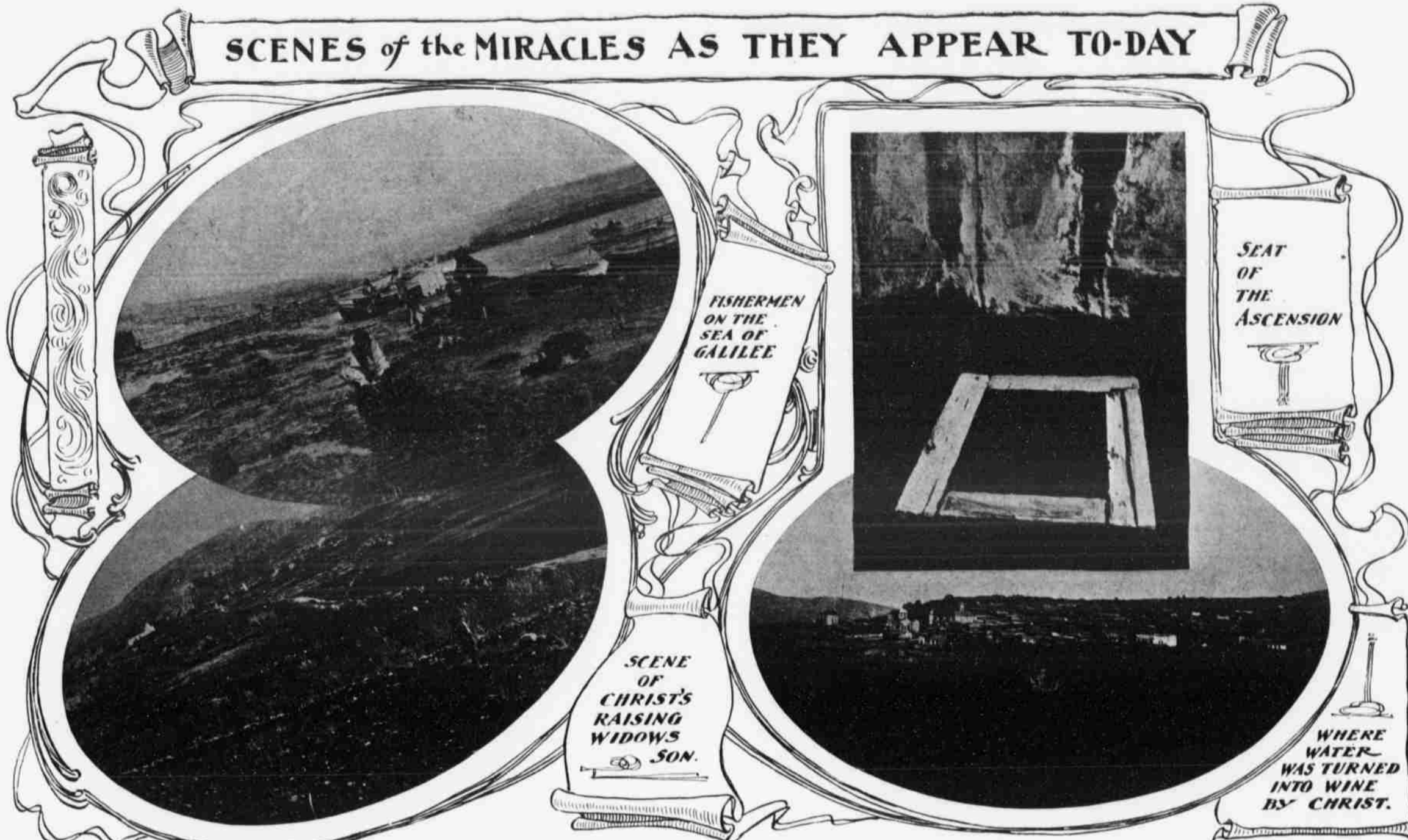


SCENES of the MIRACLES AS THEY APPEAR TO-DAY



(By Rev. Dr. Robert Stuart MacArthur.)

