



SŪR'AH, THE ANCIENT ZORAH.

The birthplace of Samson. It is five miles south of Latrôn, on a conical hill on the north side of the Wâdy es Sūr'ar (the Valley of Sorek).

PHILISTIA.

THE term Philistia or Palestine (the "land of the stranger") has now, by some strange irony of fate, been assumed by all that portion of Canaan which was conquered and occupied by the children of Israel as the Promised Land.

It is probable that this has arisen from the fact that during the time of the Grecian

supremacy the Philistines were great in power and occupied the sea-board from Jaffa to Gaza, with the ports or *majumas* of Jabneh (see page 162), Ashdod (see page 165), Ascalon (see page 173), and Gaza (see page 175), and at one time even held the people of Israel in subjection, and would naturally assert themselves owners of the inland territory to those trading on their coasts. The land of the Philistines, at the time of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, extended from Ekron ('Akir) on the north to Gaza on the south (see map), from the sea-board on the west to the mountains on the east, and was usually called Shephelath, or the Low Country. At that time the Philistines appear to have been on very friendly terms with the Anakim of the mountains and with the other nations of Canaan, and to have joined them in withstanding the incursions of the Israelites. That the Philistines alone were successful in offering a continued and strenuous resistance, is probably due to their possession of horsemen and chariots, which they could use to advantage on the plains, and which their antagonists did not possess in any number.

The whole of Philistia was in those days highly cultivated and most productive, and was renowned for its vast unbroken expanses of luxuriant corn, and groves of fruit-trees and vineyards; and even to the present day the land still enjoys a reputation for productiveness, and exports corn to foreign countries, though its breadth of production is very much narrowed, for on the sea-board the drift sand has been allowed to encroach and cover the land for some miles inland, engulfing the site of many an ancient city. This encroachment of sand from the sea-shore is a most serious evil, and every year threatens more and more the fertile plain. Already many miles of rich country have been devoured by this insatiable monster, and there is no Perseus at hand to deliver Andromeda. Gaza (see page 175) and Ashdod (see page 165) are threatened and will in a few years be overcome, while their ancient ports have long since disappeared. The method of progress of this silent sea monster is plainly visible. The whole of the coast now consists of sand dunes sloping at an angle of ten degrees in the direction of the prevailing south-west wind, and presenting a slope of about thirty to thirty-five degrees to the north-east or on the leeward side, and when the prevailing wind is blowing the sand may be seen gently working up the windward incline, and, on arriving at the summit of the dune, swiftly falling to the bottom, from thence again to ascend another gentle slope, ever moving onwards towards the interior.

On the eastern side of Philistia another enemy has laid waste the country and destroyed its ancient fertility, for there the hills have been denuded of their soil until nothing is left but the bare rock; year after year the terraces supporting the vineyards and fruit-trees have been allowed to fall away, and the rich red loamy soil has been washed down until the hillsides are bare and desolate. At the bottoms of the valleys are still narrow slips of fertile ground, which yield in abundance, when they are not deluged by torrents from the unclothed hillsides or too greatly scorched by the glare from the overhanging rocks.

Philistia is not by any means the uniformly level tract it is generally supposed to be; it may be said to be divided into two portions: first, the undulating plains, about twelve miles

in breadth, bordering on the sea-coast, elevated from fifty to one hundred feet above the sea-level, and consisting of a series of undulations without distinctive features, composed of the richest alluvial deposit. Here were built and flourished Ekron, Jabneh (see page 162), Migdol (see page 167), Ashdod (see page 165), Ascalon (see page 169), and Gaza (see page 175), cities well fortified and situated on eminences, and dedicated to the worship of the ancient fish-gods. Between this undulating country and the mountains or hill country of Judah, is the hilly country of Philistia, stretching from north to south, and about twelve to fifteen miles wide. It consists of a series of hills and spurs from five hundred to eight hundred feet above the sea-level, broken through by broad valleys, and is distinct from the hill country of Judah, where the mountains rise to a height of two thousand to three thousand feet, and overhang Philistia. In this district, as has already been stated, the productive soil has been washed away with the terraces from the hillsides into the valleys, leaving vast extents of bare rock; but even yet the country is not abandoned, and the fellahin, when not too closely ground down under Turkish rule, carefully and successfully cultivate here and there the portions left uninjured (see page 160).

It is, in a great measure, due to the desolating rule of the nations which have held sway in Palestine for so many centuries, that we are enabled at the present time to recognise so many of the ancient sites mentioned in the books relating the conquest of the country by the Israelites, more than three thousand years ago.

Instead of being the "battle-field of nations," had this country existed for any lengthened period under a settled form of government and been allowed to develop its resources and prosper, it is probable that all records of the far-distant past would long ere this have been swept away; but, owing to the state of poverty in which the country has continued, very slight changes have taken place, with the exception of a general decay.

