

THE SOUTH COUNTRY OF JUDÆA.

“THE entering in” of the Land of Promise from the south is as featureless and unpicturesque as “the entering in of Hamath” from the north. Yet to every traveller from Egypt the first glimpse of “the south land,” as it melts into the Philistian plain, must indeed be welcome and refreshing. We have called it “the entering



EL MEJDEL, THE ANCIENT MIGDOL.

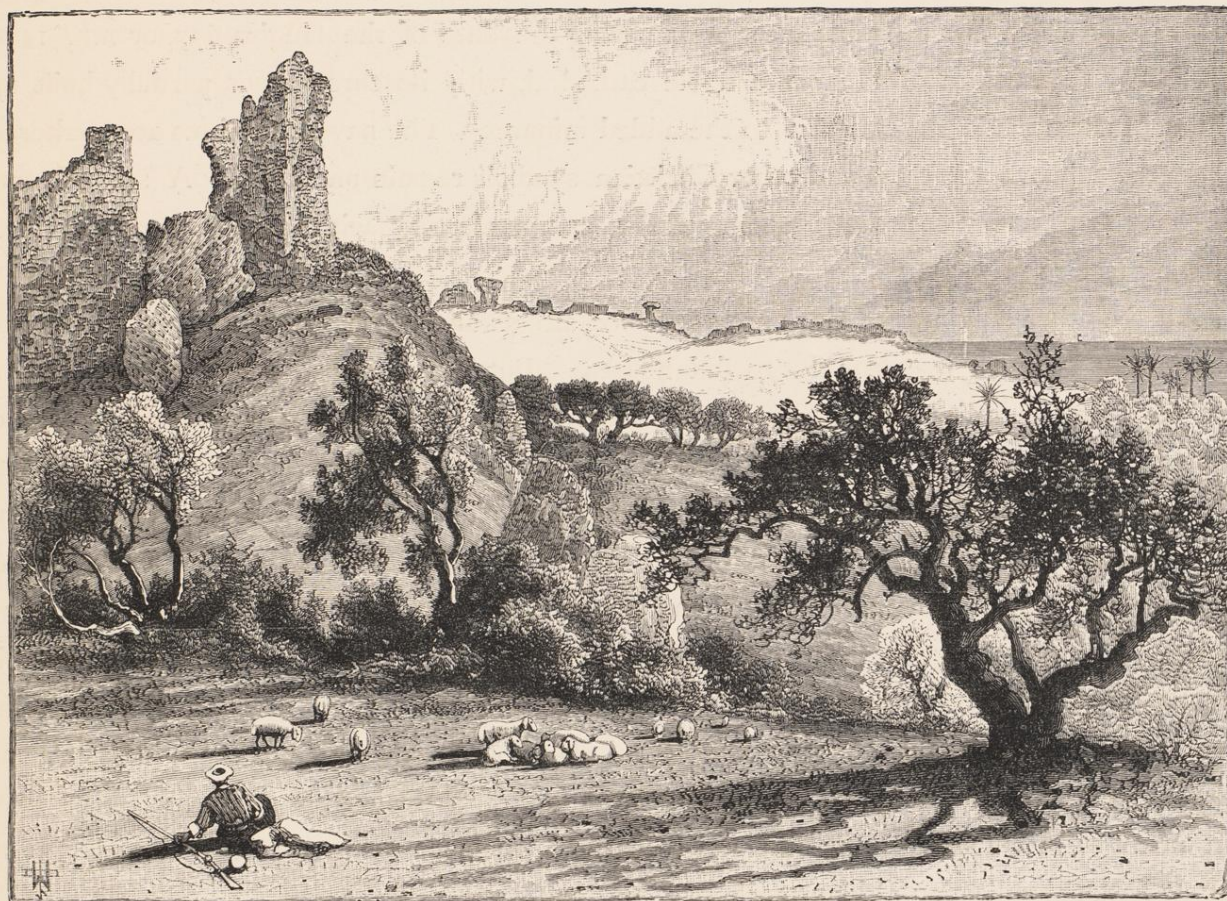
An important village of fifteen hundred inhabitants. Its mosque and tall minaret are constructed of ancient materials. A weekly fair is held here.

in," and so for ages it has been: the route taken alike by warriors and merchants, the gate of the thoroughfare between Egypt and Assyria, the rival empires of the East. Before the introduction of steamers few travellers entered Palestine by any other road, save those who undertook the *long* desert journey by Sinai and Petra. From the Nile to Wâdy el Arish is a dreary desert journey of nine days, but now we have entered the boundary of Simeon, and a few villages surrounded by palm and olive trees near the shore are gratefully refreshing to the eye, while scanty verdure takes the place of sandy wastes. When we have reached the last of these villages, Deir el Belah, the "convent of the dates," we are in the true pastoral country of the patriarchs. The country is broken up by frequent wâdys and rounded hills, few showing any cliffs or rocks, but all covered with turf, chequered by wide unfenced tracts of cornland, and dotted with many a black encampment of Bedawin. The common notion that this southern region is desert is at once dispelled. But covered though it be with countless flocks, not a tree relieves the monotony of the green expanse, and it is doubtful if this district was ever wooded as the inland region east of Beersheba (see page 209) certainly was in early ages. Most of the streams are dry in summer, and the dependence of the Arabs is on wells, always carefully concealed, and seldom known except to the tribe which claims the pasturage. Three hours south-east of Gaza (see page 175), and two hours to the east of the road from Egypt, is a featureless low ridge, rising north of a shallow valley, and commanding a wide view on all sides, which claims a visit from its historical associations. The Bedawin have no tradition respecting it, but its name has come down unchanged for four thousand years, Jerar, the Gerar of Genesis, the favourite camping-place of the patriarch Isaac. Four miles before reaching the Wâdy Guzzeh, as the combined watercourses of the Wâdy es Seba, or Valley of Beersheba, and the more northern Wâdy Sheriar are called, we leave the caravan road ten miles south of Gaza and strike east over what seems a boundless expanse of rolling treeless downs. Crossing the Wâdy es Se'ba and then the Sheriar, in both of which a copious stream was flowing at the beginning of February, we rode on, sometimes on turf brilliant with a mass of scarlet anemones, sometimes over plots of young wheat painted with various yellow flowers, till we reached the flat-topped mound, or "tell," commanding a splendid view from Beersheba eastward, to the sea on the west—Abu Jerar. Wells are its only visible ruins. The turf is scarcely broken by faint traces of foundations, and the soil is full of fragments of coarse pottery, certain indications of a former extensive occupation. The wells stud the top and sides of the hill down to the bottom of the valley. All are more or less filled in, some of them even with the surface—perhaps the wells of Abraham, choked by Abimelech's herdsmen. Some were filled only up to a depth of twelve or twenty feet, showing the lower part cut in the rock and the upper portion cemented; evidently later work, as the cement has many fragments of pottery in it. Many were roofed with low cupolas of very small masonry with a hole in the centre. Only two of them are perfect, the others being more or less broken in. We found water in two only of nineteen wells which we examined. Many of them seem to have been purposely filled in and utilised, after they were cemented, as storehouses by the Bedawin. The hill must have

been an admirable look-out station whence Isaac could watch his flocks and servants. There are traces of the foundations of a keep, but this is evidently later work.

The ride across the downs from Jerar to Gaza (see page 175), though without grand scenery, is full of interest. The district abounds in wild animals. The gazelles may be seen bounding on every hill. The fox and the jackal start up at every turn, and one long ridge is a favourite resort of the great grey crane, which returns year by year in hundreds to its quarters, like rooks to their trees.

Gaza, or rather the olive-groves which gird it, bursts suddenly upon us (see page 175). It



RUINS OF ASCALON, FROM THE NORTH-EAST.

