

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

through the House of Lords by any member of the Episcopal bench, with the assent of Her Majesty's Government, that Government could hardly decline to take charge of its fortunes in the House below. No favour is craved for the Church. All that is asked for is simple justice,—a justice which has now been twice recognized by independent bodies deputed to examine into the character and reasonableness of the demands put forward. Of one thing we may be certain. In the face of the evidence which has now seen the light, the question will not be allowed to slumber. An attempt was made during the past session to bring the subject on the *tapis*, from a quarter from which it could hardly be suspected to emanate—had the object been to strengthen the Church of England. It will be well in this case, not only to be wise, but to be wise in time. If the friends of the Church be not prepared to grapple in earnest with the abuses which cripple her energies, even if they do not paralyze her action, the task will be attempted, and perhaps achieved, in a very different spirit by her foes.

MIDDLETON.

---

ART. IV.—THE JORDAN VALLEY.

1. *The Rob Roy on the Jordan, &c. : a Canoe Cruise in Palestine, &c.* By J. MACGREGOR, M.A., Captain of the Royal Canoe Club. Sixth Edition. London : J. Murray. 1880.
2. *A Pisgah Sight of Palestine and the Confines thereof, with the History of the Old and New Testament acted thereon.* By THOMAS FULLER, B.D. London : Printed by J. F., for John Williams, at the Signe of the Crown, in Pauls Churchyard. 1650.
3. *The Land of Israel : A Journal of Travels in Palestine, undertaken with special reference to its Physical Character.* By H. B. TRISTRAM, M.A., LL.D., F.R.S., Canon of Durham. Third Edition, Revised. London : Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 1876.

THE Jordan Valley, combined with the Red Sea, is a cleft of extraordinary depth between the table-lands of Abyssinia and Arabia. Of the three lakes through which, or into which, the Jordan passes, the Waters of Merom are 160 feet above the level of the Mediterranean, the Sea of Galilee 318 feet below that level, and the Dead Sea 1,390 feet below the same. There is nothing like this in any other part of the world. The expanse of the Dead Sea—as Professor Haughton remarks, in his recent Lectures on Physical Geography—is “the lowest surface of water that exists in the earth ;” and he invites

us further to look at this fact on the great scale, in connection with the vast mountain-system which, beginning with the Pyrenees, the Alps, and the Caucasus, stretches at a still higher level through Central Asia to China. Among the Asiatic lakes on this "terraced roof of the world," is one, the level of which is as high as 29,000 feet. This gives an interval of more than 30,000 feet between the highest and lowest lake in this great irregular mountainous belt.

Turning, however, to view the Jordan on the small scale (and it is only on the small scale that we shall be able to study well its true significance), we see at once, from the facts above stated, that the Jordan must be a river of extraordinary rapidity. Here the allusion is made especially to that part of the river which runs between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and which, in fact, we are popularly understood to denote, when we speak of the Jordan. The distance between these two lakes is only sixty miles; and even if the fullest allowance be made for all its windings, it is evident that its waters must in some places, if not in all, flow very swiftly. We have good illustrations of this in the "Journal of the Exploration of the Jordan," under Lieut. Lynch, of the United States Navy. Here is an extract from his account of the adventures of the American boats, one of which was characteristically named *Uncle Sam* :

The boat swayed from side to side of the mad torrent, like a frightened steed, straining the line which held her. Watching the moment when her bows were brought in the right direction, I gave the signal to let go the rope. There was a rush, a plunge, an upward leap, and the rock was cleared . . . and half-full of water, with breathless velocity, we now swept safely down the rapids. Hard work for all hands, and the thermometer standing 90° in the shade (p. 19).

"This was just above the place where the Hieromax comes in from the East, a part of the Jordan described as pleasantly fringed with laurestinus, oleanders and flowers, and "with dwarf oak and cedar on the second terrace." Lieutenant Lynch remarks, lower down:—"The width of the river has varied from seventy yards, with two knots current, to thirty yards, with ten knots current: the depth, varying with the width, has ranged from two feet to ten feet." In the end he speaks of having passed through "twenty-seven threatening rapids."

