

HAVE ENGLISHMEN FOUND THE ARK OF THE COVENANT?

A Mysterious Expedition, Apparently Not Composed of Archaeologists, Hunts Strange Treasure Under the Mosque of Omar, Sets the Moslems in a Ferment, and May Cause Diplomatic Incident.

THE dispatches from Jerusalem stating that an exploring party has been able to dig a way under the Mosque of Omar and find there certain sacred relics of enormous importance sound like the invention of an imaginative correspondent's idle hour, but it is already known that there is an extraordinary story back of it all.

It is highly improbable that the explorers have discovered the Ark of the Covenant that Moses built and that has not been heard of since 587 B. C., though it is not after all absolutely impossible, and it is certain that the seven branched candlestick is not there, but it is known in New York that the excavating expedition which has been digging around the sacred precincts in Jerusalem went there with the object of finding the Ark.

It is possible that they have by tunnelling penetrated to some tomb or hiding place under the Mosque which stands on the exact spot occupied by the Temple of Solomon first and after the return from captivity by the Second Temple, but Jewish scholars in this city like Prof. Richard Gottheil of Columbia and Dr. Solomon Schechter, the learned head of the Jewish Theological Seminary, think it is extremely unlikely that relics of Solomon's Temple have been discovered.

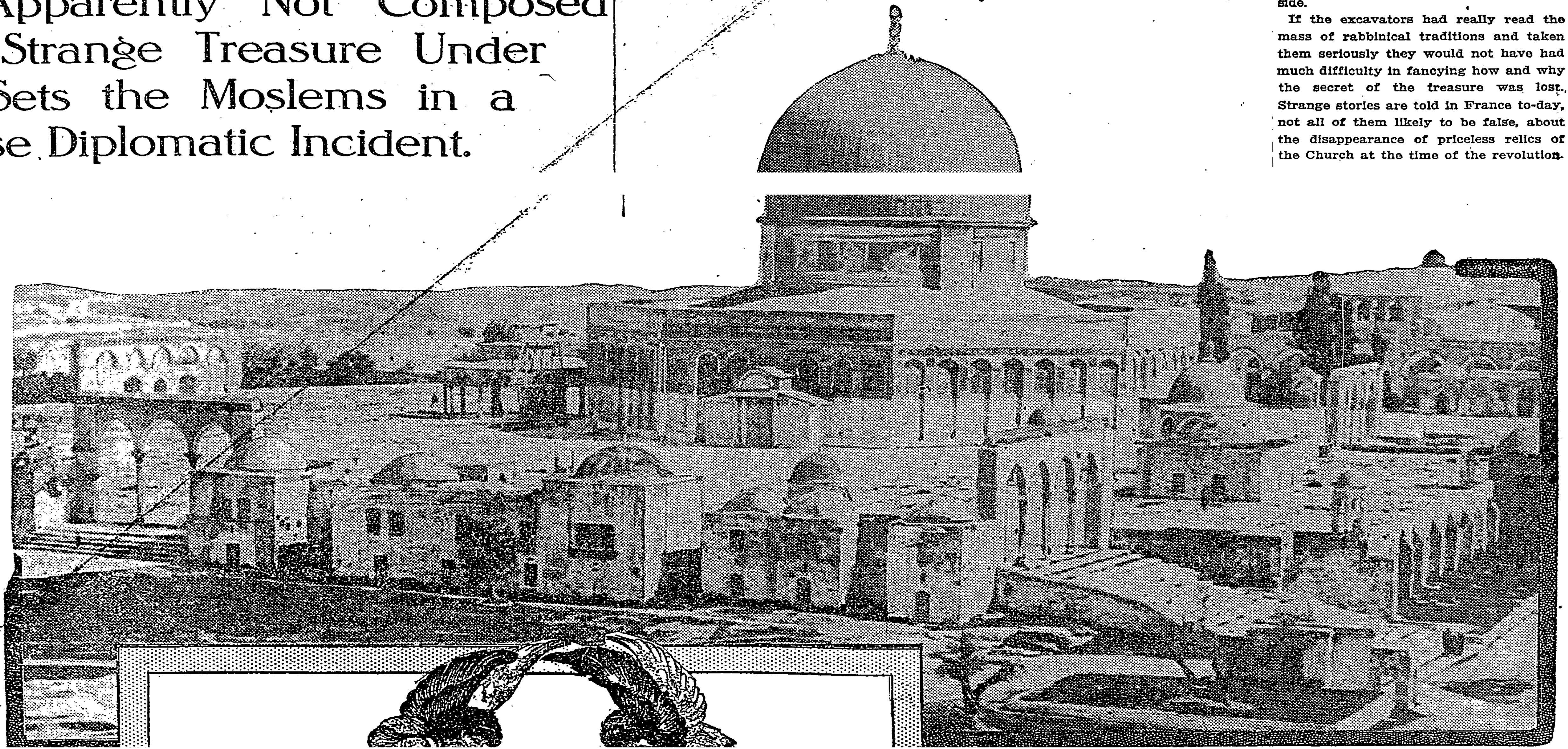
However, it is a fact that some Eng-

rounded with a bodyguard while they worked, and the curious could not get near to see what was going on.

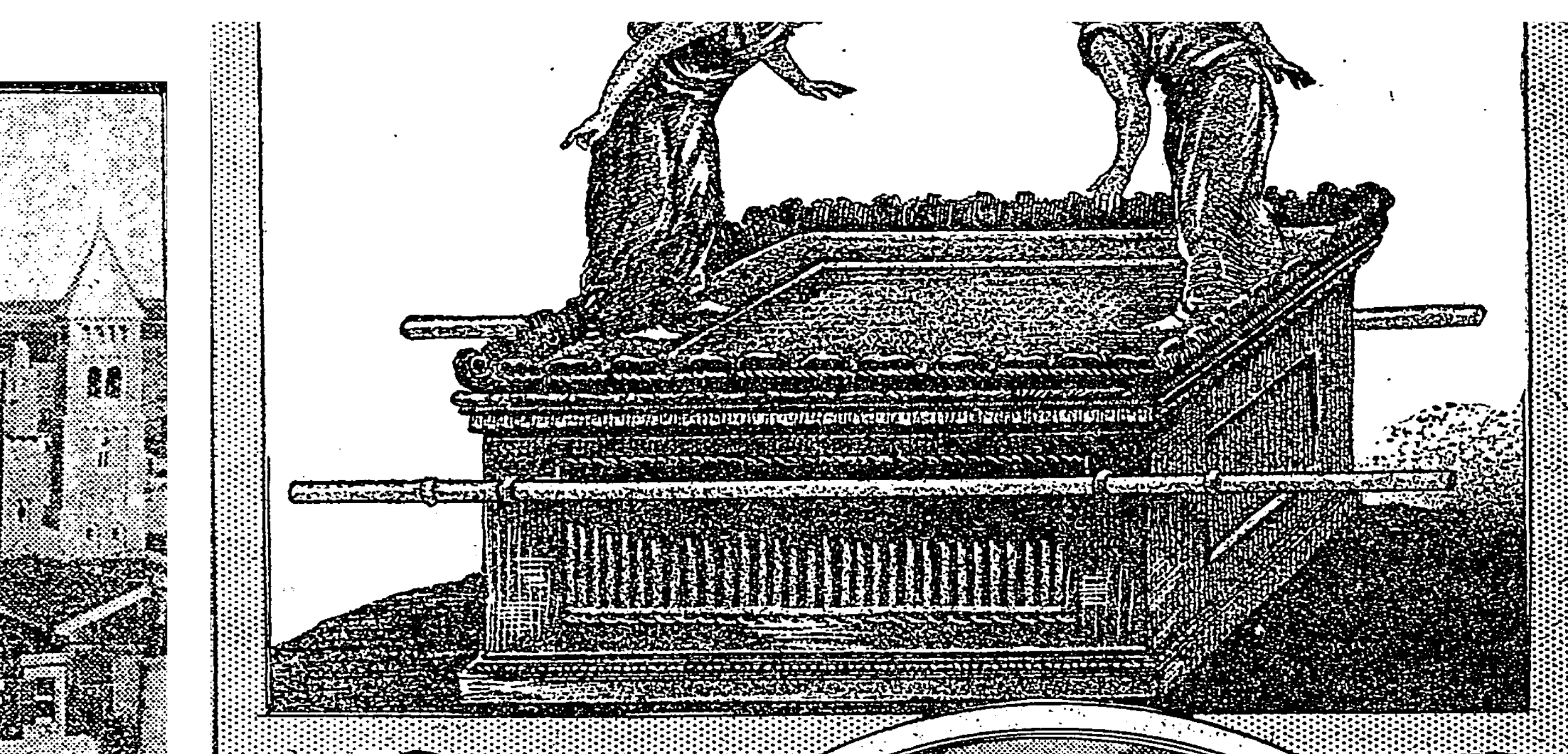
Most singular of an, none of the party appeared to be archaeologists, according to Prof. Richard Gottheil of Columbia who was there in Jerusalem in the American School of Archaeology that winter. They were a puzzle to the scholarly folk who went their way under the eyes of anybody who happened to be around and who saved money because they knew it was hard to get.