Here there are fine orchards and olive-trees, cultivated by the Egyptian peasants of the neighbouring village of El Jûrah. The wild onions of 'Askûlân are celebrated for their delicate flavour. The Romans gave them the name of *Ascalonia*, hence *scalogna* (Ital.) and shallot (*Allium Ascalonicum*).

has no natural advantages of situation, and there is no reason apparent why it should have been a city from the earliest times. It is now entirely denuded of fortifications or walls, and many of its streets straggle out into the open country. A broad sand road opens among the olive-trees, the highway of Egypt and Syria, trodden by Midianites and camels long before Abraham, by Egyptian and Assyrian kings, by Greek and Roman conquerors, by Saracens and Crusaders, and lastly by Napoleon from Egypt and back again. Gaza has over twenty thousand inhabitants. The central town, stone-built, is girt by wide suburbs of mud-built turf-covered houses, over which rise in numbers the minarets, shining white above the grass-

clad roofs, and many an isolated palm rivalling them, among which the telegraph wires shoot straight across the city—a strange mingling of new and old. There is only one hill near which can claim the name, and this is crowned by a shrine called 'Aly el Muntâr. It is south-east of the town, of which it commands a fine view, and the traditional spot to which Samson carried the gates; and may very well be so, as it is the only hill near, and is on the road to Hebron. We are shown not only this, but also the site of the Philistine gateway, of Dagon's temple, and of Samson's death! There is very little of historic interest in the buildings of Gaza. The Mosque of Hâshim, Muhammed's grandfather, is entirely of Saracenic architecture, and very ancient. We are shown the tomb of Hâshim in one corner of the cloister. But the great mosque, over which is an Arabic inscription giving the date of the Hegira 677, or A.D. 1276, is in reality the Basilica of Helena, a noble cathedral, with its three apses partially built up, and one of them made the staircase to the added minaret. The nave and aisles are unaltered, and on the columns the cross and other Christian symbols remain unerased. A second south aisle has been added by the Muhammedans, communicating with a college of dervishes adjoining (see page 175).

All the other buildings of Gaza are very poor, streets and bazaars filthy beyond description and winding between irregular flat-roofed houses. But the striking feature of Gaza is the quantity of marble relics everywhere. It rivals Ascalon (see page 173) in this abundance of columns. They are dug up in every yard and garden, and they form every threshold and most of the lintels. From the narrow street you step over a puddle on to a marble column lying across a doorway. You pass through a stable, then into a narrow court, on one side of which is the kitchen, open in front. Then by a passage into the inner courtyard, large and paved with marble fragments, the open arcaded rooms on each side of it flanked by marble columns, dug up on the premises, with capitals Corinthian, Herodian, or Late Byzantine, the relics of church and temple together. Polished slabs of marble vary the walls, built in along with Roman stones. Such is the Gazan imitation of a Damascus palace. There have been many statues found here, and very recently a fine colossus was exhumed and sent to the new national collection at Constantinople.

The environs of Gaza on the north side are far more extensive than on the south. For miles the park-like olive forest extends, the trees old, weird, gnarled, and of the quaintest shapes, with cattle grazing everywhere under their shade. Beyond the trees the road towards Hebron leads across the widest part of the great Philistian plain. The country is now all carefully cultivated, though twenty-five years ago it was a neglected waste of wild herbage, and is studded with olive-girt villages. Here and there a winter torrent has cut its way through the rich loam of the level plain, and it is no easy task to find a spot where the horses can descend and cross to the opposite bank. After a ride of fifteen miles the ground becomes more undulating, bare but rich downs take the place of the luxuriant plain, and not a habitation can be seen on any side. Lachish, the modern Lakis, is the first historic spot we reach. It is indeed a desolate heap. Low spurs from the Judæan hills very gradually

push forward into the Philistian plain. Between two of these spurs we ride, and on our left is a low "tell," with stones strewn about in all directions. This is all that is left of Lachish. The hill seems almost formed of broken pottery, which covers the ground like gravel. A few half-choked wells and lines of foundations of very thick walls are all that is left to tell of the city, whose capture forms the chief feature of Sennacherib's slabs. There the city is represented as surrounded by palm-trees. Now not a tree or a shrub remains for miles distant. Commanding the country around, and secure by its situation from surprise, the farthest elevation projecting into the plain, it is the natural position for a frontier outpost fortress.

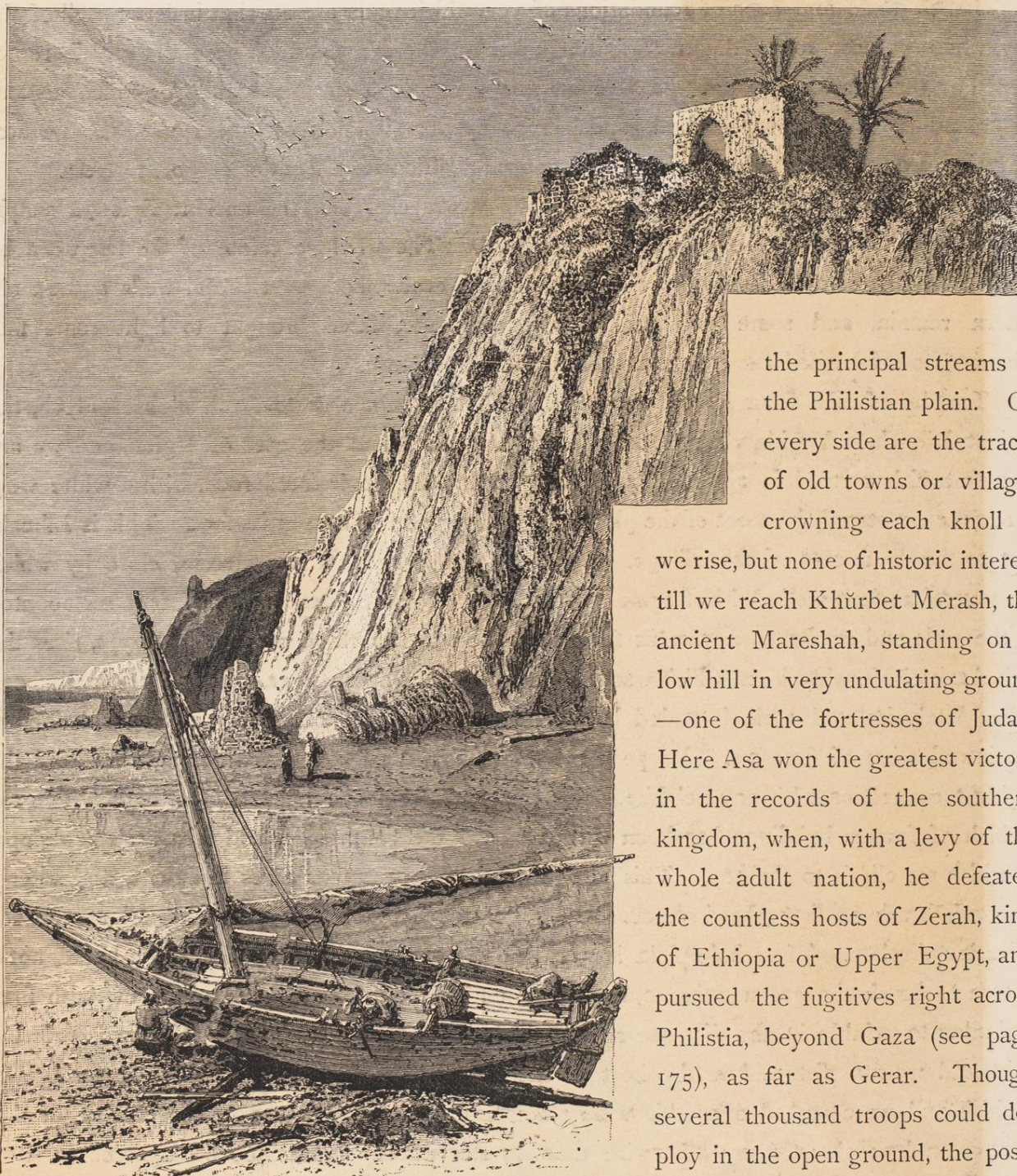
Three miles farther on, on a similar "tell," we reach Ajlân, the ancient Eglon, a simple repetition of Lachish, but much better preserved. The whole enceinte of the keep can be easily traced, now a field of onions protected by a cactus hedge. Several wells and an old cistern remain, and some excavations, recently made, have brought to light some fine substructures of dressed stone, attesting its former importance.

