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ARTICLE IX.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON PALESTINE.

By Rev. Samuel Wolcott, Longmeadow, Mass.

The Coast of the Dead Sea.

In a short notice of some recent Maps of Palestine, in a former Number of this Journal,¹ we referred incidentally to a locality on the western coast of the Dead Sea, towards its southern extremity, the ancient Masada, which the writer had visited, in company with an English artist, during his residence in Palestine. The excursion led us to traverse a portion of the coast of that sea, which no modern traveller had passed over.

The position just named was found to command a complete view of the sea; the map of which, in Robinson's Biblical Researches, was subjected to the severe test of being compared with the object itself, as it lay directly under our eye, more than a thousand feet below us. The testimony which has been given to the public, respecting the credit with which the work sustained that test, need not be repeated here. It is certainly surprising that it should have been left for American research, at so late a period, to define with any degree of correctness the shape of this singular sheet of water; as it is gratifying that it has finally been done so accurately. The annexed sketch gives more minutely and correctly the portion of the coast already referred to, which had not before come under personal examination. It is merely a general outline, drawn from the individual recollections of the writer, and without any reference to bearings and distances noted at the time and subsequently published by Professor Robinson, and which, with a more particular description of the localities, can be consulted by the reader.² We subjoin a few explanations, and cannot forbear expressing a hope that the time may be near, when some enterprising traveller will execute an undertaking which combines so much, both of scientific and sacred interest, and explore the shores and sound the depths of this remarkable sea. The Wadys here given are all dry in the summer season. During the rains, the sands are washed down and form projecting points in the sea. We observed drift wood in various places along the coast, indicating the different stages at which the water had stood. The Birket el-Khûlîl, ('Pool of the Friend,'—a name given to Abraham, and hence to Hebron, to which this probably refers,) is a mere depression in the sand, into which the waters flow when they are raised by the winter torrents, and evaporating, leave a saline deposit, which the natives gather for domestic use. The coast north

¹ Vol. II. p. 585 sq.

² Robinson's Bibliotheca Sacra, No. I. pp. 62—68.

of Masada, like the opposite peninsula, is a sand-bank or shoal, and from every part of it the rock on which the fortress was built, which projects beyond the ridge and towers above it, is a conspicuous and imposing object. We have marked the path by which our guide conducted us to Engedi.



Masada.

As our readers have before them, for the first time, a definite view of the position of Masada, we shall be justified, in connection with the accompanying sketch, in calling their attention more particularly to this once important and still interesting point. It will be remembered by the readers of the *Biblical Researches*,¹ that Robinson and Smith had a view of this rock from the high cliff over 'Ain Jidy, and with the aid of a telescope discovered ruins on its summit. They ascertained that it bore among the natives the name of Sebbeh, but could not conjecture what

¹ Vol. II. p. 239 sq.

the site had anciently been, and proceeded north without visiting it. It afterwards occurred to them that it might be Masada; and the reasons for this opinion, as given in the Researches, are quite convincing. Nothing was needed but the evidence of actual inspection, without which, of course, there could not be absolute certainty.

The spot thus discovered and waiting to be identified, though not mentioned in the Scriptures, was from its natural position, and from the place it had occupied in the earlier annals of the country, fitted to engage the attention of any one interested in such investigations, and who had an opportunity of pursuing them. Nothing was known of it, except the representations of Josephus.

He had described it, (in oriental style, of course,) as an isolated rock, of large circumference and vast height, encompassed on every side with valleys so profound that the eye could not reach their bottom. It was so abrupt as to be inaccessible except at two points, one towards the Dead Sea and the other on the opposite side. The ascent in these places was extremely difficult; it being necessary to proceed cautiously with one foot before the other, and cling to the face of the rock, with the certainty, in case the foot should slip, of being precipitated into a yawning chasm, of such depth as to quell the courage and infuse terror into the mind of every beholder. After proceeding in this way about thirty furlongs, the summit was reached, which was not a peak, but a plain of considerable extent. This is the substance of Josephus' description of the natural features of the place.

