

EXCAVATION OF THE TELL SALAHYIEH.

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THE Tell Salahiyeh is a large artificial mound situated about eight miles to the East of Damascus, on the north bank of the river Barada. The letters from which these extracts are taken were written in May and June, 1866. As the results of this investigation have never yet been made public, the opportunity afforded by the Quarterly Statement is taken to publish Mr. Rogers's account:—

“Early in the morning of May 17th, I rode over to the Tell, and, having sent out ten workmen the night before, I made them go to work on the cutting begun by Captain Wilson, on the north-west of the mound. During the day some large basaltic and lime stones were found, as if forming the courses of the wall of some building. I therefore directed a rectangular cutting to be made, to follow up the course of the stones. More stones were found, as well as a few small pieces of white marble, some pottery, some bricks of about one foot square and four inches thick, some charcoal and burnt earth.

“May 18.—The work was continued by half the men at the first cutting, while the other half were sent to deepen the cutting opened by Captain Wilson in the north-end corner.

“May 19.—As the latter cutting did not seem likely to reveal anything, a similar cutting—which I will call C—was made a little to the west of it. I thought this spur looked more promising. At the depth of a very few feet, mortar, large bricks, charred wood, and pottery were found. I directed the workmen to deepen the cutting, but not at present to widen it more than necessary. At the first cutting some more stones were found, some bones, the tusk of a wild boar, and a few more pieces of marble or pottery. The burrows of foxes traversed the cuttings in several places, so that the bones we found may possibly have been deposited by wild animals. Here, also, I directed the men to deepen the cutting. This morning I have sent out some more workmen, with better pickaxes and spades, and have directed them to deepen the cuttings already commenced, including the well, so that I hope by next mail to be able to give you some more satisfactory account of the progress.

“May 31.—Since writing on the 21st, I have had twenty-four men at work on the Tell, and have visited the place to give directions and see the progress every second day.

“I have deepened the first cutting to 24ft., and found a continuation of the bricks and a few stones here and there, and not even a perfect regularity in the position of the bricks and mortar.

“In the second cutting were a few bricks and mortar, but natural earth at the depth of about 5ft.

“Cutting C has been cut down to 22ft. At 10ft. a thick cement of lime and pebbles was found; beneath it some charred wood, under

which were alternate layers of sun-dried and baked bricks, with mortar between; but at 22ft. deep I still found nothing but solid brickwork, and came to no pavement of any kind. Pieces of pottery were found and a few pieces of limestone and basalt.

"The cutting at the well was sunk to 14ft.; bricks of two kinds were found in regular layers.

"In a fourth cutting, south of this, at the depth of 6ft. or 8ft., some flat dishes or *tazzes*, some round and some square, on three or four feet, cut in black stone, were found. One of them, about six inches in diameter, is very beautifully cut and smoothed, with three feet and a centre prop broken. Some pieces of larger square ones and of one larger round one were also found; also the foot of a broken glass of that exquisite sea-green which is only seen in ancient glass, and partly encrusted with the oxide which is seen on glass which has been buried for many years. This cutting was taken down to a depth of 18ft., and still regular layers of bricks, stones of various shapes, such as small truncated cones, that would seem to have been made for pounding or grinding powder on a slab; other black stones, like the shape of split sugar-loaves; a few pieces of mica or talc, then another piece of glass, but nothing perfect.

"Close to this cutting, and to the east of it, I made another, in which were found much broken pottery, black inside and red on the surface. A few stones, similar to those already mentioned, with bricks, mortar, and thick strong cement, were found. It was opened to the depth of 32ft.

"Yesterday, when at the works, I caused another opening to be made at the south of the mound, where the regular layers of bricks are very distinct and perfect. These bricks are about 18in. square and 4in. thick; some pale yellow, others pale red, joined by strong mortar; and I am in hope that we may be enabled to discover some clue to this wonderful work, as, after digging for a few hours, some stones of a heart shape were found, as if belonging to a pavement.

"The people in the neighbourhood came to me and said that if I wanted to make any discoveries, I must first propitiate the Sheikh, whose tomb is on the top of the Tell, by sacrificing a sheep in his honour. I immediately gave them half a sovereign with which to purchase the victim, and my workmen partook of the feast. I consented to the proposal rather to encourage the men, and it has had a good effect.

"It is early in the work to form any conjecture; but it seems to me that the Tell is a solid mass of brickwork built over, perhaps, one chamber or more in the centre, similar to the Pyramids of Egypt; for wherever I dig, I find layers of bricks and mortar. If the Tell were the mere store of a brick factory, there would be no mortar between the layers."

The work, affording no promise of further discovery, was then abandoned.