

DEAD SEA OBSERVATIONS.

AUTUMN VISIT, 1910.

By DR. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

I LEFT Jerusalem at 11.30 a.m., Nov. 22, accompanied by Mr. Hornstein and Mr. J. Morgan, H.B.M.'s Acting Consul in Jerusalem. We three Europeans, escorted by the Consul's cavass, two muleteers, and by a bedawy brought by Mr. Hornstein, made up quite a strong party—a desirable thing in the unsettled state of the country and frequent highway robberies. We took the ordinary carriage road to Jericho, where we arrived just at sunset. Bar., Jerusalem, 11.30 a.m., 27.5; Jericho, 9 p.m., 30.9.

Nov. 23.—We left Jericho at 5.40 a.m. (Temp. 66° F., Bar. 30.9), and took the new route by *'Ain el-Jehiyir*, described in the *Q.S.*, 1910, p. 290. It is the easiest of all routes though, unless advantage is taken of the level ground for quick travelling, it may take a little longer than the more direct westerly road. Close to the shore, just before reaching *Wady Kumrân*, we found a dead camel, partly eaten by hyaenas. In and near the *Wady Kumrân* were a great many camels—a large proportion of them young—in charge of two members of *Tiyahah Arabs* whose headquarters are in the plains about Gaza; their own district had become so dry this summer that these camels were sent here for grazing, and certainly they appeared to have thriven well on the young reeds and succulent plants of the *'Ain Feshkkah* oasis. It appears extraordinary that a large herd of many dozen valuable camels, in charge of two practically unarmed bedouin, who live in the open and sleep under the trees, can safely spend many weeks in a district like this, far removed from that of their tribe, whereas no European would be safe here for more than a few hours, at most, unless part of a large and well-armed party. Safety, no doubt, lies largely in the fact that every Arab recognises a camel individually at sight, and no single member of the herd could be driven away without being noticed by all passing Arabs; a theft, too, would be visited by the revenge of the whole tribe. Another noticeable point was, that although the man was so familiar with each camel and knew exactly to whom it belonged, he was unable to number the whole flock—the larger numbers had no meaning for him. Doubtless this is a result of the old superstition

against numbering such things as flocks, herds, armed forces, etc. While we were lunching at the *'Ain Feshkkeh* pool the whole herd arrived to drink: the young camels were extraordinarily tame.

Weather.—There were heavy clouds over almost the whole sky before sunrise—which was glorious—but they rapidly disappeared afterwards, and hardly any were visible about 8 a.m. Later in the day some white cirro-cumulus clouds lay in a long line above the eastern mountains.

Wind.—Very faint puffs from the east in early morning, a little stronger about 9 and 10, but imperceptible about noon. About 3.30, when we were in the mountains on our return, a fresh westerly breeze met us, but it died away about sunset. The mountains to the east were extraordinarily clear.

Surface of the Sea.—Very small waves in early morning, a little larger about 9 and 10, but surface quite smooth at noon. "White line" was not visible at all until 8.30 a.m., when it was seen far out; when we left at noon, patches of white foam—the "white line" more or less broken up—lay brilliantly white some mile or more out.

Temperature of Air.—9 a.m., 72°; 11 a.m., 76°; of water 75° F. Bar. 9 a.m., 31.25.

State of the Level.—At the "observation rock," measurement was 13 feet 8 inches, showing a *fall* of 1 foot 3 inches since last spring. At the rock in the pool, measurement was 8½ inches, showing a fall of 11½ inches. (For reasons given before, the measurements at the latter place often do not correspond with those at the former—which are much more reliable.) The level is still high as compared with most of the previous years. The reeds were all in flower and extremely plentiful. No burning of the reeds has occurred lately such as used to be done a few years ago.

Animal Life.—Many sand partridges at the oasis, and many "rock" and "sand" partridges between there and the deep *Wady Dubr*. Four gazelles were seen near *Wady Dubr*, and there also, which is unusual, a herd of camels were grazing. A little to the north of the same wady we encountered first a flock of sheep in charge of an Arab boy, and a little farther on a large flock of sheep and goats in charge of two Arabs. This is unusual. I have several times been all the way from Jericho to *'Ain Feshkkeh* and back without meeting a human being or a domesticated animal.

We returned by the route at the foot of the western mountains across the *Wady Dubr* and there we joined the "new" carriage road—made three or four years ago—where it enters the mountains. We had heard that it had so fallen to pieces from neglect that carriages could not pass. The road for the first 200 yards or so westwards from the Jericho plain has been hopelessly eroded, so that not even a Jerusalem carriage (which can negotiate most places) can go along it. The road was evidently

hastily and badly made at this spot, and having been constructed almost entirely of gravel and silt and along the actual bottom of a steep stony valley, the outlet of a long and steep mountain gorge, it is not wonderful that the mountain spates have at several spots swept it completely away. After passing this spot, however, we found most of the road in very good condition, and from the neighbourhood of the Moslem Shrine of *Nebi Musa*, all the way to where it joins the old Jericho road, it is evidently in frequent use, as carriage tracks were plentiful. At several spots the carriages have had to leave the more or less destroyed road and take a track of their own along the gravelly wady bottom. It is very regrettable to see a road so good in the greater part of its extent, allowed to fall into such a state because, through hurried and unintelligent construction, a small portion has been entirely swept away, and there is no authority with energy enough to undertake the very small amount of re-construction necessary.

We left the *Ain* at noon : entered the mountains at 2.15 p.m., reached the old Jericho road at 3.45, and the "Khan of the Good Samaritan" at 4.15 ; left at 5.30 and arrived at Jerusalem at about 8.45.
