

THE OPHEL HILL.

By DR. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

THE decision of the Committee to co-operate in the proposed international excavation of what is described as the "Ophel Hill," is one which will commend itself to all those who have followed the development of modern ideas with regard to the topography of Jerusalem. For the sake of those who may not realize the uniqueness of the opportunity, it is proposed in the present paper to set forth in a popular manner what the "Ophel Hill" is, what has been found there already, and what may be reasonably hoped from the proposed excavations.

The term "Ophel" is not perhaps a happy one to apply to the whole of the ridge running south from the southern wall of the Temple towards Siloam, an area of about 2,000 feet long by some 350 to 400 feet wide. I am not sure whether there is any name, ancient or modern, which covers the whole area. M. Weill gives the name ed-Dehourah to the part where he excavated, but we do not know how far north this name is extended. If we view Jerusalem as built upon two lines of hill—a long eastern one and a short, broader and loftier western one; and if, as many authors do, we divide the eastern hill into three, the central part being covered by the Temple area, the northern one the site of ancient "Bezetha," and the southern part the site of Ophel, the Akra, the fortress Zion, and the "City of David," then this ridge south of the Temple area may be described as the south-eastern hill of the City. It is bounded to the east by the Wady Sitti Miriam or Kidron Valley, and on the west by the valley known as el-Wad, called by Josephus the Tyropoeon Valley. Both these valleys have become half-filled with so much rubbish that the steep sides of the ridge are now largely buried. Indeed, towards el-Wad on the west, the slopes into the valley give, except on the south, no indication to-day of a site of material strength. The southern end of the ridge, where the two valleys join, ends in rocky scarps showing numerous marks of artificial work and conveying indications of possibilities of natural defence in former days.

To the north there is no indication where the ridge is cut off—if it was cut off—from the higher ground crowned with the Temple area, but that is not unnatural when we consider that from the time of the building of the Temple for perhaps a thousand years, this ridge and the Temple hill was all incorporated into one. The greater part of the hill has been for long centuries uninhabited, and to-day there are very few houses. There are a few half-developed vegetable gardens and but few trees.

OPHEL.

The name Ophel has been very generally applied in modern times to the whole of this long ridge, but it is certain that this was not the ancient use of the word. Ophel was somewhere here, but the ridge itself was not Ophel.

In 2 Chronicles xxvii, 3, xxxiii, 14, Neh. iii, 26, and xi, 21, the word occurs as a proper name with the article *ha-Ophel*. It is translated Ophel with (in A.V.) “the Tower” in the margin. We read (2 Chronicles xxvii, 3), that “on the wall of Ophel (Jotham) built much,” and (in xxxiii, 14) that Manasseh “compassed Ophel about and raised it to a very great height.” In the book of Nehemiah, we read (iii, 26) that “the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel (margin “the Tower”) unto the place over against the water-gate toward the east and the tower that standeth out.” In other passages where “Ophel” occurs without the article, it is variously translated, *e.g.* (Is. xxxii, 14) “the forts,” R.V. margin “the hill”; (Micah iv, 8) “the stronghold,” and R.V. margin “the hill”; in 2 Kings v, 24, “the tower,” and R.V. margin “the hill.”

The Rev. Dr. Burney, in the *Quarterly Statement*, Jan. 1911, gives strong reasons for believing that the meaning of Ophel is “fortress,” and that the name was at a later age applied to the fortress known earlier as “Zion,” or the “City of David.”

All the references in 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah make it clear that Ophel was situated somewhere on this south-eastern hill or ridge, and this agrees with Josephus, who, in describing the course of the old wall of Jerusalem, traces it from the fountain Siloam “where it also bends again towards the east at Solomon’s Pool, and reaches as far as a certain place they call Ophlas, where it was joined to the eastern cloister of the Temple” (B.J., V, iv, 2). In another passage he describes how “John held the Temple and the parts thereto adjoining for a great way, as also Ophla and the valley

called the Valley Cedron" (B.J., V, vi, 1). It is quite possible that in the days of Josephus, the name had already been extended further north than in Old Testament times.

While, however, it has generally been conceded that Ophel was somewhere on this south-eastern hill, a far greater interest in this site lies in the fact that almost all competent scholars now believe that somewhere here were the sites of :—

ZION AND THE CITY OF DAVID.

The controversy has been a long one. When over fifty years ago the late Rev. W. F. Birch commenced to champion these views, it was generally accepted that "Zion" and the "City of David" were both where tradition places them to-day.

