



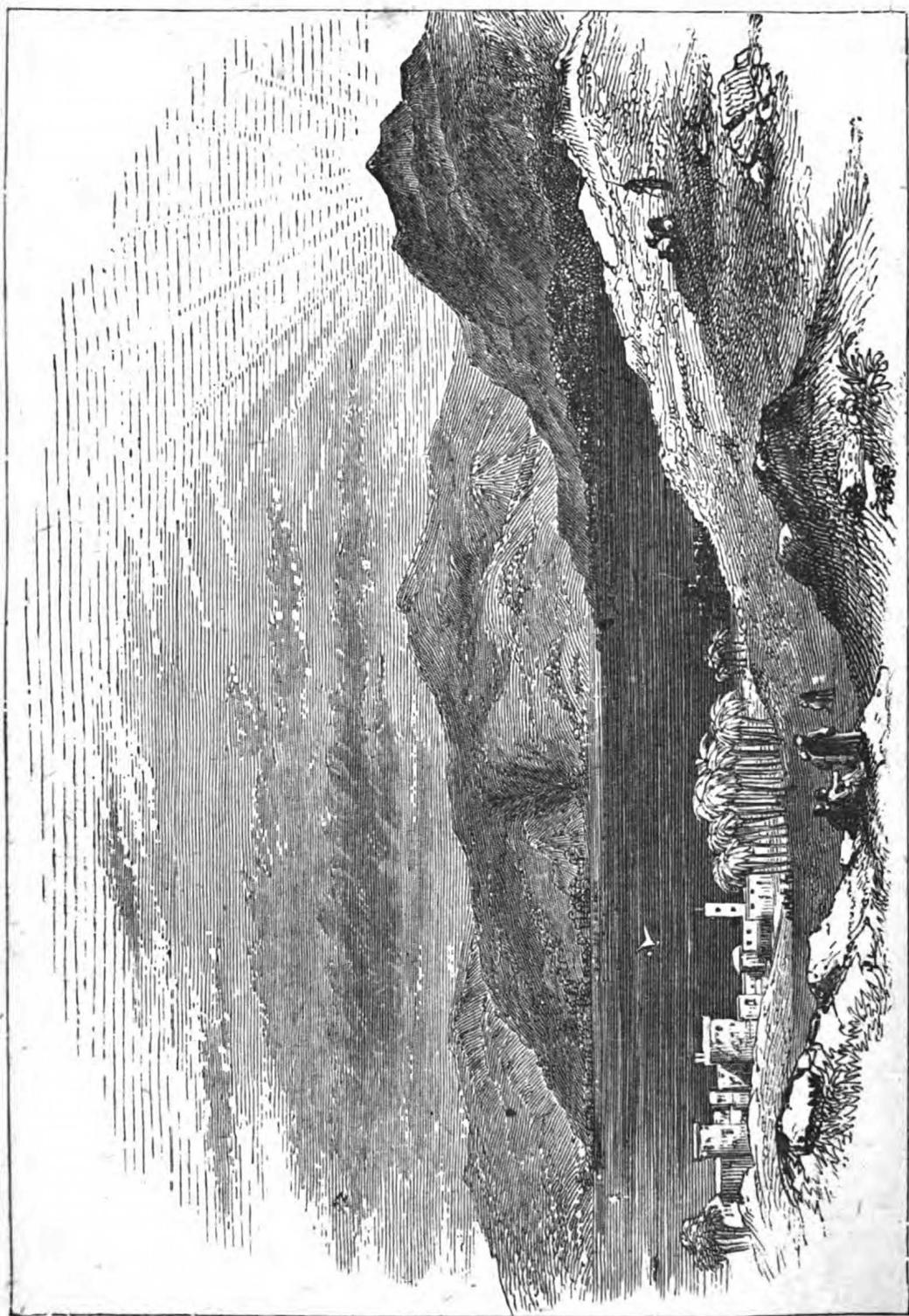
SCENES AND SITES IN BIBLE LANDS.

By A. M. S.



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TIBERIAS AND THE SEA OF GALILEE.
Page 111.



PREFACE

THE following short papers have been written with the view of presenting to the minds of the young such prominent features of localities connected with scriptural records, as appeal at once to the eye and to the heart. A host of travellers have offered their impressions of Palestine to the reading world, and our interest in the result of their investigations has never flagged, springing, as we believe it does, from an inexhaustible source. But the details with which they endeavour to satisfy the craving of older minds, are frequently too diffuse to produce a well-defined conception in those which are still immature, to accomplish which latter has been the aim of the writer of this little book.

A. M. S.



	Page
I. MOUNT CARMEL,	9
II. MOUNT ARARAT,	17
III. THE DEAD SEA,	22
IV. ANCIENT ROME,	28
V. HEBRON,	37
VI. TYRE,	42
VII. CORINTH,	48
VIII. BETHLEHEM,	54
IX. NAZARETH,	60
X. JERUSALEM,	69
XI. THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS,	77
XII. MOUNT ZION,	83
XIII. BETHANY,	86
XIV. ARIMATHEA,	95
XV. BIRS NIMROUD — BABYLON,	101
XVI. MOUNT TABOR,	107
XVII. THE SEA OF GALILEE,	111
XVIII. THE FORDS OF THE JORDAN,	117
XIX. DAMASCUS,	122



SCENES AND SITES IN BIBLE LANDS.

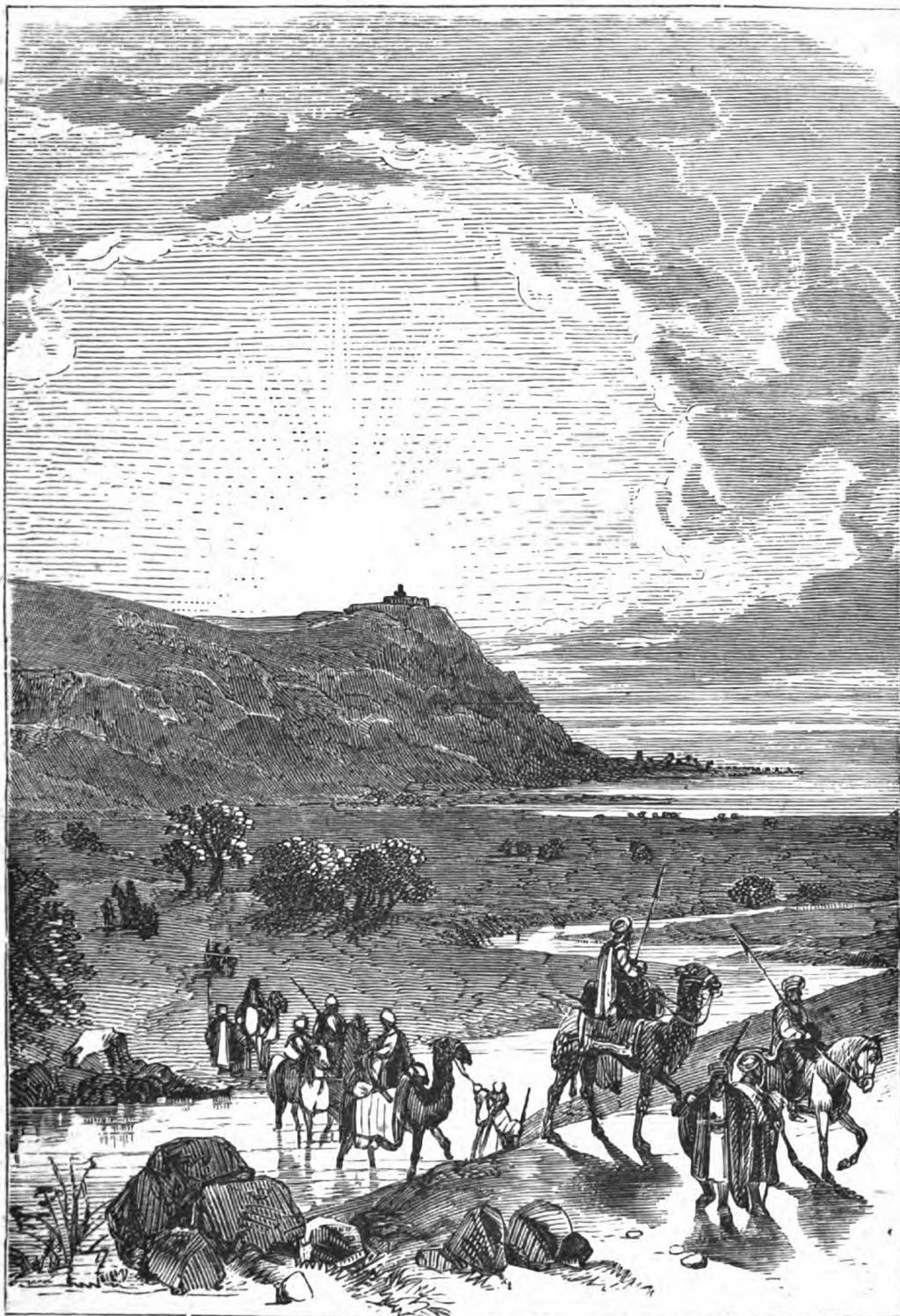
I.

Mount Carmel.

HIS mountain, or rather range of hills, forms the only promontory on the coast of Palestine worthy of notice.

Six miles in extent, of irregular outline, jutting forward on its western extremity till its base dips itself into the sea, both the situation it occupies, and the features peculiar to itself, combine to render it remarkable. It runs northwest from the plain of Esdraelon, and overlooks the Gulf of Acre. In height it rises to about 1,500 feet, and its summit commands a prospect of unsurpassed beauty.

Let us climb its grassy slopes in the foot-



MOUNT CARMEL.

Page 9.

prints which many a well-known traveller has left upon the sward. . Starting then from one of the little hamlets nestled under the mountain's shadow, we climb upwards. It is early summer ; the soft air is laden with perfume ; at every step we crush the fragrance from the blossoms of jonquil and hyacinth and anemone. Now, a mountain streamlet dashes past us, half hidden under the low bushes which overhang it, hurrying to lose itself in the broader, calmer Kishon below. Now we pass a laurel grove, melodious with the singing of birds ; now we pause under the quiet shadow of the peace-speaking olive. No desert place meets our eye, no arid rock, nothing but beauty and verdure. As we climb, we stumble on a strange discovery. A little opening in the mountain side reveals itself, barely large enough to creep into, yet once penetrated, leading away into the bosom of the hill by many an intricate turn, so that we hurry back to the light ere we lose ourselves. Then we remember that God, speaking by the mouth of His prophet Amos, says of His backsliding people, "Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence." A

thousand caverns pierce these limestone hills, and in the days of the prophets were the home and shelter of those who were faithful to God in the midst of abounding wickedness. The Books of Kings tell us that Elijah and Elisha found a frequent refuge there ; and in the eighteenth chapter of the first book we read the graphic account of the strange trial between the false gods of the people and the one true God, whose prophet Elijah was, which had for its scene the slopes of Carmel. There, at a righteous man's prayer, " the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, which he raised upon an altar, and the people, seeing it, fell on their faces with the cry, The Lord, He is the God!"

But we have rested sufficiently, and there is work before us. On we climb, still past many a sparkling brook, for water is very plentiful, till we reach the higher elevations where the tender leaves of the oak mingle with and enliven the sterner foliage of the pine. As we near the summit, the convent of the Carmelite monks, lately restored by European Roman Catholics, rises imposingly before us. We reach its site, and stand absorbed in

the beauty before us. The waters of the Bay of Acre lie sparkling below, their fertile shores stretching on either side, and away in the distance rise the blue hills of Lebanon, the faint haze of summer heat softening their outlines into almost transparency. We watch a caravan wind slowly through the plain, and cross the stream below ; and by and by as the sun begins to set, and the convent walls stand in bold outline against the glowing sky, we descend, fanned by the evening breeze which blows off the sea. So celebrated was this mountain in the days when God's people were the joy of all the earth, that we find in the Scripture records of those times, that it was used as a simile to express the perfection of beauty. Thus, in the Song of Solomon, the inspired writer deems no comparison for the bride's beauty higher than that it is as the head of Carmel ; and Isaiah, triumphantly foretelling the glory of Christ's kingdom, proclaims that to the wilderness shall be given even the excellency of Carmel.

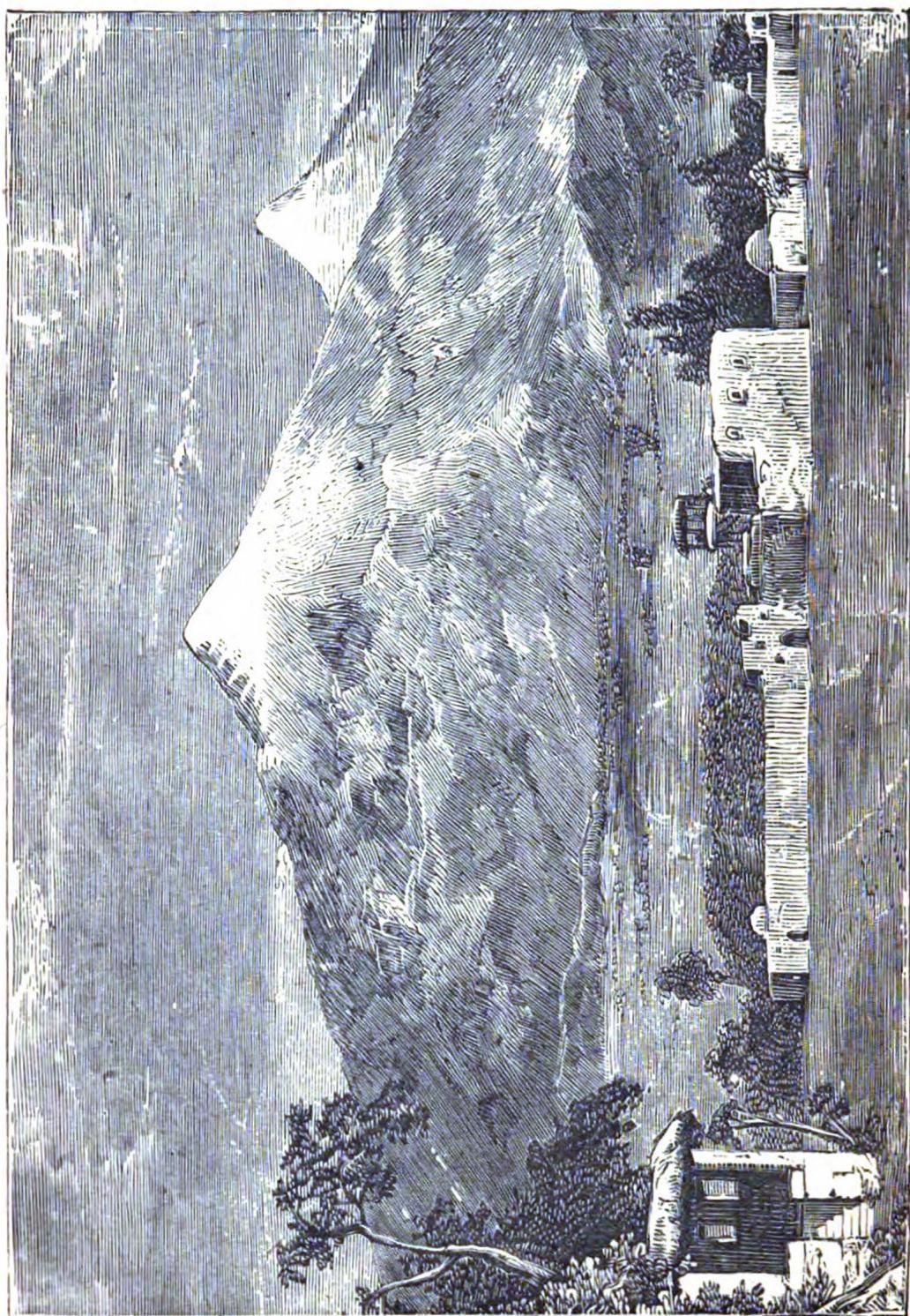




II.

