

BETHLEHEM.

By the Rev. P. N. WAGGETT, M.A.

MR. GLADSTONE preferred, Sir Henry, Lucy says, to go to the Academy in the society of an artist. "Artists," he said, "looking at a picture always see in it less to criticise, more to admire than is possible to ordinary man." The thing is true of great art also; it is true of a great building. Going about the Church of the Nativity at different times with an accomplished architect, I have found myself, by his sympathy and instruction, less embarrassed by its losses and disfigurements than before, and abler to seize, by a mental abstraction of some features, the august and simple beauty of its plan and structure. Gaunt and lustreless in its darkened state it showed its grand design; as Père Abel of the Dominicans says: "en dépit des odieuses cloisons modernes qui en ont ruiné l'harmonie intérieure."

But instruction has its drawbacks for a man who should write in a hurry. Walks with learned friends and conversations with Père Abel at the hospitable convent of St. Stephen—the home of Biblical and antiquarian research, and itself resting on Eudoxian foundations—have left me so full of matter and argument, and with such a sense of the immense and eventful history of shrine and church, that I can no longer attempt to cover the ground in the thinnest of sketches, or give any abstract of the investigations pressed by the devoted industry of many great students, beginning in modern times with Tobler and Sepp—Tobler, who prayed while Sepp measured; men equipped like de Vogüé, Weigand, Meistermann, and, finally, the Dominican Fathers Vincent and Abel.

Fortunately, such an attempt as once seemed possible to me is excluded by your possession in London—we cannot get it here—of the great book made by the two authors just named. This book,¹

¹ *Bethléem, le Sanctuaire de la Nativité*, by PP. H. Vincent and F. M. Abel O.P. (Paris, 1914.)

fully illustrated, armed with all the original documents and the closest reasoning, should be consulted by anyone who would understand Bethlehem, more especially as it takes full account of the work of de Vogüé¹ and such writers as I named just now, as well as the important collection of English studies referred to most often by PP. Vincent and Abel under the name of Mr. W. Harvey, who, by the way, differs from them in giving the church a single origin.² Among the short notices contained in general guide books, the most interesting is by F. Meistermann,³ a learned Franciscan who agrees with the Preaching Friars about the poor wall of 1842, "un horrible mur," which has quite lately, at the request of the Greek, and with the approval and consent of the Latin and Armenian authorities, disappeared from the church. It is probably because the tradition of the sacred site has at Bethlehem been so nearly unchallenged that Dr. Sanday did not devote to it one of his deeply thoughtful discussions.⁴

No book, I think, prepared one for the aspect of the place, the beauty and dignity of the church, the simplicity, all things considered, and quiet of the cave. In the first place, the town of Bethlehem—for it is a prosperous town with a many good houses seated on its two hills—is at once utterly Palestinian and utterly Christian. Jerusalem, close by, is, in buildings and aspect, predominantly Saracenic in its coloured moving crowd, now, at least, a mingling of local with Bedouin and European-Jewish elements. The student can, perhaps easily, see beyond the Saracenic aspect. The rocky site forbids the obliteration of the city's ancient and necessary outline; there are massive remains of its older walls; in the arches within the "Ecce Homo" Church and the pavements of its crypt, Rome confronts you with her strange power of carrying an impression across the ages; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, especially the front, gives you, with St. Anne and many mediaeval doorways, precious memorials of Christian art; but Jerusalem

¹ *Les Églises de la Terre Sainte et Jérusalem, hier et aujourd'hui*, by the Marquis de Vogüé.

² *The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem*, by W. Harvey, W. R. Lethaby, O. M. Dalton, H. A. A. Cruso, and A. C. Headlam. (Byzantine Research Fund. London, 1910.)

³ *Nouveau Guide de la Terre Sainte*, by Barnabé Meistermann, O.F.M., Missionnaire Apostolique. (Paris, 1907.)

⁴ *Sacred Sites of the Gospels*, by W. Sanday, D.D., with the assistance of Paul Waterhouse, M.A., F.R.I.B.A. (Clarendon Press. 1903.)

within the walls is now a Saracenic city. Bethlehem is altogether Christian in its monuments, as it is Christian by long descent in its population. When lately it had more than ten thousand inhabitants, only some eight hundred were Mohammedans. Of the Christians, nearly four thousand were Orthodox Greeks, and, besides ninety-three Uniat Greeks, the Roman Catholics, *sans phrase*, were more than five thousand, possessing, besides their rights in the Holy Place, a spacious modern church (the successor of the Church of St. Catherine of Alexandria) adjoining the Basilica. On the road by Mar Elyas and Rachel's tomb, the high headdresses of Christian women give a new character, as you approach the place, to the groups that make that road so pleasant. The narrow, winding street of the Western Hill leads to a broad and airy platform overlooking deep valleys to the north, and on the south, enclosed by a mass of fortress-like masonry, part of the crowd of conventual buildings that surrounds and conceals the church. The platform space is closed eastward by the façade of the church, obscured by an added mass of stoué, and shouldered by the Armenian convent on the south. The Latin house seems to approach more discreetly on the north side. Between the ungainly buttress and the convent, you see, from a space once perhaps occupied by Constantine's Atrium, part of the right door and the deep lintel and right upright of Justinian's central entrance to the narthex.