To obtain, however, a true impression of the Jordan, we must combine with this rapidity the fact that it is very winding. Were this not the case, it would be almost one continuous cascade between the Lake of Tiberias and the Dead Sea. To say that the Jordan is the most winding river in the world might be an exaggeration. Mr. MacGregor, whose "*Rob Roy on the Jordan*" is placed inevitably at the head of this article, says

that the courses of the Abana and Pharpar are, in this respect, quite as remarkable. There is no doubt, however, that extreme sinuosity is one of the characteristics of the Jordan. This feature, too, always involves very varied results in the scenery of a river. We can easily put this principle to the test in some of our familiar streams at home, such as the Thames and the Dee.

One very marked characteristic of the Jordan, resulting partly from the circumstances mentioned above, and partly from the dismal oppressive termination of its course, is that it is not a navigable river—that its course has never been a cheerful medium of human traffic—and that no important towns have ever been built upon its banks. Jericho, indeed, was a city of great and varied memories during a long period of the Hebrew annals; but it was situated near the base of the western mountain country, at some distance from the Jordan. Tiberias, too, as a city of note, took up the Jewish history in the Roman period, and carried it far onward, with much distinction, into the Middle Ages; but it is to be connected with the Sea of Tiberias, rather than with the river. If, too, we take under our view the tributary eastern valleys of the Hieromax and the Jabbok, and all the region which drains into the main river—as, of course, we must, if we desire to do justice to the full geographical meaning of the Jordan Valley—we are face to face with cities of mark of very various periods, such as Gadara and Pella, Ramoth-Gilead and Rabbath-Ammon; but it is quite evident that they are not connected with the course of the Jordan in its restricted sense. The river itself is unsociable, as to human habitation and human intercourse.<sup>1</sup>

Another feature of the Jordan is this, that it has on each side a belt of arid level land. By the immediate edge, indeed, of the stream there is a fringe of vegetation, which itself gives character to the valley. But beyond this, on either side, with varying breadth, and extending from the Sea of Tiberias to the Dead Sea, there is a low barren tract, the climate of which is very hot, and almost tropically hot as we approach the south. These are the “plains of Jordan,” of which we read on various occasions in the Old Testament. This “Ghor,” or “sunken plain,” of the Jordan must always have been the same, and is well described by Josephus.

Putting together what has been said regarding the peculiarities of the flow of the river, and also the characteristic features of

---

<sup>1</sup> In illustration of this point Dean Stanley quotes Pliny (*N. H.* v. 15) thus:—“*Accolis invitum se præbet.*” But is there not an error here? Pliny’s words are “*ambitiosus, accolisque se præbens, velut invitum lacum dirum naturâ petit,*” by which he seems to denote the many windings of the Jordan and the reluctance with which it approaches the Dead Sea.

the terraces which bound its tracts of attendant plain, we see at once what a barrier it must have constituted between the eastern and western portions of the Holy Land. Even to the eye this valley, as seen from any of the heights on either side, must have spoken eloquently of separation. This is well illustrated by what was done by the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, when they departed to their eastern territory after the completion of Joshua's conquest. "They built an altar—a great altar to see to—by Jordan, over against Canaan;" and when fiercely called to account by their brethren, they explained the reason. They told them that they feared lest, in time to come, it should be said: "The Lord hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad: ye have no part in the Lord: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the Lord." Hence they had built this great altar as "a witness" of the national and religious unity of those who were separated by a barrier of Nature. We could not have a better exemplification of the manner in which, from its earliest occupation, the Chosen Land connects itself with the history of the Chosen People.

