

*THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY
LAND.*

III.

THE CENTRAL RANGE, AND THE BORDERS OF JUDEA.

OVER the Maritime Plain and Shephelah,¹ we advance upon the Central Range. After the Shephelah, our immediate goal should be that part of the Range which is called the hill country of Judæa. But it is necessary first to say something of the Range as a whole.

A long, deep formation of limestone, bounded on the east by the Jordan valley, extends all the way from Lebanon on the north to a line of cliffs opposite the gulf and canal of Suez, the southern wall of the great Desert of the Wandering. In Lebanon this limestone is disposed mainly in lofty ranges running north and south; in Upper Galilee it descends to a plateau surrounded by hills; in Lower Galilee it is a series of still less elevated ranges running east and west. Then it sinks to the Plain of Esdraelon, not, however, without signs of having once crossed this plain in a series of ridges.² South of Esdraelon it rises again, and sends forth a high branch in Carmel to the sea, but the main range continues parallel to the Jordan valley. Scattering at first through Samaria into separate mountain groups, it consolidates towards Bethel upon the narrow tableland of Judæa, with an average height of 2,200 feet, continues so to the south of Hebron, and then by broken and sloping strata lets itself down, widening the while, on to the plateau of the Desert of the Wandering.³

¹ See EXPOSITOR for February and March.

² *e.g.* at Shêkh Abrek and at Lejjun.

³ The clearest and most summary account of the geology of Palestine will be found in the Memoir prepared for the Palestine Exploration Fund by Prof. Hull (London, 1888). The maps are very helpful, so are the sections at the end of the volume. I may take this opportunity of remarking how much less used the publications of the Pal. Expl. Fund are than they ought to be. The

Of this backbone of Syria the portion between Esdraelon and the desert plateau is the most definite, as it is historically the most famous. Those ninety miles of narrow highland, from Mount Gilboa to Beersheba, were the chief theatre of the history of Israel. As you look from the sea, they form a persistent mountain wall of nearly uniform level rising clear and blue above the low hills which buttress it to the west. How the heart throbs as the eye sweeps that long and steadfast sky-line! For just behind, upon a line nearly coincident with the waterparting between Jordan and the Mediterranean, lie Shechem, Shiloh, Bethel, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron. Of only one of all these does any sign appear. Towards the north end of the range two bold round hills break the skyline with evidence of a deep valley between them. The hills are Ebal and Gerizim, and in the valley lies Nábulus, the ancient Shechem.

That the eye is thus drawn from the first upon the position of Shechem, while all the other chief sites of Israel's life lie hidden away and are scarcely to be seen till you come upon them, is a very remarkable fact. It is a witness to the natural, an explanation of the historical, precedence, which was enjoyed by this capital over her more famous sister, Jerusalem. We shall return to the contrast again. Meantime it is enough to note that cleft between Ebal and Gerizim as the one sign of a pass cutting through the Central Range.

But uniform as that persistent range appears from the chief results of the great Survey, along with a whole library of historical information, are to be had in a cheap and attractive form. I ought to have mentioned before that the best map for the ordinary student is the last edition published by the Fund of the reduced Survey map ($2\frac{3}{4}$ miles to the inch), with O. T. names in red, N. T. in blue, etc. If the student or the traveller exercises caution with regard to the somewhat too numerous identifications, he will find this map by far the most informing and suggestive. The *Neue Handkarte von Palästina*, by Fischer and Guthe, on a scale of 1:700,000, with an alphabetical index and list of authorities (Leipzig: Wagner & Debes, 1890), is very good indeed, and costs only two shillings. But when shall we get a good orographical map of Palestine, or a reliable relief map?

coast, almost the first thing you remember as you look at it is the prolonged political and religious division of which it was capable,—first into the kingdoms of Northern Israel and Judah, and then into the provinces of Samaria and Judæa. Those ninety narrow miles sustained the arch-schism of history. Fields of the same Divine revelation, they are perhaps the strongest proof of how little room men need to keep bitterly apart,—men of the same family, and standing together in the very face of the Light. Where did the line of this schism run? Did it correspond to any natural division in the range itself?

