

ART. IV.—THE BATTLE OF GIBEON—I.

THE Book of Joshua, as a record of the early occupation of Palestine by the Israelites, is an intensely interesting composition. It appeals to our minds in various ways. In our youth we looked upon it as the campaign story-book of the Bible, yet something infinitely truer than a novel, the discrepancies of which young minds easily account for by relegating them to the sphere of fiction. And though we began by being told not to doubt the truth of the Bible, we discover, as we grow older, that the more we study the words of the text the clearer does the meaning appear in a manner afforded by the study of no other volume. And the Book of Joshua, containing as it does incidents which, sooner or later, present to our minds problems more or less inconsistent with the intellectual degree of reasoning at which we are conscious of having arrived, does not so much affect us as a record to be doubted or disbelieved, as strengthen our conviction that there is some misconception which we have all along been entertaining, but which is capable of correct interpretation could we but know what it is. With all its marvels it bears the impress of truth, and will submit to the minutest scrutiny without losing its Divine claim, the scrutiny invariably tending to disperse the obscuring clouds from before the clear light that we know is behind. The study may be unsuccessful at many points, and yet how often has what we have thought inexplicable yielded to some test we had not been led to apply before, the result being so ineffably reassuring as to afford a bright pledge of future success. And, of all the chapters in the Book of Joshua, the tenth is perhaps the one which contains more difficulties than any other. It is this chapter on which we venture now to offer some suggestions.

But before proceeding to indicate the line we propose taking, let us for a moment note what the difficulties are that present themselves. First, there is the reconciliation of the direction of the rout of the enemy with the geography of the places mentioned, many of which have been identified. Then comes the serious difficulty, in the eyes of the scientist, of the sun and moon standing still. Again, there is the—not very valid, but nevertheless demanding explanation—perplexity about Joshua being cognizant of the geography of the country he had never seen beyond Gibeon, arising from his mention of the Valley of Ajjalon. There is also the difficulty of understanding Joshua's motive in apostrophizing *both* sun and

moon, because he could hardly have desired the light of both at the same time; that is to say, the light of the moon is of no use during daylight, and if the day were lengthened night became day, and where was the need of moonlight? Then there is the difficulty about the physical capability of the Israelite army being able to sustain the fatigue of a quick night-march of at least five hours, followed by a running fight of about thirty-six more, that being the period we have reason to ascribe to the whole action up to the execution of the five kings, if the sun's light were prolonged for an additional day. Next, there is some explanation required of how Joshua carried on the campaign beyond Makkedah without reinforcements till he had subdued the whole of Southern Palestine, with the original body of troops that he had hastily mobilized for the relief of Gibeon. And, lastly, there is the perplexity about the phrase in the twenty-first verse, "none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel," where it is hard to realize who but Israelites could have returned "*in peace*" to Joshua. So that it really appears as if the whole chapter bristles with difficulties, if not improbabilities.

How are we to set about the solution of these perplexities? Does not the first idea that occurs to us point to the necessity of our being quite clear as to the geography of the country spoken of in this chapter, so that we may be able to trace the line of Joshua's march, the probable site of the battle, and the direction of the rout? Then, we ought to be familiar with the history of the places mentioned, and the events which led to the battle and its consequences. It would also be instructive to follow Joshua's and the enemy's movements from a military point of view. And then we might advantageously devote our attention to the phenomenon of the sun and moon standing still, if by any means that phenomenon and science may be reconciled. We shall therefore endeavour to offer facilities for inquiry in these directions, by giving some geographical, historical, strategical, and astronomical details.

GEOGRAPHICAL.

The position of each of the six important places mentioned—viz., Gilgal, Gibeon, Beth-horon, Aijalon, Azekah, and Makkedah—ought certainly to be found out by us.

Gilgal.—The site of Gilgal has not been absolutely identified yet, but it will be seen, for the purposes of our inquiry, that, owing to its propinquity to Jericho, the relative position of the latter to the other places will be quite sufficient. Wherever Gilgal was, it was in Jericho's vicinity, probably to the south-east or east, the site of which town still bears its old name

Yarihu under the Arabic form Er Riha, so that Gilgal could not have been more, certainly, than nineteen or twenty miles, in a straight line, distant from Gibeon in a south by west direction.

