DEAD SEA OBSERVATIONS.

By Dr. E. W. G. Masterman.

(Continued from Quarterly Statement, April, 1908, p. 161.)

(1) Spring Visit to 'Ain Feshkhah, made April 22nd, 1908, by Mr. Hornstein. Left Jerusalem April 20th, Bar. (12.30 p.m.) 27.4; April 21st, Jericho (7 a.m.), Bar. 30.45; N. end of Dead Sea (12.10 p.m.), Bar. 31; April 22nd, 'Ain Feshkhah, Bar. 31.2.

Measurements.—That at Observation rock showed a rise since previous November of 2 feet 3½ inches. In the pool there was a rise of 2 feet 5 inches.

General Observations.—There was a gentle S.E. breeze; no clouds; "white line" running longitudinally along lake—very broken. Reeds in fine condition. A few sand partridges seen. A small spring, said to have first made its appearance about a year ago, was visited in the Wady Kumrán: it is at the foot of the precipitous rocky descent from the mountains to the level plain.

(2) Autumn Visit made November 26th.—I left Jerusalem, accompanied by Mr. Hornstein, at 7.20 a.m. (November 25th). Bar. in Jerusalem (7.15 a.m.) 27.52; slight E. wind. The mountains to east of the Jordan and Dead Sea entirely hidden in haze; when we reached the neighbourhood of Jericho we might have been riding on a boundless plain for all we could see eastwards; in other directions we could see a considerable distance through slight haze. No excessive heat, pleasant sunshine. We
found the wooden bridge across the Wady Kelt at Jericho still unrepaired; it was carried off last February by a flood of waters which swept down the valley after heavy rain. Reached Jericho about noon, Bar. 30·86.

In the afternoon we visited the excavations which Prof. Sellin made last cool season at the tell near ‘Ain es-Sultan. It is disappointing that the work so far has not been resumed. Most of the dried brick houses and walls which have been recovered so far are comparatively late, but the magnificent city wall—a massive structure of great unhewn stones below, surmounted by bricks—is probably very ancient, and it is to be hoped that when the work is resumed the city of early Israelite and pre-Israelite times will be revealed. The pool at ‘Ain es-Sultan has been much enlarged since I was last here.

November 26th.—We left Jericho at about 6 a.m.; Bar. 30·89; Temp. 51·8° F. We took the direct road to ‘Ain Feshkhah, some two or three miles of which lies along the new carriage road to Nabi Musa. At Wady Kumran we turned aside to visit the spring which Mr. Hornstein reported on his last visit, and found it still running, though weakly.

The ‘Ain Feshkhah oasis presented a fine sweep of reeds, all in full bloom; there has been very little burning of the reeds going on here lately, and the whole district was quite deserted. Indeed, from the time we left Jericho (6 a.m.), until near Bir el-fuds (at 3.23), we did not see a human being. Of animal life we saw a great number of sand partridges at many spots; four gazelles near Hajar el-Ahmar; a pair of Tristram’s grackles near the spring at Wady Kumran; some half a dozen conies near ‘Ain Feshkhah, and a recently killed stork also on our path near ‘Ain el-Mabneyeh. This stork had apparently fallen a victim to one of the many hawks hovering over the reeds, it was torn in its back and there were signs of a considerable struggle—probably it was an old or decrepit one left behind when its companions migrated in the late spring. No Arab would kill a stork, or as he calls it Abu Sa'id, “the father of good luck.” Footprints of ibex were visible in the Wady Kumran.

Atmosphere.—The Eastern mountains were obscured by haze all day; those to the N.E. were quite invisible. The haze, as seen from somewhat higher ground, appeared to be in two layers: one, less dense, which extended a little higher than the mountain plateau itself, and a thicker layer which presented a sharp level upper surface, a little more than half way up the mountains. In the early morning there was no perceptible breeze, but at about 9 a.m. a slight S.E. breeze was noticeable. Later in the day the wind veered to N.W., and in the afternoon there was a stiff wind from that direction. Sky almost cloudless. “White line,” somewhat broken up, running longitudinally down the lake at noon. The dense haze appears to have portended a storm, because on the three following days there have been heavy rains all over the land and stormy S.W. winds.
Level of the Sea.—At the Observation rock a fall of 1 foot 10 inches—at the pool a fall of 1 foot 9½ inches.

We started back at 12.5 p.m., reached the Wady Dabr at 1.30, thence ascended the Wady Kuneitra to the plain of el-Buka‘a which we reached at 2.25; at 3.23 we were at Bir el-fids, which we found dry and half filled with stone and earth; at 4 we commenced to descend into the Wady en-Når by a long winding valley; reached the Mår Seiba road at 4.45 and reached Jerusalem at 7 a.m. Bar. 27°6.

REVIEW.


Book I, of 270 pages—about one fourth of the whole work consisting of two volumes—is devoted to a study of “The Ancient Topography.” It opens with a lengthy introduction, “The Essential City,” which every one should read who would see Jerusalem, so full it is of the life of a past day, and so fitting a prelude to the recovery of a lost form. It would be difficult to overrate the value of such an introduction to a subject which demands such constant and consistent intimacy.

Chapter I, “The Site of the City,” is a somewhat tedious chapter, illustrated by photographs and a plate of comparative sections of the East and West Hills. It is only after the remainder of the book has been studied that the reader can realize the necessity for such detailed enquiry into the site, its relation to the hills round about, its surface and rock contours, and the comparative accumulation of débris at various points, as well as the dependence of the Pool of Siloam upon both the East and West Hills. Chapter II exhibits the main points of debate in the ancient topography.

Chapter III is devoted to “The Geology,” and Chapter IV deals with “Earthquakes, Springs, and Dragons.” The former is illustrated by a map showing the geological disposition of the various rock formations. The strata of Jerusalem is “exclusively limestone and chalk.” The author’s enquiry into the different varieties of rock, in order to study the effect of the character and disposition of the strata upon the distribution of water, is invaluable for purely topographical reasons. So much depends upon the existence, or the possible existence, of springs. The conclusion come to is that there is no possibility of the “deep spring” in and around Jerusalem, and it is argued that the “Virgin’s Fountain” is a shallow spring more in the nature of concentrated percolation.