A closer observation shows that there was a natural boundary between northern and southern Israel. But its ambiguity is a curious symbol of the uncertain frontier of their religious differences.

We have seen, first, that the bulk of Samaria is scattered mountain groups, while Judæa is a tableland; and, secondly, that while the Samaritan mountains descend continuously through the low hills upon the Maritime Plain, the hill country of Judæa stands aloof from the Shephelah Range, with a well-defined valley between.¹ Now these two physical differences do not coincide: the tableland of Judæa runs farther north than its isolation from the low hills. Consequently we have an alternative of frontiers. If we take the difference between the relations of the two provinces to the Maritime Plain, the natural boundary will be the Vale of Ajalon, which penetrates the Central Range, and a line from it across the waterparting to the Wady Suweinit, the deep gorge of Michmash, which will continue the boundary to the Jordan at Jericho. If we take the distinction between the scattered hills and the tableland, then the natural boundary from the coast will be the river 'Auja, the Wadies Deir Balût and Nimr, and a line across the waterparting to the Wadies Samieh and El 'Aujah,

¹ EXPOSITOR for February, p. 191.

which will continue the boundary to the Jordan, eight miles above Jericho.¹ For it is just where this second line crosses the waterparting, about the Robber's Well on the high road from Jerusalem to Nâbulus, that travellers coming north find the country change. They have descended from the plateau, and their road onward lies through valleys and plains, with ridges between. A little farther north, however, there is a third and even more evident border in the Wady Ishar, a northerly branch of the Wady Deir Balût that runs north-east, deep and straight to Akrabbeh.

Thus we have not one, but three possible frontiers across the range: south of Bethel, the line from the head of Ajalon to the gorge of Michmash; north of Bethel, the change from tableland to valley, with deep wadies running both to Jordan and to the coast; and, more northerly still, the Wady Ishar. None of these is by any means a "scientific frontier," and their ambiguity is reflected in the fortunes of the political border. The political border oscillated among these three natural borders.

Thus, to begin with, in the days of Saul, Israel and the Philistines faced each other across the gorge at Michmash;² and while David was king only of Judah, his soldiers sat down opposite to Abner's at Gibeon, on a line between Ajalon and the Michmash valley.³ The same line seems to have been the usual frontier between the kingdoms of Northern Israel and Judah, for Bethel was a sanctuary of the former under Jeroboam and Jehu, and in the days of Amos and Hosea.⁴ But while the vale of Ajalon and the gorge of Michmash are strong frontiers, the plateau between them offers no line of division at all, but stretches away quite level to the north of Bethel. Hence we find Bethel,

¹ Trelawney Saunders, *Introd. to Survey of W. Palestine*, p. 229.

² 1 Sam. xiii. xiv.

³ 2 Sam. ii. 13.

⁴ 1 Kings xii. 29; 2 Kings x. 29; Amos iii. 14, iv. 4, vii. 10, 13; Hosea x.

passing more than once from the northern to the southern power. Soon after the disruption of the kingdoms, Abijah won it for Judah,¹ but it reverted to the north. When the kingdom of Israel fell, and the land held only scattered colonies of foreigners, Bethel seems to have come once more into the power of Judah; but it was a tainted place,² and Geba, to the south of Michmash, is mentioned as the northerly limit of Josiah's kingdom.³ After the Exile, the border of Judæa lay to the north of Bethel, which was a well-known Judæan village,⁴ and was fortified by the Maccabees.⁵ From this time the Jews must have encroached upon Samaritan territory; till, according to the few data given by Josephus, the frontier was pushed north to the Wady Ishar, as much as twelve miles from Bethel and only eight from Shechem.⁶ This left a very narrow strip to the Samaritans, but the strip probably extended to Jordan. Therefore to *go through Samaria*, our Lord and His disciples had only some twenty-three miles to cover,⁷ while if they wished to avoid Samaria altogether, they must needs cross Jordan.

