

HISTORY SECTION

PALESTINE



On the Banks of the Sacred River Jordan

NO OTHER country has so many shrines as Palestine, the Holy Land of Christians, Jesus, and Mohammedans. Few other lands have had more stirring events, yet Palestine is a tiny country, occupying only a small part of Syria.

The traveller usually enters the country through the Mediterranean port of Jaffa. Soon he passes through beautiful orange groves, and then across the flat plains of Sharon. Here in ancient times dwelt the Philistines, from whom the entire country was called Palestine.

It is as we approach the cities that we realize what changes have taken place in the Holy Land. Jerusalem is still imposing from a distance, but when we reach it, we find it bereft of all its ancient glories.

From the Holy City a rough and precipitous road leads down to Jericho, which lies nearly a quarter of a mile below the level of the sea. Jericho was

the first city which the Israelites conquered when they entered the Promised Land, many centuries before the birth of Christ, and it was already a city noted for its wealth and luxury. It was rebuilt by the Romans and made so splendid that Antony chose it as a gift to present to his beloved Cleopatra. Now only a wretched village, consisting of a few squalid huts, marks the site of that famous "City of the Palms." Even its natural beauty has suffered, for the palm trees have almost entirely disappeared.

A few miles farther and we are at the banks of the river Jordan, which we find thronged with Christian pilgrims who have come to bathe in the muddy turbulent waters of this historic stream. Each sect has a different bathing place which each claims to be the exact spot where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Trees and luxuriant shrubs clothe the river banks here, but as we follow the

swift stream southward to the Dead Sea the vegetation takes on a sickly look.

Occupying the lowest part of that great chasm through which the Jordan flows, the Dead Sea is almost 1,300 feet below the surface of the Mediterranean Sea. Its water is five times as salty as that of the ocean. If we try to swim in it, we cannot possibly sink but bob up and down like a cork. This extreme saltiness is due largely to the rapid evaporation caused by the intense heat. Each of the many streams that flow into it brings a small amount of salt, which remains while the water passes off as vapor. The Dead Sea deserves its name, for it contains no animal life except the lowest, and fish put into its waters soon die. Such scanty vegetation as is found on the shores is covered with a white salt crust that makes it look as though "it had been smitten with leprosy."

Climbing back over the barren hills, we reach Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. This town will ever be famous in sacred history. A few miles farther south, in the ancient city of Hebron, is the cave where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are supposed to be buried. About this place has been built a Moslem Mosque, for the Mohammedans regard great patriarchs with reverence equal to that of the Jew or Christian.

Passing to the north we cross Samaria and reach the fertile, well-watered, and

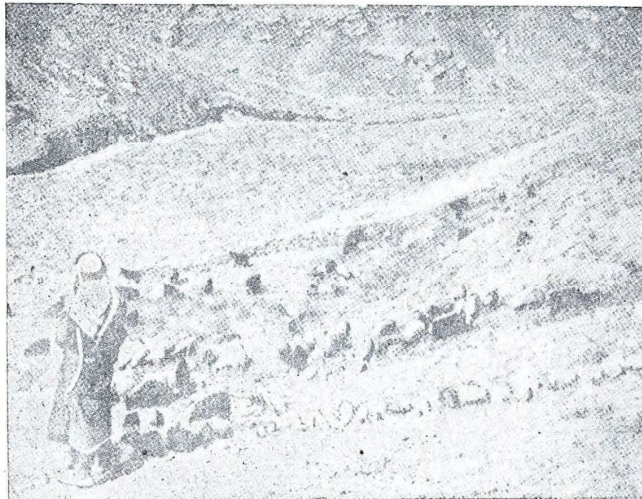
pleasant land of Galilee. Here, nestling among the hills, we find the historic town of Nazareth, where Jesus spent his boyhood. To the south is a famous plain, the vast arena in which so many battles have taken place. Armies from the great empires of the Nile and of the Euphrates, and from the north and the south, the east and the west, have here met in deadly conflict. In the early days of Israel's history many battles were fought here, and in the Middle Ages, hosts of Crusaders died on this plain fighting for the cross. Here Napoleon

was checked, and in the First World War the Allies won Palestine in this field. It is supposed to be the Plain of Armageddon to which reference is made in the Bible.

