

temple were in the new turned into the reality which abideth. Nothing was so fit as that the imperfect should pass when the perfect had come, and that its passing should be marked by the act in which "the elders, the chief priests, and scribes" took so fateful a part.

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(*To be continued.*)

THE RIVERS OF DAMASCUS:

ABANA AND PHARPAR.

(2 KINGS v. 12.)

THESE rivers are mentioned once, and only once, in the Bible. They are set in a heroic story as perennial in idyllic charm as their own cooling waters.

We owe the record of these names to a patriotic outburst of passion on the part of Naaman, "captain of the host of the King of Syria." This renowned general is described in the narrative as "a great man with his master and honourable, because by him the Lord had given victory unto Syria"; and it is added with pathetic antithesis, "He was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper."

Naaman must have been a man of transcendent genius to become the leader of the armies of Benhadad, notwithstanding the disadvantages of a loathsome disease that doomed its victims to a living death, and cut them off from all social intercourse with healthy men and women. He must also have diffused around him some of the graciousness that his name implies, for his memory is still green in the local tradition of Damascus, while the names of other great Damascene warriors are buried in oblivion. It might be said that Naaman takes rank in Damascus tradition immediately after Abraham, "the good Ibrahim."

There is outside the walls of Damascus a large edifice,

called *The House of Naaman*, devoted to lepers. The late Sir Richard Burton and I made a careful examination of the structure, and we came to the conclusion that it had been a Byzantine church, and that it probably stood on the site of the real *Beit Naaman*.

In one of their border forays the Syrian raiders had brought back to Damascus, with other spoils, a young Jewish girl, and she, in the distribution of the booty, had fallen to Naaman, and become his wife's slave. This Jewish maiden, amid the luxurious splendours of Damascus, did not forget the rugged land of the prophets, and, although the horror of flashing spears and flowing blood, and the red light of her father's blazing roof, were ever present, she had compassion on her captor, and at her suggestion it was arranged that the leper should seek cleansing from the lowly prophet of her people.

The great captain, commended by a letter from his royal master, proceeded in state to the King of Israel. He bore with him Damascus robes—gifts acceptable to sheikhs and princelings still—and much silver and gold; but the splendid embassy, with their royal gifts, only alarmed the King of Israel, and the gorgeous leper turned away from the palace of the monarch, and proceeded with his horses and his chariots to the hut of the prophet.

Elisha, undazzled by the splendour of the illustrious men that waited at his door, and regardless of their gifts, sent a simple message to the leper to go and wash seven times in Jordan and be clean.

Naaman was perhaps the most heroic figure in that heroic age. He was used to command and wont to be obeyed. The hosts of Benhadad moved at his will, and he had a swift way of settling controversies with the rivals of Syria. He had come to Samaria a suppliant, but his rank and his gifts were, he considered, sufficient to command any favour within the resources of Israel. The King of

Israel, however, would not, or could not, give him the relief he sought, and the prophet declined even to rise from his seat to speak to the great man at his door, but sent him, in defiance of Oriental etiquette, a verbal message to wash in an Israelitish river. Naaman, stung by this crowning affront, which was both personal and political, exclaimed, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"

In the light of these remarks, we now ask what were the rivers referred to by Naaman? Where are we now to look for the Abana and Pharpar?

When we turn to Greek times, we find the Damascus water called *the Chrysorrhoea*, the gold-flowing. The main stream is now known as *the Barada*, the cold. These names do not help us much in our quest, and we have to fall back on the exclamation of the leper, the topography and names of the rivers themselves, and local tradition.

From the words of Naaman we are assured of two things:—

I. The Abana and Pharpar were "the rivers of Damascus," and not merely "rivers of Damascus," as the translation runs in the Authorised Version.

II. They were for ablutionary uses, the chief consideration in the mind of the Damascene addressing Damascenes, superior to the Jordan and all other Palestinian rivers.