Two hours' ride from Eglon, across a level plain, brings us to Arak el Menshiyeh, the ancient Libnah. A wide valley from the south winds round the spur of Eglon, and we are soon on a rich corn plain again. Far ahead we can see an isolated rock, with a white wely in one corner, standing up out of the plain, and a large mud village at its foot. This is Libnah. Just to the north-east of the village, separated from it by a narrow stream, close by which are several ancient wells, with fragments of sculptured marble strewn around, and surmounted by the rude and cumbrous apparatus for lifting the water, such as we see in Egypt, rises the rock Arak el Menshiyeh, on which was the citadel of the Jewish town. It had originally been a completely isolated rock, intended by nature for a fortress, absolutely impregnable before the introduction of firearms. Its perpendicular sides stand out from the plain without the slightest connection with any neighbouring ridge, and about one hundred feet high. The old rubbish of former buildings has been thrown down the south side, and forms a steep slope, by which we climb to the top. This is perfectly flat, about four acres in extent, and utterly deserted, forming a fig orchard surrounded by a cactus hedge. The panorama all around for miles is unbroken. The whole plain is corn or pasture, not a shrub or tree, not a house, not a feature to break the green expanse, save here and there a Bedawin encampment, with fires beginning to twinkle in the distance as the shades of evening creep on. It is an impressive sight, and we can picture how the host of the Assyrians marched from the distant ridge of Lachish and were spread over this wide plain, and how impossible was the capture of this place, even by such an army, otherwise than by starvation. Hence the beleaguered garrison looked down on the plain to the west and saw the whole strewn with the thousands of corpses smitten by the angel of the Lord :

" For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed,
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still."

From Arak el Menshiyeh the route to Beit Jibrin (see page 180) is for the most part

lonely and deserted. We soon leave the rich plain and begin to ascend the spurs of the Judæan hills, where many a little winter torrent runs down to feed the Nahr Sukereir, one of



RUINS OF ASCALON, FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

Here there is a shallow bay, with a landing-place for small boats. The beach is strewn with masses of ancient masonry. On the cliff above there is a Muhammedan shrine, called El Khudrah, with a few palm-trees near it.

the principal streams of the Philistian plain. On every side are the traces of old towns or villages crowning each knoll as

we rise, but none of historic interest till we reach Khûrbet Merash, the ancient Mareshah, standing on a low hill in very undulating ground—one of the fortresses of Judah. Here Asa won the greatest victory in the records of the southern kingdom, when, with a levy of the whole adult nation, he defeated the countless hosts of Zerah, king of Ethiopia or Upper Egypt, and pursued the fugitives right across Philistia, beyond Gaza (see page 175), as far as Gerar. Though several thousand troops could deploy in the open ground, the position is such that Zerah could not bring his superiority of force to bear, and the front ranks being

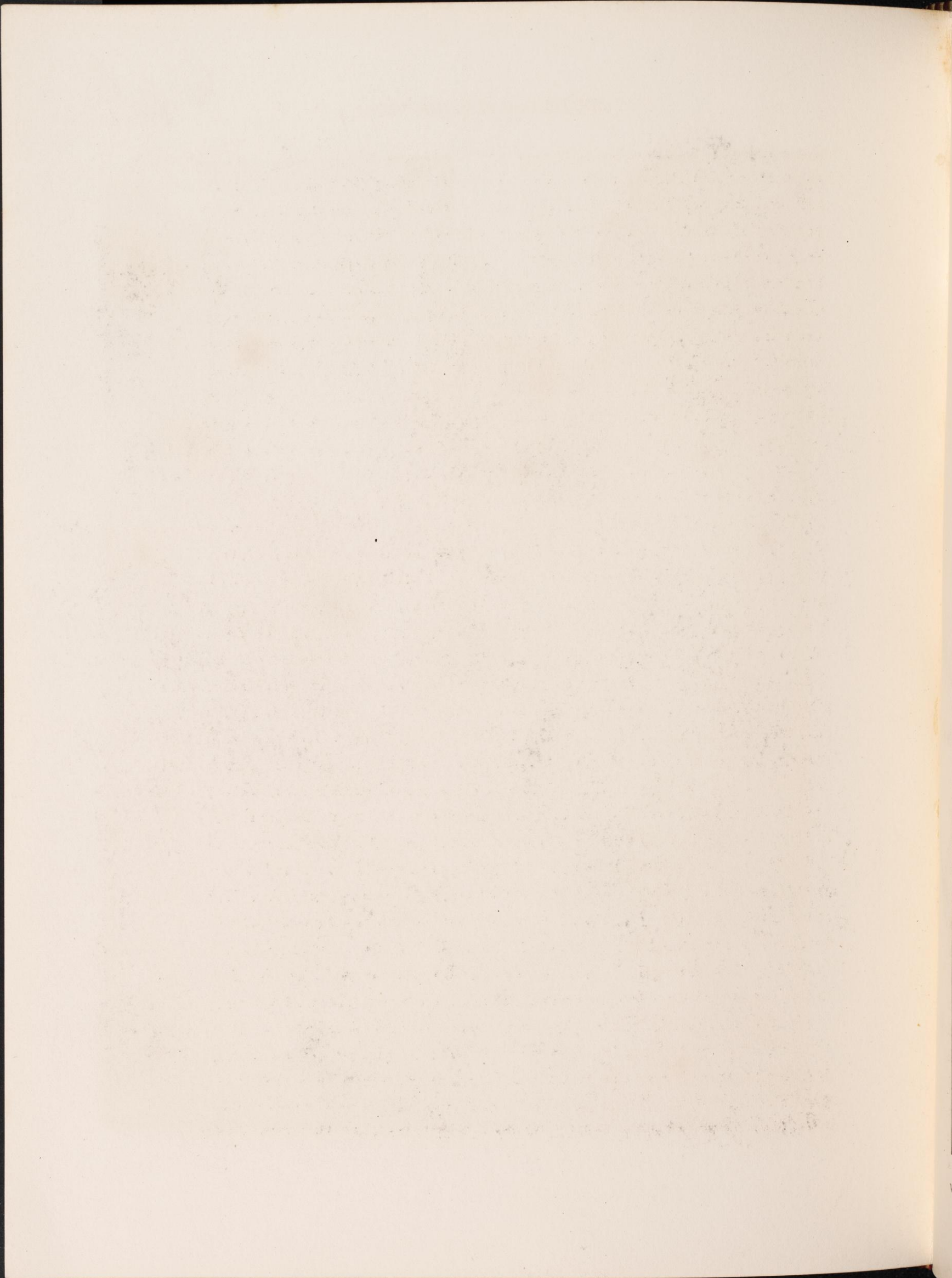
broken only spread panic among the crowded masses at the opening of the plain. The whole is now covered with low brushwood, and swarming with partridges, but not a tree exists in the whole country till we arrive at the outskirts of Beit Jibrîn (see page 180). We may make a



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ENTRANCE TO THE VALLEY OF PETRA.





RUINS OF ASCALON, FROM THE NORTH. Showing the fortifications at the north-west corner of the city. The western wall was about twelve hundred feet in length, and followed the line of the edge of the cliffs, which are from thirty to seventy feet in height. The conquest of Ascalon by Rameses II. is recorded on the walls of the Temple of Karnac.

détour hence to the north, so as to enter the town by that side, and in so doing visit a site which may aid in identifying the place—Khūrbet Gat. The name is well known and recognised by the fellahin, who point out the hill to the north-west of Beit Jibrin, full of old foundations, and well adapted for a fortress, as *Gat*. Of this more anon. No place in South Judæa contains so many and such varied remains as Beit Jibrin. The modern town is of some extent, though shrunken indeed within its ancient limits. There are, perhaps, one thousand inhabitants, of a different type from the fellahin, large-made, muscular, bold and insolent, but industrious and enterprising, and comparatively rich. The father of the present sheikh, Azazeh, was a noted tyrant, defiant of Turkish authority, the terror alike of his own people and of the country around. The stories that are told of him surpass in bloody crime even the hideous tales of Jezzar Pasha (refer to page 87). If he heard of a man having married a handsome wife he would send for the couple, and, if the hapless girl pleased him, would cut down the husband without a word, and tell her that as she was now a widow he should take her. It is only since his death that traders from Hebron (see page 196) or travellers have ventured here. The sheikh's castle is near the ancient fortress, and built of its materials (see page 177). The old citadel, round which the modern town clusters, has been enclosed by a wall of massive masonry, and is probably Crusading, as polished shafts and marble capitals of the Græco-Roman period are often built into the walls, and many broken columns are still standing *in situ* in the courtyards of the modern hovels. The citadel has been about six hundred feet square, and round the walls on the inside were rows of arched vaults, many of which are still perfect and some inhabited. In the centre of the area is the Crusading keep of similar masonry, but which has been partially ruined, restored by the Saracens, and now again a ruin, with massive arched chambers, and a splendid crypt chapel, the groined roof of which still remains. Not the least interesting and useful relic of the past is a noble well, probably Roman, of unusual diameter, faced with most beautiful masonry, and apparently about one hundred feet deep, still affording an abundant supply of water. These are the remains of Beto-Gabra, the "house of Gabriel," its Syro-Greek name, changed by the Romans to Eleutheropolis, which, though now completely lost, was retained as late as the beginning of the ninth century, when the Saracens destroyed it. Though Tell es Sâfy, a short day's journey to the north (see page 161), is a more favourite claimant for the honour, I have always inclined to the belief, when I look at the massive and certainly Crusading masonry, that this is not only Beto-Gabra and Eleutheropolis, but also the Blanchegarde of the Crusaders, the celebrated outpost, which is surrounded by a halo of romance from the heroic and almost miraculous adventures and single-handed feats of our own lion-hearted king. Round it circle the most romantic of the tales of the Crusaders. At Tell es Sâfy there is scarcely a vestige of a ruin, however strong the natural position, and if these walls be not Blanchegarde, what are they? We observed one very interesting relic which may give a hint as to the antiquity of the place. Lying near a well, a little outside the village, was a white marble Corinthian capital in the style of the best period, but in the centre of the cornice, instead of the acanthus leaf, was sculptured the seven golden candlesticks, exactly of

