

# THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

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**Determined to be "Enthused"---An Arab Militiaman---A Novel Source of Revenue ---Famous Localities---A Crusader's Battlefield---Historical Reminiscences.**

NAZARETH, September, 1867.

## "Mending Their Nets."

We took another swim in the sea of Galilee last night, and another at sunrise this morning. We have not sailed, but three swims are equal to a sail, are they not? There were plenty of fish visible in the water, but we have no outside aids in this pilgrimage but "Tent Life in the Holy Land," "The Land and the Book," and other literature of like description--no fishing tackle. There were no fish to be had in the village of Tiberias. True, we saw two or three rusty vagabonds mending their nets, but never trying to catch anything with them. If you will take the trouble to glance through a few books of Palestine travel, you will notice that the authors impartially and invariably dwell with moving pathos upon this matter of seeing the fishermen mending their nets. And they always seem astonished at it. Taking their cue from the books, our pilgrims, and all other pilgrims, make it a point to be much affected when they behold this net-mending process. They all speak of it with exultant delight, and apparently with a dim notion that some how or other it is a sort of fulfilment of prophecy, or that it is a clincher on something, or is in some inscrutable way a Bulwark of Christianity. To be on Galilee and not see the fishermen mending their nets, could not be regarded in any other light than that of a calamity. Very well, we have seen it, and are happy. I suppose it is only a natural effect of all this, that a notion I was hardly conscious of myself has crept into my head that the fishermen have never done anything with their nets but mend them, from time immemorial; and now it is likely that if any of us were to see them actually engaged in fishing with them, it would strike us irresistibly as a curious and interesting phenomenon.

## The Baths.

We did not go to the ancient warm baths two miles below Tiberias. I had no desire in the world to go there. This seemed a little strange, and prompted me to try to discover what the cause of this unreasonable indifference was. It turned out to be simply because Pliny mentions them. I have conceived a sort of unwarrantable antipathy to Pliny and St. Paul, because it seems as if I can never ferret out a place that I can have to myself. It always and eternally transpires that St. Paul has been to that place, and Pliny has "mentioned" it. Did Pliny, with the head he had, find nothing to do but poke around mentioning things? And that inveterate St. Paul, wouldn't it have been just as convenient to him to locate somewhere? Was it necessary for them to use up everything, and never give anybody else a chance? I want to hurry through this pilgrimage and get to Egypt. It is my only hope. If St. Paul has gone and landed there, and Pliny has been deprived enough to mention that also, in his absurd way, I am a blighted community.

## The Apparition.

In the early morning we mounted and started. And then a weird apparition marched forth at the head of the procession--a pirate, I thought, if ever a pirate dwelt upon land. It was a tall Arab, as swarthy as an Indian--young--say thirty years of age. On his head he had closely bound a gorgeous yellow and red striped silk scarf, whose ends, lavishly fringed with tassels, hung down between his shoulders and dangled with the wind. From his neck to his knees, in ample folds, a robe swept down that was a very star-spangled banner of curved and sinuous bars of black and white. Out of his back, somewhere, apparently, the long stem of a chibouk projected, and reached far above his right shoulder. Athwart his back, diagonally, and extending high above his left shoulder, was an Arab gun of Saladin's time, that was splendid with silver plating from stock clear up to the end of its measureless stretch of barrel. About his waist was bound many and many a yard of elaborately figured but sadly tarnished stuff that came from sumptuous Persia, and among the baggy folds in front the sunbeams glistened from a formidable battery of old brass-mounted horse-pistols and the gilded hilts of blood-thirsty knives. There were holsters for more pistols appended to the wonderful stack of long-haired goat-skins and Persian carpets, which the man had been taught to regard in the light of a saddle; and down among the pendulous rank of vast tassels that swung royally from that saddle, and clanging against the iron shovel of a stirrup that propped the warrior's knees up toward his chin, was a crooked, silver-clad scimitar of such awful dimensions and such implacable expression that no man might hope to look upon it and yet not shudder. The fringed and bedizened prince whose privilege it is to ride the pony and lead the elephant into a country village is poor and naked compared to this chaos of paraphernalia, and the happy vanity of the one is the very poverty of satisfaction compared to the majestic serenity, the overwhelming complacency of the other.