Mount Ararat.

WE cannot tell whether the majestic mountain to which this name has been given has any real claim upon our acknowledgment of it as the scene of the Ark's rest during the subsidence of the deluge. Differing theories have been constructed out of the small information the Bible affords us and the conjectures of their several supporters, each based upon some not unreasonable argument, while tradition makes the matter more complicated by adding to it the blind assertions of credulous nations, which we may neither take for granted nor lightly set aside. Still, a larger share of probability rests with the supposition which assigns to Mount Ararat in Armenia the coveted significance, than with the various contending hypotheses which place its site in other localities. The Bible does not



MOUNT ARARAT.

Page 17.

confine the resting-place of the ark to the summit of one particular mountain, nor indeed compel us to infer that it grounded on dry land at all, the Hebrew word for rest equally implying the mere cessation from tossing to and fro, so that we have some ground for conjecturing that the ark found repose in calmer waters over or near the mountains of the country of Ararat. If this range was indeed the one situated in Armenia, there can be little doubt that the double peak now known by the Scriptural name must have been the first to rise above the deluge and greet the longing eyes of the imprisoned family with its promise of a restored earth and recovered liberty.

It towers above every surrounding mountain with scarcely paralleled magnificence ; crowned with eternal ice which reflects with a dazzling glitter the radiance of the sun. So remarkable is this glare that travellers speak of its blinding effect on the eyes which rest on it. In spite of its colossal proportions—the highest point reaching the perpendicular height of 16,254 feet above the level of the sea, there is no irregularity in its outline to break the perfection of its shape. As in sublimity, so in

beauty, it excels infinitely all other elevations, and clothed with the unperishing snow of centuries, impresses the beholder with wonder and awe.

Several unsuccessful attempts had been made at different times to reach its summit, but the snow-line formed an effectual barrier up to the year 1829, when Dr. Parrot, a German in Russian employment, persevering in spite of former failures, found his reward in the victory which crowned his third effort. To him we owe the first authentic statistics relative to the height and position of the mountain. The little Ararat is 12,284 Paris feet above the level of the sea; and both it and the great Ararat tower above the plain of Araxes to the extent in the latter's case of 13,350, and the former's of 9,561 feet. A curious tradition is stoutly asserted by the native Armenians, and in its support they deny that either Dr. Parrot or his followers reached the top. They maintain that God, in order to preserve the ark, which they believe to be still resting above, permits no one to approach it, and for proof of their persuasion cite the miraculous experience of a monk who

started from the neighbouring convent of Echmiadzin with a view to complete the ascent. Falling asleep on the mountain from extreme exhaustion he was carried by an angel to the point whence he set out ; but in tender consideration of his zeal, the heavenly messenger brought him a piece of the ark he had longed to see, a relic devoutly believed in and preserved in the Cathedral of Echmiadzin.

This then is the Ararat of tradition and conjecture which amongst many rivals claims consideration, although scarcely meriting credence. Could we dispel the doubt which must shadow our belief in its genuineness, how wonderful were the interest pervading this place ! Here, we might ponder, rested the one family chosen by God out of the rebellious nations to people His world, to perpetuate His worship—alas ! to perpetuate too the enmity against Him which the heart of His own creature cherishes. In their frail prison-home, weary with waiting and watching, exhausted with dismay at the dread scenes whose sole witnesses from first to last they were, those eight men and women found repose, and exchanged the tossing of a heaving ocean, which day by day increased,

for the calm depths of the resting-place whence their winged messengers were sent to gather some token of the promised deliverance ; whence they hailed with joy the mountain summits, as first the higher, then the lower stole gradually into view, and proclaimed God's justice satisfied, His avenging **arm** stayed, His curse removed from the face of the earth for ever. That family was the world of God, for whom he so cared that for its comfort He established a merciful covenant, whose bright token still spans the sky when He "brings a cloud over the earth." The bow of promise gleamed over the restored world ; the same bow of promise, dear to our hearts because its promise has not failed through all the years, for the word of God cannot pass away, still flings its bright band of colours from time to time over the land, reminding us of the wrath of a righteous God arrested by his mercy, of the perfect justice and the perfect love of Him whose minister it is.





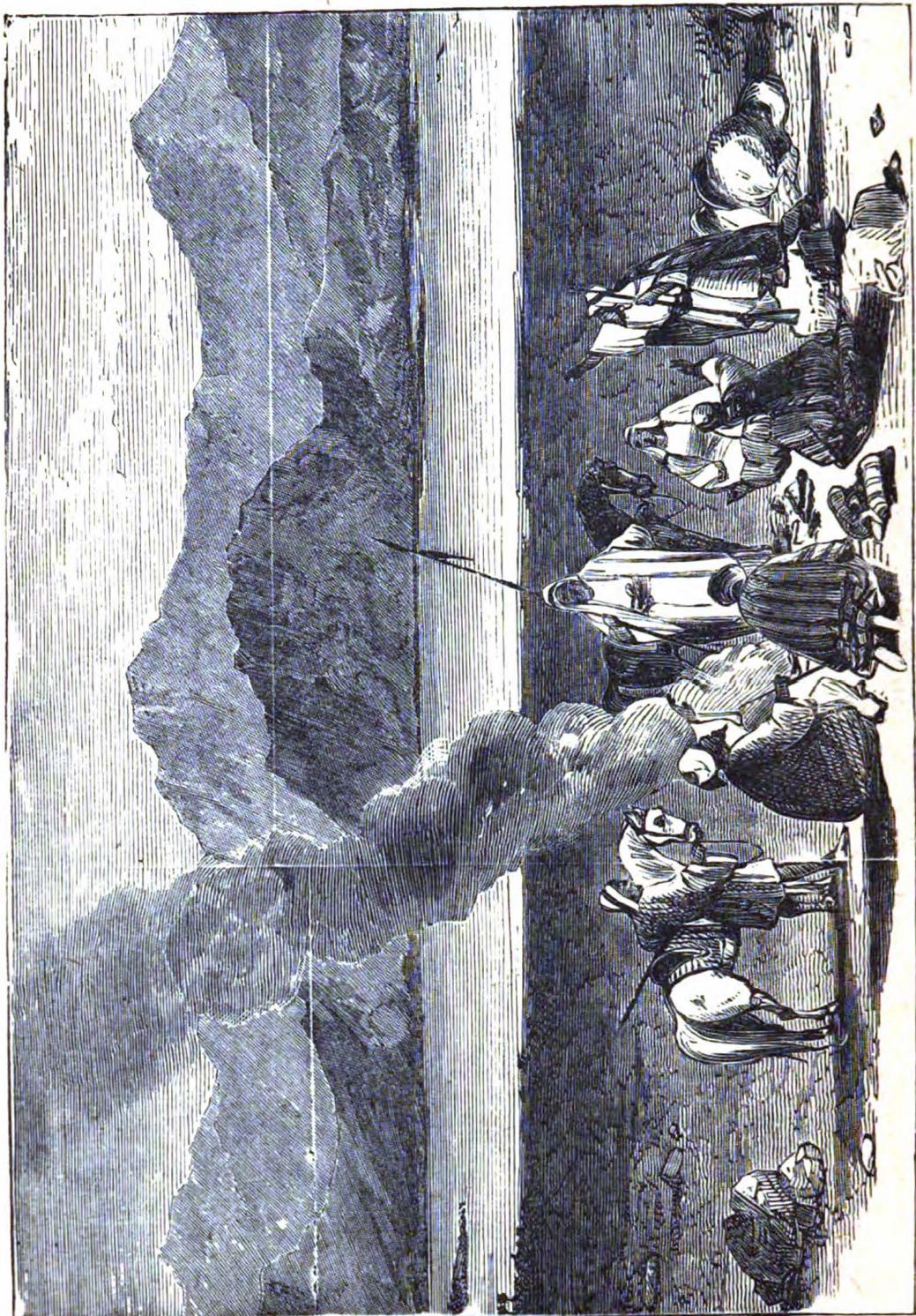
III.

The Dead Sea.

HIS strange but significant title is given to an inland sea of considerable extent in the country of Palestine. Its direction is from north to south, and it covers a length of about seventy miles, with a breadth of twelve or more. It receives the waters of the Jordan, but has no visible outlet, and is believed to rid itself of its superfluous contents by evaporation, induced by the intense heat of the atmosphere. It is difficult to present a conception of the extraordinary desolation prevailing in its neighbourhood. Those who have trod its shores seem scarcely able to frame a description adequate to the weird impression made upon them by the gloomy sterility of the scene. Bounded by imposing mountains; on the east by those of Moab, on the west by the rugged cliffs of

THE DEAD SEA.

Page 12



Engedi ; vast, dreary, sullen, answering the sunbeams with no smile, leaping to no breeze, bitter with a poisonous bitterness which permits no fish to live in its waters, lying in its torrid bed, thirteen hundred feet below the level of the sea,—the traveller who stands on its shores, isolated from all living things, except, perhaps, a solitary bird flying over the waters, feels that indeed this is the Sea of Death, the only spot in God's creation which seems nigh God-forgotten. The depression of its bed so far below the ordinary level, bearing testimony to some tremendous convulsion as its cause, brings wonderfully before us its reality as the site of the doomed cities of the plain. And well indeed has it earned its name if its gloomy waves engulfed the charred ruins of those fire-destroyed cities, entombing for ever the grandeur, the prosperity, and the wickedness which defied Heaven. How wonderful the memories which the sullen sea recalls ! Abraham's yearning entreaties and God's long-suffering, Heaven's plain warnings, the rescuing angels, who bade the one righteous man gather his household and flee for his life, looking not back upon the way, the dread

retribution arresting Lot's wife as her coveting gaze turned to all she had left behind, the fire and the brimstone rained from above, which overthrew the cities, "and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." Because of sin those billows roll gloomily upon the shore, supplying nothing to man, useless in themselves, with no life-giving property, but instead, with power to hurt and to destroy, and yet, the grand monument while time shall last of the eternal justice of God.

Strangely enough, there are oases in this wilderness, recesses hidden amongst the cliffs which amaze the traveller with their luxuriant beauty. The presiding spirit of such spots is invariably some murmuring stream, gliding with silvery cadence from rock to rock, nestling in cool clear pools below, over which bend slender canes with their feathery foliage, and richly blooming oleanders, their bright petals dropping into the stream, a dazzling humming-bird, perhaps, poising itself on their blossoms. Such is the Engedi of Scripture, "the fountain of the goat," whose caves and retreats were the scenes of much of David's eventful life.

But in this great desert, where the breeze stifles and the air scorches with intense heat, where the eye rests on an awful sterility, and the ear catches only the moan of the wind and the roll of the dark sea, these miniature gardens seem lost. One plant abounds at its southern extremity, appearing to claim identity with that which bore the apples of Sodom. Its fruit, tawny in hue, and somewhat resembling a small orange, consists of a fragile rind, which, when broken, discloses its contents rising in a cloud of dust.

“ Escape for your lives !” rang in Lot’s ears as he fled from the avenging fire and flood ; and still the air seems filled with that sudden cry, and every wave which dashes its bitter waters on the shore echoes the angel’s warning. While there is time, and ere God’s final judgment shall roll up these heavens and this earth like a garment that is cast away, escape to the hiding-place, the Zoar amongst the mountains, where the Eternal shall shelter thee, and the man Christ Jesus shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.



IV.

Ancient Rome.

HIS city was at one time the undisputed capital of the western world; and its superb ruins still attract our wonder and admiration. Its situation is now somewhat altered, the ground occupied by the present city being less extensive and more in a north-westerly direction, thus retreating from the celebrated hills covered anciently by some of its most imposing edifices. Rome, in the days of her powerful emperors, into whose dominion the treasures of many a conquered state had passed, and whose wealth and taste were lavishly employed in the embellishment of their capital, was the most stately and beautiful result of western civilization. Appropriating the Grecian arts of sculpture and architecture, bearing away from captured Corinth its choicest ornaments, the Romans



ANCIENT ROME.

Page 28.

first acquired the skill they afterward's used to such good purpose, and from that date Rome, as we picture her in our imagination, with her Capitol, her Temples, her Forums, her palaces, her baths, aqueducts, and bridges, her magnificent theatres and Basilicæ, each and all adorned with arches, statues, and pillars, rose by degrees on the site of her former humility. When in the zenith of her magnificence, her walls were about twenty miles in circuit, enclosing within their area this proud stronghold of Roman power, and overlooking the lovely Campagna, which still extends in undulating stretches on every side, crossed and bounded by ranges of purple hills. In our Lord's time the conquering arm of Rome had reached as far as Palestine, whence a number of Jewish captives had been brought to the capital. A special quarter in the city was allotted to them, where they continued to dwell in spite of the many persecutions to which they were subjected for centuries. Edict after edict was published by successive emperors, restricting their liberty, taxing their property, rendering them objects of suspicion and contempt, and yet at this present day the Ghetto of Rome swarms with

their descendants, living chiefly though they do in miserable poverty. Many of the Hebrews, who in apostolic times occupied this position, were converts to Christianity, and their influence had prevailed upon not a few of the Gentiles amongst whom they dwelt to join their persuasion, so that a Christian congregation of considerable importance had risen in Rome. To it the Apostle Paul addressed his Epistle to the Romans, despatching it from Corinth during his second visit to that town. In Rome, too, we are led to believe his last years were spent. We know that it was the scene of his long imprisonment, during which he seems to have been treated with leniency, and in no way prevented from disseminating the Gospel, in whose cause he had laboured so stoutly and suffered so often. Tradition adds his martyrdom in the city as a sequel to the narrative of St. Luke, but we have no sufficient testimony to the truth of the record. Resulting from his teaching and preaching, the Christian faith spread rapidly, and seemed only to acquire more vigour and earnestness from the terrible persecutions to which its adherents were exposed. Hunted down,

slaughtered by hundreds, thrown to wild beasts, their dying agonies exhibited for the amusement of the callous populace by a succession of emperors, whose names disgrace humanity, the faith that was stronger than death seemed to start afresh from the graves of its martyrs, firing undaunted zeal in the breasts of its adherents, shedding everywhere the light that was kindled by the hand of God, and that was destined to lighten the world. As it gathered to itself power over the hearts of men, the empire of Rome declined from day to day. Demoralized and enfeebled, it was a ready prey to the fierce invasion of barbarian hordes, and henceforward its fall was inevitable. Crime and anarchy reigned where once the noblest virtue, the order of just government had shone for the example of nations, and good pure souls fled into the desert to escape the sad contamination. We owe an incalculable debt of gratitude to these men, who sacrificed their wealth, their ambition, their homes, and sought in wildernesses and solitary places the peace and purity which their piety demanded. They are called the Fathers of the Church. Noble women, too, were their

emulous disciples, and from the Eastern deserts, whither they fled, there soon arose a voice so eloquent, so mighty, that its echoes cannot cease to reverberate while time shall last.

