

## THE DESERT OF THE TĪH.

A LINE drawn from the ancient port of Gaza, on the Mediterranean, through the wells called Bir-es-seba, the site of Beersheba, to the entrance of Wady el-Jeib, at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, cuts off the northern part of the Holy Land, where towns and villages are found, from the southern part, which is almost wholly devoid of such habitations.

The latter section is naturally divisible into three parts, viz., 1, Sinai; 2, the Desert of et-Tih, the scene of the Wanderings of the Children of Israel; 3, the Negeb, or "south country" of the Bible, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelt.

The attention which it is well known has recently been paid with so much success to the exploration and partial survey of Sinai, is now being followed up by an examination, by Mr. Palmer and Mr. Drake, under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund, of the Desert of et-Tih and the Negeb, with a view to the further elucidation of the scenes in which the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelt, and of the desert where the children of Israel spent forty years in consequence of their revolt at Kadesh. The tract in question is in some parts entirely unknown, and its exploration has now become more than ever a desideratum in the various branches of science.

The Desert of et-Tih is a limestone plateau of irregular surface, having the Peninsula of Sinai on the south, with the Mediterranean Sea and the Promised Land on the north. Just as Sinai projects wedge-shaped into the Red Sea between the gulfs of Suez and Akaba, so does the Tih advance with steep escarpments into the peninsula. On one side the edge of the plateau runs nearly parallel with the Gulf of Suez, and skirting the isthmus, not far eastward of the new ship canal, is gradually lost in the desert plain which borders the Mediterranean Sea.

On the other side in like manner the edge of the plateau faces the Gulf of Akaba, and continues in the same direction to skirt the Wady el-Arabah, which separates the gulf from the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley. On this side the desert plateau is terminated on the north by the hilly country which, extending through the whole length of the Promised Land, commences about 50 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea. It forms a well-defined limit of the desert, and is described by Dr. Robinson as rising like a wall from the desert plain, with the remarkable cone of Jebel 'Arâif on the west, and the cliff of el-Mukrah on the east.

This hilly region, as far as Beersheba, includes the Negeb, or "South land" of the Bible, with the upland pastures of Gerar, where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fed their flocks, and held personal intercourse with the Almighty. It was afterwards inhabited by the Amalekites, in later times by the Idumeans, and now by the Azazimeh, the Saidiyeh, and the Dhullam Arabs. The Azazimeh country is the most southerly, and quite unknown. Near the cliff Mukrah, an ancient road is supposed to have

passed between Gaza and the Gulf of Akaba, with a branch to Hebron. Here, too, at its base, on the verge of Paran or the Tih, and of Zin or the Arabah, some critics place Kadesh, one of the most hotly contested sites in Biblical investigation, and the settlement of which is much to be desired. The other positions of most importance in the controversy, are Dr. Robinson's Ain el-Weibeh, in the Arabah; and Mr. Rowland's Ain el Kudeirah, or Kudes, among the valleys on the west.

Just as Sinai projects into the Red Sea, and as the Tih projects into Sinai, so does the Negeb advance into the Tih. For on the west the desert skirts the hill country northwards from Jebel 'Arâif up to Beersheba and Gaza, where the Wady Suny serves for a boundary, dividing the barren waste from the Shefelah, or fertile plain of Philistia. On the east the plateau of the Tih runs up beyond the cliff of el-Mukrah, towards the Dead Sea, in the form of a narrow terrace, between the eastern base of the hill country and the great Wady el-Arabah.

In proceeding northwards from the Gulf of Akaba, the traveller ascends a succession of terraces, the first of which is the Tih itself, and the next is the hill country of the Azazimeh. This is succeeded by a third, which rises precipitously from the second terrace up a vast inclined plane of a thousand feet in height, and very steep. It is traversed by the Nukb, or pass of es-Sufa, and also nearer the Dead Sea by the pass of ez-Zuweirah, both well described by Dr. Robinson. On this third terrace are the ruins of Thamara (Kurnub), Aroer (Arara), and Arad. It is inhabited by Dhullam and Saidiyeh Arabs. Its western side is formed by Jebel Rakmah, behind which Dr. Stewart saw from Beersheba the top of another range, called Ras Tareibeh, but neither of these ranges have been explored. A valley of considerable extent, called Wady Murieh, is said to cross the high land at the foot of the third terrace, connecting Wady el-Ain on the west with Wady Fikreh on the east. It is at the western end of these valleys that Mr. Rowland places Kadesh. In the same neighbourhood are said to be the ruins of Eboda; and Jebel Maderah, which rises in a conical form out of Wady Murreh, is regarded by some as Mount Hor.

The distance from Hebron or Gaza to the cliff of el-Mukrah, the southern extremity of the hill country, is about 70 geographical miles in direct lines. The width of the hill country is about 30 geographical miles. Up to the present time it has only been crossed by travellers hurrying on to Hebron, Petra, or Sinai. It is with the view of attracting more than a passing glance to this home of the Patriarchs, and threshold of the Promised Land, as well as to define its relations to the Desert of et-Tih, that these brief remarks have been made. Until it is exhaustively studied, the situation of Kadesh must remain in doubt, and that is the key to the movements of the Israelites after they departed from Sinai. It was their third resting-place beyond Sinai. They came to Kadesh, unto the mountain of the Amorites, in the wilderness of Paran, and near to the wilderness of Zin, eleven days' journey from Horeb. There the people remained while the spies "ascended by the

south, and came unto Hebron," searching the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob. There Miriam died. There Moses smote the rock and the water came out abundantly, but, sinning in the act, he was denied admission into the Promised Land. From thence, after sojourning forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites departed on their way to Canaan, and came to Mount Hor, where Aaron died.

