were lepers and misery; then, as now, there was a city beautiful, worthy of love and tears; then, as now, there were goodness and brutality, envy and hypocrisy, and many a faithful heart. Jerusalem, Syria, this Ottoman empire,—yes, and the unchristian Christian world,—need a Redeemer now as then, a Prince of Peace. All this comes upon one here with new and tremendous force.

A city beautiful! On Palm Sunday, from the stairway near the spot where Mary stood when the body of her son was taken from the cross, I saw the Greek procession in the Church of the Sepulcher. Then I went over to the Mount of Olives. Looking back from a field well up on the hillside, the whole city lay beneath—the temple area, with the great mosque in full view across the valley of Jehoshaphat. From here Jerusalem, with its clear and stately outline of walls, the domes and minarets of the mosques, and the old towers and churches, has a singular completeness. Perhaps even in Solomon's time, from the outside, though different, it was not more lovely. The warm gray of the stones of the city is the color of the unbleached wool of goats; the hills are darker, with a delicate bloom over them, spotted with gray olive-orchards, and melting in the distance into violet. It is indeed a city set upon a hill, isolated, distinguished. The picture realizes one's lifelong dream of the city of God.

The sunset sky was wild and cold, with streaks of sunshine. The rain ceased, and the air grew warm. In the rich, low light all blemishes were lost, and the City Beautiful was spread before the pilgrim's eyes. Perhaps it was here that Christ wept over Jerusalem; along or near this path he must have come on the day of his «entry» on the first Palm Sunday, whose feast was being kept that very day throughout all Christendom. There were no other travelers; a few Syrians passed by. I gathered some flowers by the wayside, and turned again homeward.

You see that we did not find the Holy Land disillusioning. There are many things that confound the Western mind; there is filth

and degradation and superstition. But here is the same sky, the same landscape, the same dominating Orient. The painter who knows the Holy Land best said to us in Jerusalem: «At times when I look at these fields, and realize that this very picture was reflected in the eyes of Jesus, I feel myself shiver.» The Bible, no matter what one's theology or philosophy, here takes on a vitality and meaning beyond the power of conception hitherto. Are the places real? Jerusalem, all Syria, is real, and some of the «sacred places» are unquestionable. But you do not have to be sure that the place is exact when you listen, with a new emotion, to the words of Jesus repeated by the French monk on Good Friday, and at that «station of the cross» where Christ cried out, «Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.»

Even the terrible rounds of the «sacred places» in the Church of the Sepulcher, all bedizened, and ridiculous with fantastic impossibilities—is it not all given a true holiness by the passion of believing worshippers through the ages? Bent under the unescapable burdens of this life, hither from every part of the earth they have come, only that they might touch the footprints of the Man of Sorrows. Crawling on the worn pavement, they have kissed reality into every sacred lie.

The warring of emotions in the breast of the onlooker from another civilization is something indescribable. You might expect to feel nothing but indignation at some of the scenes of Holy Week; but the human element gives pathos and dignity to ceremonies which otherwise would be shocking indeed to the Protestant mind. Do you know that on Good Friday evening, in the small up-stairs Chapel of the Holy Sepulcher, which is called the true Calvary, the scene of the descent from the cross is reenacted? The Latins borrow the altar built over the very spot of the crucifixion. There is a large crucifix on the altar, flat, and painted to represent life; but the Latins bring their own small jointed crucifix; the crown of thorns is removed with iron pincers, a sheet is passed under the arms, the long nails are withdrawn one by one and kissed, the arms are turned down, and the body is laid upon the altar. There is chanting, most melodious and moving, and a sermon in French. Pilgrims, in various costumes and of various Christian beliefs, are bowed in worship in the low-ceiled room which was once «Golgotha.»

I shall not attempt to describe the effect of such a scene at such a place. The part

which sounds grotesque and painful is lost from sight; the mind rushes back to the event, and realizes it in a way which can only be hinted at in words.

But the most startling scene of Holy Week is the miracle of the Greek Fire on the Saturday before Easter Sunday.

In the center of the rotunda of the Church of the Sepulcher is the Holy Sepulcher itself, a hexagonal structure, divided into the Chapel of the Angels and the tomb proper.

The night before we had seen the pilgrims, most of them Russian peasants, lying in the places to which they would cling till they should receive the fire. With two cavasses leading the way, we arrived at about 11 A. M. The soldiers examined the natives for arms as they went in. We were led around the Greek chapel, through the pilgrims thick upon the floor, and taken to our outlook in the gallery. The armed Moslem soldiers encircled the Sepulcher, the crowd packed eight or ten deep between them and the walls. In harsh and piercing tones they were shouting their songs, some religious and some secular, with clapping of hands and excitement that grew apace. The Arabic was translated for us as the chanting went on:

O Jews, O Jews,
Your feast is the feast of devils.
Our feast is the feast of Christ—
Christ who has redeemed us,
And with his blood has bought us.
We to-day are happy
And you are sorrowful.

