

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND.

THE Fifty-fourth Annual General Meeting of the Palestine Exploration Fund was held in the Library of the Society, 2, Hinde Street, Manchester Square, London, on the afternoon of Friday, May 30th. The Meeting was held for business purposes only. Among those present were the Rev. Canon Dalton, the Rev. Prof. George Buchanan Gray, Commander D. G. Hogarth, Dr. E. W. G. Masterman, Dr. D'Erf Wheeler, Colonel S. F. Newcombe, R.E., F. W. Percival, Esq., and J. D. Crace, Esq., Hon. Secretary. The Chairman, Dr. L. W. King, was unable to be present through illness.

Mr. Crace moved, and the Rev. Canon Dalton seconded, that Prof. Buchanan Gray be asked to take the chair.

Mr. Crace then mentioned that letters of regret for non-attendance had been received from the Rev. Dr. Arthur Headlam and James Melrose, Esq.

The Minutes of the Fifty-third Annual General Meeting were read and signed.

The Chairman moved, and Commander Hogarth seconded, the adoption of the Report and Accounts for 1918, copies of which had already been circulated.

The Chairman expressed the regret of the Meeting at the continued illness of Prof. King, and mentioned that his absence was sorely felt by the Committee, especially in connection with the inauguration of the British Archaeological School in Jerusalem.

The Hon. Secretary spoke of the losses sustained by the Committee since the last Annual Meeting, namely:—

Dr. E. T. Wilson, the brother of the late Sir Charles Wilson and for many years Honorary Local Secretary for Cheltenham ;

The Rev. Prof. Mahaffy, C.V.O., D.D., Provost of Trinity College, Dublin ;

Robert Williams, Esq., F.R.I.B.A., of Alexandria, the author of a recently published little historical guide-book to Jerusalem.

The Chairman moved the election of the following new members to the General Committee :—

Brigadier-General Ernest M. Paul, C.B., R.E. ;

The Right Hon. Viscount Bryce ;

Colonel H. Pirie-Gordon ;

Lieut.-Colonel Richard L. Waller, C.M.G., R.E. ;

Rev. Prof. G. A. Cooke, D.D., Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford ;

Joseph Offord, Esq.

Remarks were made on the interest shown by these gentlemen in Palestine generally or the work of the Fund in particular, by Dr. Masterman, who seconded, and by others, and the resolution was carried unanimously.

The re-election of the Executive Committee as now constituted, with the addition of Brigadier-General E. M. Paul, C.B., R.E., was moved by Colonel Stewart F. Newcombe, R.E., seconded by Dr. D'Erf Wheeler, and carried unanimously.

A vote of thanks to the Chairman was moved by Mr. F. W. Percival and seconded by Mr. Stanley Cook, and the proceedings then terminated.

ENGLISH IMPROVEMENTS AT JERUSALEM.

By FATHER L. H. VINCENT.

[THE Committee has received some interesting remarks (of which the following is a translation) upon the works of improvement carried out in Jerusalem and the neighbourhood under the English military authorities during their occupation, from that distinguished French archaeologist, Father L. H. Vincent of St. Stephen's, long resident in Jerusalem before the war, who, after serving his country for nearly five years in France, has lately returned to Jerusalem. In a private letter which accompanied his report he states that he is so greatly impressed by the nature and extent of the improvements, and the care with which they have been carried out, that he feels it is only just to Englishmen interested in Palestine to communicate to them the very favourable opinion of a foreigner who has for many years been a devout student of the antiquities of the

Holy City. Father Vincent's important work on the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, beautifully illustrated, published in Paris shortly before the war, is the best evidence of the value of his opinion as to the recent removal of the obstructing interior wall as described in the *Quarterly Statement* of April last.—J. D. C.]

Under England's Rule in Palestine.

In returning, a few days ago, to Palestine, after fifty-four months of service in France, I was not without a certain anxiety as to the condition in which I should find Jerusalem and the Holy Places at the end of the terrible catastrophe which has shaken the world.

Certainly I knew that for more than a year the army of Liberation was employed in Southern Palestine, and particularly at Jerusalem, in obliterating traces of the war, substituting everywhere an era of beneficent justice and industrial activity for the secular *régime* of venality, carelessness and rapine which the Turkish administration represented. I had not expected that such considerable progress would have already been realised in this *desirable* transformation.