Far below the Roman lintel is a Gothic arch showing how Crusaders filled and repierced the doorway; and in the right-hand quarter as it were of a shield reversed—like those Gothic shields the hoplites of old Egypt carried points upwards—framed in three large stones, and perhaps once further divided by an iron upright, is a low rectangular entrance, the only way to the church from the world outside. This door is about a metre wide, less than one and a half metres high, a little postern-like opening designed, no doubt, as was the tiny door of the once Georgian Monastery of Holy Cross (*Deir el-Musallabeh*—now the shelter of many refugees), in the interests of defence. Some people say that it was to shut out camels. The symbolist, as he bends to pass, may recall the Magnificat temper, the humility fit for an approach to the Birth-Shrine. The square hole admits to the narthex; and thence you pass to the stately basilica, under the fine cross-carved wooden panels given in the thirteenth century by King Haytoun of Armenia, a predecessor of those Armenian princes who, passing like phantoms,

make a spectral appearance in the memoirs of Joinville and Villehardouin.

The church is cruciform, a nave with deep double aisles, the whole supported by four rows of ten columns each, with an apsed choir and a transept apsed as well north and south. The transept is of the width of the nave making, therefore, a square open crossing supported by four piers of special form; the three apses are equal, but there is a difference of arrangement. The transept apses spring directly from the line, continued beyond them, of the main side walls; the principal or eastern apse is recessed from the choir by an additional right-angled space.

The body of the church, we see to-day, has a stone pavement of 1842, so levelled as partly to hide the plinths of the colonnade; its aisle windows have been built up, perhaps for defence again; and its character is oddly obscured by a feature you do not suspect at first of this effect, an open wooden roof of the Late Middle Ages, built by Philip of Burgundy and leaded, they say, by our Edward IV. But the four great rows of columns are nearly in their first state. They are beautiful monoliths of Palestine stone, standing with capitals and bases nineteen feet high. The capitals are Corinthian without Byzantine features. A small cross surmounts the acanthus ornament. The close spacing of the pillars, determined no doubt by the flat architrave, gives the true basilican impression. The two colonnades of either side are separated about twelve feet, the columns in each series nowhere so much as six feet apart. In a side view, especially, a wonderful union of strength and grace is given by the grove of pillars of pearl, a grace not indeed to be compared with the finest results of mature Gothic, but separated by a whole scale of merit from some transitional churches, with low and widely-spaced pillars.

The small relieving arches hidden in the wall of the Bethlehem church do not concern us at this point.

The colonnades are in their first state, and the nave, with all its gloom and bareness, is nearer now to what the Crusaders saw when they first clashed to prayers on its broken marble pavement, than it was when their scutcheons and figures were bright upon its columns. No doubt at first those columns shone as they shone in the fourteenth century when Poggibonsi saw them in their true colours, red and white, and thought them marble, so oiled and polished that a man might see his face in them; and the walls were at first as then

clothed with marble—is not some of it now in the Dome of the Rock?—so fair and clean that they reflected more clearly than a good mirror all that passed in the church.¹

Of the Crusaders' pillar-paintings only traces intensely interesting and important remain, only patches of the great mosaic series which once enriched every wall of the nave and choir with glowing history and dogma.

But the gaunt place we lately saw was like what "les croises," the crossed-men, found. In such a place Baldwin was crowned at Christmas, 1110, for it was only afterwards that the church was restored and the pictures on their gold ground devised and set by the monk Ephrem.

The wall decorations must have been very splendid: brilliant pictures on a gold ground. These great straight-lined churches with large undivided spaces were made for interior splendour, and their design is not complete without it, grand as they are in simple mass and form.

Our church was covered with a profusion of designs. "My august Sovereign," says Phocas, in 1177, of the Emperor Manuel Commenus, "adorned the immense and magnificent temple with gold mosaics, and the intruded (parenthetic) pastor of the Latins expressed his gratitude by placing the Emperor's portrait in several parts of the church and even above the sacred cave itself."

