

THIRTY YEARS OF PALESTINE EXPLORATION.

UNDER the above title Prof. R. A. S. Macalister contributes to *The Expository Times* for November a most interesting article, from which we are kindly permitted to quote. The former Director of Excavations in Palestine is also the author of the chapter on "Exploration and Excavation" in the forthcoming *Cambridge Ancient History*. What he has to say in *The Expository Times* is not entirely new to regular readers of the *Quarterly Statement*, but his treatment is so lucid and concise that we are glad to be able to print the following extracts, referring them thither for the complete story:—

"Just thirty years ago there was published a brochure of modest appearance, bound in cardboard, containing 62 pages and 10 plates, and bearing the simple title *Tell el Hesi (Lachish)*, by W. M. Flinders Petrie. This little work, of which it is now extremely difficult to obtain a copy, was nothing less than the foundation-stone of a new science

"Petrie's excavation of Tell el-Hesi was the first conducted on modern scientific lines. In previous excavations the directors were not aware of the immense importance of the 'unconsidered trifles' that an ancient site contains. Large buildings and, especially, written documents were their objective; and their work was, if not actually, at any rate unconsciously, subservient to the definite aim of finding answers to the many questions regarding the nature and authenticity of the Biblical texts, which were being asked with more and more insistence from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. It is not too much to say that the excavator who works with any *arrière-pensée*, however honourable it may be, courts disaster. His sole aim must be to find what is in his site, and then to see what legitimate deductions can be drawn from what he uncovers.

"Petrie was the first to attach especial importance to the most seemingly insignificant finds—the chips of broken pottery, lying in profusion on the surface of the earth, or scattered through the buried strata. To his expert eye these fragments told a tale to which his predecessors had been blind and deaf. As a result of his six weeks' exploration, the science of Palestinian ceramics was

established on a sound basis, and a powerful new instrument was put into the hands of excavators to enable them to date their sites. It was proved that every age had its own special style of pottery, distinguished by ware, shape, ornamentation, and manner of baking; and that, therefore, when a site or a stratum contained pottery of a certain kind, its date was fixed as absolutely as though a stone inscribed with the name of a historical monarch had been found there

“Tell el-Hesy had been occupied for a long time, and had had its share of misfortunes, all marked in one way or another by traces left in its débris. Beds of ashes were a permanent record of conflagrations, and gave a chronological fulcrum—for everything under the bed must necessarily be older than the catastrophe, everything above it must be later. A river had scaped the side of the mound, so that the edges of all the strata were exposed; it was therefore possible for the explorer to pass from one level to another, to collect pottery from one layer and compare it with sherds from another, with the least possible difficulty. In consequence, the principles established by Prof. Petrie have remained unshaken by all the subsequent excavations that have taken place; requiring modification in detail only

“Prof. Petrie having thus worked for six weeks, returned to his duties in Egypt, to which, from his point of view, his Palestinian researches had been ancillary. The work which he began at Tell el-Hesy was finished by his successor, Dr. Frederick Jones Bliss, son of the venerable and honoured Dr. Daniel Bliss, the first president of the Syrian Protestant College at Beirut. Dr. Frederick Bliss had been born and had lived most of his life in Syria: he thus had a familiarity with the country, its ways, and its language such as a stranger could hardly hope to acquire; no small qualification for work which necessarily depends on Oriental labour for its prosecution. At Tell el-Hesy he cut down one-third of the whole mound, and the results of his work were published by the Palestine Exploration Fund, the organisers and paymasters of the campaign, in a small volume entitled *A Mound of Many Cities*

“When the work at Tell el-Hesy was closed, the Palestine Exploration Fund turned its attention once more to its old love—Jerusalem. But perhaps it may be permitted to say that this was a mistake. There is an important principle which it is unfortunately now too late to insist upon, as so few virgin countries remain for

archaeological excavation, namely, that hands should be kept off all the first-magnitude sites until those of lesser importance have been thoroughly examined. *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili* is ever the soundest of principles. Let us do the preliminary chronological investigation in some site of no historical importance, and then, having learned all that it has to tell us, gradually work through the second-class sites, ending with those of outstanding importance. The reason of this principle should be obvious. Excavation is necessarily and inevitably destructive. Walls *must* be pulled down to get at what lies below them. Tomb-deposits *must* be disturbed. Notes and photographs must be taken on the spot and at the moment; else they are valueless, and the lessons for science which the site contains are for ever lost. The excavation becomes what is colloquially but expressively called a 'hogging' for curiosities; and to 'hog' is the unpardonable crime in Archaeology. But even the most conscientious note-taker must know what notes to take and what to look for and observe; it is only experience that will teach him the significance of small points which at first he might not so much as observe. To gain that experience, a small site, the destruction of which would not be a scientific calamity, ought to be studied first. Every stone in Jerusalem is sacred, and the site should be treated as tenderly as a manuscript containing literary matter of value, the parchment of which has become rotten.

