

in Thompson's "Land and the Book," the same explanation is given in yet minuter detail.¹

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THE DAMASCUS RAILWAYS.

By Dr. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

FOR some two years now, two railways have been in regular working order connected with Damascus. These are the Beirût-Damascus and the Beirût-Mezerib (Hauran) lines. Though these two lines were constructed by different companies, the former by a French and the latter by a Belgian company, they have from their opening been amalgamated under the French company known as "Chemins de fer de Beyrouth-Damas-Hauran et Beredjik sur l'Euphrate." The extension to Beredjik, it is scarcely needless to remark, is not yet begun. Both railways consist of a single line on the one metre gauge and the plant is common to both. The large station at the *Meidan* end of Damascus is the starting place for trains to both Mezerib and Beirût.

¹ [The Rev. Alexander A. Body, on p. 80 of his "Christ in His Holy Land," published by the S.P.C.K. in 1897, has the following remarks on this subject:—

"With Selim el Gômri, the Syrian Deacon of Nâblus, I sat on the same Jacob's Well. We looked down into its depths, and then we lowered some lighted candles on a small frame; as they slowly descended they lit up the old stones placed there in the days of the Patriarch, and which actually were there when Jesus rested here. These very stones heard His sweet voice. 'You might wonder,' said Selim, 'why Jacob made a well here, when already there were so many springs of water in this neighbourhood. It was, I think, that he might avoid strife between his herdsmen and the men of Shechem. This would be his own well, and so none could complain.'

"'Will you tell me,' I said to this Deacon of Nâblus, 'why the Samaritan woman came to this well, and why she came at mid-day.'

"'I think that she was at work in the fields here. She would bring out from home in the morning some food for her dinner, and also her small jar and a long, light piece of rope. At noon she would leave her weeding for awhile and come here to drink this water, on which she may have set some special value of a medicinal or superstitious character. She belonged, I think, to El Askar, that village at the foot of Mount Ebal over yonder. That is where Sychar is said to have stood in those days.' (It is thought by some that this well (or pit) was chiefly a store for surface water, and that it contained softer water than could be found in the abounding springs of this Shechem vale)."—ED.]

The *Beirût-Damascus* line, commenced in 1891, is 147 kilometres long and has, including the termini, 25 stations. The quickest trains take a little over nine hours. The first section between *Beirût* and *Mu'alakeh-Zahleh*, though only 56 kilometres long, includes by far the greater part of the engineering difficulties. Over a great part of this section, both in ascending and descending the Lebanon, the cog-wheel system known as the Aptom is used. That is, there is a rack in the middle of the permanent way composed of a double row of solid cast steel cogs into which the cogged wheels on the engine play. It is, I believe, the same system as that employed on the newly-opened Snowdon Railway. The sleepers throughout are of iron. Ascending the Lebanon with an average incline of 1 in 22·5, the line rises to a height of 4,877 feet, the steepest parts having an incline of 1 in 14. At *'Areyah* and also at *'Aleih* difficult curves are avoided by running the train into a terminus and reversing the engine to the other end. At the steepest parts just before *'Areyah* and also at two points near the summit there are short tunnels. As the train commences to descend the eastern sides of the Lebanon, a magnificent panorama of the Buka'a opens before the traveller, with the Anti-Lebanon to the east and Hermon to the south. At *Mu'alakeh* a halt of half an hour is made for lunch, which is served in the railway station in a satisfactory and expeditious way. From here onwards the line is an ordinary track, and an ordinary engine takes the train on while the special mountain engine returns, taking the train from Damascus. The heights of the Anti-Lebanon are avoided by turning to the north-west and making a detour through the narrow and tortuous *Wady Yahfûfeh*, and then turning south along the *Zebdaney* Plain. After the *Wady Yahfûfeh* a great increase in speed is possible, and the last 60 kilometres is done in two hours and twenty minutes. At the end of the *Zebdaney* Plain the train turns into the winding *Wady Barada*, where the rapid pace, combined with the frequent curves and the narrow gauge, often causes a disagreeable amount of rocking motion.

The route of the railway is exceedingly picturesque—much more so than the old *diligence* road. For the antiquarian the chief points of interest are the remains of the old Roman road with the Latin inscriptions, as well as the ancient tombs to be seen from the train as it passes the ancient site of Arbela just west of the present *Suk Wady Barada* station.

There are two services of passenger trains each way in the 24 hours: day trains leaving both termini at about 7, crossing at *Mu'alakeh* at noon and reaching their destinations about 4.30, and night trains carrying the mails and going somewhat slower. There are also two goods trains each way daily. There are three classes, the fares for the whole journey being about 20, 12, and 8 shillings respectively. The first class is provided with well-padded carriage equal to the first class on many Continental railways.

Stations between Beirût and Damascus.

Beirût.	Yahfûfeh.
Hadeth.	Zurghâya.
Babdeh.	Zebdâny.
Jamûr.	El-Téquieh.
'Areiyah.	S.-W.-Barada.
'Aleih.	Deir-Kanûn.
Bhamdûn.	'Ain-Fijeh.
Ain-Sôfar.	Judeideh.
Mereijat.	Hamy.
Jedita-Shtora.	Dummar.
Saïd-Nail.	Damascus-Beramké.
Mu'alakeh-Zahleh.	„ Meidan.
Reyak.	

The *Damascus-Hauran* Railway, which has been quite lately wrongly described as a “tramway,” was completed and opened for traffic several months before the Beirût one. The construction of this line presented few engineering difficulties, as after crossing the low shoulder of the *Jebel el Aswad* and bridging the River 'Araçaj (the so-called Pharpar), the track is laid on the almost level plain of *Hauran*. The line is 101 kilometres long, and the whole journey is performed in a little over 3½ hours. The train leaves Damascus at 7 A.M., reaches Mezerib at 10.55, and leaves again for Damascus at 1 P.M.

In point of picturesqueness this line is not to be compared with the Beirût-Damascus railway, but it is full of interest to the student of the country. The great corn-growing *Hauran*, with its wonderful black basaltic cities, is now easy of access to all, and the half-way station, *Sunamein*, is an excellent specimen of these misnamed “Giant Cities of Bashan.”

Stations on the Damascus and Hauran Line.

Damascus.	Ghabâgheb.
Daraya.	Sunamein.
Sahnaya.	Kuneyeh.
Kesweh.	Sheikh-Miskîn.
Khan-Denûn.	Dail.
Zêrakié.	Mezeirib.

The management of these railways is, on the whole, good—the passenger service remarkably so. The trains run punctually, no severe accidents have occurred, and the officials are usually polite. Their smart uniform forms a striking contrast to the slender and ragged clothing of their neighbours, especially in the *Hauran*; though for the matter of that, this contrast is nothing compared with that afforded by the modern red-tiled-roofed station-houses standing in close proximity to the ruins of *Hauran's* ancient civilisations.