The real border between Samaria and Judæa lay, therefore, sometimes to the north, sometimes to the south, of Bethel. Having defined it, we may now pass to a survey of the Range to the south of it,—the province of Judæa.

JUDÆA AND ITS BORDERS.

Physically the most barren part of the Holy Land, Judæa, is morally by far the most sacred and glorious. Taken in pledge for God's people by the dust of their patriarchs—dust which still sleeps in one of its caves—Judæa

¹ 2 Chron. xiii. 19.

² 2 Kings xxiii. 4, 15.

³ *From Geba to Beersheba*: 2 Kings xxiii. 8.

⁴ Ezra ii. 28; Neh. vii. 32.

⁵ 1 Macc. ix. 50.

⁶ Josephus, *Bell.*, iii. 3, 5. 4; Conder, *Handbook*, pp. 306, 307. The determination of this boundary between Samaria and Judæa is due to the Pal. Explor. Fund Survey. Cf. their *Statement* for 1881, p. 48.

⁷ That is by the present high road from the W. Ishar, past Sychar, to Jennin or En-Gannim.

for the most of their history remained the only region assigned them by God, on which their liberty was secure, or their patriotism triumphant. It was the seat of their sacred dynasty, the site of their temple, the platform of all their chief prophets. After their great Exile they were rallied round its capital, and upon its fortresses they expended, centuries later, the final efforts of their freedom. From 2000 B.C., when Abraham encamped at Hebron, to 70 A.D., when at Masada, only sixteen miles away, the remnant of the garrison of Jerusalem slaughtered themselves out rather than fall into Roman hands, or till 136 A.D., when at Bether, but five miles from Bethlehem, the revolt of Bar-cochba was crushed by Hadrian,—Judæa was the birthplace, the stronghold, the sepulchre of God's people. It is, therefore, not wonderful that they should have taken from it the name, which is now more frequent than either their ancestral designation of Hebrews, or their sacred title of Israel. "The Jew" has suffered from the contempt of the foreigners who first used the term, as well as from the sordid associations of much of modern Judaism; but surely it is glorious to inherit the name of a land in which Abraham, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Maccabees prayed and prophesied, built and fought and reigned.

For us Christians it is enough to remember that Judæa contains the places of our Lord's Birth and Death, with the scenes of His Temptation, His more painful Ministry, and His Agony.

Judæa is very small. Even when you extend it to its ideal border at the sea, and include all of it that is desert, it does not amount to more than 2,000 square miles, or the size of one of our average counties.¹ But Judæa, in the days of its independence never covered the whole Maritime Plain, and even the Shephelah, as we have seen, was frequently beyond it. Apart from Shephelah and Plain,

¹ Aberdeenshire is 1,970 square miles; Yorkshire, about 4,500.

Judæa was a region 55 miles long, from Bethel to Beer-sheba, and from 25 to 30 broad, or about 1,350 square miles, of which nearly the half was desert.

It ought not to be difficult to convey an adequate impression of so small and so separate a province. The centre is a high and broken table-land from two to three thousand feet above the sea, perhaps thirty-five miles long by twelve to seventeen broad.¹ But before I describe this central plateau, let us get some idea of the even more important boundaries which buttress and defend it—boundaries which have so largely made the land what it is and press themselves so constantly upon the feelings of the inhabitants.

