

Nehemiah's Night Ride (Neh. ii. 12-15).

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NEHEMIAH came to Jerusalem from Susa to impel and superintend the rebuilding of the walls. He rested three days after his arrival, and then was ready for work. Before he could speak of what was to be done, it was necessary for him to inspect that portion of the wall which he could not see as he approached the city from the north on the Damascus road, but he suspected interference by Sanballat and other enemies if he should proceed openly upon his inspection. He naturally decided to do by night what it was not wise to attempt to do by day. The account, as given in the Revised Version, is as follows :

And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me ; neither told I any man what God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem : neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the dragon's well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed by fire. Then I went on to the fountain gate and to the king's pool : but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall ; and I turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned.

This account plainly states that Nehemiah came out from the city by a gate known to him as the valley gate, passed along on the outside of the ruined wall in the direction of a well called the dragon's well and to a gate called the dung gate, and went on until he found, near the fountain gate and the king's pool, such a mass of stones that he could ride no farther ; but he went, apparently on foot, some distance up the brook, and then came back, so that he re-entered the city by the valley gate.

This little expedition has been so imperfectly understood up to the present time that the absolute necessity of excavation in order to

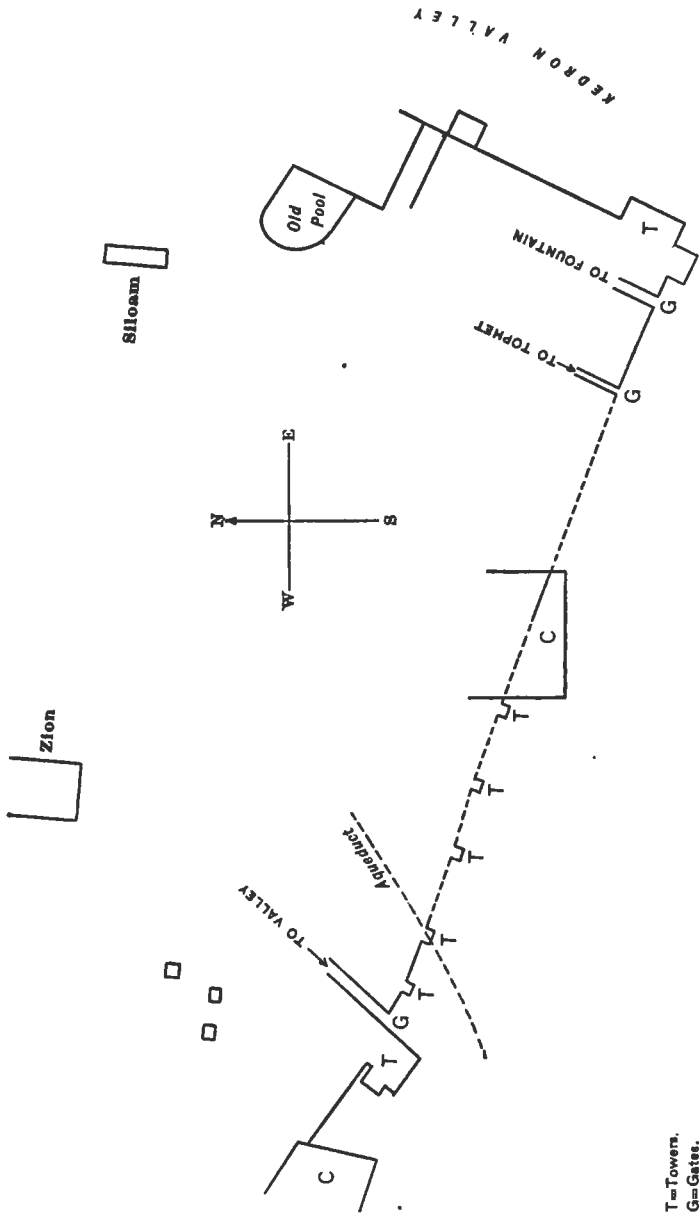


DIAGRAM TO ILLUSTRATE PROF. T. F. WRIGHT'S ARTICLE.