the same pattern as represented on the Arch of Titus. This must be præ-Christian. Is it



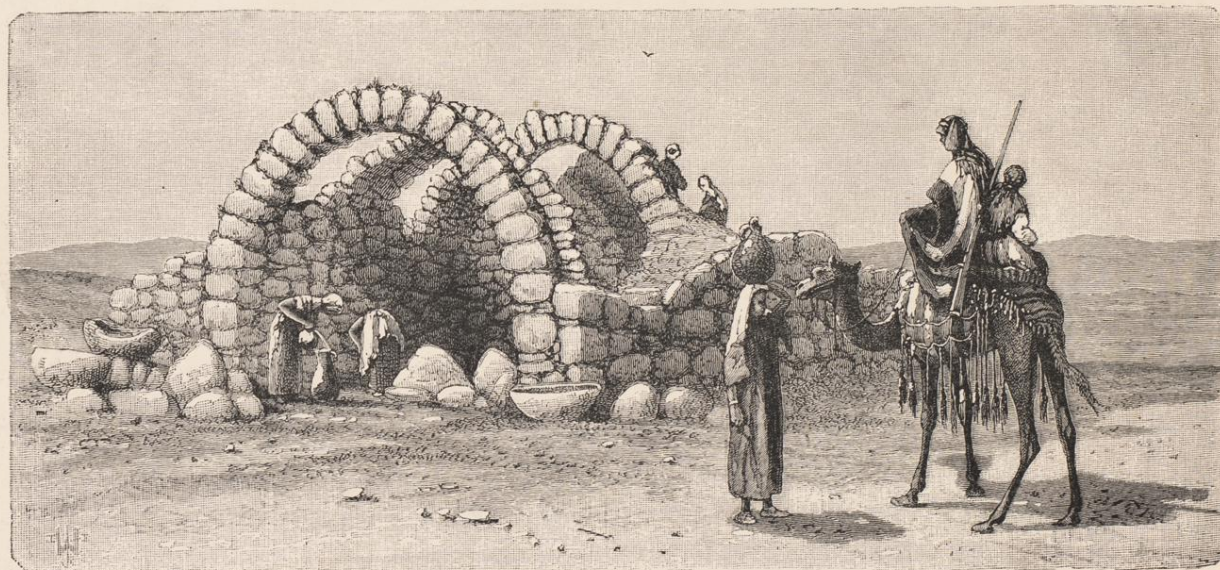
GHŪZZEH, THE ANCIENT GAZA.

The modern village, which is of semi-Egyptian character, has neither walls nor gates. The serai dates from the thirteenth century, and the great mosque, Jami'a el Kebir, which towers above the palm-trees, was originally a Byzantine cathedral.

Maccabæan or Herodian? The industry of Beit Jibrin is carpet-weaving, and all around the

Crusaders' castle we saw the tops of the houses covered with women at work, turning out, with the most primitive of looms, and using their fingers as a shuttle, strips of solid and substantial carpet. Outside, all along the pathways, on either side was a sort of public rope-walk, where both weavers and dyers were at work, carefully dyeing and stretching the threads before they were woven. Flocks and herds are abundant, and the shepherds are armed, not only with guns, but with battleaxes, for defence against the wolves, who are the depredators of the hills, as the Bedawin are of the plain. We met a weeping shepherd boy, who told us a wolf from a cave hard by had just carried off a kid before he could save it.

But I am inclined to give Beit Jibrin (see page 180) a yet older history than Blanchegarde, and to identify it with Gath, of which Khurbet Gat may have been the citadel. It is not its castle nor the remains on the surface which make the plain so remarkable, as the great

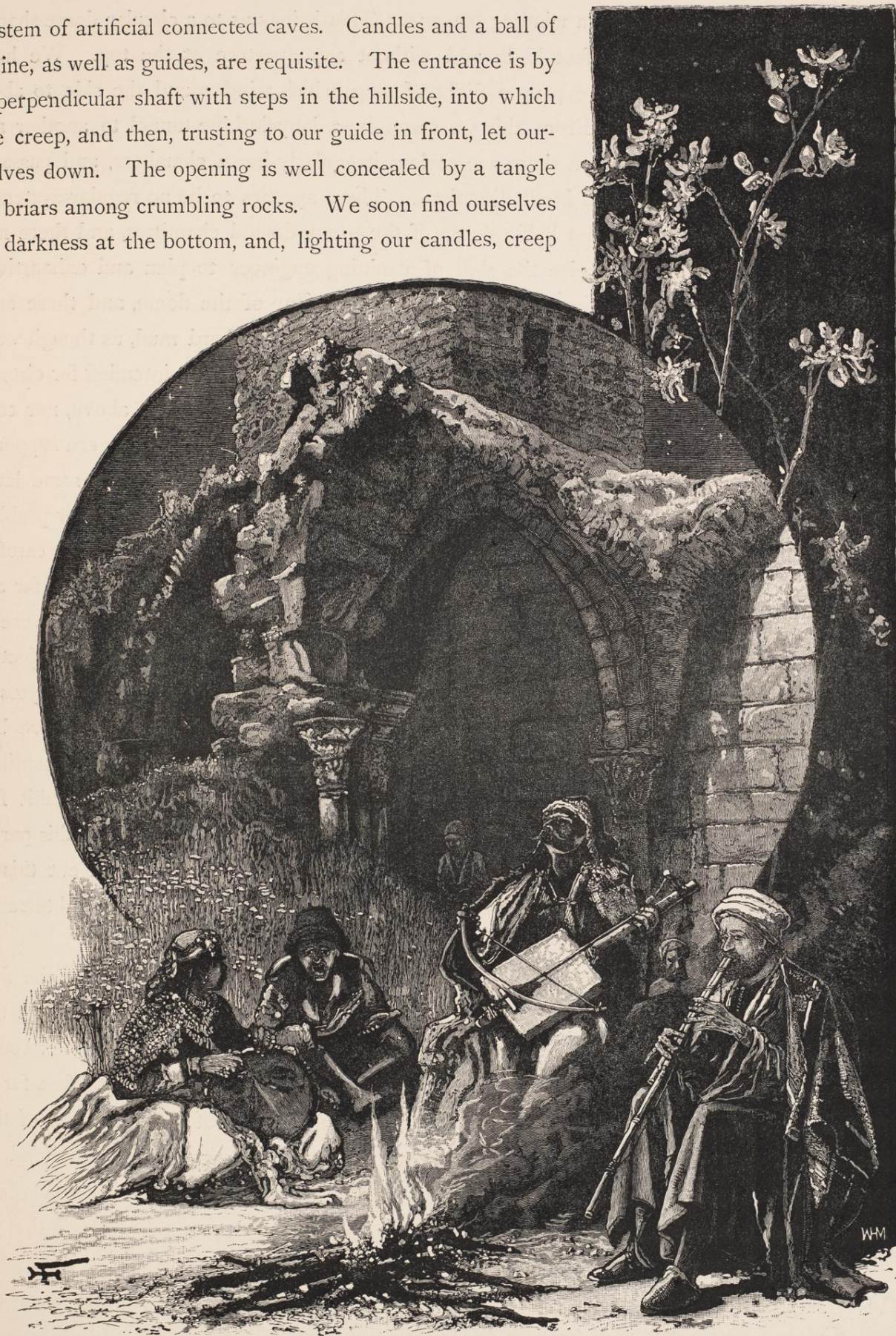


A WELL IN THE PLAIN OF PHILISTIA.