The singular exploring party did not find anything of value while Prof. Gottheil was there; but for that matter they made such a mystery of what they did that nobody could follow their work. This expedition answers, however, the description of the men who have raised such a commotion in Jerusalem, and whose findings may be made the subject of diplomatic negotiations.

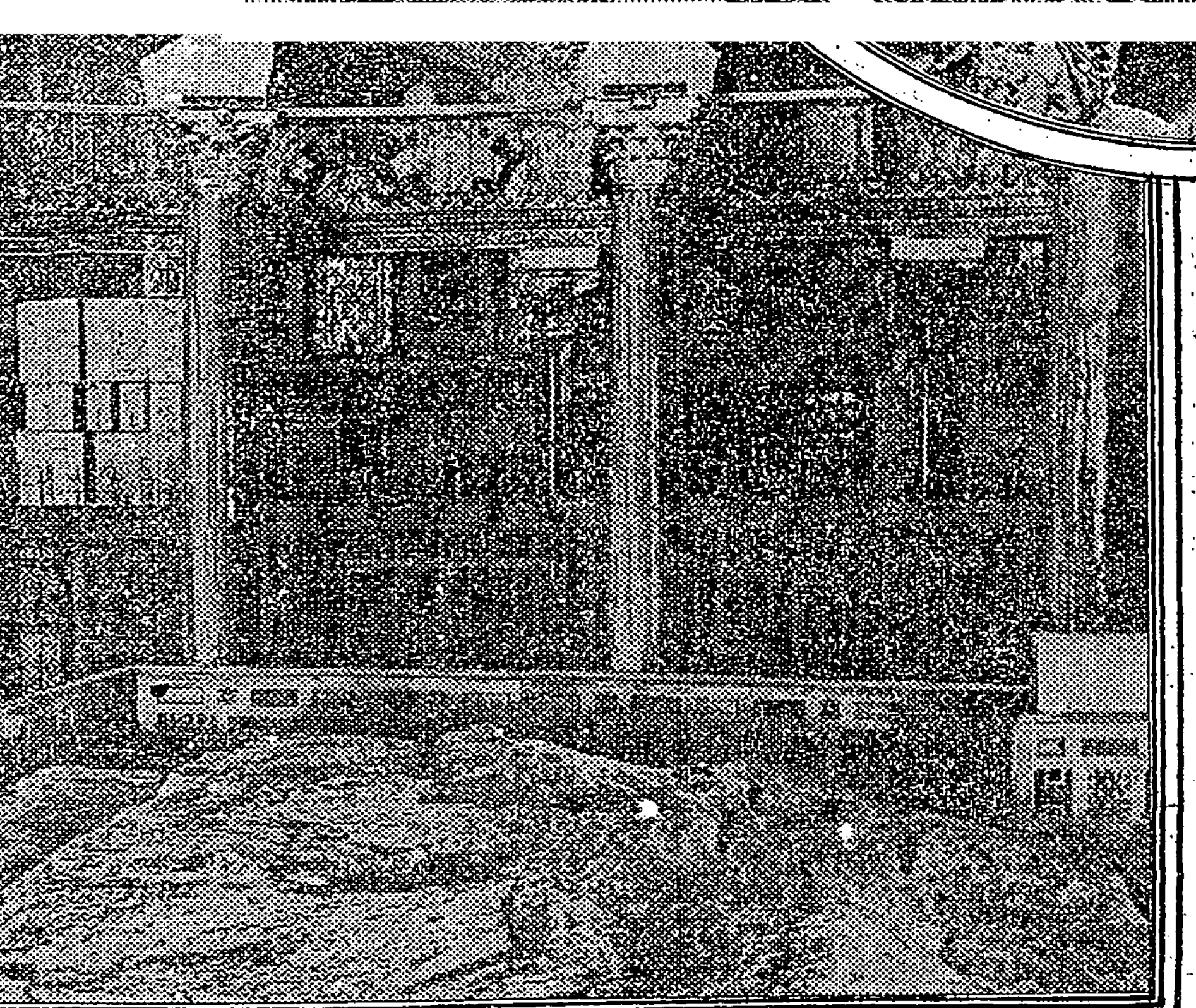