"Mount Zion" had been so long applied to the southern end of the western hill, and the traditional "Tomb of David," outside the Zion Gate (Bab Neby Daoud), had been so long venerated by Moslems, Jews and Christians, that it must have needed some mental detachment to maintain an entirely different view. Mr. Birch's contributions on this subject in the *Quarterly Statement* are numerous. They appear in the volumes for 1870, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1885, 1886, 1888, 1890, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1903, 1906, 1908 and 1911, indeed, death alone stilled his literary activity in this direction. And he has won all along the line. Not only have his arguments based on Bible and history found acceptance, but it is safe to say that every discovery on this site has strengthened his view. And yet, it may be worth while, on the eve of an excavation, which will without doubt conclusively settle the question once for all, to summarise the chief arguments in favour of placing the Stronghold of Zion, the same as the "City of David" (2 Samuel v, 7), which David captured on this south-eastern ridge.

1. On the eastern side of this hill, in the Valley of the Kedron, there gushes forth the once plentiful spring known as the "Virgin's Fountain" or in the Old Testament "Gihon." It must be evident to all those familiar with the sites of ancient cities in the east, that the two factors which decided the first people to build a town in this neighbourhood were : (1) the presence of this spring, and (2) the natural strength of the precipitous hill rising immediately above the spring. The enormous importance attached to this spring is shown by the numerous tunnels and aqueducts constructed around its source, and notably the very ancient tunnel, "Warren's Tunnel,"

which approaches the spring through the rock from the centre of the defensive area. It must be remembered that in very early times access to springs was a more vital matter than at a later age as water-holding cisterns were not then constructed. The great "water tunnel" at Gezer, and the only partially explored tunnels at el-Jib, Bittir and Khurbet Bel'ameh, were all made for the same purpose. In view of the entire absence of water on the relatively distant western hill, it is quite impossible to believe that any primitive people would pass by this favourable site for one so distant and unsuited to the military requirements of those days. The traditional relationship of the spring to the City and its sacred character is shown by Solomon's coronation there.

2. But the very shape of the two sites is a convincing argument. The long narrow ridge of "Ophel," small as it seems to us to-day, is exactly similar in general outline to many ancient fortified sites in Palestine, while the western hill presents an area which would for its defence have needed resources far beyond those of pre-Hebrew times.

An examination of the ground shows that the area, which might have been covered by the fortifications around this "Ophel" hill, may have been not much less than that around the powerful fortress city of ancient Gezer. What this exact area was, and how long were these surrounding walls are questions which the coming excavations may show us.

3. The excavations carried out on the site, to which reference is made below, have already fully confirmed, from the antiquity of the pottery remains, the primitive culture of its earliest settled inhabitants, the exact reverse is true of the western hill, where the earliest remains are Hebrew.

4. The Biblical evidence on which Mr. Birch chiefly relied entirely agrees with the findings of the archaeologist. In two rather obscure passages describing how King David captured Jerusalem (2 Sam. v, 6-9, and 1 Chron. xi, 6), one fact which emerges clear is that David captured the city "up the gutter" (R.V. "water course"). The word here used, *רֹצֶחָן zinnōr*, is one of obscure meaning, but would be admirably explained by Warren's tunnel. The capture of the Citadel against all the expectation of the Jebusites is explained by the existence of this secret passage. Josephus in describing the same event, states that David "promised that he who should first go over the ditches that were beneath the

Citadel, and ascend into the Citadel itself, and take it, should have the command of the entire people conferred upon him."

Modern excavation has shown that "up the gutter," or "water course," is a better description than the "ditches" of Josephus.

If, as is generally supposed, the "Siloam tunnel" is really the aqueduct referred to in 2 Chron. xxxii, 30, where we read, "This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water-course of Gihon and brought it straight down to the west side of the City of David," it is hardly possible to locate the "City of David" anywhere except on this hill. And the statement in 2 Chron. xxxiii, 14, that Manasseh built "an outer wall to the City of David on the west side of Gihon in the valley" (*i.e.*, the Nahal or Kidron Valley) is very explicit as locating both the "City of David" and "Gihon."

In Nehemiah iii, 15, the City of David is referred to as adjacent to the Pool of Siloam and the King's garden.