Very little of that splendour remains; perhaps more patches are hidden by the plaster and whitewash. But we know what it was from the description left by Quaresmius, learned guardian of the church in 1626, as it has been completed with infinite pains and real security by de Vogüé.²

The whole scheme was governed by the central faith of the Incarnation. On the west wall was a great Tree of Jesse, the Texts of the Prophets, the Sybil and Balaam in Latin. On the south side-wall half-figures represented the genealogy of our Lord in St. Matthew, descending from Abraham; and on the north the genealogy in St. Luke ascending to Adam. Above these, in a frame

¹ Each column, says Poggibonsi, was "de uno integro et indiviso lapide oleo politae, quod homo potest in eis vultum suum cernere sicut in speculo. Ita etiam in tabulis marmoreis politis, quibus sunt parietes vestiti, quae ita sunt quod homo in eis potest videre omnia, quae sunt in ecclesia, clarius quam in bono speculo."

² In *Les Églises de la Terre Sainte*, pp. 67-100.

of foliage and vases, were represented, on the south the seven General Councils, and on the north six Principal Councils of the next rank, all concerned more or less directly with the doctrine of God and of the person and natures of Christ. The decrees of the Councils and other inscriptions were in Greek and Latin. In the choir and transepts were scenes from the Gospel history, and round the principal apse a Greek and a Latin inscription recorded the date and the origin of the gift, both really important; for they mark a notable moment in ecclesiastical history, and one of the brilliant but too short appearances in the Holy Land of European and of English power.

Of the Latin inscription only the latter halves of four hexameters remain, with one name, Ephrem, the Syrian monk who did the work. These remains were unknown to de Vogüé, and in the Greek only one name, the emperor's, can be read. De Vogüé has reconstructed the Greek, of which much more is left, by the help of a Greek pilgrim of the fourteenth century. The Latin has since been recovered from the *Pèlerinage de Jacques de Verone* (1335), and the *Voyage de Louis de Rochechouart* (1461). The date arrived at is 1169. Usually, as by Baedeker for example, the work is attributed to the munificence of the Emperor alone, according to the testimony, perhaps "too unilateral," of Phocas. But in the inscriptions were two other names besides, those of the emperor and the artist; and they are given as if to mark more than a date. The work, says the Greek, was finished by Ephrem in the reign of Manuel the Emperor, and in the days of Amaury the king, and Raoul, bishop of Bethlehem.

Amaury (1162-1173) was the fifth Latin king of Jerusalem, Godfrey, who would call himself only baron of the Holy Sepulchre, not being counted. Raoul was bishop of Bethlehem and chancellor of the Kingdom from 1155 to 1174. The Latin suggests that these two persons were associated with the basileus in the gift. The king is called "Amicus Largus," the Bishop, "benignus." The emperor, "dator largus," is known from William of Tyre to have been not only wise and courteous, but eminently generous. "Il vaincuit de largesses tous les princes quiconcoues puis furent." This, remember, is a testimony of a Frank and a Latin, who found his own King Amaury a very faithful steward of the Church's dues, but rather more covetous than becomes a king. The bishop was our countryman and a splendid and generous prelate: a Norman

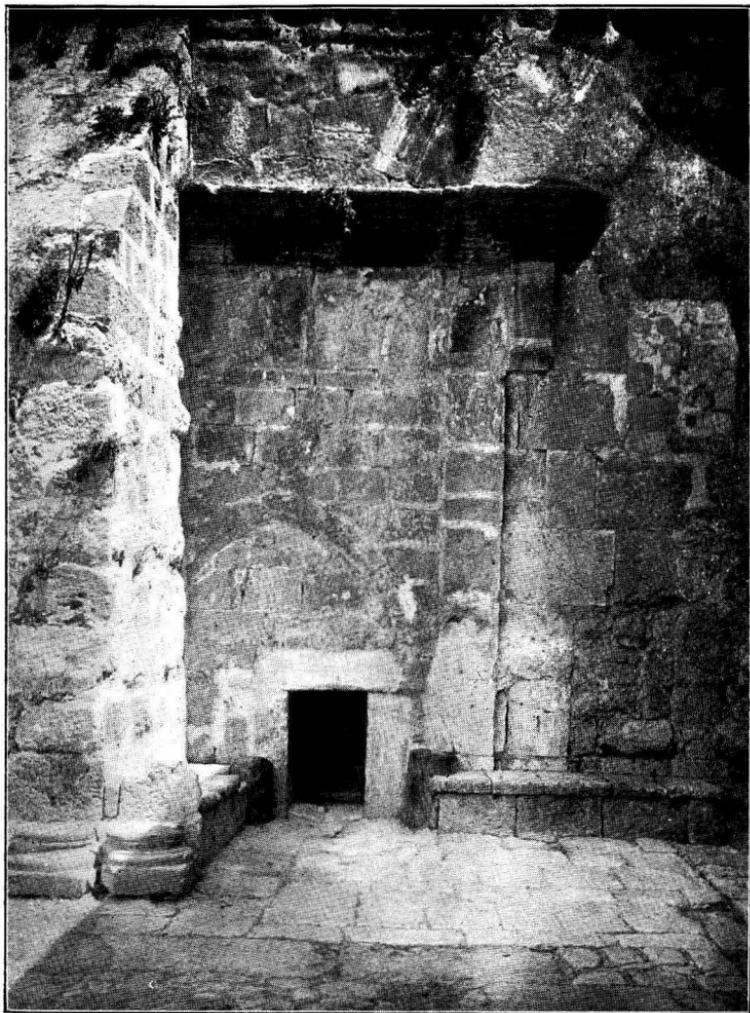
lord from England. William lets us see him *virum utique literatum, sed nimis secularem, Anglicum nationes forma decorum, regi et reginae cunctisque curialibus valde acceptum*. He was more than handsome and popular. It was he who carried in action the Relic of the True Cross. He was "Vaillant homme large et débonnaire," and his direction of the work of Ephrem is little likely to have been without cost to his own revenue.