We may assume that Benhadad's great general and those who surrounded him were men not only of experience in war, but of intelligence regarding practical matters, and that, notwithstanding the tendency and temptation to magnify everything Damascene, their words were true in substance and in fact. Naaman, though stung by an affront that was both contemptuous, and humiliating, would not have hazarded a general assertion at variance with the common experience of his followers, even to the lowest

groom in the cavalcade. Taking, then, Naaman's exclamation as fairly correct, we may hopefully examine the rivers of Damascus with a view to the reasonable identification of the two to which he referred.

My chief qualification for this investigation arises from the circumstances that I resided eight or nine years by the banks of the rivers of Damascus, and traced, without stepping beyond my duty, every stream to its fountain, and followed every affluent throughout its entire course. There is scarcely a bright pool in the whole range of the rivers in which I have not bathed, or a muddy fen in which I have not shot ducks and woodcocks, or startled pigs and hyenas. I believe I had a practical acquaintance with the rivers as complete as that of Naaman himself, or perhaps of any one else since or before his time. I had also a very thorough acquaintance with the descendants of the men who dwelt by the banks of the Abana and Pharpar in the days of Benhadad. Kings and great men pass away, dynasties are overthrown, and armies carried into captivity, but the *fellahin* of a land have their roots in the soil, and Ibrahim follows Ibrahim in Syria, as Jacque follows Jacque in France, through all the whirlwinds of revolution. The language and traditions of a bookless people, where father tells son what he saw, should not be overlooked by those who would throw light on the hidden things of the past.

The rivers of Damascus do not receive their water from tributary streams, like our rivers, but from two great fountains—'Ain Barada and 'Ain Fijeh.

'Ain Barada, the higher of these fountains, rises in the beautiful plain of Zebedâny, a little over twenty miles from Damascus, on the way to Baalbek. The plain, which is over 3,000 feet above the level of the sea, is surrounded and shut in by lofty mountains, some of which rise to an altitude of 7,000 feet.

At the south-west side of the plain, near the base of one of the mountains, the 'Ain Barada bubbles up from the level ground, and forms a marshy lake 300 yards long by 50 broad. A few yards from the upper edge of the fountain the ground is perfectly dry, and gives no indication of an underground river. The sedgy surface of the lake is tenanted by waterfowl.

There are small fountains higher up on the way to Baalbek at 'Ain Hawar, Bludân, and Zebedâny, but their waters are exhausted in irrigating gardens and fields before they reach the main stream of 'Ain Barada, and they can scarcely be said to contribute to the rivers of Damascus, though they are within the same watershed.

From the little lake the river flows gently between grassy banks, with only a fall of seventy feet till it reaches a Roman bridge, where it tumbles down a beautiful cascade, and foams and roars through the ruins of Abila of Lysanias (Luke iii. 1) between frowning cliffs, which are honey-combed with ancient rock-hewn tombs. On a hill to the south-west stands the tomb of Abel, which gave its name to the city, the ruins of which are in the bend of the river below. Having washed the crumbling remains of the ancient capital of Abilene, the river rushes between precipitous banks till it reaches its sacred and most important source, Fijeh.

The fountain Fijeh, so called probably from *πηγή*, fountain, issues from under the massive ruins of a temple, at the base of a mountain. Clear as crystal, and cold as icè, the river leaps from the sun-scorched mountain, and darts swiftly in a torrent, about 30 feet wide, and 3 feet deep, a distance of 70 or 80 yards, till it joins the Barada.

Reinforced by a volume of water more than two-thirds greater than its own, the enlarged river cuts a deep channel among the roots of the hills, and through the flinty Sahara, until it breaks through the last ridge of "Lebanon towards

the sun rising," and spreads fan-like through the city and gardens of Damascus.

As the Barada nears and enters the city, seven canals are drawn off from the main river at various altitudes, and flow by thousands of channels which carry their wealth of water to every shady garden and thirsty field, and sparkle in the marble fountains of a thousand court-yards. These waters are the life and glory of Damascus.

With the rivers spread out like a fan before us, we may determine at a glance which were the Abana and Pharpar.