Among other points which may be mentioned is the expression "up" used in connection with the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from the City of David to the Temple (1 Kings viii, 1; 2 Chron. v, 2), and Pharaoh's daughter "came *up* out of the City of David into her house which Solomon had built for her"—adjacent to the Temple (1 Kings ix, 24). The term "up" could not possibly be used had the transfer been from the loftier western hill (now called "Mount Zion") to the Temple hill.

The crowning of Solomon at Gihon (1 Kings i, 33) and the account of King David's flight (2 Sam. xiii, 23) are both more consistent with a Jerusalem centred in the south-eastern hill. I know of no passages in the Bible supporting any other view.

It follows that this hill bears the site and the long buried ruined foundations of the ancient Zion, the stronghold of the Jebusites which David captured.¹ Here he made his royal residence and capital, and this "City of David" finally became his place of sepulchre (1 Kings ii, 10) and that of many of his successors.

Besides these famous sites, two others must have been situated somewhere upon this ridge, viz., the Millo and the Akra.

¹ It may be pointed out that in the prophetic and apocryphal writings "Zion" and "Mount Zion" were names given to the Temple Hill, and sometimes "Zion" is used as an equivalent to Jerusalem itself.

MILLO.

The meaning of the word Millo (**מִלּוֹן**) is a matter of conjecture only. On account of its connexion with a root having the sense “filling,” it is generally supposed to mean a solid tower or an embankment of earth. The “House of Millo” of 2 Kings xii, 20, according to Winckler, may have been the original pre-Hebrew temple shrine of Jerusalem, built like a Babylonian temple upon such a mound. It is very generally supposed that the Millo (2 Chron. xxxii, 5, and 2 Kings xii, 20) was some kind of fortress, possibly a massive brickwork structure at the northern end of the original walls, near the great gateway.

It has been suggested by Sir George Adam Smith that it was a fortress at the southern end of this hill, guarding the old pool. Father Vincent thinks the site may have been on the site of the causeway now connecting the western and eastern hills across the Tyropoeon Valley, while M. Weill considers that it was a narrow causeway connecting the “City of David” with “Ophel.” It must have been included in the very earliest purely Hebrew fortifications of Jerusalem. We read (1 Kings xi, 27) that “Solomon built Millo and repaired the breaches of the City of David his father.”

It is significant that the LXX translators always put Akra for Millo (2 Sam. v, 9; 1 Kings ix, 15, 24; and 2 Chron. xxxii, 5).

THE AKRA.

There have been very various suggestions regarding the situation of the fortress called by Josephus “the Akra.” We have seen that the LXX writers identify Millo with the Akra. The evidence of Josephus is conflicting. Indeed, it is not quite clear from his writings whether he uses the term “Akra” always for the same locality. He states that Antiochus Epiphanes (168 B.C.) after destroying Jerusalem “fortified the City of David with a great and strong wall, with strong towers, and it became unto them an Akra” (1 Mac. i, 33, 36). This fortress became an increasing menace to the Jews until (142 B.C.) it was captured by Simon, who, not only razed the whole fortress, but “when he had done this, he thought it their best way, and most for their advantage, to level the very mountain itself on which the Citadel happened to stand, that the Temple might be higher than it so they all set themselves to work and levelled the mountain, and in that work spent both night and day without intermission, which cost them three years

before it was removed and brought to an entire level with the plain of the rest of the City" (*Ant.*, XIII, VI, 7).

This event Josephus refers to again (B.J., V, vi, 1) when he states that "the other hill, which was called Akra, and sustains the lower City, is of the shape of a moon when she is horned ; over against this is a third hill (evidently the Temple Hill), but naturally lower than Akra, and parted formerly from the other by a deep valley. However, in these times when the Hasmoneans reigned, they filled up the valley with earth and had a mind to join the City to the Temple. They then took off part of the height of Akra, and reduced it to a less elevation than before, that the Temple might be superior to it." The Akra had been a menace to the Temple (1 Mac. xiii, 52) from which the Temple could be overlooked, hence these drastic measures (1 Mac. xiv, 36).

The Akra is identified by Josephus with the "City of David" and with the "lower City" (B.J., I, xiv, V; IV, VI, 1), and yet, in its original lofty condition it dominated the Temple. Sir Charles Watson in the *Quarterly Statement*, 1906-07, produces strong reasons for placing the Akra where the el-Aksa Mosque is to-day, others, not perhaps so completely accepting the tradition recorded by Josephus, would put it further south, but there seems little doubt the Akra was somewhere upon the south-eastern hill. Whether this account of Josephus has any basis in fact should be possible of proof in the course of the proposed excavations.

