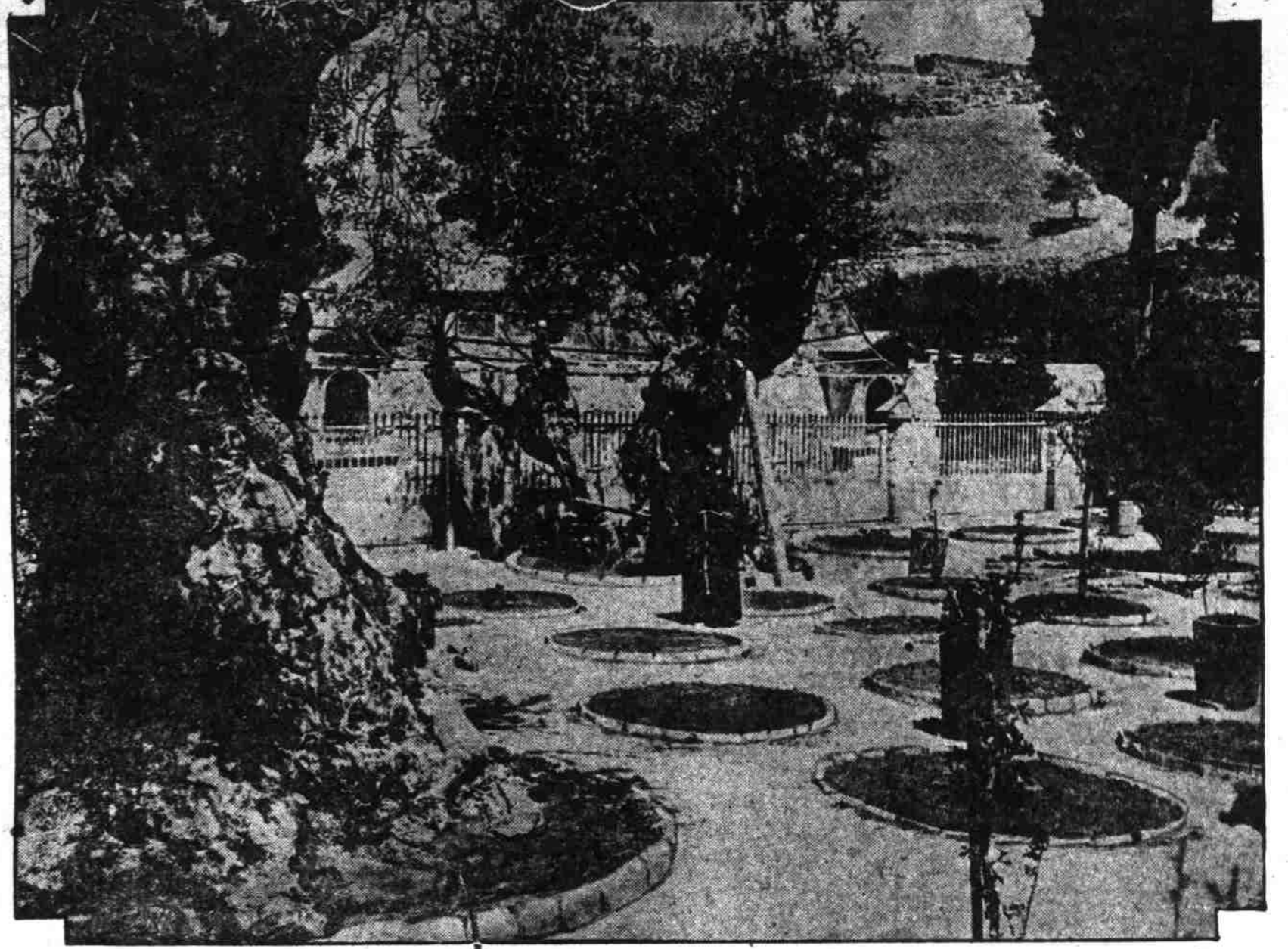


Gethsemane's Garden Swept By A Plague of Locusts



The Photograph at the Left Shows the Garden of Gethsemane with its Trees and Flowers and Shrubbery as They Were Before the Plague of Locusts Swept It. At the Right is Seen the Sacred Garden Divested by the Insect Hordes of Every Green Plant, the Cedars Being the Only Thing to Escape.

