

THE PRE-RAPHAELITE TRAVELLER'S WIFE:
THE LITERARY AND VISUAL ART OF
MARION EDITH HOLMAN HUNT

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“Is that all?” asked young Humphrey at first sight of Jerusalem. “[Is] this the aim and end of their travels, the dream-land whence has been brought so many of their father’s stories which were the delight of winter evenings and summer rambles at home?” Humphrey’s disappointment of the physical features of Jerusalem, which at his impression was like “a little village,” is shared by his two sisters Sylvia and Phoebe, all of whom are the children of the Lawsons, a British family embarking on a journey to Palestine in Marion Edith Holman Hunt’s children story, *Children at Jerusalem: A Sketch of Modern Life in Syria* (1881). This work of fiction credited to Mrs. Holman Hunt (née Waugh, 1846-1931) clearly corresponds with the true experiences of the Holman Hunts in their several journeys throughout the second half of the nineteenth century to Ottoman Syria and especially to Palestine.¹ The story is dedicated to the author’s children Cyril and Gladys “in remembrance of many hours, sad and happy, grave and gay, spent together in Jerusalem.” The Holman Hunts sailed to Jerusalem the first time as a family (William, his son Cyril, and Edith) around Christmas time in 1875 onboard the steamer *Delhi*. The fictional Lawsons’ journey begins as well on Christmas onboard the *Sphinx*. First arrival on land at Alexandria reveals the author’s main interest in depicting the lives of local people, in particular of the women and children, leaving the geographical depiction of tourist sites as a secondary aim. The first sight of Alexandria’s bazaars sets the mesmerized Lawson children on a frantic run from stall to stall, admiring the colours, goods, and the merchants’ oriental appearance. The encounter with hectic bazaar life typically reminds an English child, such as Sylvia, of *The Arabian Nights* stories, a bestseller in nineteenth-century England. However, the fantasy-like scenery and the display of richness is in contrast to Sylvia’s encounter with a local Egyptian, a little beggar girl who sells roses (20-22). The indistinguishability between rich and poor is a recurring theme, as exemplified by the depiction of a group of poor women and children in Jerusalem dressed in their