The descendants of the original inhabitants still linger about the ancient sites and ruins, and preserve their ancient traditions, so that it is practicable at the present day to go through the land, Bible in hand, and identify the places there mentioned. This is more especially the case with regard to places of minor importance, such as the ancient second-rate towns in Philistia, for very little has occurred to cause any change in their sites, while on the other hand the chief towns, such as Gath (see page 161), Ascalon (see page 169), and Gaza (see page 175), have been subject to many sieges, and to the usual fortunes of war. In many instances the stones of the ancient towns have been taken by the fellahin and burnt into lime (see page 184), or carried off to other sites, as in the case of Ascalon, whence many shiploads of cut and carved stones were taken for the rebuilding of 'Akka (see page 76) and Saida (see page 45); but, as a general rule, the remains of the cities are still to be found on the spot, covered with rubbish or built into the walls of the peasants' houses.

At the foot of the mountain-wall of Judah, just beyond the north-eastern extremity of the hills of Philistia, is still to be seen the site of Zorah, the birthplace of Samson, the son of Manoah. This place is now called Sūr'ah (see page 149); it is on the northern bank of the Wâdy es Sūr'ar, the head of the river called Nahr Rubin (see map).



THE RUINED FORTRESS OF LATRÔN, FROM 'AMWÂS,
The Emmaus of the Maccabees, afterwards called Nicopolis. In the foreground are the remains
of the ancient church of Emmaus. There is a direct road, running southwards, from
Latrôn to Zorah (Sür'ah), over hills dotted with ruined sites.

Zorah was well placed as an outlying post of the Israelites on the brow of a sharp-pointed conical hill overlooking the Valley of Sorek (Wâdy es Sür'ar) towards the Philistines, and yet with a gentle slope on the north-east towards the cities of the tribes of Dan and Judah. It is at a height of eleven

hundred and seventy-one feet above the level of the sea, and commands a view of the opposite side of the valley, on which the Philistines were located and where they still owned the soil. From this central point of view at Sūr'ah (Zorah) the history of Samson and subsequent events



can be studied to advantage, for on looking across the valley on to the opposite hills to the southwest can be seen the remains of Timnath, now called Tibneh (see page 156), where Samson's betrothed resided among the Philistines; below in the valley itself on the southern side are the remains of Beth-shemesh (see page 155), to which the milch kine brought the ark in a cart from Ekron ('Akir), and on looking down the Valley of Sorek the

line can be traced up which the cart would have been drawn (see page 155). We find that Samson grew up to manhood in the country about Zorah and Eshtaol (Joshua xix. 41); that is

SHRINE OF SHEIKH SAMAT AT SŪR'AH (ZORAH),
On the summit of the hill. Below is shown the upper part of the Wādy es Sūr'ar (Valley of Sorek), which falls into the river called Nahr Rubin.

to say, about the sides and among the steep slopes and precipices of the mountains of Judah at a time when the Philistines had dominion over Israel. And he went from Zorah (Sūr'ah, see page 149) across the Valley of Sorek (Wādy es Sūr'ar) to the opposite side, into the parts where the Philistines lived, to Timnath (Tibneh, see page 156), where he sought for his wife a daughter of the Philistines. And among the vineyards of Timnath a young lion roared against him, and Samson, who had nothing in his hand, rent him as he would have rent a kid. And as he returned he found a swarm of bees and honey in the skeleton of the lion, and put forth a riddle to his companions among the Philistines, who had come to feast with him. Through Samson's wife they ascertained the answer, and Samson's anger was kindled, and he went over the mountains to Askalon (see page 169), where he slew thirty Philistines in order to obtain garments with which to pay his wager; he then abandoned his wife and went up to Zorah (Sūr'ah, see page 149). Some time after, during wheat harvest, he prepared to visit his wife with a peace offering, but found that she was married to another. Then he determined to be revenged upon the Philistines, and caught three hundred foxes and tied them two and two, and put a firebrand in the midst. And when he had set the brands on fire he let the foxes go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives. The corn in Philistia at the time of harvest may be seen in unbroken expanses for many miles in extent, on the undulating plains and in the valleys, and on the terraces of the hills, and a conflagration once kindled would be most difficult to arrest. It would probably extend over all the land of Philistia, and reduce the people to starvation. The question naturally arises as to whether the people of Israel would have suffered from this act of Samson, but it will be noticed, on reference to a map representing Palestine at this period, that they lived entirely in the high lands, and would be exempt from this devastating calamity.

At the present day during the harvest time the people are obliged to adopt the most stringent measures to prevent any accidental conflagration among the expanses of standing corn.

