

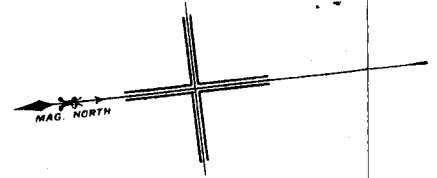
## EBAL AND GERIZIM, 1866.

ON the 6th March Lieut. Anderson and I arrived at Nablus, with the view of carrying out some excavations on Mount Gerizim, and examining the points of interest in the neighbourhood. Before, however, attempting to describe the result of our labours, it will be well to give a general sketch of the locality. At Nablus the range of hills which traverses Palestine from north to south, is pierced by a remarkable pass, running nearly east and west; on the north the pass is flanked by the range of Mount Ebal, rising at its highest point to 3,029 feet above the sea, or 1,200 feet above the level of the valley; on the south by the range of Mount Gerizim, rising to 2,898 feet. Between these two mountains the valley rises gently towards the east, to the waterparting between the waters of the Mediterranean and the Jordan, at which point there is a remarkable topographical feature which is not often met with—a recess on either side of the valley, forming a grand natural amphitheatre, the scene, in all probability, of the ratification of the law. From this point the ground falls gradually to the rich plain of El Mukhna, which runs north and south; and is bounded westwards by the steep eastern declivities of Ebal and Gerizim. Where the valley merges into the plain there are two sites of great interest—Joseph's Tomb and Jacob's Well. The beauty of the Vale of Nablus has been frequently described by travellers, and by no one more happily than by Lieut. Vandevelde, who grows eloquent on the charming character of the vegetation, the joyous notes of the numerous birds of song, the soft colouring of the landscape, and the bright sparkling streams. The latter, perhaps, more than anything else, give the vale its peculiar charm. The grateful sound of running water strikes the ear at every turn, and produces a quiet sensation of enjoyment, which is fully appreciated by the traveller weary with the dry and thirsty hills of Judæa.

Amidst this wealth of verdure, clinging as it were to the slopes of Gerizim, the mount of blessings, lies Nablus,\* the ancient Shechem; its situation, with easy access to the Mediterranean on the one hand, and to the Jordan Valley and transjordanic district on the other, marking it as a place of importance from the earliest period.

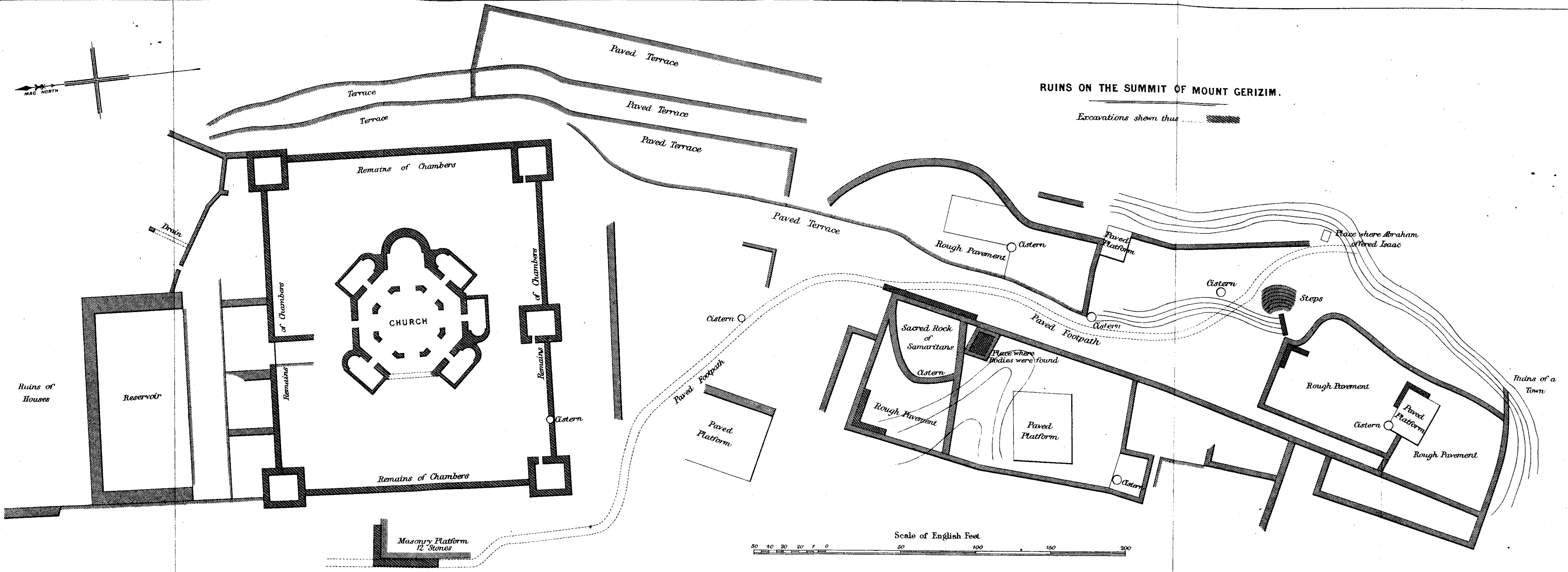
*Mount Ebal.*—The summit of Ebal is a comparatively level plateau of some extent. There is no actual peak, but the ground rises towards the west, and attains its greatest elevation near a small pile of stones. The view from this point is a perfect panorama, and one of the finest and most extensive in the country, embracing Safed, Jebel Jermuk, and Hermon on the north; Jaffa, Ramleh, and the maritime plain on the west; the heights above Beitin (Bethel) on the south; and the Hauran plateau on the east. The upper strata of the nummulitic limestone, of which the mountain is composed, are so cracked and broken, apparently by the action of weather, that the surface of the plateau, at first sight,

