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The Wailing Wall at Jerusalem.

BY THE REVEREND W. M. CHRISTIE, D.D., MOUNT CARMEL BIBLE SCHOOL, HAIFA.

THE Wailing Wall of the Jews, so prominent before the world to-day, consists of part of the Circumvallation of the Temple Court. The great stones forming the lower rows of this wall may go back to the time of Solomon, and if the adjoining 'Solomon's Stables' be genuine, which we have the strongest reasons for believing, then this building, too, dates from the time of Israel's wise king. It is named by the Jews the 'Kotel Maarabi,' or 'Western Wall,' and only by Gentile onlookers has it been associated with 'wailing,' and that because the Jew recites there, along with other items of ritual, the Book of Lamentations, very often in a loud voice.

THE PRAYER DIRECTION.

Solomon completed the Temple about the year 967 B.C., and we have his Dedication Prayer in 1 K 8. He goes over the varied circumstances in prospect in the nation's future life, and on each occasion indicates that prayer is to be 'toward this house,' thus consecrating it as the Central Shrine of Israel's faith and worship. The captive in Babylon sang, 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget' (Ps 137⁶), and in harmony with this, as also with the injunction of Solomon, we find that Daniel in 538 B.C., 'prayed three times a day,' 'his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem.' While the Temple stood, the Jew very often, as did also the Apostles (Ac 3¹), went up thither at the hours of prayer. The Women's Court was in reality a synagogue, accessible to all Israelites, but with the special provision of a gallery for the women. And everywhere from the earliest days of ordered ritual till our own day, the Israelite has begun his Morning Service, 'I will worship toward thy Holy Temple.'

CHANGES WITH DESTRUCTION OF TEMPLE.

Vespasian, Titus, and the Romans destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70. The Jewish State was at an end, and its Sacred Shrine was a heap of ruins. Conditions were changed, and for two separate reasons the pious Israelite could not enter the consecrated precincts. In the mass of ruins it was difficult to determine exactly the site of the Holy of Holies, and the worshipper might unwittingly tread upon, and profane that all-holy place. Then the Jew recognized that in terms of the Ceremonial

Law he was unclean, and that in such condition he could not enter the Courts of the Holy House. He thus became, in the first instance, self-excluded. An alteration, the smallest possible, then became necessary in connexion with the Central Shrine or the 'Prayer Direction,' and all the necessities of the case were met in the Western Wall.

A BIBLE BASIS.

Divine sanction was found for the chosen site in the Song of Solomon 2⁹, where we read, 'Behold, he standeth behind our wall.' According to the spiritualizing method of interpretation of the Jews (and some Christians too) this was explained, 'The Western Wall, of which the Holy One, blessed be He, has sworn that it should never be destroyed.' We find this interpretation repeated again and again down through the ages. About A.D. 300, the famous Rabbi Acha mentions it in such a way as to show that it had been of long standing. It is repeated in 340 by another company in studying the Old Testament Scriptures. In 1300 Rabbi Shimeon Haddarshan, the reputed ancestor of the Adler family, gives the same account in his great work, called Yalkut. And in my possession I have a valuable document, dated 1871, signed by twelve Jerusalem rabbis, and certified by three synagogue seals, in which the writers declare to the ambassadors they send out on their behalf, that they will pray for them 'these three prayers, Evening, Morning, and Midday, to the God of the Gate of the Holy Place, this Gate of Heaven, before the Shechinah, Our Strength, "Behold, this One is standing behind our wall," the Kotel Maarabi, our prayers shall be directed.'

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE.

