

## THE WILDERNESS OF ZIN.

THE Double Number of the *Annual*, about to be published under the title *The Wilderness of Zin*, would be a work of exceptional value and interest at any time, but, at the present juncture, when public attention has been directed to Northern Sinai, only to find reliable information scarce, it should appeal to a much wider circle than ordinary. It is not only a record of the archaeological remains and history of a little known district, intimately concerned with the Bible story, but also a very faithful, discerning, and picturesque description of natural features and social character. Its two authors, Messrs. C. Leonard Woolley and T. E. Lawrence, had unusual qualifications and unusual opportunities. Mr. Woolley, who was once on the staff of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, and subsequently employed for some years on Nubian exploration, has been in charge of the British Museum's excavations at Carchemish, now interrupted by the war. To a long and intimate experience of many classes of antiquities, he adds much experience of the Near East and its life, gathered from close contact with the soil and the people. Mr. Lawrence not only has been engaged in the Carchemish work since its inception in 1911, but also has explored virtually all Syria at one time or another, living with its people almost as one of themselves. Hardly anyone knows either its Hittite or its Crusading history and remains as well as he, or can move among Arab tribesmen with as much facility and profit. Both were wintering at Carchemish when they received an invitation to join the Survey party which (very opportunely) the War Office had sent under Captain Newcombe late in 1913 to connect the Egyptian triangulation with that of the earlier Palestine Survey. This work implied the mapping of the Ottoman province of Gaza from Beersheba southward to Akaba and eastward to the Wady Araba. Though sent for in a hurry, and very short of equipment, Messrs. Woolley and Lawrence were so cordially received and helped by Captain Newcombe and his subaltern, Lieutenant Greig,

and turned their opportunity to account with so much zeal and aptitude, that they were able to explore the district to better purpose than even the best of their predecessors, Prof. Palmer or the Fathers Vincent and Jaussen, of the *École Biblique*.

The authors give first an account of the route covered by them in common from Gaza to Kossaima. At this point they divided, Mr. Woolley going east and north to the Byzantine towns at Abda and Kurnub, Mr. Lawrence south to Akaba. The last named spot was forbidden to the Survey party by the Ottoman Government, but Mr. Lawrence got through with some picturesque adventures, and then came up the Araba and so to Petra, Aaron's Tomb and Ma'an. Next, the history of the whole district is dealt with, the treatment giving occasion for discussion of the problems connected with supposed prehistoric remains—stone monuments, stone implements, and early pottery—and also of possible changes of climate in historic times. The authors think that few or no worked flints of any antiquity exist in Sinai, and that, with one or two rare exceptions, the stone monuments, which they classify under types, are comparatively modern. The excavation of certain graves is described. Some of these go back, probably, into the third, or even the second, Semitic Period (latter part of the second millennium B.C.). This chapter is very attractively written, with evident feeling for the qualities of desert scenery and life. On the question of climatic variations the authors are opposed to Prof. Huntington's "pulse" theory, and cite, very ingeniously, various items of evidence to support their view.

The third chapter deals with the great road from Hebron to Egypt, the *Darb el-Shur*, now practically unused, but once a main track of caravans and armies from the time of the Patriarchs to at least that of the Crusades. Mr. Woolley also treats here of the mounds in the northern part of the district which mark the southward tide-mark of early settled life. Pottery found upon them takes us back to the second millennium B.C. In the fourth chapter the authors treat the Kadesh-Barnea question, and incidentally give us the best account yet published of the Oasis of Guderat and the 'Ain Kadeis plain, with the districts of Muweilleh and Kossaima. This is the most controversial part of the book. Thereafter follows the longest and, archaeologically speaking, most important part of the publication, an account of the Byzantine remains of the northern part of the district and the mediaeval remains at and near Akaba.

These Byzantine towns, which owed their existence partly to the imperial policy of Justinian, partly to the attractions offered by the desert to hermits, present considerable ruin-fields at Esbeita, Abda, Khalasa, Kurnub, and half-a-dozen other sites. Two of these at least, Abda and Khalasa, must have been inhabited also in Nabatean times. On the one Mr. Woolley claims to have traced the remains of a large temple of that date under the great Monastery church; on the other was found an interesting Nabatean inscription on which Dr. A. E. Cowley writes a note. This chapter is profusely illustrated with plans and drawings of the remains, many of which appear also in the numerous photographs added as plates at the end of the volume. The Greek inscriptions, not hitherto published, are dealt with exhaustively in a sixth chapter by Mr. M. N. Tod, Reader in Greek Epigraphy at Oxford, and Prof. Margoliouth contributes a reading of a road-inscription of the Sultan, Kānsuh al-Ghūr, copied by Mr. Lawrence near Akaba.

On the whole it is a volume of very varied interest, which throws light on many questions by the way. The style of the descriptive chapters is eminently readable, and the serious matter is relieved by lighter touches here and there, mostly in that vein of irony which close contact with Orientals seldom fails to encourage in the Western mind—and, perhaps, equally in the Eastern! The value of the book is enhanced by its two maps, which have been compiled from the Survey materials with the permission of the War Office. That of the interesting triangle, whose three points lie at Beersheba, Akaba, and the head of Wady Araba, is the only correct map in existence.

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