

MR. TYRWHITT DRAKE'S REPORTS.

X.

CAMP, UMM EL FAHM, *Oct.*, 1872.

On the 28th ult. we moved camp from Jenín to this place. The heat in the plain of Esdraelon had been very great. On the 27th the thermometer stood at 107 degs. in the tent, and 103·5 degs. in the Observatory. Notwithstanding this, the result of the month's work since leaving Jeb'a is most satisfactory. A base line of four and a half miles in length was laid down, measured and checked; several cairns were, as usual, put up and observed from, and a total of 145 square miles were sketched in. Though part of this lay on the plain, the greatly increased rate of progress will be seen by a comparison with the amount of country sketched in per month when we first began: this seldom averaged more than sixty square miles. The non-commissioned officers were then, however, unused to the hard riding, and new to the country and its ways. Now, notwithstanding the great heat, the rate of work is more than twice as rapid as it was seven months ago, and I feel sure, at the same time, that its accuracy is in no wise interfered with. I am glad to be able to report also that no member of the party, either European or native, has hitherto been laid up with sickness. With the exception of a few trifling ailments of two or three days' duration, our state of health has been all that could be desired.

The village beside which we are now camped is a large one, and divided into four quarters, El Jebarín, El Mahamín, El Majáhineh, and El Akbaríyeh, each of which has its own sheikh. There are some fifteen houses of Christians, which represent a total of about eighty souls. These are mostly birds of passage, who "squat" wherever, and as long as, they find it convenient, and then flit "to fresh fields and pastures new." The natives are an unruly lot, who never paid taxes till within the last few years, and who have not yet learnt the lesson of subjection. Some days ago a man tried to seize my horse's bridle as I was passing near a threshing-floor, and insolently told me to be off, at the same time making as though he would strike me; but, seeing then that he had gone rather too far, took to his heels and fled. After a suspense of three or four days, I consented, at the intercession of two of the sheikhs, the kadi, and other village worthies, not to have the man imprisoned at Jenín, so he was brought and solemnly beaten before my tent door by the sheikh of his quarter. As civility in this country is induced by fear and a sense of inferiority, we shall probably be treated with decent respect for some little time to come. One cause of the villagers' unruliness is their wealth: they possess large herds of cattle and flocks of goats, a very considerable number of horses, and more

than the normal quantity of camels and donkeys. Their land comprises a wide tract of thicket (called *Umm el Khattaf*, "Mother of the Ravisher," from the dense growth which, as it were, seizes and holds those who try to pass through it) to the south and east, arable hills to the west, and virtually, as much of the rich plain of Esdraelon (Merj ibn 'Amir) as they choose to cultivate. Besides all this, the village owns some twenty or more springs, under whose immediate influence orange and lemon trees flourish. Shaddocks grow to an enormous size; I have one now in the tent whose circumference lengthwise is 2ft. 6½in., and its girth 2ft. 3½in.; weight, about eight or nine pounds; and tomatoes, cucumbers, and other thirsty vegetables flourish. The taxes paid by the village amount to 23,000 piasters, or £185 sterling, in addition to the poll-tax on sheep, goats, and cattle, which probably comes to £20 more.

Under and immediately to the east of Umm el Fahm is the great volcanic upheaval which I mentioned in my last report as existing beneath the tomb of Sheikh Iskander. In addition to the basalt, which is mostly friable, stratified volcanic clay and mud are found in large quantities, of a yellow, red, or greenish colour, though the prevailing tint is a dusky brown. This is usually overlaid by a stratum of limestone more or less hard; that at the sides of the upheaval is distinctly metamorphic, and lower down is hard and crystalline.

On crossing Wady 'Ar'a—which, rising above Lejjun, flows in a south-westerly direction to the sea—a curious change is observable. All wild vegetation ceases, except a few thistles and plants of fennel, while the rock changes to chalky limestone at top, mixed with a few flints, and hard clay beneath, which is here used for keeping the roofs watertight. On the western side of this formation, which is closely furrowed with wadies, where it begins to sink into the Maritime Plain, lies an open woodland consisting entirely of *ballût* (*Quercus Ægilops*, locally called *Mallûl*), which here grows into trees some thirty to thirty-five feet high and six to ten feet in circumference. The thickets westward consist chiefly of *sindian* (*Q. pseudo coccifera*), *afs* (*Q. infectoria*, locally *affûs*), *sarris* (*Pistachia lentiscus*), *butm* (*P. terebinthus*), *burzeh* (a shrub with leaves very like the *sindian*, and bearing a purple berry the size of a currant); intermingled with these are a few plants of *cistus*, *arbutus andrachne*, and the usual growth of *billan* (*Poterium spinosum*), sweet-leaved vines, &c., in the more open places.

The fauna is scanty: the mammals most common are wild boars, jackals, and wolves. A few leopards are said to exist, but are more frequently found on Carmel; ichneumons are very common, badgers less so. A species of wild cat—captured near Nazareth—has been described to me by Mr. Zeller as very like the booted cat (*Felis chaus*), but without the black feet. The lynx (*F. caracal*) also exists, but owing to its very shy habits is rarely seen.