RECENT cabled dispatches from Jerusalem reputed the fall of the famous olive tree "El Butini" in the Garden of Gethsemane. Under this tree, as under its seven mates in the sacred place, the Saviour is supposed to have walked during the Night of Agony. A tradition has long been held that when "El Butini" fell the Turkish Empire would also fall. The dispatches said that the great olive tree had been blown down by the wind. It had, as a matter of fact, been practically killed in 1915, when an unprecedented plague of locusts swept down upon Jerusalem, destroying every green thing for many miles around. The extraordinary facts of this locust storm, paralleling that which the Old Testament records as having overwhelmed at Moses's command ancient Egypt, are here told for the first time by Mr. John D. Whiting, American Vice-Consul at Jerusalem.

The New Plague of Locusts

By John D. Whiting,
American Vice-Consul at Jerusalem.

"HEAR ye this ye elders, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land—hath this ever happened in your days? . . . That which was left by the creeping locust hath the swarming locust eaten; and that which was left by the grass locust hath the corn locust eaten. Awake . . . and weep and howl . . . for a nation hath come up over my land, bold and without number."

Thus the old Biblical prophet Joel, writing some seven or eight hundred years B. C., begins his description of a locust plague, and having witnessed the destruction to crops and fields by these insects in this historic land, one marvels how the ancient writer could have given so graphic and true a description of a devastation caused by locusts in so condensed a form. The plague referred to occurred in the Spring and Summer of 1915, when Palestine was closed to the outside world by the war. That the locust helped the Allied cause there is no denying. They ravaged the country from the borders of Egypt to the Taurus Mountains, and were a source of anxiety for many months both to the Turkish authorities and the native population. They consumed every green thing—which meant a serious shortage of food and fodder, which greatly militated against the movement of the Turkish forces on both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian fronts.

The full story of the plague, the destruction wrought, how the band of American citizens in Jerusalem assisted the authorities in fighting it are here told for the first time. It was toward the end of February that one of our members, Mr. Lewis Larson, returned from the picturesque Ain Fara gorge, which borders on the Wilderness of Judea, and is only a few miles east of Jerusalem, with word that swarms of locusts had flown overhead in such thick clouds as to obscure the sun for the time being. However, before they were seen a loud noise, produced by the flapping of myriads of wings, was heard, described as resembling the distant rumble of waves, or, as the Bible has it, "the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running into battle."

Immediately afterward rumors poured in from Es Salt, on the uplands east of the Jordan, and Bethlehem that similar swarms had also visited these places, causing much destruction. It was several days later, however, that the locusts were first seen in Jerusalem. Attention was drawn to them by the sudden darkening of the bright sunshine. At times their elevation was in hundreds of feet; at other times they came down quite low, detached members alighting. The clouds of them would be so dense as to appear quite black, with the edges violet, till they thinned down and faded away into the clear blue sky.

For several days Jerusalem was thus

visited, causing much excitement among the populace. The destruction wrought by these flying clouds was enormous, more especially as the country was cut off from all outside supplies, and fodder and food were in great demand for the troops. When, therefore, the flying locusts left, everyone breathed a sigh of relief, but far worse was to follow.