Once more, if it is necessary to give attention to the plain of the Jordan, it is equally incumbent upon us to mark well its fords—those "natural bridges" of early times—which alone supplied the conditions for communication between opposite banks and regions otherwise separated. We have no reason for believing that any literal bridges over the Jordan existed before the time of the Romans, though afterwards the structures of this kind were maintained by the Saracens, and, more or less, by the Turks. The storm of battle must often have swept towards these "fords of Jordan." We see this exemplified in the slaughter of the Moabites by Ehud, and of the Midianites by Gideon. It was "at the passages of Jordan," too, that the sanguinary struggle took place between the Ephraimites and Gileadites during the civil war in the time of Jephtha—so that it is with the water of this famous river that the word "Shibboleth," which has been filled with so much meaning since, was originally connected. And we might pursue this consideration of the historic importance of the fords of Jordan in the life of David, and the defeat and captivity of Zedekiah, and, onward still, in the wars of the Maccabees, especially in the events which took place soon after the death of Judas, the great hero of that patriotic family.

We have already passed away from the merely physical aspect of the Jordan to its connection with human history: nor, indeed, can the two subjects be easily separated; and now we may turn with advantage to certain definite places in its wonderful valley which have a special historical value. We turn instinctively, in the first instance, to its source at Baneas, or Casarea Philippi.

There is, indeed, another source to the west of this, at Dan, the name of which brings back into the memory important passages of the Jewish annals, especially in the events which make the phrases "from Dan to Beersheba" and "from Dan to Bethel" proverbial. Nor are these the only sources of the Jordan. Another, the Hasbany, rises still more remotely to the north, and closer under the snows of Hermon. Early travellers to Palestine were more or less conscious of the facts. In that singular map of the world, which is preserved in Hereford Cathedral, the Jordan has three streams, which are marked—"Fons Jor" and "Fons Dan," the Kishon, flowing from Tabor, being curiously made an affluent of it. Van de Velde and other recent explorers have elucidated the facts for us more correctly. But it remained for Mr. MacGregor to exhibit to us clearly and minutely the relation of these parent streams to one another, by means of his original method of exploration. The account of his adventures in the process need not be spoilt for the reader by any condensation. But a compact statement of part of his results may be given with advantage. He says, with truth, that "of the three several fountains which form this wonderful river, the Hasbany may be considered as the Arab source, the spring at Dan as the Canaanitish source, and the fountain at Baneas as the Roman source." As to their relative importance, he observes elsewhere that, after a careful examination, he comes to the conclusion that the Hasbany source is less than that at Baneas, "though the former river is the larger where the two unite, and that the source at Dan is larger than that at Baneas, though the Dan waters disperse afterwards, and fail to reach the others in any one particular channel."

Our attention must of necessity be chiefly given to the source at Baneas; for this is the Cæsarea Philippi of the Gospels. There is a great charm in watching its young waters, and listening to its cascades and its runlets underground, in the midst of rich foliage of trees and shrubs, and the ruined walls and fallen pillars of the city of the Herods. But the manner of its actual rising should be particularly noted; for even here the Jordan is almost unique, as in the other parts of its career. It comes forth suddenly with the full life of a river from the base of a tall limestone cliff, as the river Aire in Yorkshire comes forth from under Malham Cove. The name Baneas is a relic of the Greek times, when the god Pan had a sanctuary among these cliffs. But it is more to our purpose to remember that it was a city of the Roman times, which was the scene of St. Peter's great confession of our Lord's Divinity; and the interest of this occasion is very much enhanced for us by the well-founded belief that it was somewhere on the heights above this city that the Transfiguration, in the presence of the same apostle, took place. Hymns which we sing in church still inculcate the old opinion

that it was on Tabor that this event occurred ; but one result of the modern study of Holy Scripture has been that we now associate this event of transcendent beauty with the slopes of Hermon, which, rising in noble and gentle majesty, presides, so to speak, over the early moments of the life of the Jordan.

In order to appreciate what Mr. MacGregor did and saw between the sources of the river and the lake and marshes of Merom, the whole must be read. No extracts could do his narrative justice. His amusing difficulties with his canoe, first, in bringing her down from the heights by Dan to the low plain, and then in guiding her, or being guided by her, down the ever-varying rapids—the frantic excitement of the Arabs—their perpetual demand for “backshish”—the positive danger which he ran of being murdered—his ingenious mode of overcoming these dangers—his passage among the less perilous horns and eyes of buffaloes in the stream—these things form a most entertaining and exciting accompaniment to the study of Sacred Topography. In the end, he finds himself hopelessly entangled in an impenetrable jungle. His canoe voyage is brought, for the time, to a sudden termination ; and he is obliged to resume it independently at a point lower down.