PAINTERS and photographers have a distinct educational mission. The visual approach to the mind is often more factitive than the auricular. Caricatures of boodler politicians have often done more to suppress them than the philippics of the most eloquent reformers. More and more are we learning through the eye, and educators are not slow to recognize the advantages of this method of instruction. It may be made of especial value in the study of the bible and particularly so in the life of our Lord. The accompanying pictures bring to the reader scenes hallowed in song and story. The words and the pictures will illustrate and explain one another.

Turning Water Into Wine.

Let us begin with the miracles of turning water into wine at Cana of Galilee. Leaving Nazareth early in the morning we soon come to the traditional Cana, about four miles east of Nazareth, on the road to Tiberias. Some travelers, and among them Drs. Robinson and Porter, object to the traditional Cana as the site of the ancient Cana. They locate it at Kana-El Jeill, near Sepphoris and about nine miles north of Nazareth. It is by no means certain which is the true site.

There is in the vicinity a large spring enclosed by a wall, and if this is the true Cana, as I think it is, the water used at the marriage feast at the time of our Lord's visit was almost certainly drawn from this spring. Water pots of compact limestone are still used in the neighborhood. There is a small Greek church, and it is declared that one of the very water pots used at the marriage feast may be seen here.

This miracle at Cana was, as we are here informed, "the beginning of miracles." It is a remarkable thing that Christ did not perform miracles until now. The apocryphal gospels represent Him as having performed many miracles during His boyhood and early manhood. One has only to compare the accounts of those miracles with the true to see the difference between inspired and uninspired writings. They are frivolous, puerile and often ludicrous. They lack the majesty, dignity and divinity of the gospel narratives. Christ bided His time.

This miracle began the series. This inauguration was as significant in its prophetic meaning regarding His earthly ministry as was His first parable. The first parable was that of the sower. It suggests the whole work of our Lord in His public ministry. He came to sow "the good seed of the kingdom." Not less prophetic is this first miracle. It suggests the whole purpose of Christ's earthly life. He came to ennoble, to transmute, to glorify, to divinize. As He now turned water into wine, so His entire ministry was to be the turning of the water of earth into the wine of heaven.

Nature is always changing water into the juice of the grape, and all that Christ did on this occasion was to hasten the process. This remark will apply to all of Christ's miracles. Health is the normal condition

of the human body; sickness is abnormal. Christ came to restore physical and spiritual normality. Religion is the restoration of spiritual normality. It is the most interesting to see that, in one sense, miracles are not miraculous. Christ introduced in the performance of a miracle a higher law, which for the time being held the lower law in check.

Fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

Most deeply interesting was the ride from the Mount of Beatitudes to the Sea of Galilee. There is not a sheet of water on the globe which I so greatly desired to see as the Sea of Galilee. The hope of seeing it was in my thoughts for years, and it now gave zest and charm to this trip over the hills of Judea, Samaria and Galilee. And yet, as I knew I was approaching it, there was a sort of unwillingness to have the sight for which I had long waited. I refused to look up until a spot was reached where the view would be the finest. "Look now," said Abdallah, my excellent dragoon. At his words I looked, with strangely commingling emotions, and had the magnificent view of the sea and its surroundings which all travelers in the Holy Land get who approach it by this road.

In Isaiah ix, 1, the Sea of Galilee is referred to simply as "the sea." Its local name now is "Bahr Tabariyeh." It is about thirty-five miles south of Mount Hermon, twenty-seven miles east of the Mediterranean and sixty-five in a straight line north of the Dead sea.

I saw it at noonday, sunset, sunrise and in the moonlight. In the morning the surrounding hills were brilliant in color; in the evening the shadows deepened until sea, hills and sky were seen in the softest, sweetest tones and in the night all the inequalities were harmonized and the peace of God rested on the mountain and sea. Once I saw it ruffled in a slight storm, and all the memories of Christ and His disciples filled my soul.

