

THE SLOPES OF CARMEL.

I HAVE recently had occasion to ride through the oak woods which cover the low range of hills that divide the Wády el Melek from the Plain of Esdraelon. Notwithstanding the excellent work which has been done by the officers of the Palestine Exploration Fund, it was only to be expected that in so large a forest there should have been objects of interest which have escaped their observation, and which do not appear upon the map—upon which, however, the bye-paths are laid down with such admirable accuracy, as give ample evidence of the care which has been bestowed upon the Survey.

Starting from the village of Semunieh (on the Haifa and Nazareth road), and riding due north, we come, at a distance of about three-quarters of a mile from that village, to a point where the paths bifurcate. On the right are rocky mounds, covered with trees, and where caves and cisterns abound. Here in some instances I found the stone lids still standing untouched on the loculi which had been hewed from the living rock, indicating that the mortal remains within have been undisturbed to the present time. Following the right-hand path, I came, about half-a-mile further on, to a clump of ancient trees, and at their base were six fragments of prostrate columns, some of them 8 and 10 feet long, with their capitals, together with some blocks of stone, on one of which were the traces of an inscription; but they were so filled with lichen as to be undecipherable, and I had no time to scrape them out, or materials with which to make a squeeze. These trees are called by the natives, "Ashasharat el 'Arais, or the "trees of the Bridegroom," a name which would suggest some connection with the early Baal worship. The probability is, that the columns formed part of a temple or shrine dedicated to rites of a kindred nature, which succeeded to it; a little more than half a-mile beyond, I reached a mound covered with ruins, in which were numerous caves and cisterns. The largest cave contained three chambers, with loculi, but there was none of the coloured ornamentation which characterise those of Sheikh Abreik. In some cases the entrances were carved, as were also the lids of the loculi. In one a subterranean passage led to the mouth of a circular pit about 10 feet in diameter, and as many in depth, on the edge of which I found the handle of an ancient vase. The Arabs with me told me that in one of these caves they had found three bottles of red glass, which, as they contained nothing, they had broken. This mound was called Yissy. Between it and the road leading from Ailût to Beit Lahm is another ruin-clad mound called Hamiz, on which, besides the huge blocks of carved stone of which the walls of the ancient town had been composed, were several sarcophagi; a little beyond the mound, and on the side of the Ailût and Beit Lahm road, were five fragments of prostrate columns, and in an inscription on one I distinctly made out the letters IMP. AUR., which would fix the date as that of the reign of the Emperor Aurelian. I also visited a

spot in the depth of the forest between Umm el Amed and Harithiyeh, where "caves and cisterns" is marked in the map, the name of which is Mizrie, and where the ruins seemed sufficiently interesting to repay further investigation. It is also worthy of note that within the last two years, and therefore since the visit of the Palestine Fund Surveyors, excavations have been in progress at Sepphoris, or Sefurieh, beneath the ruined church, which is supposed to mark the site of the dwelling of Joachim and Anna, the parents of the Virgin. These excavations, which are being carried on by the Franciscans, have now been temporarily suspended for want of funds, and the fallen *débris* prevented my entering what I was assured by the priest was a subterranean chapel or crypt, in which were some fragments of handsome columns. Some of those which have been unearthed are now enclosed by the wall forming the new courtyard to the church, which is slowly undergoing a process of restoration; some of these were prostrate, and some standing to a height of 10 or 12 feet. Altogether I counted twelve, with several capitals and pediments. It is not impossible that remains or objects of interest, of a period anterior to the church, which only dates from the fourth century, may be found in the course of the present operations; at all events, the progress of the excavations, when they are renewed, will be worth watching.

LAURENCE OLIPHANT.

HAIFA, 29th May.

THE MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE.

THE Annual Meeting of the General Committee was held on Tuesday, June 19th, at 4 p.m. The chair was taken by Mr. JAMES GLAISHER, F.R.S.

The minutes of the last meeting having been read, the following Report was read by the Secretary.

"MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

"Your Committee, elected at the last General Meeting, held on June 17th, 1882, have, on resigning their office, to render you an account of their administration during the past year.

"The Committee have held nine meetings during the year.

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"On August 1st, 1882, Lieutenant Mantell, one of the officers of the Survey, was recalled to active service in Egypt, and on September 7th Captain Conder was also ordered on service. The Committee were thus deprived of the services of both officers, and the preparation of the Memoirs of the Survey of Eastern Palestine, so far as it has been accomplished, was interrupted. Lieutenant Mantell still remains in Egypt, and although Captain Conder returned home at the end of the war, it was