But note, in any case, the significance of the time when this gift was made. Whether or no the magnificence of the basileus allowed a share in the expense to the benevolent King Amaury, or to Ralph the splendid and benign prelate, certainly the work was accomplished with at least the generous contribution of an orthodox emperor in the kingdom of a Latin prince and in the Cathedral Church of a Latin bishop, at a time when Rome and Eastern patriarchates had suffered for a century the burden of reciprocal anathemas. For Pope Leo IX excommunicated in 1050 Michael Cernlareus and all who with him rejected the *Filioque* in the Creed. It was, in fact, a time when the long-threatened breach between East and West had been for a hundred years complete and definite, and, as time was to show, irreparable down to our day. Bethlehem was the spot where hands could be stretched out across the breach. From the care of the Holy Places then, as now, no part of Christendom was willing to be released or excluded. The glowing walls of our church recorded a moment of special hope and charity. The Norman Court of Jerusalem was in friendly commerce, even alliance, with Constantinople, and men's hearts were full of the hope of union in the Faith when they exulted in the completion of the Catholic decoration, the common work of Eastern and Frankish princes, or the splendid gift of an orthodox monarch to a church of the Western obedience.

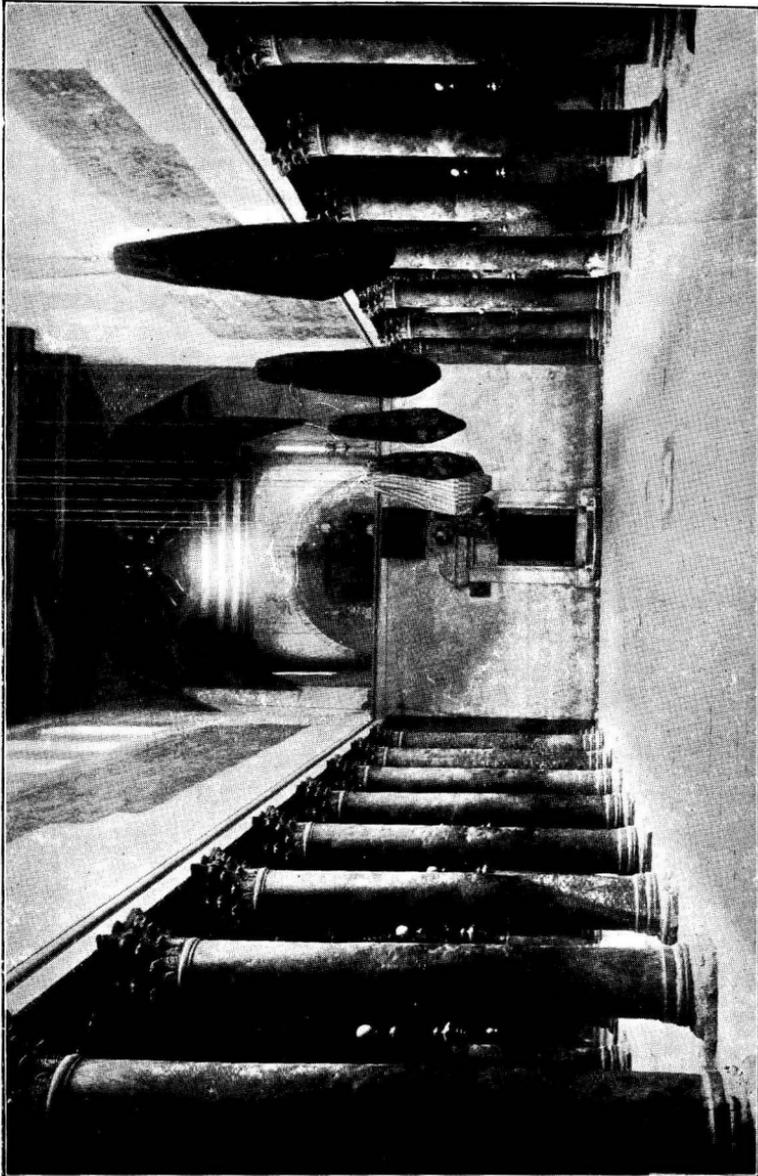
But if Franks at Bethlehem made a bridge seem possible, Franks in the Fourth Crusade destroyed its very abutments and approaches by the ruthless sack of the imperial and sacred city honoured by councils as second Rome. Since that dreadful relapse there has been no genuine rally, for the work of Michael Palaeologus (1274) was political and transitory, and the Council of Florence, nearly two hundred years later, left us nothing, if you count as nothing the portraits of its chief actors set by Benozzo Gozzoli on the walls of the Riccardi Palace.