T= Towers.
 G= Gates.
 C= Cemeteries.

get at the truth is clearly shown. It may be well to cite a few of the past efforts to explain this route :

In Schaff's *Lange* Professor Howard Crosby says that the valley gate was probably about twelve hundred feet south of the present Jaffa gate, and that the dragon's well may be the Birket-es-Sultan ; and he believes that Nehemiah went all round the city. Comm. *in loc.*

In the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*, Comm. *in loc.*, Professor H. E. Ryle says :

We may safely identify the valley gate as the chief gate in the western wall, and as thus corresponding to the present Jaffa gate. Recent investigations have given rise to the supposition that the pre-exilic Jerusalem was much smaller in circuit, and that the western wall passed down the valley of the Tyropœon. If so, the valley gate would open on the Tyropœon, which, according to this view, is to be identified with Hinnom. The dragon's well has by some been identified with En-Rogel, by others with Gihon. We gather that it stood on the west or southwest wall of the city. The dung gate was near the southern extremity of the city. The fountain was either Bir Eyub or Siloam.

In his commentary (*in loc.*), Professor E. W. E. Reuss says that the valley gate was near where the Jaffa gate now is.

In his recent work, *Buried Cities and Bible Countries*, p. 264, the Rev. George St. Clair, who was for ten years an authorized lecturer for the Palestine Exploration Fund, thus expresses himself :

The valley gate was at the head of the Tyropœon valley and at the same time close to the valley of Hinnom. It could not be far from the present Jaffa gate. The dung gate came between the Jaffa gate and the southwest corner of the city.

In the *Quarterly Statement* of the "Palestine Exploration Fund" for January, 1888, p. 47, Mr. St. Clair located the valley gate where David's gate now is, the dragon's well at the Virgin's fountain, and the fountain gate inside of the present wall. In the *Statement* for April, 1889, p. 90, he published a map showing the valley gate where the Jaffa gate is, the dung gate at David's or southwest of it, the fountain gate high up in the Tyropœon, the king's pool still higher in that valley, and the king's gardens west of Ophel.

A controversy ensued in the pages of the *Statement* between Mr. St. Clair and the Rev. W. F. Birch, which was ended by Mr. St. Clair's declaring that "appeal to the spade is necessary." This need had become plain enough, certainly, and we can now see by means of what the spade has done that all these writers were in error because their knowledge did not extend beyond the present walls.

It should be said that the *Speaker's Commentary in loc.* was cautious where others were presumptuous, and simply said that these places are uncertain. But now we know these places, and the great value of excavation is shown in a very definite way.

The excavations prove that the wall ran round the brow of Zion, and crossed the Tyropœon near its lower end, and went along the eastern face of Ophel until it joined the temple wall. At the same time the gates which Nehemiah mentions have been found, and for the first time Biblical geographers can work in the light.

Taking the plans prepared to illustrate the work of Dr. F. J. Bliss, — for the needed new map of Jerusalem is not yet made, — we find that he has uncovered a gate a short distance southeast of the English burial ground, and that this gate shows three periods by having three thresholds one above another. These periods, which have been traced at several points, represent, it is agreed, the work of Hezekiah and Herod and Eudocia. Nehemiah was dealing with Hezekiah's wall, which had been ruined by Nebuzaradan a hundred and more years before. Tracing that wall, Dr. Bliss has found a gate exactly meeting the requirement of Nehemiah's valley gate, for its street has been uncovered for some distance, and it leads from the vicinity of the temple straight into the valley of Hinnom at its central part.