EXCAVATIONS UPON THE OPHEL HILL.

In 1870, Sir Charles Warren found a wall $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick running from the south-east corner of the Temple area south for 90 feet and then south-west along the edge of this hill for 700 feet. This wall showed at least two periods of construction and abuts against the Temple masonry by a straight joint.¹ Sir Charles Warren considered that the Ophel wall as at present existing is later than the Sanctuary wall. Along the course of this wall were four small towers with a projection of 6 feet and a face 22-28 feet broad, and a great corner tower projecting $41\frac{1}{2}$ feet from the wall with a face 80 feet broad. This was built of massive masonry, very similar to some of the city wall remains afterwards found by Bliss on the western hill. It still stands under the ground from

¹ See "Excavations on 'Ophel,' Jerusalem," Volume of the Memoirs of the Survey of W. Palestine (P.E.F.).

its foundations to a height of 60 feet. Warren suggested that this was the "tower that standeth out" of Nehemiah iii, 25. The examination of these walls was incomplete, and conclusions as to period of construction were at the time considered very doubtful.

In 1881 Prof. Guthe picked up fragmentary traces of this city wall further south.

When Bliss and Dickie were excavating in Jerusalem they concentrated their work upon the walls from the south-west corner of the ancient city wall down to the Pool of Siloam,¹ but they made, at the suggestion of the Committee, a small excavation at the southern end of the Ophel hill in the hope of discovering the "Tomb of David." It was considered by M. Clermont-Ganneau that the wide curve of the Siloam tunnel may have been deliberately made to avoid the site of the Royal tombs. Nothing very notable was found, and M. Clermont-Ganneau stated that the excavation had not been made at the curve he had indicated.

During 1909-11 a party of Englishmen under the Hon. M. Parker obtained a permit to excavate in this hill and made a number of explorations, especially in the neighbourhood of the Virgin's Fountain (Gihon) and the various tunnels connected with this source. Father Vincent was fortunately able to follow the work throughout, and he drew up a copiously illustrated account which is now on sale at the P.E.F.² An English translation has also been published.

From November, 1913, to March, 1914, M. Raymond Weill, on behalf of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, made a most important excavation of the southern end of the "Ophel Hill." M. Weill has published his results in *La Cité de David*,³ and Father Vincent has given an illustrated account in the *Revue Biblique*, 1921, pp. 247-277, 410-433, 541-569. Some account of this has been given in the *Quarterly Statement* of January, 1922. It is unnecessary, therefore, to repeat what has been said there.

It will be seen, therefore, that already this "Ophel Hill" has been examined at many parts, especially the line of the eastern city wall, the neighbourhood of Gihon, and the southern extremity

¹ See *Excavations at Jerusalem*, 1894-1897, by F. J. Bliss and A. C. Dickie (P.E.F.).

² *Jérusalem sous Terre*.

³ *La Cité de David, Compte rendu des fouilles exécutées à Jérusalem sur le site de la ville primitive. Compagnie*, 1914. (Paris, Geuthner, 1920.)

where it ends in rocky scarps at the junction of the Kidron and Tyropoeon valleys.

It will be the work of the new excavators to amplify our knowledge of these points and correlate our information from these various sources. The periods to which the already partially discovered eastern city walls belongs has to be determined. Of the line of the wall on the western side of the ridge where it abuts on the Tyropoeon we know nothing, nor do we know where the ancient Jebusite walls ended towards the north, where at any rate must have been a city gate and strong fortifications. Perhaps we may find the Millo in this neighbourhood. Then whether there was a natural valley or an artificial fosse between this northern wall and the slopes further north is as yet unknown. There must be extensive foundation remains of the early cities still deeply buried over a very wide area—more than possibly an ancient Canaanite sanctuary with the broken remains of *masseboth* may be uncovered. The site of the palace of David must occupy a prominent position in the hill and the tombs of David and of his successors (some of which M. Weill thinks he has found) should be of the utmost interest. It is to be hoped that the site of the Millo and the Akra may be established.

The excavation of a site belonging to periods so interesting to biblical and historical students must necessarily be of enormous importance. We should be able to form a clear conception of the pre-Hebrew and early Hebrew civilizations which flourished here for centuries. There is always the possibility that cuneiform tablets or some Hebrew inscriptions may be found. Lastly, it is more than probable that in such a site, which was thickly populated right down to the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus, much may be found which will throw light upon the Maccabean and Roman periods.