1. TO THE EAST.—You cannot live in Judæa without being daily aware of the presence of that awful valley which bounds it on the east—the lower Jordan and the Dead Sea. From Bethel, from Jerusalem, from Bethlehem, from Tekoa, from the heights above Hebron, and from fifty points between you see that gulf; and sometimes you feel Judæa rising from it about you, as a sailor feels his narrow deck or a sentinel the sharp-edged platform of his high fortress. From the hard limestone of the range on which you stand, the land sinks swiftly, and, as it seems, shuddering, through softer formations, desert and chaotic, to a depth of which you cannot see the bottom, but you know that it falls far below the level of the ocean to the coasts of a waste and bitter sea. Beyond this emptiness rise the hills of Moab, high and precipitous, and it is their bare edge, almost unbroken, and with nothing visible beyond it, save a castle or a crag, which forms the eastern horizon of Judæa. The depth, the haggard desert through which the land sinks to it, the uniqueness of that gulf and of its

¹ From the centre of the Wady Ali to the Eastern base of the Mount of Olives (1,520 feet above the sea) is fourteen miles. From the W. en Nagil on the Shephelah border to the descent from the plateau east of Mar Saba is about seventeen miles; and a line across Hebron from edge to edge of the plateau gives about fourteen miles.

prisoned sea, and the deep barrier beyond, conspire to produce upon the inhabitants of Judæa a moral effect, such as, I suppose, is created by no other boundary in the world.

It was only, however, when I had crossed into Moab that I fully appreciated the significance of that frontier in the history of God's separated people. The table-land of Moab to the east of the Dead Sea is about the same height as the table-land of Judæa to the west, and is almost of exactly the same physical formation. On both of them there are landscapes on which it would be impossible for you to gather, whether you were in Judah or in Moab—impossible but for one thing, the feeling of what you have to the east of you. To the east of Judah there is that great gulf fixed. But Moab to the east rolls off almost imperceptibly into Arabia—a few low hills, and no river or valley, between her pastures and the great deserts out of which in all ages wild and hungry tribes have been ready to swarm. Moab is open to the east; Judah, with the same formation, imposing the same habits of life on a kindred stock of men, has a gulf between her and the east, and in this broad fact lies a very large part of the reason why Judah was chosen as the home of God's peculiar people.

The wilderness of Judæa, which rises from the Dead Sea to the centre of the land, will be best studied in connection with its influence on the people. Here it is necessary only to ask what passes lead up through it from the Jordan and the Dead Sea. There are, to begin with, the roads up from Jericho,—north-west to Bethel, and south-west to Jerusalem—roads which do not keep to any great lines of valley, for here the mountains are cut only by deep gorges, but for the most part traverse the ridges between the latter. It was by the more northerly of these easily defended roads that Israel invaded the central plateau. Joshua came up from Jericho to the north of the

Michmash Gorge. But we do not read of any other invasion of Judæa, either here, or by any gorge leading up from the Dead Sea, except twenty-eight miles north of Jericho, at En-Gedi. It was at En-Gedi that the Kenites succeeded in establishing themselves in a fortress, from which they afterwards conquered the south of Judah,¹ and it was by the pass of En-Gedi that the children of Moab and the children of Ammon came up against King Jehoshaphat to battle.² Farther south in the dreary desert, as it falls towards the precipices of the Dead Sea, the traveller comes across unmistakable traces of a great military road.³ But this, even if it was made before the Romans came, was a purely inland passage—a connecting way between the Judæan fortress of Masada and the centre of the land.

2. THE SOUTH.—The survey of the southern border of Judæa leads us out upon a region of immense extent and of great historical interest—the Negeb, translated *The South* in our version,⁴ but literally meaning the Dry or Parched Land. The character and the story of the Negeb require a separate study: here we are concerned with it only as the southern border of Judæa.

From Hebron the Central Range lets itself slowly down by broad undulations, through which the great Wady Khulil winds, as far as Beersheba,⁵ and then, as Wady es-Seba turns sharply to the west, finding the sea near Gaza. It is a country visited by annual rains, with at least a few perennial springs, and in the early summer abundance of flowers and corn. We descended from Hebron to Dhâheriy-

¹ Num. xxiv. 21.

² 2 Chron. xx.

³ We found these fragments in a line making straight for the edge of the precipice above Masada; but how it ever passed down the cliffs it was impossible to discover. It had been a road suitable for wheeled vehicles, but mules can scarcely get down to Masada now.

