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PILGRIM TO THE HOLY MOUNT by H.F.M. Prescott

PILGRIM TO THE HOLY MOUNT Almost five hundred years ago Friar Felix Fabri set out on an arduous journey to Sinai that few undertake even today—and left behind a lively chronicle of adventure by sea and desert

On a morning in April, 1483, the Black Friars of Ulm, in Swabia, stood at the gate of the convent saying goodbye to one of their fellows who was setting out upon pilgrimage.

Three years earlier Friar Felix Fabri, by birth a Switzer of Zurich, had gone to Jerusalem. Now he was off again, but this time to go farther and to brave new and unknown dangers. For he looked forward, on reaching Jerusalem for the second time, to finding other like-minded pilgrims there with whom to undertake a journey to Mount Sinai, the Holy Mount far in the desert, where Moses had received the Law.

As Friar Felix sat on his horse at the priory gate, the brothers crowded round him with last injunctions. They must all have read the account of his earlier pilgrimage that was to form the first part of his *Evagatorium* or "Wanderings"—his "little book" as he called it, which when finished would amount to two stout volumes. So now the friars detained him a moment longer as they insisted that in his travels he must once more notice carefully all he saw, must write it down, and bring it back for them to read. He promised, and he kept his promise. For, says he, "I never passed one single day...without writing some notes, not even when I was at sea, in storms, or in the Holy Land; and in the desert I have frequently written as I sat upon an ass or a camel; or at night while others were asleep. ... " It is from this travel diary, profuse, vivid, and humorous, that the following brief account of his pilgrimage is chiefly drawn.

The Friar and the rest of his party, a dozen German noblemen and their servants whom he joined at Sterzing, made their way thence to Venice, the greatest of all European commercial cities at this period and the chief port for pilgrims to the Holy Land. For the Signory, with its usual business acumen, ran, as a sideline of its merchant marine, a highly organized pilgrim—one might almost say tourist—service for those bound for Jerusalem. Summer was the favorite pilgrimage season, and every year soon after Ascension Day one or, more commonly, two big Venetian sailing galleys, fitted to accommodate pilgrims instead of merchandise, left Venice for the port of Jaffa, and returned after their passengers had spent a grueling fortnight visiting the Holy Places of Palestine.

So when Felix Fabri and his companions reached Venice they found, set up in front of St. Mark's Cathedral, two pilgrim banners—red cross on white ground—as a sign that the captains of the two galleys were prepared to accept bookings. At the foot of each banner stood servants of the two noble Venetians who, this year, were rivals for the pilgrims' trade: Augustine Contarini and Peter de Lando. These at once "invited the pilgrims to sail with their master, and they

endeavored to lead the pilgrims, the one party to the galley of Augustine, the other to that of Peter; the one party praised Augustine and abused Peter, the other did the reverse." Nor did their publicity confine itself to words. Each galley captain invited the pilgrims aboard and regaled them with Cretan wine and sweetmeats from Alexandria, and both the promises and attentions of each were so evenly balanced that it was only the greater beam and, therefore, the greater stability of Lando's galley that tipped the scale in his favor.

Although both captains had been prodigal with assurances that the galleys were on the point of departure, Fabri and the other pilgrims found themselves condemned to spend a number of weeks and a corresponding sum of money before they could leave Venice. Neither was wasted. From their comfortable quarters "at the sign of the Flute," one of the hostels for pilgrims licensed by the Signory, Felix and his friends toured the sights of Venice, from the great Ascensiontide procession and the ceremony of the Espousal of the Sea, to a six-year-old elephant. "He keeps his head bowed like a pig, little eyes like a pig. ... His nose is full six palms ... long .... His nose he bends and raises, stretches it and turns it hither and thither; with his nose he does everything."