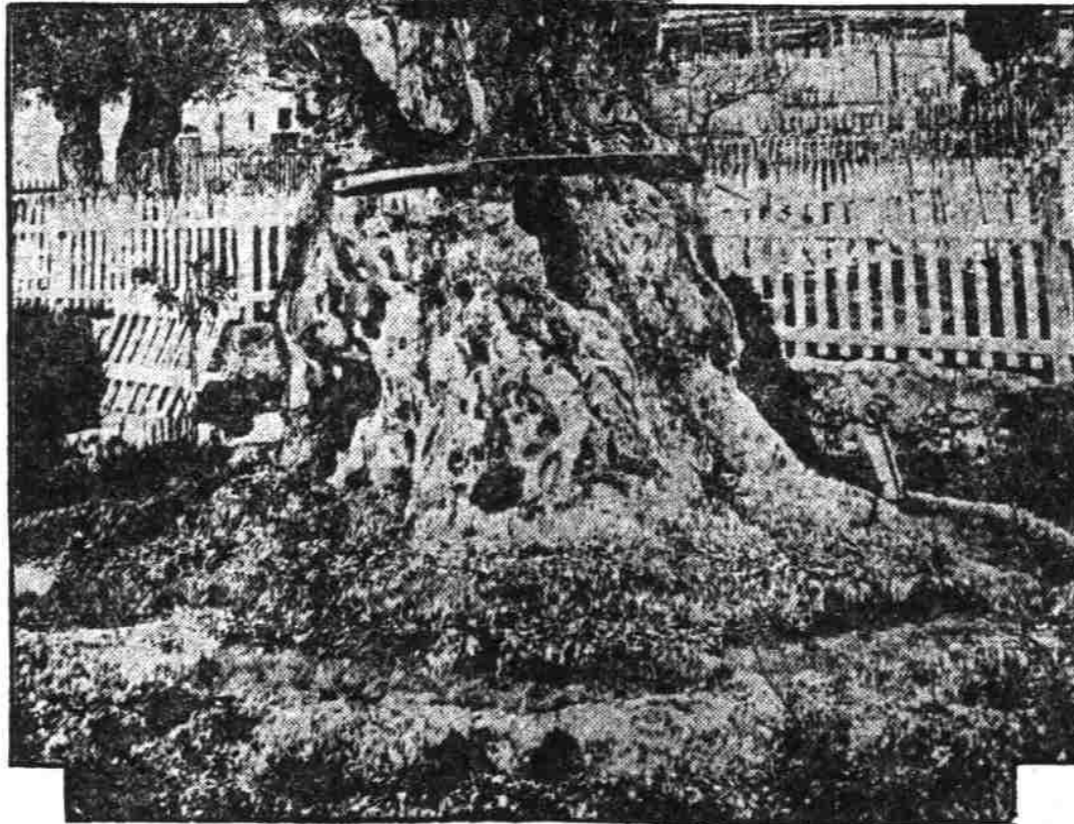
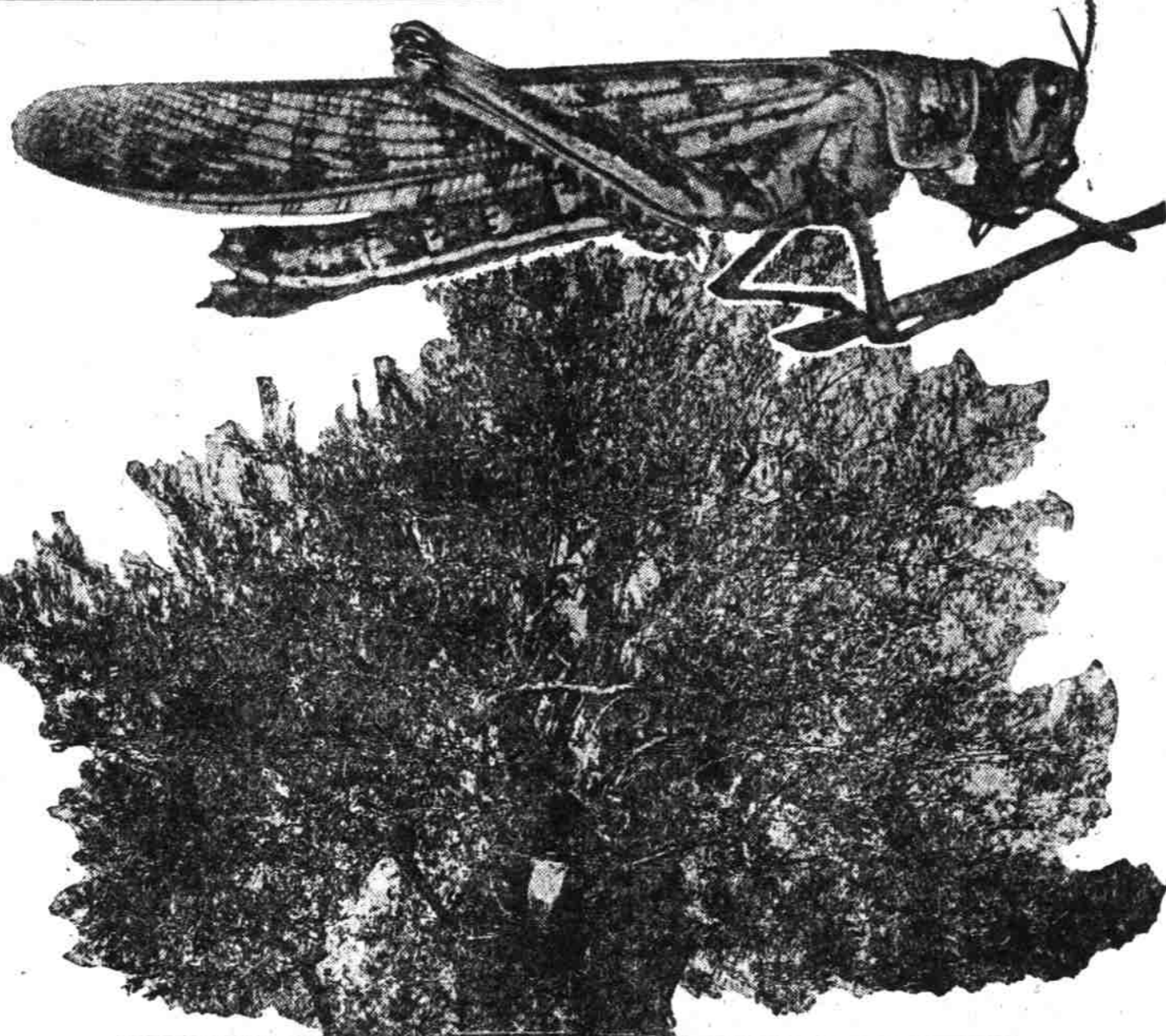
Before the pests disappeared they laid their eggs, literally by the hundreds of millions, all over the land. With her ovipositors the female is able to sink a hole as much as four inches deep through hard, compact soil, such as would try the strength of human muscles even with iron tools.

