

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTERS FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

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The Great Temple—The Stones of Jerusalem— Surfeited Tourists—"Twain" Blase—A Crowd of Notable Places.

JERUSALEM, September, 1867.

The Temple.

Everywhere about the Mosque of Omar are portions of pillars, curiously wrought altars, and fragments of elegantly carved marble—precious remains of Solomon's Temple. These have been dug from all depths in the soil and rubbish of Mount Moriah, and the Moslems have always shown a disposition to preserve them with the utmost care. At that portion of the ancient wall of Solomon's Temple which is called the Jews' Place of Wailing, and where the Hebrews assemble every Friday to kiss the venerated stones and weep over the fallen greatness of Zion, any one can see a part of the unquestioned and undisputed Temple of Solomon, the same consisting of three or four stones lying one upon the other, (which is an unimportant variation from the prophecy,) each of which is about twice as long as a 7-octave piano, and about as thick as such a piano is high. But it is only a year or two ago that the ancient edict prohibiting Christian rubbish like ourselves to enter the Mosque of Omar and see the costly marbles that once adorned the inner Temple was annulled. The designs wrought upon these fragments are all quaint and peculiar, and so the charm of novelty is added to the deep interest they naturally inspire. One meets with these venerable scraps at every turn, especially in the neighboring Mosque el Aksa, in whose inner walls a very large number of them are carefully built for preservation. These pieces of stone, stained and dusty with age, dimly hint at a grandeur we have all been taught to regard as the princeliest ever seen on earth; and they call up pictures of a pageant that is familiar to all imaginations—camels laden with spices and treasure—beautiful slaves, presents for Solomon's harem—a long cavalcade of richly caparisoned beasts and warriors—and Sheba's Queen in the van of this vision of Oriental magnificence. These elegant fragments bear a richer interest than the solemn vastness of the stones the Jews kiss in the Place of Wailing can ever have for the careless sinner.

Underneath the olives and the orange trees that flourish in the court of the great Mosque is a wilderness of pillars—remains of the ancient Temple; they supported it. There are ponderous archways down there, also, over which the destroying "plough" of prophecy passed harmless. It is pleasant to know we are disappointed, in that we never dreamed we might see portions of the actual Temple of Solomon, and experience no shadow of suspicion that they were a monkish humbug and a swindle.

Too Much of a Happiness.

We are surfeited, completely surfeited with sights. Nothing in Jerusalem has any fascination for us, now, but the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We have been there every day, and have not grown tired of it; but we are utterly weary of everything else. The sights are too many. They swarm about you at every step; no single foot of ground in all Jerusalem or within its neighborhood seems to be without a stirring and important history of its own. It is a very relief to steal a walk of a hundred yards without a guide along to prate unceasingly about every stone one steps upon and drag you back ages and ages to the day when it achieved celebrity.

It seems hardly real when I find myself leaning for a moment on a ruined wall, whistling gently, and looking listlessly down into the slimy cesspool that lives in history as the Blessed Pool of Bethesda. I did not think such things *could* be so crowded together as to even cheapen their interest, much less take it away altogether. For several days we have been drifting heedlessly about, using our eyes and our ears merely because it was our duty to do it, and for no other reason. We have been glad, always, when it was time to go home and bother no more about illustrious localities.

We have worried through. There is ineffable happiness in the thought. Except that we have not seen the frog-pond they call the Pool of Bethesda, where David saw the wife of Uriah (I think that was his name) taking her bath, and fell in love with her. When they told us there was Scripture testimony that David sent Uriah to the front of the battle so that he could get him killed off and then marry his wife, we said we didn't care. We visited David's tomb, but we felt no enthusiasm in the knowledge that David had a tomb. I think we felt a resentment toward him for having a tomb at all. If he hadn't had one we need not have gone to it.

Well, likewise we went out at the Jaffa Gate, and of course in going out we passed by the Tower of Hippicus. The guide insolently tried to tell us something about it, but we let him know, in few words, that we did not care anything about Hippicus or his ruinous old property; and we gave him to understand that he must not offend in this way again.