His history of it as a fort is briefly as follows. One of the Jewish high priests first built a fortress on it, and called it Masada. Afterwards king Herod, perceiving the advantages of the position, erected here extensive fortifications. He built a wall around the entire summit, with thirty-eight towers. He also built a citadel and a palace, which he fitted up and furnished expensively; and cut capacious reservoirs for water in the rock. The object of Herod was to secure a safe retreat for himself, in case of imminent danger; and it served his purpose, for when Jerusalem was besieged by Antigonus, he escaped with his family, with great difficulty, and placed them here for a season, having made provision for a long residence, if necessary. It came at length by treachery, during the war of Vespasian, into the possession of the Licarii, a set of Jewish banditti, under the command of one Eleazer, a powerful man, who had resolved to submit on no terms to the Romans, and who treated as enemies those of his countrymen that did, and plundered their property. They found in it the provisions which Herod had laid up; arms for ten thousand men, and immense stores of grain, wine, oil and fruit. Josephus would have us believe that the fruits were fair, ripe and fresh, as when they were deposited there nearly one hundred years before, and argues 'that the air was here the cause of their enduring so long, this fortress being so high, and so free from the mixture of all terrene and muddy particles of matter.' Every other hold in Palestine had yielded to the Roman legions, and the capture of this, the strongest of all, was reserved for their crowning achievement. The Procurator, Flavius Silva, collected his troops from all parts of the country for the

expedition against it. Arrived at the spot, he first built a stone wall entirely round the rock, that none of the besieged might escape. He then with incredible labor, at a point where the rock formed a sloping ridge, raised an embankment two hundred cubits high, and upon this another of fifty cubits, and a tower still higher, fitted with iron, from which he was able, with his machines and weapons, to reach the garrison. The resistance was desperate and protracted, but becoming ineffectual; and at the close of a day's assaults, which had made it apparent that the place would be carried by storm on the next, Eleazer made an impassioned appeal to his men, urging them to save themselves from the power of the Romans in the only way that was now possible to them, by self-sacrifice. The suggestion was adopted with a frenzied ardor, and every man proceeded to slay his own wife and children, having first tenderly embraced them. They then selected by lot ten of their number to be the executioners of the rest, and lying down by the side of their respective families, they offered their necks for the appointed stroke. The ten, having despatched their comrades, cast lots for one of their number to do the same office for the remainder. Having done his work, the survivor examined all the bodies to see that none were alive, and set fire to the palace, and then ran his sword through himself and fell down dead by his relatives. Nine hundred and sixty individuals were thus slaughtered. It was their intention not to leave a single soul of their number to come under the Roman dominion; but two women and five children having secreted themselves, were overlooked, and escaped to tell the tale. The massacre was made in the night; and when the Roman soldiers, who renewed the siege in the morning and were amazed at the unexpected solitude and silence, entered the fortifications and beheld the tragic spectacle, they are said to have been much affected, and 'could take no pleasure in the fact, though it were done to their enemies.'

We are not aware of any subsequent mention of the place as one of which the position was known, by historians or travellers. It appears to have remained in entire obscurity for eighteen centuries, until it was observed at a distance by our countrymen. It was, therefore, no slight gratification to us, while spending a winter in Jerusalem, to be able to accept the invitation of our English friend to accompany him to the spot. We found the rock accessible at a single point; and to the account of our examination of the place, and of the general correspondence of its ruins with the preceding descriptions of Josephus, reference has already been made. In the sketch before given, we have marked the Roman wall of circumvallation referred to in the narrative, and indicated in it the two principal encampments, the walls of which are also standing. It was built at a safe distance from the rock. On the side towards the Dead Sea, we launched some of the large stones which Herod had laid in the wall on the brow of the cliff some twelve hundred feet above it, none of which quite reached it, though making the most stupendous bounds. We regarded it as a striking illustration of the Roman perseverance that subdued the world, which could sit down deliberately in such a desert, and commence a siege with such a work, and with such military engines as were then known could scale such a

fortress. It brought the siege before us with an air of reality, and vividly recalled to our minds, as we looked down upon it, the awful immolation which had taken place on the very spot where we stood. This was the conclusion of the war in which Jerusalem was seen encompassed with armies, the winding up in blood of the drama in which were enacted the scenes of great tribulation foretold by the Saviour; and terribly, to the last, was realized by the devoted people the fearful imprecation of their fathers, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'

Route from Mount Lebanon to Bâalbek.

