

IN THE WAKE OF THE RISING SUN.

(By 'VIATOR.')

AIN KARIM

AMONG the hallowed spots revered of pilgrims to the Holy Land, the little out-of-the-way village of Ain Karim, the birthplace of John the Baptist, has its own peculiar charm and claim. 'The Vine-plots' or 'the Vineyards' would seem the English rendering of the Hebrew *Ain Karim*, and the name is not undescribed, for creeping up the stiff sides of the encircling hills, relieved here and there with fig, olive, apricot, and almond trees, are flourishing vineyards. But above the visible signs of thrift and lowly comfort, not everywhere apparent in Palestine, there are memories of the holiest enshrined in Ain Karim. This is verily 'the hill country of Judea' whither our Blessed Lady, who had already conceived the Divine Infant, journeyed to visit her cousin, St. Elizabeth, now about to become the mother of John the Baptist. Here it was where Zachary and Elizabeth, parents of the Baptist, had their humble dwelling; here it was that the unborn child of promise—the precursor to be—'leaped in his mother's womb,' sanctified before birth by the visit of the Mother of God and her Divine Son; here it was that the latter part of the Hail Mary—'Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb'—was uttered in words of welcome by St. Elizabeth; here it was that the Blessed Virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit, broke forth into the inspired canticle of the 'Magnificat'—'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour, because He hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid, for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.' Was prophecy ever more splendidly fulfilled? Here, too, it was that the Baptist grew and waxed strong ere he went before Him 'the latchet of whose shoe he was not worthy to loose.' Tell me, now, is not the air here embalmed with mystery, do we not tread the cradle-land of the faith? Is not every turn in Ain Karim brimful and suggestive of the 'fulness of time' when 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.' Favored above many lands is this nook far from the highway of the world, buried in its own setting of rich verdure, sleeping with placid smile at the foot of eternal hills that rise in crescent horns of protective strength.

This indeed is Ain Karim, or St. John's as it is sometimes called, still fragrant with the memories of a splendid, glorious past. Thither in torrents of welcome rain—it was the only wet day during our pilgrimage—we journeyed, due west of Jerusalem, over the rough road, up shingly hills pelted by the driving rain-storm, shooting under culverts, and turning sharp angles in a primitive carriage. But the ponies are sure of foot, and land us at length at the monastery door at Ain Karim. It is verily a 'hill country,' stretching away in rise and fall, patch over patch, terrace over terrace, 'in gay theatric pride,' telling of peasant workers happy and prosperous in this basin bounded by hills, drawing content and living wage from a not unkindly soil. No whitefaced fear, in this nook hidden among the hills, of big towns eating up the country, no advancing tide of factory and store and street swamping the land, no fears, as Faber wrote:—

'Mayhap too hotly cherished
Of the dense towns, like storm-clouds, o'er the land,
Killing the popular heart, that has been nourished
With fear and love, all chaste from Nature's hand,
Spurning the weight wherewith the green earth lies
On peasant spirits with her mysteries.'

All here is rural simplicity with a hint of mellow comfort and sober ease,

'Where the great sun begins his state,
Right against the Eastern gate
Robed in flames and amber dight.

To us it was distinctly noticeable that those places in the Holy Land, more intimately associated with our Blessed Lady—Bethlehem, Ain Karim, Nazareth—have an air of peace, of content, of softness that gives the people and the *locale* a *cachet* at once peculiar and attractive. Before dipping from the hill into the basin beneath, we have a good view of the Mediterranean, and of the sentinel heights of Mount Olivet. We are now at the monastery of the the Franciscan Fathers, castellated and fortress-like, clinging like a limpet to the buttresses of the hill. Every place is open to us, every explanation given. Here is the spot—marked by a tablet—where the Blessed Virgin stood when she intoned the 'Magnificat,' here is the place where Elizabeth welcomed her cousin, even then bearing in her womb the Saviour of the world, the Man-God, and see, here is the stone on which Elizabeth placed St. John the Baptist ere she fled before Herod. We drank deep of the potent spirit of the place and could wish to store up great draughts against a day when we shall move in less heavenly atmosphere. As under a spell we knelt and kissed the sacred ground, thankful that to us it was given to realise the sweet piety of the 'Hail Mary' in its cradle, proud that it is given us too to be of those 'nations that call her blessed.' There is a well in the village—still called 'Mary's Well'—and here spite the long, swift pencils of beating rain, the village maidens were gathered in coil and shawl, bare as to the feet, drawing water, as in all the ages, and balancing their pitchers on their heads with comely grace and beauty unadorned.