Perhaps the most characteristic part of Mr. MacGregor's book, and the most valuable, is his account of the Waters of Merom, or the “high” lake, as its name denotes. Through his original and spirited mode of investigation, he has been enabled there to discover a geographical fact, quite unknown to previous explorers, and to describe a fact of natural history, which, at least, has never before been so vividly set before us. The geographical discovery relates to the actual course of the Jordan in connection with this lake ; the new resources which he has supplied to naturalists, relate to the growth of the papyrus in this part of the river. Previously, the opinion had been confidently entertained that the main river from above entered the Huleh lake on its eastern side. This—not without some perils from Arabs on the steep Bashan shore, lying in wait to fire at him, or splashing into the water through the reeds to seize his canoe—he ascertained to be a mistake ; and not only so, but he found that no secondary stream whatever enters on this side. It remained to discover the true entrance of the river from above into the lake of Merom. It is the account of this discovery which brings before us the aspect and character of the papyrus in the most interesting way :—

On turning into one of the deep bays in the papyrus, on the northern side of the lake, I noticed a sensible current in the water. In a moment every sense was on the *qui vive* ; and with quick-beating heart and earnest paddle-strokes I entered what proved to be the mouth of the

Jordan. At this place the papyrus is of the richest green, and upright as two walls on either hand; and so close is its forest of stems and dark recurving hair-like tops above, that no bird can fly into it, and the very ducks that I found had wandered in by swimming through the chinks below, were powerless to get wing for rising. . . . The river enters the lake at the *end* of a promontory of papyrus; and one can understand that this projection is caused by the plants growing better where the water runs than in its still parts, so that the walls or banks of green are prolonged by the current itself. Once round the corner, and entering the actual river, it is a wonderful sight indeed, as the graceful channel winds in ample sweeps or long straight reaches, in perfect repose and loneliness with a soft silent beauty all its own (pp. 258, 259).

For a time, the adventurous traveller says that, under this strange experience, he was half overcome by a mysterious fear lest he should be "lost in the maze of green." But he resumed his courage and took precautions for retracing his steps; and this he did successfully. He had penetrated through this wonderful waterway, between walls of papyrus, nearly to the point where he had been arrested by jungle at the end of the previous stage of his voyage. Soon after his return the wind rose, and he heard suddenly a most curious hissing, grinding, bustling sound, like that of waves upon a shingly beach :

In delighted surprise I found that the margin of the lake about me was waving up and down, and the papyrus stems were rubbing against each other as they nodded out and in. It was plain in a moment that the whole jungle of papyrus was floating upon the water, and so the waves raised by the breeze were rocking the heavy green curtain to-and-fro (p. 264).

All that follows regarding the growth of this historic plant is full of interest. It is a very curious fact that, now that it is extinct on the Nile, it should be found in such abundance here. Mr. MacGregor adds, in reference to his recording of the position of his last papyrus, after emerging from the Lake of Merom, and having gone some little way towards the Sea of Tiberias, that he subsequently found that the famous traveller Bruce had remarked the papyrus at that identical spot.

The distance between the Huleh Lake and the Lake of Genesareth is ten miles. We have seen how much the water level of the former is above, and of the latter below the surface of the Mediterranean. Thus, the fall in this short distance is extraordinary. Jordan, from the first, is true to its name, which means "the Descender." It is evident that it was more convenient for Mr. MacGregor's canoe to travel from one lake to the other by land than by water. The river, in fact,