Our next detailed account relating to the southern part of Philistia is that concerning the journeys of the ark after it had fallen into the hands of the Philistines at Eben-ezer, near Aphek, when the sons of Eli were killed. And the ark was taken from the mountains about Eben-ezer down to Ashdod in the plains, and it was brought into the house of Dagon; and in the morning the people of Ashdod found that their god, Dagon, was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. And they took Dagon and set him in his place again, and were much troubled about the matter. And on the following morning again Dagon was found to have fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and was broken, and the people of Ashdod (see page 165) and the surrounding district were smitten with emerods. And when the people saw that this was on account of the ark being among them, they summoned a council and decided that the ark should be taken across the plain to Gath (see page 161), at the foot of the hills. And the people of Gath suffered in like manner for

holding the ark in possession, therefore they sent the ark to Ekron; and the people of Ekron were afraid, for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city, and the hand of God was heavy on them. And after the ark had been seven months among the Philistines they called for their priests, asking them what they should do with it, and how they could get rid



'AIN SHEMS, THE SITE OF BETH-SHEMESH.

South of the Wady es Sür'ar (Sorek), and nearly opposite to Sür'ah (Zorah). The ancient and modern names Beth-shemesh (House of the Sun) and 'Ain Shems (Eye of the Sun) are indicative of sun-worship.

of it. And they were told to make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there had come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart and take their calves home from them. And the Philistines did this, and took the ark in the cart with the milch kine out from Ekron ('Akir) to a place where three roads met, and then left it. And the milch kine, instead of returning to



THE VALLEY OF SOREK.

Where the men of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest when the ark arrived from Ekron.

their calves or going on into the plain of Philistia, turned up the Valley of Sorek, and, passing between Timnath (see page 156) and Zorah (see page 149), arrived opposite to Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel vi. 12), on the south side of the valley, then in the hands of the Israelites. Now Beth-shemesh was a suburban city allotted to the children of Aaron. And the people were

reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark approach (see page 155). And the cart came into the field of Joshua, and the Levites among them set down the ark upon the great stone of Abel, and offered burnt offerings and sacrifices unto the Lord. Now the five lords of the Philistines had followed the ark until they arrived at the border of Beth-shemesh, and when they had seen the ark in possession of the Israelites they returned to Ekron ('Akir) the same day. And the people of Beth-shemesh suffered, as did the Philistines, because they looked into the ark of the Lord; and they sent



TIBNEH, THE SITE OF TIMNATH.

The home of Samson's wife, and the scene of his encounter with the young lion in the vineyard.



messengers to the people of Kirjath-jearim, which lay about ten miles farther to the east, in the mountains of Judah. And the men of Kirjath-jearim came and fetched up the ark of the Lord out of Beth-shemesh. Beth-shemesh was in after years the scene of a contest between Jehoash, King of Israel, and Amaziah, King of Judah, when the people of Judah were put to flight and their king taken prisoner (see 2 Kings xiv. 13, and Josephus, "Ant." chap. ix.). And afterwards, in the days of King Ahaz, it fell into the hands of the Philistines (2 Chronicles

xxviii. 18). It is now known under the name of 'Ain Shems, but there is no fountain to be found there at the present day (see page 155).

One of the most interesting incidents recorded in the early history of the Israelites in Palestine is the passage at arms between Goliath of Gath and the youthful David in the Valley of Elah. This valley, now recognised as Wâdy es Sûr or Es Sunt (see engraving), commences in the mountains of Judah, near Hebron (see page 192), and descending rapidly towards the north, divides them from the hills of Philistia to the west. After about ten miles it bends round to the west, and is here crossed by the main road leading from Gaza to Jerusalem; that road by which the Egyptians of ancient times gained the hill country, and by which the Bedawin of the present day make their forays upon the villages in the mountains. Hitherto it has been a somewhat broad valley, with parallel lines of hills on either side, but after passing Shocoh (Shuweikeh) on



WÂDY ES SUNT, THE VALLEY OF ELAH.
The scene of David's encounter with Goliath. The valley winds between the low hills, and enters the plain of Philistia opposite Tell es Sâfy.

the left (see page 159), it narrows considerably, and winds in and out through a somewhat narrow gorge for some miles until it enters the more open plain near Tell es Sâfy. This Valley of Elah (or the Terebinth) at the present day contains, near Shocoh (Shuweikeh), one of the largest terebinth-trees in Palestine, fifty-five feet in height, with a spread of shade seventy-five feet in diameter, and a trunk seventeen feet in circumference (see page 159). The bottom of this valley, near Shocoh, is a fine fertile plain, cultivated as corn-fields, and here it was that the encounter between David and Goliath took place, the Philistines standing on a mountain on one side, and Israel on a mountain on the other, with the valley between them. The people of Israel came down from the mountains and were to the north-east, while the Philistines concentrating from the plains were on the south-west, army against army in battle array. Gath, famous for its giants, had given to the Philistines a champion called Goliath, ten feet in height, clad in a coat of mail, with a helmet of brass, and the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and the spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. For forty days were these two armies face to face, and for forty days did Goliath call to the armies of Israel, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." And all Israel were greatly afraid, for a champion who could cope with Goliath was unknown (1 Samuel xvii.).