Gibeon (Bib. Dict.).—"The situation of Gibeon has, fortunately, been recovered with as great certainty as any ancient site in Palestine. . . . Retaining its ancient name almost intact, El Jib stands on the northernmost of one of these mamelons, just at the place where the road to the sea parts into two branches, the one by the lower level of the Wady Suleiman, the other by the heights of the Beth-horon to Gimzo, Lydda, and Joppa."

Beth-horon (Bib. Dict.).—"There is no room for doubt that the two Beth-horons still survive in the modern villages of *Beit-'ur*, *et-takta*, and *el-foka*, which were first noticed by Dr. Clarke. Besides the similarity of the names, and the fact that the two places are still designated as 'upper' and 'lower,' all the requirements of the narrative are fulfilled in this identification. . . . From Gibeon to the Upper Beth-horon is a distance of about four miles of broken ascent and descent. The ascent, however, predominates, and this, therefore, appears to be the 'going up' to Beth-horon which formed the first stage of Joshua's pursuit. With the upper village the descent commences, the road rough and difficult even for the mountain-paths of Palestine. This rough descent from the upper to the lower *Beit-ur* is the 'going down to Beth-horon' of the Bible narrative." The writer is here under the impression that this "going up" to Beth-horon was the first stage of Joshua's pursuit; but we think from the narrative that it must have been the last.

Aijalon (Bib. Dict.).—"The town has been discovered by Dr. Robinson in the modern *Yálo*, a little to the north of the Joppa road, about fourteen miles out of Jerusalem." Its position on the latest map (Pal. Ex. Fund) is about nine miles west of Gibeon in almost the same latitude, with its valley extending from somewhat east to mostly north of it.

Azekah (Bib. Dict.).—"A town of Judah with dependent villages lying in the Shefelah, or rich agricultural plain. It is most clearly defined as being near Shochoh (1 Sam. xvii. 1). Joshua's pursuit of the Canaanites after the battle of Beth-horon extended to Azekah. . . . The position of Azekah has not yet been recognised." But the Shefelah, or rich agricultural plain of Judah, is considerably south of Gibeon; and yet the writer of the above seems to think that Joshua's pursuit of the enemy to Beth-horon was on the way to Azekah. This, we think, is a misconception, which in all due courtesy we shall venture later on to correct. The valley near to

Azekah (1 Sam. xvii. 1), which "there seems no reason to doubt is the Valley of the Terebinth," has been pretty well identified, and may therefore be sufficient in informing us of the southerly position of Azekah on the way to Makkedah.

Makkedah (Bib. Dict.).—"Its situation has hitherto eluded discovery. The report of Eusebius and Jerome is that it lay eight miles to the east of Eleutheropolis, *Beit-Jibrin*, a position irreconcilable with every requirement of the narrative." The writer of the above is, we think, led to doubt the position given by Eusebius and Jerome because it places Makkedah so far south, and, certainly in the opposite direction to Joshua's rout of the enemy over Beth-horon, which was west-north-west of Gibeon. But are we quite sure that Joshua did pursue the enemy to Makkedah? Until this is quite clear from the text, we should not have impugned authority so topographically given. For Eusebius' and Jerome's Makkedah does not appear to be irreconcilable, but, on the other hand, agrees with every requirement of the narrative.

The accompanying diagram shows the correct positions, at any rate, of Jericho, Gibeon, Beth-horon, and Ajalon, about



which there is no doubt; as also the probable positions of Gilgal, Azekah, and Makkedah, the first of these three places being close to Jericho, the second being in the Shefelah of Judah, and close to the spot described in 1 Sam. xvii. 1 as the boundary of the Philistines' battlefield; the third is where Eusebius and Jerome place it. We shall see if the narrative itself does not bear out these positions.