Alas! that other tones ever crept in to weaken their effect; that even as the triumph of Christianity seemed approaching, and Rome herself gathered its professors from their scattered habitations, and was heart and nucleus of all religious life, there glided in the false traditions of guileful men, to poison all its system, to work the ruin first begun in Eden, when the serpent's whisper tainted the pure world with sin for ever. We thank God for the strength which has flung that burden of heresy from off our shoulders, and we pray that He will again send deliverance to them who still groan under its oppression.





V.

Hebron.

HIS city, one of the most ancient existing, was the scene of many important events in the history of God's people. Chosen at first by Abraham, it continued to be the chief residence of the patriarchs during their lifetime; and it was in the cave of Machpelah within the environs of the town that they and their wives were buried. The town is situated eighteen miles south from Jerusalem. At the time of Sarah's death it was called Kirjath-arba, "the city of Arba," who was the progenitor of its inhabitants. Then, again, it and the surrounding plain were known by the name of Mamre, a designation frequently used in the Scripture records of Abraham's life. It was here that this man, "The friend of God," held frequent intercourse with the Almighty and was

acquainted with the Divine purpose, securing a wonderful destiny to his descendants. At the door of his tent in Mamre the three angels found him, when they delivered to him the special promises of God; one of the three, that mysterious angel of the covenant, more peculiarly the Divine representative, to whom the patriarch appears to have directed his lowliest worship. Here, on the very soil which God designed for his children's children, this old man lived and prospered till the inhabitants honoured him as a prince amongst them. And hither he returned from other wanderings to weep over the grave of Sarah, his wife, in the burial place of Machpelah, where he too was laid in after years by his mourning sons.

Long after, Hebron rose to considerable eminence amongst the towns of Palestine. We find its name in the list of the cities of refuge, and when the country became a kingdom, it was raised to the rank of a royal residence. This was under the sway of king David, who continued here for seven years and a half until all Israel acknowledged him as sovereign, when Jerusalem became a more

central and convenient metropolis. It is in the record of this short period of supremacy that we read of a reservoir of water called "the pool of Hebron," in connection with the execution of the murderers of Ishbosheth. David, in his unswerving justice, disregarding the insidious flattery of the assassins who had held some very different result of their cowardly crime in view, caused them to be hanged over this pool, so that their blood defiled its waters. Now there still exist outside the town two cisterns for the reception of rain-water, one of considerable size, both bearing the stamp of very ancient construction. They are built of hewn limestone and are much resorted to by the present inhabitants of the town. The larger one is reached by flights of steps at the corners, and although its contents are somewhat muddy the people depend greatly upon them. We somewhat eagerly hazard a conjecture based upon their existence and supported by the opinions of many whose eyes have noted their manifest antiquity, that these reservoirs may be the same beside one of which David's justice was carried into effect. A massive buttressed wall

is all that else remains of the ancient city. The date of its erection cannot be ascertained, but surrounding as it does the supposed cave of Machpelah, enclosing a mosque built over and sacred to the tombs of the patriarchs, some travellers have considered it possibly the building to which Josephus and other early writers have alluded as the sepulchre of Abraham. All other vestiges are swept away. Modern Hebron presents only the characteristics of other eastern towns. It is believed to contain a population of nearly five thousand, a portion of whom, perhaps one hundred families, are Jews. Well-built houses, well-filled shops and bazaars, close narrow streets spanned by arches and awnings, a manufactory of glass lamps, and the mosques of the Moslems, are the objects which meet the traveller's eye. One of the latter I have mentioned as built over the cave of Machpelah, but as the intrusion of Christians is carefully prohibited, little is known of its interior. Enough, however, has been gleaned to expose the large amount of imposture invested with a sacred character by the worshippers. Tombs of the patriarchs, each with its enclosed sarcophagus, are within,

while a lamp, perpetually burning, swings in the cave below, where the actual sepulchres are supposed to remain. But there is no access to this sacred spot; not even Moslems appear to have the right of entry.

The hills surrounding Hebron are covered with excellent pasture, to which large herds of cattle, goats, and sheep are sent. The plains produce vines and olives, and altogether Hebron possesses resources and advantages, which, under proper administration, might restore to it much of the eminence it formerly enjoyed. But the days of Abraham the friend of God, and of David His servant are gone for ever. Only their memory lingers round that little town in the valley of Mamre, recalled by the names, familiar from childhood, which fall on the traveller's ear and realize more vividly than ever in his experience the unquestionable facts of their existence and the solemn atmosphere permeated by the presence of God which enveloped them, as guided by His special providence, they stood forth the father and the leader of His people, the ancestors and the types of His Son, our Saviour.



VI.

Tyre.

THIS once beautiful and wealthy city stood near the north-western frontier of Palestine, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Old Tyre was built on the borders of the sea, but, as its population and riches increased, a new city was founded on an island about half a mile from the land, which the Tyrians, by reason of their maritime strength, converted into a stronghold. Both positions were favourable to its eminence as a mercantile city, and contributed to its security against the invasion of such enemies as were not possessed of similar naval power. Thus its internal resources enabled Tyre to withstand the five years' blockade of the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser, a success which added not a little to its prestige and importance. The Tyrians were the most

TYRE.

Page 42



skilful artisans of their day, so much so, that we find their workmanship lauded both in Holy Writ and in the books of Homer. Solomon employed their assistance in building the Temple, their talent for elaborated architecture being unequalled elsewhere. This accomplishment, and the exquisite merchandise of jewels, embroidery, unrivalled purple and fine linen which supplied their commerce with other countries, served to establish them in a high position and render them opulent and influential. Their ships made voyages, unparalleled in those days for enterprise, and in many a distant colony their children founded and strengthened important cities. The celebrated Carthage was one of these, and is believed to have been established nearly nine hundred years before Christ. Thus the parent city amassed wealth and power, revelling in all the intoxicating pleasures and luxuries which she had at her command, for we are told that festivity with its usual accompaniments of music and the dance was eagerly encouraged by her inhabitants. Not so much her excessive luxury as her haughty scorn of the people of God seems to have

earned the wrath of Heaven and inspired the terrible predictions of her appointed doom which we read in the prophetic writings.

Nebuchadnezzar was the first instrument of Divine vengeance, besieging the city on the mainland, which fell into his hands after a determined resistance for thirteen years. This arrested the activity of Tyre for the predicted period of seventy years, at the end of which her recovered energies began to manifest themselves in the renewed success of her commercial enterprises, and soon restored her to something like her old prosperity. But a more powerful foe, furnished with a completer mechanism of destruction, was at hand, and the all-conquering Alexander accomplished the capture of both cities, laying waste as he advanced on his victorious course; out of the ruins of old Tyre which he swept into the sea, he constructed a mole, rendering the hitherto wave-girt city an easy prey, and her boasted impregnability was at an end for ever. From that day no effort has inspired her with sufficient vigour to overcome the effects of her humiliation, and the prophecies concerning her have continued calmly but irresistibly to fulfil

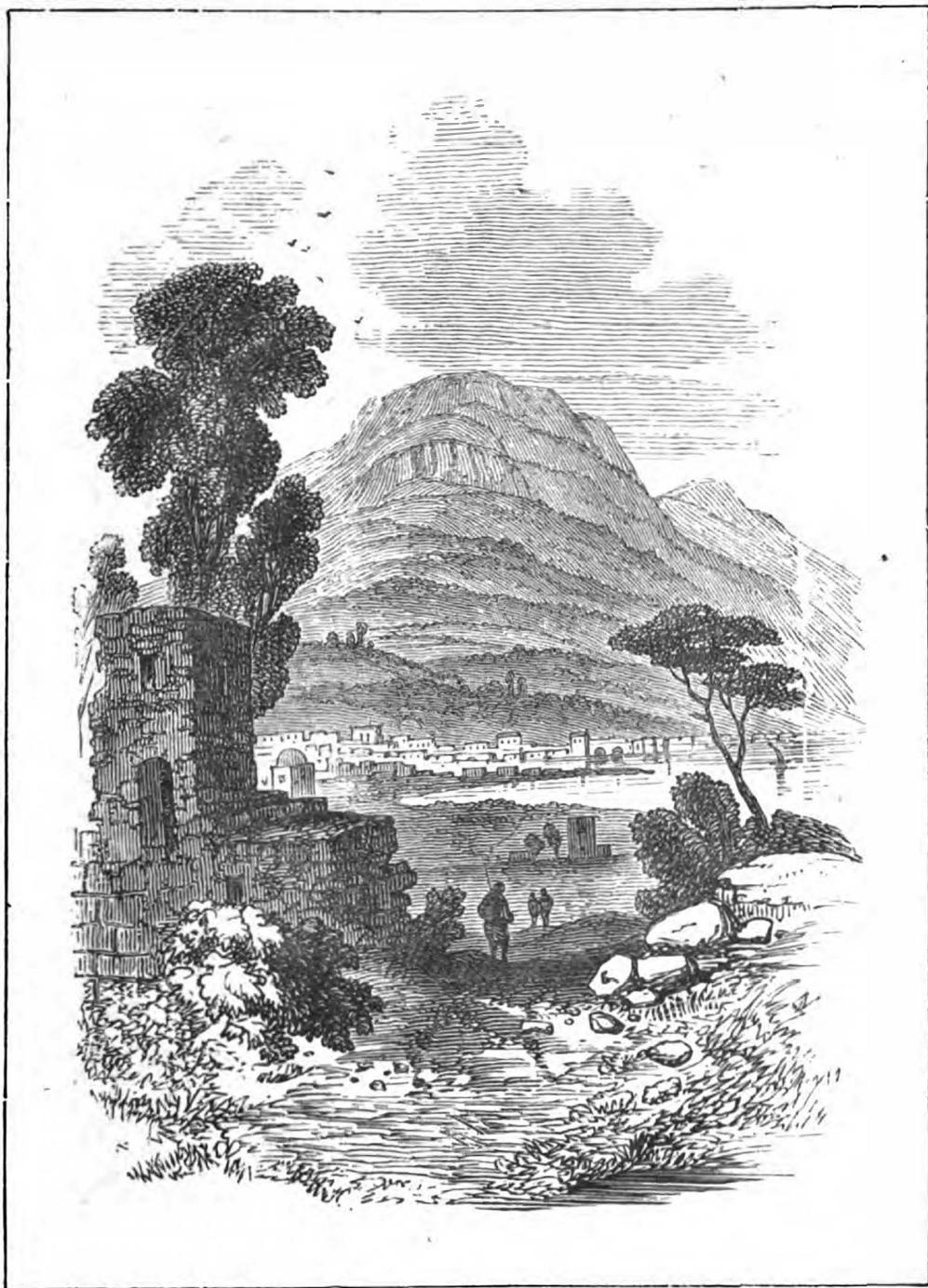
themselves. The waves now roll over shattered columns and the fragments of once stately edifices which the eye can fathom as they lie in heaps beneath, and the Tyre of to-day comprises a little village of lowly appearance and humble population, where the princes of commerce dwelt once in palaces of marble and granite while their fleets rode at anchor around,—for such is the word of the Lord: “Thou shalt be built no more.” Thus Tyre holds a memorable place in the list of those cities whose sin no injunction could arrest, whose doom no entreaty could avert, and who, swept into desolation by the righteous displeasure of God, whom, in every case, they seem to have defied or denied, were held up as warning examples to His erring people to save them if it were possible from incurring a similar retribution. But the people would none of His reproof, and the day arrived when the Son of God, finding not reverence but scorn and bitter hatred in the land of His Father’s adoption, called down a woe upon the cities he yearned to save,—“It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.”



VII.

Corinth.

CHE celebrated city of Corinth, the mercantile centre of Greece, stood, in ancient times, on the isthmus which joins Peloponnesus to the mainland. It was founded by the family of Bacchiades who, as far as we can discover from the dim records of the time, established the worship of Venus and Bacchus which disgraced and demoralized the state. It was built at the foot of a lofty rock upon the summit of which stood the citadel, the Acro-Corinthus, and in proximity to the fortress, a graceful temple to the goddess Venus. Wealthy, cultivated, and esteemed for the justice of its domestic and foreign policy, Corinth maintained for long an enviable position, but in the second century before Christ, fell before Roman power, and was pillaged and destroyed by its invaders.



C O R I N T H.

Page 48.

These rebuilt it after their own fashion, and peopled the new city with freedmen from Rome, and in this position it became the field for successful apostolic labour, supporting a Christian church of considerable extent to which the two Corinthian epistles were addressed by Paul. These remain in our possession, held eminently valuable by all Christian Churches for guidance and enlightenment, and we therefore owe a deep debt of gratitude to those Corinthian converts, in reproof and encouragement of whom they were first written. Even at that early stage the Church had manifested symptoms of division and anarchy, separating into parties, each of whom declared some celebrated apostle or preacher to be its head. The reports of this disunion had greatly grieved Paul and led to his addressing them in these epistles. We gather from them that much as this Church distinguished itself by unusual gifts, its proneness to sink into error and degeneracy was equally great and demanded the stern reproof of its original founder. Yet such records as we possess of its after-history manifest the fulfilment of its early promise,

and among its bishops we find names which were afterwards enrolled in the venerable list of the Christian Fathers. Doubtless, Paul's spirited correction of the evil so ready to spring, and encouragement of the good rooted in faith in the Saviour of the Gentiles, did much to eradicate the former and confirm and extend the latter.