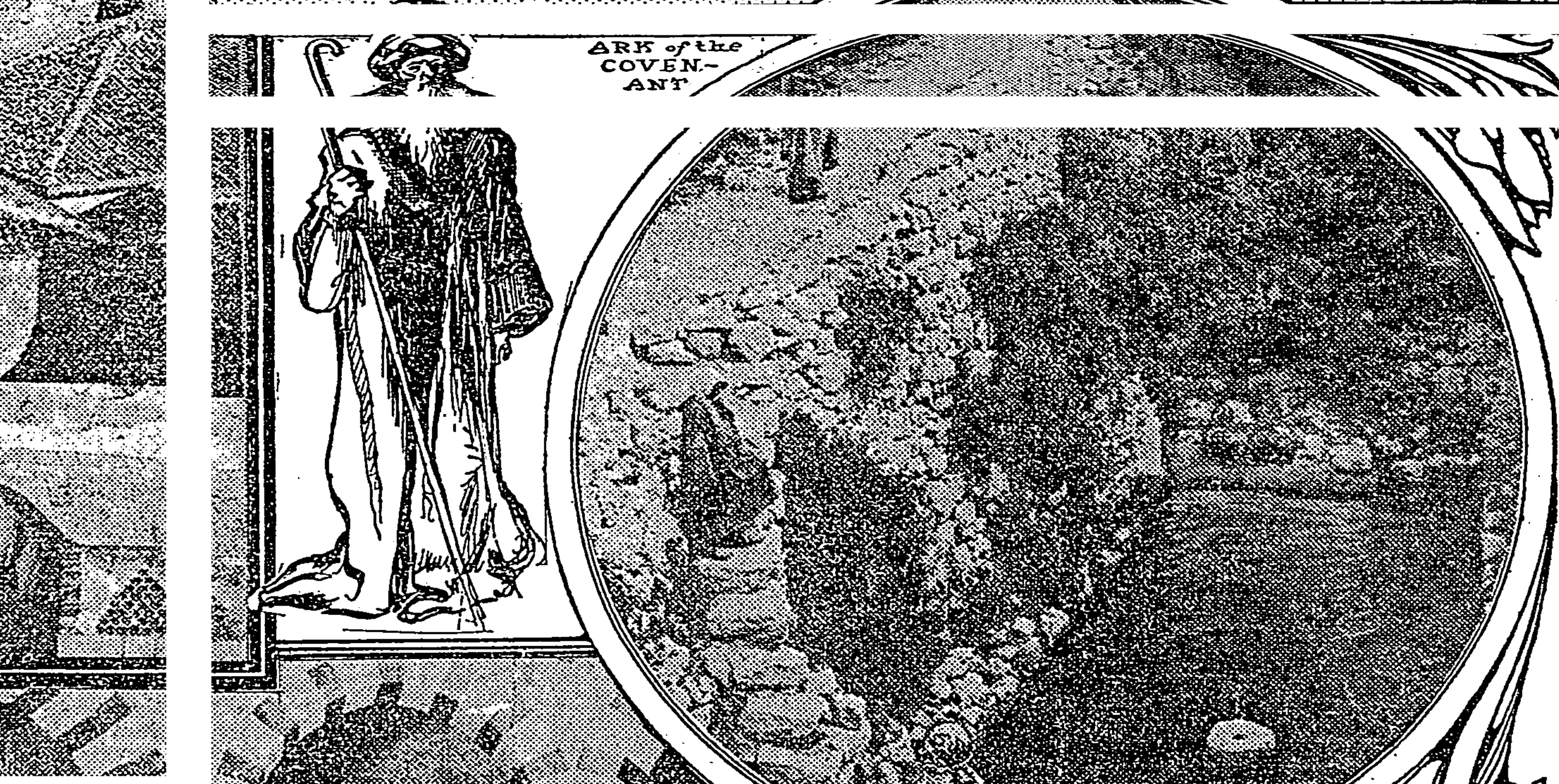
For, if they have found any sacred relics under the Mosque of Omar by tunnelling in from the shafts they sunk by the wall, they will doubtless have to return them. The hill of Jerusalem is sacred to Mohammedans in only a little less degree than the shrines connected with Mohammed. Abraham was their ancestor, they say, no less than he was the fore-