⁴ e.g. Gen. xiii. 1; 1 Sam. xxx. 1; Psa. cxxvi. 4.

⁵ El-Khulil, "the friend," that is, of God, a title of Abraham, is also the modern name of his city, Hebron, near which the Wady starts.

ah, probably the site of Kiriath-Sepher, through wheatfields, arranged in the narrower wadies in careful terraces, and lavishly spread over many of the broader valleys. A rank scrub covered most of the slopes. There were olive groves about the villages, but few trees elsewhere. We passed four springs, two with tracts of marshy ground, and though it was the end of April, some heavy showers fell. South of Dhâheriyah the country is more bare, but travellers coming up from the desert delight in the verdure which meets them as soon as they have passed Beersheba and the Wady es-Seba.¹ The disposition of the land—the gentle descent cut by the broad Wady—and its fertility render it as open a frontier and as easy an approach to Judæa as it is possible to conceive. But it does not roll out upon the level desert. South of Beersheba, before the level desert is reached and the region of roads from Arabia to Egypt and Philistia, there lie sixty miles of mountainous country, mostly disposed in “steep ridges running east and west,² whose inaccessibility is further certified by the character of the tribe that roam upon it. More wild and isolated sons of Ishmael are not to be found on all the desert.³ The vegetation, even after rain, is excessively meagre, and in summer totally disappears. “No great route now leads, or ever has led, through this district”;⁴ but the highways which gather upon the south of it from Egypt, Sinai, the Gulf of Akabah and Arabia, it thrusts either to the east of it up the Wady Arabah to the Dead Sea, or to the west towards Gaza and Philistia. Paths indeed skirt this region and even cross its corners, but they are not war paths. When Judah’s frontier extended to Elath, Solomon’s cargoes from Ophir,⁵ and the tribute of Arabian Kings to Jehoshaphat⁶ were doubtless carried through it. When any one power held the whole

¹ Robinson : *Biblical Researches* (1st ed.), 305, 306.

² Robinson, *Id.*, 275.

³ The Azazimeh; cf. Trumbull: *Kadesh-Barnea*.

⁴ Robinson, as above.

⁵ 1 Kings ix. 16.

⁶ 1 Kings ix. 26.

land, merchants traversed it from Petra to Hebron or Gaza, or skirted it by the Roman road that ran up the west of it from Akabah to Jerusalem;¹ and even whole tribes might drift across it in days when Judah had no inhabitants to resist them. When the Jews came back from exile, they found Edomites settled as far north as Hebron. But no army of invasion, knowing that opposition awaited them upon the Judæan frontier, would venture across those steep and haggard ridges, especially when the Dead Sea and Gaza routes lie so convenient on either hand, and lead to regions so much more fertile than the Judæan plateau.

Hence we find Judæa almost never invaded from the south. Chedorlaomer's great expedition, on its return from the desert of Paran, swept south by the Arabah to the cities of the plain, sacking En-Gedi by the way, but leaving Hebron untouched.² Israel themselves were repulsed seeking to enter the Promised Land by this frontier; and—perhaps most significant of all—the invasion by Islam, though its chief goal may be said to have been the Holy City of Jerusalem, and though its nearest road to this lay past Hebron, also swerved to the east, and, like Israel, entered Judah from the Jordan valley after the conquest of eastern Palestine. The most likely foes to swarm upon Judah by the slopes of Hebron were the natives of this wild desert, the *Arabians*, or, as they were called from the Red Sea³ to Philistia,⁴ the *Amalekites*; but it is to be remarked that though they sometimes invaded the Negeb,⁵ they must have been oftener attracted, as they still are, to the more fertile and more easily overrun fields of the Philistines. It was *nine furlongs from Jamnia* that Judas Maccabeus defeated in a great battle *the nomads of Arabia*.⁶ The proper de-

¹ Tabulæ Peutingeriana.

² Gen. xiv.