Ancient Corinth has been almost swept away; most of its houses were shattered by an earthquake which passed under its very foundations some years ago, and even those which remain are partly in ruins. In the midst of this desolation there still tower some beautiful columns of its old temple to Minerva, spared both by time and the destructive earthquake. The lofty Acropolis, from whose summit extends a view of almost ideal loveliness, retains but few vestiges of the buildings which formerly crowned it. The steps and gate leading to the ancient fortress are still remaining, but the temple is replaced by a Moslem mosque falling, like all around, into ruins. From this point the entire isthmus, with its classical surroundings, may be overlooked: the scene of the Isthmian Games,

once the second in importance of the national festivals; the bays on either side where the world's merchandise once gathered in ships; Cithæron, Parnassus, and Helicon, and very faintly Athens, with its sister Acropolis. Corinth was the favourite residence of Diogenes, and it was here that he confounded the haughty Alexander with his contemptuous indifference to that monarch's condescension. On the plain between the ancient city and the bay a new Corinth has risen, on a site supposed to be more secure from the devastations of earthquakes. This plain is a fruitful source of revenue to its present population, producing as it does with surprising fertility the tiny grapes, which, when dried and exported, we know by the name of currants. Like every other state in Greece, the isthmus contributed its statesmen and heroes to the battle for independence which, some years ago, flashed over Greece like an awakening to its ancient nobility. The details of this war are amongst the most interesting records of modern history.

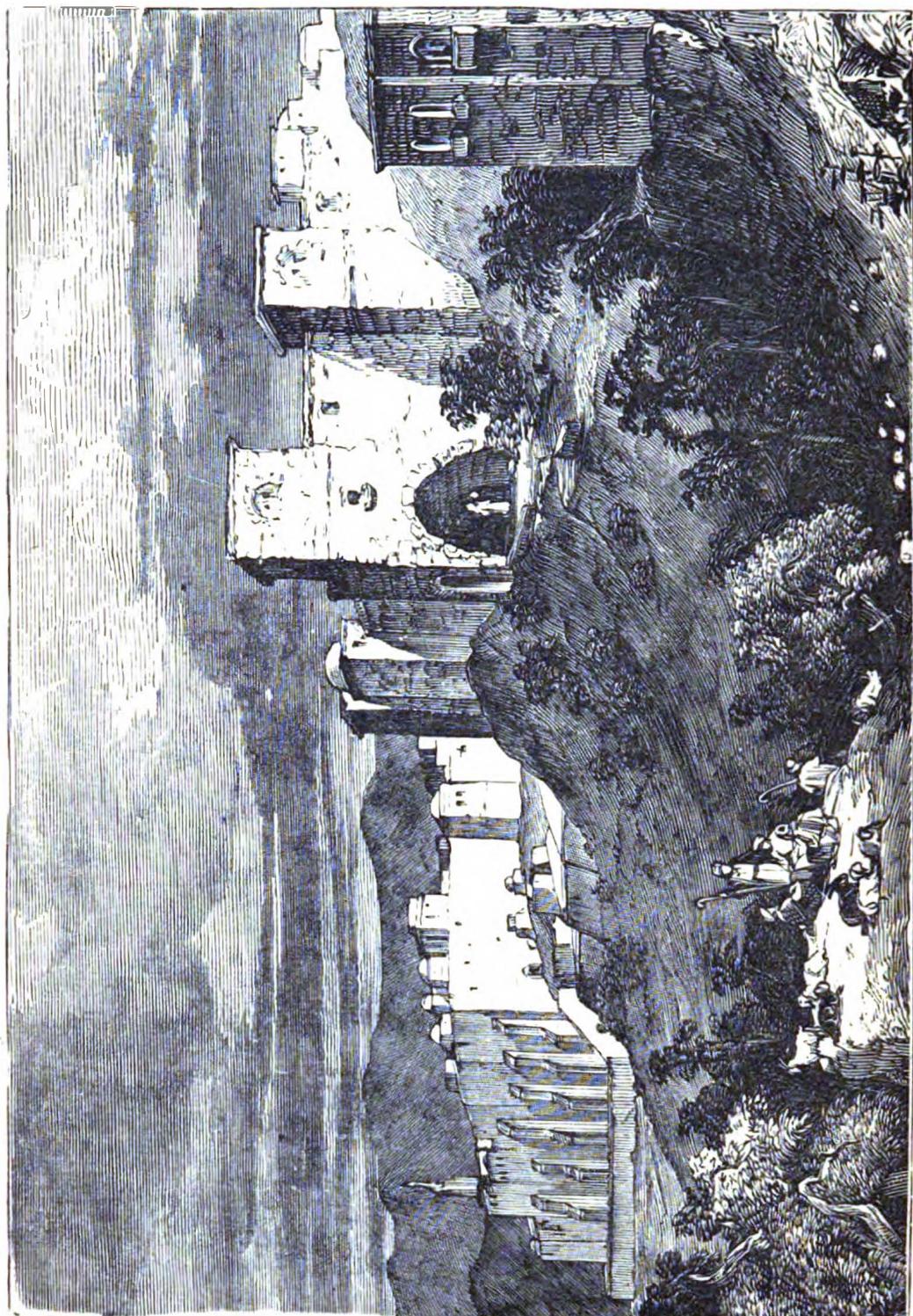


VIII.

Bethlehem.

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

BY PON this little town between Jerusalem and Hebron was this glorious crown of prophecy set. It had been already honoured by being the birthplace of David, but in these words lay the indication of an infinitely greater and imperishable distinction. The prophecy was fulfilled, and Bethlehem knew it not. In the midst of that busy crowd which filled the little spot to overflowing, its individuals impressed alone by the importance of their own concern in the matter which had brought them thither, who would have dreamt of bestowing a thought on the birth of a lowly babe, the child of insignificant parents whose



BETHLEHEM.

Page 54.

lodging was a stable ? To them it was an occurrence scarcely worth a remark. The angels of heaven indeed filled the air with triumphant songs because a Saviour was born into a world, which knew Him not, but some humble shepherds, whose opinion had no value in the eyes of that world, were all who shared the glad tidings with them that night. Born in a stable, laid in a manger, unknown and unnoticed ;—the first fitting step in a life which knew no rest; tasted no indulgence; admitted only the bare necessities undenied to the poorest man who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow; whose choice was sacrifice; whose Spirit was the offering up of Himself. And now, the world rings with His name, nations rejoice in His glory, and the voices of Christians dwell tenderly on the name of the birth-place of their Lord.

The town, which is still and has always been inhabited, lies about six miles southward from Jerusalem. That it is indeed the Bethlehem Ephratah of prophecy and the scene of the Saviour's birth is undisputed, every evidence being in its support. Ephratah, by which name it was sometimes known,

signifies "the fruitful," a title to which its admirable situation gives it a claim. The hill which forms its site, abounds in luxuriant vineyards, groves of almond and fig-trees laid out in terraces, through which fertilizing streams of water glide, and the view is enlivened at different points by towers and the necessary wine-presses. The town possesses one principal street and straggles without plan in other directions. The houses are of brick, flat-roofed and remarkable for having, in most instances, a row of earthen bee-hives along the top. It has about three thousand inhabitants, mostly native Christians, whose chief employment and source of sustenance is the carving of beads and crosses from mother-of-pearl, wood, and other materials. Rude and somewhat savage as these people are their carvings are elegant and skilful. A deep valley lies below the town, giving rise to the suggestion that in it the hosts of heaven appeared to the watching shepherds. A fountain of clear, cool water springs here which furnishes a not unreasonable argument to the hypothesis that from it David's three warriors carried the draught of water, for which

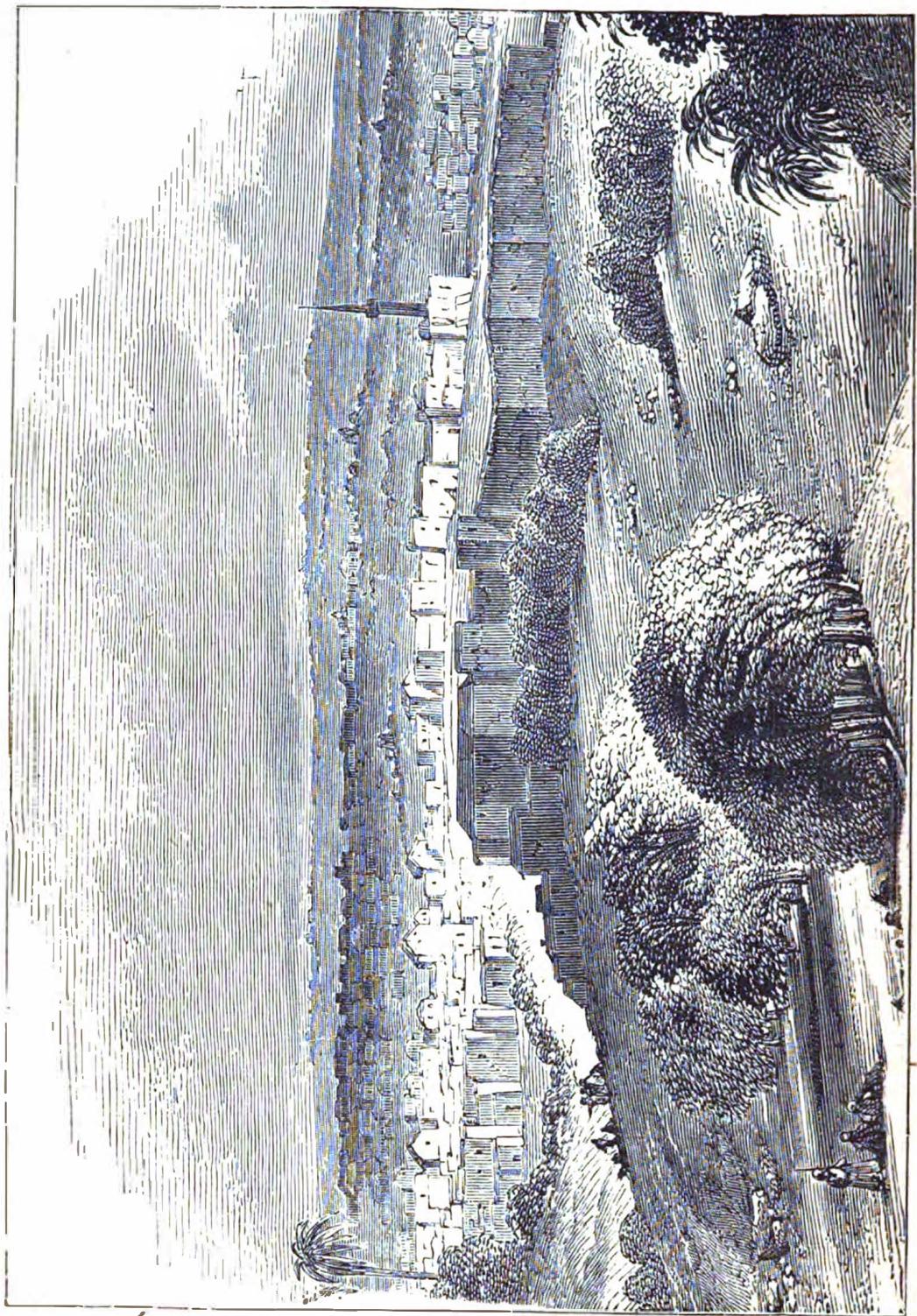
their leader longed, at the risk of their lives, but which he, in pious self-denial, offered up to the Lord, for he said, "Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" A cave at one end of the town is asserted by the supporters of the convent built over it, to have been the scene of the nativity, but no evidence beyond that of tradition assures their belief. The convent is a beautiful building of very old date, roofed with wood from the cedars of Lebanon, rows of stately pillars lining its interior, in excellent preservation, and esteemed one of the finest specimens of architecture in Palestine. Within, there are pointed out to the visitor the various sacred spots it preserves and celebrates, places eagerly sought and worshipped by the zealous and credulous pilgrim of a perverted Church, and although not denied, yet somewhat doubted, by the traveller who acknowledges our holy and simple creed, who, even while unassured that this is indeed the very birth-place of our Lord, grieves over the mocking mummeries which are deemed becoming homage to its associations.



IX.

Nazareth.

THE village of Nazareth is built on the lower part of a hill, and overlooks a narrow valley about a mile in length. It lies in a region of considerable fertility, corn, vines, olives, figs, being cultivated beneath. Six miles eastward, rises Mount Tabor. The village contains about three thousand inhabitants, many of whom are Christians. The houses are of grey stone, well built, flat-roofed, but without any attempt at ornamental architecture. The valley is luxuriant in loveliness and well cultivated, field being divided from field by olive groves and cactus hedges. The mountain in the background descends in several abrupt precipices near the village, lending a somewhat wild character to the scenery. In old days, this secluded Galilean hamlet numbered



NAZARETH.

amongst its inhabitants Joseph the carpenter and his family. A man of grave aspect, the kinsman and husband of the gentle mother of our Lord, of royal lineage, and a member of a profession counted honourable in Judea, Joseph was also a “just man”—that is, not only remarkable for his integrity, but also for his kindness and gentleness. Mary, his young wife, spent those years in simple, loving obedience, pursuing in quietness her daily duties, perhaps only the unfathomed depth in her eye distinguishing her from the other women of Nazareth, and revealing that she hid a great mystery in her heart and pondered over it alone. For Jesus, our blessed Saviour, abode with them, and “was subject to them,” and perhaps also learned Joseph’s trade; but He gave no sign of His omnipotence, showed no evidence of His divinity,—was content, in the humility of His obscure youth, to be looked on as the son of Joseph the carpenter: and yet, Mary knew that an angel from the throne of God had borne the promise of His coming; that the hosts of heaven had hailed His birth with anthems; that away in the wise East a sign in the sky had marked the

event; that in the Temple, but the other day, He had claimed Jehovah for His Father; and she hid all these things in her heart, wondering, perhaps, at the daily life wherein her heavenly Son repressed His divine nature, noting in silent tenderness how He bowed Himself to all that they decreed, and was only unlike the sons of others in the perfection of His obedience. That family, whose members, known as they were to all around, yet seem to have wrapped themselves up in sacred reserve even towards each other, honourable in their obscurity, dignified in their retirement, in choosing Nazareth for their home have dignified its name throughout the ages. What would Christians not give to obtain one glimpse of their untold history? Uneventful it must needs have been, occupied by domestic interests, owning as its highest excitement the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, although the latter part of those unrevealed years must have been disturbed by the Galilean insurrection headed by that Judas whose nature so strangely combined rare nobility with blind fanaticism. The grave father, the silent mother, and the Child

who was subject to them, were linked to each other by that unutterable mystery of which they all were conscious but which only One could unravel, and which the other members of that household, vaguely known to us as the brethren of Jesus, could not even dimly recognise. Wonderful, that in Nazareth there was spent the one perfect life in the sight of heaven; that from its little synagogue there rose to God the one pure worship out of all the world, trammelled as it was by many a human ordinance which it was His mission to annul; that, clad in common garments, subject to toil, unobtruding on the humblest, very man of very man, the very God of very God dwelt there!

In the neighbourhood, one of the precipitous cliffs is still pointed out as the scene of the attempted assassination of our Lord, where the people, unwilling to recognise in the son of Mary their promised Messiah, would gladly have avenged with a frightful death what they deemed His blasphemous assumption of divinity, had He not, clad in the very omnipotence which they denied in Him, passed unseen through the midst of them; thus testi-

fying to the world that no man took His life from Him, but that, when He died, He laid it down Himself, for the world's sake.