There also, it is worth noting, you have a Nativity story—the

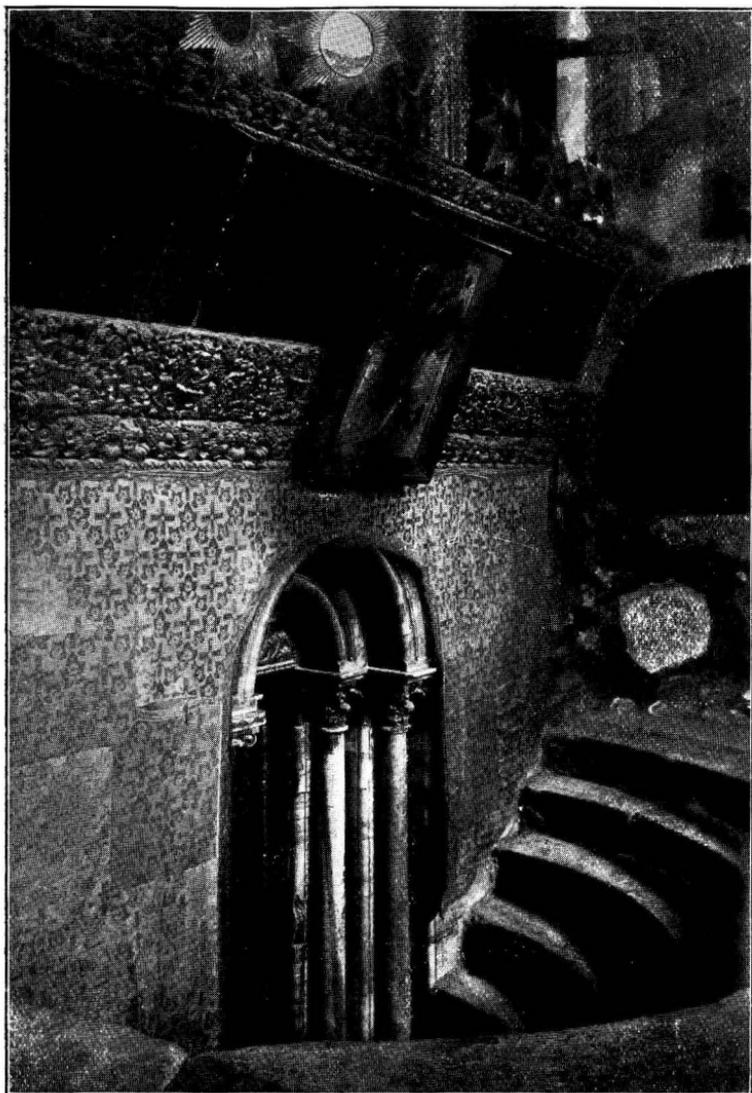
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MAIN (WESTERN) ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY.