was a mountain torrent, as was told very clearly by its sound, even when its "white-foamed rush of water" could not be seen. But the travelling by land over these few miles was by no means easy. The pony which carried the canoe had a difficult path down sliding precipices, among boulders, and through morasses. Sometimes storms of wind nearly capsized it. Sometimes it was necessary to dismount it and to carry it by hand. Here, too, was an adventure with ruffians, which might have been very serious, but that, "just at the proper moment, the bow of the *Rob Roy* appeared over a distant hill, nodding, nodding, as the horse-stepped carefully, bearing it," and the robbers found that the traveller was not alone. Just one historical fact must be noted in this section of the river. Not very far below the outlet from the upper lake is the bridge which bears the name of "the Bridge of Jacob's sons." Certainly this is not the place where Jacob crossed the Jordan: and it is probable that the name was given in the great days of Tiberias, when the Jews were desirous to fix in Galilee the scenes of their sacred history. However this may be, the presence of this bridge indicates an important point in the course of the river. For ages it connected the region of the Nile with the region of the Euphrates. The great *via maris* of the Middle Ages crossed the river here. It is probable that St. Paul went this way, on his errand of persecution, from Jerusalem to Damascus. The actual age of the bridge is unknown. Mr. MacGregor says it is sixty feet long, with three arches. Robinson states that it has *four* arches, and is sixty *paces* long. This is a curious illustration of liability to error in the most accurate of travellers.

The Sea of Tiberias, though in a most true sense the very part of the Jordan Valley which deserves the greatest attention, must be postponed to another occasion when Northern Palestine is brought under review. The manner, however, in which the river leaves the lake—the new birth, in fact, of the river in its great historic course—must not be omitted here.

Mr. MacGregor, from the fact that he visited the region when the lake was low, has been able to add a good deal to what is recorded in the English Ordnance Map. At this point was the city of Taricheæ—so called from its large manufactories for salting fish—its position being marked by the modern Kerak. The ancient city was built and fortified on a triangular mound, which was made into an island by the waters round it. "The Jordan forms a fosse on one side, while the lake guards another, and an artificial lagoon is towards the mainland." Just opposite this took place, on the waters of the lake, the only sea-battle between the Jews and the Romans. Josephus describes it as sanguinary and terrible. The student is very

curious to realize to himself the circumstances of this engagement, the size of the ships, and the manner of the fighting; but materials do not exist for gratifying this curiosity. On the beach, and on the steep sides of the clay cliff, Mr. MacGregor says, are remains which would well reward an explorer. Turning now with his canoe to enter the Jordan, he quotes some well-known writer as remarking that "the Jordan leaves the lake in an ordinary manner;" and to this description he demurs, and very naturally. Certainly *he* did not leave it in an ordinary manner. "The east point of Kerak is high; and below it there juts out a promontory, with thick trees growing in the water. The stream runs fast through these; and the canoe cut across this leafy cape, and then swept round the bay just in front of the ferrymen, who ran out, uproariously shouting; but they were soon distanced, as the powerful current hurried us along." Passing onwards, he found the river bending east and west under cliffs, and with a stream rapid and merry among canes and reeds. He reaches an Arab camp, and the people rush out *en masse*; but the *Rob Roy* was too swift to be caught; and after a mile or so he came to the ruins of the old bridge, Em-el-Kanater, or "The Mother of Arches," of which nine or ten piers still stand in the stream. Here we part from this adventurous traveller and amusing writer. It formed no part of his plan to descend the Jordan from this point towards the Dead Sea in a canoe. In the upper waters of the Jordan the *Rob Roy* "had gone to what could only be seen from a boat, and what no boat had done before." Henceforward, all parts of the course of the river can be seen equally well from the banks. Under the banks, in a canoe, "there is no view to see, and nothing but heat and gravel and Arabs to meet with, wasting much time, muscle, and money, but without even the prospect of new knowledge to be gained."

The above-mentioned ruins of a bridge mark an important historical point in the river. A Roman road doubtless passed this way. Here must have been the place of communication with Gadara and other important cities on the eastern tableland. These are probably the remains of the Roman bridge observed by Irby and Mangles in 1823. Those who have read the Journal of these intelligent early travellers in the Holy Land must have been struck by the acute way in which they noted all traces of Roman roads, with occasional milestones, in this region. Every such indication of imperial civilization and government in the time of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles ought to be most carefully marked.

