

A JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

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A MARCH afternoon. At Ascalon, five miles from the Gaza Strip, in a hot, windless silence smelling of orange blossom, three of us had picked up fragments of Roman glass and pottery two thousand years old, had looked down from the broken ends of the ruined Crusader walls to the long white beach and the dark Mediterranean. We had forgotten the huge factory and the new settlement to the north. We had forgotten our plan to drive on to Beersheba, thirty miles to the south-east. For the moment we were isolated from the pressure of work against time which makes Israel an invigorating, exhausting, nervous country.

Now there was no time to visit Beersheba. We must drive fast to reach Jerusalem before dark. Our guide, tirelessly informative, drove eastwards. As we approached the Jordan frontier a prospect of wild, hilly, stony, deserted country opened out, the edges of the Negev. We were suddenly aware of tension and anxiety. We stopped to pick up a young soldier who wanted a lift to the next military post. The tension dropped momentarily: we had a revolver aboard. That mound on the left? That was the mound of Gath. Yes, there was heavy fighting here during the war. Which war? The War of Liberation, the most recent of the endless conflicts which have raged across the landscape of Palestine.

A few miles further on, at an army camp which used to be a Palestine Police Station, the soldier got out. Tension mounted and we drove faster into the bare, rocky mountains of Judaea. No, there were no settlements between the road and the frontier. An army patrol car swung out ahead of us. We raced to keep it in sight. And then, as we ran down into a little valley the guide relaxed. We had evidently returned to civilization. This was the valley in which David fought Goliath. That was the brook from which he picked the stone for his sling. Beside it tobacco plants were growing under glass.

We drove on into the mountains up narrow, steep wooded valleys. The light dwindled. And when we entered Jerusalem it was dark, a moonless night. In the light of street-lamps every city loses its individuality, even perhaps Jerusalem. In the morning we should see if it was what we expected.

It was not. No picture, no photograph can prepare you for the contours, the colours or the contrasts of Jerusalem. It stands on a rocky spur two thousand five hundred feet above the sea. The rock drops suddenly into narrow valleys. It has been cut away to build the walls, the houses and the churches of the city. It is as beautiful as any stone could be, honey-brown-gold. As the sun swings round the sky its colour changes. It shines and glows and fades from the towered walls of the old city which is closed to Israel. For Jerusalem is divided by barbed wire, by no-man's-land, by mines, by sentries and by a fathomless gulf of hatred and suspicion.

The Israeli city, to the west, is quickly shouldering its way out into the surrounding hills and valleys: new houses, new flats, a new university, a new seat of government. But it is developing against an untamed background which can still surprise and frighten you. We sat down to dine in a flat on the edge of the city in a light and lovely room. We might have been in London or Paris. And suddenly an abrupt and terrifying crescendo of wailing screams stopped our conversation. It was a pack of jackals in the valley below. Yes, they often heard them at night, but they were very shy. No, they never saw them.

By day, in the streets of Israeli Jerusalem, this wild world seems infinitely remote. Here the diaspora has been gathered into a cosmopolitan city. Jews from the Yemen, from Persia, from North Africa, from Poland, from Russia, are united here in a sensation and a loyalty which are new to them. In Israel, for the first time, they feel at home.

But the Jerusalem we had come to see is not in Israel. The old walled city lies beyond the frontier in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. On a bright, hot morning we crossed through the Mandelbaum Gate.

At once the emotional climate altered, became less insistent. We had left behind the earnest, secular evangelism of Israel. We met, in the Arabs who came to greet us, a gravity illuminated by sudden flashes of humour which chime with the English refusal to appear to take serious matters too seriously. This sense of humour is not extended into any discussion of Israel. And those who have friends on both sides of the frontier can only be saddened by the incompatible anxieties of a land where so many innocent people are refugees.