Perhaps the best views are at Tiberias, looking toward Capernaum. This view I had for hours in the soft evening light as I sat alone by the shore near the center of the town of Tiberias. The lake is pear shaped, the broad end being toward the north, or we may say that it is harp shaped with the bulge to the northwest. It is between twelve and thirteen miles long and between six and seven miles wide and is almost embosomed among the hills. The Jordan flows into it on the north—a muddy stream, coloring the lake for a mile from its mouth—and out of it on the south, being then pure and bright. It has been called "a sparkling diamond suspended by a thread." Its depth is 160 to 230 feet; its level varies at different seasons, but its depression below the surface of the Mediterranean sea may be put at 682 feet, although often it is said to be 700 feet.

Memories Glorify Surroundings.

Some describe the view in terms of great extravagance; others equally deprecate it. The truth lies between the extremes. Many, having in mind only the deserted waste, the barren hills and the extent of the water, will tell you that lakes in England, Scotland, Ireland and Switzerland far

surpass this view. In several respects they are quite right. But the thought of Christ's presence glorifies mountains, shore and sea and makes this the most interesting and transcendently beautiful place on this globe.

The lake was really the center of the trade of the province. Here, then, was the touch with the commerce, the industry and the powerful Greek influences of the time. Near Tiberias the water is polluted with sewage, but elsewhere it is entirely fit for drinking purposes, although it is somewhat brackish, which brackishness is due to the salt springs on the shore. A bath in the lake is very enjoyable, as in it are many warm springs.

The depression of the lakes causes the tropical heat here experienced; it also accounts for the semi-tropical vegetation on the shores. Excellent fish abound in the lake, including several tropical species, which now, as in Christ's day (Luke v:6) are seen in large shoals. Great interest attaches to chromis, as they are called, the male of which carries the eggs and the young in its mouth and also to the coraenius of Josephus and the barbur of the Arabs, which gives out a sound.

Boats abound on the lake. Many travelers, partly because of the sacred associations, prefer to go by boat from Tiberias to Capernaum. Boats can be had large enough to hold from ten to twelve passengers, in addition to the rowers. Both sides of the lake can, of course, be best seen from a boat, and in this way the gospel scenes also can be made more real than when one rides or walks on the shore. But a careful bargain ought to be made, as the charges are apt to be exorbitant.

In Christ's time the ships and boats on the lake were very numerous. Josephus used the phrase "climbing up into their ships," indicating that some of the vessels were large. At that time there were nine considerable towns on the shores of the lake. Among these were Bethsaida, Capernaum, Chorazin, Tiberias and Magdala. These towns contained a large and busy population. Dr. Selah Merrill indorses the strong statements of Josephus regarding the great size of the population of Galilee as a whole, and also the statement mentioned above, that many vessels then cruised the lake.

Once Populous Towns in Ruins.

Tiberias is now the only town visible and there are only three or four small villages on the coast. Dr. Merrill also indorses what Josephus says of the beauty and fruitfulness of the plain of Gennesaret. Josephus gives Galilee 294 towns and villages, the smallest of which had 15,000 inhabitants. But nearly all these towns are now indistinguishable masses of ruins.

Galilee was only from fifty to sixty miles long and from thirty to forty miles wide, but it is believed that at least 3,000,000 people lived there. The lake then was white with sails and was ploughed with thousands of keels. The shores of this sea were vastly different in Christ's day. Then there were great woods on the banks; now there is not a tree. Then there were noble gardens; now there are only marshes. Then there were prosperous towns and cities;

now there are only nameless ruins. This beautiful lake charms every sense. It is at once food, drink and air, rest to the eye, coolness in the heat, an escape from the crowd and a means of travel very welcome in so exhausting a climate. Even those who do not share its memories of Christ feel an enthusiasm for it. The rabbi said: "Jehovah hath created seven seas, but the sea of Gennesaret is His delight."

Christ's presence hallowed the sea and its shores. He looked on its quiet beauty; He stilled its wild waves; He glorified its rocky shores. On its bosom several apostles were called to be "fishers of men." In its waters Peter sank until Christ saved him from a watery grave, and on its shores Christ met His disciples after His resurrection, in the gray dawn of the morning, while a miraculous meal was prepared on the shore.