This spot, like many others in the Holy Land, is a point of contest between the Greek and Latin churches, who differ as to its precise locality. The argument seems in favour of the precipice nearest the town, and many intelligent travellers have given their opinions in its support. But our most reverential curiosity is baffled by the uncertainty which envelops the minuter topography of Palestine, leaving investigation so frequently unanswered. Let it suffice, that all we truly require to know has in no case been withheld from us.

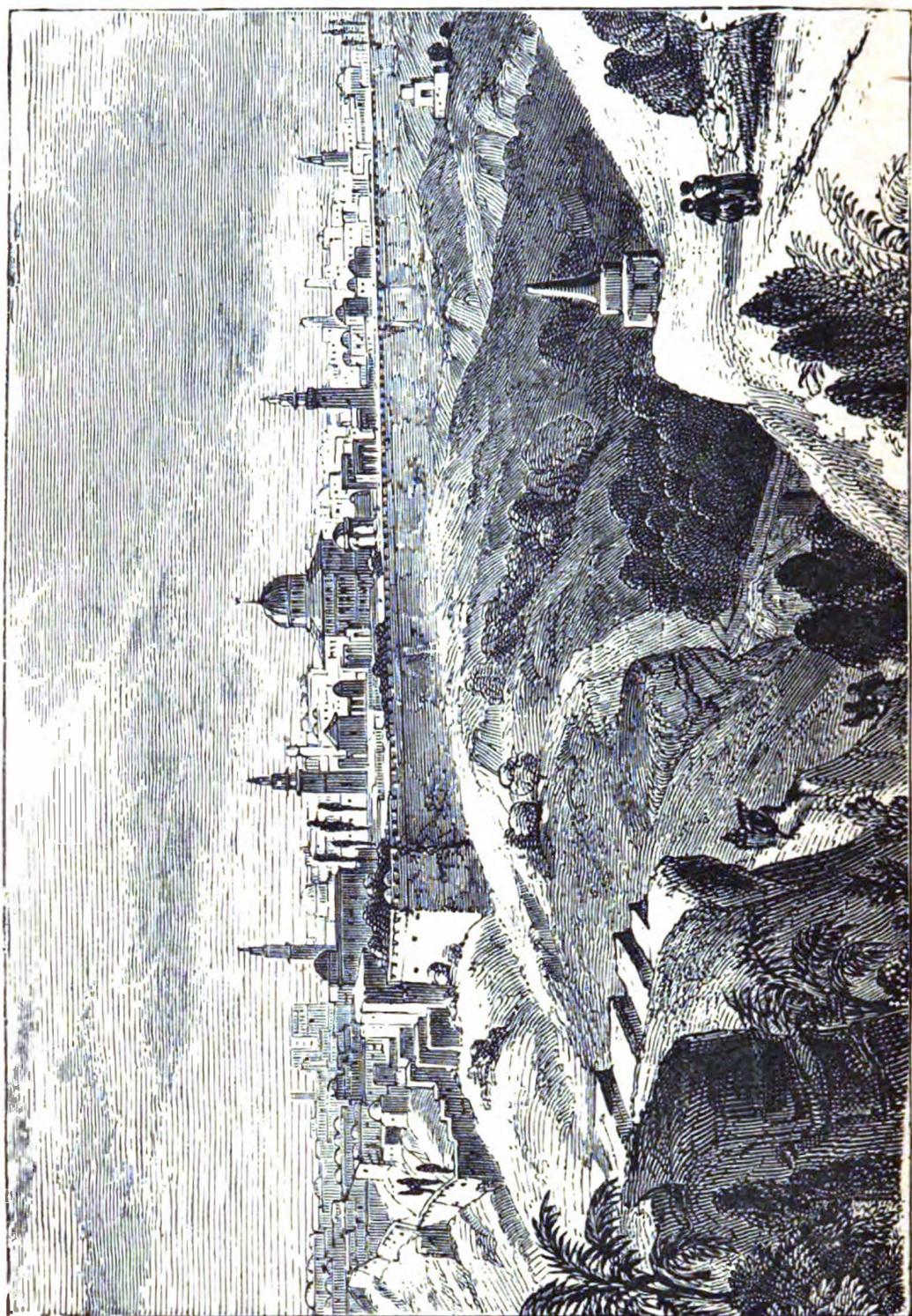




X.

Jerusalem.

HIS city, the capital of the land, the centre of its religious and political life, and at the time of our Saviour the most beautiful of eastern cities, lies near the summit of a broad tract of table-land running to the west of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea. It is surrounded by hills with their intervening valleys, between the mouths of two of which latter, the valley of Hinnom and the valley of Jehoshaphat, the city is built. But the topography of modern Jerusalem differs widely from that of the ancient town, for the boundary wall excludes much that formerly belonged to it, and the nature of the ground itself is greatly altered, the accumulated rubbish which resulted from its reiterated overthrows filling up the original hollows and forming artificial elevations. The



JERUSALEM.

Page 69.

hands, too, of its many conquerors have for their own purposes aided this work, and a Jew of the time of the luxurious Herod would scarcely recognise the modern travesty of his city which, under the rule of the hated Gentile, occupies its site. But, even in his day, it differed widely from the capital of David and Solomon. Again and again its temple had been overthrown and defiled, its walls levelled, and its fortifications shattered, while as often did the Jews, with their great strength of purpose and their passionate attachment to the city of their God and their kings, repair and restore its ruins. During the grand up-rising of the strong-handed Maccabees it was wrested from the power of its Syrian masters, and remained for nearly a century under their princely rule, increasing in wealth and power until, in the year B.C. 63, the Romans seized and retained it for a considerable time. During their possession Herod the Great ascended the throne of Judea, and the Jerusalem of the days of our Lord was the result of his unsparing expenditure and architectural improvements. He took down the old Temple, and built one greatly surpassing it in magnificence ; he

strengthened the walls of the city, constructed by his father; he built the superb citadel of Antonia on the site of the stronghold of Zion, the ancient residence of King David, whose foundations had been lowered by the Macca-bees after its evacuation by the Syrian garri-son, while every portion of the city received improvement at his hands. It is, therefore, upon this renovated and beautified Jerusalem that we look in connection with the incidents in our Lord's life of which it formed the scene. Various sects had arisen within its precincts, the offspring of intercourse with foreign nations and pursuit of the philosophies of rival schools. The haughty Pharisee, of faultless behaviour and rigid adherence to the letter of his Talmud, argued loftily in the Temple; the culti-vated Sadducee, of laxer conduct and luxurious tastes, smiled with refined contempt at the vigorous ardour of his rival, treating as a superstition fit only for the ignorant his earnest belief in a supernatural world, the heaven and hell of the hereafter; the gentle Essene, of ascetic habits and pure morality, undisturbed by the fanaticism of the one or the sneer of the other, promulgated his simple doctrines and

led away many a disciple to seek the happiness he promised in a hermit life in the cave-pierced cliffs of the desert. Undoubtedly, the greatest influence was possessed by the Pharisaic school which ruled in the Temple, in the Sanhedrim, in the regard of the people, dictating to the latter, observances, traditions and laws, many of which were burdensome in the extreme. Upon it Christ turned the strong current of His reprobation, stripping it of its assumed sanctity in the eyes of the people, laying bare its hypocrisies, its pride, its passions, and from it He encountered unremitting opposition, enmity even unto the death. With sad fore-knowledge of its destiny He viewed the costly structures of Jerusalem; with each fresh persecution, each appeal despised, each miracle slighted, the coming storm gathered darkly overhead, and the riven rocks on Golgotha, the rent veil in the doomed Temple, the hidden light of day were but its first faint thunder-peal. The cup of iniquity was filled upon the day that Christ was nailed to the cross by murderous hands,—“therefore their house is left unto them desolate.” Jerusalem forms the nucleus for the most sacred associations of

the Christian traveller, yet the uncertainty which prevails as to the accuracy of its hallowed localities is supremely tantalizing, for although most of them have been fixed by tradition, the topographical evidence does not always justify their claim. The modern town, built on the old ruins, is composed of narrow, ill-paved streets, arched over in true oriental fashion and harbouring much poverty in the apparently respectable houses. The mosques of the Moslems, some Latin, Greek, and Armenian convents with their churches, form its most striking buildings. On Mount Moriah rises the Mosque of Omar, erected on the site of the Temple, of which there still remain, venerable for their antiquity, the foundations and lower portions. A portion of the Temple wall still lingers at one corner of the sacred enclosure of the Mohammedans, and is consecrated to a supremely pathetic use. Here, on the outside, the Jews congregate every Friday to bewail the wreck of their country and their kingdom, beating their heads against this ruined fragment, weeping, praying, agonizing. The population is estimated at about twelve thousand, one half of

whom are Moslems, while the rest are in equal numbers Jews and Christians. The Jews inhabit the most squalid quarter of the town, between Mounts Zion and Moriah, and live in misery and want, most of them coming thither from other lands, actuated by the desire to die and be buried in the Holy City. Their burying-ground is in the valley of Jehoshaphat, which contains amongst others the tomb of Absalom. This ravine, through which flows the brook Kedron, is wild and gloomy; its mouth narrowed by mounds of rubbish which have choked up the stream, still believed to be percolating beneath. The summit of the Mount of Olives commands the finest view of the city with its environment of hill and valley. From some point near this, Christ gazed upon it as its towers and palaces burst with imposing grandeur on His view, while He wept over the approaching doom which her acceptance of His offered salvation might have averted. This hill is still sparsely clad with the tree whose name it bears, while north of the city the olive plantations are numerous and fruitful. There is little cultivation in the neighbourhood, the scorching sun being unfavourable to all produce.



XI.

The Acropolis of Athens.

THE city of Athens, capital of ancient Attica, was founded in an age so remote that its records are only a tangle of dim fables. King Theseus, renowned in these heroic myths, is said to have been the first to unite the small provinces of Attica into a state and establish its capital at Athens. Long centuries before Christ, it had attained a proud eminence in the eyes of the surrounding world, become the parent of many colonies, and gathered to itself much wealth and influence. Its monarchy had been abolished, a hereditary aristocracy succeeding to the various offices of government, which in its turn gave place to a democracy, the mainspring of much greatness and wisdom. The laws of the celebrated Solon formed the basis of the country's polity, and maintained its constitu-



THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS.

Page 77.

tion in equity and order. A war with Persia commenced in the fifth century before Christ, and was followed by the dire confusion of the Peloponnesian revolt, in both of which Athens distinguished herself by consummate bravery and moderation, and it was only when weakened by internal strife that she fell a victim to the combined efforts of her Spartan and Persian foes. After this unhappy and demoralizing war, she never recovered her political importance, and with the other Greek provinces was in after years included in the kingdom of Macedonia. But the greatness of ancient Athens was not that alone of judicious government and skilful generalship. She was the nursery of intellect of the highest order, art and science, philosophy and oratory having either germinated, or received the most favourable cultivation there. The present schools of philosophy and art throughout Europe, drink even now at the fountain of Athenian inspiration, and the country that could number amongst her children, a Homer, a Plato, a Phidias, a Demosthenes, must dwell in the reverence of men for ever. The list of her poets, orators, sages, generals, is one grand

inscription to her genius, nobility, patriotism, immortal valour. Her religion, now known to us as a mythology, held an important place in the interests which enveloped her. These old, graceful deities, worse if possible than the men who worshipped them, and excelling in nothing but the power imputed to them, inspired many a noble temple, many a masterpiece of sculpture. One of the most dignified of their vast number, was the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, to whose protection Athens entrusted herself, and in whose honour the superb temple was built the ruins of which still crown the Acropolis. The famed statue of the divinity, executed by the hand of Phidias, stood in front of the building, her golden accoutrements gleaming abroad. The site was eminently picturesque, and rising superbly above the city, fittingly expressed the conception of watchful strength. The palace and temples are not so dilapidated, but that an accurate idea of their pristine perfection may still be formed, and even now, set like a rare crown upon the brow of the Acropolis, they complete the most beautiful object in this beautiful city. Not only did

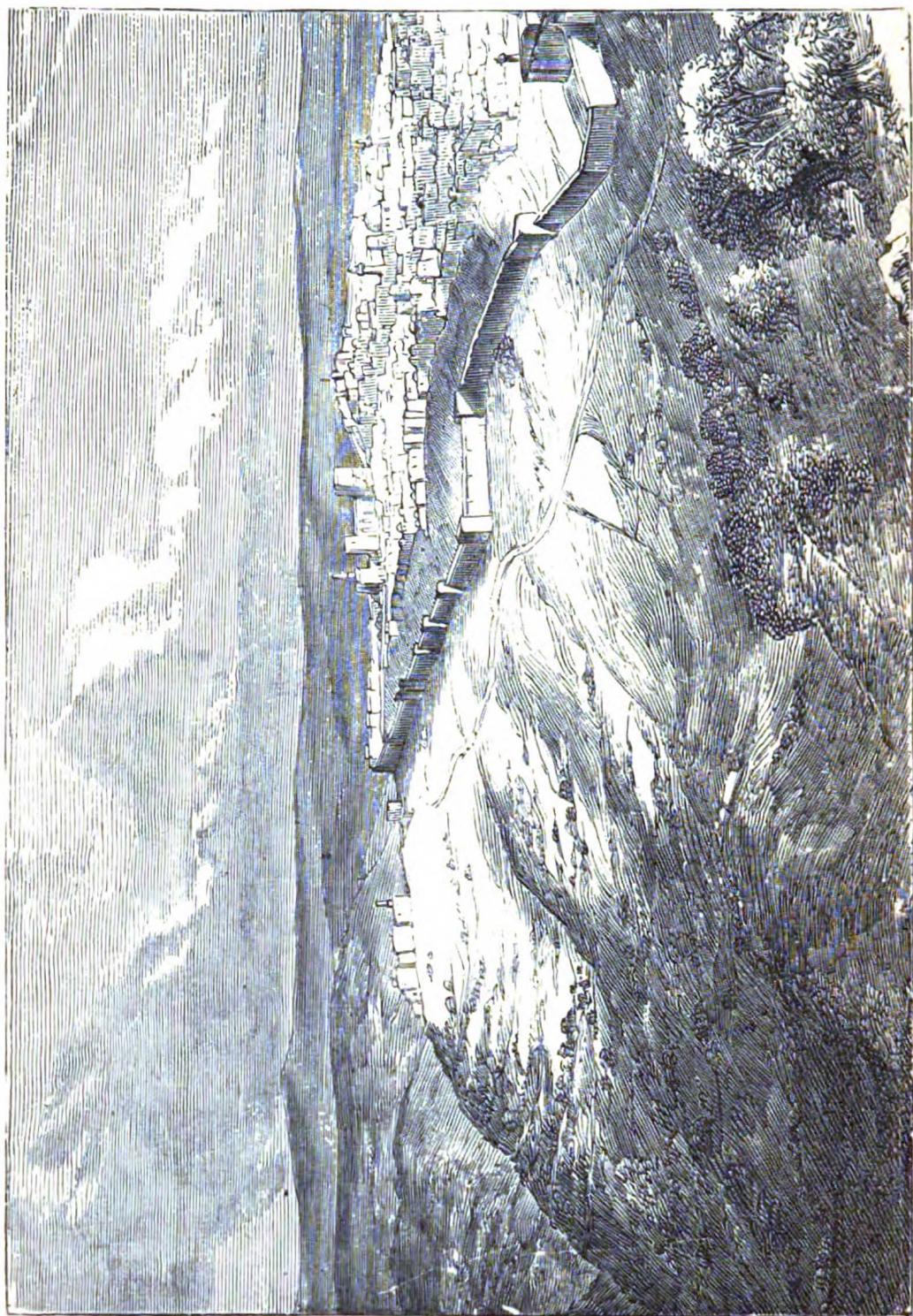
Athens lie under Minerva's eye, but the wide country on every side, as far as the faint line of the Peloponnesian coast across the band of "innumerable laughing waves." Temples and theatres abounded at the foot of the rock, the remains of the latter still tolerably preserved, while to the exceeding number of the former we have a remarkable testimony from the Apostle Paul. Fearful that the whole circle of divinities had not been honoured in their town, the Athenians raised an altar bearing the strange inscription, "To the Unknown God." "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship," said the apostle, standing in the midst of Mars' hill, "him declare I unto you." We can well imagine these talented Athenians crowding curiously round this eloquent stranger, who proclaimed with such authority a creed both new and wonderful, listening courteously, smiling, it is true, sceptically, but withal enthralled by the power of both the Faith and its Apostle. Not fruitlessly was that seed cast abroad; at first perhaps, only the plaything of their speculative minds, but resulting not long after in Christian converts and a Christian church.



