

Chapter 31: The Holy Lands, New Religious Concepts (1847)

As the party neared the Holy Land, Martineau's excitement grew. On 27 March, "Mrs. Y. and I were off on foot before six" along the supposed pass "by which the Hebrews attempted to enter Palestine the first time, from Kadesh," she wrote in *Eastern Life*. At one in the afternoon, riding on ahead with Ewart and "a youth of the party," she saw the sheikh trying to stop for the night, instructing the drivers to make their camels lie down. When the travelers objected, the sheikh began to gallop around Ewart's camel, finally poking it under the tail with his spear. While Ewart rode on stoically the other travelers began to finger their pistols and at last the sheikh let them go on. At 3:30 they found a grassy spot suitable for camping, with "purple iris . . . wild oats, daisies, buttercups [and] scarlet anemones" abounding, though scorpions and black beetles had to be uncovered before the tents could be set up.

Sunday, 28 March began with an English worship service. Martineau and Anne Yates then walked on together comparing childhood impressions of Jesus, unaware they had entered Palestine during the morning. While intent on relating her surroundings to biblical stories, Martineau's sciatica "increased to a degree which was really terrible." Lingered behind, she "sank down on the wet ground fainting" while the rest of the caravan passed her. At last two armed Arabs came back shouting, lifted her onto her camel and turned her over to her party, who quickly gave her brandy. Later she claimed the experience revealed how it felt "to be alone on the wild hills of Judea."¹

Before Hebron, the party were surprised to see Ewart "promoted downwards from his camel to riding the Sheikh's horse." He had declined the honor repeatedly, he said wryly, "'but some men have greatness thrust upon them.'" Later, rid of the sheikh, the caravan proceeded towards Jerusalem through beautiful countryside, the sight of the city exceeding all Martineau's expectations. As they "ascended a winding, steep, rocky road" to the Jaffa gate, "I was on foot, and lagged behind, that I might not lose . . . any feature of the scene," she recalled. "But I believe no one spoke. We all felt that it was such a moment as we should never know again."

At Salvador's hotel, she looked out from the terrace of her room onto flat roofs, picturesque walls and the narrow, winding street below. It was Holy Week, and the bazaars were selling "oranges, lemons, figs, nuts and almonds, pumpkins and cucumbers." She noticed "the lightness of complexions, and the mild beauty of the faces . . . after so many weeks among the Arabs in the Desert."

The party inspected the "English church" under construction - its Good Friday service seeming "utterly dead." Martineau also took a dim view of the Protestant mission and proposed House of Industry. They visited a Jewish home and walked through the streets gazing at Biblical and Moslem holy places. That evening, Martineau balked at going to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to see the washing of the pilgrims' feet. Other biblical associations moved her, but these seemed "mummeries done in the name of Christianity." Nor could they visit "David's tomb" - now in a mosque outside the walls - but Martineau scoffed at the claims of such sites. On Sunday, 4 April, they walked out of the city by way of the Damascus gate to the "Cave of Jeremiah . . . the silent rock-retreat." Sitting in the shade in the Turkish cemetery, they read aloud the whole gospel of Matthew, pondering the historic localities around them.

In the next few days, the party rode out on horseback to the Jordan and the Dead Sea, where splashes on Martineau's skirt turned to "thin crusts of salt." At the convent of Saint

Saba, "an extraordinary place, - its buildings . . . plunging down the precipice," the tired Englishwomen were not permitted inside. Next they heard that "some Bedouens were hanging about, and had stolen two horses of our escort." When a gentleman advised Martineau "to take great care" of her watch, she laughed: "I would thankfully have done [so], if I had known how." Indeed, she thought the Mohammedan servants seemed delighted at the "opportunity of protecting the Christian ladies." Riding back to Jerusalem next day, they passed through "the valley of the Kedron, approaching the ancient Tophet," where gardens and fruit and olive groves abounded.²