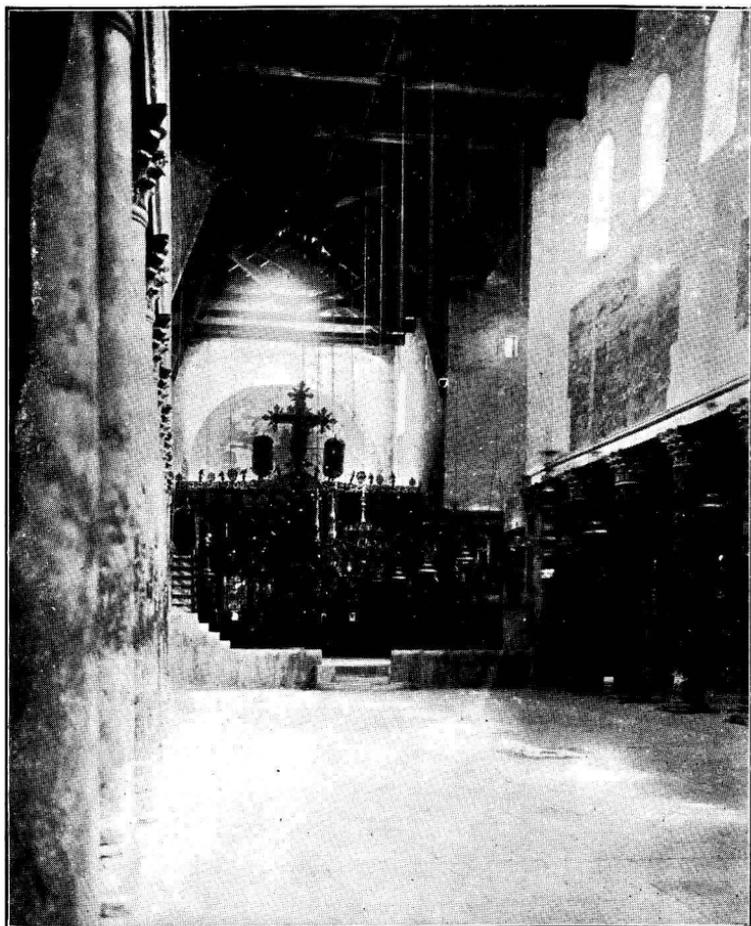


INTERIOR OF CHURCH BEFORE REMOVAL OF WALL.



ENTRANCE TO GROTTA OF THE NATIVITY CONTAINING THE
SACRED MANGER.

[To face p. 65.



NAVE AND SANCTUARY AFTER REMOVAL OF WALL.

coming of the Magi—for motive of the glittering procession where the young and reverend Emperor John rides superb in line ahead with Cosimo the mould of form, with Castruccio and his hunting-beast, and the Patriarch Joseph every inch an Eastern Sage. But the wise men of East or West had no success that time, and the mosaics began to perish as if in sympathy with hopes—one day to be fulfilled—of the reconciliation of Christian men in the temple of Divine Humility.

In the light of these mediaeval glories, the nave as we saw it lately seemed cold and gaunt and eyeless. But, as I said, we saw it very much as the Crusaders must have seen it on their arrival, with one important exception. For until the other day the poor wall of 1842 closed our view to the East, shutting off apse and eikonostasis (Plate II). To some people this wall seemed the end of the basilica. Beyond that empty rectangle was "The Greek Church," a strange recessed space, with altars and a gilded wall, and guides with tapers ready for a descent by the south lateral stair to the Cave of the Nativity. Even the instructed had to "think away" the wall to see the plan of the whole church.¹

The "odieuses cloisons" of PP. Vincent and Abel were built right across the church from north to south at the height of the architraves, when the Greek authorities carried out repairs made necessary by the earthquake of 1834, and when they repaved the nave with local stone, the choir or *solea* and *bema* with marble. Of these walls the middle one was removed a few weeks ago, revealing the altar screen and giving meaning to the nave and unity to the interior. The partition walls still close the aisles. The gain secured by this change is plain enough. It is equally plain to most people, and certainly to everyone responsible here, that a gain however great to the harmony or the significance of the interior cannot justify—even by revocation of an earlier state—grave interference with an historic monument, or an offence to the religious sentiment.

But the questions thus raised cannot be faced without first finishing a sketch of the church. For without this the *relative* importance and the merits of the wall cannot be estimated. To

¹ See Plates I-IV. The doorway in Plate III is twelfth-century Crusaders' work. In Plate IV the roof is English oak, sent by Edward IV of England in 1475. The low wall-like structure with steps stands where it did east of the wall removed; it is really the back of a set of seats.

relieve anxiety, let it be said at once that the wall had no structural function, and that its stones have been carefully preserved and—contrary to rumour—bear no inscriptions.