There is a curious tendency on the part of great cities to develop residential west end suburbs, and Damascus in its palmy days fell under the natural law. Excavations show by the foundations of mansions, and by extensive underground water-courses, that the abodes of the rich and luxurious extended on each side of the central river far beyond the limits of the present city. There are also indications that even in Mohammedan times the wealth and prosperity of the city overflowed in the same natural trend.

These two western suburbs of Damascus were watered by two distinct rivers. The Abanias, a river drawn off on the right side of the main stream, flowed through the residential suburb that spread along the southern bank of the Barada. In the name Abanias we have the long sought-for name, Abana.

The Taura, drawn off from the left side of the main stream, flowed through the residential north-west end suburb. Above the Taura there is a more important river, but it flows along nearer the base of the mountain that overhangs Damascus, and waters an important agricultural district, beyond where stood the luxurious west end.

The Taura ought to be the Pharpar. It watered the north-western suburb, as the Abanias (Abana) watered the south-western suburb. Naaman and his rich friends lived in those luxurious and healthy suburbs, and they knew the

virtues of those two rivers. The bath is an oriental institution borrowed by the West. In the days of Benhadad at Damascus, as in the time of Juvenal at Rome, it was used for luxury as much as for cleansing, and Naaman spoke of the crystal waters that flowed through his court, and had so often refreshed him in his marble bath when he returned weary and dust-stained from his campaigns.

The conjecture that the Taura is the Pharpar does not stand unsupported. In the ancient version of the Arabic Bible, translated by Rabbi Saadiah, published at Constantinople in 1545, and reproduced in the Paris and London Polyglots, the names Abana and Pharpar are rendered Abana and Taura. The translation was made long before it was published, and the translator doubtless gave Scripture currency to the tradition of his time.

When I reached Damascus, I met Dr. Meshaka. He was by far the most learned man in Damascus, or in Syria, and he knew all the traditions of the place. I asked which of the seven rivers were the Abana and Pharpar, and he promptly replied, "The Abanias and Taura." I reminded him that the 'Awaj (the Crooked) had been identified with the Pharpar. He said, smiling, "That is a foreign identification. No Damascene could have made that mistake, for the 'Awaj is not a river of Damascus at all. It is distant three hours from the city at its nearest part, and it flows beyond the *Jebel el Aswad* (the Black Mountain), which shuts it out even from the plain of Damascus." The local tradition thus combines with the fitness of things in marking the Abanias and Taura as the rivers referred to by Naaman.

Those who identified the 'Awaj with the Pharpar were influenced by the consideration that the 'Awaj is an independent river, while the Pharpar is only a canal drawn off from a river. But this is also a mistake which could not have been made by a Damascene. Each of the canals

drawn off from the main river is called a *Nahr*, or river. There was another reason for identifying the 'Awaj with the Pharpar. The 'Awaj was supposed to issue from a Wady Barbar, a name which seemed to retain an echo of the word Pharpar. This theory was investigated by Burton and Drake, and found to be baseless. A *Jebel Barbar* was discovered, but no Wady of the name.

Nor could any one acquainted with the 'Awaj have ever supposed it was one of the Damascus rivers referred to by Naaman. It descends from Mount Hermon, and throughout its whole highland course is muddy with clay and sand. I once tried to bathe in a quiet part of the stream, and I came out as white as Naaman himself. In the lower reaches of the river it flows sluggishly between mud banks and swarms with toads, frogs, and leeches. I once, and only once, attempted a bath in the lower 'Awaj. During the winter torrents it is swollen to the dimensions of a river; but under no circumstances could Naaman have lauded the 'Awaj over the Jordan in the presence of his least intelligent follower. Between the 'Awaj, a mountain burn, and the Great Jordan there is no room for comparison. And although the patriotism, pride, and prejudice of the great general were roused, he could not have been guilty of the folly of comparing the 'Awaj with the Jordan.

On the other hand, the charms of the Abana and Pharpar for purposes of luxury and comfort are so much superior to those of the muddy Jordan, that every Damascene in the days of Benhadad, and even under the rule of the Turk, would join in the patriotic boast, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" The love of even the decadent Damascene for his cool and flashing rivers is one of his strongest passions.

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