

a rational and enterprising population would still be able amply to verify this.

Three hours' ride over the plain from Jericho, or rather "er-Riah," takes us to the barren shore of the Dead Sea. On our road we see to the right a chapel "built over the spot where Moses was buried," although he was dead before the people entered Canaan, and notwithstanding the fact that nobody knew where he was buried. But here in the Holy Land one must not be astonished at anything. On the left we passed the place where John the Baptist used to live.

As soon as we reached the sea we jumped off our donkeys and—after the necessary preparations—plunged into the water. It was a beautiful day. The sun showered upon us his brightest smiles, and the bath was truly refreshing.

From my early school days I had got the impression that the Dead Sea was a kind of ghostly sheet of water, giving the impression of a corpse. This idea is altogether wrong. Viewed on a clear, sunny day it presents to the eye a truly beautiful landscape. The water has a deep blue color. The surrounding mountains lift their heads majestically towards the sky, and the contrast is very striking. Were the shores enlivened with human dwellings and the waves ploughed by neat crafts, one could hardly desire a better motive for landscape painting. As it is, perfect stillness prevails. One feels as though he were alone in a neglected corner of God's vast house. But the magnificent scenery is there.

The Dead Sea is 75 kilometres long and 15 wide, covering an area of 915 square kilometres. It lies 394 metres under the surface of the Mediterranean, and its greatest depth is 399 metres. It has no outlet whatever. The great volume of water with which it is constantly supplied through the River Jordan must consequently evaporate. This it does. The hot, dry air drinks it all, even perceptibly diminishing—as has been recently discovered—the quantity of the water in the sea.

The water in this sea contains 25 per cent. of mineral stuff, chlornatrum, chlormagnesium, chlormalcium, etc. It is clear that no known species of animals can live in it, but the shores are very verdant wherever the water from the river or the springs can exercise their influence. At the time of Abraham and Lot the whole region was "as a garden," as "the land of Egypt," and with the blessings of God it is still capable of great things.

From the shore of so remarkable a sea we hasten to view the swelling waves of Jordan. We camp a moment at Jordanford ("el-Helu.") Here, so says tradition, is the place where John the Baptist baptized the thousands who confessed their sins; here Jesus was baptized; here St. Christopher carried Jesus across the water, if Roman tradition knows anything about it; here the thousands of pilgrims who come to Jerusalem to worship generally flush their pilgrimage with a bath, and

they usually take some water home with them in which to baptize infants, or for other religious purposes. The shores here are high and muddy; the current is rapid, and nothing looked as if a bath here would be a pleasant thing. The water itself was of a muddy, yellow color.

From Jerusalem to Bethlehem there is a very good road, and a traveler can therefore in a wagon make a trip to that city and return the same day.

Bethlehem was for a long time a small place—"the least among the princes of Judah" (Micah v: 1), but it soon became renowned on account of the great men who here first saw the light of day. David was from Bethlehem, and in the mountain hills surrounding it he, as a shepherd, performed his first act of heroism. From Bethlehem were also Joab, Abigail and Ashael, the great generals of David's army, and here our blessed Lord was born, while the heavenly hosts announced the fact with songs of praise whose echoes reached even mortal ears in the stillness of night. Rehboam fortified the city, but it was taken by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and with the rest of the cities of Judah demolished.

After the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus several Jews still lived in this city, but the Emperor Adrian drove them away. Many battles have after this time been fought here, and the history of the last one belongs probably yet to the future.

The city is situated 772 metres above the sea, on two hills. It is surrounded by verdant fields and gardens, and has increased in size considerably of late years. Its inhabitants are now estimated at 8000 in number, most of whom are Catholics. Only a few are Mahomedans, and still fewer Protestants. Their chief sources of living are agriculture, horticulture and manufacture of crucifixes, lockets, rosaries and other trinkets necessary to the happiness of ladies of the Catholic persuasion. Peddlers from Bethlehem now travel all over the world with these trifles and seem to do a profitable business.

The most remarkable building in Bethlehem is the Church of Mary (St. Mariae praesepio). The church is built over a cave which, according to tradition, is the one in which Jesus was born. The entrance is an old plain portal filled up with rocks and mortar, so that a very narrow opening only is left. This has been done in order to prevent the Mahomedans from using the building as a stable. The inside of the church is well worth seeing. It still shows remnants of past glory, and one must regret a vandalism that has spoiled the beautiful works of art that once ornamented this edifice.

Having viewed the various altars, pictures and statues of the church, we take a candle and follow our guide down into the cave where Christ was born. The walls are here covered with marble, and fifteen silver lamps throw a magical light in the little chapel. A star of silver, surrounded

by the following inscription indicates the spot. "*Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.*" (Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary). In another place we are shown a marble crib, and in yet another we see the very spot where the astronomers of the Orient worshipped the new-born "King of the Jews." We are also shown a hole in the ground, a well, being the one in which fell the star which guided the three astronomers to Bethlehem. Whether the star is still in the well, or whether it proceeded further down, is not known. We likewise visit the grave of Saint Hieronymus, who spent twenty years in Palestine, and who is the author of the Latin Bible translation known under the name of "Vulgate." This bible is remarkable in several respects. It is the first book ever printed; and, notwithstanding its errors, it has gradually gained the reputation of an inspired work—that is in the Catholic church. Its text is made up partly from the so-called old italic, but is mostly a direct translation from the Hebrew. It generally follows the Septuagint, even where this differs from the Hebrew. The psalms were made up from Origen's "Hexapla," and is called the "Psalterium Gallicanum." This patchwork, revised by later scholars, among whom are Aleuin and Langfranc, is the inspired Bible of the great infallible church of the world! Heaven preserve us from such infallibility.

Such were my thoughts when I stood on the spot where I was told the venerable man rested who had conceived the idea of translating the Scriptures into the Latin tongue.

But we have one more place to see before leaving Bethlehem. We are taken to a cave called "The Cave of Our Dear Lady." This is one in the rock-mined cavity. Here the virgin once nursed her child. A few drops of her "sacred" milk fell on the ground. Hence, if the ladies take some of the limestone on the ground and dissolve it in water and drink the water, they are for ever free from the necessity of using nursing bottles for their little ones. Isn't that a blessing? Whether the stone is capable of producing beneficial results among the cows also did not appear from the statement of our innocent guide, but as I bought a few specimens of the stone, I may for the further enlightenment of the world experiment with it in the corral as soon as I return home to Utah. Until then the many readers of this sketch, who are now anxiously waiting to see my "specimen," will have to control themselves. I can do no better.

Having seen these wonders, we naturally enter the shops where curiosities are sold. We here are surrounded by all sorts of objects—paper-knives, penholders, brooches, beads, lockets, rosaries, crucifixes, portemonnaies, candlesticks, tumblers, etc. Some are of wood, some of bone, some of rock, some of oyster shell, and all are "sacred" from the fact that they have been made in a sacred spot.

J. M. S.

PALESTINE, April 15.