In passing down the Jordan, however, we turn back to a romantic passage of the Old Testament and pause there: for the existence and course of the river give to that passage of

history much of its animation and character. About a quarter of the distance to be traversed between the Sea of Tiberias and the Dead Sea and we are over against the ridge of Gilboa near Jezreel, where King Saul was defeated by the Philistines and took away his own life. To the east, on the opposite side of the Jordan Valley, at some considerable distance, is Jabesh-Gilead. The exposing of the bodies of Saul and Jonathan at Bethshan, above Jezreel, and the coming of "the men of Jabesh-Gilead," to bring away these royal corpses and to give them burial, form a passage of Hebrew history which deserves to be well remembered. We will take the notice of this subject from old Fuller's "Pisgah Sight of Palestine," a book most remarkable, not only for its comical humour and earnest and devout spirit, but for its geographical instinct and its anticipations of our modern method of viewing the Holy Land:—

Jordan, having got out of the Sea of Galilee, is presently crossed over with a stately bridge. I conceive it of no great antiquity (no stone thereof appearing in the Scripture); but Mercator's maps take notice thereof. And a moderate Jesuite tells us (observe it, reader, against the time thou travellest into those parts), that the way over this bridge, though somewhat further about and less frequented, is an easier and safer road from Damascus to Jerusalem, than what is commonly gone over Jacob's bridge in the tribe of Naphtali. . . . And now Jordan being enriched with the tributary waters of Jabbok<sup>1</sup> grows fair and large, yet not so deep but that it is fordable, especially at that place so fatal to the Ephraimites, where forty-two thousand of them were by Jephthah put to the sword. . . . From hence Jordan casteth a glancing eye at the fair city of Jabesh-Gilead, sweetly seated at the bottom of balsm-bearing mountains. The inhabitants hereof ingaged not with the rest of Israel against the Benjamites. . . . They, the Benjamites, being Gileadites by the mother side, it was not onely protection to his subjects, but also love to his kindred which invited Saul to succour this city, when Naash the Ammonite besieged it. . . . Saul saved all this harm by a speedy march, suddenly surprizing the Ammonites, and delivering the city of Jabesh-Gilead. Gratitude to Saul for so great a benefit probably did afterwards put the people on that honourable, but dangerous designe, to rescue Saul and his sons bodies from the wall of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them up. It was no pleasant prospect to these men of Jabesh, Bethshan being opposite on the other side of Jordan over against them, some eight miles off. Loyalty hath a quick sight and a tender heart, at a distance to behold and bemoan affronts to her sovereign . . . . Out march all the valiant men in the city in the night over Jordan: Saul and his sons corpses they took down from Bethshan, bring them home, burn the flesh, and bury the bones thereof under a tree neare the city (pp. 80-82).

With this we may advantageously combine the following extract

---

<sup>1</sup> Here Fuller is in error. The Jabbok is considerably to the south.

from Dr. Tristram's "Land of Israel." It helps us to combine through the eye the two opposite and widely-separated sides of the Jordan Valley, just as the story of the men of Jabesh-Gilead helps us to combine them in another way. The author of this excellent and important book was for the moment on a circuitous route from Mount Carmel to Mount Gerizim; and a slight *détour* to Bethshan brought him full in view of the Jordan Valley and the mountains beyond:—