At last the pilgrims heard that the Signory, always jealous for the business reputation of Venice, had ordered the galley captains to delay no longer. The pilgrims made their last dispositions: they addressed themselves to Saints reputed to be peculiarly interested in travelers, took purges, and did their final shopping. This last was a matter of moment, for the accommodation provided by the galley was merely a space, one and a half feet wide for each man, chalked out on the deck of the compartment where the pilgrims slept, "a kind of hall ... supported by columns." Although their contract with the captain provided for two meals a day, pilgrims discovered that often "feeble bread and feeble wine and stinking water" were what they got. And so, in addition to the mattress which the traveler could buy from "a man near St. Mark's" and sell back to him on his return—even if it were "broken or worn"—in addition to the sheets and pillows, the coverlets and mats which the wealthy took with them, pilgrims were advised to take with them a barrel of water, a barrel of wine, flour, firewood, hams, cheeses, eggs, bread, and biscuit. Even a crate of poultry, with "a bushel of millet seed ... for them," finds a place in one list.

On June 1, 1483, "very early before sunrise," Felix and his friends had the last of their stuff rowed out to the galley. On the next morning the captain came aboard, and as soon as it was light the ship was hung with silken banners; then, "with a fair wind which was blowing the banners up on high," to the sound of trumpets, the shouts of galley slaves, and the chanting of the pilgrims, the galley set sail.

Felix Fabri, with an inexhaustible appetite for experience that carried him through all hardships, found much to interest him on the voyage. The sailors taught him the meaning of the Venetian sea marks along the steep Dalmatian coast; he watched the pilots poring over the fine Venetian Portolano sea charts and learned from them signs of the weather "in the color of the sea, in the … movement of dolphins and flying fish, in the smoke of the fire, the smell of bilge water, the glittering of ropes and cables at night." Yet as the end of the voyage drew near, Fabri lost, he

says, both appetite and sleep, so great was his eagerness for sight of the Holy Land, and he would sit waiting in the bows for hours before dawn, hoping that in the first minutes after sunrise he might catch a glimpse of the mountains of Israel silhouetted against the disk of the sun.

Jaffa was the port of entry for pilgrims. Here the rival galley captains were forced to come to an agreement before the Saracen officials would negotiate with them. While these settled the fees to be paid for registration and for access to the Holy Places, the subjects of their debate were herded into a foul, ill-smelling cave, there to suffer much annoyance from the aggressive impudence of naughty Moslem boys.

At last they were let out. It was dark, and the torches or glass lamps round the Saracen emirs' tents gave the only light as each pilgrim was subjected to the piercing scrutiny of the Moslem officials, and his name checked off in the registration book. He was then passed on, to be fought over by a crowd of country people who had converged upon Jaffa bringing with them far more donkeys for the journey to Jerusalem than the total number of pilgrims. On his first arrival Felix had endured this daunting experience and had been literally run off with by a Saracen "with a very cruel look." Yet the man had proved so kind and friendly that this time Felix had brought him a present—a pair of German stirrups—and when the two men found each other in the crowd "he ran to kiss me ... with a most joyful countenance, and he laughed and said much to me that I did not understand."

After a day spent at Ramle and a night on a stony hillside under the stars, the pilgrims got their first sight of Jerusalem suddenly, "like a flash of lightning." They entered the city by the Fish Gate, now the Jaffa Gate, going two by two, in silent and reverent procession, all on foot, and some barefoot, down a long street. At last they were halted outside "a great closed church before which was a fair large courtyard paved with polished marbles of exceeding whiteness." One of the Franciscan guides told them that this was the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, for Christians the most venerated shrine in the world.

They began the set program of sight-seeing next morning. It was indeed "no light task." For ten days or so they had to endure "the intense heat of the sun, the walking from place to place, kneeling and prostration; above all ... the strain which everyone puts on himself to earnest piety .... " Felix concludes that "to struggle after mental abstraction whilst bodily walking from place to place, is exceedingly toilsome."

The actual quantity of sight-seeing and devotion crammed into the short period was immense. In Jerusalem itself almost every incident in the Old and New Testaments had its traditional exact locality: the houses of Caiaphas, of Dives, of Lazarus, of Saint Veronica were pointed out; even the pillar upon which the crowing cock of Good Friday morning stood was shown to the pilgrims. Round about the city there were expeditions to the valley of Jehoshaphat, the Mount of Olives, Bethany, and other sites. Farther off lay Bethlehem, Jericho, Jordan, the Dead Sea, and the Mount of Fasting, all of which were on the pilgrims' list. No wonder that, toward the end, on their visit to the Jordan, discipline and pious sobriety were cast aside. In vain the Saracen guides tried to bring the merrily bathing pilgrims out of the water. The devout Felix himself committed

the ecclesiastical impropriety of swimming about in his underwear. Even religious recollection was tinged with frivolity as the pilgrims, "bobbing up and down, washing and cooling themselves... jestingly baptized one another."