This interpretation seems to have been put into practice from the very first. About A.D. 75 we read of Jochanan ben Zakkai (almost certainly the John of Ac 4⁶), Head of the Sanhedrin (Great Council), visiting Jerusalem, evidently for devotional purposes, and meeting the daughter of a Nicodemus ben Gurion, whom some take for Nicodemus. Twenty years later we have a case that is quite certain, and in which we have every indication that the Western Wall was the site visited. Gamaliel II., Akiba, and other rabbis visited the Holy City. When they came in sight

of the ruins they rent their clothes. They passed the site of the Holy of Holies, and saw a fox creep out of the ruins. All the rabbis wept, but Akiba manifested signs of joy. Why this unseemly conduct? He explained that he saw there the fulfilment of the threatening prophecies against Israel, and that gave him the assurance that the glorious promises would also find fulfilment. They must have passed by the western side of the ruins of the Temple; they passed farther south than the site of the Holy of Holies, and that led them exactly to the position of the present Wailing Wall. In the first tract of the Talmud, we have the story of Rabbi Jose going from Galilee to pray among the ruins, and of his experiences there. This was about A.D. 150. Rabbi Levi (c. A.D. 350) tells us of the joy of the pilgrims in the days of the Temple and of the silence now. And the same is recounted by Rabbi Berechiah about the year A.D. 1200.

EARLY CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY.

But we are not dependent on Jewish testimony alone. It is true that the Christians resident in the land, as well as pilgrims who came from abroad, cared little for things Jewish, and too often left them unnoticed. Still, the evidence from this source bears out all we learn from the Jews, and they are weighty as coming from men of distinction all of different race and mental outlook. In A.D. 333 the Pilgrim of Bordeaux records that the Jews were allowed to visit for prayer and weeping 'the pierced stone.' We think there is a little confusion here and that for 'pierced' we should read 'memorial.' The difference is that 'q' has been heard for 'k.' This is a frequent source of error in all the Semitic languages. Jerome (340-420) tells us that the Jews were not permitted to enter the city except for the purposes of wailing, and he indicates they had for this to pay a price—an early indication of bribery to local officials. Gregory of Nazianzen (a Syrian) in one of his sermons gives the same story. And in harmony with all these we have the account given by Eusebius, the famous Church Historian of Cæsarea, who lived in the same century.

IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

In mediæval times the whole life and literature of the Jewish world were touched by the associations of the Western Wall. Many allusions might be found to it in both the Babylonian and Spanish-Jewish literatures, but a few direct references must suffice. Poets sang of it, and pilgrims went through dangers and hardships to visit it.

Jehudah Halleivi, who died on his journey to Jerusalem in A.D. 1040, has given us his beautiful *Songs of Zion*, the finest Hebrew poetry produced since the days of the great psalmists, and from one of his songs we translate literally:

Would that one might give me the wings of eagles,
That I might moisten with my tear thy dust,
Shall I not take pleasure in thy stones and kiss them?
And the taste of thy clods shall be sweeter to me than
honey.

There the Shechinah dwells for thee,
And thy Creator has opened thy gates,
Against the gates of the sky,
I will choose for my soul to be companion in the place
Where the Spirit of God is poured upon thy chosen
ones,

I will fall with my face upon the ground,
I will take pleasure in thy stones,
And thy dust will be dear unto me.

Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish Jew, who journeyed in the interests of trade and geographical science, records, under A.D. 1163, that 'in front of it (the Mosque of Omar) you see the Western Wall, one of the walls which formed the Holy of Holies of the Ancient Temple; it is called the Gate of Mercy, and all the Jews resort thither to say their prayers near the wall of the courtyard' (Bohn's Edition, p. 83).

Estor Parchi, a Spanish traveller in the interests of antiquarian research, in 1322; and Meshullam of Volterra (1481) also give testimony, the latter mentioning specially the 9th of Ab, the anniversary of the Fall of Jerusalem.

In 1495 Rabbi Obadiah of Bertinora, who became Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, and died in 1520, sets down in one of his Letters the following: 'In the midst of the city, near to the Holy House, there is a place, open and empty, to which the community after prayer resorts, that they may pray opposite the Holy House, for from there they see the Holy and Fearful Place.'

IN TURKISH DAYS.