The other places mentioned are Jerusalem, Ai, Hebron, Eglon, Gaza, Jarmuth, Lachish, Libnah, Gezer, Debir, Kadesh-

barnea, and the country of Goshen. The positions of the first five are known, while those of the others are still open to conjecture, though Eusebius and Jerome have fixed the sites of Lachish and Libnah. Jarmuth is probably *Yarmuk* in the Shefelah, visited by Dr. Robinson. "Perhaps the strongest claims for identity with Gezer are put forward by a village called *Yasur*, four or five miles east of Joppa on the road to *Ramleh* and *Lydd*" (Bib. Dict.). Debir is the name of three places in Palestine, two of which are apparently in Judah: (a) Debir, also called *Kirjath-sepher*, south-south-west of Hebron; (b) Debir "near the 'Valley of Achor,' and therefore in the complication of hill and ravine behind Jericho" (Bib. Dict.). We can only say that *Kadesh-barnea* is about the southern boundary of Palestine, while the country of Goshen is evidently some tract "apparently between the south country and the lowlands of Judah" (Bib. Dict.). With reference to the above places, we think that Debir (b) is perhaps the Debir which Joshua destroyed when returning from Hebron on his way to Gilgal after finishing his campaign to the south. But all of the names belong to the southern country, except, perhaps, that of Gezer.

HISTORICAL.

The inquiry in this direction embraces a concise account of what we know of Gilgal and of Gibeon, with the circumstances that led to the battle and its consequences. The large cantonment of Gilgal evidently presented peculiar qualifications for the base of Joshua's operations in the occupation of Palestine. We can imagine that the general, having himself been chosen by Moses as one of the twelve spies sent from *Kadesh-barnea*, would in his turn choose men specially suited for their ability and judgment to "view the land and Jericho," and to bring a reliable report, not only of what the state of feeling in the country was, but also to reconnoitre positions for the best possible camp. It is, therefore, probable that the two spies who were harboured by Rahab, and one of whom may have been Salmon, a prince of Judah—for he afterwards married her, and was the ancestor of our Lord—had reconnoitred the position of Gilgal as being most favourable; because as soon as the passage of Jordan had been effected the whole host of Israel proceeded straight to this place, to form, not only a temporary halting-ground for an attack on Jericho, but a permanent camp as a base of operations in every direction, as we know from its subsequent history. The first mention, therefore, that we have of Gilgal is when Joshua occupied the place after crossing Jordan, on the tenth day of the first

month (iv. 20). It was here that the first Passover in the Promised Land was kept, on the fourth day after reaching it from Jordan (v. 10). This was the place where the general circumcision of the Israelites took place, and from which circumstance it derived its name of Gilgal. The daily investment of Jericho was made from this camp, and to it all Israel returned even after the city had been captured on the seventh day. From this camp the ill-fated expedition set out to reduce Ai, and in this very camp the culprit Achan was condemned as the cause of that failure, and put to death in the neighbouring Valley of Achor. The second and successful expedition against Ai was also made from Gilgal, and to it Joshua and all Israel returned after the capture of that city. To this same camp came the deputation of Gibeonites who succeeded in making peace with the invaders and obtaining immunity from destruction; and from Gilgal the children of Israel took three days to reach Gibeon and its dependencies to arrange formal alliance and suzerainty. It was to Gilgal that the Gibeonites sent an urgent appeal to Joshua for immediate aid against the powerful combination of the five kings that had come up against their city, which appeal was answered promptly by Joshua in a rapid night-march to Gibeon. *And it was to Gilgal that Joshua returned after the appalling destruction by the Lord's hand of the enemy at Beth-horon, and before the execution of the five kings at Makkedah* (x. 15). The next thing we hear of Joshua was at Makkedah, where the execution of the five kings took place, from which he began the operations against the southern fortresses till he had subdued them, returning finally to Gilgal (x. 43). And after the whole country had been conquered, the demarcation of the land among the tribes was begun at Gilgal, and here Caleb received the charter of his inheritance of Hebron. It was after three tribes had been settled in their possessions, and when yet seven remained to be awarded possession, that the tabernacle and ark were removed from Gilgal to Shiloh. Thenceforward Gilgal ceased to be important—at any rate, as far as military considerations were concerned, though as a place of sanctity it is mentioned in connection with Samuel's history, and was also one of David's halting-places on his return to Jerusalem after Absalom's defeat at Mahanaim.