In connection with notices referred to in the preceding pages, Prof. Robinson communicated to the public a few observations which were made on Bâalbek and the Cedars.¹ The notes taken on the journey to these sites were not sent to him, because we had no instrument for taking bearings; without which they could be of little value. On consulting the maps, it appears that a few of our specifications, particularly of distances, might serve to correct or define a few positions. We therefore copy the following notes on a part of the route from the memorandum book in which they were entered at the time; not as possessing any interest for the general reader, but because they may be of some slight service to the cartographer. The excursion was made in company with others.

Sept. 13, 1842. Left el-Abadyeh (a village in Mount Lebanon about three hours from Beirût) at 8h. in the morning, on horseback. At 10h. 30' reached Khân 'Ain Saufeh, on the Damascus road, and at 11h. Khân Medairej, near the head of the large valley of the Metn, and commanding a fine view of it. Left at 2h. and had a noble view of the Metn from its head, one of the finest inland mountain prospects. At 3h. came in sight of the Bukâa, on Cælo-Syria Plain. At 4h. left the Damascus road on our right, and below us, further to the right, the ruined Kûlah Kubb Ellas, on the border of the Plain, surrounded by a grove of poplars. Continued north along the edge of the Plain, crossing some small streams which flowed into it, and which were feeding mills and irrigating fields of green Indian corn. The brooks, the grain and vegetation, and the meadow-like plain reminded us, more than any part of the country that we had seen, of New England. The Anti-Lebanon range of mountains is less bold, but more graceful than the Lebanon. Having passed a small village on our left and another on our right, we reached Zahleh at 6h., and pitched our tent in a quiet nook in the hill-side, a few rods south-east of the town. The latter is imbedded in a valley, about a mile west of the Plain. A copious stream runs through the bed of the valley, which is full of green poplars, and has a picturesque appearance. The town is compactly built, and the houses have mostly an external coat of whitewash, but like other Syrian villages, its interior is crowded, filthy and wretched. Our path, a little before reaching the town, had been lined with vineyards, protected by hedges of the hawthorn rose.

¹ *Bibliotheca Sacra* (First Series) No. 1. pp. 84—87.

Sept. 14. Left our encampment at 7h., and descended the valley through the poplar grove, and by the side of the babbling brook. Passing at its opening the village Malaka, with its orchards and gardens, and proceeding north, we reached in half an hour the small village of Kerak, where we halted to take a look at the reputed tomb of Noah. It was shown to us by the man who has charge of it; in a covered building, constructed like other Muslim tombs, and covered with a green pall. It is more than one hundred feet in length, and is claimed to represent the exact height of the Antediluvian Patriarch!¹ Our route hence lay along the western border of the Bukáa, which became narrower and more undulating. We passed three or four indifferent hamlets, and along fields of melons, beans, and maize. Half an hour before reaching Báalbek, we came to the remains of an octagonal structure, supported by eight columns of polished red granite, which had probably been brought away from the temple, and placed here to form a shrine for some Muslim saint. We reached Báalbek at 2h., and passed directly through the village to the Rás el-Ain. This is perhaps the most copious fountain in the country, and its waters were cool and limpid. We threw ourselves on the green sward by its side, under the shade of a willow, after a hot and fatiguing ride, and refreshed ourselves with draughts of the sweet water, and some clusters of fresh delicious grapes which were brought us from the neighboring vineyard. This would have been a pleasant spot for our encampment, but on account of its distance from the ruins, which lie at the other extremity of the town, we returned and pitched our tent near some walnut trees west of the grand temple, and proceeded to make our observations.

ARTICLE X.

SELECT NOTICES AND INTELLIGENCE.

The *Allgemeines Repertorium für theologische Literatur und Kirchliche Statistik*, formerly edited by Rheinwald, has passed into the hands of H. Reuter. The present editor has furnished in the September number of the last year a critical notice of the third part or volume of Ritter's History of Christian philosophy. The first four volumes of Ritter's great work embrace the complete history of ancient pagan philosophy. With the fifth commences the history of Christian philosophy, which is con-

¹ The tomb of Eve is also shown by the Muslims in Arabia. It was visited by Burckhardt, who represents it as "about four feet long" and as "resembling the tomb of Noah;" (*Travels in Arabia*, Vol. I. p. 25). There would seem to be no ground for the comparison; and it would be strange, in connection with the above, that the Orientals should assign so small a stature to "the Mother of all living." We venture the suggestion that the number entered by Burckhardt in his notes was 40, and that it was abbreviated by his editors, supposing it to be a mistake.