XII.

Mount Zion.

THIS appellation, in the figurative language of the inspired writers, is often meant to express the entire city of Jerusalem. But apart from the poetic use to which it is thus put, it is literally the name of a distinct quarter of the city, a district which up to the time of David was held by its original owners, who dwelt there in peaceful proximity to the children of Judah. At that time it embraced Mount Moriah, the special property apparently of Araunah, a prince of the Jebusites, from whom David purchased the Temple site, which, consecrated by its use, received afterwards the name of "The holy hill of Zion." At no great distance upon a rocky elevation, towered the fortress captured from the Jebusites by Joab under David, afterwards strengthened by the king



MOUNT ZION.

Page 53

for his own palace, and known as the city of David and the stronghold of Zion. This citadel in after centuries became the medium of much insult and aggression to the Jews from the successive foes who occupied it, and on this account was razed and levelled by the Maccabees after their victorious siege. In three long years they completed the arduous task of lowering its rocky foundations, so that no future foe might employ its natural advantages for the hurt and terror of the people. These hills with part of the lower town connected with them, were the ancient Zion, but a very small portion of which is included in the modern city. It was thus therefore, that the name became expressive of the very spirit of Jerusalem and was employed by the prophets when alluding to it. Upon the one hill rose the stately Temple, the dearest possession in Jewish keeping, the house built for the habitation of the Lord their God. "Walk about Zion and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God, for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Upon the other rose the strong palace of their kings, whence David's just decrees issued for their happiness, whence the wisdom and splendour of Solomon went abroad throughout the earth,—theirs by the warrior monarch's might, beautified and strengthened by his hand. “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.”

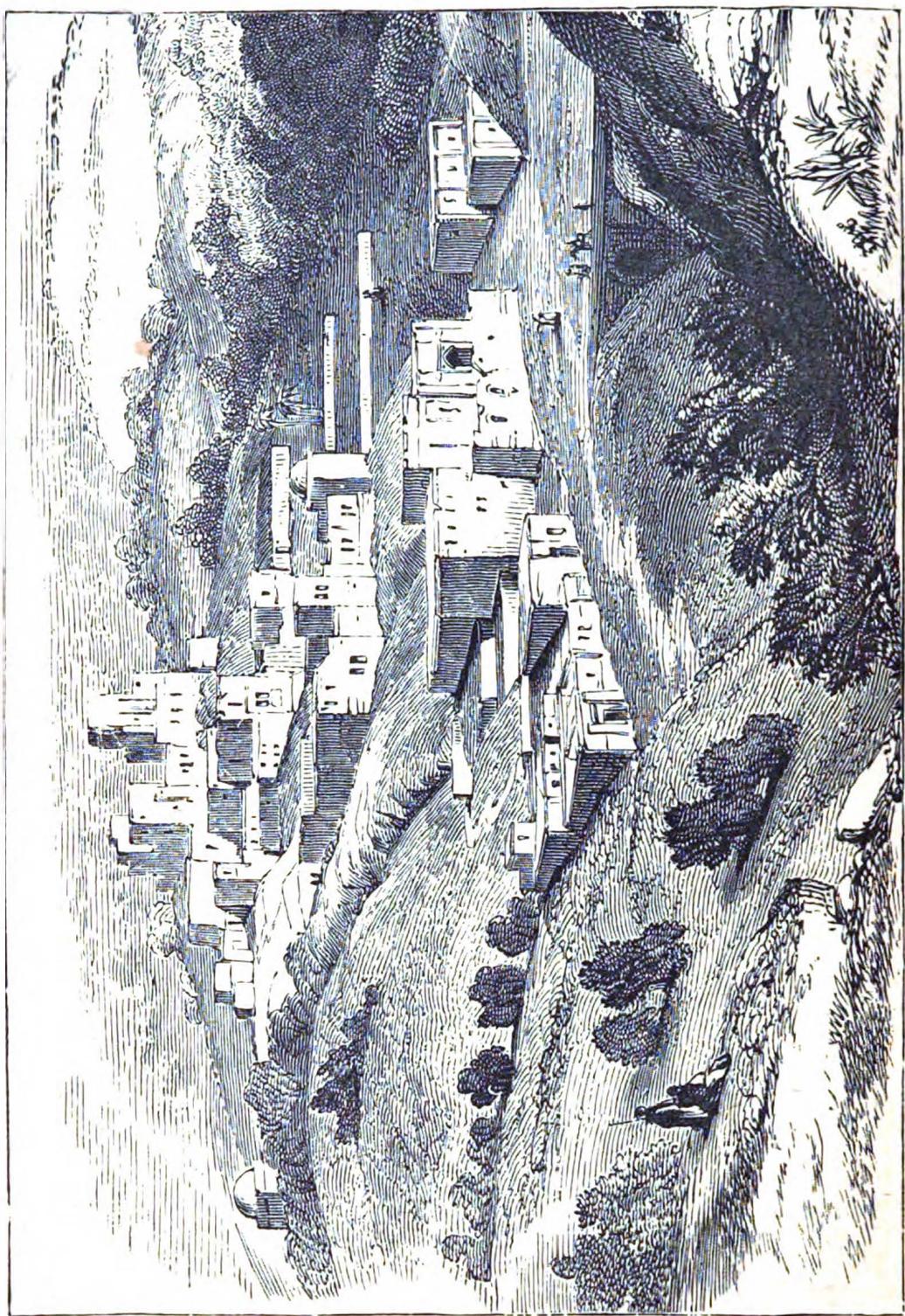
Including as it therefore did all that contributed to the importance of Jerusalem, Zion naturally became the cynosure of every eye, the most cherished and most sacred spot in Palestine. The habitation of the King of kings and of His anointed, all devout and loyal hearts held it in passing reverence, rallying round it again and again, even when well-nigh broken by the desecration offered to it by their enemies. Now, the glory has departed from it, and Moslem minarets, Greek and Latin convents, here a hotel and there a dwelling-house, rise from its slopes. One little church has of late years been erected on it, the only one where the simple faith of Christ is preached amidst the scenes of His sufferings and death.



XIII.

Bethany.

BIN a little glen on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, lies the village of Bethany. Its distance from Jerusalem is very short, the walk between the two places occupying scarcely more than half an hour. At present a few cottages of gray stone, sheltering perhaps a score of Arab families, comprise the entire village, and only some fragments of sculptured marble, found in several of these wretched dwellings, are left to intimate the refinement which formerly distinguished it. One house superior to the rest, in which the largest number of these marble bas-reliefs seems collected, is pointed out to travellers as the house of Martha and Mary; an absurd fiction bearing evidence against itself, but a useful pretext to the Arab guide for extorting a “backshish.”



BETHANY.

Page 86.

Just out of the village is the reputed tomb of Lazarus, reached by a descent of twenty steps hewn in the rock. The chambers below, of which there are three, are asserted to be the sepulchres of the entire family; but although there is nothing in the situation to gainsay the tradition, the tomb itself in no way follows the pattern of those of ancient times, but bears evidence of a more modern date. The road, leading from Jerusalem by the Damascus gate, to Bethany, winds amongst hills to the right of the Mount of Olives, and affords extensive views of the elevated country on all sides, while shortly before reaching the village, the waters of the Dead Sea, spreading out beneath the purple Moab hills, come in sight. Divested as the place is of all traces of the sacred hours spent there by our Lord, we cannot but linger within its precincts, moved by the hallowed curiosity which its associations awake. Here dwelt the only family whom Christ seems to have signalized along with His disciples as more than common acquaintances, for whom He cherished a tender regard, sympathizing as a friend might in all their joys and sorrows, and inspiring them with trust and reverence

towards himself in a degree to which His disciples scarcely attained during His life-time. We cannot wonder that he sought once and again the rest and sympathy they so gladly offered, passing over the mount He afterwards hallowed by His sufferings, the soft hill breezes cooling His aching brow, fevered by the bitterness of life's conflict, and meeting with so joyous a welcome—such genuine hospitality—as He reached the house of the brother and sisters, that the little glimpse we have of them remains to us one of the fairest pictures in New Testament description. It is true one faint discord interrupts its harmony, the fretful complaint which Martha uttered from the midst of her cumbersome labours as she found Mary sitting with folded hands at the Saviour's feet, listening to the gracious words He spake, but we had lost else the gentle rebuke, the tender commendation, the assurance which will last while there is a quiet heart resting at His feet, "Mary hath chosen the better part which can never be taken from her."

One day death darkened the door of that happy dwelling. The brother sickened and died, uncheered too by a last look of the

Friend for whom he had sent. He was laid in a sepulchre outside the village, and mourners came and went tendering their sympathy to the desolate sisters. But while their tears were falling, Christ was coming, and in His strong right hand He held the keys of death and the grave. Surely an outburst of living hope inspired their impetuous rush to His feet; hope, in spite of the murmur they had not strength to resist, silenced by a word spoken with the majesty of omnipotence. But their faith was too feeble to grasp its full significance, even while at His bidding they led the way to the grave. "And Jesus wept." Was it because of their unbelief, was it because of their grief? Was it not rather because sin reigned in all the world, and death by sin, and desolation by death? The tears which fell on the tomb of Lazarus, were wept over every grave, and the tears of Jesus preceded a glorious resurrection, for we reap the rich reward of His sufferings. Then, in the midst of that awe-stricken throng of mourners, He spoke with the voice of God and bade the dead arise and come forth. And the bands of death were loosened, and Lazarus, swathed in

white burial garments, came forth and Christ delivered him to his sisters. Who can depict the emotions which overspread the countenances of these spectators? Who can dream the joy of the happy sisters? Who can compute the strength of their after-faith in Christ, the Messiah, the Man who wept while their tears were falling, the God at whose word the fetters of death fell from off their beloved?

They did not know that their cement-bound brother was the first fruit of the coming victory over death. They did not know Christ then to be the Resurrection and the Life, for even they wept despairingly at that other sepulchre wherein their hopes seemed to be withering away, forgetful that they had already seen His power. But their devoted hearts were altogether His, and they loved on in their despair, till the glad cry rang out, "He is risen!" and they felt at last that He in very deed was God.

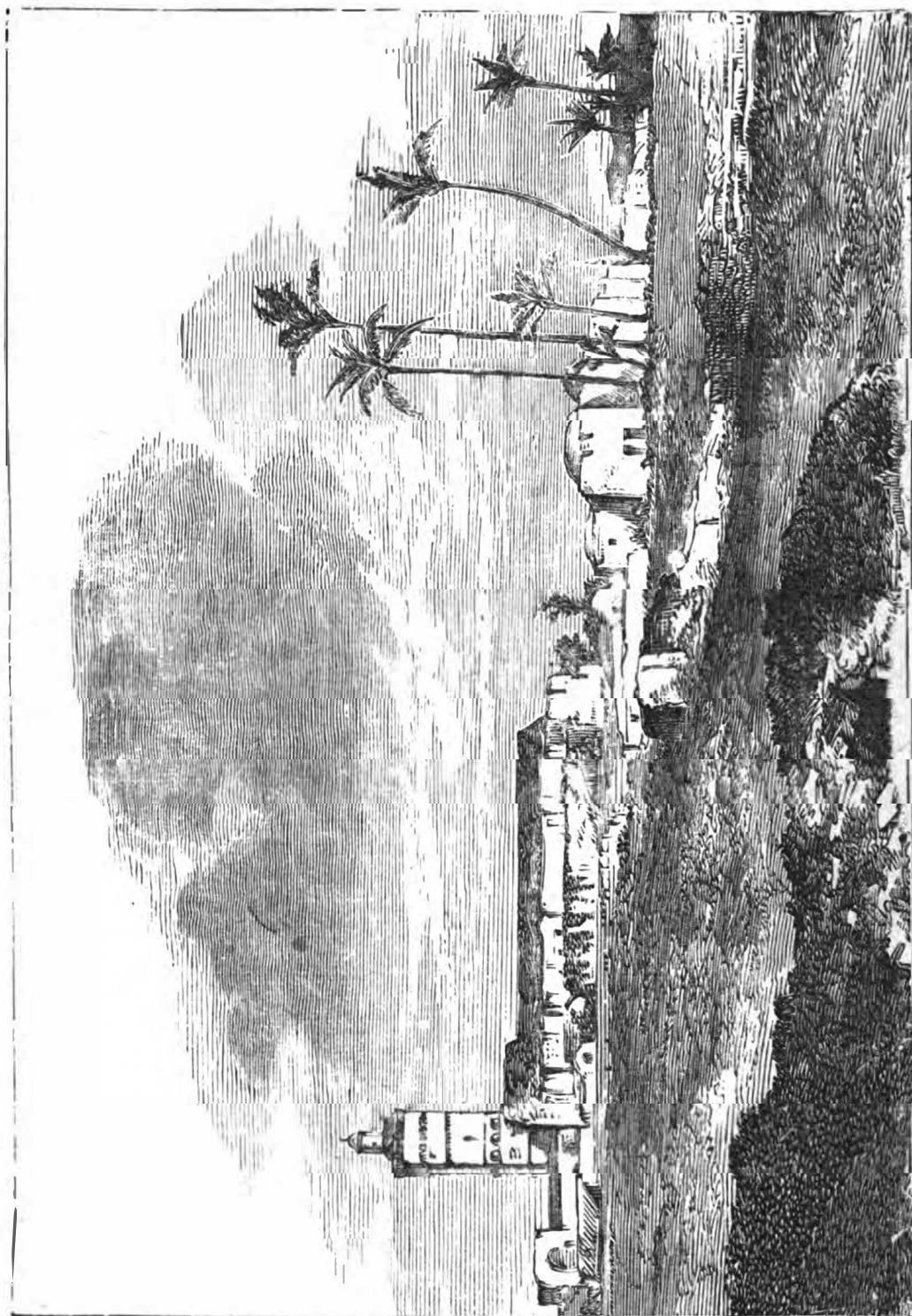




XIV.