"Who is this! What is this?" That was the trembling inquiry all down the line.

"Our guard! From Galilee to the birth place of the Saviour, the country is infested with fierce Bedouins, whose sole happiness it is, in this life, to cut and stab, and mangle and murder unoffending Christians. Allah be with us!"

"Then hire a regiment! Would you send us out among these desparate hordes, with no salvation in our utmost need but this old turret?"

The dragoman laughed--not at the facetiousness of the simile, for verily, that guide, or that courier, or that dragoman never yet lived upon earth who had in him the faintest appreciation of a joke, even though that joke were so broad and so ponderous that if it fell on him it would flatten him out like a postage stamp--the dragoman laughed, and then, emboldened by some thought that was in his brain, no doubt, proceeded to extremities and winked.

In straits like these, when a man laughs, it is encouraging; when he winks, it is positively reassuring. He finally intimated that one guard would be sufficient to protect us, but that one was an absolute necessity. It was because of the moral weight his awful panoply would have with the Bedouins. Then I said we didn't want any guard at all. If one fantastic vagabond could protect eight armed Christians and a pack of Arab servants from all harm, surely that detachment could protect themselves. He shook his head doubtfully. Then I said, just think of how it looks--think of how it would read, to self-reliant Californians, that we went sneaking through this deserted wilderness under the protection of this masquerading Arab, that would break his neck getting out of the country if a man that was a man ever started after him. It was a mean, low, degrading position. What were we ever told to bring navy revolvers with us for, if we had to be protected at last by this infamous star-spangled scum of the desert? These appeals were vain--the dragoman only smiled and shook his head.

I rode to the front and struck up an acquaintance with King Solomon, in all his glory, and got him to show me his lingering eternity of a gun. It had a rusty flint lock; it was ringed, and barred and plated with silver from end to end, but it was as desperately out of the perpendicular as are the billiard cues of '49 that one finds yet in service of the ancient mining camps of Calaveras and Tuolumne. The muzzle was eaten by the rust of centuries into a ragged flange-work, like the end of a burnt-out stove pipe. I shut one eye and peered within--it was flaked with iron rust like an old steam-boat boiler. I borrowed the ponderous pistols and snapped them. They were rusty inside, too--had not been loaded for a generation. I went back, full of encouragement, and reported to the guide, and asked him to discharge this dismantled fortress. It came out, then. This fellow was a retainer of the Sheik of Tiberias. He was a source of Government revenue. He was to the Empire of Tiberias what the customs are to America. The Sheik imposed guards upon travellers and charged them for it. It is a lucrative source of emolument, and sometimes brings into the National treasury as much as thirty-five or forty dollars a year.

I knew the warrior's secret now; I knew the hollow vanity of his rusty trumpery, and despised his reckless complacency. I told on him, and with reckless daring the cavalcade rode straight ahead into the perilous solitudes of the desert, and scorned his frantic warnings of the mutilation and death that hovered about them on every side.

## A Distinguished Panorama.

Arrived at an elevation of twelve hundred feet above the lake (I ought to mention that the lake lies six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean--no traveller ever neglects to flourish that fragment of news in his letters,) as bald and unthrilling a panorama as even Palestine can afford, perhaps, was spread out before us. Yet it was so crowded with historical interest, that if all the pages that have been written about it were spread from horizon to horizon, they would flag it from horizon to horizon like a pavement. Among the localities comprised in this view, were Mount Hermon; the hills that border Cesarea Phillippi, Dan, the Sources of the Jordan and the Waters of Merom; Tiberias; the Sea of Galilee; Joseph's Pit; Capernaum; Bethesda; the supposed scenes of the Sermon on the Mount, the feeding of the multitudes and the miraculous draught of fishes; the declivity down which the swine ran to the sea; the entrance and the exit of the Jordan; Safed, "the city set upon a hill," one of the four holy cities of the Jews, and the place where they believe the real Messiah will appear when he comes to redeem the world; part of the battle-field of Hattin, where the knightly Crusaders fought their last fight, and in a blaze of glory passed from the stage and ended their splendid career forever; Mount Tabor, the traditional scene of the Lord's Transfiguration, around whose confines cluster Nazareth, Cana of Galilee, Nain, Endor, Esdraelon the storied battle-field of Palestine, Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan fell; the Fountain of Jezreel. And down toward the southeast lay a landscape that suggested to my mind a

