

RECENT OPINIONS ON THE SITE OF CALVARY.

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It is worthy of note that no less than three important works on Jerusalem have recently been published by writers of great authority. Dr. G. Adam Smith's *Jerusalem*, in 2 volumes (Hodder), 1908, has been noticed with general admiration by all critics and reviewers. It is a monument of great learning and erudition, and is likely to take rank as a standard work. The late Dr. Merrill's *Ancient Jerusalem* (Revell), 1908, was reviewed by Dr. Smith in the Palestine Exploration Fund's *Quarterly Statement* of October, 1908, p. 332. Dr. Merrill was, for many years, U.S.A. Consul at Jerusalem, and is well-known as a learned and most diligent archaeologist. Col. C. R. Conder's *City of Jerusalem* (Murray), 1909, is the latest, and not the least interesting, of the three works. It conveniently summarises the views expressed by Col. Conder on Jerusalem exploration and antiquities, during the past thirty years. His *Tent Work in Palestine*, 2 vols. (1878), and *Handbook to the Bible* (Bentley), 1887, are well-known to all Palestine students. He was for many years employed, with the late Sir Charles Wilson, on the work of Palestine Exploration, and his contributions to the *Quarterly Statements* of the Palestine Exploration Fund are both numerous and learned. All three writers are entirely opposed to the traditional sites of Calvary, and the Tomb of Christ; but they differ markedly in the position which they take up regarding the alternatives proposed. Dr. Smith frankly suspends judgment about the disputed sites, considering the evidence as altogether inadequate to enable any certain opinion to be formed about any of them. He notes the fact that "the most sacred sites of all, Calvary and the Sepulchre, lie in that part of the city where the destruction by Titus was complete, and continuous excavation has been least possible." *Jerusalem* (II, 564). "Where Golgotha stood, and where the neighbouring

garden lay in which he was buried, we do not know, because, for reasons already explained, we cannot tell how the second wall, at this time the outer wall on the north, exactly ran." (II, 576.)

The Crucifixion took place, he thought, "in the northern suburb." (II, 577.) Beyond these general statements he has not thought it prudent to go.

Dr. Merrill's learned work will chiefly appeal to professional archaeologists. His description of the second wall, in Chaps. XXIV and XXV, illustrated by numerous maps, will naturally be compared with those of Dr. Smith and the late Sir Charles Wilson. Dr. Merrill considers, in opposition to those authorities, that the course of this wall is substantially established. He entertains no doubt that the site of the traditional tomb and Calvary was inside this much debated wall. But many will consider it a pure waste of time to demonstrate the course and general direction of this wall, merely in order to discredit the claims of the traditional site of Calvary.

Defenders of tradition, who regard belief in the "holy places" as matter of faith, are little likely to be moved by any such appeal to reason and ordinary evidence. The more surely it is proved that Helena's site was within the second wall, the more tenaciously are its defenders likely to cling to the orthodox view, because it involves a greater exercise of faith. *Certum est quia impossibile* (Tertullian.)

Dr. Merrill has for many years supported the view that the Crucifixion took place on the hill above Jeremiah's Grotto, commonly known as the Skull Hill.

Col. Conder has been, since 1878, a warm supporter of this same view of Calvary. He was not the original discoverer of this site, which has attracted much attention since 1842, when the German writer, Otto Thenius, drew attention to it; but Col. Conder, more than thirty years later, was the first to point out its importance as the traditional Jewish place of stoning, or place of public execution, and the probable scene of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The site is one which appeals directly to the eye, and possesses, in this fact, a natural advantage. It was close to the great road which led from the north to Jerusalem. Edersheim describes it as "a weird, dreary place, two or three minutes aside from the high road, with a high, rounded, skull-like, rocky plateau, and a sudden depression or hollow beneath, as if the jaws of that skull had opened." *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, 583 (Longmans), 1883.

Col. Conder's views on the subject of this site have been fully discussed in the pages of the Palestine Exploration Fund's *Quarterly Statements*, and in Sir W. Besant's *Thirty Years' Work in the Holy Land*, published on behalf of the Palestine Exploration Fund. They are adopted in the *International Teachers' Bible*, and have obtained thereby very great currency, both in England and America.

While Dr. Smith frankly holds his judgment in suspense regarding the traditional "holy places," he has simply ignored all the suggested alternatives. This attitude is consistent and entirely intelligible. No one doubts that the evidence on the subject is altogether incomplete, and no one has made this fact more clear than the late Sir Charles Wilson, in *Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre* (1906). That eminent Palestine scholar was for many years regarded as one of the principal champions of the traditional sites. His masterly work shows clearly where his real sympathy lies. He has said all that was possible to encourage supporters of these "holy places," and he has criticized the alternative sites as practically unworthy of serious consideration. Those who have followed the arguments on both sides, will readily perceive that Sir Charles Wilson and Col. Conder (both Royal Engineers of great distinction) are, in fact, the real protagonists of the rival sites. The former, while unwilling to abandon all belief in the time-honoured sites, is evidently doubtful about the evidence. He is, at the same time, frankly sceptical regarding all the modern speculations on the subject, and is evidently inclined to think that the real sites have been lost, and are beyond the reach of human knowledge. Col. Conder represents the more sanguine view, that scientific research has not spoken its last word, and that further light is possible on the subject. He believes that Helena's site within the walls is manifestly false, and that the real Calvary must be sought outside the walls at the traditional Place of Stoning, near the so-called Grotto of Jeremiah. The arguments for this view have appealed to many minds. They are supported by a remarkable consensus of learned evidence.

The late Sir Charles Wilson's views would, perhaps, carry more weight if he had not ignored one important branch of literary evidence, and if he had shown more appreciation of the weight of testimony opposed to his own views. He has omitted all notice of the maps and descriptions of Jerusalem by geographers and well-known writers, such as Christian van Adrichem (1584) and Thomas Fuller (1662). Their maps are founded on the earlier maps of

Marino Sanuto, and other geographers named in Tobler's *Bibliographia Geographica Palestinae*, Leipsic (1867). These ancient maps exhibit the site of Calvary, and the tomb outside the walls north-west of Jerusalem, approximately in the same position as that suggested by Otto Thenius in 1842, and accepted by Col. Conder. These maps may be of little value, but they show, at any rate, that there has long been more than one view regarding the site of Calvary, and that the traditional site was by no means unchallenged.

Those who reject the traditional site of Calvary will find abundant reasons, under the circumstances, to keep an open mind on the subject, and to use their own judgment in a matter on which the greatest experts differ in opinion. The late Sir Charles Wilson, and those who follow him, take one view. Col. Conder, and no less than thirty well-known scholars and writers take another. The Christian public, who are the final court of appeal, must judge between them; and now that Jerusalem is so readily accessible, and visited every year by hundreds of educated travellers, they are no longer at the mercy of experts, however eminent, or bound to take their opinions on trust. Col. Conder's view is supported by many eminent Palestine scholars, including, amongst others, Tristram, Chaplin, Merrill, Hanauer, Edersheim, and Laurence Oliphant. It may be right or wrong, but it cannot hastily be dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration, or treated with contempt as one of the mystical fancies of the late General Gordon. That remarkable man has undoubtedly done much to make the new sites famous, but they were not discovered by him, but by the experts above named, who were all distinguished members of the Palestine Exploration Fund.