\* Photos. 95, 96.



# RUINS ON THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT GERIZIM.

Excavations shown thus



looks as if it were covered by a rude pavement; and it was some time before we realised that it was quite natural. Towards the east end of the plateau is the remarkable ruin called by the Arabs "Khirbet Kneeseh."\* It consists of an enclosure 92ft. square, with walls 20ft. thick, built of selected unhewn stones, without mortar. In the thickness of the wall are the remains of several chambers, each about 10ft. square, and at two opposite ends there is a projection of 4ft., as if for defensive purposes. There is a cistern within the building, and round it are several heaps of stones and ruins. Excavations were made, but without result. It is not easy to form an opinion on the object of this building; it is too small for a fortified camp, and though the chambers are somewhat similar to those in the fortified churches, the interior space, 50ft. square, is too restricted to have held a church. There was no trace of any plaster, and nothing that would enable us to connect it with the altar said to have been erected by Joshua on Mount Ebal.

The contrast between the rich vegetation on Gerizim and the barrenness of Ebal has frequently been commented upon by travellers. This arises from the structure of the rock, the strata dipping towards the north across the valley, and thus preventing the existence of springs on the southern slope of Ebal. The mountain, however, is by no means so sterile as has been supposed; for a considerable height it is clothed with luxuriant cacti gardens, carefully cultivated in terraces, and above these, to the very summit, rise a succession of terraces well supplied with cisterns, that speak of a careful system of cultivation and irrigation at a former period. Many of these terraces are well preserved, and planted in springtime with corn, which is as fine and healthy-looking as any on Gerizim. The northern slope of Ebal is rich in springs, and almost as well supplied with water as the northern slope of Gerizim.

At the foot of Ebal there is a modern Moslem cemetery, and scattered amongst the cacti gardens, and over the southern slope, are numerous rock-hewn tombs, which have been alluded to in a previous paper.†

*Mount Gerizim.*—Immediately above Nablus there are several stone quarries, and in places the limestone strata stand out in bold cliffs, which seem to overhang the town and form a peculiar feature in the view from the opposite ridge, at the point where the road to Samaria crosses it. From the top of one of these, whence escape to the mountain behind would be easy, it is natural to picture Jotham delivering his striking parable (Judges ix. 7—21).

On reaching the summit of the mountain, by the road from the fountain of Ras el 'Ain, a long narrow shoulder is seen stretching eastward to the Samaritan place of sacrifice.‡ On the north the ground descends abruptly to the Vale of Nablus, and on the south there is a more gradual slope, with no water and sparse cultivation. East of the place of sacrifice rises the true peak of Gerizim, crowned with the well-known ruins, and form-

\* See Photograph 92.

† See notes on "Tombs," *Quarterly Statement*, No. III., 1869.

‡ Photos. 125, 128.

ing the eastern extremity of the ridge. From this point a spur stretches out northwards, and partly encloses the natural amphitheatre mentioned above. The mountain is almost entirely composed of nummulitic limestone. The summit of Gerizim is a small level plateau, having its largest dimension nearly north and south. The northern end is occupied by the ruins of a castle and church, the southern by smaller remains, principally low and irregularly built walls. In the midst of the latter is a sloping rock, which is regarded by the Samaritans with much veneration; it is said to be the site of the altar of their temple, and they remove their shoes when approaching it. At the eastern edge of the plateau, a small cavity in the rock is shown as the place on which Abraham offered up Isaac. West of the castle, and a short distance down the hill, some massive foundations are pointed out as the "twelve stones" which were set up by Joshua after the reading of the law.

