

THE HOPES FOR PALESTINE EXPLORATION.¹

By FREDERICK J. BLISS, A.M., PH.D.

AFTER four and a half years of confinement in Beirut, Syria, and the immediate vicinity, I obtained an unexpected release about the 1st of April, 1919. Up to the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the United States, on April 21st, 1917, Americans could obtain permission to leave the country, but not without great difficulty. With the departure of the last party in May the door was finally closed. My decision to remain was based on several reasons, prominent among which was a desire to "see the thing through."

It seemed to be the only chance which one's lifetime would offer to follow history in the making. How our history was made in the months and years that followed is now known to all the world. The magnificent drive of Allenby's army through Palestine and Syria, in the last weeks of September, 1918, and on through October, completely reversed our situation.

The Turks and Germans fled. We came under Allied administration—the British holding the military control, the French conducting civil affairs. Still, egress by land and sea continued to be difficult, as the means for transportation were naturally required for military purposes. Even civilian travel between Syria and Palestine was restricted for the same reason. However, in February there came to Beirut two Egyptian archaeologists, serving as army officers, who, together with a French *savant*, had been appointed by General Allenby to make a report on the actual condition of the ruins in the occupied enemy territory. These gentlemen arranged with the higher military authorities to have me invited officially to join their commission in Jerusalem as archaeological adviser.

So, armed with a "movement order" to use the means of transportation by land and sea, I started off one April morning to revisit the scenes of my former diggings in Palestine. Leaving

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Beirut harbour in a "drifter" that had not long before been used as a submarine chaser, I was able from its deck to follow the route of the victorious army along the coast of ancient Phoenicia. Sidon, Tyre, the famous Ladder of Tyre, Achzib, and Acre were passed in quick succession, and at about four in the afternoon we reached the port of Haifa.

It was strange that night from the hotel window to watch the brilliantly lighted Night Express rush past on its way to the Suez Canal, where a change would be made for Cairo! It was strange the next day to follow in the track of its flight as far as Lydd, on the new railway made by the British along the coast, passing the line which had been held so stubbornly by the Turks against their foes. It was strangest of all to find a Ford car waiting to take me that very night to Jerusalem and to arrive in the Holy City in two and a half hours, over the route which it had taken me some eight hours to cover in a lumbering carriage in former years!

This trip, together with the journey back, taken some weeks later by a different route, gave me a bird's-eye view of many of the sites which have already been partially excavated, as well as of many that await the digger's spade. In the gardens north of Sidon had been found traces of a temple dedicated to Eshmûn, with large blocks of stone inscribed in Phoenician letters. From Sidon also had come the beautiful sculptures on the so-called Alexander sarcophagus, now in the museum at Constantinople, whose discovery, like so many others before and since, was the result of accident. Systematic search may supplement these discoveries to a degree which the imagination can scarcely compass.

Yes! Phoenicia still calls for the spade. The ancient topography of Tyre, studied rather superficially by Renan in 1860-61, awaits elucidation by patient excavation. The hinterland is rich in sepulchres, still doubtless containing treasures of glassware, though scores of tombs have been rifled by natives, who have found a secret market for their precious but contraband wares. This illicit excavation is of course a menace to archaeology, which seeks to know not only the *provenance* but the exact position of each object found.

On the railway route from Haifa to Lydd we passed many curious rock-cuttings, some of which are merely quarries, while others may be rock-cut heathen temples. As I sped by night from Lydd along the ancient plain of Sharon, I glanced up at the mound

of Gezer to the north, where Prof. Macalister added so much to the knowledge of pre-Israelite days of Palestine. On the south, nearer or farther, were the other sites of the Shephelah excavated at various periods since 1890 under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund: Lachish by Prof. Flinders Petrie and the present writer; Mareshah and the probable sites of Gath and Azekah by Prof. Macalister and myself; Beth Shemesh by Dr. Mackenzie.

The same region is honeycombed with hundreds of bell-shaped underground chambers, cut out from the chalky soil, forming sometimes a complicated connected series, capable of holding thousands of refugees, and in my view actually used for this purpose. With indefatigable zeal Prof. Macalister has already explored many of these huge chambers, climbing down the sometimes balustraded stairways, only to find at the bottom an opening into a lower excavation. But an indefinite number still await exploration.

The return trip to Beirut furnished other reminiscences of excavation in the past, and hopes for excavation in the future. It was like a dream to find myself proceeding from Jerusalem to Damascus in one day, even though that day was seventeen hours long. As far as Haifa my route followed the one taken before. At Haifa I changed for the old Turkish railway to Damascus, *viâ* the south end of the Sea of Galilee and the winding wonders of the Jarmûk Valley.

Not long after leaving Haifa we passed near the site of Megiddo, excavated by the Germans, and of Taanach, where Dr. Sellin found a number of cuneiform tablets, linked up with those which were discovered at Tell el-Amarna, and which gave the Egyptian end of a diplomatic correspondence between Egypt and Palestine. The first tablet of the kind to be found in Palestine had turned up years before at Lachish. Oh! for a new kind of X-ray machine to photograph for us archaeologists the insides of the numerous sites in Palestine, where, according to indications in the tablets found at Tell el-Amarna, similar tablets must be hidden. Only we should demand the exclusive right to use this machine!

The view of the Sea of Galilee reminded me that the topographical and archaeological study of its shores is as yet quite incomplete. Thus far actual excavations in Palestine have thrown more light on the pre-Israelite civilization than they have on that of later times.