Despite certain deeply moving experiences, Martineau was discomfited by the spectacle of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with its "lamps, and marbles, and shining metals, and altars, and the chapels of the Latins, Greeks and Armenians." She weighed it against "the temples where I had seen the sculptured Osiris," and she postulated the "calm and pure . . . records of his life and doctrine." One set of relics seemed quite genuine to her, however - the spurs and sword of Godfrey of Bouillon - which, oddly, seemed "to suit rather a small hand." Handling Godfrey's relics caused Martineau to exclaim that she was glad she had come! As they left the church, however, hawkers and filthy beggars harassed them, and the "dragoman had to lay about him with a stout stick before we had any peace." The dragoman's ferocity seemed to echo Martineau's disillusionment with Jerusalem, a "heathen metropolis of Christendom" she labeled it in *Eastern Life*.

Excursions outside the city helped to make up for disappointments. The Mount of Olives and the "garden of Gethsemane" seemed valid Biblical sites, and the party enjoyed the view from the top of the governor's house. Martineau described the Mosque of Omar as "gay and graceful in its elaborate structure [with] springing arches of the avenue to its platform," arcades and "the row of cypresses with worshippers at prayer beneath them." Even the pathetic cry of a muezzin "thrilled on the unaccustomed ear."³

As they bought supplies in the Bazaar on their last weekday, four soldiers and "a citizen" came to help them bargain, "which made it very amusing" for no one "seemed to have anything to do." Martineau watched with delight people "playing with snakes on the shop-board, or smoking, or simply staring at us." She thought one's "eye gratified at every turn by the deep arches, vaults, interiors, weedy old walls, the very handsome people, the black shadows, and pencils or floods of light." That evening, 10 April, they went to a soiree at the home of the British Consul, James Finn. Among the guests were members of the English mission, a greedy English woman tourist they had noted on the boat to Cairo, and officers from "the English brig Harlequin," who reported on "a world of European news." One officer had family ties in Norwich. "It was strange," Martineau murmured, "after talking over old Norwich . . . and the state of the dying O'Connell, and various doings in Parliament, to walk home through the streets of Jerusalem."⁴

On their last day in the city, a Sunday, the Yates party rode towards Bethlehem, trying out new horses. Martineau's chestnut mare seemed "the best of the lot," later carrying her "to Damascus . . . and afterwards over the Lebanon, and down to Beyrout." Setting forth for Samaria on Monday, 12 April, they gazed back from "a ridge on the Nablous (the northern) road" towards Jerusalem, lying "bright and stately, on its everlasting hills," the scenery full of vivid colors. Passing wheat fields, fig and olive trees, "upland tracks" strewn with flowers, drinking cattle, browsing camels and "Arabs with their asses, carrying corn to the city," they

spotted "stone villages on the heights." Traveling in their small group seemed easier, and Alee stoutly defended them when a group of Arabs once tried to camp too close. Yet riding through towns could be nerve-wracking. At Nablous, Martineau felt "three slaps in the face from millet stalks and other things." People were "grinning, thrusting out their tongues, and pretending to spit" at them. For once, Martineau's tolerance failed her. In compensation, they were taken to the Samaritan synagogue and allowed to see, but not touch, an ancient parchment copy of the Pentateuch. Scrutinizing the tattered document, carefully held by the priest, Martineau (apparently ignorant of Aramaic script) noted the text as "clear, small and even; - the lines continuous, and not broken into words." Even more rewarding, was the opportunity to observe a "remnant of the ancient sect" crowding around, curious about Martineau's ear trumpet.

Returning to their camp, the travellers were lighted by a single candle "through the archways, and down the hill" in time for the ladies to bathe in a spring bubbling "up out of the ground." After tea, to refresh their memories, they solemnly read "the 4th chapter of John, and the history of the Jewish and Samaritan controversy."⁵

Next day riding through a profusion of blue iris, a new guide, Giuseppe, "our buffoon for the time," decorated himself and his ass with bunches of the iris. Slopes were "all yellow with marigolds, and the ground covered with scabius, white convolvulus, yellow nettles, hollyhocks and wild artichokes." As a trick by the governor of the town where they camped, they received warning of thieves and in the morning found their best mule gone to the honest surprise of their guards.⁶

