

**A Talk given by my Grandmother, Alice May Binnie,  
in 1929, after her world tour the previous year.**

**Part 1: The Holy Land**

As I must not attempt any detailed account of my 4 1/2 months' tour round the world last winter, I must try to give you a few pictures of each country, illustrated as far as possible by the best slides I could find.

I joined the ship in the South of France, and about a week later after visiting Naples and passing close to the rocky islands of Crete and Cyprus, we arrived early on the morning of Christmas Eve at Haifa, Palestine. It was my first thrill when looking out of my porthole at daybreak I saw the sandy bay and low-lying hills all around. Mt. Carmel, rugged and bare, rose high on our right and I pictured vividly the scene of Elijah calling down fire from heaven to proclaim the greatness of his God where the priests of Baal had failed.

After an early breakfast we landed in huge flat-bottomed barges with forms placed across to sit on. In rough weather people have to land in baskets. I heard one sailor giving devout thanks that they were spared struggling with old ladies in baskets, though I for one would have liked the experience!

Five hours' train journey through rough rocky country brought us to Jerusalem situated on the top of a sandy-looking hillside. No vehicles can drive through the town as the streets are all so narrow and irregular and with many steps leading up and down. We entered by the Jaffa Gate and at once we were in the midst of familiar names and places. David's Tower and Mt. Sion enclose all the remains of the house of Caiphas, in which the early scenes of the Crucifixion took place. Very near is the room of the Last Supper, covered now by a mosque and, not far away below, a convent cherished by devout nuns. We were shown the spot of the Scourging and the pillar to which Christ was bound. The arches and pillars, witnesses to Pilate's judgment to all, are still standing below the present street level.

After dinner on Christmas Eve I joined some others and drove over to Bethlehem five miles away to attend the service in the Church that was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century over the very spot of the stable and manger. It seemed like a dream to be there that night. The service did not begin until 10.30, but by 9 o'clock we could hardly find seats the church was so full. But everyone was very reverent and during that quiet time it was possible to live through the wondrous event; all else seemed to disappear and there was just the marvellous Light. We did not stay for the Mass and processions. I longed to drive out to the fields of the shepherds, but no one would volunteer – it was cold, dark and very wet.

Next day, Christmas day, we drove out again to Bethlehem and this time visited the stable and manger just below a very small rock grotto. They were holding a service down there and it was packed. We squeezed in one by one and were shown the very spot marked by a star above, the manger, which is just a cleft in the rock. But these details did not matter; just to walk about Bethlehem and look up to the shepherds' fields, and to see the old gateway of the inn, and surely the same-looking people in the streets, for I don't think they ever change. It was all a thrilling experience.

We also drove to the Mt. of Olives passing the Garden of Gethsemane, so full of sacred memories. There are olive trees 2,000 years old still standing, and the altar of the little church encloses the Rock of the Agony. We continued the drive up the mountain with full hearts; we imagined the walks and talks Christ had with the disciples and saw the spot where, looking down on Jerusalem on the opposite hill, He wept over it and the desolation to come. At the top of the Mt. of Olives is the Mt. of the Ascension where a Church is built, but the actual spot is left open and reverently protected.

An afternoon's drive to Jericho will live ever in the memory. We passed through Bethany, a stony village on the hillside, and then began a gradual descent for forty miles. We saw the wild bare looking country where the scene of the Good Samaritan took place. We saw too the ravine through which the Kedron runs, where Elijah was fed by the ravens; now a monastery perches there in wild seclusion. The country grew sandier and wilder as we went on. Now we were in the wilderness of John the Baptist, and further on was the scene of the Temptation. By this time we caught sight of the Dead Sea lying far below, a blue peaceful lake backed by the blue and purple Mountains of Moab with wonderful lights and shadows on them, and in front the yellow sand of the desert. It was a picture. We had ten miles of rocky bumpy old river beds to reach the lake where the water tasted so bitter and salt. Some friendly smiling natives crowded round us and showed us their houses looking like storks - they have no lower story as the lake floods at times.

Returning we visited the Jordan, a sweet sunny river shaded with green and yellow trees. It was there that John baptised. Finally we visited Jericho. Leaving quickly the flourishing modern city, we came to the old Jericho which lies in ruins; here echoes of the Seven Trumpet Blasts and the fall of the walls which still lie in desolate heaps, made the scene live again. The drive back to Jerusalem up and up into the glowing sunset was a fitting end to such a day.

Next day we saw much more than I have time to tell you; the Temple area, the ruined pool of Bethsaida, the Mt. of Golgotha now covered by churches. Each morning we were wakened up at daybreak by the Mohammedan muezzin call from the minaret of the church. It sounded so weird in the dark silence of the night.

Leaving Jerusalem we saw the open country where David and Goliath fought, and further on the home of Samson and the cave where he lived with Delilah. Our thirteen hours train journey across the desert where the Israelites wandered for forty years seemed an extraordinary feat. It used to take eight days straight across by camel; now one train daily goes on a little unprotected line newly opened, which is still a source of wonder and interest to all the wild looking Bedouin and Arabs one sees en route.

At Cairo we spent five days full of fresh interest and novelty. Of course the Museum with the Tutenkhamun finds claimed most attention and these were of supreme interest; the gold and colours might have been of yesterday so fresh and bright they are after their sleep of nearly 6,000 years. The beds and chairs are not so very different from ours, and we could wear some of the necklaces and rings without much remark today. The great Cairo mosques of course had all to be visited, but they left me cold. I was much interested though in the Moslem University of El Azhar, the centre of their education. Little

groups of students sat on the floor around their teachers at various pillars, and our guide said they were mostly learning the Koran. They seem to have no education as we have it, it is so mixed up and part of their religion that even their largest university is a mosque and we had to enter it in slippers.

Our one night in the desert is an ever memorable one. We drove out one afternoon from Cairo into a wonderful sunset which was the background of my first view of the Pyramids. For the last three miles we mounted camels which made for a very long cavalcade. It was quite dark when we reached the camp near the Pyramids. There were about thirty small tents each shared by two, and a large tent hung with gorgeous embroideries for meals. We had tea and afterwards a grand dinner, followed by a conjuring entertainment which made our hair stand on end; also, as a further diversion, there was a huge bonfire outside around which weird forms danced and whirled. But what I really remember most of all was the wonder of the stars which had never seemed so near before.

I and an American lady who shared my tent rose early and climbed up as high as possible to see the sun rise over Cairo. The colour lighting up the huge pyramids and the soft morning light and haze in contrast to the clear brilliancy of day, is to be remembered. The large tent was open to the sunshine for breakfast at 7 o'clock, and the few words of 'salaam' to the God over us all uttered by a clergyman in our party made a beautiful close to our visit.

We returned to the ship waiting for us at Suez on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Just as we were coming to it in small steamers, there was a revelation of wonder in the sky that I could not have thought possible. A throne of molten gold cloaked with richest coloured enamels and all around in thick masses, as it were, the clustering Hosts of Heaven. One could only think of the prophet's words 'He came His glory covered the heaven'. We all grew silent with a great wonder.

This is an unedited version of "A talk given by my Grandmother" submitted to  
Piddle Valley News & Views by Valley resident, Stella Burrows

An edited version appeared in the November / December 2014 issue of  
Piddle Valley News & Views

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