We rode across the Valley of Hinnom, between two of the Pools of Gihon, and by an aqueduct built by Solomon, which still conveys water to the city. We ascended the Hill of Evil Counsel, where Judas received his thirty pieces of silver, and we also lingered a moment under the tree a venerable tradition says he hanged himself on. Were we reflective?—were we emotional? We swabbed the sweat from our faces, and glared up into the tree at some imaginary Judas—but it is likely that the first reflection was, "Why couldn't you have hanged yourself in town?"

We descended to the cañon again, and then that guide began to give name and history to every bank and boulder we came to: This was the Field of Blood; these cuttings in the rock were shrines and temples of Moloch; here they sacrificed children; yonder is the Zion Gate; the Tyropean Valley; the Hill of Ophel; fifty other things; here is the junction of the Valley of Jehoshaphat—on your right is the Well of Job—and so on. It was awful. We turned up Jehoshaphat. The tune went on: "This is the Mount of Olives; this is the Hill of Offence; the nest of huts is the Village of Siloam; here, yonder, everywhere, is the King's Garden; under this great tree Zacharias, the high priest, did something to somebody, or somebody did something to Zacharias; yonder is Mount Moriah and the Temple wall; the tomb of Absalom; the tomb of St. James, the tomb of Zacharias; beyond, are the Garden of Gethsemane and the tomb of the Virgin Mary; here is the Pool of Siloam, and—"Then, let us go in and take a drink and have some respite from this merciless persecution!" exploded from several lips.

We went. The Pool is a deep, walled ditch, through which a clear stream of water runs, that comes from under Jerusalem somewhere, and passing through the Fountain of the Virgin, or being supplied from it, reaches this place by way of a tunnel of heavy masonry. The famous pool looked exactly as it looked in Christ's time, no doubt, and the same rusty looking, dusky Oriental squaws, came down in their old slouchy Oriental way, and carried off jars of the water on their heads, just as they did two thousand years ago, and just as they will do fifty thousand years hence if any of the breed are still left on earth. Pilgrims are always astonished to see them carry the jars on their heads—though I do not see why they should be, the custom is always so represented in the pictures. But your pilgrim that has marked his guide book all up with marks that signify "here be astonished," is going to be astonished just at every one of those places, if it kills him.

We cleared out from there and stopped at the Fountain of the Virgin. But the water was not good, and there was no comfort or peace anywhere, on account of the regiment of boys and girls and beggars that persecuted us all the time for bucksheesh. The guide wanted us to give them some money, and we did it; but when he went on to say that they were starving to death we could not but feel that we had done a great sin in throwing obstacles in the way of such a desirable consummation, and tried to collect it back, but it could not be done.

But there is no use in my trying to talk about the Garden of Gethsemane—this mood of mine is ill suited to the subject—or about the tomb of the Virgin, for the same reason. I cannot speak now of the Mount of Olives or its view of Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab; nor of the Damascus Gate or the tree that was planted by King Godfrey of Jerusalem. One ought to feel pleasantly when he talks of these noted things. I cannot say anything about the stone column that projects over Jehoshaphat from the Temple wall like a cannon, except that the Moslems believe Mahomet will sit astride of it when he comes to judge the world. It is a pity he could not judge it from some roost of his own in Mecca, without trespassing on our holy ground. Close by is the Golden Gate, in the Temple wall—a gate that was an elegant piece of sculpture in the time of the Temple, and is even so yet. From it, in ancient times, the Jewish High Priest turned loose the scape-goat and let him flee to the wilderness and bear away his twelve-month load of the sins of the people. If they were to turn one loose now, he would not get as far as the Garden of Gethsemane till these miserable vagabonds here would gobble him up, sins and all. They wouldn't care. Mutton-chops and sin is good enough living for them. The Moslems watch the Golden Gate with a jealous eye, and an anxious one, for they have an honored tradition that when it falls, Islamism will fall, and with it the Ottoman Empire. It did not grieve me any to notice that the old gate was getting a little shaky.

MARK TWAIN.