These began in A.D. 1517 when the Turks took Jerusalem from the Egyptian Arabs. The evidences are few, but the reason is there was no question. It is said that Selim I. granted the Wailing Wall by Charter (Firman) to the Jews. We have not been able to trace it yet, but this is just the kind of thing such a man would do in the circumstances. At any rate we can say that, apart from the tyranny of one brutal pasha in 1625, there seems to have been peace for three centuries, and literature flourished in the Jewish cities.

In 1640, however, we read in another Letter a

confirmation of all that has been said of Jewish practice, and there is further added a note concerning the Ritual of the Wailing Wall, which shows revision from time to time. Once again there was a revision in Turkish days of the same ritual, when at the beginning of the nineteenth century Rabbi Samuel issued his *Gate of Tears*, which under different names has been published in Jerusalem.

MORE THAN A SHRINE OF PRAYER.

That the Western Wall was not exclusively a centre of prayer, but could be used, and was used, for other kindred purposes we have ample evidence. During the invasion of Egypt and Palestine by Napoleon in 1798, the Jews were suspected of favouring his cause, and of being desirous to help him in his conquests, and accordingly they were threatened with death. In response to this they gathered under the leadership of Mordechai Elgazi, at the Western Wall for prayer and protest. Their action seems to have been effectual in warding off the danger.

In 1856 the Reformed Jews made their first efforts in the East by opening a school in Jerusalem. This was too much for the Orthodox party, and, as on the former occasion, they gathered for Prayer and protest at the Wailing Place.

In 1882 (Ab, 5642), according to a Hebrew newspaper cutting in my hand, Jerusalem was visited by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, and was received by the Chief Rabbi Chayyim David Chazzan, and all the leading Jews at the Western Wall. He questioned the rabbi as to the antiquity of the buildings, and was assured that they were from the time of Solomon. The rabbi then raised his hands and prayed for the 'Peace of Queen Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, and Empress of India, that her days might be long over her kingdom, and that perfectly she might rule in wisdom and righteousness.'

RESTRICTIONS AND HINDRANCES.

We are generally given to understand that on the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the Jews were forbidden by Titus to approach the Holy City. We have been unable to trace any such regulation, and, on the contrary, the evidences we have already given show that the ruins were partially occupied. We also read of Arabs with their camels in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, clearly engaged in trade.

It was probably after the movements in the Jewish world in A.D. 115-117 that hostile laws were

made, and then the threat to create a Roman colony with a heathen temple in place of that ruined by Titus, roused the Jewish world, and brought disaster especially with Barcochab's Fall (c. 135). Then many things were forbidden—Circumcision, the Sabbath, Study of the Law, Ordination of Rabbis, and that the Jews should approach Jerusalem. But with the death of Hadrian (A.D. 138) there came a great modification, if not a complete abolition of these laws. We have, on the other hand, many stories of a great friendship between his successor, Antoninus Pius, and the Patriarch of the Jews—Rabbi Jehudah Hakkodesh.

We have noticed the restrictions that are recorded in the fourth century. They seem to have been determined by the fancies of the local rulers, or perhaps rather their desires to bleed a helpless and despised people. We have no very definite information as to what happened on the Advent of Islam and the passing of Jerusalem unto the hands of the Arabs in A.D. 636. The evidences we have been able to trace are seven hundred years too late, and besides they are contradictory. Bar Hebræus, a Christian of Jewish descent (ob. 1286), says that the Christians made terms with Omar for the exclusion of the Jews from Jerusalem. On the contrary, Isaac Chelo (fl. 1333) asserts that the exact site of the ancient temple was pointed out to Omar by an aged Jew, and that the payment made for this service was the preservation of the Western Wall. We are inclined to accept the latter as more correct, for very soon thereafter Omar manifested a peculiar confidence in the Jews, in entrusting them with the making of the first Arabic coinage. We have indicated the probable conditions following the Advent of the Turk. He received in the Turkish cities around the Ægean Sea multitudes of the fugitives from Spain, and treated them kindly. The same took place in Palestine, and the descendants of some of these immigrants, still bearing their Spanish names, occupy the holy cities to-day. Under the tyranny of avaricious pashas and cruel underlings, they had to live, and were both as communities and as individuals freely bled. At times, too, they were raided and robbed by Arabs and Druzes, but on the whole their lot was a comparatively happy one as compared with that in the lands whence they came, and in the very worst days we never hear an echo of a doubt regarding the Wailing Wall.