Then it would be

The resurrection of Christ has redeemed us from our sins,

given out with antiphonal yells, and with hand-clappings. Sometimes they shouted working-songs and sometimes a Bedouin war-song.

At about one o'clock some Armenian monks formed a small procession. At this moment a youth in white was lifted on the shoulders of the crowd.

This is the tomb of our Saviour!

first the youth shouted, clapping his hands, and pointing to the tomb; then the crowd responded antiphonally,—this over and over.

Now the youth is hoisted higher in the air to the top of a pyramid made with three men on the shoulders of the level crowd.

Our candles are in our hands,
And to the tomb we are praying—

still antiphonally. Now the youth drops down, and five men are raised in a circle, and, chanting, move around, from left to right.

A man wearing a pink shirt, red waistband, and white trousers is standing with his arm in the oval window of the Sepulcher. The shouting and clapping continue:

O the Jews! O the Infidels!
Your feast is the feast of the dead,
And our feast is the feast of Christ.

It is like college foot-ball games, negro camp-meetings, the Salvation Army, the boatmen on the rapids of the Nile. An American presidential nominating convention is a quiet gathering in comparison with all this hysterical yelling, pulling, pushing, and gesticulating.

But if the ear suffers, the eye has a feast beyond the power of words to picture. The processions of Greeks, Armenians, Copts, and dark-faced Abyssinians—one sect following another, and each vying with the others in splendor—are like chains of jewels drawn through a box of precious stones. For there is color everywhere, not only in the glowing marbles, and the jutting ornaments of the architecture, and all the unmoving background, but in the whole swaying mass below: the red fezzes and gleaming guns of the Sultan's troops; the fezzes and turbans and flowing robes of the Syrians, red, white, blue, and orange. The black dress of certain of the Greek priests serves as a foil to the magnificence of their dignitaries. Gorgeous indeed are the jeweled miters of the chief ecclesiastics, and their vestments of blue, white, and pink, stiff with embroidery of gold and silver.

The surging to and fro of the crowd below; the swinging of the lamps, the strange and outlandish odors, mixed with the smell of incense; the straining of the gaze past the archways into the chapels where mass was continuously chanted; the waiting for some strange new thing to happen, made us at times faint and dizzy.

Occasionally a big, black drinking-jar is passed over the heads of the people, and eagerly seized.

The Armenians waiting at the window on the other side of the tomb seem more quiet.

Now there are high-pitched yells that sound like catcalls; now it is "God save the Sultan!" sometimes joking and laughter; but there is no cessation of the clapping and singing, though at some moments louder than at others, and more antiphonal and concerted.

To the right from where we stand, in the corner made by the tomb and the little Copt chapel, is a group of Copt women in robes of black, with children, and some older men, looking sedate and devout, a pleasant contrast to the clamor.

For a few minutes the shouting has ceased; but I cannot note the fact before they have begun again, clap, clap; yell, yell, yell.

Now the time of the miracle approaches. A flame from heaven is to be communicated to the expectant world. As a preliminary to this sacred manifestation there is a new, wild outburst of cries and screams. We are told that it is the Jerusalem worshipers, who pound with their fists their fellow-Christians of Jaffa, and drag and jerk them away one by one from the window where the celestial fire is to appear.

At about two o'clock the Greek patriarch approaches with banners and attendants. He comes from the Greek chapel, near the door of the Holy Sepulcher. The excitement intensifies. The noise is frightful, and the vociferous scrambling in front of the Greek window of the Sepulcher is a thing of amazement. Men, standing on the shoulders of the crowd, screech words of religious greeting,—

This is the tomb of Christ

darting a finger at the tomb itself with every repetition.

Now the procession moves; those nearest the crowned patriarch join hands about him to prevent violence or accident. Three times they wind about the tomb. Two officially appointed carriers of the light appear in front of the window, and the man who has stood with his arm extended into it gives place to them, and stands by, shouting with the rest. Increasing noise. A seeker of the divine fire climbs up on the side of the Sepulcher, supporting himself by a rope around a pillar. The roar and screams are louder. The procession has halted in front of the door of the tomb. The crown is removed from the head of the patriarch and carried back into the Greek chapel. Now he enters the tomb. He leaves, we are told, in the outer tomb, or Chapel of the Angels, a Greek bishop and an Armenian bishop or priest; he then goes into the inner tomb, where the visible divinity is to be communicated to him. He is to hand

the light from heaven to both of the attendant priests, and they are to give it out through the two windows at the sides.