The first mention that is made of Gibeon is when the inhabitants sent a deputation to Joshua which by a ruse deceived him and the Israelites into granting them immunity from extermination (ix.). It is there described as a city of the Hivites (ix. 7), of being the head of a community of cities, its dependencies being Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath-jearim, all of which were included in Joshua's

charter to Gibeon. It was a huge and royal city, larger even than Ai, which had once defeated Joshua, and its army was regarded by the Amorites as a formidable one (x. 2). After Joshua had taken Jericho, the stronger fortresses—of which we have reason to believe that Jerusalem and Lachish, at any rate, considered themselves impregnable—would most probably have defied the invader in their own strongholds, especially after Joshua's defeat at Ai; but on hearing of the capture of that city they saw it was necessary to take the initiative and unite in a combination against the victor (ix. 13). Their preparations, therefore, for taking the field in strong opposition were begun before Gibeon made peace with Joshua, and we have no reason to doubt that Gibeon itself formed one of the confederacy, being a Hivite stronghold (ix. 7). We may then easily judge of the consternation of the united forces when they learned of the defection of a fortress which they had regarded as one of their strongest, their consternation being enhanced by the subsequent attitude of Joshua towards Gibeon on becoming aware of how he had been beguiled, as now no further chance of a compromise with the conqueror was possible under any circumstances. Their position was not only desperate, but one of extreme exasperation against the traitorous Gibeon, and they determined upon the best move they could make, which was to take Gibeon by a *coup de main* before Joshua could come to its relief. The direct cause of the battle of Gibeon, therefore, was its sudden investment by the confederacy of the five kings in force. We are distinctly told that it was at this very city that Joshua practically defeated the allies, though the victory had to be followed up beyond it during the rest of the day. We are not told anything more about Gibeon after the battle, except in allusion to that event.

STRATEGICAL.

The fact of Gibeon having made peace with Joshua was looked upon by the rest of the confederacy as a distinct turning of the balance of power into his hands, considering the importance of the place; and the movement to snatch it out of his grasp without warning, during the temporary lull in the campaign after the capture of Ai, was so well concerted that it appears to have taken the Gibeonites, whom we should have expected to find prepared for an emergency of the kind, by surprise. In order to understand how such a movement could have been carried out, we should be familiar with the physical features of the locality, so as to realize this *coup* thoroughly from a military point of view, putting our-

selves, as it were, in the place of the confederate army, and fixing upon our plan of campaign. We are apt, perhaps, in this enlightened age, to think little of the military capabilities of these tribes in comparison with those of our own times, but we have not much reason to congratulate ourselves on more than the accessories to warfare which the inevitable progress of centuries has been improving for us; while, on the other hand, we may often have had reason to be ashamed of strategic mistakes such as none of those leaders would have been guilty of. In such tactics as are founded on perfect acquaintance with ground and position, and as depend on a thorough reliance on the comparatively limited material at their disposal, they had probably more ability to boast of than we are at first sight likely to give them credit for. But in Hebrew warfare the Divine arm was always so much in evidence, that, though we must give their commanders every allowance for knowing their business, we somehow feel we must not include their nation in any comparison with others. And, in order to realize clearly the extent of the Divine assistance given, we must in no way underrate the capabilities of their opponents. As a military study for the present age, the movement of the confederate Amorite chiefs upon Gibeon is an extremely instructive one, when the country lies spread out before us on a reliable map such as the Palestine Exploration Fund can place at our disposal. We are apt to lose sight of what must have been their tactics when we merely read of their general move and its results, and the best way to understand what they could have been is to put ourselves on their side at this crisis. Let us, then, imagine ourselves among those confederate leaders, breathing a united spirit against Gibeon, and try to play the best game under the conditions. Look at it as we will, the capture of Gibeon by a *coup de main*, by a sudden swoop without warning or exciting suspicion, was undoubtedly the course to be pursued. But how concentrate forces of different States for such a purpose without exciting the suspicion of a presumably wary foe? Clearly, these must be collected for some other ostensible purpose than the capture of Gibeon, in order to allure their victim's attention to another direction. Taking a survey of the southern part of Palestine, and knowing all that had taken place up to this point, our conclusion would be, certainly, that Jerusalem, the stronghold of which held the fourth angle of what we may term the Palestine Quadrilateral, would be the next *point d'appui* of Joshua's campaign, before he could penetrate farther into the country. He was already in possession of three points, and could hardly subdue more of the southern fortresses as long as Jerusalem stood in her strength. But here was the problem.