In addition to their daytime exertions, all pilgrims were expected to spend three nights in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, whose walls contained a multiplicity of objects of the greatest solemnity. In chanting procession and with lighted candles they moved from the Chapel of the Virgin to the marble-encrusted Chapel of Calvary, and from Calvary to the Chapel of the Sepulcher itself with its tiny cave-chamber, blackened by the light of many lamps. But alas for human nature! There was jealousy among them because rich pilgrims had bought "candles twisted and decorated with gilding and painting, and looked with scorn on those who carried plain candles," while some of the priests, in their eagerness to celebrate Mass upon the Tomb itself, fought among themselves for the vestments, to the great scandal of their lay companions.

But the long hours in the church could not be spent in procession and service alone, and for considerable periods the visitors were free to occupy themselves as they chose. Every pilgrim was eager to thrust his head into the fissure in the Rock of Calvary beside the socket hole of the Cross; Friar Felix himself, a tireless investigator, narrowly examined the interior of the Sepulcher and believed that in one spot he "discerned the naked rock of the original tomb." Other pilgrims passed the time in far less elevated pursuits. Some slept or ate or "sat down together swilling ... till the bottles were empty." There were other secular attractions besides food and drink: merchants who had paid a heavy fee for the privilege of entering with the pilgrims spread out their wares on the marble pavement—"not only Pater Noster beads and precious stones but also cloths of camlet, of damask, and of silk"—and noblemen of Germany haggled for bargains in a manner which Felix thought to be at once irreverent and undignified.

On the morning after their third vigil in the church, all but a score of the great company of two hundred pilgrims left Jerusalem for Jaffa and the galleys waiting to take them home. Those who remained, and Friar Felix was among them, were the stout of heart who had determined on the Sinai pilgrimage. Few of the several hundred pilgrims who annually made the journey to the Holy Places in Jerusalem had the courage or stamina to go on to visit the mountain; when Felix had experienced both and could assess the labor involved, he would rate the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with all its discomfort, risk, and exhaustion, no more than "a holiday and diversion" compared with that to Sinai.

Having decided to go, they now had to wait till arrangements could be made for their transport, and for the guide to lead them across the desert to the Holy Mount. After visiting Sinai, still conducted by the official Saracen guide, a noble old Moslem of eighty, the caravan would continue its journey along the Red Sea coast to Egypt. At Alexandria the pilgrims would take their passage back to Venice in one or another of the Venetian merchant galleys, which in the autumn regularly repaired there for the great yearly spice market.

No less than three of these twenty daring pilgrims have left accounts of the journey. Those three are Felix himself; Paul Walther, a Franciscan as sour and self-centered as the Dominican Felix

was merry, eager, and friendly; and Bernhard of Breydenbach, a rich lay canon of Mainz, whose wealth enabled him on his return home to pay a "ghost" to write his lifeless and borrowed narrative. With better judgment, Breydenbach took with him an artist who supplied the handsome volume with vivacious illustrations (several of them shown on these pages) and who possibly undertook the printing of it as well.

The pilgrims left Jerusalem at the end of August. They rode upon donkeys, as they had during their expeditions in the Holy Land, but now were accompanied by twenty-two camels which carried, in the great panniers on either side of their humps, provisions for the whole caravan and the enormous conglomeration of the pilgrims' own luggage, the magnitude of which amazed even its owners when they saw it stacked for loading outside the Franciscan House at Jerusalem.

From Jerusalem to Gaza, and two days beyond, they moved still within sight of cultivation and human habitation. But then they left the last village behind them and came to a land where "there was only sandy soil burnt up by the great heat of the sun"; by noon of the next day they reached the desert itself, "the region ... of immense desolation in which certainly no man lived nor could live."