Considerable excavations were made under the superintendence of Lieut. Anderson, and the accompanying plan made of the ruins. The castle \* is rectangular, with flanking towers at each of its angles; on the eastern side are the remains of several chambers, and over the door of one of them is a Greek cross. The walls are built of well-dressed stones, which have marginal drafts, and are set without mortar; many of them appear to have been taken from earlier buildings.

The church is octagonal. On the eastern side is an apse, on the northern the main entrance; on five sides there are small chapels, and on the eighth side there was probably a sixth chapel, but this could not be ascertained, as the foundations had been almost entirely removed. There is an inner octagon which gives the plan some resemblance to that of the "Dome of the Rock" at Jerusalem. The flooring is partly of marble, partly of tiles, and below this a platform of rough masonry was found; in the intervening rubbish a very early Cufic coin was turned up, which had apparently slipped down through the joints of the tiles. The only capital uncovered was of a debased Corinthian order. The church is believed to have been built by Justinian, *circa* A.D. 533.

South of the castle there are no massive foundations, but numerous small walls, and amongst these are several cisterns half-filled with rubbish; a pathway of late date runs along the crest of the hill from south to north, passing in front of the "twelve stones," where for some distance it rests on a mass of loose stones and rubbish, in which some Cufic copper coins were found. The "holy place" of the Samaritans † is a portion of the natural rock dipping to the north-west, and draining into a cistern half full of stones; an excavation in an adjoining enclosure uncovered a mass of human bones lying on a thin layer of some dark substance, which had stained the rock beneath to a dark burnt-umber colour. The Amran said they were the bodies of priests, anointed with consecrated oil, but they seemed rather to be hasty interments, such as would be made in time of war.

There are several platforms of unhewn stone, somewhat similar to the

\* Photo. 90.

† Photo. 89.

praying-places in the Haram at Jerusalem; and one of these near the place at which Abraham is said to have offered up Isaac, is approached by a curious flight of circular steps.\*

The "twelve stones" form part of a solid platform of unhewn masonry; there are four courses of stones, and the upper, shown as the "twelve stones," is set back eight inches; two of the stones were turned over, but no trace of an inscription was found on them. The stone when exposed to the air is of a dark bluish-grey colour, but when newly broken it has a cream-coloured appearance.

East of the castle are the remains of three platforms, and below them on the slope of the hill are broken terraces; the platforms have evidently been built to support some building on the top of the hill, and add to its appearance; and they, as well as the "twelve stones," may not improbably have formed part of the substructure of the Samaritan Temple. Of the temple itself there is nothing left, but to judge from the appearance and construction of the platforms, it probably stood on the site now occupied by the ruins of the church and castle; if it were south of the castle every stone must have been removed, as the ground was carefully examined and no trace of the foundations of any large building was found.

North of the castle is a large pool, and below this and surrounding the hill on all sides are the ruins of a considerable town, to which no distinctive name could be obtained. These ruins are most marked on the southern slope,† where a portion of the enclosing town wall, and the walls and divisions of several of the houses, can be seen; the walls are of unhewn stone, set without mortar.

Near the Samaritan place of sacrifice, at the western foot of the peak, are some inconsiderable ruins, to which every one we asked gave the name which Mons. De Sauley heard, Khirbet Louzah. This Dean Stanley identifies with the second Luz, founded by the inhabitants of Luz when expelled by the Ephraimites from Bethel.

At the extremity of the arm mentioned above as running northwards from the castle ‡ is a mound, partly artificial, and isolated from the ridge by a deep ditch. There are traces of steps on the four sides leading to the summit of the mound, which was occupied by a building fifty-three feet square, having walls of great thickness. Some excavations were made, but with the exception of a few Roman coins nothing of interest was found. Below the mound on the north are some excavations in the rock, apparently for holding water.

*Scene of the reading of the Law.*—The natural amphitheatre § previously mentioned as existing at the waterparting near the eastern end of the Vale of Nablus was, probably, the scene of the events described in Joshua viii. 30—35. It may be remembered that, in accordance with the commands of Moses, the Israelites were, after their entrance in the promised land, to "put" the curse on Mount Ebal and the blessing on Mount Gerizim. "This was to be accomplished by a ceremonial in

\* Photos. 91, 127. † Photo. 88. ‡ Photo. 126. § Photo. 93.