³ Exod. xvii. 8.

⁴ 1 Sam. xxx. 1.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxx. 1.; 2 Chron. xxvi. 1.

⁶ 2 Macc. xii. 11.

fences against these impetuous swarms of warriors are strong towers, such as still protect the great Hajj road from Syria to Mecca from the Bedouin, and of these Uziah built a number in the desert to the south and east of Judah. The symbolic use of towers in the Bible is well-known.¹

The most notable road across this border of Judah was the continuation of the great highway from Bethel, which kept the watershed to Hebron, and thence came down to Beersheba. From here it struck due south across the western ridges of the savage Highland district, and divided into several branches. One, the Roman road already noticed, curved round the south of the Highland district to Akabah and Arabia; another, the way perhaps of Elijah when he fled from Jezebel,² and much used by mediæval and modern pilgrims, crossed to Sinai; while a third struck direct north upon Egypt, the *way to Shur*. By this last Abraham passed and repassed through the Negeb,³ Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman, fled from her mistress, perhaps with some wild hope of reaching her own country;⁴ and Jacob went down into Egypt with his waggons.⁵ In times of alliance between Egypt and Judah, this was the way of communication between them. So that fatal embassy must have gone from Jerusalem, which Isaiah describes as struggling in *the land of trouble and anguish, whence are the young lion and the old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent*;⁶ and so in the time of the Crusades, those rich caravans passed from Cairo to Saladin at Jerusalem, one of which Richard intercepted near Beersheba,⁷ It is an open road, but a wild one, and was never, it would seem, used for the invasion of Judæa from Egypt.⁸ The nearer way to Syria from Egypt lay, as we have seen, along the

¹ Cf. Douglty: *Arabia Deserta* i. 13.

² 1 Kings xix.

³ Gen. xiii. 1.

⁴ Gen. xvi. 7.

⁵ Gen. xlv. 1.

⁶ Isa. xxx. 6.

⁷ EXPOSITOR for February, p. 208.

⁸ We do not know how Shishak came up in Jerusalem.

coast, and passing up the Maritime Plain, left the hill country of Judæa to the east.

This then was the southern frontier of Judah, in itself an easy access, with one trunk-road, but barred by the great desert ridges to the south of it, and enjoying even greater security from the fact of its more lofty and barren position between two regions of such attractiveness to invaders as the valley of the Jordan and the Plain of Philistia. Before we leave this region, it is well to notice that the broad barrier of rough highlands to the south of Beersheba represents the difference between the ideal and the practical borders of the Holy Land. Practically the land extended from Dan to Beersheba, where, during the greater part of history, the means of settled cultivation came to an end; but the ideal border was the River of Egypt, the present Wady el Arish, whose chief tributary comes right up to the foot of the highlands south of Beersheba, and passes between them and the level desert beyond.

3. THE WEST.—The ideal boundary of Judæa on the west was the Mediterranean, but, as we have seen, the Maritime Plain was never in Jewish possession (except for a short time in the days of the Maccabees), and even the Shephelah was debatable ground and as often out of Judah as within it. The most frequent border therefore of Judah to the west, was the edge of the Central Range. In the previous paper on the Shephelah it was pointed out in detail how real a frontier this was. A long series of valleys running south from Ajalon to Beersheba separate the low loose hills of the Shephelah from the lofty compact range to the east—the *hill country of Judæa*. This great barrier, which repelled the Philistines, even when they had conquered the Shephelah, is penetrated by a number of defiles, none more broad than those of Beth-Horon, of the Wadi Ali along which the present high-road to Jerusalem travels,

and of the Wady Surar up which the railway is to run. Few are straight, most of them sharply curve. The sides are steep, and often precipitous, frequently with no path up them, save the rough torrent bed, arranged in rapids of loose shingle, or in level steps of the limestone strata, which, particularly at the mouth of the defile, are tilted almost perpendicularly into easily defended obstacles of passage. The sun beats fiercely down upon the limestone; the springs are few, though sometimes very generous; a low thick bush fringes all the brows, and caves abound and tumbled rocks.¹