We revelled in the pelting rain now working overtime in shame for long spells of masterly drought, and we shot the swollen brooks that leaped from every crevice in the hills, for we were minded to see and note the stories written at every turn in this favored spot. All the traditions cluster round the 'Baptist' and tell of the early days of the 'Prophet of the Most High,' till he turned his back on his Father's house and went down to the valley of the Jordan to fulfil his mission, to become 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness,' and earn the divine tribute, 'Amen, I say to you, there hath not risen among them that are born of women a

greater than John the Baptist' (Math. XI., 11.). We feasted to the full on the pith of the rich, legendary lore of the place, then climbed the slippery pathway to our carriage. The merciless rain beat fiercely on our bent heads, and danced to its own music on the roof when we got ensconced in sodden, soaked discomfort behind our bemuffled charioteer. Still we thought fondly of the memories of Ain Karim.

VIA DOLOROSA.

It was Friday evening, our objective the 'Via Dolorosa,' our intent to make the Way of the Cross over the very ground traversed by Our Lord, and bedewed every step of it with His precious blood.

Quis est homo qui non flet?

It was a journey to be scored in memory's folds, that Way of the Cross from the hall of Pilate to Mount Calvary and down to the Holy Sepulchre. The steps—or *Santa Scala*—up which Our Lord went were removed, as is known, to Rome, and are enshrined in a church, under care of the Passionist Fathers, just opposite the Basilica of St. John Lateran. At three o'clock the procession, headed by cross-bearer and acolytes and preceded by beadle, came forth from the convent hard by and took up position in the courtyard of the Turkish military barracks, the traditional site of the house of Pilate. We knelt in awe as the First Station—'Jesus is condemned to death'—was announced by the officiating priest. All round about, impervious to faith, the Turkish soldiers looked vacantly on, or chatted to themselves, or burnished their horses' stirrups and bits, while we bent low in thought and prayer as we called back the tragedy of the cross—the passion of Jesus Christ. So it was even in the Gospel days, when Jesus went about 'doing good'; many said, though 'in admiration of His doctrine,' 'is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?' But when St. Peter was asked by Our Lord, 'Who do men say that I am?' and Simon answered, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' Jesus, looking on him kindly, said 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to you, but My Father Who is in heaven.' Alas! sense and reason penetrate but little into the higher things. Faith alone scattereth the darkness and lights up the straight and narrow path that leads to the crystal battlements. Nothing less than the angels' trumpet blast, loud, clear, and close, could sheet home the truth to ears that listen but hear not. We follow to the Second Station at the foot of the steps, leading from Pilate's house to the Via Dolorosa. Here the cross was laid on the shoulders of Our Lord. Close by is the Convent of the Sisters of Zion, a convent well worth a visit by reason of the historic memories preserved in vaults, arches, passages, pavement dating to the Roman occupation. Spanning the street is the Arch of Pilate, or 'Ecce Homo' Arch, marking the spot where Pilate showed Our Lord to the Jews, uttering the memorable words 'Behold the Man.' A tablet in the wall marks the spot—the Third Station—where Our Lord fell for the first time. Near the site of the Fourth Station, where Jesus met His afflicted mother, we pass the house of 'the poor man Lazarus.' So we follow the stations in turn, kneeling on the stony street with priests, monks, Sisters, ladies, gentlemen, and the pious poor, while the sonorous tones of the officiating priest tell anew the blood-stained journey of the Saviour of men from the Praetorium to Golgotha. A little oratory marks the spot where Simon of Cyrene was forced to help Jesus to carry His cross. The last five stations are within the walls of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

To Calvary in procession we mount, and then go down to the Holy Sepulchre where the body of Jesus was laid, laying up into ourselves stores of tender, precious memories unto all time. The blessing with the crucifix followed. A truly impressive, awesome scene as all—citizens of the world decked in gay or sombre apparel, monks in cowl and cord and sandal, ecclesiastics in rigid black, nuns in training habit relieved with gimp and veil of white, natives robed in strong contrasting colors—bent down to earth near Our Lord's sepulchre receiving through His minister the blessing of the God-Man crucified.

We strolled thoughtfully through the great wandering church, big with corners and chapels and passages, our thoughts after prayer and meditation attuned to the sacred precincts, choosing for an hour or more

'To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high embowered roof,
With antique pillars mossy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.'

Here indeed was a new, unwonted sensation, a new and fresh reading of the book of life, a train of thought that

'Dissolve me into ecstasies
And bring all heaven before my eyes.'

The Commissioner of Crown Lands, Dunedin, notifies that certain sections in the Barnago estate will be open for selection on lease in perpetuity at the Lands Office, Dunedin, on Tuesday, June 4....

Sections of rural land in the survey districts of Catlins, Blackstone, Akatore, Teviot, Warepa, Woodland, and Lower Hawea, will be open for selection, either for cash, occupation with right of purchase, or lease in perpetuity, on and after June 11. Sale plans and full particulars can be obtained from the District Lands Office, Dunedin....

Our readers in South Canterbury whose business takes them to the Empire City will find first-class accommodation at the Te Aro Hotel, Upper Willis street, which has been taken over by Mr. E. C. Chute, late of the Temuka Hotel. It is unnecessary to say that the new proprietor will do everything possible to ensure the comfort of patrons....