which half the tribes stood on the one mount and half on the other ; those on Gerizim responding to and affirming blessings, those on Ebal curses, as pronounced by the Levites, who remained with the ark in the centre of the interval.\* It is hardly too much to say of this natural amphitheatre that there is no other place in Palestine so suitable for the assembly of an immense body of men within the limits to which a human voice could reach, and where at the same time each individual would be able to see what was being done. The recesses in the two mountains, which form the amphitheatre, are exactly opposite to each other, and the limestone strata running up to the very summits in a succession of ledges present the appearance of a series of regular benches. A grander sight can scarcely be imagined than that which the reading of the Law must have presented : the ark, borne by the Levites, on the gentle elevation which separates the waters of the Mediterranean from those of the Dead Sea, and "all Israel and their elders, and officers, and their judges" on this side and on that, "half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal," covering the bare hill-sides from head to foot. Two questions have been raised in connection with the reading of the Law : the possibility of hearing it read, and the possibility of assembling the twelve tribes on the ground at the same time. Of the first there can be no doubt ; the valley has no peculiar acoustic properties, but the air in Palestine is so clear that the voice can be easily heard at distances which would seem impossible in England ; and as a case in point it may be mentioned that during the excavations on Mount Gerizim the Arab workmen were on more than one occasion heard conversing with men passing along the valley below. It is not, however, necessary to suppose that every word of the Law was heard by the spectators ; the blessings and cursings were in all probability as familiar to the Israelites as the Litany or Ten Commandments are to us, and the responses would be taken up as soon as the voice of the reader of the Law ceased. With regard to the second point, Lieut. Anderson's plan † of Ebal and Gerizim gives a good representation of the ground and the principal distances ; but without making a minute contoured plan of the mountain sides (a work of great labour), it is not possible to form a correct estimate of the number of persons who could be assembled within the amphitheatre. There are, however, few localities which afford so large an amount of standing ground on the same area, or give such facilities for the assembly of a great multitude.

At the foot of the northern slope of Gerizim is one of the prettiest cemeteries in the country, consisting of a courtyard, with a well, and several masonry tombs, one of which was said to be that of Sheikh Jusuf (Joseph). We were not allowed to examine the tombs, but were much struck with the care bestowed on the trees and garden within the enclosure. The place is called El Amud (the column), and the Rev.

\* *Dictionary of Bible*, art. Gerizim.

† Published in "Recovery of Jerusalem."

George Williams has with much probability identified it with "the pillar that was in Shechem," where Abimelech was made king (Judges ix. 6); and with the oak of Moreh, near which Abraham built his first altar to the Lord after entering the promised land, and Joshua set up a great stone (Joshua xxiv. 26).

Jacob's well, at the eastern entrance to the Vale of Nablus,\* is covered by a vaulted chamber, round which are the ruins of a church, dating probably from the fourth century. On a second visit to Nablus in May, Lieut. Anderson made a careful examination of the well, and has given an interesting account of his descent, in the "Recovery of Jerusalem." He found the well to be 7ft. 6in. in diameter, and 75ft. deep; there was no water at the bottom, and the well was lined throughout with rough stones, being sunk in alluvial soil. According to Dr. Robinson, the depth in 1838 was 105ft. Christians, Jews, Moslems, and Samaritans, agree in considering this to be the well made by Jacob, and as the tradition goes back to the early part of the fourth century, there seems little reason to doubt that it is the same well at which our Lord met the Samaritan woman. Lieut. Anderson aptly remarks on this point that "the existence of a well in a place where watersprings are abundant is sufficiently remarkable to give this well a peculiar history." †

The small square building known as Joseph's Tomb lies a short distance north of Jacob's Well; within it we found two modern inscriptions, one Hebrew, the other Samaritan, and two vases for burning offerings, similar to those seen at Meiron. Within them were the ashes of some articles of apparel, which had recently been burnt. The tradition with regard to the Tomb is not so continuous as that of Jacob's Well. The little cemetery described above was shown to Maundrell as Joseph's Tomb, and the accounts of earlier travellers are not quite clear. Joseph, as we know, was embalmed in Egypt, and placed in a coffin or sarcophagus, with a view of his being carried by the Israelites to Palestine, and his body was probably conveyed in one of the waggons which accompanied the twelve tribes during their wanderings. The depth of alluvium at this spot, as indicated by Jacob's Well, precludes the idea that his body was placed in a rock-hewn chamber; and if this be really the site of his burial, the sarcophagus may still remain in the soil beneath the little chamber.

The town of Nablus contains many ancient remains, of which the most interesting is the principal mosque, with its fine Gothic portal. ‡ A description of the town, however, with its many ruins and its numerous springs, hardly comes within the scope of the present paper, nor is there space to enter upon the history of the place, or the solution of the many questions relating to the disputed sites on Gerizim and elsewhere, such as that of the altar on which Abraham offered up Isaac, &c. These have been fully examined by Robinson, Williams, Stanley, De Saulcy, and other travellers, and in the "Dictionary of the Bible," arts. Ebal, Gerizim, and Shechem.

C. W. W.

\* Photos. 131, 132. † "Recovery of Jerusalem," page 465. ‡ Photo. 94.