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the epithet Dung Heap would have suited Bab el-Mogharbeh. The Nehemiah gate of this name belonged to an older wall further to the south which overlooked the valley of Ge-Hinnom (Gehenna). Towards the fifteenth century native Christians thought out a play on the name Mogharbeh and called this gate *khum-ibreh* (eye of a needle). In consequence, pilgrims to the Holy Land identified it with the eye of a needle referred to by our Lord (Mt. xix, 24) ! This gate, the narrowest of all the gates of Jerusalem, appeared to deserve no more dignified title than that of postern, especially with the ugly dark building with which it had been covered for many a long year.

To judge by its wretched appearance one would think that it must have been overlooked at the time of the great restoration carried out by Soliman in 1537. This is not so, however, for quite recently, the ugly vestibule has been demolished, exposing to view a finely ornamented gateway ending in a broken arch decorated with carved arch-stones. The whole is a reproduction on a smaller scale of the design of the Zion Gate (Gate of the Prophet David). Above the gateway an open flower is carved in relief. The surroundings of the gateway have been cleaned and levelled. Through the opening thus left, a loaded camel can easily pass, and the women of Siloe, balancing great baskets of vegetables on their heads, are proud to pass through this fine gateway which no longer deserves the title of Dung Gate or the undignified name of "Eye of a needle."

F.-M. ABEL, O.P.

April 1947.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*What evidence is there, apart from the Gospels, for the statement that Christ was born in Bethlehem? Nazareth was the home of Joseph and Mary. Certain modern writers maintain that the Gospel account of Christ's birth in Bethlehem is merely an attempt to show that Jesus is the Messiah foretold in Old Testament prophecy, and has no sound historical foundation.*

It would be only too easy to turn the question against the questioner by the comment: If Christ was not born in Bethlehem, where was He born? As regards the traditional place of His birth we have a quantity of early testimony (Justin, Origen, Jerome, and others), and we have no testimony at all which would make Nazareth the place of the Nativity. And, as regards the earliest testimony, contemporaneous with the first Christians, we have two witnesses—the Gospels of SS. Matthew and Luke, and both of these clearly mention Bethlehem, not Nazareth,

as the sole spot on this earth with any title to make use of the words which adorn the silver star in the grotto of the Nativity: "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est." It would, in fact, be delightful to take account of the studied contempt with which those self-styled "independent critics" who have, as it were, attempted to erect a rival sanctuary of the Nativity at Nazareth, would have viewed their own pitiful arguments *if they had been presented to them from a Christian source!* "Certain it is," writes the Abbé Fillion in his classic *Vie de N.S. Jésus-Christ* (English translation by Rev. N. Thompson, Herder, 1928, I, p. 577) "that the name of this little town [of Nazareth] is inseparably and gloriously connected with that of the Lord Jesus; but honest exegesis tells us that not one of the texts just cited proves that He was born at Nazareth." The whole of his study of the objection: *Jésus ne serait pas né à Bethléem, mais à Nazareth* should be read as a patient investigation by a most experienced writer of certain pseudo-critical aberrations and absurdities.

It may be useful, apropos of the traditional site, the present glorious Church of the Nativity, to emphasize the point that, while it is the oldest of all Christian sanctuaries, and viewed critically, perhaps the one best guaranteed in all Palestine, its authenticity is no part of the Christian faith! The greatest of living authorities on Palestinian archaeology, Père Hugues Vincent, O.P., in his monumental *Jérusalem* (Vol. II, p. 89) has declared, in regard to Calvary and the Holy Sepulchre, that their authenticity "is invested with the best guarantees of certitude that are to be expected in such a subject," and that this conclusion is, doubtless, most moving and consoling. Yet the judgments on which this finding rests were arrived at with the same independence of mind with which one might determine the site of the Akra, and according to the principles generally recognized in classical archaeology. All this, *mutatis mutandis*, is entirely true in regard to the traditional site of the Nativity basilica, that mighty Constantinian edifice enshrining the lowly cavern in which the Incarnate Word was born of His holy Mother.

JOHN M. T. BARTON.

*What is the meaning of "He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good"?* (Isai vii, 15). *What does the symbolism mean, and why should the eating of butter and honey enable the child to distinguish between good and evil, when he was already able presumably to do this, since he was God?*

Several questions are here proposed, not all of which admit of a certain answer; I submit the following with due reference to other opinions: "butter and honey," better, "curds and honey": "curds" meaning thickened milk. The expression seems to imply a comfortable livelihood