Everything conspires to give the few inhabitants easy means of defence against large armies. It is a country of ambushes, entanglements, surprises, where large armies have no room to fight, and the defenders can remain hidden; where the essentials for war are nimbleness and the sure foot, the power of scramble and of rush. We see it all in the eighteenth Psalm: *By thee do I run through a troop, and by my God do I leap over a wall; the God that girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet and setteth me on my high places. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped.*

Yet with negligent defenders the western border of Judæa is quickly penetrated. Six hours at the most will bring an army up any of the defiles, and then they stand on the central plateau, within a few easy miles of Jerusalem or of Hebron. So it happened in the days of the Maccabees. The Syrians, repelled at Beth-horon, and at the Wady Ali, penetrated twice the unwatched defiles to the south, the second time with a large number of elephants, of which we are told that they had to come up

¹ I describe from my observation of the Wady el-Kuf from Beit-Gibrin to Hebron, and of three defiles that run up from the W. en. Nagil to the plateau about Beit, Atab.

the narrow gorges in single file.¹ What a sight the strange, huge animals must have been, pushing up the narrow path, and emerging for the first and almost only time in history on that plateau above! On both occasions the Syrians laid siege to Beth-sur, the stronghold on the edge of the plateau, which Judas had specially fortified for the western defence of the country. The first time they were beaten back down the gorges; but the second time, with the elephants, Beth-sur fell, and the Syrian army advanced on Jerusalem. After that all attacks from the west failed, and the only other successful Syrian invasion was from the north.²

4. THE NORTH.—The narrow tableland of Judæa continues ten miles to the north of Jerusalem, before it breaks into the valleys and mountains of Samaria. These last ten miles of the Judæan plateau—with steep gorges on the one side to the Jordan and on the other to Ajalon—were the debatable land across which, as we have seen, the most accessible frontier of Judæa fluctuated; and, therefore, they became the site of more fortresses, sieges, forays, battles and massacres, than perhaps any other part of the country. Their appearance matches their violent history. A desolate and fatiguing extent of rocky platforms and ridges, of moorland strewn with boulders and fields of shallow soil thickly mixed with stone—they are more fit for the building of barriers than for the cultivation of food. They were the territory of Benjamin, in whose blood, at the time of the awful massacre of the tribe by Judah,³ they received the baptism of their history. As you cross them their aspect recalls the fierce temper of their inhabitants. *Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf, father of sons, who, noble or ignoble, were always passionate and unsparing,—Saul, Shimei, Jeremiah, and he that breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and was exceeding mad*

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, xii. 9.

² By Bacchides, in 160.

³ Judges xx. 5.

against them. In such a region of blood and tears Jeremiah beheld the figure of the nation's woe: *A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children: she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.*

But it is as a frontier that we have now to do with those ten northmost miles of the Judæan plateau. Upon the last of them three roads concentrate—an open highway from the west by Gophna, the great north road from Shechem, and a road from the Jordan valley through the passes of Mount Ephraim. Where these draw together, about three miles from the end of the plateau, stood Bethel, a sanctuary before the Exile, thereafter a strong city of Judah.¹ But Bethel, where she stood, could not by herself keep the northern gate of Judæa. For behind her to the south emerge the roads we have already followed—that from the Jordan by Ai and those from Ajalon up the gorges and ridge of Beth-horon. The Ai route is covered by Michmash, where Saul and Jonathan were entrenched against the Philistine, and where the other Jewish hero who was called Jonathan-Maccabæus,—held for a time his headquarters.² The Beth-horon roads were covered by Gibeon,³ the frontier post between David and Saul's house.⁴ Between Michmash and Gibeon there are six miles, and on these lie others of the strong points that stood forth in the invasion and defence of this frontier:—Geba, long the limit of Judah to the north; ⁵ Ramah, which Baasha, king of Israel, built for a blockade against Judah; ⁶ Adasa, where Judas Maccabeus pitched against Nicanor, coming up from Beth-horon.⁷ These, with Michmash and Gibeon, formed a line of defence that was valid against the Ajalon and Ai ascents, as well as against the level approach from the north.