TURKISH TOLERATION.

But the attitude of the Turk, and indeed of the whole Moslem world, to the Jew in things that

pertained to the Wailing Wall, was kindly and tolerant, and official practice acknowledged his rights there perhaps more fully than any other religious right in Turkey was recognized. There was a strict censorship of all books printed in Turkey, or introduced through the custom houses. Christian religious papers were closely watched, and on the slightest grounds stopped or suppressed, while the censor sought to confiscate a book of my own because it contained the hymn, 'Hold the fort,' the remark being made, 'We do not allow people to hold forts in Turkey.' But notwithstanding all this strictness, the Ritual for the Wailing Wall was printed in numberless editions and forms in Jerusalem in Turkish days under the eye and direction of the censor. That revision of the Ritual might take place we have already indicated, but we are not aware of any alteration having been introduced during the present century. Indeed, just before these troubles commenced, we lent to a pious Jew for use at the Wall and elsewhere a copy of the Ritual printed in Turkish days.

The introduction to the prayer for the Western Wall recognizes both the individual worshipper, and also the *Minyan*, or synagogal group required for the conducting of a full synagogal service. We have seen in 1894, and on many occasions since, arrangements of benches, chairs, cushions, and carpets for the convenience of the worshippers, as well as individual devotees, and groups following a leader, and though we have never seen a screen ourselves, the testimony of others bears out its existence and use. And, besides, the segregation of men and women is in accord with the practice of all Eastern sects. During our presence at the Wall, the women occupied the north end and the men the southern, with a space between. Such, too, was my experience with even Arab Protestant Christians. For sixteen years in Aleppo, I tried to get the people to come and sit in the church 'as families.' Invariably I got a complaisant approval, but equally invariable was the practice carried out that the men sat on one side and the women on the other in the church. The Moslem world is careful about the segregation of the women. The question, 'How are your wife, daughters, or sisters?' is an impossible one from a genuine Moslem. Besides, the Moslem has a profound reverence for everything connected with prayer and worship. He would resent any intrusion himself, and as a rule he treats worshippers of every faith as he desires to be treated.

THE MIZRACHI PICTURES.

These, too, are an evidence of Turkish toleration, but their importance is so great that they must be considered by themselves. These are symbolical pictures, hung on the eastern (*mizrach*) wall in the home of every pious Jew throughout the world for the purpose of indicating the 'prayer direction' to which one must turn in every time of prayer. It generally presents Moses with the Two Tablets, and Aaron with a censer in his hand, while between them there appears a picture of the Western Wall, set forth as the Central Shrine of Israel's Faith, the place where Israel's God, and prophet, and priest are met. These pictures, printed in colour in various lands abroad, were being continually brought into Palestine in Turkish days, through the custom houses. They were allowed through centuries to pass freely, and no objection was ever raised. They were recognized as representing Israel's most sacred and exclusive shrine. The word 'rebellious' against the government was a very common one on the lips of avaricious officials in the old days, but it was never used of such pictures, though there was a fine opportunity here if the Moslem had any pretence to an interest in the Wailing Wall. Furthermore, the picture of the Western Wall forms part of some of the official synagogal seals in Jerusalem. These were used on documents as between the Jewish and the Ottoman authorities, and had Jewish claims been in doubt, the Jews would have been dealt with, as it would have been expressed in our law, for the assumption of 'false arms.' While speaking about pictures it may be worth while to mention that even the possession of a portrait of Mr. Gladstone was regarded by the Turks as a criminal offence.

ARAB PRETENSIONS.

