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The Jordan and its Associations.

I

NO country in the world can vie with Palestine in enduring interest. At the present moment its early possession by the Children of Israel is to them an inspiring hope. They will "return" to their own land ; the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and He will enable Britain to keep her promise.

Palestine, or the Holy Land, is a place of world-wide significance. It is very small, about equal in size to Lancashire and Yorkshire united. The interest centred in it is not confined to Protestant people. It embraces every section who call themselves Christian. But for any descendant of Abraham—be he Jew or Arab—it is a marked country. Which of our readers would not be glad to be able to say :

I have heard the cedars shaken,
By the storm on Lebanon's Hill ;
Wandered by the ancient rivers,
Flowing through Damascus still.

On the verdant skirts of Tabor,
Listened to the morning hymn ;
Joined the worship of the evening,
By Samaria's Gerizim.

I have culled the glorious lilies
On Gennesareth's flowing shore ;
And where Jesus lingered, laboured,
Learned to love Him more and more ?

The associations of the whole country would occupy volumes, much less the space at our disposal in this series of brief papers. We must confine our attention exclusively to the Jordan and the adjacent regions.

If we compare the Jordan with other rivers of our earth, how insignificant it seems ! The Mississippi runs a course fifteen times its length ; the mighty Amazon pours out more water into the Atlantic in an hour than the Jordan discharges into the Dead Sea in a year. It has no great cities on its banks, with their teeming millions, like the Ganges, or Yangtse rivers. But, not the mighty "Father of Waters," with its Indian legends ; not the amazing volume of Amazon ; not the fertilizing life supporting eastern rivers, nor the

mysterious Nile, nor thundering Niagara, nor the wealth-laden Thames can *compare for a moment* in interest with the Jordan—so wonderful in its historic memories, so hallowed in its sacred associations, and so remarkable in its physical characteristics—it is without a parallel in the world! Here are scenes, not of natural beauty only, but beauty associated with tender, thrilling or ennobling human feelings, exciting thoughts which cannot be evoked by any other stream that waters the earth.

“ ALL MY MOUNTAINS A WAY.”

Mount Hermon is *the* mountain of Palestine. Ebal and Gerizim, Olivet and Tabor, Carmel and Gilboa, are all under 3,000 feet high. Hermon towers up in its double peak more than 10,000 feet, just the height of Dent du Midi, which so many travellers on the Continent have seen, at the head of Lake Geneva, facing Montreux. A wonderful site it was for the altars of the Sun-god; from such a position his fires could be seen far and wide over Syria and Palestine. Hermon stands almost at the centre of four mountainous ranges. From this chain flow four rivers, on which at different times have sprung up ruling powers of that part of the earth—the Baroda, or Abana, which flows south east, through Damascus; the Leonites, flowing south west through Tyre; the Orontes, flowing north by Antioch, the capital of the later Syrian kingdom; and the fourth, the Jordan, due south—the river of the Israelites.

The Jordan's sources, for there are three principal ones, are found round the foot of Hermon. The first, or rather the first permanent one, being the highest and longest, is called the Hasbany; the second rises at a place called Tel-el-Kady—Tel, like the word Knock, means a hill—here it is the hill of the judge, ancient Dan. The third is the most beautiful, and is called Baniasty, it rises at Ceserea Philippi. Beside this beautiful bubbling fountain, under the old castle, which was erected on a precipitous cliff, the Lord Jesus stood and taught some of His profoundest doctrines. Here under the great cliff He said “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church,” referring not to Peter, but to the everlasting truths which he enunciated. Later on, by this same place, He appealed for sacrificial decision and self-effacement, in the memorable words: “If any man *will* come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”

TRANSFIGURED.

Though the evidence of tradition favours Mount Tabor, some authorities think, there is little doubt that in six days after, He ascended Mount Hermon, a mountain apart, and was transfigured before them—the miracle to which Peter refers as the most convincing one to him that he had not followed “cunningly desired fables.” Here is a grand rugged mountain, its lower parts crowned by the battlements of a Phoenician Castle, the ruins of which show that it was *then* one of the largest and strongest fortified places in the world.

The city stood on a natural terrace, amidst groves of oaks and olives, and shrubberies of hawthorn and myrtle, acacia and oleander, and was all alive with streams of water and miniature cascades, while in the front stretched the broad plain and lake Merom, with Mount Lebanon in the distance. These three sources of the Jordan and some lesser tributaries unite in the plain of Huleh, becoming the true Jordan. After running a short distance, the river is scattered and lost in an immense morass, the lower part of which contains probably the largest collection of Papyrus in the world, fifteen feet high and three to four inches thick. (Papyrus—Ark of Bulrushes.)

