

# THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

## LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Forty-Five.]

### Jerusalem—A Knobby City—The Holy Place—The Story of the True Cross—The Sword of Bouillon.

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#### "The Joy of the Whole Earth."

A fast walker could go outside the walls of Jerusalem and walk entirely around the city in an hour. I do not know how else to make one understand how small it is. The appearance of the city is peculiar. It is as knobby with countless little domes as a prison door is with boltheads. Every house has from one to half-a-dozen of these white plastered domes of stone, broad and low, sitting in the centre of, or in a cluster upon, the flat roof. Wherefore, when one looks down from an eminence, upon the compact mass of houses (so closely crowded together, in fact, that there is no appearance of streets at all, and so it looks solid), he sees the knobbiest town in the world, except Constantinople. It looks as if it might be roofed, from centre to circumference, with inverted saucers. The monotony of the view is interrupted only by the great Mosque of Omar, the Tower of Hippicus, and one or two other buildings that rise into commanding prominence.

The houses are generally two stories high, built strongly of masonry, whitewashed or plastered outside, and have a cage of wooden lattice-work projecting in front of every window. To reproduce Jerusalem street it would be necessary to up-end a chicken-coop and hang it before each window in a row of American houses.

The streets are roughly and badly paved with stone, and are tolerably crooked—enough so to make each street appear to close together constantly and come to an end about a hundred yards ahead of a pilgrim as long as he chooses to walk in it. Projecting from the top of the lower story of many of the houses is a very narrow porch-roof or shed, without supports from below; and I have several times seen cats jump across the street from one shed to the other when they were out calling. The cats could have jumped double the distance without extraordinary exertion. I mention these things to give one an idea of how narrow the streets are. Since a cat can jump across them without the least inconvenience, I suppose it will not be worth while for me to state that such streets are too narrow for carriages. These vehicles can not navigate the Holy City.

The population of Jerusalem is composed of Moslems, Jews, Greeks, Latins, Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Abyssinians, Greek Catholics, and a handful of Christians. One hundred of the latter sect are all that dwell now in this birthplace of Christianity. The nationalities of the above list of sects, and the languages spoken by them, are altogether too numerous to mention. It seems to me that all the races and colors and tongues of the earth must be represented among the 14,000 souls that dwell in Jerusalem. Rags, wretchedness, poverty and dirt, those signs and symbols that indicate the presence of Moslem rule more surely than the Crescent flag itself, abound. Lepers, cripples, the blind, and the idiotic, assail you on every hand, and they know but one word of but one language—the eternal "bucksheesh." To see the numbers of maimed, malformed and diseased humanity that throng the holy places and obstruct the gates, one might suppose that the ancient days had come again, and that the angel of the Lord was expected to arrive at any moment to stir the waters of Bethesda. Jerusalem is mournful, and dreary, and lifeless. I would not desire to live here.

#### The Holy Sepulchre.

One naturally goes first to the Holy Sepulchre. It is right in the city, near the western gate; it and the place of the Crucifixion, and, in fact, every other place intimately connected with that tremendous event, are ingeniously massed together and covered by one roof—the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Entering the building, through the midst of the usual assemblage of beggars, one sees on his left a few Turkish guards—for Christians of different sects will not only quarrel, but fight, also, in this sacred place, if allowed to do it. Before you is a marble slab, which covers the Stone of Unction, whereon the Saviour's body was laid to prepare it for burial. It was found necessary to surround the slab with stone in this way in order to save it from destruction. Pilgrims were too much given to chipping off pieces of it to carry home. Ours were disappointed—none of them have got a fragment of this famous stone. Near by is a circular railing which marks the spot where the Virgin stood when the Lord's body was anointed.

Entering the great Rotunda, we stand before the most sacred locality in Christendom—the grave of Jesus. It is in the centre of the church, and immediately under the great dome. It is inclosed in a sort of little temple of yellow and white stone, of fanciful design. Within the little temple is a portion of the very stone which was rolled away from the door of the Sepulchre, and on which the angel was sitting when Mary came thither "at early dawn." The stone was there, at any rate, day before yesterday. Our pilgrims have been there since. Steeping low, we enter the vault—the Sepulchre itself. It is only about six feet by seven, and the stone couch on which the dead Savior lay extends from end to end of the apartment and occupies half its width. It is covered with a marble slab which has been much worn by the lips of pilgrims. This slab serves as an altar, now. Over it hang some fifty gold and silver lamps, which are kept always burning, and the place is otherwise scandalized by trumpery gew-gaws and tawdry ornamentation.

All sects of Christians have chapels under the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and each must keep to itself and not venture upon another's ground. It has been proven conclusively that they cannot worship together around the grave of the Saviour of the World without fighting. The chapel of the Syrians is not handsome; that of the Copts is the humblest of them all. It is nothing but a dismal cavern, roughly hewn in the living rock of the Hill of Cavalry. In one side of it two ancient tombs are hewn, which are claimed to be those in which Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramathia were buried.