Martineau named other Biblical sites, but "[n]o place in Palestine satisfied me more entirely than Nazareth," she recorded in *Eastern Life*. Rain was expected, and some of the British naval officers they had met in Jerusalem gave up their rooms in the Latin convent for them. There inside the "Church of the Annunciation," Martineau was impressed by "the earnestness of the monks, and the beauty of the music" (another instance of *hearing* during her eastern journey). Meanwhile, she compared events solemnly associated with Christianity to similar legends in the Egyptian religion. In the morning, they had smiled at the officers galloping up the hills followed by their panting dragoman; in the evening, English newspapers from the *Harlequin* were "pitched up the mountain" by efforts of the officers. Martineau doubted whether "'Arab intensity' itself" transcended that of "British naval officers, on a scamper ashore." Next day, 17 April, they had "a charming ride to Acre and back." On Sunday, 18 April, returning by way of Nazareth they found the "stolen" mule awaiting them.⁷

At the Sea of Galilee, Martineau looked in vain for "fishing boats," thinking she had never seen "a sheet of water so entirely without beauty." Owing to the heat, the gentlemen decided it was unwise to try to climb Mount Tabor. Martineau longed to go next day, but the "whole party were panting, as if in a vapor bath," and they deemed it unsafe for her to go alone with Alee: the "only serious omission in the whole journey," she recorded wistfully. Later walking along the lake to the baths, they noted "oleanders coming into blossom all along the shore; - and massive ruins strewn about." Martineau and Anne Yates entered the women's bath, where every woman "seemed to be gabbling at the top of her voice," so they fled outside and went bathing "from a fine old roofless tower."

Next morning before "four o'clock," Martineau looked out from their terrace and "saw a curious sight" - roofs spread with mattresses and fully dressed families just awakening.⁸

As they rode on to the frontier between "the Pashalics of Acre and Damascus," they found guards living in reed huts. Martineau bathed luxuriously in a mill-race nearby and explored a recess "hung with vines, and tufted with delicate ferns." Passing further Biblical sites, they viewed "the great Saracenic castle of Panias on its mountain top, - looking almost too high to be reached by man or beast," with another castle below and ancient ruins scattered over the "gloriously beautiful scene." From the shade of their tents pitched in an olive grove, Martineau thought the variety of objects in the picture "harmoniously combined by Nature's master hand" outdid Poussin himself. While the two Englishwomen now bathed in a waterfall, the gentlemen found "the shrine of old Pan, - from whom the place derived its most ancient and modern name." Next day, they visited the shrine - a cavern and series of niches, empty of statues but "arched off with graceful shell ornaments." In *Eastern Life*, Martineau exclaimed that she had never dreamed the fable of the death of Pan at the birth of Christ "would appear like historical truth!"⁹

For their first night in Syria, the party rested at Nimrod's Tomb. On 25 April, within a few miles of Damascus, they were surprised by cold gusts bringing "mists and flying showers" from the mountains like those of Westmoreland in March. Riding on the plain, they encountered a mirage of a "wide gleaming lake, with wooded shores" that dissolved as they approached and formed again behind them. The apparition upset Martineau, though the area seemed "truly a paradise" as they rode "along green tracks, past gravel pits and verdant hollows, round villages, through cemeteries [and] under the shade of glorious groves." Walnut trees flourished above the field crops, citrons perfumed the air and fig trees grew to "vast size."

Entering Damascus, "the oldest known city in the world," they noted people in the bazaars selling "fruit and vegetables, making clothes, and a large quantity of baskets." At the highly touted Italian hotel, they found two of their desert comrades, one of whom gave up his room to Martineau and Anne - which proved "so perilously damp, and infested with beetles," they refused to sleep there a second night. "By remonstrance," Martineau groused, "we obtained better: but the table is not to be praised . . . in a place so amply supplied with provisions as Damascus." Through a resident physician, "Dr. T.," they were nevertheless able to see the interiors of houses that featured "marble courts, fountains, thickets of orange plants and . . . lofty, cool, luxurious apartments." Martineau thought the dress of several visiting Jewish ladies of "coloured muslins, gold embroidery and handsome shawls around the waist [with] a profusion of diamonds" superb. "Their heads were entirely covered with natural flowers and clusters of diamonds, inserted in a close fitting silk net," she raved, but she did not like their plucking of eyebrows and the painting "of a dark stripe straight across." A celebrated Jewish woman named "Esther," a British citizen who hoped to be granted a divorce by the House of Lords from her insane husband, seemed to arouse equivocal feelings in Martineau.