The last part of the trip, between Damascus and Beirut, was not without its archaeological suggestion. Ancient High Places were seen, one of which has its Sacred Grove. On the plain of Coele-Syria one's fingers itched for a spade to unearth the story of the ancient mounds. Those mounds of Syria and Palestine! They form a library of hundreds of books—each mound a volume—only a score or so of which have as yet been opened with any scientific knowledge. Alas! from some of them, to continue the figure, odd pages have been torn out, not only by the seekers of spoil, but by unintelligent archaeological amateurs, and all with the same result of leaving the text for ever mutilated.

My weeks in Jerusalem and vicinity were full of realization of the contrast between the new *régime* under the British and the former Turkish control. What a difference between my cordial reception by the military governor, General Ronald Storrs, whose gifts of administration are supplemented by his interest in archaeology, literature, and music, and former interviews with Ottoman Valis, on the gaining of whose personal good-will depended in considerable measure my practical success as an excavator.

A day or two before I left, I met General Storrs at the Pool of Siloam, in the vicinity of which Prof. Dickie and I had excavated a historic church, together with a flight of steps formerly leading down to the Pool and portions of the City Wall, a Gate, and the like. Here we were joined by the Secretary of the Greek Convent, which now owns the land where these discoveries were made, for an informal consultation as to the best means for once more laying bare and for preserving the monuments. For these monuments had been largely excavated by the means of tunnels, most of which had been closed in.

I must emphasize the fact that this consultation was purely tentative and unofficial, for no excavations can be undertaken until the signing of the Peace Treaty with Turkey, and until the assigning of Palestine to some mandatory power, at present undetermined. Whatever that mandatory power may be, whether England or another, such a work will doubtless be welcomed by the authorities.

In the meantime it is quite within the province of the Army of Occupation to make improvements in the city, that do not involve technical excavation. While I was in Jerusalem one specialist was at work on the restoration of the tiles around the so-called Mosque of Omar; another was repairing the neglected pathway around the

battlements of the City Walls, and planting a garden in the fosse surrounding the "Tower of David"; another was elaborating plans for city improvement.

Side trips which I took with members of our commission were also illustrative of the new order of things. It was amusing to find it so simple a matter to enter the Hebron Mosque, where for centuries the Moslems have guarded the holes looking down into the Cave of Machpelah from the inspection of all Christians save certain crowned heads or heirs-presumptive, together with American ambassadors and one or two other bearers of Imperial Firmans.

It was wonderful to be conducted in person by the enthusiastic young Deputy-Governor of Jericho to inspect a mosaic with Jewish inscription which had been laid bare by a shell.¹ It was interesting to examine an Ancient High Place between Es-Salt and Amman, and to note that the ruins were strewn with British shells. It was encouraging to find British officers in Amman itself interested in the preservation of what remains of the Roman theatre which has been robbed of stones in order to build Circassian houses.

And now what of the chances for excavation in the future? One great obstacle has been removed, namely, the slow operation of the Turkish law on antiquities. This law has many admirable features, but the machinery is cumbersome to a degree. First, application through the Consul at Jerusalem to the authorities at Constantinople; then, the referring of the matter by the Porte to the local authorities; then further discussion between the Department of Public Instruction and the Museum; then the appointment of Commissioner, and so on. I usually counted on the lapse of one year between my application for a permit and its delivery into my hands. In the future there should be little difficulty in obtaining from the authorities of Jerusalem permission to excavate in Palestine, always provided the applicant can show credentials of fitness.

Enough has been said to indicate that the work yet to be done is enormous. Here should be no question of rivalry. There is not the slightest need for any one nation or society to try to get in ahead of the rest. Should every signatory power of the Peace Conference put in a claim for sites there are enough to keep them all busy for a hundred years, working day and night. There is no

¹ This is the inscription of 'Ain-Duk referred to in the last *Q.S.*, pp. 82 *seq.*

lack then of opportunities. What is needed is the money. Indeed, in many of these lands there is no lack of money; what is needed is the determination to spend the money on excavation. It is purely a question whether money enough can be diverted from expenditure on the pleasures of the hour to the recovery of the history of the past. Of an archaeological interest sufficiently strong to open up the purse-strings there is at present very little sign. May that interest be awakened by the unique opportunities now offered!

THE GREEK EASTER AT JERUSALEM.

By ESTELLE BLYTH.

(*Concluded from Q.S., April, p. 77.*)

Do the people believe in the Holy Fire? The pilgrims and the unlettered masses do, most certainly. They say that the Patriarch rubs the tomb with consecrated oil and prays, while it grows warmer under his hand, and then suddenly the flame leaps forth. This is the story the Crusaders told and believed—perhaps invented in the first instance. Says Geoffrey de Vinsauf (1192):

On Easter Eve Saladin, with his retinue, paid a visit to the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, to assure himself of the truth of a certain fact—namely, the coming down from Heaven of fire once a year to light the lamp. After he had watched for some time, with great attention, the devotion and contrition of many Christian captives, who were praying for the mercy of God, he and all the other Turks suddenly saw the divine fire descend, and light the lamp, so that they were vehemently moved, while the Christians rejoiced, and with loud voices praised the mighty works of God. But the Saracens disbelieved this manifest and wonderful miracle, though they witnessed it with their own eyes, and asserted that it was a fraudulent contrivance. To assure himself of this, Saladin ordered the lamp to be extinguished; which, however, was instantly rekindled by the divine power; and when the infidel ordered it to be extinguished a second time, it was lighted the second time; and so likewise a third time. . . . Saladin, wondering at the miraculous vision,