At once the routine of desert travel clamped itself down upon them. Long before dawn they would be roused from sleep to begin the day's march. The breaking of camp and the loading of the camels was achieved, but only after a tempestuous scene; not only must every camel carry an equal load and each of the panniers weigh equally with the other, but the camelmen made each day's loading an occasion for blackmailing their employers. "They would carefully leave behind something, a bed or a basket or a sack ... so that the pilgrim to whom ... [it] belonged should be obliged to ask them to pick it up," and that of course would be done only at a price. Morning after morning the pilgrims would rage at the rascals, "but as we swore in German at them, and they shouted in Arabic at us, neither they nor we could understand the other." In fact, the travelers were reduced to such a state of fury that, as Felix remarks, "we could have eaten them alive, as the saying is."

After the noise and tumult of the start, the caravan would move off, silent except for the strange chant by which the camelmen encouraged their beasts in the hush of the desert. At first in piercing cold, and after dawn in pitiless heat, they continued on their way. There could be no midday halt, for the habits of camels forbade it, so that each man must eat as he rode such cold cooked salt meat, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, and biscuits as he could carry in the basket hung from his donkey's saddle, washing them down with the bottle of tepid wine and water which had jogged at his knee through the scorching hours of the morning.

Sometime before sunset they would halt for the night. While the donkeymen went off to fetch water and the camels were unloaded, the pilgrims had their own domestic duty. All, without exception, had to hunt firewood for the night's cooking; "ordained priests, counts, barons, and knights rushed about the plain," pulling up from the parched soil the dry and prickly bushes which in burning gave a sweetly aromatic perfume.

When supper had been prepared and eaten, and the next day's picnic lunch made ready, there was an interval of relaxation during which Felix sometimes explored the nearby desert and always made a point of questioning the old Saracen guide and the camelmen as to the names of the wadies and hills through which the march had led them during the day. All this information, together with the events of the day, he recorded upon his wax tablets and later transferred to paper, producing such recognizable versions of the strange Arabic names that the pilgrims' route can even today be plotted by a traveler who knows the ground.

Not long after sunset the whole caravan would settle down for the night, the pilgrims in their tents in the center, with their baggage about them; the servants and the tethered beasts beyond, with a no man's land between. The fires had been scattered and every spark trodden out so that no gleam could betray the position of the camp. Through the dark hours one of the pilgrims kept watch, not only, or indeed chiefly, against possible Arab attack, but against the certain marauding of the thievish servants. "Yet," Felix laments, "however well we watched, in the morning we would find holes made in the sacks, or eggs stolen from the baskets."

A little more than twenty years later, the desert journey was made so dangerous by unruly Arab tribes that pilgrims found the risks too great to take. But now, in 1483, though their ancient Saracen guide carefully coached the pilgrims in the pacific deportment they should practice in any encounter, and though he consistently avoided camping near wells in order to avoid Arab bands, to Felix and his companions the Arabs showed themselves only as mendicants or, at worst, as greedy extractors of dues. Indeed, on one occasion when thirst forced the pilgrims to make for one of the water holes, after a few tense moments the Christians were so well received that, before the pilgrims moved on again, young German knights and Arab youths had competed amicably in running, leaping, and hurling stones.

Man, in fact, was not man's chief enemy in the desert: the worst perils were those of the desert itself. In one of the blinding sandstorms a man might part unknowingly from his companions and find himself alone and lost in the pitiless waste; if the storm blew for long, a whole caravan, unable to move, might die of thirst where it camped.

Heat and thirst, and the fatigue of arduous travel, even if not fatal, bore heavily on the traveler; none of Felix's companions succumbed in the desert, but one died on the return to Alexandria. Thirst was a day-long preoccupation, and when water was lacking the pilgrims longed with passion for it, even though it was dyed red and tasted of salt from the waterskins or "whitish and thick" with a heavy sediment that made it look like milk. "We would," says Felix, "put our mouths to the empty skins, and think it delicious to suck the tainted water from the stinking leather."

Yet sometimes after such privations, and the more delicious because of them, there were interludes of rest and refreshment, as when at the bottom of a deep rock wadi the parched pilgrims found (as the Saracen guide had promised) water standing among the stones, pools where they might drink their fill and even bathe, green shrubs growing in the shade of

overhanging rocks. "Never in this journey," Felix vowed, "did we enjoy ourselves as much as we did there."