The scarcity of birds in these thickets has most surprised me; the dense growth of brushwood is just the shelter which many of the

warblers most affect, but I have been able to detect very few taking advantage of it. I have noticed a few Montagues harriers, and a peregrine falcon. Black-headed jays, the Athene owl, and kestrels are as common as usual.

The season of gathering the olives has just commenced, and the women, boys, and girls are all busy thrashing the trees with long poles and gathering up the fruit, which is just beginning to turn black. The other day a boy was killed by falling from a high branch. A litter was hastily improvised with a cloak and a couple of poles, the corpse was carried off, and, after the fashion of the country, buried instantane. The yield of olives this year is exceedingly good, as is that of all the crops except the cotton and millet. The *simsim* (sesame), which is exported to Marseilles for the purpose of being converted into "superfine olive oil," has been most abundant, and the tax collectors, local governors, and even the fellahín, will benefit from this year of plenty.

The woodlands which I have mentioned are a most pleasing relief to the eye after the bare grey rocks, varied only by patches of grey-foliaged olives, and vaulted with a glaring grey sky, like molten lead, to which we have been so long accustomed. Our first shower of rain fell on the evening of the 3rd, and though it only amounted to .005 in., the air was somewhat cooled, and the 5th was one of those wonderfully clear days, so rare in northern latitudes, which lend a charm even to the most monotonous stretch of round-topped hills. From our stations near here, Jaffa, Carmel, Jebel Sunnin (in the Libanus), Mount Hermon, the range of Jebel el Durúz, Hauran (with its prominent volcanic cones), and block of Jebel Ajlún (Gilead), were all distinctly seen.

The tomb of Weli Iskander, which stands near here, has proved a most valuable trigonometrical station. This personage is, on the authority of the Kadi, one of the kings of the Children of Israel, but I cannot find any foundation for this legend in history, unless it be some memory of Alexander, son of Herod, who was strangled at Sebaste, but buried at Alexandrium (Jos. B. J. 1 xxvii. 6). Others say that it is a *makam* in honour of Alexander the Great, of whom Moslem legends, with their usual disregard for chronology, tell marvellous tales. He was a negro, the son of El Dhab'aak, king of Himyar, and a Greek princess, and is called *Iskander z'ul Karnayn*, "Alexander with the two horns," which grew like a ram's from his temples. To conceal them he invented the turban; he also invented the fashion of shaking hands. He had an interview with Abraham in Wady Seb'a (Beersheba) B.C. 300; his conquests extended over the world, and amongst other notables he slew Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog), who were each 240 feet high; and to avoid the plague which would ensue from the putrefaction of such a mass of flesh, he caused an army of birds of prey to tear off their flesh and carry it to the sea. These giants were omnivorous; they ate trees, crops, men, horses, and cattle, and were able to drink the Lake of Tiberias dry in a single day. Some of their race, who were also

cannibals, rode ants as large as camels instead of horses. Alexander was a fit hero to cope with such monsters, as his nose was three spans long and, of course, the rest of his body in proportion. Og, the king of Bashan, to reach whose knee Moses, who was twenty cubits high, took an axe twenty cubits long and leapt up twenty cubits from the earth, must doubtless have been a connection of these giants.

In several places among the brushwood we have observed square towers measuring twelve to fifteen feet on each side, and built of roughly-hewn stones two to four feet long. These, together with huge built-up cairns, and the rock-hewn wine and oil presses, are doubtless of remote antiquity.

In one ruin—Khirbet Abu 'Amir—near Kefr Kúd, we found the ruins of a building. It is probably a small temple, and there are appearances as though it were *in antis*. The stones are too much scattered and decayed for satisfactory examination. Lieutenant Conder and myself have made sketches of the ornamentation, which is much overcrowded on the cornices. All around are ruins of houses and traces of a road up to them, on which are strewn the voussoirs of a circular arch with plain mouldings. The usual rock-hewn cisterns exist, but lined with a very hard pinkish cement. This colour arises from the finely coloured pottery mixed with the lime.

Near by is a pit hewn in the soft rock, in which I was told water still collects and remains, even in the summer, after abundant rains. Beside it are some fine ballút trees, and a solid platform 35ft. by 30ft. of large roughly-hewn stones. The object of this erection is not evident; whether sacrificial or merely an oil-press is impossible to say. The tomb of Sheikh Selámeh now stands upon it.

THE COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF PALESTINE, EGYPT, AND ASSYRIA.

BY FRANCIS ROUBILLAC CONDER, C.E.

NOT a little disquiet has been awakened in the minds of many estimable persons by the statement that the results of recent decipherments of the hieroglyphical inscriptions of Egypt, of the cuneiform records of Assyria and of Persia, and of the Phœnician tablets of Palestine, are irreconcilable with a belief in the uncorrupted accuracy, or even the original authenticity, of the historic books of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is of no little importance to arrive at the truth in this matter. On the one hand, writers may be named who eagerly seize the occasion to impugn much to which a high degree of unquestioned veneration has long been accorded. On the other hand, the patient, unrewarded, unappreciated labours of the students of long-forgotten tongues are