As Nehemiah came out of this gate, riding on an ass as became his dignity, he turned toward the dragon's well. By this name we may safely understand a cistern having an intermittent flow of water due to being supplied by the overflow of another cistern above. The Jewish thought in such a case was that a serpent in the conduit stopped the flow. When the pool of Bethesda was opened, a man who went into the passage came out, saying that he had seen the serpent, and he soon died of fright. Now, just within the valley gate, Dr. Bliss found several cisterns which would receive water coming from Zion: it is wholly likely that the overflow from these was received by another cistern east of the gate, where people coming out could bathe and wash clothing, and where people coming in could find water for animals. Indeed, at just about this point the aqueduct, discovered by Sir Charles Wilson in 1867 and believed by him to be the original one from Solomon's Pools, ran under the wall, and this may have given rise to a pool. But the determination of Nehemiah's route does not rest upon this identification, since we know that he went eastward. The Septuagint calls it "the well of the fig," confounding two similar words. It is of course true that fig-trees love

to grow in moist ground, as is the case at Ain-et-Tin near Khan Minyeh, and there may have been a group of fig-trees at this place at a later day.

Nehemiah next went to the dung gate. There is such a gate now, and there always was such a means of carrying forth refuse to the place of burning, Tophet; but the wall now is far within the old line. A gate of this name is therefore to be sought in the excavated wall, and here it is, as mapped by Dr. Bliss in the *Statement* of October, 1895. It lies just where the natural pathway would lead. Moreover, in his account of the rebuilding of the wall (iii. 13), Nehemiah says that the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the valley gate and built a thousand cubits of wall to the dung gate. This statement has been in contradiction to all previous views of the positions of these gates; but upon the actual excavation of the wall it appears at once that the dung gate is a thousand cubits east of the valley gate.

We then read that the party went on to the fountain gate. This would be at or near the southeastern angle of the wall. Here Dr. Bliss has found many cisterns lying in the neighborhood of Siloam and supplied by water coming through the Siloam aqueduct, which tells us by its own inscription of the work done by Hezekiah at that point. This fountain gate would seem to be the one found by Dr. Bliss close by a large drain with several cisterns above. Especially we note the large 'Old Pool,' which was probably an irrigating reservoir of ancient date. Siloam had been constructed by Hezekiah. The overflow watered the gardens in the 'King's Dale,' and hence was called the King's Pool.

But here, as the buildings had been more extensive, so the ruined heaps more fully covered the ground, and Nehemiah could no longer ride. He therefore went on foot by 'the brook.' This means the Kedron, up which he probably passed as far as the temple wall, which may have stood more firmly and could be easily visited from the inside.

Turning back, therefore, at this point, not going all the way round, as some have supposed, he returned to the ass, and entered the city by the valley gate in the same manner in which he had set forth.

It may be well to add that the account of the rebuilding of the wall given by Nehemiah in ch. iii. is now cleared of some of the difficulties which have hitherto attended it. The rebuilding began at the sheep gate, which was at about the middle of the eastern wall, and was the place where sheep from Bethlehem for sacrifice were brought in. Then, as we follow the account, we move northward,

passing the fish gate, which was probably near the northeastern angle, and coming round to the old gate, which is supposed to be represented now by Damascus gate. And so we go around by the west into the south, and here we have the valley gate, the dung gate a thousand cubits east, and then "the gate of the fountain, and the wall of the pool of Siloah, and the stairs that go down from the city of David, and the place over against the sepulchres of David, and the pool that was made, and the water gate, and the horse gate," until the sheep gate is reached again.

While this paper is passing through the press I am informed from the office of the Palestine Exploration Fund that Dr. Bliss has uncovered in the Tyropœon a street, well paved and having stone curbing. He had first traced out the line of the old wall as the diagram indicates. He then began again at a point near where the word "Zion" appears, and moved eastward along the line of the present wall. This has brought his work to the Tyropœon at a point considerably above the old wall and near Siloam. If he now excavates this street southward, as he will undoubtedly do, he will make still more clear the position of its gate and the purpose for which it was used and which gave it its designation.