Once the alarming extent to which these eggs were laid was realized the authorities made a proclamation, requiring each male person from sixteen years to sixty to gather eleven pounds weight of the eggs. It is estimated by competent authorities that as many as sixty-five to seventy-five thousand locust eggs are concentrated in a square meter of soil. Allowing for a loss of thirty per cent in hatching, some sixty thousand destroyers can emerge from a space thirty-nine inches square.

Scarcely had Jerusalem got over the excitement of the search for eggs than word poured in that the country was teeming with the young larvae. When first hatched they were quite black and resembled large ants, having no signs of wing; but as they developed, passing through one stage into another, they cast their little outer skins, now no longer large enough to contain the growing body. Thus they pass through several moults, of which, however, but three stages are plainly distinguishable—the larva or wingless stage, the pupa with small wings, or properly wing sacks developing, and the full-fledged flying locust.

Once hatched the little fellows seemed to hold together for a few days, till a little developed and in sufficient numbers, when they start their forward march of from 400 to 600 feet per day, and clearing the ground of any vegetation before them. It was observed that these new broods instinctively went in the reverse direction to which their flying parents had come, making practically for the northeast. None but those who have seen them can imagine their countless multitudes and the destruction they wrought.

Countless numbers of them poured into the broad walled road leading into Jerusalem from the west, past the United States consulate to the Jaffa Gate. For three or four days an incessant and unending stream filled the road from side to side like numberless troops marching on parade, and in spite of the traffic at this junction, which to this city is like lower Broadway to New York, their ranks, al-



"El Butini," the Most Famous of the Garden of Gethsemane's Eight Olive Trees, Under Which the Saviour Is Supposed to Have Walked. This Great Tree, Weakened by the Locust Plague, Has Recently Collapsed. ("When 'El Butini' Falls, Then Falls the Turk," Runs the Legend. (And Above) One of the Largest Forms of the Locust Which Swept in Clouds Over the Holy Land.

though thinned, entered the ancient gateway and the New Breach. The goat-around "David's Tower" was so filled till the dry earth seemed to be a living mass. Up and by the city walls and the castle they climbed to their very heights.

It was the 28th day of May when the larvae, already transforming itself into the pupa stage, reached the quiet of the Garden of Gethsemane, now in its full Summer bloom; but scarcely had a day passed before every tender thing was consumed, and even the leaves of the woody cypress and of the olive trees, the latter about one thousand years old, were attacked. The Garden was ravaged.

The entire city of Jerusalem, with the

exception of the portion within the walls, fell a prey to the ravages of the creeping pests, while the entire land from "Dan to Beersheba" was laid desolate.

Fortunately, by the time the young broods had hatched, a large portion of the grain crops had already been harvested, but the fruit and Summer crops were ruined. The native vineyards and orchards are always planted in perfect confusion. Between the vines one finds figs, olives, pomegranates, quinces and other trees. These were the places at which the locusts naturally halted, for the rapidity of their marches or their stops seemed all to be regulated by the amount of forage encountered.