While the people of Israel were "dismayed and greatly afraid," there arrived in camp the youthful David, who, when he had heard of the challenge of Goliath, asked what should be done for the man who killed the Philistine, and took away the reproach from Israel, and was told in reply that the king would enrich him and give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel. And David was brought before Saul and offered to fight with the Philistine. Now in this personal combat, thus contemplated, there was not only the danger to the life of David to be considered, but also to the whole people of Israel, for if the Philistine conquered they were to be servants to the Philistines. The consequences were, therefore, so momentous that Saul required a pledge as to David's ability and prowess. David recounted his adventures with a lion and a bear, in each of which combats he was victorious, and Saul admitted his claim to act as champion, and bid him go against the Philistine. This circumstance shows clearly that the people of Israel were on the verge of a panic, on the point of giving in, otherwise they would not have so desperately adventured their safety to a comparatively unknown champion, to a youth totally unversed in the arts of war; but it also shows us something more—they permitted David to go to the encounter without armour, and knew that he was about to enter the lists trusting in the assistance of the God of Israel. It is clear from this that the people as a body still thoroughly believed in their God, and trusted to David as His instrument:—"And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, and slew him. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled; and the Israelites pursued them even to Gath and Ekron, and spoiled their tents." At the present day the account of this victory of David can be read and studied on the spot, and all the incidents realised; for the ancient sites are still in existence, and

the habits of the people are as in former days. It is not unusual at the present day to meet



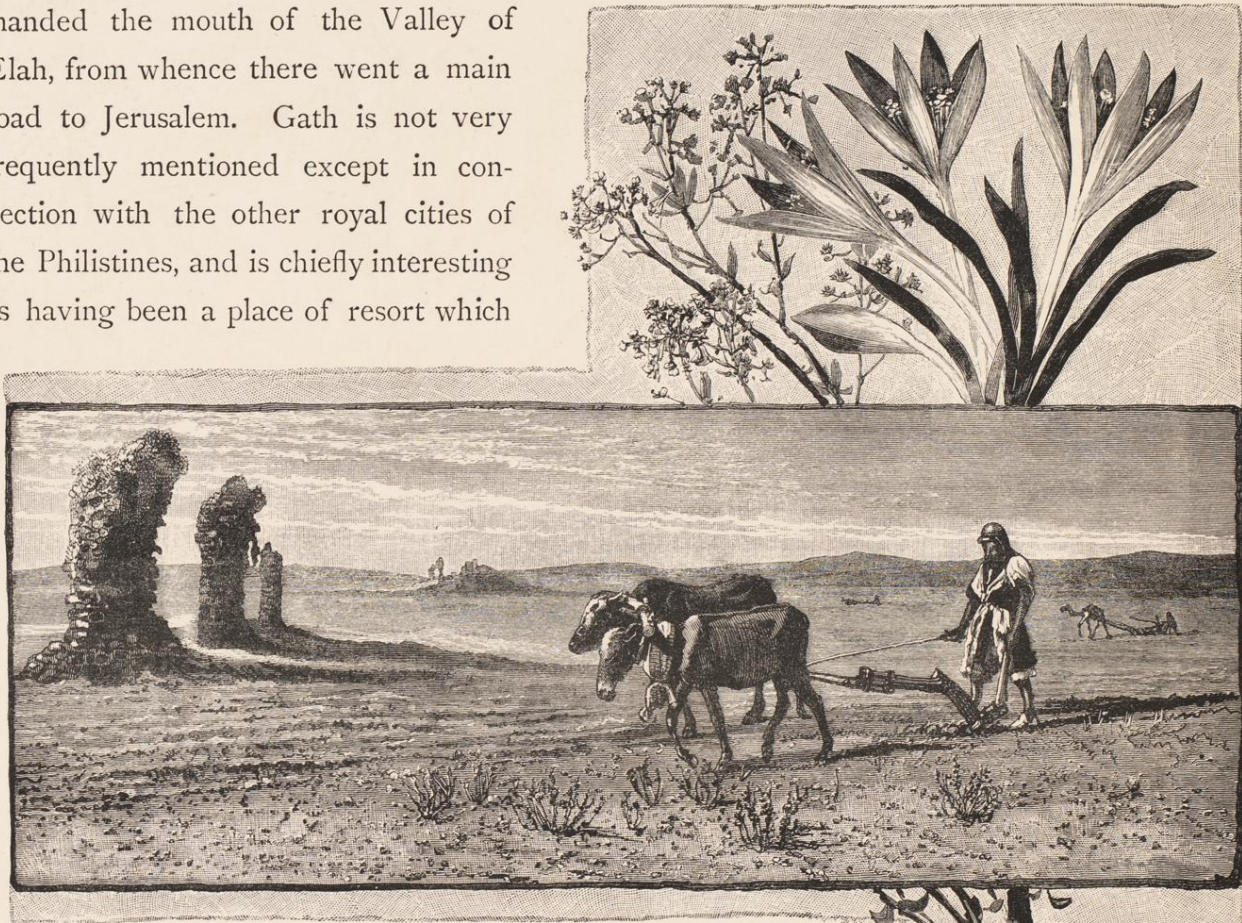
SHOCOH, THE CAMP OF THE PHILISTINES.