"However, work began under Dr. Bliss at Jerusalem in 1894 and continued till 1897. With Dr. Bliss was associated in this work Mr. A. C. Dickie, an architect, now the Professor of Architecture in Manchester University. Starting from the famous scarp on Mount Zion, associated with the name of Henry Maudslay, who had first called attention to it, trenches and tunnels were cut along the line of the foundation of the old south wall of the city, surrounding the hill called Ophel. By this work the southern limit of the city at different periods of history was determined. Numerous interesting discoveries were incidentally made, notably the church erected over the Pool of Siloam by the Empress Eudocia

"When the permit for the excavation at Jerusalem expired, and the monograph was finished, the Palestine Exploration Fund returned to the country towns in the Shephelah. . . . Tell es-Safi, long identified, on good grounds with Gath, was selected as the central site of the next campaign; but with it were included a number of other sites in the neighbourhood, which the Committee of the Fund

considered might also be examined. Application was made to the Turkish authorities for permits to examine nine sites in all; these were granted, with one exception, the story of which is not uncharacteristic of the difficulties which met the explorer working in Turkish territory. The site in question, Askalan, was not of the slightest importance. It was withheld because the Turkish authorities confused it with Askalun, that is, Askalon, on the alleged ground that there were certain holy places there which the exploration would interfere with. The real reason, no doubt, was that as Askalun is near the sea, it would have been possible for an explorer to evade the law requiring all the antiquities found in an excavation to be given up to the Turkish government. However, Askalun was not desired, and Askalan was too insignificant to regret. . . .

“Tell es-Safi proved very disappointing. The summit of the mound was crowned by a village of unusually large size, inhabited by a peculiarly greedy and cantankerous breed of Fellahin; and round the village extended on every side the cemeteries where generations of its folk had been buried, most effectively sealing up the precious underlying accumulations from the truth-seeking archaeologist. Only a few places were found in the whole tell where pits could be sunk, and these proved singularly unproductive. The city wall was traced, but had it not been for a comparatively late rubbish-heap that was found outside one corner of the wall, containing broken fragments of statuettes and other odds and ends, hardly anything worth mention would have been found on this site at all. . . .

“At Tell Sandahannah the whole site of the Hellenistic city was exposed and planned. Much was added to our previous knowledge of the pottery. Some important tombs were discovered and searched—although, alas, the best of all, the great tomb of Apollophanes at Moresheth was missed by the excavators, and found afterwards by Fellahin, who dispersed its contents unrecorded. Fortunately Science, embodied in Dr. J. P. Peters, of New York, and Prof. Hermann Thiersch, of Freiburg, were in time to save the wall-paintings from being cut off the wall for sale, and to place them on permanent record in their work, *The Marissa Tombs*, published by the Palestine Exploration Fund. During this campaign a beginning was made with an exploration of the extraordinary caves which are among the most remarkable monu-

ments of antiquity in Southern Palestine; huge labyrinths of chamber after chamber—in at least one case there are as many as sixty chambers in a single group—excavated out of the soft chalky rock at some quite unknown time, to serve some quite unknown purpose.

“The site chosen for the next excavation was Gezer.¹ The city had been identified with the mound called Tell el-Jazari, beside the village of Abu Shusheh, near Ramleh, by Prof. Clermont-Ganneau, in the year 1871; and the identification had been confirmed by an inscription found close by—a circumstance which remained unique until an inscription in the tomb of Apollophanes established the identity of Tell Sandahannah with Marissa (Moreseth). It was on an important highway, and was a centre of trade with Egypt; it had been in Egyptian hands, and also in Philistine hands; it had contributed to the Tell el-Amarna correspondence. Here Amorite, Philistine, Egyptian, Hebrew, had all met, and might all have been expected to leave recognizable traces. Remains of all periods from very early Canaanite or Pre-Canaanite to Herodian times were found, although in many respects the results of the excavations differed from the anticipations. The mound is of huge size, and, though the work lasted through five years, it was not possible to dig more than about three fifths of the whole. . . .

“Most remarkable among the rock-cuttings was the great water tunnel, a huge passage sloping downwards through the rock to a depth of about 90 feet, giving access to a great cave in which rose a powerful spring of water. This excavation was kindred to the elaborate series of passages and galleries which radiate from the Virgin’s fountain at Jerusalem, originally explored by Sir Charles Warren, and re-opened in a curious treasure-hunting expedition that took place in 1909.

“Several large residential buildings, castles or palaces, were found here and there; the two city walls were exposed—great structures some 15 feet in thickness—and their architectural history determined. In the centre of the town was found an open space, across which ran an imposing line of rude stone pillars, which it is most reasonable to regard as *masseboth*. Although four of the Tell el-Amarna letters came from Gezer, no further documents of this series were discovered. Two later contract-tablets, however,

¹ [Prof. Macalister modestly omits to mention that the highly successful work here was carried out by himself.—ED.]

came to light, written in Assyrian, and referring to the sale of land and other property, doubtless in or near the city itself. These belonged to the time of the Assyrian captivity. A limestone tablet inscribed with Hebrew also came to light. Its contents were not very exciting—nothing but a list of the agricultural operations of successive months. The tablet has, however, the interest of being the oldest extant document in the Hebrew language. . . .