Yet through it all, and in spite of the discomforts about which the pilgrims grumbled as persistently as God's Chosen People in this same desert long before, Felix found in the journey a strange delight. He discovered that for him the desert possessed an irresistible attraction, and since such an attraction needed to be explained, he attempted to do so. "It is principally this," he says, "that every day, indeed every hour, you come into new country, of a different nature, with different conditions of atmosphere and soil, with hills of a different build and color, so that you are amazed at what you see and long for what you will see next. All the time something new comes along, which ravishes you with wonder, either the marvelous structure of the mountains, or the color of the ground, the variety of the rocks and pebbles ... all of which delight the curious." Certainly this man would in any age have been a traveler.

Long before dawn on the tenth day of their journey from Gaza, the pilgrims set out by way of a ravine so narrow and deep that the moonlight shone only on the rocks far above them. By sunrise they had reached a high and bleak plain whose rocks and pebbles shone red, across which they had to toil against the force of a bitterly cold wind.

This plateau, however, came abruptly to an end as the ground fell away suddenly in a steep and rocky escarpment. For a moment this was all that they were aware of, but then they saw that the camel—and donkeymen were pointing into the great gulf of air which lay before them to the south. There, far away among a tremendous company of bare and jagged peaks, their guide showed them one "dark as it were with distance"—Mount Sinai, the object and end of their pilgrimage. Down went the pilgrims on their knees, as they had knelt at their first glimpse of Jerusalem weeks before.

Once they had made the descent and crossed the wide tract known as "the Sea of Sand" (Debbet-el-Ramla), which lay at the foot of the encampment, they were in a country very different from the desert through which they had passed since leaving Gaza. All around them were the magnificent defiles and peaks of the Sinai massif, fantastically colored with brown, myrtle green, purple, black, red, lilac, maroon, and crimson. They had left the utter sterility of the desert behind, and their hearts lifted at the sight of a shepherd with his flock. The scent of some flowering thorn trees seemed to Felix, fresh from the scentless desert air, the sweetest he had ever smelt. Best of all, they were able to gather from the young branches of tamarisk a gum that the pilgrims were sure was the very manna which had fed Israel in the desert. Canon Breydenbach, who rarely intrudes into the impersonal narrative of his book, here intervenes to remark that "it tasted sweet as honey and stuck to your teeth when you ate it."

It was not yet noon on September 20 when the pilgrims reached the monastery of Saint Catherine, a church and convent surrounded by the wall which Emperor Justinian had built; together with the monks' watered and fruitful garden, the monastery was set so close under one of the perpendicular rock faces of Mount Sinai that "when one stands in the monastery and looks upward it seems as if the mountains would fall on it."

Installed in the bare guest rooms of the monastery, where at this time pilgrims drew from the monks only firewood, and water from the deep, pure, and copious well within the walls, the travelers rested awhile before taking a look about them—at the church built by Justinian, at the little courts connected by small flights of steps, at the mud-built cells of the monks clinging "like swallows' nests" to the ancient fortifications.

They had to follow, during the few days of their stay, a prescribed routine of devout sight-seeing. Within the monastery, the church must be thoroughly and ceremonially visited. Without, the peaks of Jebel Musa (Mount Sinai) and Jebel Caterina (Saint Catherine's Mount) must be climbed.

The abbot and monks escorted the pilgrims on their visit to the church. There, where Justinian's mosaics were illumined by the light of scores of hanging lamps, the pilgrims, bearing lighted candles, followed the abbot in procession to the chapel where the bones of Saint Catherine lay in a marble sarcophagus. But by no means all the bones. The pious larceny of generations of pilgrims had left only a few ribs and leg bones, "a fairly big head without a jaw" crowned with a diadem, and the bones of the left hand, "white as milk ... the fingers ... long and covered with rings." When the pilgrims came close to drop their offerings into the coffin, Felix noted that the abbot kept watch with unceasing vigilance.