As we moved among the great piers and pillars of another part of the Church, we came upon a party of black robed, stupid, animal-looking Italian monks, with candles in their hands, who were chanting something in Latin, and going through some kind of a circus performance around a disk of white marble let into the floor. It was there that the risen Savior appeared to Mary Magdalene in the likeness of a gardener. Near by was a similar stone, shaped like a star—here the Magdalene herself stood, at the same time. Monks were performing in this place also. They perform everywhere—all over the vast building, and at all hours. Their candles are always flittering about in the gloom, and making the dim old Church more dismal than there is any necessity that it should be, even though it is a tomb.

#### The Finding of the Cross.

We were shown the place where the Lord appeared to His mother after the Resurrection. Here, also, a marble slab marks the place where St. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, found the crosses about 300 years after the crucifixion. According to the legend, this great discovery elicited extravagant demonstrations of joy. But they were of short duration. The question intruded itself: "Which here the blessed Saviour, and which the thieves?" To be in doubt, in so mighty a matter as this—to be uncertain which one to adore and kiss, and steal chips from for keepsakes—was agonizing. It turned the public joy to sorrow. But when lived there a holy priest who could not set so simple a trouble as this at rest? One of these soon hit upon a plan that would be a certain test. A noble lady lay very ill in Jerusalem. The wise priests ordered that the three crosses be taken to her bedside one at a time. It was done. When her eyes fell upon the first one, she uttered a scream that was heard beyond the Damascus Gate, and even upon the Mount of Olives. It was said, and then fell back in a deadly swoon. They recovered her and brought the second cross. Instantly she went into fearful convulsions, and it was with the greatest difficulty that six strong men could hold her. They were afraid, now, to bring in the third cross. They began to fear that possibly they had fallen upon the wrong crosses, and that the true cross was not with this number at all. However, as the woman seemed likely to die with the convulsions that were tearing her, they concluded that the third could do no more than put her out of her misery with a happy despatch. So they brought it, and behold, a miracle! The woman sprang from her bed, smiling and joyful, and perfectly restored to health. When we listen to evidence like this, we cannot but believe, too. Even the very part of Jerusalem where this all occurred is there yet. So there is really no room for doubt.

#### The Pillar of Flagellation.

The priests showed us, through a small screen, a fragment of the genuine Pillar of Flagellation, to which Christ was bound when they scourged him. We could not see it. This was because it was so dark inside the screen, perhaps. However, a broom handle is kept here, which the pilgrim pokes through a hole in the screen, and then, naturally enough, he no longer doubts that the true Pillar of Flagellation is in there. He cannot have any excuse to doubt it, for he can feel it with the stick. He can feel it as distinctly as he could feel anything.

#### The Place of a Relic.

Not far from here was a niche where they used to preserve a piece of the True Cross, but it is gone, now. Our pilgrims are out of luck since we got here, somehow. They have not been able to make any collections worth having. This piece of the cross was discovered in the sixteenth century. The Latin priests say it was stolen away, long ago, by priests of another sect. That seems like a hard statement to make, but I know very well that it was stolen, because I have seen it myself in several of the cathedrals of Italy and France.

#### Godfrey's Sword.

But the relic that touched us most was the plain old sword of that stout Crusader, bold Godfrey of Bouillon—King of Godfrey of Jerusalem. No blade in Christendom wields such enchantment as this—no blade of all that rust in the ancestral halls of Europe is able to invoke such visions of romance in the brain of him who looks upon it—none that can prate of such chivalric deeds or tell such brave tales of the warrior days of old. It stirs within a man every memory of the Holy Wars that has been sleeping in his brain for years, and peopled his thoughts with mail-clad images, with marching armies, with battles and with sieges. It speaks to him of Baldwin, and Tancred, the princely Saladin and gorgeous old Richard of the Lion Heart! It was with just such blades as these that these splendid heroes of romance used to segregate a man, so to speak, and leave the half of him to fall one way and the other half the other. This very sword has cloven hundreds of Saracen Knights from crown to chin in those knightly times when Godfrey wielded it. It was enchanted, then, by a genius that was under the command of King Solomon. When danger approached its master's tent it always struck the shield and clanged out a fierce alarm upon the startled ear of night. In times of doubt, or in fog or darkness, if it were drawn from its sheath it would point instantly towards the foe, and thus reveal the way—and it would also attempt to start after them of its own accord. A Christian could not be so disguised that it would not know him and refuse to hurt him—nor a Moslem so disguised that it would not leap from its scabbard and take his life. These statements are all well authenticated in many legends that are among the most trustworthy legends the good old monks preserve. I can never forget old Godfrey's sword, now. I tried it on a Moslem, and clove him in twain like a doughnut. The spirit of its ancient owner was upon me, and if I had had a graveyard I would have destroyed all the infidels in Jerusalem. I never like to kill a man when I have no place to bury him in. I wiped the blood off the old sword and handed it back to the priest—I did not want the flesh gore to obliterate those old sacred spots that crimsoned its brightness six hundred years ago and thus gave Godfrey warning that before the sun went down his journey of life would end. And they do say that—

Dinner is ready. MARK TWAIN.