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MOSQUE OF OMAR



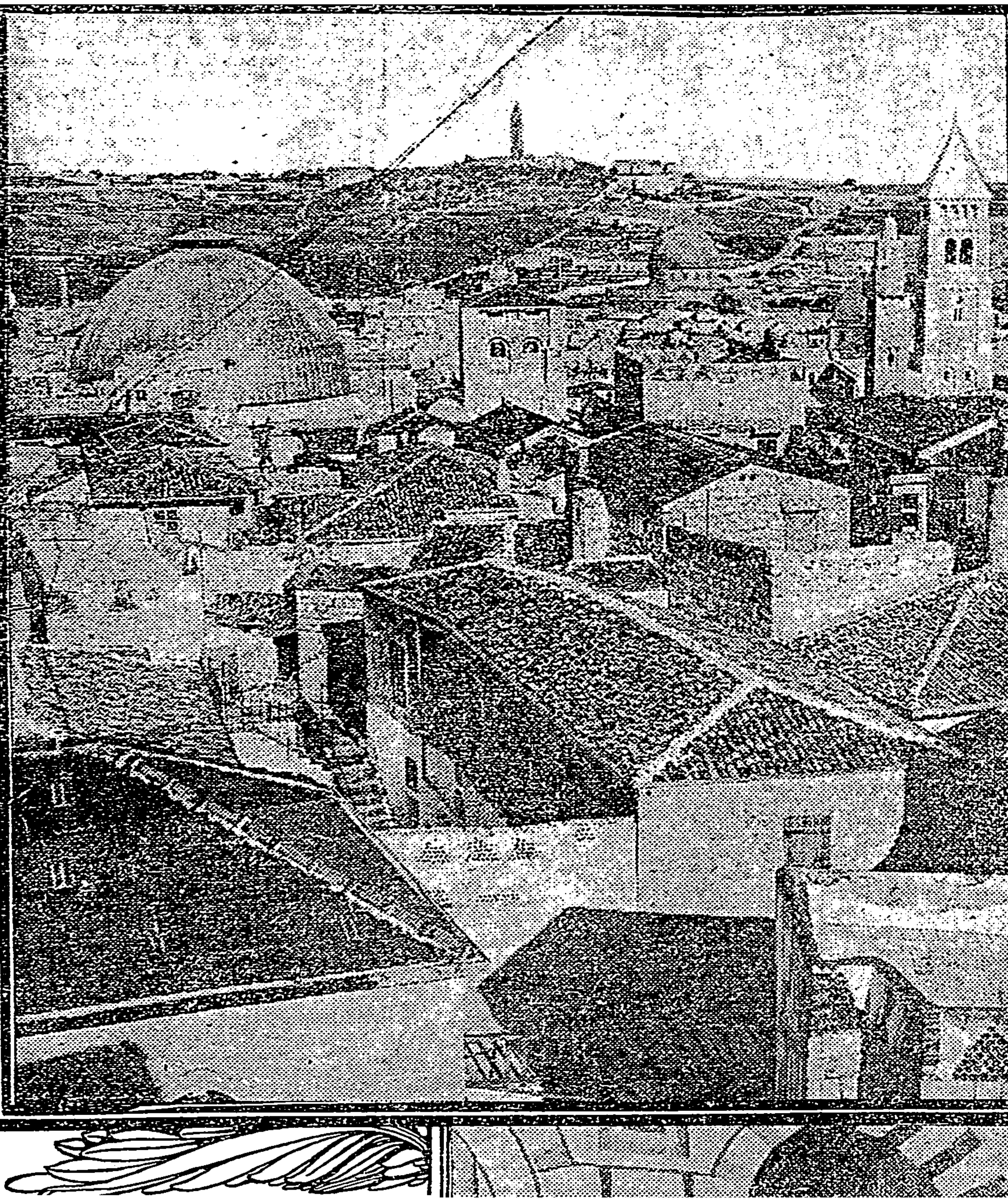
ARK OF THE COVENANT



Interior of the Mosque of Omar



The Pool of Siloam outside of Jerusalem



JERUSALEM and the MOUNT OF OLIVES.

