

The Delivery of Palestine

Jerusalem the Golden with milk and honey blest.

—*J. M. Neale. Fr. St. B.*

THE story of Palestine, or the Holy Land, as it is most familiarly known to us, is replete with the greatest interest for all mankind. It is the Holy Ground of Jew and Christian—a sacred place for the Mohammedan. It was here that the “Son of Man” trod the path of Tears for our Redemption,—it was on hallowed Calvary that was consummated that Sacrifice of Blood from which has sprung our Christianity, that Sacrifice which shall be continued until the end of time as foretold by the Prophet in the words: “From the rising of the sun until the going down thereof there shall be offered unto Me a clean oblation.” It was here that the sweet singer of the Lord—David lifted up his voice in the Immortal Psalms—here that Solomon sat in the Judgment Seat of Israel. This is the hallowed land of Abraham, Moses and Samuel.

Jerusalem is indeed an exceedingly ancient city, flourishing before Abraham left her; the city of the Moonworshippers, or Chaldees; and it was comparatively at a late date that it was conquered by the Israelites and made the capital of Palestine.

Jerusalem witnessed the clash of Hittite (or as Scripture calls that people “Children of Hitte”) and Egyptian—the fall of Corchemish and the rise of Nineveh and Susa. Jerusalem was old before the fratricide Romulus built the walls of Rome—before the Dorians had left their pasture lands beyond Olympus.

Jerusalem the capital of Palestine is situated about fifteen miles west of the head of the Dead Sea. It was built on a high plateau of limestone about two miles square, and adjoining the mountains on the North. It was originally the chief city of the Jebusites—one of the Canaanite tribes expelled by Joshua.

Under the rule of David and Solomon before the separation of Israel from Judea Jerusalem arose to some prominence. It was regarded as the Holy City of Israel and acquired great fame as the principal seat of the worship of Jehova.

During the period of the Babylonian ascendancy—Jerusalem, lying in the direct path between Babylon and Memphis, was many times the victim of the cupidity and vengeance of the warring nations of the East and the West. Her demolished walls, ruined towers, pillaged temple, and depopulated streets frequently were witness to obstinate defense and signal punishment.

The history of this time as narrated in Holy Writ relates many glorious and heroic actions, and holds up for our emulation and admiration the deeds of numerous patriotic men and women. It tells of many instances of Divine intervention on behalf of that hard and stiff-necked people. For when Sennacherib dared to challenge the God of Israel and lead his hosts into Judea the power of the Most High was made manifest.

“For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed.”

Or when the impious Pharaoh forgetting the warnings of Moses and the plagues of God presumed to disobey His commands and follow the descendants of Jacob behold the sea swallowed the power of Egypt and well may Miriam cry out :—

“Sound the loud timbrel o’er Egypt’s dark sea
Jehovah has triumphed ; His people are free.”

Then the bright glory of Israel shone forth in the Wisdom of Solomon and the inspired utterances of Daniel and the prophets. Thus Theocracy established in Israel and her proud boast of being the chosen people of God resulted in a glorious literature and music all directed in a Sacred channel and her architectural energy culminated in Solomon’s temple dedicated to the omnipotent Jehovah.

Then came division, dissension and faction from within ; foreign machinations, jealousy and idolatry from without and the glory of Israel was no more. The Egyptian, Babylonian and Assyrian one after another poured their flood of blood and pillage over Palestine ; Nebuchadnezzar led the remnant of the nations captive and they remained in captivity until they found the

favor of Cyrus of Persia on the collapse of Assyrian power.

Then began the anxious and weary wait for the Messiah during which time the star of Alexander blazed for a time on the horizon then burst and melted away. Alexander visited Jerusalem bowed before Jehovah and departed.

The tide of Judea's power ebbed away under the tyranny and persecution of Antiochus of Syria, brightened it is true by that page of fitful glory commemorated in the book of Maccabees

Then at last came Pompey the Great and swept Anstobrutus and the priestly squabbles, desecrated the Sancta Sanctorum, and established Hycanus as High priest. Independence was gone. Herod the Idumaeon was Tetrarch of Galilee and the Sceptre had departed forever from the line of Judah—the seventy weeks of years spoken of by Daniel were all but accomplished. The Empire had replaced the Republic in Rome, the temple of Janus was closed for the second time in its history and Augustus Caesar was determined to know the extent and strength of his empire and was enrolling the tribes and peoples of the known world.