We entered the city and moved into a world inconceivably distant from the transplanted synthesis of the other side. The streets are high and narrow, ancient, over-arched, secret. Few of them can admit motor cars. We walked through a network of market lanes past the endless invitation of tiny shops whose doors open out into the crowded pathways. The butcher, the baker whose new bread spices the air, the confectioner who reminds you of Hassan, the man who cooks meat and onions share these noisy tunnels with the chemist who sells perfume from Paris, the toy-shop which displays tricycles and celluloid ducks, the Bata shoe shop. And the traffic that passes is a procession of Arabs in head-dress and flowing robes, veiled women, soldiers of the Arab Legion immaculate in khaki, bare-footed children, occasional Europeans. The variety of the scene explodes and escapes from your memory.

But you observe with your feet and your heart that this city is built on the side of a mountain. You are always walking up or down a slope. And in the strong sunlight we walked out of narrow lanes into the Haram esh Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, the site of Solomon's and Herod's Temple.

It lies on the eastern edge of the city, a vast, bare, stone platform crowned by the magnificent simplicity of the Dome of the Rock which has stood there for more than twelve hundred years. To the east, below the city, the hill falls away into the dry valley of the Kedron. You look down into the Garden of Gethsemane, and beyond it the slope of the Mount of Olives rises to a hard edge framed against the sky. And at once the savagery of the story of the first Holy Week comes to life. The big white church in the valley conceals the Rock of Agony. The road that winds up into the city is the track that led Christ to his judgment.

We followed it. Beneath the Convent of the Sisters of Zion we found the worn flagstones which were once the courtyard of the Fortress Antonia where Pilate condemned him to death. We followed the Via Dolorosa down into the little dip and up again through the crowded, indifferent streets. At each station we knelt in the sunlight beside a group of servicemen from the Royal Air Force. It was unforgettably moving to hear these English voices joined in the recollection of suffering which gives this path its name. And at the end of the Via Dolorosa we entered the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which encloses Calvary and the Tomb.

This church, we are told, is a reproach to Christendom. Perhaps it is. Every Christian must be shocked by the scars of scaffolding and decay which disfigure it. But it is dangerously easy to allow a sophisticated taste to be outraged by the decoration and elaboration of its chapels. It may be harder, but it is more proper, to remember the loyalty and devotion which inspired them. The criteria of good taste are not enough. And those who have attended Mass in the Aedicule, the shrine which covers the Sepulchre, will remember with gratitude and joy the picture of the priest and his server, kneeling in the candle-light, framed by the tiny arch which leads to the Tomb of our Lord. In spite of its scars and its blemishes, in spite of the dispute which makes it hard to heal them, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was for us the scene of the most touching, the deepest, the most cherished experiences of this journey.

ROSMINI AND PIUS IX, 1848-49¹

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ANTONIO ROSMINI, who died a hundred years ago, has a distinguished but rather singular place in Catholic history. Revered by many as a saint in all but name, founder of the Institute of Charity, a priest *corde et animo*, he was also, in the judgment of the relatively few who have studied his writings, a very great Christian intellect; while for students of Italian history he has an honourable if somewhat isolated place in the complex national revival known as the Risorgimento. Evidently a many-sided person and yet, just because of this, not one to be easily identified with any particular group or trend in Church or State. And this isolation, so to call it, is reflected in the fortunes of those voluminous philosophical writings which Rosmini himself considered his main life-work, along with the

¹ My chief authorities are Vol. X of Rosmini's complete *Epistolario* (Monferrato, 1892) and Vol. II of the standard *Vita di Antonio Rosmini*, by 'un sacerdote dell'Istituto della Carità' (Turin, 1897). Of recent works D. Massé's able apologia for Pius IX has been useful: *Pio IX e il gran tradimento del '48* (Alba 1948). Mr E. E. Y. Hales's *Pio Nono* (1954) has too little, I think, about Rosmini. A new biography of Rosmini, to mark the centenary, is expected from the Rev. C. R. Leatham, Inst. Ch.