Climbing to the summit, we enjoyed the finest panorama, next to Gerizim, which Central Palestine affords, and spent half an hour in examining it with delight. Spread at our feet, yet far below us, the vast plain of Jordan stretched north and south, as far as the eye could reach; and in its centre we might trace the strangely tortuous course of the river, marked by a ribbon of dark shrubs and oleanders, through the otherwise treeless plain. Facing us, nearly ten miles to the north, was the gorge of the Hieromax; nearly opposite was a long narrow plateau, raised a few hundred feet above the Ghor, on the edge of which the glass enabled us to descry the ruins of Tubaket Fahil, the ancient Pella. Gradually sloping back to the west of its lofty plateau, picturesquely dotted with oaks, but nowhere in a forest mass, and scarred by the ravine of the Yâbis and the Seklab, stretched the whole front of Gilead. . . . Through a thin haze we could detect the blue outline of the supposed Nebo, and the mountains of Moab in a long ridge fringing the Dead Sea, the view of which was shut out by a spur projecting from the west. . . . How clearly the details of the sad end of Saul were recalled, as we stood on this spot! There was the slope of Gilboa, on which his army was encamped before the battle. Round that hill he slunk by night, conscience-stricken, to visit the witch of Endor. Hither, as being a Canaanitish fortress, the Philistines most naturally brought the trophies of the royal slain, and hung them up just by this wall. Across the ford by the Yâbis, and across that plain below us, the gallant men of Jabesh-Gilead hurried on their long night's march to stop the indignity offered to Israel, and to take down the bodies of the king and their sons (pp. 493, 494).

Gilead and Moab—these two regions, with Bashan to the north, sum up that great mountain background to Palestine, within which were settled the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manassch. In one sense, indeed, it is separate from the Holy Land; but it is essential to our contemplation of it, both historically, and geographically also, because it is like the grand framework of the picture before us. This system of lofty table-land is divided very definitely by the Wady of the Jabbok, which opens upon the Ghor from the east, at about two-thirds of the distance from the Sea of Tiberias to the Dead Sea. This gorge of the Jabbok is as remarkable physically as it is memorable for the meeting of Esau and Jacob, and for the division which it made between the kingdoms of Sihon and Og. It is distinctly seen, for instance, from Bethel, which is twelve miles

due north of Jerusalem. But still more worthy of attention is another valley, which opens eastwards further to the south.

Here we are in the plain of Shittim, the scene of the last encampment of the Israelites during the life of Moses. On the northern side of this valley, far inland, is Rabbath-Ammon, which saw the crisis of David's crime in the death of Uriah. Opposite to it, on the southern side, is Heshbon, the capital of Sihon, and on the boundary line between the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Nearer to the Dead Sea, on the south of this valley, are those heights of Nebo, or Pisgah, which must attract the eager regard of every Bible student. It was a happy thought of Fuller to entitle his book a "Pisgah Sight of Palestine." The survey of the nearer plain by Balaam, and the death of Moses after his wistful survey of the distant Promised Land, invest these mountain heights with a romance and mystery quite unique. It seems, that we owe to De Saulcy the first exact identification of Mount Nebo. Two charges are brought against this traveller; first, that by his lavish expenditure of money he made the condition of all future travellers difficult; and, secondly, that he was not accurate in his statements. However this may be, there seems no reason to doubt what he tells us of his experience here. While passing along the valley, he asked one of his escort the name of a mountain which was conspicuously in view; and he was startled by the reply, which gave the name as "Djebel-Nebâ." Thus, he says, through the chance word of an Arab, he had made "the most charming—most unexpected of discoveries." The point is south-west from Rabbath-Ammon, and nearly west from Heshbon. Accompanying the description is a very clear map, showing the position of those places in relation to the head of the lake.<sup>1</sup>

Canon Tristram ascended these heights, and "gazed on a prospect on which it has been permitted to few European eyes to feast." He says that "on these brows overlooking the mouth of the Jordan, over against Jericho, every condition is met, both for the Pisgah of Balaam and of Moses." The day was clear, yet not fully clear. Looking from "the lower Nebbah," the Dead Sea lay like a long strip of molten metal, as though poured from some deep cavity beneath their feet. A break in the western ridge beyond the lake, and a green spot below, revealed Engedi. Further on, the ridge of Hebron was traced, as it lifted gradually from the south-west, as far as Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Though all the familiar points in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem were at once identified, the actual buildings of the city could not be seen;

---

<sup>1</sup> The map is clear. How far it is accurate, we shall know more fully when the English survey of the land beyond Jordan, under the Palestine Exploration Fund, is completed.

and there must have been a slight haze, as the point where the travellers stood is visible from the roof of the English Church. "There was the Mount of Olives, with the church at its top, the gap in the hill leading up from Jericho, and the rounded heights of Benjamin on its other side." Beyond, to the north-west, "the eye rested on Gerizim's rounded top; and, further still, opened the plain of Esdraelon, the shoulder of Carmel, or some other intervening height, just showing to the right of Gerizim; while the faint and distinct bluish haze beyond it suggested the sea—the utmost sea. Snowy Hermon's top was mantled in the cloud, and Lebanon's highest range must have been shut behind it." Even in a traveller's moments of highest satisfaction there is commonly some disappointment.