One advantage we may infer he had gained from the Gibeonite alliance was the facilities it afforded to his Intelligence Department, and the information about the exceeding impregnability of Jerusalem must have been, certainly, if not given him firsthand by the Gibeonites, at least thoroughly confirmed by them; for he never took the fortress, nor have we any reason or record to show that he ever attempted to take it. He was now also fully aware that this formidable capital was at the head of a powerful combination against him, which meant, in plain language, that an opposition in the field had been formed, and that it must be reckoned with. So we can realize Joshua's position at this time, and, now, what should we surmise would be the plans of the allies opposed to him, when the one vital point at stake with them was the capture of Gibeon? We should say that their entire demonstration should be made in Joshua's direction to distract the vigilance of the Gibeonites from any design upon their city. We can quite imagine the situation. In the open ground to the west of Jerusalem, between that city and Aphek, where we know two battles were afterwards fought, we can picture the confederate encampment and the council of war being held. Two plans would be discussed. All are unanimous that the capture of Gibeon is the first essential move, and all are agreed that the movement for this seizure must be so masked that the blow may be decisive and final when delivered. The first plan would be what a modern commander would probably advocate, to divide the forces into two divisions, one to pounce down upon Gibeon, while the other would proceed to waylay a relieving force from the east. But to these Amorite leaders, in their desperate state, this meant, after full discussion of details, a weakening of their combination. Besides, Joshua would by means of his spies, or anyone giving him information of the investment of Gibeon, learn of the presence of an intercepting force, and, if it were annihilated and Gibeon not taken, any chance of success they might have would be utterly shattered. The other plan, therefore, would be better, to divide into eastern and western columns of simultaneous advance upon Gibeon, so as to make the cordon complete by meeting on the north with such rapidity and precision that its fall would be certain, or, in any case, that their unbroken combination would be strong enough to resist the raising of the siege till it was successful. But till this movement was ripe for inception their front must still be directed east towards Gilgal, in order to put the Gibeonites off their utmost guard, and then, with a sudden change of front to the north, the *coup* could be carried out in the manner agreed upon. Now, what is the use of going into these conjectural details?

Just to show us, what we are likely to lose sight of, that this move upon Gibeon must have been, under the circumstances, consummate, or the city would certainly have been protected by a strong Israelite contingent; as also to show us that Joshua's attention must have been altogether absorbed in dispositions to meet the enemy's ostensible front. Otherwise it is difficult to see how the Gibeonites could have allowed a deliberate advance to be made upon them without letting Joshua know. And the movement is instructive, in that it must have been made from within easy reach of Gibeon, so as to effect a complete surprise. And yet we must give the Gibeonites credit for being sufficiently on the alert to have despatched a messenger to Joshua directly the change of front was observed, as the hill of Gibeon would certainly afford singular facilities for not being caught napping. All the conditions considered, therefore, the confederate investment of Gibeon must have been rapid and carried out with consummate precision. From the nature of the ground, possibly a little altered to the south where the hill rises behind the town—for a road now passes between both—we may conclude that the disposition of the investing army would be somewhat as follows: The most open ground about consists of a plain to the north-east, enclosed by more or less rising ground and hills sweeping round to the east and north, and narrowed by them on the south and west to within a mile or so of the hill of Gibeon. The ground on the west and north-west is broken and rough where it forms the northern entrance to the Valley of Gibeon, running in a tortuous south-west direction, bounded on the east by the hills of Mizpeh and Gibeon, and on the west by a series of ranges separating it from the Valley of Aijalon, eight or nine miles further west. We may reasonably say that the bulk of the investing force occupied the north-east plain, though a strong cordon could be drawn all round the town, except perhaps on the south, whence, in that age of warfare, no assault was possible, though it would be the best station from which operations could be directed. Here, then, we shall leave the confederate army, and join ourselves to the other side—the Israelites in their camp at Gilgal.