From Saint Catherine's Chapel they went—moving back, as it were, through many centuries—to the Chapel of the Bush, marble-encrusted and lamplit, where, stepping upon costly rugs, they reached the pavement before the altar, in which was set "a thin plate of copper, engraved with the similitude of the Burning Bush, and Moses sitting down taking off his shoes."

Two days were allowed for the ascent of the two mountain peaks. The start was made, as usual, some hours before dawn. Led by the sacristan of the monastery, the pilgrims climbed the same flight of stone steps and passed under the same archways by which the modern traveler makes the ascent of Mount Sinai. They halted at the various chapels to do honor to the Blessed Virgin, to the Prophets Elijah and Elisha, to Saint Marina; they also saw and wriggled into the "Clift in the Rock" in which Moses had hidden himself from the Glory of God. At the top they celebrated the august associations of the Mount with the suitable prayers and responses provided by their *Processionals*—little books produced for and carried by most pilgrims, which contained, in addition to these devotions, tourist information that Felix considered very inaccurate. Then they descended, but not by the way they had come, since the best approach to the stiffer climb up Saint Catherine's Mount was from the Monastery of the Forty Saints, a cell of the monks of Saint Catherine in the Wadi Leja. There they were to spend the night, and in the cool of the following morning make the second ascent.

But as they sat over the meal of dates, dried figs, and pure water that the monks brought to them in the delightful garden, where water from the rock above ran from pool to pool among the fruit trees—orange, fig, almond, apricot, pomegranate, and olive—someone suggested that those who felt equal to it should this very day make an impromptu dash up the peak.

At that, "ten hardy pilgrims," of whom Felix Fabri inevitably was one, "rose up ready to make the ascent ... in the fiercest heat of the day." Halfway up, one of the knights found that he had overestimated his strength; sitting down on the blazing hot slope, he begged only to be left where he was. His companions first tried persuasion, then gentle compulsion; at last, with one hauling at a napkin tied to his belt, and two others pushing him from behind, they got him to the top. "A terrible business," says Felix, "we had with that pilgrim."

The official expedition up the mountain left the little monastery early the next morning by brilliant moonlight—which could not, however, penetrate the deep fissures in the mountain on which they must climb. And here, where yesterday the adventurous ten had sweltered and panted, the pilgrims were chilled by such an icy wind that when they halted, it was not, as yesterday, to slake their thirst at the two springs of water on the way but to light fires at which they might warm themselves. Even when they reached the top, and the sun rose, they could not "pray nor do anything proper" till another fire had been lighted; only when the cold wind dropped were they able, first to attend to their devotions, then to look around at the superb spectacle that spread before them on every side, where the majestic confusion of mountain peaks and winding rocky valleys of the Sinai massif lay between two seas. Felix, at least, did not fail to remember that those seas were the highway for the ships that brought from India and the farthest fabled East "gold ... garments of purple and perfumes, stones and ivory ... balsam and outlandish birds, woods unknown in our forests, roots not native to all soils, from which for sick men and sound are extracted things medicinal and delicious."

When, after a merry meal on the small plateau of the mountaintop, the pilgrims began the descent, they knew that the turning point of their long journey had been reached and passed. They therefore took the steep rocky slope in holiday mood, "not walking but tumbling down, because we knew that we were beginning to go home."

Between that hilarious stampede and the actual homecoming, however, there lay for everyone except the youngest of them all, who was never to see his home again, months of hardship and anxiety. They would endure all the dangers and discomforts of another desert journey; they would have to submit to the extortions of Moslem officials as well as to blows and insults from the hooligans of Cairo. Seasickness, cold, and danger would be their lot in a prolonged and tempestuous winter voyage. And at last, in order to reach home, they would have to cross the Alps in the dead of winter.

And yet, once more, intermingled with all trials, Friar Felix found things to enjoy. The wonderful nightly illumination of Cairo brought him out on the roof of the pilgrims' lodging again and again to gaze and marvel. The chicken incubators of fifteenth-century Egypt and the vast mysterious monuments of its most ancient past, both were subjects for his insatiable interest. When foul winds held his ship in port at one or another of the Greek islands, he took the opportunity of making pleasant explorations ashore, storing in his memory views of the cliffs and

capes of Greece, of wide seas and the narrow straits and small island cities of the Dalmatian coast.