lishmen believed they had discovered a clue to the hiding place of some sacred relics of the Jewish temple. Three or four years ago they were trying to raise money for such an expedition and it is evident that somebody must have thought their story worth following up, for they have been spending large sums of money in Jerusalem.

Their story was that a scholar working in the library of Constantinople had found an ancient volume which told of a secret place beneath the Temple of Solomon which was used, at the time of the destruction of the Temple, as a hiding place for the sacred relics. This scholar, a Swede by the way, took his discovery to England and there interested some men, who in turn tried to raise money from prominent people in order to make what they considered the greatest archaeological venture of all time.

Most people, when approached, thought the whole idea too fantastic, and many again, even if they believed in the possibility of success in the diggings, were too well aware of the fanaticism of the inhabitants of Jerusalem to think it possible to get away with the spoils when they should be unearthed. But in the course of time backers were found and prominent people, from the Duchess of Marlborough to the Armourers of Chicago, have been mentioned as taking part.

When this expedition arrived in the Holy City it caused a sensation. Never had an exploring party appeared before with so inexhaustible a fund of money. They had a yacht, and they were intimate with important officials so that they were sur-

rounded with a bodyguard while they worked, and the curious could not get near to see what was going on.

There has been for two thousand years a tradition of a hiding place under the Temple. It is not improbable that there may be something there which has not been suspected through all these centuries. One theory is that the tombs of the kings may be discovered beneath the Mosque of Omar.

This particular theory, which interested Baron Edmond de Rothschild, is borne out, by the fact that the tunnel which brings water to the Pool of Siloam takes

a crooked track, as if it had been turned to avoid something that lay in the way, under the Temple.

It is possible that the expedition struck some such treasure trove. And it is also possible that the population of Jerusalem, so easily excited on questions of religion, have been misled, and that the expedition has not violated any of the sacred shrines.

But at any rate something curious has been going on. Infidels digging near the holy place and screened from the eyes of the faithful would not be popular in Jerusalem, and the story told in the dis-

patches, inaccurate as it evidently is in some details, tallies none the less with the story, known to be true, of the exploring party that wanted to seek the Ark.

While it is in the highest degree improbable that the Ark of the Covenant has been found, there is no way of declaring that it hasn't been until the party gets to London. The golden candlestick we know about. Its history is traced from the taking of the Second Temple by Titus in the year 70 A. D., through its wanderings in Rome and Carthage and Constantinople back to Jerusalem, up to 614

the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. No man looked upon it save the high priest, who once a year entered to pray before the mercy seat that the sins of the people should be forgiven. Between the two winged figures, made doubtless after the Egyptian fashion, the Jews said a glory hovered, proof of the presence of the Lord himself, the Shekinah radiance that protected the Chosen People of God.

Then came the descent of the King of Babylon upon Jerusalem and the disappearance of the Ark. For a thousand years it had been with the people and then, in the day of the captivity it was lost so completely that a mass of legends have grown up around the disaster and form a whole chapter of rabbinical literature.

The easy and obvious solution of the mystery is that the King took it away with the captives and used the gold with which it was overlaid inside and out. The Apocalypse of Esdras says that this was the end of it. The Fourth Book of Kings, another of the Apocrypha, says that the Babylonians took much silver and brass and gold away from the captured city.

But there is another legend. The Second Book of Maccabees tells a different and more romantic story. It quotes from the writings of the Prophet Jeremiah as to the fate of the Ark:

"The prophet, being warned by God, commanded that the Tabernacle and the Ark should accompany him till he came forth to the mountain where Moses went up and saw the inheritance of God. And when Jeremiah came thither he found a hollow cave and he carried in thither the Tabernacle and the Ark and the Altar of Incense, and he stopped the door. Then some of them that followed him came up to mark the place, but they could not find it.