At an elegant dinner given by the English vice-consul (who shared a house with Dr. T.), Turkish musicians played so loud they were "presently sent to amuse the native ladies, who were arriving," but a promised sword dance did not take place. Sitting among the ladies bored Martineau, though she watched in amazement as some "took up a cucumber, and ate it, rind and all, swallowing after it some arrack, to promote its digestion." In their rooms that night, Martineau learned that a grievance against the French consul, whose wife was present, had almost prevented the Jewish ladies from coming and had led to the sword dance being cancelled.¹⁰

"Our rides [out of Damascus] were always charming," Martineau continued in *Eastern Life*. At the entrances to the city, they passed through elegant arches and into countryside that was "luxuriant beyond English imagination." Their friend "Dr. T." was encouraging Englishmen to invest in mulberry plantations in Syria, but Martineau determined that past religious persecutions and the inefficient and corrupt Turkish rulers would threaten such projects. Yet as they rode out by way of "home-like lanes" from Damascus, people greeted them civilly.

On the evening of 5 May, the party arrived at Baalbec where their tents were pitched under the walls of "the great Temple of the Sun." Examining the "large and striking area of the quarries," they marveled at the size of an unremoved block "whose bulk exceeds that of any stones we saw in Egypt." Martineau was charmed with the beautiful children who gathered round her as she peeled and divided an orange for them. One girl "most gracefully" kissed Martineau's hand, a spontaneous act she felt no English child would be encouraged to perform. In the morning, almost before the two Englishwomen were dressed, "a train of five ladies" sent by Dr. T. called on them in their tent. "They stroked our gowns, looked merrily in our faces, and every now and then, burst into a laugh . . . from . . . glee." From the Baalbec agent of the English consulate, the party received a tray covered with butter, cheese and fresh flowers, he then acting as guide to the "massive, wonderful and beautiful" edifices. Some in their group were more impressed than by anything they had seen in Egypt, Martineau declaring the grandest feature to be the "six enormous columns . . . seen for many miles round." The ruins, to her newly awakened sensitivity, seemed visible signs of ideas that led to a better appreciation of Baal-worship and regret for past prejudice against it.¹¹

On 6 May, the travelers passed further ruins amid varied scenery that included another mirage. A guide from a village was hired, she narrated, "to conduct us . . . directly up the face of the mountains" towards the Cedars of Lebanon, through holly and oak "and over a profusion of wild flowers." Riding last, Martineau paid "lavishly" for a welcome drink of goat's milk, then learned that "Mr. Y." had paid the man "handsomely" and *sent* him to her. Meanwhile the mountain air invigorated her, and she bathed in an icy-cold waterfall.

From their camp in an Alpine-like valley, the party reached the summit and looked back towards Baalbec. The "losing sight of Antilibanus, was rather sad," Martineau commented, "for we felt this was our true farewell to the East."

At last they came among the "enormous old trees," of which "one measured 38 feet 11 inches round the trunk." The priest living nearby related various customs such as mass being performed once a year under another ancient tree. "The next day, 8 May, was to take us to the coast . . . to encamp within the sound of . . . breakers," Martineau went on - though several dangerous incidents awaited. The guide missed the way, "a thick mist came down," and when the track became "a mere staircase of rock" Martineau's mare slipped, causing the crupper of the saddle to break, the saddle to fall over the mare's neck and Martineau to go "over her head." The guide reacted with "such consternation, that his only idea was to hold us both . . . until the rest of the party came up." No serious "mischief" resulted except that Martineau twisted her ankle "slightly, and tore my skirt to strips." Then descending through "terraced mulberry plantations; and between walls where the laden mules had no room to pass," they were forced to wait while fences were pulled down. At last, below the mist, they caught sight of "the rich skirts of Lebanon stretching away to the shore." Next, however, one of their drivers "missed his footing, and tumbled over and over to a considerable depth" indicating he must be