Arimathaea.

OUR interest attaches itself to this town, claimed by its having been the birthplace of one whom the sufferings of our Lord called over to join the little band of his disciples. And he came nobly forward, leaving all to follow the Christ whose death had nigh extinguished the hope of those who had been daily with Him, witnesses of His divine power. Nor was the sacrifice a small one. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, an honourable counsellor, a good man and a just, for in these terms the evangelists speak of him, disregarding the scorn of the haughty Pharisees and the hatred of the fanatic people, went boldly unto Pilate and begged the body of Jesus; and tenderly taking it down from the cross on Calvary, he wrapped it in fine linen, embalmed it in fragrant spices,



ARIMATHFA.

Page 83

laid it in a new sepulchre, gave the despised Saviour the burial of the rich. For long he had cherished a secret conviction that this was indeed the Christ, but the fear of a cruel persecution and perhaps some lingering unreadiness to fling off the habits of a lifetime and accept contempt and enmity for the honour and consideration hitherto paid him, had held him an undeclared disciple; but now, fired with a great indignation at the awful crime of his fellow-countrymen, and inspired with a holy courage that knew each obstacle only to despise it, his is the first uplifted voice, his the first out-stretched hand to do honour to Him who hangs upon the cross. Beyond the mention of its name the Bible gives us no account of Arimathea. Travellers are nearly agreed in identifying it with Ramleh, a town twenty-four miles to the north-west of Jerusalem. Lying in the fertile valley of Sharon, it is embowered in gardens and olive-groves, above which towers an occasional palm or sycamore tree. It has now about three thousand inhabitants, mostly Moslems, with a sprinkling of Christians belonging to the Greek Church and a few Armenians. There

are as many as five mosques, two of them perverted to their present use from their original dedication to the Christian religion.

During the time of the Crusaders in whose possession it was, it formed a post of considerable importance, deteriorating greatly thereafter, although it has enjoyed some degree of prosperity in the course of the present century. The ruins which the traveller meets at every step, cisterns and vaulted reservoirs of vast extent, indicate the size and eminence it possessed in former days when it is believed to have occupied a league and a half of ground. The most conspicuous object which attracts the eye is an ancient tower which rises imposingly to the height of 120 feet. It stands a little to the west of the town, and is quite isolated. The architecture is Saracenic, of solid stone, enclosing merely a narrow staircase, which winds up to an external gallery within a few feet of the top. The Moslem date 718 A.H., answering to the year of our Lord 1310, is engraved upon it and lends support to the conjecture that it belonged to a minaret of remarkable beauty which an Arabian historian describes as built at Ramleh in that year by

the sultan of Egypt. Before those days, the town ranked after Jerusalem amongst the cities of Palestine, and united with Lydda to endow the first Latin bishopric in the country. Two centuries after, it was almost deserted, scarcely twelve families being left in it. Now, it forms a halting place for pilgrims and travellers on the way between Joppa and Jerusalem, and perhaps owes its improved condition to its convenience in this respect. We have no record of its being distinguished by a visit from our Saviour. Only this is told of it in the Bible, that the wealthy counsellor to whom it was given to fulfil the prediction of our Lord, "He made His grave with the rich in his death," was born there, and was known by the name of Joseph of Arimathea.

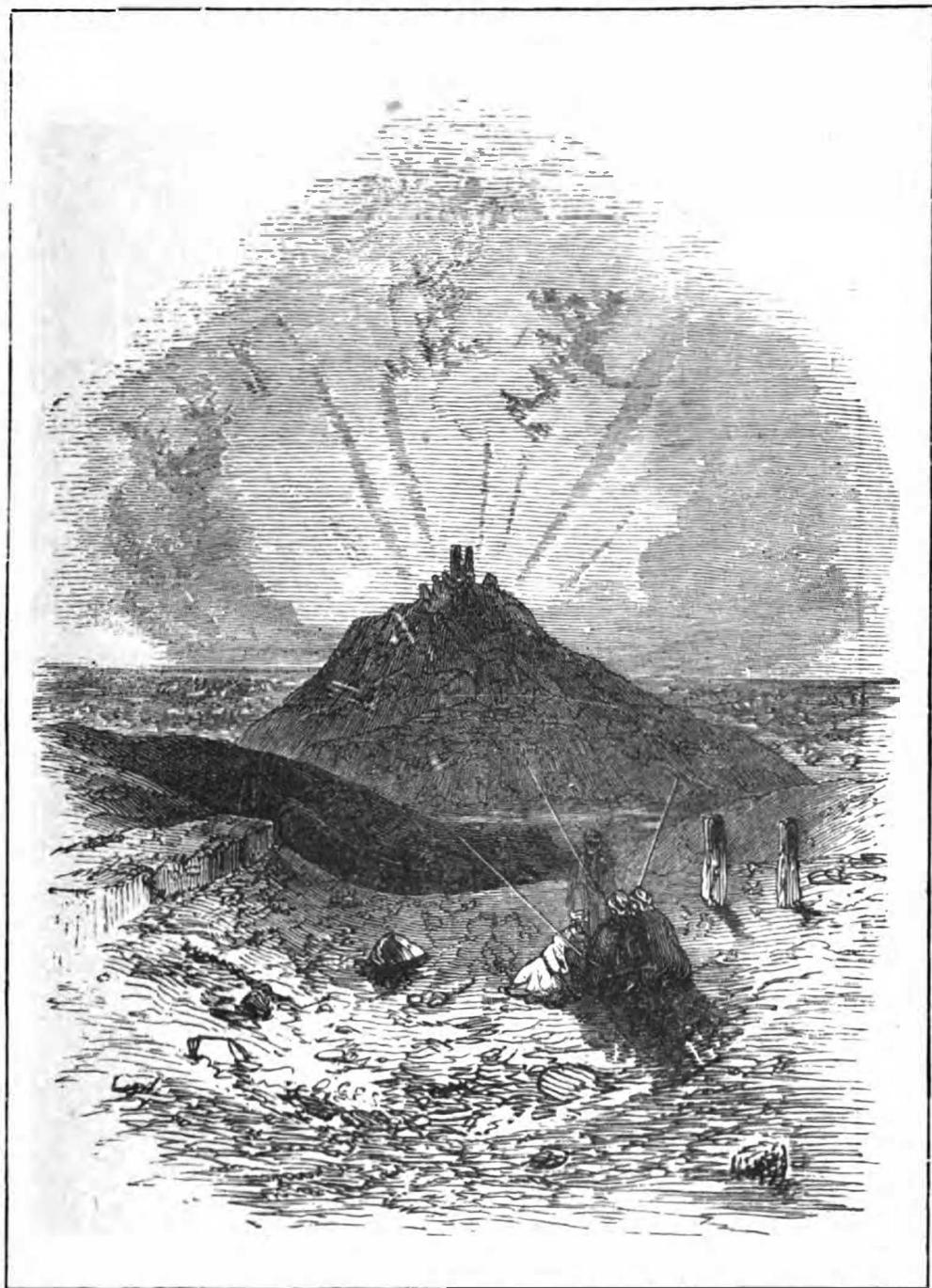




XV.

Birs Nimroud—Babylon.

THE city of Babylon, whose destruction is so complete that its very ruins are but useless mounds of rubbish, was in its zenith the splendid capital of the Chaldaean empire. Its foundation carries us far back in the records of the world, and was the scene of that miraculous dispersion into different nations, and confusion of tongues with which God punished the arrogance of its founders. The result of this divine interposition formed the basis of the world's after history, and in spite of the meagre details with which we are furnished, we cannot but regard it as an era of the utmost importance. Its immediate sequel gave that name to the enterprise which induced the calamity by which we still distinguish it, and Babylon has significantly commemorated it through



BIRS NIMROUD—BABYLON.

Page 101.

many a century. The work was commenced at the instigation of Nimrod, on the banks of the Euphrates, on a plain of enormous extent, known in those days as the Land of Shinar. It was arrested by a catastrophe which rendered co-operation impossible and left to the care of future generations for completion. This was effected tardily, with many alterations, the city increasing however in power and magnificence until the reign of Nebuchadnezzar who brought its strength and beauty to perfection. The tower of Babel was consecrated to the worship of Bel, the divinity of the Chaldæans, while on its utmost pinnacle, raised to an elevation so imposing that it commanded the wonder of the world, the celebrated astronomers of Babylon erected an observatory. The city was built of brick, in the form of a square, its walls of unparalleled height and thickness, and sixty miles in circumference. One hundred brazen gates gave entrance to this superb capital, while two hundred and fifty towers strengthened its outskirts. The Euphrates, flowing through its centre and admirably bridged and embanked, added to its beauty and advantages. The Babylonians, in

spite of their learning and civilization, were depraved in the extreme, practising every iniquity which could draw down upon them the wrath of Heaven, and celebrating even their religion with the most demoralizing rites. The temple of Bel was furnished with golden appurtenances of immense value, to which were added the consecrated treasures of the Jewish Temple, after its conquest by Nebuchadnezzar. This monarch also constructed the hanging gardens, which, attracting the admiration of all who visited them, were classed by the Grecians amongst the wonders of the world. His over-weening presumption and its humiliating punishment are graphically described by the prophet Daniel, who spent his youth at the Babylonish court, enjoying the special favour of the king, and becoming skilled in all such sciences as specially distinguished the Chaldæans. The captivity endured at this time by the children of Israel forms the burden of many a pathetic prophecy, while divine denunciations were also hurled against the nation whose captives they were, and which was but employed for a time as God's minister of justice, ere its own doom was sealed.

for ever. “Thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.” “Desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know.” “Babylon shall sink and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.” In such terms, and with sublime metaphors of the terrible completeness of her overthrow, was its approach foretold. Nor was the picture overdrawn, for who can listen to the tale of her utter desolation without realizing the supreme truth which dwelt in each prophetic line? Some scattered mounds upon the wide lonely plain, from which the busy excavator may extract a broken image, or a crumbling skeleton, are the remnants of mighty Babylon, while the sterile, lightning-blasted hill on which still stand the ruins of that old tower, founded by bold Nimrod in an age of dimly chronicled antiquity, still scares the traveller with its gloom and rises, all rent and shattered, a monument of the powerlessness of that human arm which dares defy the Almighty. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cast down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations !”



XVI.

Mount Tabor.

HIS mountain, which tradition asserts to have been the scene of our Lord's transfiguration, rises about six miles eastward from Nazareth. It stands on the plain of Esdraelon, and attracts the traveller's notice by its picturesque conspicousness. Approached from the south-west it assumes the form of a dome, while from the opposite direction its outline is that of a lofty cone. Its height is about thirteen hundred feet above the plain, and the existence of an ancient bridle-path to the summit brings the ascent within the reach of all travellers. It is necessary, however, to secure a surefooted horse for the purpose, an inferior animal being apt to stumble where the stones to be surmounted are unusually large and dangerous. But the excursion repays all the trouble which



MOUNT TABOR.

Page 107

may attend it. Approaching the base, the traveller rides under the shade of luxuriant foliage, oak and pistachio trees accompanying him to the top. At every turn of the path which winds spiral-fashion round the mountain, some new aspect of the unrivalled prospect presents itself, and when he stands on the little plain which forms its summit, park-like in its natural beauty, and his eye fills itself with the perfection which stretches away on every side, blue hills and rich valleys, the calm Sea of Galilee and the little villages which glitter here and there amongst the rocks, while in the far west it catches a dim vision of the Mediterranean, he yearns for the deliverance of this beautiful land from its desolation, for its restoration for ever to the favour of God. The oblong plain at the top is covered with ruins of different dates in the past, fortifications which bear the mark of Saracenic origin, dwelling-houses, exhibiting Roman handiwork, churches and convents which point to the time of the Crusaders, all alike in ruins.

The existence of a fortified town upon this site during our Lord's lifetime, forms the chief argument against the tradition which makes

it the scene of His tranfiguration, and in connection with the fact that this belief cannot be traced further back than the fourth century, it seems to discourage our faith in it. Still, some travellers state that they found several breaks in the symmetrical outline of Mount Tabor where the level space is sufficient to form the platform for such an event, out of sight of the town above, and by its sublime surroundings in harmony with the glorious scene. Had the superstition arisen in a later and more corrupt period in the history of the church, we might have had less hesitation in discarding it, but those early centuries were earnest ones, and if the zealous Christians of the East were prone to weave their assertions from slender store of facts, helping them out by visions whose inspiration they never doubted, still we know not from what source of oral story this faith descended to them, nor the claims it had in their eyes upon implicit credence. It is authentic at any rate, that in its honour they raised convents and churches, three of the latter in emulous fulfilment of Peter's wish when he cried, "It is good for us to be here; let us build three tabernacles."

Mount Tabor is mentioned several times in the Old Testament. Here, the army of Deborah and Barak was assembled, and David as well as the prophets drew from its beauties types and metaphors wherewith to translate their sublime inspirations. Whether it be immediately connected with our Lord's transfiguration or not, it has a special interest for us as one of the most familiar objects which met His eyes during His long residence in Nazareth. In His boyhood, He may have climbed its slopes and threaded the recesses of its tree-clad heights, turning to gaze on the fair land He had come to deliver, which knew Him not, which, when the hour came wherein He stood forth in the midst to declare Himself the Messiah, Him whom the Father had sent, would not have Him to reign over it, rejected and despised Him. Perhaps, too, it was hither He retired to commune with his Father, choosing in early years, as he did in after life, a "mountain apart" in whose loneliness He might seclude Himself and offer His pleadings to the One Friend who could sympathize with the yearnings of a nature so mysteriously fashioned, alike human and divine.



XVII.

The Sea of Galilee.