Around it there are a few rudely formed cup-shaped stone water-troughs for the use of flocks and herds.

artificial caves, unrivalled in extent and size in any other part of Palestine, chiefly artificial and far older than mediæval times. Nowhere are Jewish tombs, and kokim, or niches for the dead, so abundant as in the valleys of Beit Jibrin. They are absolutely countless, and point to a vast and concentrated population. Then there are vast *columbaria* (artificial vaults), containing hundreds, nay thousands, of niches for urns. But besides these are the most remarkable subterranean works of Palestine—the labyrinth of artificial caverns, of which the origin and use is utterly lost, and which occupy the whole interior of a hill. The access to them is most intricate and difficult. Robinson was, I believe, the first to explore them. Though from its situation there is much in Tell es Sâfy to support Captain Conder's identification of it with Gath, I have great difficulty in passing over the claims of such important remains as those of Beit Jibrin. But whatever they be, these subterranean halls deserve a visit and description. About one mile south of the town, Tell Sandannah is completely hollowed out by a vast

system of artificial connected caves. Candles and a ball of twine, as well as guides, are requisite. The entrance is by a perpendicular shaft with steps in the hillside, into which we creep, and then, trusting to our guide in front, let ourselves down. The opening is well concealed by a tangle of briars among crumbling rocks. We soon find ourselves in darkness at the bottom, and, lighting our candles, creep



THE CASTLE OF BEIT JIBRÍN, BY STARLIGHT.

Arab musicians in the foreground. The one-stringed instrument is the "rabâb esh shâ'ir," or poet's viol; it is used as an accompaniment to chanted poetry. The double-reed pipe is the "arghûl;" its longer reed serves as a drone or continuous bass.

for some way on all fours along a winding passage. This brings us to a circular dome-shaped cavern, apparently about sixty feet high, and without any aperture at the top. We have entered near the bottom, and creep up a flight of steps which wind round the side to about half its height (see page 179). From this we creep by a labyrinthine tunnel to another and smaller domed cave; but between them are various irregularly hewn chambers, and passages branch into bewildering confusion in all directions. There appears to be no regular system of arrangement. We visited at least half-a-dozen of the great domed chambers, and there may be many more, for it would require the skill of a mining engineer to plan and exhaustively explore them. In some the staircase admitted us near the top of the dome, and these steps led to the bottom. There was no exit at the bottom, and only dry hard mud, as though water had at some time penetrated and remained. But they cannot have been intended for cisterns, still less for tombs. There is no trace of any system of lighting them from above, nor could we find a trace of sculpture or inscription. The roofs of the smaller chambers are supported by many pillars of rock left standing. Neither chambers nor domes are on the same level; everything is most irregular. How the excavated rock has been removed is another problem. There may possibly have been holes in the centre of the domes, which have been carefully filled in after the stone was removed. Nothing elsewhere in Syria or in Petra, so far as I am aware, in the slightest degree resembles this subterranean labyrinth. Who were its excavators and what was its purpose, can only be answered by the vaguest conjecture. They can scarcely have been the Horites, or cavemen, the prehistoric troglodytes of Canaan, for these domes are far more elaborate and artificial than any known to have been worked out by primæval man. But long subsequent to their epoch the Idumæans continued to be cave-dwellers, as had been the aborigines. It is possible they received the habit from their predecessors, and that at the period just before the Maccabæan times, when this part of the country was held by them, until conquered by John Hyrcanus, they hollowed out this hill for the sake of security, and finding the rock extremely soft, developed a form of subterranean architecture impracticable among the granite cliffs of Petra.

Half-way between these caves and Beit Jibrin is a very interesting ruin, one of the finest Byzantine churches in Palestine; it was dedicated to Santa Hanna or St. Anne (see page 181). The east end, with its massive apses, is still perfect, and the foundations and a few courses above them remain for the whole length, which is over one hundred and twenty feet for the nave. But two walls run out on either side in a line with the arch of the apse, each of them over sixty feet long, and making the width of the building a little over one hundred and fifty feet; and at the west end are chapels seventy-five feet by twenty-five, with apses parallel to that of the nave. The Crusaders, those marvellous builders, have evidently altered the plan of the building in many ways. Probably they found it partially ruined. They have added piers to the walls of the nave, which support pointed arches. The bay next the central apse still has its roof entire, but it is ten feet lower than the splendid domed roof of the Byzantine apse, which is of magnificent masonry, and has not a stone out of its place. The appearance

of the restored church, with the roof of the nave below that of the east end, must have been somewhat peculiar. The difference between the Byzantine and Crusading masonry may here be studied with advantage.

Between the church of St. Anne and the village we visit many other caverns, some of them with domed roofs such as we have described above, and quite as extensive, but all more or less open to the day. Great portions of the roofs have fallen in, and many of the domes have a circular opening at the top about six feet in diameter, as though these had been intended for cisterns. There are many inscriptions, some of them at a great height, but all entire. We could find no Latin or Greek inscriptions, but many Christian symbols, proving that they are at least prior to the Saracenic invasion. The sides of the caverns are dressed with a pick diagonally, and in some places great pillars have been left to support the roof; and there are apses at the east end of two or three, as though they had been at some time used as chapels. On one, and one only, was a broad border of tracery



SUBTERRANEAN LABYRINTH OF TELL SANDANNAH (BEIT JIBRÍN).
Showing one of the numerous circular dome-shaped caverns, with its winding rock-cut stairway.



THE VALLEY OF BEIT JIBRĪN.

With a distant view of the sea and the sandy coast-hills. - On the hillside on the left the entrance to one of the great caverns with which this district abounds is shown. In the foreground a shepherd is sleeping; near to him are his dog and gun and double-reed pipe.

running on either side just below the roof. Days might be spent in exploring the caverns of



subterranean Beit Jibrin. Everywhere the hills are honeycombed, and the ground rings hollow as we walk.

Instead of taking the direct road from Beit Jibrin (see page 180) to Hebron (see page 196), on which there are not many historical sites of note, we may make a *détour* northwards, and in a long day's ride visit Wady es Sûr, the upper portion of the Vale of Elah, the recently recovered cave of Adullam (Ed el Miyé), and Keilah. Wherever we wander we shall find ruins in abundance.

THE CHURCH OF ST. ANNE, BEIT JIBRÍN.
Called by the Arabs El Keniseh; it stands one thousand and seventy-two feet above the sea, opposite to Tell Sandannah (Santa Hanná?). It was originally a Byzantine church, but was restored by the Crusaders.

So frequent are the proofs of a former dense

population that Captain Conder estimates the number of ruined sites to average three for every two square miles. We ascend the whole way, for Hebron lies two thousand one hundred feet above Beit Jibrin, and the hills we cross to reach it are three hundred feet higher still. For two miles the path winds among the charming olive-groves by the side of the old Roman road to Jerusalem, still very distinct and even perfect in places. Emerging from the olive-groves we continue up a narrow wâdy, for some way by the side of the Roman road and aqueduct, with the characteristic rounded and rocky hills of Judæa shutting us in on all sides and forbidding any distant view. Then turning eastward we wind up a labyrinth of little wâdys, the lower portion always cultivated with corn, by the edge of which we ride, guiding our course by compass and map alone, for the valleys meet and intersect in bewildering confusion, and we find not a solitary human habitation the whole way, and rarely meet a fellah at work or an Arab wandering on foot. After three hours' ride over rugged hills and through little winding stony valleys, carpeted with green wheat, we find ourselves in front of a dome-shaped hill, round the base of which the valley divides. The sides are perforated with caves. For the first time to-day we see families of women and children sitting in front of the scattered caves. We have in fact come on a troglodyte village. We are told that the next hill is Ed el Miyé, and declining the hospitable proffer of coffee if we will only alight, we ride on to the head of a little glen which opens out on either side. To the right and left the brown stony hills, brilliantly stippled with cyclamen and anemone, are studded with countless caves. In front is an isolated hill, round which these wâdys sweep, clothed with green turf and crowned with low ruins—"Khurbet Ed el Miyé," the old city of Adullam (refer to page 142, vol. i.). To this we climb direct; up the hill, and just below the brow, where it dips on the opposite eastern side, is a small whitened dome—the Mukâm of Neby Mudkhar. The prospect hence surprises us. A fine broad valley (Wâdy es Sûr) is spread before us, the upper part of the Vale of Elah, the land of Samson and of David's wanderings. Here and there a terebinth, one of them an especially noble tree, forms a conspicuous feature in the valley. On the opposite side rise other bare and rounded hills. Close by the wely is the low opening of a well-smoked cave, still inhabited. It is nowhere lofty, but very extensive, and several of its branches have been built up. We afterwards found one of these branches which had been built off, with an opening cut in its roof. There was certainly here abundant room for David's four hundred refugees. The mouth of the cave commands a fine view, and is well situated for security from surprise. It must have been an admirable station from which to make forays and sweep down on any hapless travellers making their way to or from the Philistian plain by the wâdy below.