fatally hurt. Alee, scrambling after him, "shook him up and down . . . as if he wished to dislocate any joints which might not have undergone that process already," and the man was soon on his feet. Now the restless horses had to be led over a "slight temporary bridge" across a tumultuous stream; and when a mule balked the men "lifted up the hind legs of the animal [and] forced it over the bridge, wheel-barrow fashion." After that one of the mules fell over the side of the path and had to be propped up until his burden could be removed and the animal led back to the path. As they continued up a winding gorge "among thickets of thorns and wild roses," Martineau felt comforted to see Alee "sitting sideways on his horse, smoking his chibouque, and trying to help laughing at the tatter of my skirt."¹²

When at last they emerged from the gorge, they could see far away Tripoli. Onward "over hills and round them, and dipping into valleys . . . from where our puzzled guide had some difficulty in extracting us," they rode. One man received "a dreadful kick on the knee from one of the horses," but he went on. "It was just twelve hours from breakfast when we descended our last long and formidable hill," Martineau recorded. Then where "the path made a sharp turn on the very verge of a precipice," her saddle turned sideways. "By a sudden check," she managed to pull her horse around, "so as to fall on the ground instead of down the steep." Anne Yates quickly rode ahead for some wine, and "by means of that refreshment, and Mr. E.'s stout stick," she reached the bottom of the hill. In another hour, they came to "a low grassy cliff" within sound of the breakers where their tents awaited. Lying on the "thick grass and daisies in the tent," Martineau felt pleased at the adventures "of the most fatiguing day of our travels."¹³

Sunday, 9 May, began with sea bathing. Then continuing along the cliffs they met men who almost all carried spears. "At a sharp turn on the shore," two men accosted Martineau, "one of them shaking his weapon in my face," she recorded. Instinctively, she "twitched the rein out of their hands, laughed in their faces, and rode away." Perhaps they meant "merely to beg," she added in *Eastern Life*, for they made no attempt to stop her.

From their camp that evening, the travellers could see the "white specks in the sunset light [of] the dwellings of Beirout." This was to be their port of departure for Alexandria, and before them "lay the sea, our homeward path." Martineau sighed, knowing she should "never taste that kind of life again." As she rested and walked along the shore late in the day, she pondered the effect of eastern thought on the western mind. "The thoughtful traveller must have some knowledge," she affirmed at the end of *Eastern Life*, to gain "ideas which he could not have obtained at home." Her own mind had received a powerful stimulus that would help to bring about an already glimpsed break with traditional religion and female subservience to male divines.¹⁴

¹ *EL* 3: 42-49, 53-58 (Martineau's fainting spell seemed to replicate incidents of childhood hysteria).

² *EL* 3: 58, 77, 109, 111-44 and 157-61.

³ *EL* 3: 162-66 and 179-180.

⁴ *EL* 3: 180-81 (in 1860 during the troubles in Syria and Palestine, Martineau touted Finn's "energy, frankness, and manly liberality;" writing to Lord Russell to seek a Royal grant to Finn for expense, she further censured the English mission at Jerusalem: see *HM/DN* [25 September 1860] 239-44 and *HM/FW* 197-98).

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- ⁵ *EL 3*: 181 and 190-202.
⁶ *EL 3*: 206.
⁷ *EL 3*: 219-22 and 237-39.
⁸ *EL 3*: 245-50.
⁹ *EL 3*: 256-62.
¹⁰ *EL 3*: 272-73 and 276-88.
¹¹ *EL 3*: 300-318.
¹² *EL 3*: 319-28.
¹³ *EL 3*: 328-30.
¹⁴ *EL 3*: 330-35.