The noise swells like a tempest. A burst of sound—the clanging of bells and stricken bars of metal! A flash at the Greek window. The fire has come! One wild rush, one high-pitched, multitudinous scream, still the excited clanging, and out springs the light over the frantic human mass, leaping from hand to hand, as if each flame were lightning and music. Around and up and over and through, till flame is added to flame, spreading from candle to candle, and floor to gallery. Now a priest appears on the roof of the Sepulcher itself, and the flame runs round the top like a crown of fire. Higher it springs—drawn by a rope up to the people at the base of the dome. It illuminates the most distant and dungeon-like vaults, the chapels above and below, every vantage-ground where the spectators have stood or crouched on the floor, or in temporary lodgments in mid-air.

On and on sounds the clangor and the shouting; men, women, and children are mad; they pass their hands over the flame,—is it not from heaven? how can it do harm?—and then draw their hands over their faces, taking the celestial touch in ecstatic adoration. Over a path made clear for the runners from the window already the fire is on its way to the ends of the earth.¹

The Armenian patriarch declared to us later, and without hesitancy, that the Greek patriarch simply had a lamp on the tomb proper, which he blessed. This kindly old Armenian said to us that it was not miraculous. It was rumored that a prominent visitor was told by the Greek patriarch that he told the people it was only a symbol, and not a miracle. I asked the visitor whether this was true, and was answered: «No! How could he tell them that? He would be torn to pieces.» Intelligent Greeks assure you that it is a symbol, that «holy fire» is the same as «holy water.» The Latins will have nothing to do with this, one of the most venerable ceremonies and the most appalling scandal of the Christian world.

At the height of the frenzy, as the flame leaped through the rotunda and lighted the encircling chapels, making more rich and glittering the altars, the gorgeous vest-

¹ An account, which I have from a resident, states that three bunches of candles are given first by the Greek patriarch to the Greek community, through the window on the side of the Latin chapel. After that a bunch is given by the Armenian priest to his people through the window on their side. The last two bunches are for the

Copts and Syrians. They are handed to their priests, who wait for them at the door of the Sepulcher. My informant adds that the Greeks say that the Armenian priest does not enter inside the sepulcher proper, but only as far as the Chapel of the Angels; and the Armenians claim that their priest goes in as far as does the Greek patriarch.

ments, the whole ecclesiastical paraphernalia, the arms and uniforms of the troops, and the many-colored costumes of the mad and motley crowd, the thought flashed upon me: Was there ever anything in all Christendom so beautiful and so blasphemous?

THE ANGER OF CHRIST.

I.

ON the day that Christ ascended
To Jerusalem,
Singing multitudes attended,
And the very heavens were rended
With the shout of them.

II.

Chanted they a sacred ditty,
Every heart elate;
But he wept in brooding pity,
Then went in the holy city
By the Golden Gate.

III.

In the temple, lo! what lightning
Makes unseemly rout!
He in anger—sudden, frightening—
Drives with scorn and scourge the whitening
Money-changers out.

IV.

By the way that Christ descended
From Mount Olivet,
I, a lonely pilgrim, wended,
On the day his entry splendid
Is remembered yet.

V.

And I thought: If he, returning
On this festival,
Here should haste with love and yearning,
Where would now his fearful, burning
Anger flash and fall?


VI.

In the very house they builded
To his saving name,
'Mid their altars, gemmed and gilded,
Would his scourge and scorn be wielded,
His fierce lightning flame.

VII.

Once again, O Man of Wonder,
Let thy voice be heard.
Speak as with a sound of thunder;
Drive the false thy roof from under;
Teach thy priests thy word.

R. W. Gilder.



TOPICS OF THE TIME

The Right Place for an Expert.

WHEN, in January last, it was made known that President McKinley had selected Mr. Lyman J. Gage of Chicago to be Secretary of the Treasury, the announcement sent a thrill of confidence and hope throughout the channels of trade and industry in all parts of the country. Why was this? Simply because business men and financiers everywhere knew Mr. Gage to be preëminently fitted for the post. They knew him to be a financial expert of the first rank, in whose hands the finances of a great nation could be trusted, with entire confidence that they would not be mismanaged. Various other men had been suggested for the place, but none of them had commanded the wide approval which the first mention of Mr. Gage's name had called forth. Some of them were excellent men, of long experience in public life, but they did not possess the expert qualification which distinguished Mr. Gage.

We count it a piece of great good fortune that such a man should be at the head of the financial department of the government at the present time. As our readers are aware, we have urged for many years that in no branch of the public service is expert knowledge more essential than in the conduct of our finances. The whole country realized this last year, when uncertainty about the future financial policy of the nation plunged us into a more acute period of anxiety and alarm than we had experienced since the Civil War. An incompetent man at the head of the treasury would only prolong this period. We must have assurance of safe leadership there, and this Mr. Gage's reputation gives us. It is as comforting as the entrance of a tried and trusted physician to a sick-chamber. We know that in the latter case everything possible for the restoration of the patient to health will be done, and in the best way.

That this nation has been sick nigh unto death from financial distempers was admitted by all of us last year.