We have seen how Joshua must have been preparing for a great struggle with the confederate army, and, relying upon information, he is now awaiting developments, either to take the field for a pitched battle or otherwise, when a messenger comes with hot haste into the camp with the news of the enemy's change of front upon Gibeon, and imploring aid for the doomed city. Joshua at once asks counsel of the Lord, and is reassured by the answer to attack them resolutely, as

not a man of them will be able to stand before him. And here we see how prompt he is, as if there was no time to be lost. Ordering out his best troops and most veteran commanders, he determines to set out at nightfall and surprise the enemy before dawn. Here we have another picture before us: The relieving force, elated with the assurance of success and confidence in their general, marching rapidly through the night—the messenger from Gibeon as an aide-de-camp by the general's side, the other commanders round him also arranging the details of attack. The probable positions of the besieging force are discussed, with all the minutiae of the ground about Gibeon, and the impracticability of any action extending westward over ranges of hills separating its valley from that of Aijalon: but learning that there are no northern allies in the confederacy, what should we suppose would be Joshua's plan about Gibeon and its relief? The answer is fairly obvious—to do his utmost to bar retreat southward, and to prevent escape in that direction by closing the Valley of Gibeon on the west of the town. The attack would, of course, begin on the east, but every nerve must be strained to prevent the enemy from breaking southward down the Valley of Gibeon. Then, as soon as the beleaguered garrison would be set free, it would sweep the hills to the south, over ground it well knew, taking up a scattered pursuit in that direction, while the Israelites, turning the town to the north and west, would drive the bulk of the forces northwards and complete the discomfiture. And we venture to think these plans were carried out to the letter, for what was the result? The text tells us (ver. 9): "Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, (for) he went up from Gilgal all the night." 10. And the Lord discomfited them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah and Makkedah." That is to say (according to the suggestions we have given), the northern rout before Israel was towards Beth-horon, while the southern before the Gibeonites was towards Azekah and Makkedah. Are we justified in explaining the direction of rout thus, or in bringing the Gibeonites at all upon the scene? We submit that there is no other view to take, when the whole of the subsequent narrative is taken into careful consideration. Let us see (ver. 11): "And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, while they were in the going down of Beth-horon, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah," etc. Assuredly, if the Divine arm had ever fought for Israel, it did so on that day! But this eleventh verse tells us something more. It indicates clearly the usual direction of hailstorms

of this description—from north to south. Anyone who has seen one of these terrific local visitations in the East will realize what occurred. A storm working in a straight course from north to south, generally from one to two miles wide, leaving ruin in its wake as it goes, the devastation being in proportion to the size of the hailstones—the heavens about as gloomy as dark clouds can make them, with fierce lightnings adding awe to the scene! If we were to try to understand a more perfect picture of heaven's artillery, we could hardly do so. Surely this hailstorm in its direction accounts for the destruction at Beth-horon, as well as for that on the road to Azekah, and would about coincide in its velocity with the period at which it caught the southern flight after leaving extermination behind it in the northern. Immediately after this record comes the poetical episode of Joshua's apostrophe to the sun and moon, which we will leave to be considered at length under our astronomical inquiry, and go on with the narrative. Ver. 15: "And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp at Gilgal." Surely this is explicit enough in informing us that after the appalling destruction witnessed by Joshua from the height of Beth-horon on the fugitives he was pursuing—presumably the extermination by the Lord's hand of all of them—he saw that no more was to be done, and, wheeling about, led his Israelites leisurely back to the camp at Gilgal, as there was no use to try to overtake the southern pursuit. What authority there is for stating that this (fifteenth) verse must be the forty-third, inserted somehow beforehand, we have yet to learn; but we prefer to give the sequence of events as it is narrated. We learn, later on in the chapter also, that Horam, King of Gezer, had the temerity to come to the aid of Lachish against Joshua. May we not infer that this undismayed chief would have opposed Joshua's further progress beyond Beth-horon, and that we should have heard of it? But, now the difficulty of reconciling the direction of the enemy's rout with the geography of the country no longer presents itself. We can now surmise how Joshua knew of the Valley of Aijalon. We can now see that, after all, there is no need to argue that the Israelites were granted the physical endurance to undergo what never soldier yet underwent or could undergo without miraculous help, and we can now understand how Joshua returned and reinforced his army before proceeding to Makkedah on his more protracted southern campaign.

(To be continued.)