Thus the stage was set for the greatest event that was ever to occur in the history of mankind. Life seemed to pause under the blessing of the Romana—Joseph and Mary journeyed up from Nazareth to Bethlehem the city of David. "For thou Bethlehem art not the least among the Princes of Judah." Here where the crowd was so great, that the descendants of the Royal Psalmist had to lodge in a stable, was born the Christ. His Star appeared in the East and guided thither the Wise Men with their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. The Angels descended and sang the Canticle of "Peace on Earth to men of Good Will." Then followed the fright of Herod, Joseph's warning and the flight of the Holy Family and finally the Slaughter of the Innocents.

The Jewish conception of the Messiah was altogether different from that of Christianity. They wished and thought of Him as One who would come to reconstitute the Jewish state—as One under whose lead

Israel should overcome the world and establish the power of Zion in perpetuity and as One who would shower His material and spiritual blessings on the chosen people alone and leave the Gentile in outer darkness. Thus it was that the Divinity of Christ was never recognized by the bulk of the Jewish Nation for to them God and Divinity were for the Jews and their greatness, compassing the destruction of all who dissented from the Mosaic Law. They could never understand that Christ's Kingdom was not of this world but the Kingdom of the Spirit. Theirs was the doctrine of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth nor could they realize the Charity of Jesus of Nazareth.

So it was that as Jesus went about healing, and teaching the way of Charity and Salvation, he incurred the deadly enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees—who saw the people led away from them.

It was these men disappointed in their dreams of glory and power that paved the way to Calvary where was raised that Cross beneath which the very earth shook—where was consummated the Infinite Sacrifice by which man was once more raised to the friendship of God. The beacon light reared here shone on and on in ever increasing volume until the old Gods were overturned—until the heavy voice of Thor called from the misty Northland: "Thou art God O Galilean" and the benificent balm of Christianity overspread the Earth.

Palestine continued a Roman Province but the Procurator generally resided in the coast town of Caesarea and stood aloof from the interminable broils of the Jews. Never was a people so turbulent; so excited in the expectation of a deliverer who would redeem the ancient Kingdom, so fired with bigotry and fanaticism as the wretched Jews at this period. One Messiah came after another. Revolt was succeeded by revolt under some pseudo—prophet or king.

Rome did little but despise Jewish prejudices and Caligula dared to set up his statue in the temple of Jehova. Under Nero the Roman officers, imbued with the spirit of that detestable tyrant, began to oppress and trample on the Jews. A general rebellion was the

result. The priests led the people to trust in the interposition of heaven as of old for the authority of that body was as absolute over the Jews as the sway of Druids over the Celts of Mona.

The conflict was waged with a desperation hardly equalled in the annals of warfare. Vespasianus bore down with his veteran legions upon the doomed people. During the Campaign of 69 A. D. the Romans systematically destroyed the resources of the outlying country and the populace flocked to Jerusalem. The Jews perceived that annihilation was to be the fruit of their rashness, yet this merely inspired them with a greater hatred of the Romans and a sullen determination to resist to the last. Titus, who now commanded in succession to his father Vespasianus, and who had been raised to the purple, offered peace, but it was defiantly rejected. Angered at this the Roman general began the siege ; one of the most terrible and memorable in the history of humanity.

Jerusalem wore much the same aspect as she did at the time of the Crucifixion thirty-five years before. At that time she held three factions and to rival these, namely the Essenes, Sadducees and Pharisees were those of Eleazar, John of Gerschala and Simon of Gerasa but presently Eleazar was assassinated and there were only two.

The siege opened about the close of March A. D. 70. The Roman missiles poured like hail into the city ; the outer walls yielded to the battering rams of legions, the talons of the eagles were closing upon their prey. Then came a pause. Josephus came forward and pleaded with his countrymen. But all in vain, the Zea'ots were sworn to resist and to slay those who would yield. Famine stalked through the city, gaunt men devoured the bodies of the slain, the living feared to be served up to the soldiery and this carnival of unnaturalness culminated when the daughter of Eleazar roasted her own infant child. The Romans caught those who went outside the walls in search of herbs and crucified them at the rate of five hundred a day, until at last there was no wood to make crosses.

