

A VISIT TO TELL ZAKARÎYA.

By Major-General Sir CHARLES W. WILSON, K.C.B., F.R.S., R.E.

ON the 24th March last I left Jerusalem to visit the excavations at Tell Zakariya, and travelled by the Jerusalem-Jaffa Railway as far as the Deir Abân Station. After crossing the "Plain of Rephaim" the line enters the Wâdy el-Werd ("Valley of Roses"), and then, in its rapid descent, follows all the windings of the deeply-cut valley known as Wâdy Ism'aîn and Wâdy es-Sūrâr. The train stops for a few moments beneath Bittîr and the stronghold which Bar Cochba and the insurgent Jews held for three and a half years against the might of Rome; then it runs on through the ever-deepening ravine. The scenery is wild and picturesque. On either side the hills of blue-grey limestone rise abruptly. Here and there are olive trees or low brushwood. In the valley-bed there is rich red earth that has been washed down by the rains, and high above is a brilliant sky of deepest blue.

As the train approaches the mouth of the gorge, a cavern high up in the rock to the right is pointed out as the trysting-place of Samson and Delilah; and as it leaves the hill-country of Judah it enters that part of the Shefelah ("Lowland") which is so closely connected with the stormy life of Samson. Here the Wâdy Sūrâr rapidly expands into a broad, fertile valley bordered by low hills. On the left, a little east of Deir Abân Station, it is joined by Wâdy en-Najil, in which lies the village of Deir Abân (Ebenezer). On the right, separated by that part of Wâdy el-Mutluk which has been identified with Mahaneh Dan, are 'Artûf, now occupied by a colony of Roumanian Jews, and Sūrâh (Zorah) with its little white-washed tomb. Higher up the valley, but hidden by the spur on which 'Artûf stands, is Eshû'a (Eshtaol).

At Deir Abân Station I was met by one of Dr. Bliss's men, who acted as guide. For a short distance we rode westward through a grove of old olive trees, and had in front of us the

broad valley Wādy Sūrār (Valley of Sorek), up which the untended oxen brought the ark from the land of the Philistines. It was now covered with wheat and barley, and looked like a bright green carpet spread at the foot of the grey hills to the north. Soon we turned southward, and, after a slight ascent, passed between 'Ain Shems (Beth-shemesh)—a site that should be excavated—and the tomb of Neby Shamshûn. Here we came in full view of the Latin Hospice and Orphanage at Beit el-Jemâl, which stands in a conspicuous position on the top of an olive-clad hill. The land was purchased by the Marquis of Bute, and given by him to Don Belloni for the construction of an Agricultural School in connection with the orphanage of the latter at Bethlehem. In 1892 Don Belloni transferred the Orphanage and School to a religious society founded by Don Bosco at Turin, and under its auspices the work is now carried on. There are at present at Beit el-Jemâl priests, lay brothers, and sisters belonging to the Society, and about 30 orphans in the school.

From 'Ain Shems the way led across the bed of Wādy en-Nahîr, in which were pools of stagnant water, and up one of its branches—a long valley between low rounded hills capped with grey limestone. At first the valley and the slopes of the hills were covered with young wheat and barley, in the midst of which stood a few olive trees; but higher up, near Biyar, there was much swampy water and an abundance of grass. Here the hillsides were gay with anemone, cyclamen, and other flowers, growing amidst the low, green brushwood. Near the head of the valley we turned to the right, and, after a short climb, looked down upon Wādy es-Sünt (the Valley of Elah), with the village of Zakarîya on its right bank, and Dr. Bliss's camp in an olive grove, at the foot of Tell Zakarîya, on its left bank. Descending by a rough path we passed through the village, which is built of mud and stone, and contains nothing of interest, and came to *Bir es-Siflâni*, a well in the valley with a never failing supply of water. A little farther was the camp with the Turkish flag flying over the tent of Shauket Bey, the Commissioner, to whose tact and influence amongst the *fellahîn* the Fund is so much indebted.

Tell Zakariya rises about 350 feet above the bed of the valley. It is a natural fortress commanding one of the approaches to the hill country of Judah, and its appearance, when seen from a distance, is almost as striking as that of Tell es-Sâfi, which stands on the skirt of the Shefelah like an outpost overlooking the plain of Philistia. A steep climb by a path which passes some rock-hewn chambers leads to the top of the Tell upon which the ancient town¹ stood. The surface is fairly level, except on the south, where higher ground marks the position of the Acropolis, and it was here that work was going on. Dr. Bliss had already traced the walls, and the workmen were clearing out one of the sections into which the enclosed area had been divided. The rock had been reached and a few rock-hewn steps had been found leading down to a small cave that had not at that time been completely explored. The extent of the excavation is shown in Plate I.