How Storms of Grasshoppers Destroyed the Trees and Plants of the Sacred Place Wherein the Saviour Walked Just as They Did When Moses Sent Them to Plague the Wicked Pharaoh

Once entering a "vineyard," the sprawling vines would, in the shortest time, be nothing but bare bark, the long dark stems lying flat on the ground, much resembling snakes. Fig leaves, perhaps of all things, best suited their taste, and when once a tree fell a prey to them the ground about would be literally layers deep, and the trunk so covered with crawlers as to make it a bright yellow color.

Disastrous as they were in the country, equally obnoxious they became about the homes, crawling up thick upon the walls, and, squeezing in through cracks of closed doors or windows, entered the very dwelling rooms. When unable to find an entrance they often scaled the walls to the roofs and then getting into the houses by throwing themselves into the open courts such as most Oriental houses are built around. Women frantically swept the walls and roofs of their homes, but to no avail. In Nazareth it required several hundred men busily sweeping the locusts together and destroying them, and eight donkeys to carry away to nearby fields the miniature carcasses. Stores were closed and some houses even abandoned.

About our homes in Jerusalem the pests became so thick that one could not help crushing them with every step. They even fell into one's shirt collar from the walls above, and crawled up onto one's person. Women were especially troubled with them, and on one occasion a lady, after being away from home for half a day, returned with one hundred and ten of the creatures concealed within her skirts. Whenever touched, or especially when finding themselves caught within one's clothes, they exuded from their mouth a dark fluid, an irritant to the skin and soiling the garments in a most disgusting manner. Imagine the feeling, and I speak from experience, with a dozen or two such creatures, over an inch long, with saw-like legs and rough bodies, making a race course of your back!

While in the pupa stage, that is, with their wings only partially developed and unable to fly, it was comparatively easy to trap them as they marched over the country in long, endless columns. In their path would be sunk a bottomless box with the inside lined with shining tin up which the locusts cannot crawl.

The fighters now make two long lines, one on each side of the trap. To noise and racket the locusts seemed only to turn a deaf ear, but a large flag—the darker the better—with which to cast a deep shadow upon the ground, proved to be the most formidable tool one could employ to make them move in the desired direction.

After two weeks' steady and relentless work the fight to save the fields was given

up and efforts concentrated upon protecting our homes and garden plots. Was it a losing fight? The natives, who predicted that it was useless to combat "Allah's army," surely would have said it was. From the standpoint of dollars and cents' worth saved to ourselves, it certainly was. But when we calculated the tons' weight and countless numbers of the pests eliminated from the coming stages of disaster, to say nothing of the value of a good example and the engrossing interest in observing their habits and development, we felt that the results more than outweighed the costs and efforts.

In the early days of June a few scattered locusts were seen about the tree tops of a decided red color. Some supposed them to be a kind of grasshopper, for they were so different in color to the fliers that first came and laid their eggs that it was difficult to detect in them the resemblance to the parents. A few days later the air was filled with quantities of these new flying locusts with the thin transparent wings, producing the effect of a large-flaked snowstorm.

It was at first hard to realize that these had not, as most supposed, flown in from elsewhere, but right under our eyes had been transformed from the small creeping locusts, millions of which we had destroyed. During the day they kept busily hovering about from tree to tree, or alighting on some green patch, while in the evening they settled for the night by myriads upon the olive trees, almost covering them and transforming the dark green foliage into a distinctive red appearance.

Up to this time the olive orchards had suffered comparatively little. The creeping locusts had not seemed to care for the tough bitter leaves while better things were at hand, and as a rule only severely damaged individual trees where other food was scarce. But now that these ravenously hungry, freshly moulted fliers appeared, food had already become scarce, obliging the creepers to seek the heretofore despised olive, crawling up the trunks layers deep.

Between the two they stripped every leaf, berry and even the tender bark, leaving only, where such existed, the green tufts of the poisonous mistletoe.

It was then that the famous olives of the Garden of Gethsemane were ravaged. Likewise, every variety of tree was attacked and stripped, with the sole exception of the Persian lilac and the oleander bushes. The devastation was complete, and only those resident in the country at the time can appreciate the sufferings and hardships the locusts caused. All vegetables and fruits virtually disappeared as by magic. Olives and olive oil were almost unobtainable. Were it not for the arrival of a ship load of flour and other food commodities from America the condition of the populace would have been serious.