

The Jordan and its Associations.

II.

IN our first article we traced only a short portion of the Jordan, let us now follow it further south. The central source, that from Dan, pours out three times the quantity that either of the others do. When it has run some five miles, it is joined by the eastern stream from Cæsarea Philippi. Another mile further it is joined by the Hasbany, which from its most distant source has already run about forty-five miles. Then the three united streams, which may now be called the Jordan, meander sluggishly for some miles through a marsh until it forms the Lake.

This marsh is almost impenetrable to man, though McGregor (Rob Roy) pushed his way through the whole of it, except one mile. Its muddy shores are the haunt of the buffalo, which some commentators believe to be the "Behemoth" of Job. It is pretty generally allowed that this country to the south of Geshur, and so bordering the Lake on its eastern side, is the land of the Patriarch himself—the land of Uz. Little disturbed, until recently by Europeans, all its customs and manners are very much what they were in the Patriarch's time. But this part of the land has other memories for us, for, besides much that is remarkable in its present condition, some ancient peculiarities were discovered during the nineteenth century.

GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS.

We learn from the Old Testament that this whole eastern side of Jordan was first peopled by a race of giants, under the names Rephaims, Anakims, Horims, Emims, etc.; and in the territory of the last named, the Israelites make their first permanent settlement, this northern part, then called the Kingdom of Bashan, being ruled by one of the last chiefs of giants, Og, King of Bashan, though some remnants of these giants existed down to David's time. This Og, King of Bashan, if he was not the inventor, was certainly the introducer of that most useful article—now almost universally used in home and hospital—the iron bedstead!

One province of this Kingdom—Argob—is one of the most remarkable on the face of the earth. Argob, meaning stony, is,

in the New Testament, called Trachonitis. The length of the province is about the distance from London to Reading, and is only some twenty miles broad. It is surrounded by a rampart of rocks, thirty feet high. In Deuteronomy we read that this stony province contained sixty cities, fenced with high walls, gates and bars, besides "unwalled towns, a great many." The statement seems almost incredible! It would not stand five minutes before some modern writers, only for one well-ascertained fact—they are there still!

THE OLDEST HOUSES IN THE WORLD.

Riding along the edge of the region, we are told you could count thirty cities in a day's ride. The houses are there, the paved streets, the walls and the gates. The houses are probably the oldest in the world, and were built by giants, who had been dispossessed of them before the Israelites came out of Egypt. The walls of these houses are from five to eight feet thick, built of large blocks of hewn-stone, without lime or cement, and the roofs are slabs of stone. One that was measured was twelve feet long, eighteen inches wide, and six inches thick, laid perfectly regularly and jointed closely. One would weigh half a ton. The door and window shutters are of stone, and in many cases are in their places still. The doors turn on pivots, and are let into sockets, above and below, and are so nicely adjusted that after four thousand years, a man can still shut them with ease though they weigh from a half, to a ton and a half! These houses would be splendid "cover" from German aeroplanes! They have been too massive for man to destroy.

But some reader may ask, how do you account for the fact that they have resisted the action of time and weather; most of the hills of Palestine consist of limestone, and if like these, would they not have crumbled away like chalk, and formed part of the dust of the desert? Exactly, but these houses *are not built of limestone*. My Father, who was an experienced and widely-read Geologist—I am indebted to his work for substantial facts in these Palestine papers—ascertained that they are built of dark basalt, a hard volcanic rock like that which forms the celebrated Giant's Causeway in the north of Ireland. In writing about these houses one traveller says: "The whole history of the country, for four thousand years, from Rephaim to the Osmanlis, is inscribed upon them. The massive

dwelling show the simple style and ponderous workmanship of Giant architects. Jewish masonry and names, Greek inscriptions and temples, Roman roads, Christian churches, Saracenic Mosques, Turkish desolations—all, all are there, and all alike are illustrations of the accuracy and confirmations of *the truth of the Bible!*

THE WORD OF THE LORD ABIDETH.

