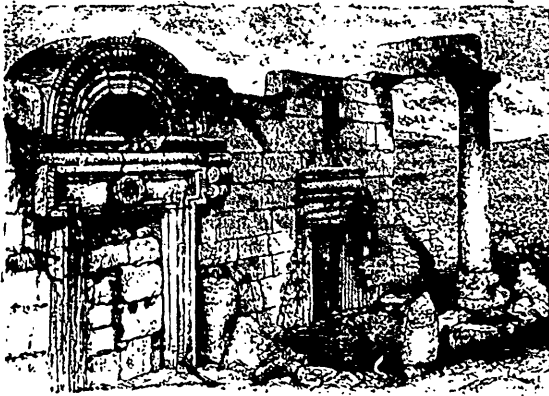


THE LORD'S LAND.

BY REV. H. R. RIDGAWAY, D.D.



Ruins of Synagogue at Meiron.

THE plain was soon crossed, and we began to ascend the hills of Asher. With each successive height the shore line receded, and the great sea opened out in its wide expanse. On the right was the range of hills terminating in the White Cap, on which is perched Ramah of Asher; and far away on the left we could see the cliffs overhanging the course of Nahr el Kasimiyeh (River Leontes), which formed the northern boundary between Israel and the Phenicians. When we reached the highest range of hills, the view of the sea backward, of Lebanon and Hermon, north and north-east, of the valleys and the old castle at Tibnin, just ahead, was really grand. A short ride further on, and we found our tents pitched near the village of Tibnin. In two hours from Tibnin we came, by a south-east course, to Bint Jehel.

Part of our company went directly on to Safed, and others of us detoured to Meiron, about two hours out of our way. At Meiron are located the tombs of the rabbis, which are held in highest veneration by the Jews, such as Hillel, Shammai, Simeon, and Ben Jochai. These tombs are more revered among the Jews than any other shrines in Palestine, except, possibly, the Wailing Place at Jerusalem. Meiron is supposed by some to mark the location of the ancient Meroz. The road to Safed was quite rough, and the climb to the village very steep. The summit of the hill above the village is crowned with an old fortress in ruins. It covers a large area, and must have been a great strength. Clambering to the top, we obtained the first good view of the Sea of Galilee. There it lay, seemingly just at our feet, as beautiful, amid the encircling hills, as the day when Jesus sailed over its bosom, or walked along its shore. Beyond the sea, stretching far away, were the mountains of Bashan; and towards the south, Kurn Hattin, and the clean and graceful form of Tabor.

The descent from Safed to the sea was very precipitous. Three hours brought us to Ain Tabighah, directly on the shore of the sea. This is supposed by some to be the site of Bethsaida of Galilee, the home of Peter and Andrew, of James and John, and of Philip. About twenty minutes further north, on a gentle slope not far from the shore, we came to Tell Hum, where are extensive ruins. This Tell Hum is by many regarded as the site of Capernaum. Here, while most of the party turned back, three or four of us followed the path northward, determined to see the upper end of the lake and the upper mouth of the Jordan. It took us three and a-half hours to accomplish the task, but we were well repaid. We crossed Wady Kerazeh, on the left bank of which, about a mile back from the shore, is Bir Kerazeh, and because of its location, and the striking correspondence of the name, it is regarded as the Scriptural Chorazin. Wheeling about, we retraced our steps as rapidly as possible to rejoin our companions.

We were now fairly on the traditional "land of Gennesaret" (Matt. xiv. 34), called by the Arabs el Ghuweir, the "Little Shur." We paused a moment to look at an Arab tomb, and then hastened on, finding at the further end, on a gentle swell of ground, Mejdol, or Magdala, the home of Mary

Magdalene. Mejdol is a miserable, squalid mud village; we had seen none inferior to it in all Palestine. The name fully identifies it with the Magdala of the evangelists, and the situation is entirely appropriate in relation to other places.

Sunday, June 7. In the morning the lake was quiet. We felt delighted that we could have a Sunday on its shores, and thus commune, on the Lord's own day, with the scenes which were so familiar to Him.

Tiberias is thrice spoken of in the New Testament, and in each instance by John; twice as the name of the Sea of Galilee (John vi. 1; xxi. 1), and once as the name of the city (John vi. 23). We could not see the south end of the lake from our camp, because the mountain extends out a short distance below the baths, and the shores trend eastward. Well nigh the whole eastern shore is visible. It rises very abruptly to the height of two thousand feet through its whole extent, except as it nears the north end of the lake, when it falls toward the plain of the upper Jordan. There are no peaks, but the land from the upper line rolls away gradually, and the mountain forms a sort of natural wall to the hills of Bashan. There is little or no verdure, except as here and there a small wady makes down to the water's edge. Almost directly east of us, where Wady Semark marks the barren mountain with its line of green, and where, between the main mountain wall and the sea are a few slopes of less height, was pointed out to us the traditional site of Khorsa (Gergesa). Here it was "the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters" (Matt. viii. 32). The western shore is not so abrupt, but is broken by the Plain of Gennesaret, and such depressions as 'Ain Tabighah. Upon the whole, the hills of both sides are too naked and uniform to entitle them to be regarded as either grand or beautiful.

Early the next morning we bathed in the sea, and after breakfast were soon again in the saddle. Resuming our journey from the Round Fountain, we took our course diagonally across el Ghuweir for Kna'ah Miniyeh. It was not without regret that, after another lunch under the same tree, overlooking 'Ain Tin, we mounted the hill back of 'Ain Tabighah, and, riding along the line of an old Roman road toward Kahn Jubb Yusuff, we finally left the home of our Lord and the chief scene of His earthly ministry.

Khan Jubb Yusuff lies on the great caravan route from Accho, or Acre, to Damascus. From this point the direct road to Damascus runs north-eastward, on the right of Lake Huleh, and to the east of Mount Hermon.

The next morning we continued our journey up the plain, frequently fording streams of water. About noon we arrived at Tell el Kady, the Hill of the Judge. From Tell el Kady we rode eastward for an hour and a-half until, amid rushing waters, we came to our camp at Banias. In the morning we walked around Banias, the Cesarrea Philippi of the New Testament. Just in the grotto the water is quiet, and covered with scum; but, passing under broken rocks, it flows out a stream of fifty feet in width, and, rushing on for several hundred yards, dashes violently down a deep ravine on the north side of the town. Cesarrea Philippi is the farthest point in the north-east reported to have been visited by our Lord. It was in this vicinity in which He said to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 13-20).

Our course on leaving Banias lay north, through the great Wady et Teim, along the banks of Nahr Hasbany, with the slopes of Hermon on our right. Riding on northward, we soon came upon the flourishing town of Hasbeiya. The population of Hasbeiya in 1860 was five thousand persons, of whom four thousand were Christians.

June 11. The next morning we came first to the Fountain of Hasbany. The water springs up liberally through a gravelly bed, rushes on, and leaps over a stone wall, forming a beautiful cascade. This is another source of the Jordan. It flows down Wady et Teim till it intersects the streams from Dan and Banias, and then together they empty into Lake Huleh. Soon after leaving the fountain, we turned westward, and ascended one of the slopes of the Lebanon range to the village of Yabmur. The ride during the afternoon, through the broad valley et Teim, was rough, but entertaining. At every step we would get different views of the noble Hermon, called fittingly by the Arabs as Sheik, and once in the Bible (Num. xxxiv. 7, 8) Mount Hor, the mount, by way of pre-eminence. It towers aloft 9,376ft.