This site, now called Shuweikeh, is marked by extensive ruins, large terebinth-trees, and a Muhammedan shrine dedicated to Sheikh Abû Helâl.

with shepherds so skilful with their slings that they can easily bring down birds at a distance of several yards.

The royal city of Gath (see page 161) is generally admitted to have stood on the

conspicuous hill now called Tell es Sâfy, on which was built the important fortress of Blanchegarde by King Fulke during the Crusades (see page 161). It lies about sixteen miles from the seashore, and is situated on the extremity of one of the spurs of the hills of Philistia, as they melt down into the undulating plains. It obtained the name of Alba Specula during the Middle Ages on account of the glaring white chalk cliff or scarp which surrounds it, and which is most conspicuous for many miles to the south-west. It was a most important stronghold of the Philistines, and commanded the mouth of the Valley of Elah, from whence there went a main road to Jerusalem. Gath is not very frequently mentioned except in connection with the other royal cities of the Philistines, and is chiefly interesting as having been a place of resort which



PLOUGHING IN THE PLAINS OF PHILISTIA,
In the neighbourhood of Tell es Sâfy. Ploughing and sowing for winter crops extends from the end of November to the middle of January, or later.

King David frequented during his troubles ; here out of fear of Achish "he feigned himself mad, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate ;" and here again, some years later, he was received with honour by the Philistine king, and again out of Gath came one of David's most faithful of followers and firmest of friends, Ittai the Gittite (2 Samuel xv. 19—23). When Gath was rebuilt under the name of Blanchegarde, it played a most important part in the wars of the Crusades, and was witness to some of the chief adventures of Richard Plantagenet with the Saracens who infested the plain. The hill on which the city stood is about two hundred feet above the surrounding plain, and is of an irregular shape. A modern wely rests on the highest level, and around are the remains of the ruined castle, and some large stones forming



portions of the terraces which cover the hill. It appears in a great measure to have been scarped all round, though the rubbish from the ruins has fallen over and covered up the old fortifications (see engraving). Here, as in many adjoining villages, there are extensive well-cut cisterns; the vines still grow luxuriantly on the terraces and the olive-trees on the hillsides. In the valley and on the plain around are tracts of corn-fields stretching as far as the eye can reach, and in the middle of June all the people are in the fields bringing in the corn to the threshing-floors (see page 160).