For many decades now, the stones in Palestine have been testifying, after centuries of silence, in language that cannot be disavowed, that the word of God, inbreathed by the Holy Spirit, is living and not bound, and because *it is* His word shall stand for ever. University students who read widely and think deeply may increasingly enjoy the stability and steadfastness of those who keep His testimonies, and may *rest* even through tempests of doubt, on the "more sure word of prophecy."

It is an appalling fact, and a further illustration of the awful and dynamic nature and power of sin—sin, about which many are not worrying to-day—that some of our latest advances in Science should be used by nominally Christian countries for the physical destruction of innocent masses of humanity. We all welcome fresh light from stones that speak, and from lands that lure by learning, but that light *will be darkness* if it leads away from the Light of the World, and to the unsettling, if not the destruction, of that "faith which was once for all delivered to the Saints."

MAN'S DEMOCRACY AND CHRIST'S AUTOCRACY.

Some writers who are not "pot bound," men who can take a "long view," have been freely expressing their opinions about the Bible and the War. The Rev. Dr. Ritson, the distinguished Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society, recently said: "In these days of tremendous growth of democracy, the question for all thinking Christian men is: How can this growing democracy be brought to recognize the autocracy of Christ?" Dr. Ritson believes, and we support his contention, that it will be through the *re-discovery of the Bible by the common people.*

Whilst with some, Bible reading as a habit has probably diminished during these terrible war years, yet, the Bible by earnest-minded folk is being studied as never before. An awakened interest, too, is being exhibited about Bible lands. It is not for nought that the *Daily Telegraph's* excellent Map of Palestine is being sold

at our bookstalls! People *are* thinking to-day about the Man of Galilee and the land He trod! Thousands of soldiers are now reading their khaki Testaments, with Lord Roberts' letter in it, with fresh zeal. Some of our brave defenders are studying the Word in Y.M.C.A. Huts in Jerusalem itself! Whilst writing these papers, our soldiers, on March 22, 1918, actually crossed this same Jordan, with their Bibles in their knapsacks, by sixteen temporary bridges thrown across the stormy current! Five days later, our forces were within one mile of the town of Amman, a city of the Ammonites and regarded as the Philadelphia of the Greeks, and important now because of the Hedjaz railway. Our troops have now taken Es Salt.

THE DESCENDER.

We now return to the Lake, and find the Jordan slowly proceeding through a jungle, then between sloping banks to a Saracenic bridge, the highway to Damascus, thence it runs for some miles down a succession of rapids. Here, indeed, it has earned its name Jordan—The Descender, for in thirteen miles it falls seven hundred feet! Then it enters a tolerably wide and fertile plain, flowing for two miles, and then through a perfect grove of pink flowering Oleanders, filled with thousands of singing birds, and enters the north-end corner of the Sea of Galilee. How inspiring to be able to say with McCheyne:—

“How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,
Oh! Sea of Galilee!
For the glorious One Who came to save,
Hath often stood by thee.

Graceful around thee, the mountains meet,
Thou calm reposing Sea;
But, oh, far more, the beautiful feet
Of Jesus walked o'er Thee.”

GENNESARET!

What memories are associated with this “Paradise of Perfection,” as old Jewish writers call this lake! Of this beautiful expanse they say it was “beloved of God above all the waters of Canaan.” Volumes have been written about this Lake alone. We can but touch this wonderful subject, doing little beyond indicating a few of the leading sites.

Dr. Clarke describes the Lake as presenting one of the most

sublime and striking prospects in the Holy Land. The Lake is much larger than our Derwentwater or Windermere, but is only a third of the length of the Lake of Geneva, which it strongly resembles. In picturesque beauty it is said to come nearest to Lake Locarno in Italy. 700 years B.C., heathen shadows rested on "Galilee of the Gentiles," but when the Light of the World came to reside on the banks of Gennesaret, this secluded spot became the scene of wondrous life. "The land of Zabulon, and the Land of Nephthalim, by way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matt. iv. 15, 16; Isa. ix. 1, 2).