Besides all this there were moments of vision that profoundly enriched and illuminated his mind. His experience and observation in Palestine and Egypt brought new life to his understanding of the Bible narrative. In Jerusalem he saw bundles of the dried prickly brushwood which is the common kindling for the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, and having seen, he decided that no strange and farfetched shrub, such as the books told of, was used for the Crown of Thorns, but that the soldiers who mocked Christ had merely fetched the thorns from the kitchen. In Cairo too, as the pilgrims hung over a bridge watching a company of poor men mix the sticky Nile mud with straw, Friar Felix realized that just so had the Children of Israel fashioned their sun-baked bricks for Pharaoh.

But if as a priest he learned many things which must have added an incomparable vigor and liveliness to his sermons to the people at home, as a traveler he learned still more of the world that the merchants knew and of the great trade between East and West, upon which the dazzling civilization of Venice was founded—the trade which, in the form of jewels, rich and delicate materials, and spices, filtered through to the courts, castles, and kitchens of Germany.

From Saint Catherine's Mount he had seen the sea route by which the eastern cargoes came to Egypt. At Alexandria he saw the spices poured out in heaps upon the quay, and the harbor full of the galleys of western merchants who must buy here and, in buying, pay the preposterous customs duties which the Sultan extorted from western traders. That sight brought to his mind the sand-choked channel which he had seen near Suez, and he reflected how, if there had been "this way for the merchants of the world to trade everywhere," the ships of Christendom would have sailed to "the land of cinnamon and thence come to farthest India."

But Friar Felix did something more than merely witness the machinery of the great commerce. During the voyage back to Venice, he laid his mattress upon the enormous spice sacks in the galley's hold and found them a hard bedstead. In Venice, on his return, he stayed not at "The Flute" but with the German merchants in their *fondaco* on the Grand Canal, and it was with one of these same merchants that he crossed the Alps in January, over the icy roads. His own luggage—silken altar cloths from Jerusalem, baskets of pebbles from Palestine and the Red Sea shore, and palm leaves from Alexandria—was packed together with the spices and Murano glass which his companion was bringing to the marts of Germany.

In all this part of his experience the Friar was looking, as generation after generation before him had looked, toward the Orient as the source of wealth and wonder. But he stood at the end of a period. Less than a dozen years after Fabri's return from pilgrimage, Christopher Columbus broke through the Atlantic distances, revealed the new continent, and turned men's eyes and minds to new ways and to new and greater adventures.

But on the evening of January 29, 1484, Felix could have no inkling of this as he and his merchant-companion came "within sight of the sweet city of Ulm." They crossed the wooden

"Sheep Bridge" together but parted at the gate of the Dominican priory in the southeast angle of the city, where only a wall separated them from the green waters of the Danube.

The convent gate was shut; the Friar could hear the voices of his brethren as they chanted Vespers; no one answered his knock. Or rather no man answered. "But I had hardly knocked for the first time when the convent dog was there, who knew me through the gate, and not with angry barking, but with a strange joyful howling and whining scratched and bit at the planks as though he would tear the gate down, in such a hurry he was to get out to me ... . And when the gate was opened, before I could cross the threshold, the dog jumped up almost to my chest, rejoicing with extraordinary leaping and whimpering, and much tail-wagging; then off he rushed through the convent making a squeaking through his nose as if he were announcing the coming of his friend."

That was, says Felix, "the best welcome so far, from the best beast." But now the prior came running, "as if to put out a fire," and in a few moments all the brethren poured out of church, having got through Vespers as quickly as might be. They crowded round him, then led him in to kneel together before the altar and repeat the simple and touching prayers which gave thanks for a pilgrim's safe return.

Only when that was done did they all gather in the parlor, where Felix talked and, we may be sure, interminably talked. After his long wandering he had come home.

H. F. M. (for Hilda Frances Margaret) Prescott has written two books about Friar Felix Fabri's pilgrimages, Jerusalem Journey *and* Once to Sinai*; a biography of Mary Tudor; and four novels, one of which*—The Man on a Donkey—*was acclaimed as one of the finest historical novels of our day.*