At last the daily sacrifices ceased to be offered, for

with the fall of Antonio the war had closed in around Temple. A soldier climbing on the shoulders of a comrade applied a torch to one of the golden windows. Titus who always desired to have this place of ancient glory, rushed from his tent but his voice was lost in the taunts of Romans and curses of the Jews. Soon the glorious edifice was a giant billow of fire and then no human hand could stay the catastrophe about to be accomplished. The great domed roof fell with a crash of doom for Judea and the house of God oft hallowed by the Divine presence of Christ, was no more. Darkest despair preyed on the minds of the Jews for now faded trust in God's manifest assistance that had so long sustained them. The Messiah had come unto his own, but his own knew him not. God had sent His Mercy unto the Jews. They had turned from him and thus they were being punished.

Then at last the remnant yielded; the blood of Israel ran so deep down Zion that burning houses were quenched in the red stream. The seven branched candlestick, the golden table and the book of the Law together with Simon of Gerasa were taken to Rome to grace the triumph of the Conqueror. So closed the tragedy for the Jews, for since that time they have wandered the earth as a scattered and friendless people.

Jerusalem ceased to be important and at the division of the Roman Empire passed to the rule of Constantinople under whose dominion it remained until 637. Under the Patriarch Sempronius it fell into the hands of the Caliph Omar, third ruler of that new and terrible power of the Desert known to us as the Saracens. He, searching out the site of Solomon's temple, cleared the sacred spot of the debris of centuries and laid the foundation of the great mosque which bears his name. Thus the ancient and Holy capital of the Jewish nation passed to the power of the followers of the Prophet of Allah, but the Christians were quite leniently dealt with under the mild rule of the Saracens, for they too revered the Holy Places.

In 838 the Siljukian Turks came into influence under the Abussidae dynasty and their power increased much as the Praetorino Guard of old Rome until at

length they too commenced to set up and depose Caliphs at will. As their ascendancy became more and more pronounced their intolerable dominion was felt and resented as much by the quiet Mohammedan of the South West as by the Christians, who especially in the Holy Land were subjected to every species of humiliation and barbarity that the Seljuks could invent. The Seljuks were a semibarbarous race of Tartaric descent from the steppes beyond the Caucasus. In 1050 under Togrul Beg they came out of the North and overran Khorassan and other Persian provinces. In 1055 Bagdad fell before the invader when he took the title of Commander of the Faithful. In 1063 Togrul Beg died and was succeeded by his equally famous nephew Alp Aeslan, who continued the policy of his predecessor, pushing back the Bysantine Greeks and finally capturing the Emperor Romanus Diogenes. He carried his victorious arms from Antioch to the Black Sea. On his death, by the hand of an assassin, the Sultanate passed to his son Malek Shah, who transferred his capital to Ispohan.

In the course of these triumphant campaigns the Seljuks came into possession of Palestine—at that time an appanage of the Western Caliphate now under the rule of the African Fatimites successors of Aba Absedalloh.

This was the antecedent condition which bore fruit in the Crusades. Such was the condition of mankind when Urban II. following in the footsteps of Gregory the Great summoned the Council of Clermont and exhorted all Christendom to lift the Cross against the Crescent. The outrages of the Seljuks were the occasion of the outpouring of European Chivalry on the East. Mohammedanism had done harm incalculable to the Christian cause. All that the Missionaries of Christ had accomplished in Arabia, Abyssinia, Egypt and Northern Africa had been eradicated by the followers of the false Prophet. When the tides of Islam reached their flood and were borne back from the steel clad lines of Martel and rolled forever back across the Pyrenees upon the ruins of Visigothic power in Spain there was left that resentment in the breasts of Europ-

ean Christians which continued to burn for four hundred years. It was the instinct of revenge postponed, the West said unto herself "Vengeance is mine and I will repay" and Europe found time and occasion to gratify her passions and animosities of old. It was but the long suspended reaction of Christian Europe against the Mohammedan world and the swords of Godfrey and the Lionheart were to repay in blood the slaughter of Taric and Abdalrahman.

In 1077 the Holy City fell under the dominion of Molek Shah who instituted a high revel of violence and outrage against Christian and Arab. It has become the custom of the centuries for many pious pilgrims to journey to the Holy Land that they might kiss the earth whereon our Saviour trod, to bathe in the Sacred waters of the Jordan and carry back a palm leaf to be laid on the altar of their own parish Church. A picture of the Palmer, as the Pilgrim was oftentimes called, may be found in the literature of the times.