It was a pleasant surprise to pass in the space of a few hours, tranquilly installed in a railway carriage, the immense desert-barrier between Egypt and Palestine. It was yet another to observe the rich country of ancient Philistia, better cultivated than formerly, rapidly hiding the scars of its wounds under crops full of promise. But particularly at Jerusalem there is most happily manifested this splendid initiative of the English military administration.

To appreciate at its right value the amount of laborious effort liberally bestowed on this task of reorganization one must have lived long in Jerusalem before the war. Despite fine projects, periodically renewed by the Turkish administration, careful only to make of them a pretext for new taxes, notwithstanding the goodwill of some groups of Americans and Europeans established in the interior or around the ancient city, nothing efficacious had yet been realised to ensure, not certainly any comfort, but the most elementary hygiene in a city seething with a perfectly heterogeneous population. The highway was confided almost exclusively to the sun, aided by the legion of unpleasant dogs and by the violent mountain winds. The most bizarre caprice of each proprietor could at every turn complicate the regulation of many quarters.

For some months, on the accession of the Young Turk, one hoped in vain for some amelioration of this deplorable state of things. The Young Constitution Government of 1908, in burdening Jerusalem with new changes, only started projects without a morrow, or outrageously profaned the charm of the ancient city by inflicting on it here and there some embellishment in the style of the Clock Tower which has for ten years disfigured the Jaffa Gate, or the monstrous *Sébil*¹ attached like a horrible parasite to the slope of the ancient Citadel, so hideous this last that Djemal Pasha was offended by it and did away with it during the war. The erection of this pretentious *Sébil* seemed indeed an irony on the part of an administration which never arrived at providing drinking water for the town, having succeeded only in restoring with metal pipes (too small and badly laid) the Roman canalisation which formerly led the water from Solomon's Pools to the Colony of Aelia.

The *Quarterly Statement*, Palestine Exploration Fund, January, 1919, has already described, as it deserved to be, the admirable work of the English military engineers which in four months ensured to Jerusalem a copious supply of excellent drinking water, the benefit of which to such a congested population can hardly be over estimated.

Not least to be praised is the very notable improvement of the public ways, not only of the more frequented and less tortuous streets of the New Town, but also of the labyrinth of lanes and by-ways seething with a population which apparently rejects the most elementary rules of health and cleanliness.

It is not my business to describe the projects in view for purifying and embellishing judiciously the Holy City. General Allenby has placed this task in careful hands in confiding it to the Chief Administrator of the southern occupied territory and to the Military Governor of Jerusalem. Under their active instigation able specialists make daily progress with this gigantic undertaking. Obviously, archaeologists must necessarily be interested, and it is precisely with the object of jealously and scrupulously preserving these interests that the Governor has engaged the services of qualified specialists.

Of the works actually in progress or already completed interesting to archaeologists, I should like to point out two which have greatly

¹ Drinking fountain.

rejoiced me, and which I think will particularly interest the readers of the *Quarterly Statement*.

The first is the methodical cleaning-up of the Citadel of Jerusalem. Everybody knows that this vast edifice includes some relatively modern constructions with the splendid mediæval buildings, and some Roman and Jewish elements of the Herodian epoch, the monumental character of which impresses itself strongly on every visitor.

Transformed long ago into a Turkish barracks, the venerable Citadel remained almost inaccessible. When after much difficulty one succeeded in getting the doors open, in the hope of studying its structural changes more nearly, and of obtaining a closer knowledge of its long history, one wandered with the most distressing disappointment in a sordid labyrinth of parasitical sheds amid heaps of rubbish and unspeakable filth from which very few vestiges of ancient works emerged. These ignominious remains of the Turkish occupation were not only an insult to the dignity of the ancient edifice, but had become a pestilential centre for the town.

Well might the authorities have shrunk from the work of cleaning this Augean stable, and deferred so unpleasant a task until the political situation of the country was more definitely settled.