Passing over the swelling plains of Philistia, at about



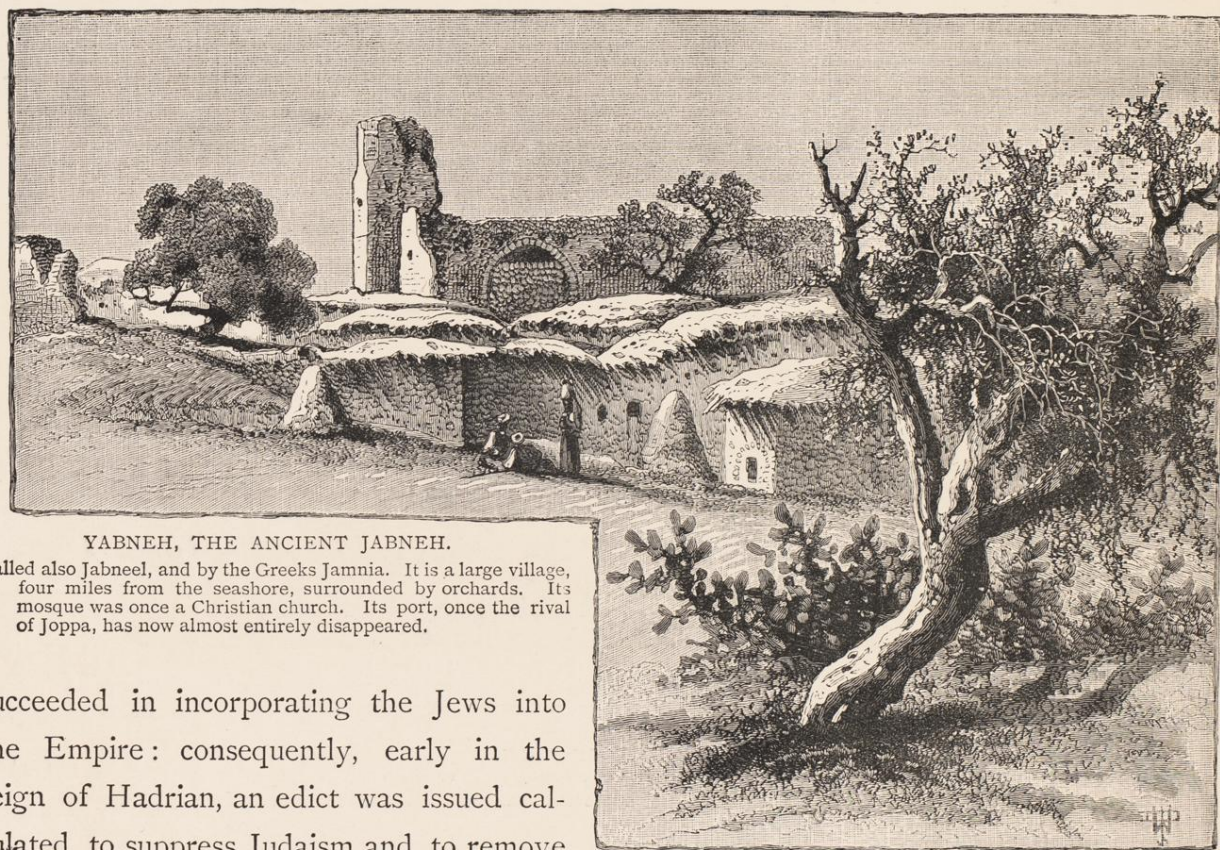
TELL ES SÂFY, THE SUPPOSED SITE OF GATH.

An isolated hill of irregular form sixteen miles from the seashore. A shrine dedicated to El Khudr (St. George) stands on its highest point, six hundred and ninety-three feet above the sea. The Roman road runs north and south on the eastern side of the Tell.

eighteen miles to the north-west of the city of Gath we arrive at the site of the ancient Jabneh (see page 162), a town of the Philistines, situated on a slight eminence on the west bank of the Valley of Sorek (Wâdy es Sūr'ar), about four miles from the sea-coast. It is now called Yabneh. This city is mentioned as having been taken by assault and its wall broken down by the forces under Uzziah, King of Judah, and it is subsequently spoken of as a fenced city by F. Josephus; but it did not prominently come into notice until just before the great siege of Jerusalem by Titus, when it became the residence of many of the members of the Sanhedrin, and during the first and second centuries of our era was famous as the great theological and legal seminary of the Jews. The Sanhedrin had previously assembled in the Chamber (Gazith) of the Court

of Israel, in the Temple at Jerusalem, but at the time of the siege by Titus its members were permitted by him to proceed to Jabneh, under Gamaliel, their Nasi, A.D. 70. This school, after the demolition of the Temple, obtained great authority over the Jews who were left in Palestine, owing to the rank and position of the learned Gamaliel and other members of the Sanhedrin located there, and in a large measure served to prevent the extinction of the Jews as a nation, and to keep in their minds the prospect of the Messiah's advent.

The influence of the Rabbins over the minds of the people was at this time complete, not only in the religious services and in the superintendence of education, but also in all matters connected with domestic life. The Romans felt this, and realised that they had not yet



YABNEH, THE ANCIENT JABNEH.

Called also Jabneel, and by the Greeks Jamnia. It is a large village, four miles from the seashore, surrounded by orchards. Its mosque was once a Christian church. Its port, once the rival of Joppa, has now almost entirely disappeared.

succeeded in incorporating the Jews into the Empire: consequently, early in the reign of Hadrian, an edict was issued calculated to suppress Judaism and to remove all power out of the hands of the Rabbins.

The rites and existing ceremonies of the Jews were interdicted, and it was declared that Jerusalem should be established as a Roman colony, and the site of its Holy Place adorned with a temple dedicated to Jupiter.