"And when Jeremiah perceived it he blamed them saying: The place shall be unknown till God gather the congregations of the people and receive them to mercy. And then the Lord will shew these things and the majesty of the Lord shall appear and there shall be a cloud as it was also shewed to Moses and he shewed it when Solomon prayed that the place might be sanctified to the great God."

This tradition goes back 200 years before the Christian era, but on the other hand it is 800 years and more later than the Babylonian captivity.

There is a mass of rabbinical tradition much more in accord with the story told in the recent press dispatches. Dr. Schechter thinks it possible that the explorers may have collected these rabbinical legends and determined to follow what they took to be a clue. At any rate, some of the Talmudic writers set forth a belief that the sacred Ark had been hidden just about where it was reported to be found, under the Temple of Solomon.

A place had been made there, says the tradition, so that in case of fire or destruction by enemies the Ark and the other treasures of the Temple could be quickly hidden. The legend went that the Ark would not be brought forth until the day when the Messiah should bring the scattered people of Israel back to their land and Temple.

There are, of course, many chambers under the Mosque and foundations and hidden places that have not been explored. It is hard enough to see from the outside the sacred places of the Mohammedans without aspiring for permission to go into the nooks and corners, so the explorers, if their object had been to get under the Temple, would naturally

have been obliged to tunnel from the outside.

If the excavators had really read the mass of rabbinical traditions and taken them seriously they would not have had much difficulty in fancying how and why the secret of the treasure was lost. Strange stories are told in France to-day, not all of them likely to be false, about the disappearance of priceless relics of the Church at the time of the revolution.

Some simply disappeared, their secret lost with a man suddenly killed. Others are said to have come to light by chance, and to have been the source of some suddenly acquired wealth. At any rate such things are always possible when there are religious objects of great sacredness and people determined to save them from invaders.

This is all that is known about the Ark—and this is not "knowing" anything, since it is all a tangle of tradition. If it had been buried, however, the place that the explorers dug in would have been the rational spot to hide it in, for so sacred an object, and one so valuable to the invaders who must have filled the country, could not easily have been taken out of the Temple.

The Mohammedans would be angry at the explorers for two reasons. They believe, according to the cabled story, that the sacred rock has been tampered with, and the rock is of course the most holy spot to them in all Jerusalem. It is the centre of the Holy Hill, the reason for the existence of the Mosque of Omar.

Some places in the world have always been considered sacred and the hill top at Jerusalem crowned with the Mosque of Omar is one of them. Long before Solomon built his temple there it was venerated. Here tradition says was the rock on which Abraham sacrificed the "ram caught in the thicket" that took the place of his son Isaac.

This is the very rock, the Mohammedans believe, that lies in the centre of the Mosque. It is so holy that it is veiled. No one may touch it. Forty feet wide and fifty-six feet long, it lies under the great dome, the best protected and most widely revered object on the globe. It is only recently that Christians have been allowed to gaze at it.

It is generally believed that this stone was the foundation for the altar in the Temple of Solomon and, later, in the Second Temple. Certainly there has always been an atmosphere of reverence about it. And if the people of Jerusalem think that by any ruse strangers have tampered with it the seriousness of the situation is evident.

Then again, the Mohammedans have their own traditions about the Ark. They believe that the Ark contains the broken tables of stone, the staff and clothing of Moses and the turban of Aaron. At the death of Moses God took it to heaven and angels brought it back. Some say Moses did not make the Ark but God sent it when Adam fell, as a token that his presence was not altogether withdrawn.

With it came the Light of Mohammed, that which created the earth, the most precious gift of God. When Ishmael, ancestor of the Arabs, was driven into the wilderness with his mother Hagar he took the Ark with him. It was returned to the children of Isaac, but the Light of Mohammed remained with the Arabs.

Together with the rod of Moses the Ark lies, they say, in the Lake of Tiberias and on the last day it will be brought forth.

Here, then, are the various traditions as to the fate of the Ark and the story of the strange expedition so far as it is known to-day. The yacht is sailing in the Mediterranean, headed for England. What has the mysterious ship on board? Some sacred object laid away by the hands of priests dead these twenty-five hundred years, or relics of the glory of Solomon, taken from a hidden tomb, or which is a possible theory—nothing at all?

At least the whole expedition is an exciting adventure that goes to show this old-world not nearly so bare of romance as people try to make out.