Turning now to the TĪh itself, the first point that invites examination on approaching it from Sinai is the nature of its southern limit, and the passes which cross it. Beyond the names of Jebel er-Rahab, Jebel et-TĪh, Jebel Ojmeh, and Jebel Dhelel, as divisions of the range, together with certain prominent points seen at a distance, as Tas et-Sudr and Jebel Wardan, as well as the passes of er-Rakineh, Wursah, and Mureikhy, there is but little to be found that deserves the name of accurate description or delineation. The south-eastern edge is perhaps worse defined than the south-western; indeed, there is scarcely anything definite known about the former.

The surface of the plateau itself, although traversed by the route of the Egyptian caravan to Mecca, and often crossed by travellers, has never been systematically explored. It is for the most part drained by the Wady el-Arish into the Mediterranean, and by the Wady el-Jeib into the Dead Sea. But although many branches of these great watercourses are delineated and named on such a map as Robinson's, yet nobody has yet attempted to trace any one of them throughout, and the entire outline will certainly be found very inaccurate. Still more imperfect is the orography of the plateau. It is known to be diversified by various elevated groups and ranges, but only passing glances have been bestowed upon them. Russegger, in 1838, threw light upon the subject by his observations for general elevation and geology, but no one has yet attempted to deal with it in detail.

Perhaps the most interesting inquiry about this plateau, in a Biblical point of view, is as to its capacity for sustaining a considerable population under such conditions as it now presents, and under such other conditions as may appear to have existed in former times. Robinson's rapid journey across the eastern corner of the plateau enabled him to ascertain the names of the tribes now inhabiting the entire plateau, viz., the Haiwât, the Tiyahah, and the Terâbin. The Terâbin appear to be of the chief importance, and to be very rich in flocks and herds. They inhabit the western side of the plateau from Jebel er-Rahab to Gaza, and their head-quarters are said to be near Tas et-Sudr. The Tiyahah occupy the centre in two divisions, and are in alliance with the Terâbin. The Haiwât inhabit the eastern part. Besides this meagre information, very little is known of these tribes.

The examination of the TĪh, or Wilderness of the Wanderings, including, it is to be hoped, the highlands of the Azazimeh, Saidiyeh, and Dhullâm, by Mr. E. H. Palmer and Mr. C. F. Tyrwhitt Drake, cannot fail to throw much new light on this interesting region. The familiarity of the former with the Arabic tongue, and the experience of the latter as

a naturalist, are excellent qualifications for the work. Mr. Palmer will, at all events, give us a full account of the people, their history, numbers, organisation, manners, customs, and traditions. Through these inquiries, some light may perhaps be thrown upon the Israelite stations in Numbers xxxiii. It would have been satisfactory to have found an experienced surveyor among the party, but this deficiency may be counterbalanced by a systematic examination of the ground, coupled with such an itinerary as Dr. Robinson supplies in his "Biblical Researches."

T. S.

### NOTES ON A VISIT TO SAIDA IN JULY, 1869.

BY CAPTAIN WARREN, R.E.

THE journey up from Jerusalem to Beyrout, overland, in the summer time, has two advantages to those who can enjoy riding in the full blaze of a Syrian sun for several hours every day.

1st. The days being so much longer and the roads dry, a journey that takes the whole day in winter can be accomplished by noon.

2nd. All the under-vegetation being burnt up, any architectural remains can be examined without difficulty.

Starting on 11th July from near Jerusalem, without tents, and provided with letters to the several Turkish governors, and (through the kindness of M. Ganneau) with introductions to the various Latin convents, I arrived at Beyrout in eight days, including one day's detention at Saïda.

On the second day, at Jentn, midway between Nablûs and Nazareth, we found no accommodation whatever; but, the soldiers having lately moved down to Beisan (where a block house has been built), we were able to get possession of the chief room in the deserted serai.

We arrived at Nazareth on the third morning about eleven o'clock. I paid a visit to Dr. Varton, to whom Dr. Chaplin has confided the care of the meteorological instruments of the Palestine Exploration Fund at this station. It is gratifying to see how much interest he takes in this work; and it would be very desirable to send some more mercurial barometers out to Jerusalem, so that Dr. Chaplin could supply Nazareth and Gaza.

The observations at the two hill-stations, Jerusalem and Nazareth, as compared with those at Jaffa and Gaza, will be of great interest; as will those again compared with those taken by Mr. Eldridge in the totally different climate of Beyrout and the Lebanon.

I understand that observations were taken at Saïda by the American missionaries for several years. It would be desirable to obtain permission to examine these, and publish what would be useful.

Next day, from Nazareth early, I passed Sefurieh. There are several interesting remains about this town. I examined the square tower at the top of the hill, and do not think the lower stones are *in situ*; they have sunken marginal drafts, and some stones are 2ft. 6in. in height and 4ft.