Not so did the English military administration look at the matter; so anxious were they for the health and welfare of the town lately snatched from oppression that they had already some months before begun the clearance. One cannot imagine any method more prudent and carefully considered than that which they adopted. Without imprudent haste, especially without the smallest demolition, even were it the most shapeless mass and foreign to all signs of antiquity, up to the present time the results are splendid. Nearly a third of the monument has been cleared of the rubbish with which it was encumbered, and leaves partly visible its original arrangement. An extraordinary profusion of broken furnace-pipes of every style and date represents the only spoil which the most attentive vigilance of the superintendents of the works have been able to extract from these formidable rubbish heaps: curious symbols of generations of Turkish military bureaucrats who have so long dishonoured the ancient palace of the Herods. But one need not look far to see that the work in process of accomplishment at the Citadel is largely archaeological.

Those who ordered it and those who direct it have earned the

congratulations and all the gratitude of those who take any interest in the history and antiquities of the Holy City.

The second enterprise, almost completed, which deserves mention is the removal of the ignoble superadded wall which disfigured the great Nave of the Basilica of the Nativity at Bethlehem. All visitors, whether pilgrims or tourists, to this venerable church, have deplored that this hideous screen should so stupidly have cut off the admirable perspective of the splendid nave and entirely hidden the choir. More implacable were the maledictions hurled at this unfortunate screen by archaeologists. Certainly, archaeologists may differ as to the exact origin and the vicissitudes of the Basilica, but unanimity is absolute in denouncing this rascally piece of work of which the final date is well known.

It will henceforth suffice to place before the readers of the *Quarterly Statement* (as Père Abel has done recently in the *Revue Biblique*) the photograph of the actual state of the works, to enable them to put a finger on the exact place from which this horrible parasitic wall has been so judiciously removed. Exact records establish that in its last state the wall was erected about the middle of the nineteenth century, but one must not lose sight of the existence of some former enclosure, although of a totally different kind, enclosing the raised portion of the choir which covers the Grotto of the Nativity.

The modern wall has been prudently attacked from the top; it consisted of shapeless rubble disguised by a heavy cresting. As the pick-axe disturbed this masonry, exposing at the two ends of the wall the fine shafts of the pilasters at the openings of the transept, there came into view on these shafts the remains of mediæval paintings and graffiti. One could not demand better evidence were any needed to prove again the superadded and late character of this hideous screen. As the work of demolition approached the level of the choir, the most vigilant care was exercised, and although the nature of the construction remained identical throughout there was not the slightest evidence of ancient work. The demolition was stopped at about two feet above the level of the choir pavement and about four feet above that of the nave. In order not to do away with any traces indicating a screen, and not to prejudge any details of a screen which originally enclosed the Sanctuary of the Basilica, this base of the wall will be retained intact. Desiring to give this lowered screen a finish in harmony with the character of the edifice,

the Governor instructed his qualified assistants to study with great care a design for a balustrade which would reproduce as closely as possible the features of the chancel, which should enclose the elevated choir of a Constantinian Basilica.

When this work is accomplished it will be to the honour of the high authority who took the initiative amidst the preoccupations entailed by his position, and to the men of science and taste who carried it out.

The Palestine Exploration Fund is not likely to be indifferent to the fact that this brilliant improvement is due to English officers.

PÈRE L. H. VINCENT.

JERUSALEM, *March*, 1919.

A JEWISH FEAST.

THE ANNUAL FEAST OF RABBI SIMEON BEN YOKHAI AT
MERON.¹

By E. W. G. MASTERMAN, M.D., F.R.C.S.

ANNUAL festivities at sacred tombs are common to all the three great religions in Palestine. Thus, the "Holy fire" in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre draws thousands of Oriental Christians together every Eastertide, and at the same time the Moslems from all over the land pour down into the Jordan Valley to celebrate the Feast of Nebi Musa at the (to them) traditional tomb of Moses. Both these celebrations have been repeatedly described. The corresponding Jewish feasts held in Galilee are little known outside Palestine, but are certainly quite as picturesque, and, among Oriental Jews, are times of great rejoicings. These two annual spring festivals are, the one at the tomb of Rabbi Meyer Baal Nes, held on the thirtieth day after the Passover, at Tiberias, and that at the tomb of Rabbi Simeon ben Yokhai on the thirty-third and thirty-fourth days after the Passover, at Meron, on the slopes of

¹ Reprinted, with kind permission of the Editor, from the *Near East*, Aug. 2, 1918.