The Rabbins of Jabneh (Yabneh) saw on the one hand entire annihilation of their schools, and consequently of the national life of the Jews; on the other hand, they kept in view the prospect of success in a sanguinary struggle with the Romans. With great astuteness they seized upon this moment for the proclamation of the advent of the long-looked-for Messiah. The star that should "arise out of Jacob" was at hand, who should govern the Jews with great power and majesty. His name, Barcochaba (the Son of a Star), fulfilled the prophecy. He was a man of considerable force of character, and the great and learned Rabbi

Akiba acknowledged him as the Messiah. The revolt commenced in A.D. 130. Jews flocked to his standard from all parts of the world; the whole Hebrew race was in a state of ferment at the news of his advent. Barcochaba advanced against the Romans at the head of a large body of insurgents, and at first was constantly successful; he even captured Jerusalem, and held it for the space of three years. It is said that he was at the head of an army of two hundred thousand fighting men, and though this is probably an exaggeration, it is worthy of note that Strabo states that so great was the population about Jabneh, that this district in his time could furnish forty thousand fighting men. It is not necessary to follow the fortunes of Barcochaba, and to watch how quickly the star of this false Messiah set for ever, until even his name was changed by his aggrieved and despairing countrymen to that of Barcosba (the Son of a Lie).

At the termination of this unsuccessful revolt the whole of the Rabbins of Jabneh were barbarously persecuted by the Romans, as the ringleaders of the insurrection, and were forbidden to fill up the vacancies in the Sanhedrin, an order which they managed to evade. After the death of Hadrian, and on the accession of the gentle Antoninus, the Rabbins were emboldened to re-establish their synagogues and to re-open the school at Jabneh (Jamnia), but in consequence of the indiscretion of the rabbi Simon Ben Jochai, in speaking evil of the Roman authorities, the school was suppressed and the Sanhedrin wandered to other places in Palestine. Benjamin of Tudela asserts that even in his day (A.D. 1163), the site of these schools could still be traced. During the time of the Crusades a fort was here established called Ibelin, the site being admirably adapted for a work of defence.

Jabneh became the site of a bishopric, and its mediæval church is now converted into a Muhammedan mosque (see page 162). This ancient site (called by the Arabs Yabneh) is now occupied by a flourishing town, numbering about two thousand inhabitants, principally Muhammedans, and on the coast, at a distance of four miles, is still to be seen the remains of the ancient port, or Maju-ma, of Jabneh, mentioned by Pliny. If we turn to the south from this port and traverse the sea-coast there is little of interest for some miles. The rich lands of Philistia for three to four miles inland are covered to a depth of thirty to forty feet with ever-increasing heights of sand dunes, blown eastward by the sea breeze, and threatening ere long to engulf the whole lowland districts if steps are not taken to obviate the growing evil. It is a truly melancholy sight, when travelling over this once densely populated country, to find little remaining save here and there a fellah's solitary hut, surrounded by walls of sand which have from day to day to be battled and wrestled with. With wonderful tenacity of purpose these fellahin continue the struggle until at last they are driven out of the inheritance of their forefathers. In some cases the sand has so far got the upper hand that nothing is left of the cultivated lands, the most strenuous labour being only sufficient to preserve a few remaining fruit trees from the general destruction. These are to be seen each at the bottom of a crater of sand, laden with delicious fruit.

After proceeding about eleven miles along the coast a sandstone town or barrack is met

with, which probably marks the ancient site of the port of Ashdod, of which nothing now is visible; and about five miles farther to the south the low line of coast is seen to develop into a bold cliff, which increases in picturesqueness as it is approached, and on which are the remains of "Ascalon by the Sea" (see page 173). But here we turn off to view the modern Mejdol, identified as *Migdol* (see page 167), Gad of the Philistines, and even as Magdala, mentioned by Herodotus (xi. 159), when Pharaoh-Neco engaged the Syrians by land and conquered them. Mejdol is now the site of the government of the district about Ascalon, and is a flourishing country town. It possesses a mosque with a tall minaret, large stone houses, and a bazaar. It is surrounded by groves of large olive-trees, and undulating plains covered with cereals, interspersed with palm, walnut, and fig trees. The soil around is very rich, and the people are industrious, watering their crops from deep wells, in some of which the water is one hundred and twenty feet below the surface. In many instances the wells are common to the whole village. The water is brought to the surface by means of a "Persian wheel" or "naura," which is worked by camels or oxen, provided in turn by the various heads of families (identical with the "sâkiyeh," see pages 81 and 132).