Descending the hill of Adullam, the route to Hebron lies up the wâdy, now called the Wâdy es Sûr. Below, at the junction of another valley, stands one of the largest trees in Palestine, and which sometimes gives its name to the valleys. It is conspicuous from afar, and reminds us of the ancient name lower down—Emek Elah—the Vale of the Terebinth (Wâdy es Sunt, see page 157). An old road, not Roman, but earlier, may be traced up the valley towards Hebron, passing between Keilah and Hharass, or Hareth. We rapidly ascend,

the valley narrows to a watercourse a few feet wide, the hills are steeper and steeper, and the path a goat-track occasionally varied by a flight of broken natural stairs. Several ancient wells, shaded by a tree on the wayside, still supply the traveller with water; and just above one of these are the ruins of Keilah, still known by the same name, dreary and unattractive, and with no decipherable remains, yet once the head-quarters of David, and then a fenced city. It is a strong natural situation, and a few men might hold the pass.

There is little to detain us on the rest of the way to Hebron. Hharass is passed on the right. The road still ascends till we reach an irregular mountain plateau, about six miles north-west of Hebron, and after crossing it, descend no longer bare hills, with brushwood and pasturage, but carefully enclosed and cultivated vineyards, with clumps of olive and fig yards. We are now in what is popularly known as the Vale of Eschol (see page 192), though the true Eschol must be placed many days' journey to the south, near Kadash Barnea.

As we approach the environs of Hebron, on the left of the paved and walled road, a wide gateway leads through some vineyards to a large building, the Russian hospice, erected just behind a very fine old tree, the traditional oak of Mamre (see page 193). For at least three hundred years this tree, which is not a terebinth (*elah*), but an *ilex*, or evergreen holm oak (*Quercus pseudo-coccifera*), has been visited by pilgrims and known as Abraham's oak. That, however, was in another place, Ramet or Mamre, and was a terebinth. It has long since gone, and this noble tree will soon follow, for within the last twenty-five years it has lost more than half its limbs, and is rapidly sinking into decrepitude (see pages 192 and 193). It used to spread its shadow over a circumference of one hundred yards, and its trunk measures thirty-two feet in circumference at a height of six feet from the ground.

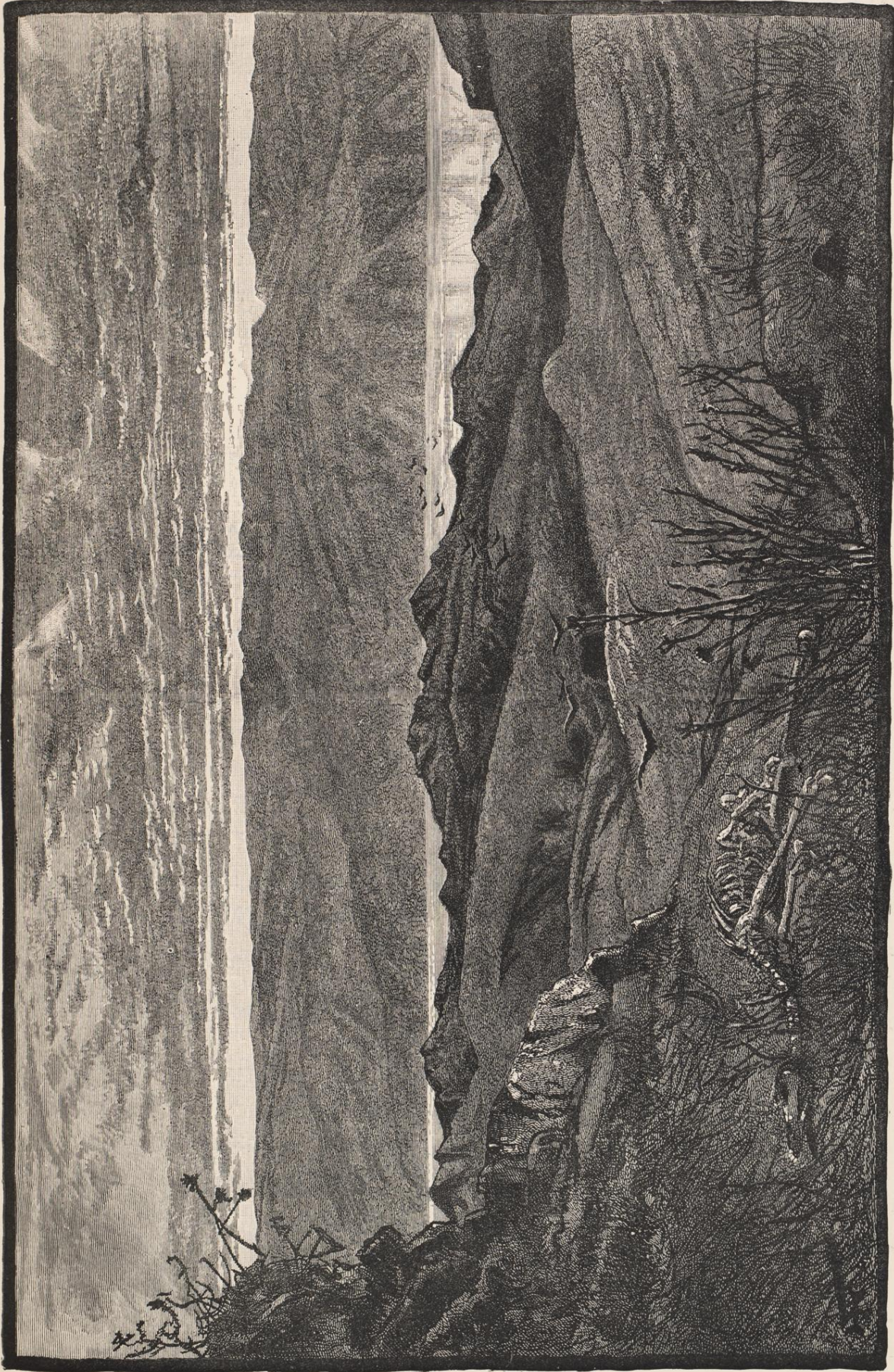
One mile farther and we are at Hebron (see page 197), or rather in front of it, for the road runs alongside the long straggling suburb of Esh Shêkh, and then passing to the south of the central quarter El Haram, we halt on the slope facing the city, by the Muhammedan cemetery, with the pools of Hebron directly below us, and the famous mosque in front, behind the buildings of the city. Hebron, though it stands higher above the sea than any other city of Palestine, is yet one of the very few ancient sites which is not on, but under, a hill. The ancient city may have been a little more to the north-west, but the pools (see page 196) as well as the Haram fix the variations within narrow limits. A wide open grassy space extends south and west, surrounded by olive-clad hills. The central and conspicuous feature of Hebron is the great Haram wall (see steel plate). It is an oblong enclosure about two hundred feet by one hundred and fifteen, and fifty-eight feet high, surrounding the cave of Machpelah, the burial-place of Abraham and his family for three generations. The ground on which it stands is very steep, and was possibly below or "before" the ancient city, which claims to be one of the oldest in the world, built, as we are told, seven years before Zoan, the classical Tanis (a date which has not yet been ascertained), and coeval with Shechem and Damascus. Besides its own antiquity, it embraces here the most ancient and the most authentic of all the holy places of the Holy Land. Much controversy has arisen as to the date of this wall. Beyond



THE VALLEY OF BERACHAH.