Now it was that these Christian pilgrims were subjected to every possible form of indignity and outrage and as the tales of these crimes were poured into the fierce and passionate heart of Europe, great was the wrath engendered. Nor were the cries of Alexius Comnenus who in dire distress pleaded for succor against the Infidel, a negligible cause; for at this time the Turks had established themselves at Nicea, the ancient capital of Diocletian, within seventy-five miles of Constantinople. Well might Europe be alarmed at the near approach of these deadly foes of civilization and so it was that Urban II. listened patiently to the Story of Byzantine woes.

These motives were powerful enough to induce Urban to summon two great councils, the first at Piacenza in Italy, which failed to accomplish anything, chiefly because it was too much taken up with the petty trials of local princes and prelates. But not so at the council of Clermont. Here was gathered a wonderful concourse of nobles and ecclesiastics. There the arguments of Urban and the fiery eloquence of Peter the Hermit so moved the nations that the cry of "Dieu le

veut" rent the skies and the Crusades were decided upon.

The story of the Crusades is a long one marked with pages of heroism and also unfortunately deeds of blood; but suffice to say that in 1100 A. D. on the death of the noble Godfrey de Bouillon a fairly stable Christian Kingdom was established in Jerusalem and Palestine with dependencies of Edessa, Antioch and surrounding country. These continued a precarious existence for about a century until the Moslem recovered from the terrible blow when Jerusalem was retaken by Saladin in 1087. All of us are more or less familiar with the exploits of the Lionheart in the East during the Crusade that followed. He was indeed a prodigy of valor and performed many almost incredible feats yet Jerusalem was not retaken though a favorable peace was concluded with Saladin.

Ultimately after many vicissitudes Acre the last stronghold of the Christians in Syria fell in 1291. The defense of this city is one of the grandest in the history of warfare. The garrison was composed mainly of Knights of St. John and Knights of the Temple. They fought on and on never resting, at last breaches appeared in the wall, the defenders were weary and worn, of the Hospitallers only seven were left. Then they retreated to the convent of the Templars where they continued to hold out until the Moslems offered peace. It was accepted and the thin and gaunt but terrible warriors came forth. Then their savage enemies forgetting terms of peace and all honour fell upon the band of heroes but amid a halo of flashing swords a path was hewn through the fierce barbarians and some of the Templars escaped to the interior where they continued to smite the Infidel until they made their way to the coast and escaped to Cyprus.

Such was the final act of the drama: all the Christians escaped from the Phoenician coast as quickly as possible and left the savage Madmelukes in absolute and unchallenged sway. Thus after a continuance of one hundred and ninety-one years the contest between the cross and the Crescent had ended in the restoration of the ancient regime throughout Syria and Asia Minor

and the Semi lune of Islam was once more in the ascendant.

Jerusalem dragged out weary years under the rule of the "Unspeakable Turk." The fitful glare of the Napoleonic conflagration for a moment threatened the East and there flashed out but during the last century Christians fared somewhat better, for the Ottomon had learned to know and dread the powers of Europe, although their acts in Bulgaria and Armenia tend to show how Christians would have fared at their hands if they had dared to act.

Then came the final catastrophe, the Sublime Porte blinded by the blandishments of All Highest linked their fortune with that of the Huns of the North. Gradually the lines drew in, the Turk found himself in a grasp of steel, then his German tutors in frightfulness fled until at last the descendants of the old Crusaders, engaged in a new Crusade against might and wrong raised the Standard of Justice in the Holy Land,—then came the fall of Nazareth and Jerusalem, the Crescent waned (let us hope never to reappear) and the shadow of the Cross fell across the hills of Galilee and the Holy places of Zion are once more free.

Now the scattered and persecuted race of Jacob again see hope for the future. They see again in their dreams another Temple like to Solomon's; again the city of David is glorious and Israel has taken her place in the world of nations working in unison with us who are Christians for the happiness and welfare of the Race in the glorious era of Peace on Earth to Men of Goodwill which is about to be ushered in.

J. JOS. R. H. FLEMMING.

The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of our own ignorance.—Spurgeon.

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn !
—Burns.