

ROBINSON'S ARCH.

BY W. SIMPSON, ESQ.

THE excavation at Robinson's Arch has led to what is perhaps one of the most picturesque points of "underground Jerusalem." A bridge is always attractive to an artist, but a bridge in ruins is doubly so. In the present case we find that a *bridge buried in ruins* is not less attractive, that it is a good subject for the pencil, and its position, where it has been entombed for ages, endows it with an interest which it is difficult to convey in words. The three courses seen above ground, and forming part of the Haram Wall, had been the subject of many theories. Dr. Robinson's first and most natural conclusion, that it had been a bridge, was doubted by some of the highest authorities upon the topography of Jerusalem. But when Mr. Warren sunk a shaft at this place and came upon the pier which supported the other end of the Arch, every doubt was set at rest. A fact was attained and a point settled.

In descending this shaft the visitor first reaches the base of the pier. It is formed of the same kind of stones as older parts of the Haram Wall, the "bevelled draught" is on them, and some are very large. This, with the fact that the pier is founded on the rock, would indicate that they belong to the same date, and are part of the original design of the wall. That there need be no doubt about the pre-existence of the arch above, you are shown the voussoirs, or bevelled stones of it, still lying where they fell, on what would be the level of the ground at the time. They are in a confused heap, and one has to wriggle through these large blocks like a weasel, and then there is a farther descent of about 20ft. and a new feature is discovered. You find yourself in an arched passage. It is both high and wide. You could not drive a cab through it, but one could easily pass riding on a donkey. It runs north and south along the course of the Tyropœon Valley. At a short distance to the north it contracts in size, so much so that a man must crawl to enter. Although arched with stones, the sides are cut out of the solid rock, so that here we are clearly below the most ancient surface of the ground, but not far, as the arch overhead indicates. To the south the arch ceases, and you enter an expansion of the passage. This is choked up with earth, but a square hole in the roof clearly tells its purpose. That hole was for drawing water, and the spot is a cistern. This also conveys a point of importance; the passage was not a sewer, but a conduit for pure water. And another important point is also reached, that when the ground was 60ft. below its present surface, at some former period long gone by, the people of Jerusalem dipped their vessels through that square opening into this well of running water. Imagination has to stop at the date of Solomon as the time when the temple, the Haram Wall, and the bridge were built; but this cistern may have existed ages before that time. Scandals whispered at the mouth of this well may have echoed round its rocky sides as far back as the time when the Jebusites and Canaanites ruled in the land. But

a cistern or cave with no constructive character about it, no ornament, not even the mark of a tool left, leaves small material to guide any one to its probable age. It might have been but of yesterday, did not the mass of *débris* above preclude the idea. And another evidence of its antiquity will be given.

Through the arched roof of the rock-cut passage two of the voussoirs have penetrated in their fall. These stones are very large, and must have descended with an immense force. Only one corner of these voussoirs is visible, where they have forced themselves down through the arch, and they now rest supported by the wall of solid rock on each side. These voussoirs, by their position, prove that the rock-cut passage and its arched roof had been in existence at the time when the destruction of Robinson's Arch occurred. As to when that took place, we have as yet no data by which to judge, but it could not have been of yesterday. The 60ft. of rubbish overhead is a clear proof of that. The roof of the conduit must have been very near the surface when the bridge fell, for a very few feet of earth would have deadened the fall, and prevented the very picturesque result which we now see so far below the surface.

It would be of the highest importance if the date of the building or of the destruction of any one of these places could be determined. As yet we can only come to conclusions as to the relative age of each part from the indications of their position, and we can only hope that Mr. Warren will in his diggings stumble upon something that may give us this most important key-note. It would be vain to speculate on the time necessary for 60ft. of rubbish to accumulate; we can only conclude, when we see the surface with corn-fields upon it, a forest of prickly pears and old houses, and massive walls with towers built since the accumulation took place—and these walls and towers now in ruins—that we have a very long period of time to deal with. It would be equally vain to speculate on the destruction of this magnificent bridge; the stones do not seem to have decayed, and this prevents the mind from supposing that it had become a ruin before it fell. Was it an enemy destroying the walls, or an effort of defence breaking down the approaches? Before the days of gunpowder the destruction of such an arch would be difficult. An earthquake would be the easiest explanation, and Josephus does chronicle a very severe one in *Antiq.* xv. ch. v. § 2.

Mr. Warren describes a second fall of voussoirs, which now lie upon a pavement formed upon *débris*, and 20ft. above the top of the conduit below. This would imply that the arch had remained broken while the 20ft. of *débris* was forming. Mr. Warren also describes houses as having been built on the level of this pavement, and their destruction helped to supply the rubbish which now fills up the place.

That this corner is one of the most ancient parts of the Haram Wall no one doubts. The immense stones still remaining in it are considered to be a clear evidence of this. The spring of the arch is 3Sft. from the

south-west corner, and there is one stone stretches along the whole of this space. The second course of the spring of Robinson's Arch is usually represented as being formed of two stones, but I was inclined to the idea that it was only one. What seems the junction of the two may be only a crack which has increased by the decay of the stone. If they are two stones, one thing is clear, they were one stone in the quarry; for the same stratification passes along from the one to the other. If this should be found to be only one stone, it will be one of the largest in the whole Haram Wall.

It is not so generally known that there is the spring of another arch still visible in the Haram Wall: all that is to be seen is one course formed of two stones. This is at the south-east corner. As it is about the same distance north from the corner as Robinson's Arch, it follows that if a road or pathway went direct from one of these that it would lead straight to the other. This would indicate a symmetry in the design of the two bridges; but as this second bridge would lead across the Kedron to a point not far from Absalom's pillar, one asks, "For what purpose could such a work be constructed?" The width of the valley is great, and the depth would be still more giddy than the walls as described by Josephus. The spring course would indicate a narrower bridge than that at the south-west corner, and it puzzles one to explain for what purpose such slight structure could be for. None but a nation of Blondins could have used it as a bridge. The only explanation yet given is, that it was for the scapegoat to pass over on its way to the Dead Sea and the desert. If this is not the true theory, the only other thing that one can suggest is, that it was an aqueduct, by which the waters from the temple could "issue out towards the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea" (Ezek. xlvii. 8). Still there is a possibility that it may have been only a balcony or a stair. It was the stairs leading up unto the house of the Lord that so affected the Queen of Sheba, and as yet no remains of these have been found. We cannot expect everything to be cleared up at once. The Explorations have already done good work, and there is more in store for them to do.

FROM THE
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO THE
GENERAL COMMITTEE, AT THE MEETING OF THE
4TH MAY, 1869.

THE Executive Committee desire to express their very strong sense of the activity, intelligence, and ability displayed by Lieutenant Warren in the conduct of the works at Jerusalem. It would be difficult to find a man more qualified for the prosecution of such works, requiring as they do, great tact, judgment as to the most likely spots for excavation, and the most unwearrying personal activity and courage. He has now