Jehoshaphat's "valley of blessing." A wide open vale between Tekoa and the road from Hebron to Bethlehem. In the foreground there is a lime-kiln, and on the distant hill a ruined site, two thousand eight hundred and fifteen feet above the sea, called Khurbet Berekuh.

its great height and massiveness, it is of marvellously beautiful workmanship — as Josephus describes it, "of beautiful marble and admirably worked." The stones are many of them of immense size: one is thirty-eight feet long and three and a half feet high, the chiselling is very fine, and all have the true Jewish marginal draft, broad, shallow, and beautifully cut. Sixteen pilasters strengthen each of the longer, and eight each of the shorter sides. In spite of recent theories and criticism, it seems impossible to assign to the building a date later than that of Solomon. It existed in the time of Josephus, who speaks of it with



THE WILDERNESS OF JUDEA.
With a view of the Dead Sea (Bahr Lût) and mountains of Moab at sunrise.

rapture; and had it been the work of his hero, Herod, it is incredible that he should not have assigned it to him, when he so fully specifies all his other architectural works. And if it were old then, it is impossible to assign a later epoch than the Hebrew monarchy. After the return the nation was too poor and enfeebled to have undertaken such a structure, and the masonry harmonizes with what we know of Solomon's age. There is really no valid ground for rejecting the consentient tradition of Jews and others for two thousand years.

It were strange indeed if any of the Herodian princes should here also have raised, at enormous cost, a building utterly differing from the countless products of their architectural passion and Roman taste, with which the land is strewn. Stranger still had any Byzantine architect here conceived a work of such impressive simplicity, without one single feature—either in design or execution—in common with the elaborate ornamentation in which he everywhere else indulged.

A modern Saracenic wall surmounts the old enclosures, and at the north-east and south-west angles minarets have been added. The entrance is by a staircase, to which access is forbidden to Christians, though we succeeded in running up and peeping in at dawn, without being detected. But this is a rash and rather dangerous experiment. It is only within the last few years that two or three royal and princely parties have been permitted to enter. The first of these was the Prince of Wales in 1862, and to his companion, the late Dean Stanley, we owe the account of the interior. This has been at one time a Byzantine church, the enclosure having, in the Jewish period, been free from buildings. The apse has been cut and the arches pointed when it was transformed into a mosque. It occupies about a third of the interior space, and contains cenotaphs, not tombs, of the various patriarchs whose dust lies in the cave beneath. The shrines of Abraham and Sarah are outside the mosque, and within, in corners, are the chapels of Isaac and Rebekah, and of Jacob and Leah, the two latter in a separate cloister. Outside, but attached to the enclosure, is another cenotaph, which Muhammedans claim as that of Joseph, who, they say, was brought hither from Shechem. There is a mosque on the north side, to the roof of which we obtained access, and whence we could look down upon two other shrines of Jacob and Leah. To the cave itself beneath no one has yet obtained access. There is an opening at the corner of Abraham's shrine, in the living rock, which is evidently an aperture into the cave itself, but this has never been penetrated for centuries. Were it examined we could not expect to find any traces, save dust, of the earlier patriarchs; yet as Jacob was embalmed with all the skill of the Egyptians and dignified with royal honours, it is quite possible that his mummy case still remains, for Machpelah has never passed into any hands but those who loved and revered the patriarchs. Jew, Christian, and Moslem concur in this, and during the period of Roman rule, we know well how careful they were to conciliate the local cults of every conquered nation, to whom they always left the regulation of their own religious matters. We may feel certain that these hallowed sepulchres have remained for four thousand years undesecrated and undisturbed.

There remains one more relic of the Hebrew times to be noticed in Hebron—the pools

or tanks. The most important of the two is the lower pool, a square tank of very ancient masonry, massive and finely wrought, one hundred and thirty-two feet square, and some fifty feet deep (see page 196). Its supply never fails, being derived from subterranean conduits, which seem also to supply a similar but rather smaller pool of like antiquity, higher up on the north edge of the city. It was over this lower pool, according to consentient tradition, that David hanged the murderers of his rival Ishbosheth, and set an example of magnanimity to foes and of stern justice rarely witnessed in the struggles of Oriental monarchs.

The history of Hebron—with the single exception of the seven and a half years during which it was the capital of David's southern kingdom, before the fall of Ishbosheth enabled him to unite Israel at Jerusalem—presents scarcely an event worthy of note, since the days of Abraham; with memorials of whom the whole neighbourhood abounds. The only two undoubted monuments of the past, the Haram and the Pools, are, we have seen, connected with these epochs respectively. To the Jew, though he clings to it, the memories are bitter as well as hallowed. For it was close to Hebron, at a spot if possible even more hallowed than Machpelah itself—under the oak of Mamre (see page 189), where Abraham had so often pitched his tent, where he conversed with God, and where he received the promises to himself and to his seed—that, after the great revolt of the Jews had been finally suppressed at Bether, the Emperor Hadrian sold tens of thousands of hapless captives to a slavery worse than death itself.

The site of Mamre, now known as Râmet el Khülil (see page 189), is about two miles north of Hebron, a little to the right of the road to Jerusalem. It was once a Roman road, carefully paved, as perhaps it had been in the days of royal Solomon, but certainly it is worse now than it could have been when it was but a mountain path, along which Abraham may have often passed to visit his friends at Hebron. The place is identified on the authority of Jerome, and must have been well known in his days, and the Jews have always looked on it and revered it as the home of Abraham. There is nothing to mark the place till we reach it—a small flat plain extends to the foot of the hills half a mile off, without a tree or a shrub, and only some few dilapidated fences where patches of vegetables have been cultivated. Here we find several deep wells, three of them carefully faced with dressed stone, and evidently very ancient. By the largest of them are two lines of an unfinished enclosure, at right angles, two hundred feet and one hundred and sixty feet respectively in length, and built of very large square stones, but without a marginal draft. There remain only two courses, three and four feet high respectively, and some of the stones fifteen feet in length. It is impossible to discover the object of this building, if indeed it were ever finished, for there are very few traces of débris to be seen around. It cannot have been the basilica which Constantine erected here, for a little farther to the east the foundations of a large Byzantine church can be easily traced. It may have been the enclosure by the great terebinth, which had become before the time of Constantine a place of worship both for Christians and heathens, and under which Hadrian sold the captive Jews. A great terebinth existed here as late as the fourth

century A.D., traditionally that which had shaded Abraham's tent, and very possibly its real successor. It is well worth while to ride up to the top of the hill to the east of the plain. The view is fine and commanding, and there are traces of an old town. But it suggests a corroboration of the true positions of the cities of the plain, at the north end of the Dead



TEKU'A, THE SITE OF TEKOA.

Showing the remains of a Byzantine church, and its massive baptismal font of octagonal form.

Sea, which is of some importance. This must have been the hill above Mamre to which Abraham resorted, and whence

he saw the smoke of the cities of the plain ascending like the smoke of a furnace. The view is entirely shut out towards the south by nearer and loftier hills, but northwards the opening at the higher end of the Dead Sea can be detected by the space between the Judæan range and the dim distant outline of the Moab mountains, so that though the plain of Jordan is itself sunk far out of sight. the

smoke of any great conflagration could be seen, and the spot whence it arose identified.

There is a curious tradition connected with Beni-N'aïm, a lofty height just five miles south-east of Rameh, with a wely, called Neby Lût, believed by Muhammedans to be the burial-place of Lot. Here, they say, Abraham stood and interceded for Sodom. The place is worth a visit for the sake of the view from the top of the mosque. It is exactly on the watershed between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, and we ascend the whole way from Rameh or

Hebron. It is one of the highest isolated points in this part of the country. The view embraces the country round Hebron, but not the city itself; and though shut in to the north, is unveiled towards the south and south-east. We could see the whole southern wilderness of Judah, rapidly descending from Nabal's Carmel, which is very distinct, with its tower, seven miles south, and seeming to form a gradually sloping plain rather than a series of ravines, which it really is. The mountains east of the Dead Sea (see page 185) can be traced from the neighbourhood of Heshbon southwards, and through two openings glimpses of the sea itself may be caught, one by the pass of Engedi (see page 200), and another showing a portion of the sandy promontory of the Lisan (see page 204). The Muhammedans, in dedicating this as a holy site, appear to have seized on an old Christian tradition, for this height is evidently the Caphar Barucha of Jerome, which was visited by his friend Paula as the place where



RÂMET EL KHÛLÎL, THE SITE OF MAMRE.