Most refreshing was our halt at Shunem, with its beautiful grove, its musical and delicious streams and its tender memories of Elisha and the family in which he found a hospitable welcome. We resumed our journey and, turning the western part of Little Hermon, as this part of the mount has been called since the time of Jerome and which is probably identical with the hill Moveh, we were in less than an hour at Nain. The word Nain, according to some, means green pasture, but according to others and with better reason, fair or graceful.

Raising the Widow's Son.

The name is mentioned nowhere in the old testament and not elsewhere in the new, except in connection with the raising of the widow's son. The name has always been preserved and it was often tenderly mentioned in the time of the crusaders and the place is frequently visited by travelers of the present time. It is near Endor and about four miles southwest of Tabor. It is picturesquely situated on a low mountain spur, the northwest edge of Little Hermon, where the hill descends into the plain of Esdraelon. It commands a fine view of the hills of Galilee.

Once it was a town of considerable extent, but now it is a poor village of wretched mud huts, with heaps of rubbish and many old ruins. Its dwellings are few, only about twenty in number, and the population is correspondingly small. Its modern name, Nain, is identical with the ancient name, Nain. Its foundation has done much to perpetuate its existence. As the traveler approaches the village he observes that above the town there are holes in the face of the hills. These are doubtless rock tombs and this was the old burial place.

This fact gives remarkable interest to the tender, beautiful and divine incident in our Lord's life which occurred here. That incident has made the place memorable forever and that incident is recorded with sweet simplicity and tender suggestion by the evangelist Luke, the only evangelist who does record this miracle. There is now no doubt as to the identity of the location, with the tombs a short distance east of the village. It was in this direction that our Lord approached and it was probably to one of these tombs that the

mournful procession which He met at this gate of the town was journeying with the bier on which lay the young man who was "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

Let us look for a little time at the account of the raising of the widow's son, as given in Luke, vii, 11-15. Our Lord now was probably going to Jerusalem to keep the second passover of His ministry. It was a beautiful coincidence that our Lord should have met the funeral procession as it was going out of the town, and yet it was quite in harmony with the custom of the Jews, who did not bury within the walls of towns and cities. "Much people" followed the bier. The case called forth general sympathy. Dean Trench calls attention to the fact that sorrow for an only son has passed into a proverb. In Jeremiah, vi, 26, we read, "Make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation," and in Zechariah, xii, 10, "They shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son."

Her case instantly aroused our Lord's compassion. He said to her, "Weep not." She must have wondered at such words from a stranger, but the tones of His voice and the glance of His eye must have revealed the pity at His heart. Christ's words are not empty exhortations. He can even now anticipate the time when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Behold Him arresting the progress of those who carried the bier. Hear His words, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." Then we read that "he that was dead sat up and began to speak." There are three cases of raising from the dead in connection with our Lord's earthly life.

It is as easy for Christ to raise up men from the bier as for us to arouse men from the bed. In the case of Elijah and Elisha much labor and prayer must precede the miracle. Christ spoke the word and the miracle was wrought. Blessed moment was that when Christ delivered him to his mother! Think of her joy! This act was prophetic of the time when He shall deliver those who have fallen asleep in Him to their beloved friends, and when fellowship shall be renewed and joy shall be universal and eternal. The effect on the people was marked. They experienced a degree of fear; they recognized a great prophet had come and they glorified the Lord, saying that "God hath visited His people."

His Rest in Bethany.

Few places in the New Testament history are more suggestive of tender memories than is Bethany. Groups of people may still be seen at the eventide returning to this quiet village from the busier scenes of the neighboring city. Bethany is not "wholly in the busy world nor quite beyond it."

One can readily imagine that here our Lord found the restful seclusion which made Bethany a place of frequent resort. Mary's act in anointing the precious body of Jesus with the contents of her alabaster box makes the place fragrant to this hour with the memory of her loving act. The odor

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