The church then is cruciform, a five-fold nave with apsed end and transept. Some good observers have believed that this plan was of one date, wholly of Constantine or wholly of Justinian. That it is not at any rate all of Justinian is all but proved outright by the character of the columns. A conclusion of that sort cannot be certain in this land of the use of old materials in successive buildings. But it is most strongly suggested. In spite of the instance of the Aksa one cannot easily believe here in the later rearrangement of a whole set of uniform columns. But the exact pages of Vincent and Abel have put many discussions out of date. For an exhaustive examination of the evidences this book, very rich in documents not only of the church but also of the Sacred Place for which the church was built, may as well, since it cannot be passed over, be consulted first of all. One entirely convinced by those writers—with a few particular reservations—can here only give their conclusions, with some heads of their grounds and some indication of the Constantinian plan they reconstruct.

We shall then be ready for the case against the change just made—a case most needing an answer in England.

Pères Vincent and Abel base their argument for the composite character of the church on five groups of evidence: the two sets of proportions in the western and eastern portions; differences of masonry; the confused state of the façade; certain features of the higher parts of nave and transept; and, what is most impressive and interesting, the fact that the cave itself of the Nativity, the spot for which the whole church was built, does not “answer” to any significant point in the present plan. The star on the floor of the cave is on the axis of the church, but that is all. It does not correspond in any way to the apses. The arguments from masonry need drawings or careful study on the spot. But any one can see the interruption of masonry-courses in a straight joint where the transept apse meets the wall of the nave. From the eastern edge of the apse the masonry runs continuously into the straight wall.

The conclusion reached from these and other data is that the nave and aisles (“cinq nefs”) are Constantinian, the eastern portion of the time of Justinian, all the columns of Constantine.

The four supports of the crossing, each consisting of two pillars

engaged in a rectangular pier, are equally Constantinian. They show no later "Byzantine" feature. It is conjectured that they were moved by Justinian to their present position from an atrium attached to the first church. The western surfaces of these pillars were embedded in the modern wall and, now they are uncovered, show mediaeval letters and designs. The eastern part of the building might appear at first a trefoil apse like the cella of Saints Sextus and Cecilia in Rome, the trilobed chamber in the Palace of Meshatta in Moab, or the more easily seen crypt of St. Lawrence at Grenoble. The position of the pillars in line with those of nave and aisles beyond the crossing shows that it is really a choir and transept accommodated to an existing quadrangular building.

The reconstruction of that building is not difficult, broadly, to follow. But we have no early description of the church, because, when it was built, everyone knew what a basilica was like.

Eusebius, in the panegyric of Constantine, only says that the emperor adorned this and the other two greatest sites with buildings, and, in the *Life*, says of the Empress Helena, who in this place had appropriately the chief honour as founder, that the devout lady raised at Bethlehem a temple and left the sacred birthplace resplendent with her gifts and the emperor's.

This church was a rectangle with a single apse springing directly from the wall. The side walls and colonnades of our church were continued eastward to the length of seven, or, perhaps more probably, six bays; and the altar stood over the holy cave and near the chord of the apse. The lower part of the east transverse wall can be seen from the stair descending from the Latin church to the Cave of St. Jerome. The entrance to the Cave of the Nativity was by central steps in front of the choir, like those in the "Confession" or Martyr's Tomb in many ancient churches. Such, we may suppose, was St. Helena's church, but it, was all paved with marble, and marble covered the walls above the colonnades and in the aisles. Treasures of marble of that and later dates have, no doubt, been taken from the church by the builders of later temples, and by the people of Bethlehem.

Justinian's work was occasioned by damage done in the Samaritan revolt (521-528). A fanciful story tells how he ordered a complete rebuilding, but he seems to have been satisfied with the cruciform end, the replacing of the atrium by a narthex, and the rearrangement and embellishment with mosaics of the front. How Persians

and Moslems—all but Hakim, the wild man of Cairo—spared the place; how the church has been served since the Middle Ages by Austin canons, by priests from Sarum, or at least sent by Bishop Walter, by the great Order of St. Francis; how later there is a debatable history of the debates of Latin Greeks and Armenians, must be read in the books.

We keep space for a word about the eloquently abused wall. The Latins, no doubt, had low cancellae of open marble or wood-work with return stalls, and, in justice it must be said, that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as we learn from a plan by Bernardino Amico, the choir space or *solea* was enclosed on front and sides by walls about six feet high. Was not our wall the western one of these? The answer is in the negative, because its twenty feet stood further west imbedding the pillars, and it was different in form, for the old one was double, with staircases within. The date, 1842, was on our wall, and this date is agreed upon by all the parties interested. Its purpose, the Greeks say, was to shut off a practicable church from the nave, then used by Turks as a market. The need it met has now passed away, and as the nave was not in fact used for any separate worship—it became, says Fr. Meistermann, merely a haunt of loafers and old-clothes men—there is no ritual loss in the return of the church to its normal appearance.