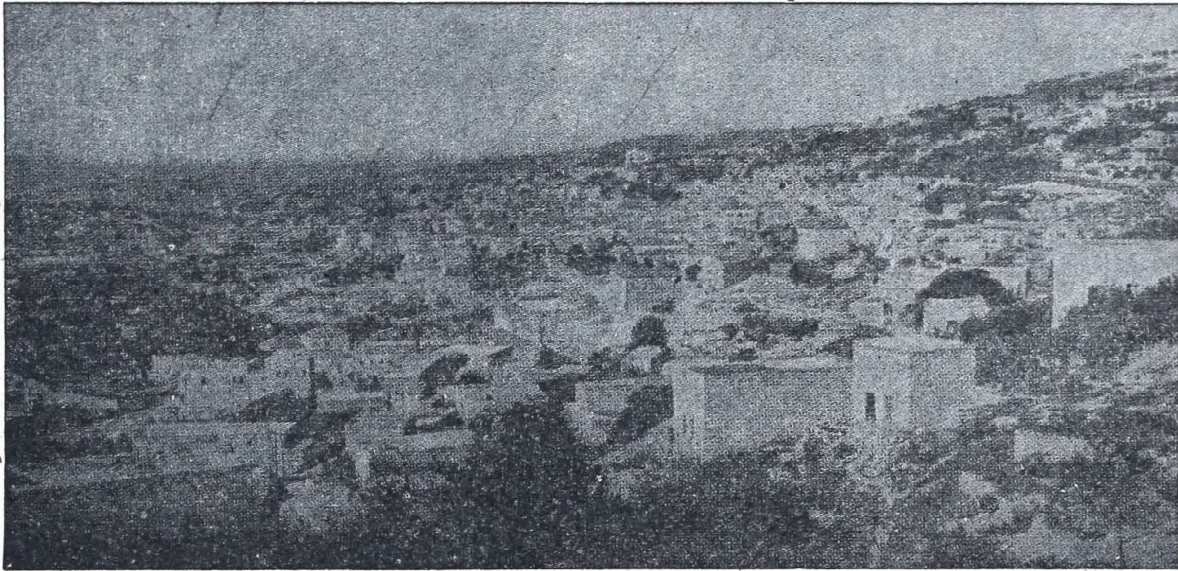
How peaceful after these scenes of strife seem the calm blue waters of the Sea of Galilee. On these

shores Jesus often walked, and here He met the fishermen who became His apostles. Now the region is quieter than it was in His day. Only a few scattered boats are seen on the waters which were once covered with sails; the cities once on its shores are now only heaps of ruins. It is not surprising that after many centuries much of the country should become waste. But almost everywhere the soil is rich, and modern irrigation is working wonders.

The population of Palestine is extremely mixed. About five-sixths are



A herdsman in Palestine is watching his sheep where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob drove their flocks.



Nazareth, Boyhood Home of Jesus, as it Looks Today

Arabs (Mohammedans in faith) and the remainder Christians or Jews. Since the First World War there has been much fighting between the Arabs and the Jews, due to the Zionists' dream of "establishing in Palestine a national home for the Jewish people."

REVIEW

1. Locate Palestine on the map of Asia Minor.
2. Palestine is the Holy Land to what peoples?
3. What is the Mediterranean seaport of Palestine?
4. Why is the country called Palestine?
5. Tell about Jericho.
6. What can you say of the history of Jericho?
7. Tell of the river Jordan.
8. Tell of the Dead Sea.
9. Why is Bethlehem of historical interest?
10. Why is Nazareth of historical interest?
11. What historic events have occurred on the plains south of Nazareth?
12. Tell of the Sea of Galilee.
13. Tell of the population of Palestine.
14. What is the Zionists' dream?
15. Why has there been trouble between the Jews and the Arabs?
16. What city is called the "City of the Palms?"
17. In what way is the Dead Sea different from other seas.
18. Why is it so named?
19. In what city were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob supposed to be buried?
20. Who was Napoleon?
21. Ask your teacher to tell you in what ways Christians, Mohammedans, and Jews differ from one another.
22. In the present world war, who are fighting in the Holy Land?