In this Papyrus jungle the waters aggregate again, and running about three miles emerge into the Lake of Huleh, which occupies a good deal of the lower part of the plain. The five spies sent out from Dan in the south thus describe this place : “ We have seen the land, and behold it is very good, . . . a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth.” God’s liberated ones to-day, who, having come out of Egypt, get “ clean over Jordan,” discover a perennial blessing such as the Danites never enjoyed, for “ they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.”

“ OUR GOD SHALL FIGHT FOR US.”

All the other memories for us of this district are of battle scenes. The first, when Abraham, who through faith waxed valiant in fight, and with his allies Mamre and Eshcol rushed down by night on the confederate kings who had carried away Lot captive, defeated and pursued them to Hobah, near Damascus, returning triumphant with all the captives and spoil, and meeting Melchisedec on the way to his tent at Hebron. The next was a great battle with the Canaanites

under Jabin. They had horses and chariots very many, so that we hear the command "Thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire."

Notwithstanding advances in civilization, education, and science, the diabolical spirit of Militarism in 1915-1918 is more in-human than any spirit old-time warriors exhibited, when intoxicated by greed, or love of power and conquest! Though David was a Man of War, he warns us not to put our trust in horses or in chariots, but in the Name of the Lord. How largely has Britain set at naught this injunction. Had we with Nehemiah "remembered our God," thousands of hearts and homes might not now be broken, dark and desolate! But General Allenby's prayerful, humble, bloodless entry into Jerusalem is one of the bright episodes in this great world-war. (2 Chron. xiv. 11-15.)

One would like to draw a veil over the next scene and the treachery of the Danites against Laish, afterwards called Dan, so that from "Dan to Beersheba" became proverbial for the whole land. The last war scene is coupled with a rebellion in David's time. A man of Mount Ephraim, Sheba, raised the standard of revolt, but at the instance of the wise woman, his head was thrown over the wall of Abel to Joab and the rebellion ended. Traitors or rebels at places like Khartoum, Delhi, Petrograd, or nearer home, have always found that sooner or later a Nemesis overtakes them, and that the Old Book is right, "they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

At the eastern side of lake Merom is the country of Geshur. Few readers would probably think of associations connected with Geshur worth remembering. But a lesson *for us all lies here*; and is strongly emphasised in 2 Corinthians vi. 14 and 17, impressing on all Christians, as it does, the folly of worldly alliances, and the unutterable sadness which results from such partnerships.

SEPARATION!

Geshur was a country of mountain fastnesses; here, at the fort of Hermon, the remnants of the Amorites who were expelled from the fertile plains of Bashan took refuge. This was just before the conquest of Palestine, and the Editor of the Book of Joshua says, "The Geshurites and the Maacathites dwell among the Israelites until this day." *But David came here!* One sentence in the Book

of Samuel is given to what he was doing :—“ David invaded the Geshurites.” This step brought sorrow and darkness into David’s life. There is usually a gradation in the fall of godly, or indeed, ungodly men ; a walking, a standing, a sitting down (*Psalm i.*). In Achan’s case, he saw, he coveted, he took, he hid ! (*Joshua vii. 21.*) A Christian man does not usually fall suddenly into a valley of sin, neglect or bitterness, by going over a precipice, but enters from the top of an inclined plane, and it may be almost unconsciously to himself—though at prayer-time lack of confidence is experienced, and it may be twinges of conscience are felt—reaches a point which to his friends seem to be a sudden and unaccountable fall ! (*1 Corinthians x. 12, 13.*)

MARRYING “ IN THE LORD.”

David in Geshur did what Napoleon did in Austria—first, he beat the King in battle, and then *married his daughter!* David may have married her for her beauty ; at all events one of the direct offspring was said to be the most beautiful person in all Israel. Alas ! David had pleased his eyes and gratified his senses ; he thereby brought distress and grief to his heart and darkness into his home. Absalom—vain, wild, wayward, impetuous, was the fruit of the marriage with this heathen Princess. Through union with this Canaanitish woman we can trace some of the greatest miseries of David’s life. How necessary at all times, but especially just now, in choosing a companion for life, to remember it is a choice *for every circumstance of life*, and not merely for the bright hours of sunshine. When a Christian woman, in a moment of impetuosity, or through the glamour of position, forgets that “ two cannot walk together except they be agreed,” and becomes united with one who may be amiable and attractive, but who is not devoted to the immortal Lover of Souls, lack of sympathy, if nothing worse, may embitter an entire lifetime !

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(*To be continued.*)