I went round the excavations and visited some of the rock-hewn chambers with Dr. Bliss and Mr. Macalister, who have fully described their investigations in the *Quarterly Statement*. The walls of the Acropolis show every sign of having been several times rebuilt, and the towers apparently belong to one of the later reconstructions. In no instance is the character of the masonry so distinctive as to fix its date even approximately. I have ventured to suggest a Maccabean origin for the later masonry from its resemblance to that of the buildings at Machaerus, but this is a mere supposition. All that can be said is that the Tell was occupied at a very early, pre-Israelite, period, and that it was probably deserted soon after the Roman occupation. It is impossible to say when or by whom any particular restoration was made.

The inscribed jar-handles, the scarabs, the cylinders, and other small objects that have been found are of great interest: and not less so, in their way, are the rock-hewn chambers which have been examined and planned by Mr. Macalister since my visit. Somewhat similar chambers are found in other localities in Palestine, and their arrangement seems to

¹ Possibly Azekah, see Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," 2nd edition, on that place.

PLATE I.



EXCAVATION IN THE ACROPOLIS AT TELL ZAFARÎYA.

PLATE II.



TELL ES-SÂFI FROM THE EAST.

indicate that they were used as places of refuge in times of danger. A possible allusion to such retreats is perhaps contained in the Bible reference to the condition of the Israelites before Saul's victory at Michmash. The view from the top of the Tell is extensive and interesting, especially towards the east. The battlefield on which David slew Goliath is plainly visible near the foot of the hills, and the route followed by the Philistines in their rapid flight can be clearly traced.

In the evening I was present at the payment of the *fellahîn* for the pottery and other objects they had found during the day's work. Each *fellah* produced his "find," and on handing it over to Dr. Bliss received a small sum, with which he appeared well satisfied. The system of giving every man who finds something a small money payment in addition to his pay is an excellent one, and beneficial both to the Fund and the *fellah*. I may add that the relations between Dr. Bliss and Mr. Macalister and the *fellahîn* from Zakariya were evidently excellent—a sure proof of their tact and unflinching good temper in dealing with the native workmen.

On the 25th I rode with Dr. Bliss to Tell es-Sâfi. Our way lay down Wâdy es-Sünt, a fertile valley in which the villagers were ploughing preparatory to sowing their *dura*. We had a good view of the Tell as we approached it from the east (Plate II). It lies approximately north and south, and at either end the ground rises, leaving a hollow in the centre in which a part of the village lies. A steep ascent led to the top of the Tell, where we found that the ground available for excavation was limited. At both the north and south ends there are cemeteries, and at the latter a *Makam*; but we noticed several fields and small enclosures which were either under cultivation, or had not been used as burial places. There are a few remains of the castle, Blanche Garde, built by King Fulke in 1144; and the line of the old city wall was clearly marked by a terrace running round the hill. In these clear spaces it was decided that Dr. Bliss should commence digging, and the interesting results which he obtained are in course of publication in the *Quarterly Statement*. There are many caves,

tombs, cisterns, granaries, and other chambers hewn in the soft white rock which will probably repay examination.

Tell es-Sâfi, standing above the broad valley, Wâdy es-Sünt, at the point where the lowland gives place to the plain, protected by its white cliffs, and connected at one point only with the low hills to the south, is a position of great natural strength. It must have been occupied at a very remote period, and have been one of the principal strongholds of the country long before the appearance of the Israelites and the Philistines. The difficulties, arising from the position of the village and the cemeteries, that prevent a thorough examination of the site are consequently most unfortunate.

After completing our examination of the Tell I parted from Dr. Bliss, and rode over the last outlying spurs of the Shefelah to the railway station at Sejed. The district through which I passed is well adapted to the growth of the olive, and was no doubt formerly covered with olive trees. Nothing is now to be seen but low shrubs and brushwood with a few small olive groves near the villages. During the whole of my ride from Deir Abân to Sejed, I saw nothing but old olive trees; there were no new grafts, and there was no attempt to replace the aged trees that had only a few years' fruitful life before them. This is due to the crushing taxation on the trees, which is more than they can bear in ordinary years, and leaves little to the proprietor in prosperous seasons. In some cases it is said the *fellahin* were cutting down the old trees to avoid taxation.

At Sejed, where H.I.M. the Sultan has a large farm, I took the afternoon train to Jerusalem.