LIKE the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee lies considerably below the ordinary level, although not to the same extent. It is oval in form, somewhat irregular, fourteen miles long, and at its widest part nine miles in breadth, its water soft to the touch, and light blue in colour. The river Jordan flows through it, leaving the lake at the southwest corner, in which neighbourhood the Jews had their naval station, supporting more than two hundred vessels of war. It is the centre of the loveliest scenery in the country; the surrounding plains are rich in streams and fountains, and unlimited in their resources were there but the wise direction which could make use of them; the western coast is guarded by rugged mountains, Hermon towering amongst them; the air is tropical in its

warmth and effects, and the ground covered with luxuriant vegetation from waving palm-trees to fragile wild flowers. From very early ages we have testimony to the surprising fertility of the locality. Ancient historians tell us that whatever is cultivated finds growth in the rich soil, and enough evidence remains to prove that a little skill and labour might again cause the deserted, ruin-strewn shores of the lake to "blossom as the rose." But these sad ruins possess an undying interest in our eyes. There can be little question that they are the remains of the cities whose inhabitants shut wilful eyes to the manifested Divinity of Jesus. To identify each singly is scarcely possible, but where these shattered fragments lie, boulders, and columns, and dishevelled fortifications, we know there stood Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, where the mighty works of God were done and scorned. And like those far older cities of the plain, whose sin no warning could arrest, retribution was swift to overtake them. Here, where multitudes dwelt, where the hum of busy traffic was heard all day, where the cool evening drew fishermen by hundreds to seek the living

treasures of the lake, where kings founded their palaces, and built vast luxuries of stone and marble, where stern forts faced the enemy, protecting a host of vices and effeminacies, where a Babel of tongues had ever been heard, and swarthy tribes dwelt and defied each other, there is now almost utter desolation. A few hamlets, sheltering fierce, degraded, thievish Moslems, modern Tiberias, with its four thousand inhabitants, a few of them Jews, all living in squalid misery, are all that is inhabited in this most beautiful, most sacred of localities. This city of Tiberias, built by that luxurious monarch whose vast undertakings and comparative moderation won for him the name of Herod the Great, is situated about the northern portion of the lake. We have no reason to believe that Jesus ever entered its precincts, although in His days it must have been in the zenith of its fresh magnificence. He walked and talked amongst the villages and hamlets, for not kings and their courtiers but the common people heard Him gladly. Here He fed the five thousand who hung upon His lips; here He healed the sick, delivered the possessed from their cruel tormentors, blessed little chil-

dren, and spake to all as never man spake, with wonderful, sympathizing tenderness, comforting, raising, strengthening all that came to Him. Under the light of the brilliant stars He trod the troubled sea; the waters knew their Creator, and as His voice rang out above the noise of their billows, "Peace! be still!" they sank into obedient calm. On the eastern side of the lake lie the ruins of Gergasa in the shadow of a huge mountain. Traces of the city wall exist, and much probability, founded on the circumstances of its situation, attaches to the general belief in its identity with the place where Christ cast out the devils from their distracted victim. The hills on this side are intersected by ravines of indescribable wildness. Black, repellent, intricate, they are the haunts of the fiercer and more lawless tribes, whose savage character is fitly expressed by their well-known soubriquet of "Wolves."

Truly, this land is given over to desolation, its riches wasted, its beauties unappreciated by the degraded dwellers on its soil, its homes destroyed, its palaces defiled, its children swept away, because the Voice that cried unto them, "Come unto Me, and I will give you life," was lifted up in vain.



XVIII.

The Fords of the Jordan.

THIS river, the great fertilizer of Palestine, and, indeed, the only stream of any importance in the country, has its origin in a fountain which issues from the base of Mount Hermon, near the village of Hasbeyiah. It commences its course amid scenes of wild beauty, bounded on every side by the mountains of the land, Hermon towering over its cradle, the hills of Galilee and the beautiful range of Lebanon guarding it beyond. Remote as this source undoubtedly is, and recent as has been its recognition, there exists now little doubt of its reality. The river very soon increases to a noteworthy size, fed by many a tributary, of which, perhaps, the most important are the streams gushing from the Fountains of Banias and the outflow at Tell-el-Kady, each of which



THE FORDS OF THE JORDAN.

Page 117.

places has with much reason been conjectured to be the true source. Five miles from Tell-el-Kady, the gathering streams unite finally, gliding calmly onwards till they encounter the first of the three great lakes on their course. This is Lake Huleh, the centre of a plain of surprising fertility, where corn and rice can be plentifully cultivated, and which affords excellent pasture for the abounding cattle. It is indeed "the land of milk and honey" promised of old. The Jordan flows placidly through the lake and the surrounding jungle, but at a little distance further on dashes for miles over basaltic rocks till it enters the Sea of Galilee, where it resumes its calmer flow. The distance between the two lakes is about ten miles, and the course of the stream is that of a roaring torrent, rushing impetuously over every obstacle. Before quitting the upper Jordan we cannot but note with some surprise the vast forests of oak which it traverses. Near Banias and amongst the hills these forests are majestic, one of them reputed to be thirty miles in length, and their tangled undergrowth and jungly intricacies cause the vision of David's rebel son, suffering his well-merited but

terrible death, to assume a vivid reality in our eyes. Issuing from the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan enters its celebrated valley, passing through valley within valley, its level gradually lowering, descending in foaming rapids, or gliding with scarcely perceptible motion on its way. Desolate of human habitation, for only the Bedawin robber lurks in its neighbourhood, it is still the presiding feature of a beautiful land. Its banks are a garden of gorgeous flowers ; oleanders, tamarisks, and canes bend over its waters ; ruins that lend a sad beauty to the scene are scattered here and there, and in the north, blue Hermon lifts its head to the skies. The valley is clothed with oak, cedar, and arbutus trees, and the song of the bulbul is heard from their branches. At intervals, we encounter the remains of an ancient bridge, while here and there an entire one spans the stream ; one of Saracenic construction is built on the route to Damascus, through whose central arch the river rushes. Such Arab tribes as are strong enough to defend the locality sow large tracts of the valley with grain, and their harvests relieve the customary desolation which haunts the

district with scenes at once wild and picturesque. The average width of the Jordan is about sixty yards, and its depth seven or eight feet. During a freshet, however, the water rises to a scarcely credible extent, overflowing its banks, and realizing the scriptural accounts of the 'swelling of Jordan.' Near the place where the Jabbok joins the stream are the Fords of the Pilgrims; and a short distance above them appears an old bridge of Roman structure, spanning a dry bed, and intimating how far the present deviates from the ancient bed of the river. These Fords attract our deepest interest. It was here that Joshua led the hosts of Israel across; here that the smitten waters rolled back to let the chosen of God pass over; here that their long pilgrimage was ended, as it was begun, by the miraculous exercise of Divine power. It was here, too, that the prophet Elijah repeated the miracle in the strength of Jehovah. And in this vicinity, somewhere near Jericho, the Son of God was baptized with water and with the Holy Ghost, standing in the stream which was hallowed for ever on that day, and submitting to the sacred rite at the hands of a man who

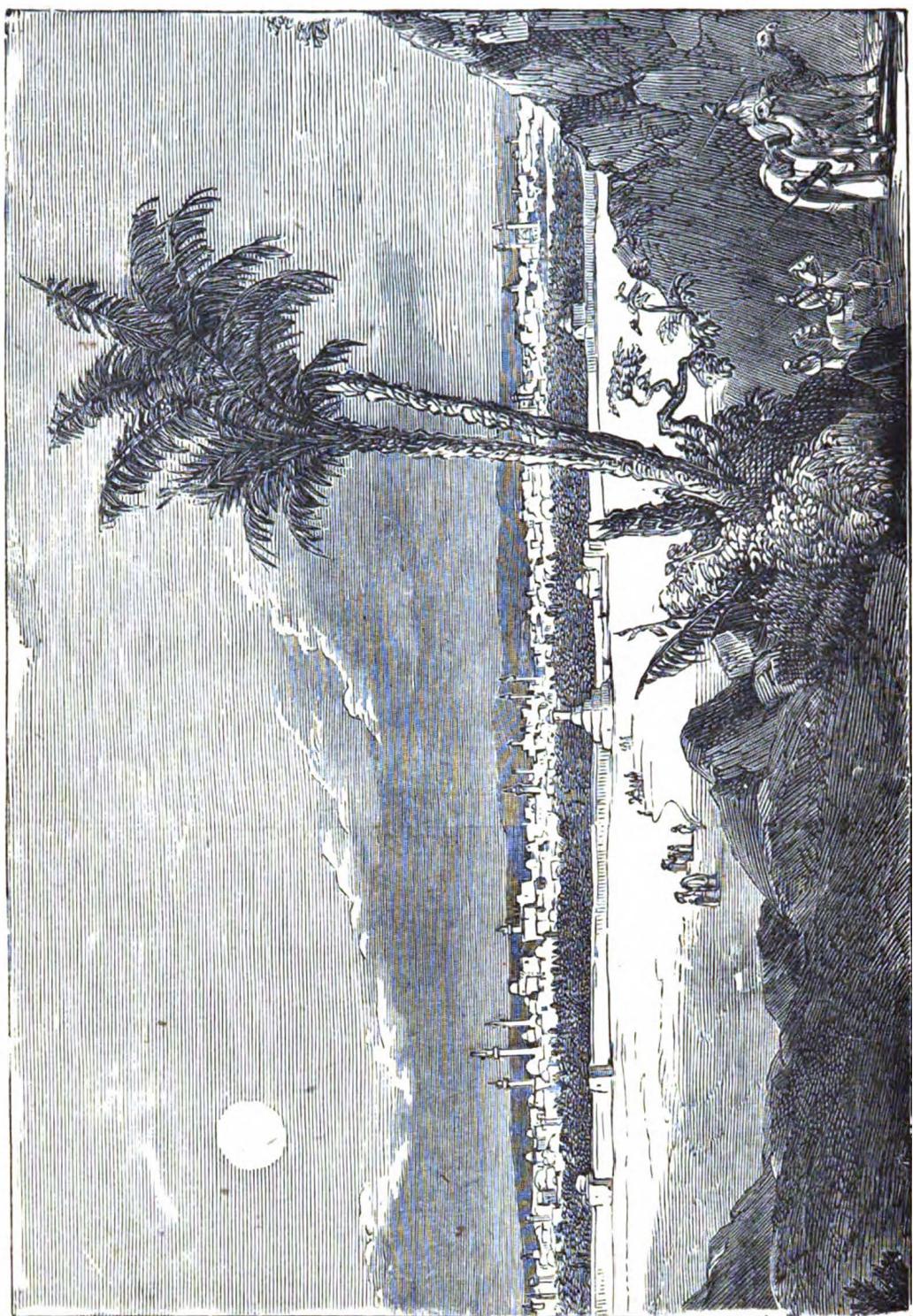
cried in an agony of humility, "I am not worthy to loose the latchet of Thy shoe," because it was meet that He should fulfil all righteousness. Alas ! this spot is every year the scene of wild uproar and superstitious excitement. Thousands of deluded pilgrims, of every rank and of many nations, crowd hither to share in the fanatical ceremonial which in their eyes constitutes devout worship. To rush into the Jordan, and with unmeaning shouts to dip himself thrice in its water, is to such a devotee an infallible pardon for all past transgression, a sure passport to eternal bliss. The Latin and Greek Churches have each selected what they call the veritable scene of the Saviour's baptism. The two localities are three miles distant from each other, and have been chosen in both cases with an eye to beauty and suitable surroundings. Travellers have forded the river at different points, and many passages are known to the Arabs which are not otherwise distinguished. After the confluence of the Jabbok ensues a series of dangerous rapids, and thence the Jordan winds silently through the valley till it reaches the Dead Sea, in which its waters are mysteriously lost.



XIX.

Damascus.

THE most ancient of existing cities and the capital of Syria, Damascus occupies a situation of scarcely rivalled beauty, and one well calculated by its natural advantages to preserve to the town its long continued vigour and prosperity. It lies on a plain watered by the river Barrada, at the foot of the Anti-Libanus, and is encircled by a superb forest stretching for fifty miles around and composed of one luxuriant mass of fruit trees, figs, pomegranates, citrons, apricots, and many others. The journey from Jerusalem occupies six or seven days, and the city may also be reached by the desert from the east, and by the high road from Aleppo and the north. The changes in its political history have been manifold. The Israelites, the Assyrians, the Romans wrested it in turn from



DAMASCUS.

Page 122.

its native kings and from each other, and at the time of Paul's conversion and the incidents in his life which attach our interest to the city, it was in the power of the Arabian prince Aretas. From that date its fortune was still to be conquered and reconquered, and Christians and Mohammedans succeeded each other as its captors. At last it passed into Turkish rule, whence dates the rigorous prevalence of the Moslem faith which still distinguishes it, rendering its inhabitants, until within the last few years, fanatical in their abhorrence of Jews and Christians. Latterly, however, the presence of a British consul has modified this hostility and made the city a safe resort to foreign merchants and travellers.

The earliest intimation we have of its existence is in the Mosaic records of the patriarch Abraham's life. There we read that his servant Eliezer was a native of Damascus, and we suppose, from the mention made of it that even at that early period, it must have been known as a not unimportant town. An excellent commercial centre, its wealth has at all times been great, and at present its trade with India by Bagdad and with other nations by

Beirout forms the essential feature of its activity. The town presents a strictly oriental appearance. Its houses are built of mud; its handsomest streets formed by gloomy, barrack-like erections whose interiors are fitted up with all that wealth and elegance can contrive, and which are the palaces of the aga aristocracy. Bazaars of great length, the superb khan of Hassan Pasha, and the mosque of St. John are its most noteworthy edifices. It has received a borrowed sanctity in the eyes of the Moslems by being a necessary stage on the route to Mecca, and as it forms the meeting place for pilgrim caravans from all directions, its streets are annually filled with a rabble of excited devotees. To the Christian Church its associations are permeated by a purer, profounder interest. On the plain which stretches around it, there happened, eighteen centuries ago, an incident so marvellous, so thrilling, effecting so great a transformation in the affairs of the Christian Church, that it stands alone, its record shining from the pages of the New Testament with a special radiance. The persecutions foretold by Jesus had commenced their active develop-

ment. Everywhere, His suffering followers were dragged forth into the light of martyrdom or fettered and flung into prison, and heading the instruments of these cruelties, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," we find a young Jew of gentle birth and culture named Saul. It was in pursuance of this self-appointed task that he journeyed to Damascus, all his youthful talents and energies devoted to its accomplishment, studying doubtless as he travelled how best his victims might be ensnared and condemned. The end of his journey was nearly won, there rose before him the projected scene of his fanatical labours, when, startling him from his reverie, there burst with sudden splendour a light from heaven around him. And from its centre there fell the reproachful accents of a voice which spake as never man spake, upon the ear of the stunned and prostrate Saul. With graphic detail Luke records the dialogue and its sequel, how Saul the persecutor, converted, chastened, received into the Christian community by the express command of God, became Paul the apostle, the light sent to

lighten the Gentiles. This glimpse of the Saviour, robed in the majesty of divinity, yet speaking with the same gracious, tender, long-suffering voice as of old, employing directly His power to turn the heart of man from sin to serve the living God, remains to us unexampled, inestimable, amongst the records of gospel history. Saul, from that hour, no longer persecuting, was life-long persecuted; but ceased not to sow broadcast over the earth what Jesus had opened the heavens to declare to him, until the Master called him home to the rest that remaineth for ever for such as serve Him.