Not far from Mejdol is the site of Ascalon (see page 169), whose general position is well known, but the exact site of which has not as yet been identified. It was one of the royal cities of the Philistines when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, and remained in the hands of the Philistines until the time of the Jewish captivity. Ascalon is described by Herodotus as having possessed the most ancient of all the temples erected to Venus, or Derceto, the mother of Semiramis. She was represented as a woman above the waist, with termination in shape of a fish-tail, a female counterpart to Dagon. Ascalon, like other towns of the Philistines, had its seaport, now called "Ascalon by the Sea." This town came prominently into notice in the time of Herod the Great, who adorned it with public baths and fountains and palaces; here his sister Salome resided.* During the wars of the Jews with the Romans, the former suffered a great defeat here at the hand of Antonius.

At an early period Ascalon was made the seat of a bishopric, and owing to its advantageous position and strong walls it became the most important fortress in Palestine during the Middle Ages, and during the Crusades was a thorn in the side of the Christians, as it had been to the Jews when in possession of the Philistines. It was around Ascalon that the great battle took place between the Egyptian army and the Crusaders under Godfrey. Godfrey of Lorraine, after the capture of Jerusalem, was just elected King by the army of the Crusaders, when intelligence arrived that a vast army of Egyptians had crossed the desert into Palestine, to annihilate the Christians and raise again the standard of Islam. Hurriedly the Christian army was assembled and collected in battle array near Ramleh, prepared to dispute the passage of the Egyptian invaders (see page 148). Raymond took up a

* In the year 1815, Lady Hester Stanhope having procured a firman from the Turkish authorities, instituted a search for antiquities among the ruins of 'Askûlân (Ascalon). Among other objects then brought to light was a colossal statue of a Roman emperor, probably one of Augustus erected by Herod. Unfortunately it was broken to pieces by the excited workpeople, who apparently expected to find some wonderful treasure concealed within it.—M. E. R.



ESHDÚD, THE ANCIENT ASHDOD. The modern village stands on the slope of a hill, one hundred and forty feet above the sea, and three miles from the shore. The green knoll in the foreground is crowned by the wely of Sheikh Ibrahim el Matbúk.

position on the sea-coast, Godfrey invested Ascalon with five thousand cavalry and infantry, while Tancred and the two Roberts directed the attack upon the enemy. Gallantly the Christians charged their swarthy antagonists, who exceeded them greatly in numbers. It is related that large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle accompanied the Christians from the mountains, and these were mistaken by the Muhammedans for the Christian reserve forces, apparently so numerous that when the first collision took place a panic arose among them and they fled in all directions, hotly pursued by the Christians. Some fled to the seashore and were there put to death by Raymond, while others perished in the desert. One portion attempted to escape into Ascalon, but were intercepted by Godfrey and killed. On the destruction of this vast army Godfrey now laid siege to Ascalon, but was in a short time obliged to raise the siege again in consequence of the quarrels among his knights, and Ascalon still remained in the hands of the Muhammedans, a standing menace to Jerusalem.

In A.D. 1124 the Muhammedans made an ineffectual raid from Ascalon upon Jerusalem, while the Christians were endeavouring to subdue Tyre. It was not until A.D. 1153 that Ascalon was taken from the Muhammedans. Then Baldwin III. laid siege to it, determined to capture it at all hazards; he completely invested the fortress both by sea and land, and for two months carried on extensive siege operations. During this period he omitted to observe the Easter festival, and ordered all the pilgrims in the land to hasten to the assistance of the investing army. The Muhammedans defended the walls with the utmost gallantry, and when at last they were obliged to submit they were enabled to make their own terms and march out of the fortress with all the honours of war.

In a few years the cause of Christendom languished, and under the leadership of the Sultan Saladin the followers of Islam recaptured many of the cities of Syria. Among others Ascalon was the last to capitulate previous to the march of the Muhammedans upon Jerusalem (A.D. 1187). In 1190 Saladin determined to destroy the fortifications of Ascalon, lest it should again fall into the hands of the Christians; accordingly, under his directions, this magnificent fortress became in a short time a heap of ruins (see page 169). During the Third Crusade the walls of Ascalon were rebuilt by the Christians, in which work Richard Plantagenet took a special interest, part of the expenses being defrayed by a subscription from the ladies of England. In the year 1270 the walls were again totally destroyed by the Sultan Bibars. The walls of Ascalon are still standing in places (see page 173), but they are of small-sized pieces of indurated sandstone; here and there may be seen remains of the massive blocks which formed the old walls, which for the most part have been carried away for the building of other sites. Columns of granite, seventeen to eighteen feet in length and two and a half feet in diameter, are to be seen projecting from the faces of the walls. Ascalon is still used as a seaport in a small way (see page 172), and exports bones and pottery. The neighbourhood is very fertile; groups of palm-trees give a picturesque aspect to the place (see page 169). Vines, olives, and many kinds of fruit, including apples, are cultivated by the inhabitants of El Jûrah, a small village north-east of the group of ruins now called 'Askûlân.