The case is strong for leaving untouched every feature of an ancient building. We know the harm done in former years by a passion for the restoration of original states. It may be urged that even 1842 is a date; that the ugly and meaningless wall once had a meaning if never a grace; that it also was a page of history and ought not to be torn out. The argument against restoration is valid in many cases, probably in by far the greater number. When a new Norman end is given to a place like Christchurch, when a Jacobaeen or a Caroline screen is removed from an old Gothic church, we do well to be angry. A Gothic church can bear a good deal of accumulation, and the dates of Wickham, of the English Bible or the Restoration, are great enough for record in the history of England. But the Church of the Nativity Cave, when it is also the oldest church standing in use in Christendom, is too august a monument to sacrifice to the sentiment of 1842, and a Constantinian basilica is too simple to accommodate and too rare to be littered with every page of history. Here the anti-restoration plea is strong, but not strong enough. The church is too good and

the wall was too bad. A week ago I saw pages of the *Arabian Nights*, manuscripts of Victorian date, in the Mosque of Gaza, and the floor is heaped with the cartridges the Turks stored there. Is that Gothic church to show for ever its classic pillars from an earlier temple, split just as they were split in 1917, and may not the rubbish of an enemy small-arms explosion be swept up? I take the emergency wall at Bethlehem to be little more venerable, and its occasion less worthy of a monument.

We must use, every now and then, a little commonsense. The wall spoilt the church, made it miserable and eyeless; and not this church or that, but the most important basilica of Christendom and the shelter of perhaps the holiest place. The disfigurement was not blameless enough to be kept for history of an episode at the loss of obscuring the broad history of the whole place.

If you need a memorial of the repairing efforts of the last century, you have it in the marble pavement of the choir, and the over high level of the nave floor. And if you seek a monument of the condition under which worship needed walls for mere protection, look around to the blocked windows, and the tiny entrance eloquent of fears and disorders, passed, as we hope, for ever away.

I have called ours the most important Christian basilica, and so it is if we take everything into account, even excluding the sacredness of the site. The four vast and glorious patriarchal churches of Rome have been rebuilt or gravely changed. In these and the other lovely basilican buildings the persistence of the Roman tradition of art conceals the fact that, immensely rich as they are in memorials of their past, these churches, as we see them, are far later than Bethlehem. St. Clement-above-Ground is of the Middle Ages, with the cancellae perhaps preserved from the much earlier church beneath it—itsself hiding a more ancient temple. Until the discovery of its own buried predecessor, St. Clement was thought the type of a Constantinian basilica, as it still is, with St. Sabina, St. Mary-across-Tiber, and other beautiful Roman churches, the model of basilican arrangement.

The Church of the Nativity really stands alone, as old as St. John Lateran and much less altered, as lovely in that form as any church on earth.

But it has not the kind of loveliness to bear every bulky intrusion—every trifling memento. I confess I would go farther than part with the wall. I would move the splendid font from its

insignificant position; I should be content to see a new carpet replace the celebrated slant-cut one in the Armenian chapel—text of so many lectures on religious rivalry, cause of so many sad head-shakings of our innocent soldiers. I would have those famous windows cleaned which the Greeks own and the Armenians will not have touched—or is it the other way round? The truth is that, profoundly impressed as we all ought to be with a sense of the delicacy and immense complication of a long and tragic history, I do not think that the greatest respect for ancient rights need make one value unnecessary records of ancient discords. And when we come to the milder if still lamentable modern instances, it is difficult to prize the memorials of petulance, even when it rises to the dignity of violence, described sometimes with the weight of detail fit for a great battle story, and horrifying till one learns that “the indescribable scene of carnage and bloodshed” ended without any fatal hurts in the list of injuries “signed by two prominent Jerusalem doctors, as well as by the physician of the Municipality.” If I must one day go over these stories, old and new, let it be on a day not spent in or near the Cave of Bethlehem.

When one is tempted to be interested in the strife of tongues and hands, or scandalised at it for lack of sympathy, it is good to remember that we are at the focus, not only of rival traditions and ceremonies, but of endless humble prayers. A tall young Abyssinian walks there every day just now from Jerusalem for long and silent devotions in the crypt. The saints of all creeds meet at Bethlehem in act or will; and we may hope that what has been reverently done will cause pain to none of these.

I returned to these bookish exercises from the jolly highlands of North Judaea, the society of a famous division, the homely spectacle of shell-bursts on an enemy line, and a glimpse of endless heights which then, so lately, remained to be taken and held. It seems a childish thing to think of masonry and mosaics when armies are conquering and a new and happier history begins.

But the soldier who does the real work is the last to think meanly of anything that belongs to the Sacred Places and the Holy Land, now, by his skill and courage, to be made free and safe for men of every creed.
