

## THE LORD'S LAND.

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OUR arrangements being perfected for the tour to the Jordan, through Moab, and around the Dead Sea, we started on the morning of April 21. Sheik Haza, of the Adwan nation, whose territory lies from Jerash on the north to Ma'an on the south, and from the Jordan seventy miles east, had come over to Jerusalem, and agreed to conduct us through their land for thirty napoleons. His protection could only avail after crossing the Jordan, and so we were obliged to obtain from the sheiks of the Jordan a safe conduct through their domains. Travellers to the Jordan, unprotected by an escort from these sheiks, are as liable to fall among thieves to-day as in the days of Jesus. A young American, who only recently disregarded this advice, was stripped and robbed.

We left the Jaffa Gate at nine a.m. The morning was pleasant. We all felt in good spirits, though the expedition before us was one of greater danger than even that of the Desert. We had no assurance at starting that we could succeed in all we proposed, since the tribes beyond the Jordan, especially those of Kerak and at the south-east of the Dead Sea, were treacherous. We were, however, especially favoured in having Dr. De Haas as one of our party during the Moab tour. His office, held in high respect by the Bedawin, did not a little to facilitate our movements.

Our pack-train, consisting of about thirty mules and donkeys, with their drivers, under the control of Aref, or Abu Kaliol, "Father of the Little (son)," had started in advance. We passed around the north wall of the city, and across the Kedron, and on the east side took the old road to Jericho over the eastern slopes of Olivet. We stopped to look at some rock caves to the right of the road just above Bethany, one of which is said to be the tomb of Lazarus, and also at Bethany, just at the foot of the eastern shoulder of the mountain, to see the "House of Simon the Leper," and also the "House of Mary and Martha." The tradition which places the grave of Lazarus among these caves is not without plausibility, since it was a universal custom for villagers to bury the dead in tombs hewn in the rocks near by their villages. The road goes directly through Bethany, and over against it, to the south-east, is a village occupying the site of Bethphage. The road descends from Bethany quite rapidly, and is in much better condition than I had expected to find it. There is no village between Bethany and Jericho, nor do we read that there ever was any; the wild state of the country accounting for the fact that it has always been a favourite resort for robbers. Hills and valleys suited for cultivation are the exception. Limestone rocks, twisted and torn, bleak and scorched, are piled up in all directions.

After lunching by the ruins of an old caravansary called the Khan, situated on a high ridge, we resumed our journey. Immediately we met a band of desperate-looking black Arabs, all armed, who, no doubt, if we had not been regularly guarded, would have fallen upon us and despoiled us of our purses and raiment. The road now approached the deep gorge of Wady Kelt, and for an hour we rode looking down into the dry bed of the supposed brook Cherith, where Elijah was fed by the ravens. There was a little water trickling through it. Emerging from the narrow defile, the Plain of the Jordan, the course of the river marked by a belt of green, the Salt Sea, and the mountains east of the Jordan, stretched out before us. An easy descent brought us to the edge of the plain.

The same afternoon we visited the site of old Jericho, lying on a tell, or hill, a mile north of Wady Kelt. At the foot of the hill, on the east side, is a large spring, called 'Ain es Sultan, which answers to the description of the fountain whose waters were healed by the prophet Elisha. See 2 Kings ii. 19-21. Certainly the rank growth of the thorny knukub, of weeds and wild flowers, and of grain wherever cultivated, attest that the land is not now barren. The position of this spring fixes the site of the first Jericho. On the adjoining hills are heaps of *débris*, but so matted with bushes and weeds as to defy examination. The vicinage of the mountains, and the lay of the land between them and Jericho, furnish a ready explanation of the ease with which Joshua's spies made their escape from the house of Rahab.

On returning to the plain, we deflected to the east of the point where we forded the Kelt and found our camp pitched

near the village er Riha, which stands on the supposed site of the second, or Herod's Jericho. This is situated about a mile and a quarter from the site of the old city.

The next morning, instead of going on up the valley, as we had anticipated, we agreed to spend the day in the vicinity. We all started off together in the direction of the mouth of the Jordan, or head of the Dead Sea. As we expected to see much of the sea later in our trip, we allowed Dr. Vail and the ladies to go by themselves, the rest of the gentlemen striking across the plain. They reported the approach to the sea as very level, and the distance very deceptive. The ground is covered with salt incrustations. The mouth of the river is about one hundred and eighty yards wide, with only three or four feet depth of water, but with a bottom of very deep mire, so as to render it impassable. At its mouth the river sweeps toward the north-east corner of the sea. The shore of the sea is very flat, with much drift-wood lodged upon it. On the west a peninsula makes out, which is covered with ruins of massive stones. The heat was oppressive but endurable.

On the north-east of the head of the sea, beyond Jordan's mouth, is a wide open ghor, which is identified by some as the Vale of Siddim, on which Sodom and Gomorrah stood. The mountains of Moab shoot down on this plain like a wall, and thus continue along the east side of the sea, cut here and there by wadies making down from the east. The mountains of Judea, with their bold, chalky cliffs, also trend close upon the north western angle of the sea. Prominent among them rises Nely Musa, on the summit of which is a Mohammedan wely. This mount the Mohammedans regard as the true Pisgah, where Moses was buried, and to it they make a yearly pilgrimage.

Our first pause was at Kasr Hajla, the ruins of a Christian monastery. Thence we rode, in a north-east direction, to 'Ain Hajla, the scriptural Beth hoglah, a place on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin. Joshua xv. 5, 6. The spring is large, surrounded by bushes, and the water is good. We bore thence a little south-east over a smooth path, with here and there a slight depression, until we reached the Jordan. There is at first an outer bank with a slight dip, and then a short stretch and the bank proper, which is come upon very suddenly; so suddenly, indeed, that the river is scarcely seen till one is right upon it. At this point—the bathing-place for the Greek pilgrims, the traditional site for the crossing of Israel and of Elijah and Elisha, and, according to some, of the baptism of Christ—the river is from eighty to a hundred feet wide, and its main channel from ten to twelve feet deep.

Bidding adieu for the present to the Jordan, we galloped back toward our camp, visiting, as we returned, the sites of Gilgal and the second Jericho. The spot to which we were taken for Gilgal is a little over a mile south-east of the village er Riha, and has nothing but measurement to give probability to its identity. It was, according to Josephus, fifty *stadia* from the Jordan and ten *stadia* from Jericho. The Jericho of Josephus was the Jericho of Herod, likely the present village er Riha. We found on the supposed site of Gilgal only a few stones covered with tangled bushes and weeds.

Near the village er Riha we passed a large tower, which is the single ancient ruin that affords any clue to the Jericho of Herod the Great. The curse upon ancient Jericho probably led Herod to rebuild the city at this point. It could not have escaped his passion for city and fortress building, that a great city was desirable in the midst of this fertile plain, where residence was so pleasant in the winter season. This was the Jericho which Christ frequented, and where the miracle of healing the blind Bartimeus and the conversion of Zaccheus took place. Here, also, the death of Herod the Great occurred, by a most loathsome and painful disease, after a reign of thirty-seven years. The present Arab village is but a collection of mud huts, exceeding rude and filthy. Most of the population were now out in their tents on the banks of the Kelt.

In the afternoon we rode up past the site of ancient Jericho, to the mountain directly west of it. We went, without regard to paths, part of the time through fields of grain. The remains of aqueducts, and reservoirs, and old mills are numerous. At the foot of the Quarantania, or Mount of Temptation, we dismounted, and walked up its steep sides. The almost perpendicular east face of the mountain abounds with caves, which give evidence of having been occupied at various periods by human beings.