notation (imperfectly remembered, no doubt,) that is familiar to certain myriads of men of all nationalities, all climes and all languages this day:

"The Ephraimites, not being called upon to share in the rich spoils of the Ammonitish war, assembled a mighty host to fight against Jephtha, Judge of Israel; who, being apprised of their approach, gathered together the men of Israel and gave them battle and put them to flight. To make his victory the more secure, he stationed guards at the different fords and passages of the Jordan, with instructions to let none pass who could not say Shibboleth. The Ephraimites, being of a different tribe, could not frame to pronounce the word aright, but called it Sibboleth, which proved them enemies and cost them their lives; wherefore, forty and two thousand fell at the different fords and passages of the Jordan that day."

## Hattin.

We jogged along peacefully over the great caravan route from Damascus to Jerusalem and Egypt, past Lubia and other Syrian hamlets, perched, in the unvarying style, upon the summit of steep mounds and hills, and fenced round about with giant cactuses, (the sign of worthless land,) with prickly pears upon them like hams, and came at last to the battle-field of Hattin.

It is a grand, irregular plateau, and looks like it might have been created for a battle-field. Here the peerless Saladin met the Christian host some seven hundred years ago, and broke their power in Palestine for all time to come. There had long been a truce between the opposing forces, but according to the Guide-Book, Raynald of Chatillon, Lord of Kerak, broke it by plunging a Damascus caravan, and refusing to give up either the merchants or their goods when Saladin demanded them. This conduct of an insolent petty chieftain stung the proud Sultan to the quick, and he swore that he would slaughter Raynald with his own hand, no matter how, or when, or where he found him. Both armies prepared for war. Under the weak King of Jerusalem was the very flower of the Christian chivalry. He foolishly compelled them to undergo a long, exhausting march, in the scorching sun, and then, without water or other refreshment, ordered them to camp in this open plain. The splendidly mounted masses of Moslem soldiers swept round the north end of Genessaret, burning and destroying as they came, and pitched their camp in front of the opposing lines. At dawn the terrific fight began. Surrounded on all sides by the Sultan's swarming battalions, the Christian Knights fought on without a hope for their lives. They fought with desperate valor, but to no purpose, the odds of heat and numbers, and consuming thirst, were too great against them. Towards the middle of the day the bravest of their band cut their way through the Moslem ranks and gained the summit of a little hill, and there, hour after hour, they closed around the banner of the Cross, and beat back the charging squadrons of the enemy.

But the doom of the Christian power was sealed. Sunset found Saladin Lord of Palestine, the Christian chivalry strewn in heaps upon the field, and the King of Jerusalem, the Grand Master of the Templars and Raynald of Chatillon captives in the Sultan's tent. Saladin treated two of the prisoners with princely courtesy, and ordered refreshments to be set before them. When the King handed an iced Sherbet to Chatillon, the Sultan said, "It is thou that givest it to him, not I." He remembered his oath, and slaughtered the hapless Knight of Chatillon with his own hand.

It was hard to realize that this silent plain had once resounded with martial music and trembled with the tramp of armed men. It was hard to people this solitude with charging masses of cavalry, and stir its torpid pulses with the shouts of victors, the shrieks of the wounded, and the flash of banner and steel above the surging billows of battle. A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action.

Yonder, where the glory of the setting sun kindles the western hills--supper is ready. Time and hash wait for no man.

MARK TWAIN.