¹ 1 Macc. ix. 50.

² Josephus, XIII. *Antiquities*, i. 6.

³ Josh. x. 1-12.

⁴ 2 Sam. ii. 12, 13.

⁵ 2 Kings xxiii. 8.

⁶ 1 Kings xv. 17.

⁷ Josephus, XII. *Antiquities*, x. 5.

The earlier invasions delivered upon this frontier of Judah are difficult to follow. Before it was a frontier, in the days of Saul, the Philistines overran it probably from Ajalon; Saul's centre was in Michmash. Whether in their attacks upon Jerusalem¹ Joash or Rezin and Pekah crossed it, it is impossible to say; probably the latter at least came up from the Arabah. Isaiah pictures a possible march this way by the Assyrians after the fall of Samaria. *He is come upon Ai; marcheth through Migron, at Michmash musters his baggage; they have passed the Pass; "Let Geba be our bivouac." Terror-struck is Ramah; Gibeah of Saul hath fled. Make shrill thy voice, oh, daughter of Gallim. Listen, Laishah, answer her Anathoth; in mad flight is Madmenah; the dwellers in Gebim gather their stuff to flee. This very day he halteth at Nob; he waveth his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.*² This is not actual fact—for the Assyrian did not then march upon Zion, and when he came twenty years later it was probably by the Beth-horon route—but this is what might have happened any day after the fall of Samaria. The prophet is describing how easily the Assyrian might advance by this open route upon Zion; and yet, if he did, Jehovah would cut him down in the very sight of his goal.³ All the places mentioned are not known; and of those that are, some are off the high-road. How Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem is not stated;⁴ but we can follow the course of subsequent invasions. In the great Syrian war in 160 B.C. Nicanor and Bacchides both attempted the plateau—the former unsuccessfully by Beth-horon, the latter with success from the north. In 64 Pompey marched from Beth-shean through Samaria, but could not have reached Judæa had the Jews only persevered in their defence of the passes of Mount Ephraim. These being left open, Pompey advanced easily

¹ 2 Kings xiv. 8; xvi. 5. ² Isaiah x. 28-32. ³ *Ib.*, vers. 32, 33.

⁴ 2 Kings xxiv. 10.

by Koreæ upon Bethel, and thence unopposed to the very walls of Zion. In 37 B.C. Herod marched from the north and took Jerusalem.¹ In 68 A.D. Cestius Gallus came up by Beth-horon and Gibeon to invest Jerusalem, but speedily retreated by the same way. In 70 Titus marched his legions to the great siege past Gophna and Bethel. It seems to have been by Pompey's route that the forces of Islam came upon Jerusalem; they met with no resistance either in Ephraim or Judah, and the city was delivered into their hands by agreement, 637 A.D.

In 1099 the first Crusaders advanced to their successful siege by Ajalon; in 1187 Saladin, having conquered the rest of the land, drew into his power Hebron, Ascalon and the north.

This paper has been occupied with the borders of Judæa. I must leave to the opening of the next the general conclusions to be drawn from them with regard to the isolation and security of the province; and then, after describing the rocky plateau itself, I shall state the three features of its geography that are most evident in its famous history, viz., its pastoral character; its unsuitableness for the growth of a great city; and its neighbourhood to the desert.

GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.²

STUDENTS will find this an extremely useful book. There is not a subject connected with the text of the Old Testament, its history and condition, on which it does not afford all needful information. It is written with great clearness and commendable brevity, and is by far the best manual that exists on the subjects of which it treats.

¹ Josephus, *I. Wars*, xvii.

² *Canon and Text of the Old Testament*, by Dr. Frantz Buhl, translated by Rev. John Macpherson. Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1892.