In his entrancing volume of "Memories," Dr. J. R. Macduff says "The Sun of Righteousness not only arose in Galilee, but He rose 'with healing in His beams.'" "The common people heard Him gladly." His best converts, His truest and trustiest friends were from the ports, and fishing-boats, and villages of Gennesaret. Oh, if He effected such a change on them, there is no room for despondency! He is willing to take up His home in every soul. "God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, is willing to shine into that heart, with the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Whatever your darkness may be, Christ can relieve it; Christ can dispel it. If your heart be as a Gennesaret swept with storms, He will come and whisper in your ears, as He did of old, His calming words—"Peace, be still!"

"EXALTED—BROUGHT DOWN."

Just where the Jordan enters the sea, at the foot of the hills which border it on the western side, are some extensive ruins of buildings. At one time the town which stood here occupied both sides of the Jordan. About three miles from the Jordan, west and north of the Lake, are the ruins of another large town. A traveller who visited it tells us "he had to employ some shepherds to open a passage for him to enter into the ruins, they were so surrounded by a jungle of thorns and rank weeds, etc., and then what a scene of desolation presented itself! Not a house, not a wall, not a solitary pillar was standing; broken columns, hewn stones, sculptured slabs of marble, and great shapeless heaps of ruins, half concealed by thorns, alone mark the site of a rich city." If we ask, "what

mean these ruins, and those at the mouth of the Jordan," we are told they are the answer to the prophetic doom: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" Bethsaida being the site on the Lake, Chorazin the more distant one. Of Capernaum so little trace exists, no less than four distinct places have been pointed out as its site. This city, which was the home of the Lord Jesus for a great part of the time of His Ministry, and was exalted to heaven by its privileges, is literally brought down to utter destruction! Had Capernaum, though tossed with tempest, known the day of its visitation, all its children might have been taught of the Lord, and filled with a great peace. But it despised its King, and to-day Capernaum is a warning to all who seek not those riches "which are above the spoiler's touch and beyond the throw of capricious fortune!"

THE SEED AND THE SOWER.

Just in this neighbourhood the shore is indented with small creeks where a ship might ride in safety, while the Lord went into it and sat, but the whole multitude who listened were on the shore. As if made to furnish seats for them, the shore on both sides of the narrow inlets is piled up with smooth boulders of basalt or trap rock; it is so called from a word that means a stair—this is the common form this rock assumes; voices can be heard easily in such places at a distance of nearly a thousand feet in clear air!

We know how the Master adapted His teaching to His hearers, and drew His illustrations from every surrounding object. Bearing this in mind, and that it was *here* the parable of the Sower with its detailed illustrations was given, it is well worth repeating what Dean Stanley says of his visit to the spot. He asks: "Is there any thing on the spot to suggest the images thus conveyed? So I asked as I rode along the track under the hillside, by which the plain of Gennesaret is approached, seeing nothing but the steep sides of the hill, alternately of rock and grass. And when I thought of the parable of the sower, I answered that here at least was nothing on which Divine teaching could fasten; it must have been the distant cornfields of Samaria or Esdraelon on which His mind was dwelling. The thought had hardly occurred to me, when a recess in the hillside, close upon the plain, disclosed at once in detail, and with a conjunction which I *remember nowhere else in Palestine*, every feature

of the great parable ! There was the undulating cornfield, descending to the water's edge, there was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here or there on either side of it, or upon it, itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet ; there was the good rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighbourhood from the bare hills, elsewhere descending into the Lake, and which, where there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn ; there was the rocky ground of the hillside, protruding here and there through the cornfields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes ; there were the large bushes of thorns ; the ' Nabk,' that kind of which tradition says the crown of thorns was woven, springing up, like the fruit trees of the more inland parts, in the very midst of the waving wheat ! " What a striking testimony to the truths of God's Most Holy Word, from one who could speak with authority !

This thorn-tree, usually called " Spina Christi," has sharp prickles, and its leaves resemble our ivy ; with ivy the Emperors and Generals were crowned ; probably this thorn-tree was selected that insult and derision might be added to the pain and anguish of the rejected King of the Jews ! As we pen the concluding words of this second paper on Easter Monday, one involuntarily thinks of millions of men and women who throughout this redeemed world, only three days ago—with loving reverence and trustful look—as they sat beneath the Cross of Jesus—sang words which will never pass from the Church's Psalmody :—

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down,
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown ?

J. T. BUDD.

(To be concluded.)