“Hitherto Britain, and the Palestine Exploration Fund, had enjoyed a monopoly of legitimate excavation in the country—legitimate, because unfortunately many of the ancient sites and cemeteries had suffered from the attentions of dealers’ agents and other plunderers. . . .

“The first of other nations to join in friendly rivalry was Austria, which, in the person of Prof. Sellin, then of Vienna, undertook the exploration of Taanach—the first site to be examined on the Plain of Esdraelon. The general civilization proved to be identical with that revealed in the Southern Palestinian sites. Indeed, Palestine is so small a country, that it is unlikely that it should be found to be divided into different zones of culture. Among the more special finds are to be named the now famous altar of terra-cotta, adorned with strange figures of lions, and a number of cuneiform tablets, the correspondence of one Ishtar-washur, which belong to the Tell el-Amarna period.

“Germany followed shortly afterwards, and, represented by Dr. G. Schumacher, attacked the twin mound of Taanach, that is to say, Megiddo (Tell el-Mutasellim). Here again the usual Palestinian culture was revealed. . . . The chief “find” at Megiddo, which, on the whole, produced little of outstanding interest, was a seal, bearing a finely engraved figure of a lion, and a Hebrew inscription stating that it belonged to one Shama’, described as “servant of Jeroboam”—very probably King Jeroboam II.

“America followed next, with an elaborate and extensive exploration of the site of Samaria. It is, however, impossible to say much about this investigation here, as the results of the excavation as yet await publication, and it is not permissible to intrude on the rights of the explorers. When the publication does make its appearance it will be cordially welcomed, as the curiosity that was aroused by the announcement of the discovery of ostraka with Hebrew graffiti still remains only partially satisfied. . . .

"The next site examined, again under German auspices, was that of Jericho. Its results were not very stimulating, . . . a considerable area exposed, but nothing of special importance seems to have been found. Much the same may be said of the partial excavation of 'Ain esh-Shems (Bethshemesh) under the Palestine Exploration Fund. . . .

"The end of the war has brought a new *régime*, and new duties, devolving especially upon Britain as Mandatory for Palestine. The Department of Antiquities seems to have been well organized already. Under the Turkish rule everything was prohibited; but everything was possible. A caustic Armenian gentleman, formerly well known to the present writer, used to say that the Turk had one virtue and only one—he would take a bribe. Illicit excavation was prohibited with a drastic thoroughness that was worthy of a civilized nation; but diggers and dealers had but to give a small *douceur* to the local administrator of law and order to ensure his complaisance. The only result of the Turkish law, therefore, was to put serious difficulties in the way of legitimate investigators, while allowing plunderers practically a free hand. This is no longer the case.

• "Moreover, an important move forward has been made by the establishment of a British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. This body, which will work in collaboration with the American School of Archaeology that has existed there from the beginning of the century, and with the yet older foundation, the magnificent *École Biblique* conducted by learned members of the Dominican Order, is designed for training students in archaeological method, and giving them a practical experience of research work in its several branches. . . .

"For all these works and institutions money is necessary, and unless Britain greatly increases the support which she has hitherto given to them she will lose the position in the front rank of Palestine research which she has hitherto held. Other nations are pressing hard upon her in the competition; thus America is beginning the excavation of the great mound that covers the important city of Beth-Shean. It is not to the credit of any country that it is prepared to squander tens of thousands on cinemas, horse and other races, football matches, but starves the work of research in the land which is the centre of the Faith that it at least nominally professes.

“ Looking back over the general results of the last thirty years’ work of exploration in Palestine, the strongest impression which it leaves on the mind is a deepened sense of the wonder of the Old Testament. Even if we throw overboard all theories of a supernatural inspiration, and agree to regard that marvellous anthology of poetry, history, philosophy, and law as the unaided product of the human intellect, its growth in the uncongenial soil and surroundings of Palestine would still be one of the greatest miracles of human history. All the excavations which we have enumerated have uniformly shown that the standard of material civilization was low throughout the whole time covered by the Old Testament history. . . . Yet it was in these uninspiring conditions that the greatest poetry in the world was written, and that text-books of history were first compiled. . . . What makes this fact even more remarkable is, that the historic sense was not highly developed among the people at large. . . . There was so little historic instinct among the people, as a whole, that they even neglected to record the names of the dead buried in the tombs which they hewed from the rock with such great labour. Round Jerusalem there are scores, even hundreds, of rock-cut tombs, some of them of great extent; but hardly any of them bear inscriptions, and, when they do, these in almost every case commemorate foreigners—Greeks, Romans, and in one case a German.

“ The drab monotony of the civilization revealed by the diggings, darkened still further, as it is, by statuettes and other objects that frequently come to light to testify to the crudity of the nature-worship followed by the rank and file of the people, is a background which sets forth in greater brilliance the prophets and psalmists, the teachers and the tellers of tales, who played out their parts upon a stage so strangely incongruous.”
