

standing to the height of some six or eight feet, but no arches remain. The masonry throughout is very rough, and somewhat resembles that of another small church a few miles farther north, at a place called *el Kabá*, where the arches are pointed. The ashlar is only rudely squared, and averages about one and a half to two feet in length of the stones. Upon one stone a rude boss was observed. There were no masons' marks visible, and indeed in this style they do not appear ever to occur. The interior of the apse, which was domed, was covered with a hard cement. These indications seem to point to the chapel having been built in the 12th or 13th century, as it resembles in general character the church of St. Jeremiah at Abu Ghôsh. Two rude caves exist some some fifty yards west of the chapel, in the side of the precipice. The ruins of *Khamasa* consist of scattered stones and of the remains of a rectangular building measuring 24ft. by 34ft. The masonry in this is similar to that of the church.

The existence of these mediæval ruins is interesting. The site evidently has been regarded as sacred in Christian times, but, as far as our present information goes, it cannot have been ever the *traditional* Emmaus, for down to the 14th century all geographers placed the Scriptural site at *'Amwâs* (Emmaus Nicopolis), and since that period tradition has pointed to Kubeibeh, seven miles from Jerusalem, where the remains of a splendid Crusading church still exist. It is possible that some tradition might be obtained on the spot, but of this we heard nothing at the time, and as the identification did not then present itself to my mind, I contented myself with sketching and planning the ruins.

The proximity to the main Roman road and the choice character of the immediately surrounding territory render this a very probable site for the home of the disbanded Roman soldiery. The name and distance agree, as shown, with the requirements of the case, and as no other site has been found by us bearing any title approaching to that of Emmaus, the identification is evidently the most satisfactory yet proposed for this interesting place.

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THE ROCK ETAM.

Judges xv.

15th July, 1876.

WHILST surveying the district called *el 'Akub*, "the ridges," lying west of the Judæan watershed, we spent some time in hunting for this famous site in the neighbourhood of Zorah and Eshtaol, and in the midst of Samson's native country. It occurred to Sergeant Black and to myself that the nearest approach to the name was in the modern *Beit 'Atab*, supposing a change from the final M to B, of which we have several instances, such as *Tibneh* for Timnah, &c. (See *Quarterly Statement*, 1874, p. 18.)

A further confirmation of this identification I pointed out later (*Quarterly Statement*, 1875, p. 12), in the fact of the existence at this site of a cavern of peculiar character, answering to the "cleft in the rock Etam," mistranslated "top of the rock Etam" in the Authorised Version.

I have just met with a further indication in the same connection. In preparing the nomenclature of the sheet (No. 17) on which the place occurs, I was led to search for the meaning of the name *Bîr el Hasûta*, which is given to this curious cave. It has not, as far as I can find, any meaning in Arabic, but it corresponds with the Hebrew word, הַסוּתָה (*Hasutah*) which is translated "a place of refuge." Thus the name seems to indicate that this place has been used from a very early time as a lurking or hiding place, as we gather it to have been in the time of Samson.

Beit 'Atâb is a modern village, though there are traces of antiquity about it, including a rock-cut tomb. It seems probable that in the time of Samson no town existed here, as it would in such a case most probably have been mentioned with the fourteen Shephelah towns in its neighbourhood. Etam has been confounded with the Etam of Solomon, which was situate farther east, probably near the pools of Solomon. This name has been recovered in the modern *'Ain 'Atân*, to the east of the pools.

Beit 'Atâb stands, as has been previously explained, on a rocky knoll, answering well to the meaning of the Hebrew word translated "rock," quite bare of trees and consisting almost entirely of hard, barren limestone. This peculiar summit stands up from a plateau on the east, where is a good olive grove and a spring, by which we encamped. On the west the ground falls rapidly, and thus, though not really at a great elevation as compared with the surrounding hills, *Beit 'Atâb* is very conspicuous on all sides.

The cavern is in all some 250 feet long, running in a S.S.W. direction. Its average height is about five to eight feet, and its width about eighteen feet. The west end of the tunnel is supposed to be about the centre of the modern village, but is now closed, as is another entrance about half way along. The east end leads to a vertical shaft six feet by five feet and ten feet deep, in the sides of which are niches, as if for lamps. It is from this shaft that the cavern has been called *Bîr*, or "well." The shaft is about sixty yards from the spring which supplies the village with water, and which is called *'Ain Haud*. The whole cave is rudely hewn in the rock.

The site so chosen is close to Zorah and Eshtaol, and on the border of the mountain country of Judah. The site of Ramoth Lehi is to be sought in the same district, possibly at the present *'Ain Maktush*, near Kesla.

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NOTE.—There was another site of the name Etam (*Chron.* iv. 32), which is probably the ruin called *'Aitîn* to be found on the Survey Sheet

near En Rimmon (*Umm er Rümâmîn*), in connection with which it is mentioned. Vandeveldt has confused this site with that of the Rock Etam, and places Lehi at the modern *Lekiyeh*, which does not contain the Hebrew guttural Cheth.

LETTER FROM REV. SELAH MERRILL.

(Reprinted, by kind permission, from the *Athenæum*.)

Beirut, Syria, June 28, 1876.

My last expedition east of the Jordan occupied eighty-one days, ending with the 5th of May, and I devoted more than half this time to the valley and foot-hills lying immediately east of the river, and between the Lake of Tiberias and the Dead Sea. Between the Lake of Tiberias and the Jabbok the region is one of great fertility, and not the unproductive desert that it is usually represented to be. The Yarmuk, on the north, is a large river; and the Jabbok, on the south, is a river of respectable size. Between these no less than eleven living streams, more than half of which can be called large ones, flow down from the hills to water the plain. Canals carry the water from these streams in all directions, and irrigate the vast wheat-fields which are the pride of the valley. The valley is from three or four miles to about six miles in width. In the valley itself there are no ruins; but it is an interesting fact that there is a ruin in every case just at the point where these streams leave the foot of the hills. On my map I have marked thirteen such ruins, several of which appear to have been places of wealth and importance. These towns were practically in the valley, but in many cases just off from the great thoroughfare leading from north to south, and so situated that, while they had a good head of water in the fountain or stream behind them, they had spread out before them the fertile plain, with its marvellously winding river, beyond which the western hills rose in grandeur. The region, however, on the east side of the river, from the Jabbok south as far as Wady Nimrîn, is of an entirely different character, being desolate and barren, owing to the fact that there are no fountains or streams flowing down upon it from the hills. From the Wady Nimrîn to the Dead Sea the plain is fertile again, since Wadies Shaib, Kefrein, and Hesban send down an abundant supply of water.

I made diligent search in the region of Wady Yabis for the site of Jabesh Gilead. I examined every ruin and all the prominent hill-tops, and am confident that the name "Jabesh" is not preserved except in the name of the wady itself. Robinson passed hastily through this section, and had his attention called to a ruin bearing the name of Ed Deir, situated on the south side of Wady Yabis, where there are some important remains; but he did not visit the place, and probably was not aware that it is perched upon an eminence very difficult of access,