The camping-place of Abraham. It is a little way to the right of the old Roman road to Jerusalem, and is also known as Beit Khûlîl, "the house of Abraham."

Abraham met the Lord. The village itself is well built of stone, with some ancient remains, and the surrounding lands are well tilled; but we are here almost on the limits of arable cultivation.

This Barucha must not be confused with the Berachah of 2 Chronicles xx. 26, near Tekoa (see page 188), where Jehoshaphat and his army returned thanks for their miraculous deliverance from the combined forces of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, who had turned their arms against each other in mutual slaughter near Tekoa, before the Jewish king and his troops could meet them. The name they gave to the place was the Valley of Berachah, *i.e.* "blessing." The name has continued to this day in the Wâdy Bereikuh, a wide open valley between Tekoa and the road from Hebron to Bethlehem, and represented on page 184. It does not lie directly in our course, but may conveniently be visited by following the Roman road northward till within three miles of the Pools of Solomon (see page 145, vol. i.); or, more conveniently still,

by pursuing the mountain track parallel to this along the crest of the ridge towards Tekoa, and then descending at once on Berachah. West of this ridge there is general cultivation; the eastern slopes are for the most part bare downs, with sparse stunted shrubs, pastured over by the Ta'amireh Arabs, abounding in partridge, and the favourite haunt of the gazelle and a few ibexes or wild goats.

From the Wâdy Bereikuh a ride of five miles brings us to Tekoa (see page 188), crossing the little upland plain, ensconced in a circle of hills, called Bukat et Teku'a. In front of us is a long hill, with a copious spring at its foot and ruins on its top. The name is scarcely changed, Teku'a for Tekoa, and the district in its natural features seems to have been always what it is now—bare, treeless, open pasturage. We here lose all traces of the ancient terraces which gird the undulations of every hill farther west with their swathing bands. Here and there are still patches of cultivation in the hollows of the valleys, but the soil is dry and stony, and we begin here to lose the rich vegetable mould which, however scanty, still covers more or less the whole of the central hills, and have, in its stead, only a thirsty chalky marl. That vegetable soil is doubtless due, in the first instance, to the primæval forest, which certainly once covered the whole of the Judæan as of the Gilead range, but which has left no traces of its existence on the western slopes towards the Dead Sea (see page 185). Tekoa thus stood on the outskirts of civilisation. Though a city, and a fortified one, for its strategic importance is evident, and it was the permanent advanced post towards the pass of Engedi (see page 200), yet it is not girt with a number of low ruin-topped knolls, like the strongholds of the country we have been traversing. As a town it stood in the centre of a nomad district, and the inhabitants of the region eastward dwelt in tents like their modern successors, the Ta'amireh Arabs. But that it was always a garrison post is indicated by the words, "Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Beth-Haccerim" (*i.e.* Frank Mountain, or Jebel Fureidis, the peak facing us on the north), (see page 137, vol. i.). Tekoa was fortified by Rehoboam as one of his frontier posts. Of its large buildings little remains that can be identified; but it was occupied during the Christian era, and the most conspicuous ruin is that of the Byzantine church, with the broken columns of its aisles, and a large baptismal font well wrought in hard limestone (see page 188). St. Saba established a convent here; and the Crusaders resettled the place, only to be again, after their expulsion from the country, devastated by the Bedawin.

But the chief interest of Tekoa is not its history, but the fact of its being the birthplace and home of the prophet Amos, a "herdsman of Tekoa" and a "gatherer of wild figs." His early life here, the character of the country, and the nature of his calling, have stamped his writings with an individuality which has attracted the notice of every student and critic, from St. Jerome, the father of commentators, downwards.

From Tekoa to Engedi (see page 203) there is no track, but we may follow the course of the wâdys which converge towards the pass, the Wâdy Husasah, Wâdy el Jihar, or Wâdy el Areijeh. All are equally featureless, all alike without relics of the past, or dwellings of the present. But any of them afford an admirable opportunity for studying the natural products,

especially the flora of the wilderness or midbar, "the highland downs," as contrasted with the lowland plains. During the ride we descend from Tekoa—which is two thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight feet above the sea—two thousand one hundred and twenty-eight feet to the cliff over Engedi (see page 205), which, though only six hundred and sixty feet higher than the Mediterranean, yet overlooks the Dead Sea immediately beneath from a height of all but two thousand feet (see page 204). On the way we see here and there traces of ancient beacon stations. One of these may have been that "watch-tower in the wilderness," the wilderness of Jeruel, mentioned in Jehoshaphat's history (2 Chronicles xx.). But of the name Jeruel we have found no trace in the Arabic nomenclature, though this must be the region, as it lay between Tekoa and Engedi. But of Hazziz, the cliff of Ziz, we have the equivalent in El Hasasah, the tableland just before the pass.

The pass itself is not recognisable till we are close upon it. It is simply a zigzag path, chiefly artificial, but occasionally aided by nature, cut out of the sides of the precipices, at the inner edge of a semicircular wall of cliff, which, spanning a chord of about one and a half miles, embraces a horse-shoe plain, which gently slopes to the shore and forms a sub-tropical oasis. This pass and cliff have been, from the days of Chedorlaomer and Abraham, the one ascent by which invaders from the south and east entered the hill country of Judæa. As far as Engedi they could march by the shore without any obstacle; north of it the shore line is impracticable, even for footmen, and there are no paths by which beasts could be led up. Had they taken any of the openings south of Engedi this must have entailed a long march across a rough and almost waterless wilderness. The trade between Jerusalem and Kerak in Moab is still carried on by this route, by which also the salt is brought from Jebel Usdum.

Few landscapes are more impressive than the sudden unfolding of the Dead Sea basin, and its eastern wall, from the top of the pass of Engedi (see pages 200 and 201). The whole length of the lake may here be taken in one view; the opposite hills are veiled in a delicate haze, the evaporation from the sea clothing the mountain-sides with a gauzy pink, and the tops with as gauzy and light a blue. We wind down the zigzag niche which serves for a path. After descending more than one thousand two hundred feet, there is a break in the cliff. It becomes a rugged slope for the next six hundred feet, and at the base of a rock, the copious warm fresh "Fountain of the Kid" (En-gedi or 'Ain-Jidy)* bursts forth amidst an oasis of tropical vegetation (see page 203), and then, kid-like, skips from rock to rock till it reaches the plain below. From the level at which this spring gushes out of the cliff there are evidences of the most careful system of irrigation, carried round the little amphitheatre at different levels, in the days when the palm, the camphire, and the sugar-cane brought in rich revenues to the possessors of the oasis. It is still the home of many of the choicest and most peculiar plants, birds, and insects of the Dead Sea shore. The camphire still lingers. The fine and striking

* The ancient name of Engedi ('Ain-Jidy) was Hazazon-tamar, "the pruning of the palm" (Genesis xiv. 7). There is no doubt about this identification, for, in 2 Chronicles xx. 2, the place is referred to as "Hazazon-tamar, which is Engedi." The vineyards and camphire of Engedi are mentioned in the Song of Solomon, and Pliny praises its palm-trees, which, according to Josephus, were of "the best kind" (Ant. ix. 1, § 2); he also alludes to its precious balsam, "opobalsamum." In the time of Eusebius "Engaddi" was still a place of importance, and its position, "east of Hebron," is described by the Arab historian, Mejr ed Dîn, who wrote towards the end of the fifteenth century.—M. E. R.

asclepiad, the osier, is abundant, and over its great leaves hover some richly painted Nubian butterflies, while bulbuls and sunbirds suck the bright blossoms of the Indian parasite (*Lonicera indica*). Engedi is the true halting-place for those who purpose to examine the marvellous



WÂDY ET TUFFÂH, COMMONLY CALLED THE VALE OF ESHCOL.

The peasants grouped in the foreground are under the southern branches of Abraham's oak. In the distance the minaret of the great mosque of Sheikh 'Ali Bakka, Hebron, may be distinguished.

remains of Masada, the fortress and the Roman camp around it, which can be visited with only an absence of one night from camp, and which from their position, their workmanship, and their history, are the most remarkable remains on either side of the Dead Sea shore,