These are so shadowy and indefinite that it is difficult to grasp them at all. They consist mainly in the assertion that this is also a sacred shrine of Islam, and that it is, and has been always named, 'The Buraq.' Neither Arabic nor Jewish literature supplies even an allusion to support such a claim. It was never the custom of Moslems to resort thither for prayer, and recent attempts to gather a company at the Wall for the *Zikr* Prayer are in themselves an innovation and violation of the *status quo*. Besides, we cannot imagine the Moslems sharing in any place or service religiously with the Jews. Exclusiveness in such matters is an undeviating Moslem characteristic. What about 'The Buraq'? This is the name given to the

imaginary winged horse on which Muhammad is supposed to have made 'the night journey' from Mecca to Jerusalem. On the rock within the Great Mosque they show to-day the mark of the hoof of the horse as struck by it on mounting for the return journey, and it was to this part of the Temple Court or Mosque of Omar that the designation was always given. The attempt to transfer the name to another site for evidence purposes can only be regarded as a proof of insincerity. But, as we have indicated, the claims made are quite modern, their ground is intangible, and the evidences are mere assertions.

CONCLUSION.

From the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the Jew could not, and cannot, enter the Temple Court. As a substitute for that ancient shrine he has used all down through the past nineteen centuries the one accessible, convenient portion of the Western Wall. Through all the centuries his Claim of Right in that meeting-place as the Central Shrine of his Faith has been unchallenged. In times of local tyranny he was sometimes forbidden to approach

even the city itself, and we learn of his being sometimes compelled to secure access by payment. There can be little doubt, however, that this was a despotic imposition, and if modern claims of this nature were made, it ought to be made very clear what was the nature of such a tax, and whither the money went. There seems to have been in former times a greater free space around the wall, as indicated by our quotation from 1495. That seems to have been encroached upon, and it is worthy of note that the Moslems dwelling around, and who are playing so great a part in this movement, are themselves immigrants as their name, Moghrabiyeh, or Westerns, indicates, they having come from various places in North Africa during the nineteenth century.

The Western Wall, or Wailing Place, is the most ancient and most sacred devotional shrine of the Jew. He possessed and worshipped at it centuries before Islam came into existence. He has a prescriptive right of nineteen centuries' duration in it, and what man can show a better claim than that to anything on earth? Every principle of righteousness and honour requires the recognition of his unique claim.

In the Study.

Virginibus Puerisque.

A Temperance Talk.

BY THE REVEREND F. J. ASHLEY, JOHANNESBURG.

'It biteth like a serpent.'—Pr 23³².

'Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.'—Eph 6¹⁷.

IF we could get rid all at once of the things we don't like, how good life would be! There was a Roman emperor long ago who wished his enemies had but one neck so that he could kill them all with one blow. But then, he forgot one thing, that he would have had to kill himself as well, for he was his own worst enemy. He was an example of what we mean when we say that men's worst enemies are often their own desires, such as stealing, cheating, lying, gambling, and drunkenness. I want to talk about this last one, for he has been an enemy of man for ages and ages. So great and strong is he that we can't help wishing he had only one neck, and then, even if it were the neck of a dragon breathing fire, we could soon find a

George, or Patrick, or Ian, or David who would set out and make short work of him. But it is difficult to talk about enemies you can't see, and so in olden days, to help their imaginations, men gave forms to them. Chief of them all is Satan, who is the father of all sins; but nobody has seen even Satan walking about the streets, and so men thought of some terrible beast by which to describe him, and St. Peter tells us the devil is a roaring lion going about seeking victims to devour.

Here drink is likened to a snake, and that is a creature even more feared than a lion. 'Look out, a snake!' I don't know any cry that makes a man jump more. Most white people living in the wilds keep a snake-bite outfit handy, as thousands of people die from snake-bite every year. Remember it has been so for thousands of years, and then you can understand why it is instinctive with us to shudder when we see one, and why, when the old Hebrew writers wanted to tell how sin came into the world, they were sure it must have been through the creepiest and most cunning creature.