In another part of Canon Tristram's book we find a description of the entry of the Jordan into its desolate final home, the Dead Sea. We have been made familiar by many authors and painters with the general nature of the scene—its briny ooze and mud—its trunks of trees—its utter desolation. But the scientific habit of Dr. Tristram's mind gives to his writing certain valuable characteristics which we do not find elsewhere. For instance, he remarks that among those trunks of trees "a very large proportion were palms, many with their roots entire;" and he conceives that we have in this place, perhaps, "the wreck of centuries, accumulating from the days when the City of Palm Trees extended its groves to the edge of the river." He proceeds thus:—

We were fortunate, so far as some questions respecting the Dead Sea are concerned, in visiting it at this time of the year, since no writer has observed it accurately during the winter floods. . . . The line of sticks and rubbish left by last week's flood was exactly five feet above the water-line to-day; and, from all appearance, that had been the highest point reached during the present season. But the Jordan several miles above had risen at least fourteen feet, and the plain through which we had just passed had been inundated twenty feet above the actual water-line. . . . We walked eastward along the edge of the lake with some difficulty, till we reached the mouth of the Jordan. Strange indeed is the contrast between the romantic birth of that mysterious stream, under the beautiful cliffs of Baneas, cradled in the lovely recesses of Hermon, and its ignoble, sewer-like exit into its final home. The volume of water it poured in at present was very great; and its turbid flood might be distinctly traced by its coffee-brown colour for a mile and a half into the lake, the clearness and purity of whose waters—in colour at least—is unequalled. . . . The embouchure of the Jordan does not exhibit the usual characteristics of the outfall of a southern stream. No rich belt of trees or verdant tangle here fringe its bed. The river rushes violently between its narrow banks, through a muddy, naked plain, sparsely covered with salicornias, and here and there bordered by stunted tamarisks to the

very edge of the sea. . . . Beyond the mouth of the river the whole bay was covered with trees and heaps of reeds and canes, with tangled masses of roots and branches floating calmly on the surface. This collection of "snags and sawyers" recalls the appearance of the delta of an American river; and there must be a very rapid deposition of mud silting up the top of the basin. The process is slow, owing to the enormous depth of the fissure at this end; but the operation is sufficiently palpable to explain the formation of the whole lower Ghor, and how the older terrace level has been gradually washed down, and then deposited, partly here, and partly at the southernmost extremity of the lake (pp. 242-244).

We could have no more instructive companion than the same writer in taking our leave of the Jordan valley, and passing over the sites of Gilgal and Jericho towards the ascent to Jerusalem. The beautiful park-like and woodland scenery round the place where the City of Palm Trees once stood (the last of the palm trees of Jericho is now gone) has often been described: but there is a peculiar pleasure in going through it in the company of a naturalist. The ornithology of Dr. Tristram is one of his strong points. He is in love with all the birds around him, though he cruelly shoots them down. If he is on the Acropolis of Beisan, and a black kite comes to share his meal, he kills it. When he is examining the entrance of the Jordan into the Dead Sea, where cormorants are sitting on the snags, and herons fishing from them, and white gulls from time to time sailing down the stream, a fine golden eagle comes pouncing in pursuit of them, and he "gives him a couple of cartridges," when he provokingly falls in the land of Moab. When he was waiting outside the walls of Jerusalem, drenched and hungry, on his dripping steed, at a time when the gates were shut, a black-headed jay tried his patience too much, when, with the familiarity of a sparrow, it lighted under the Damascus gate; and that bird, too, "secured its niche among his *souvenirs* of the Holy Land." In the woodland region near Jericho Dr. Tristram obtained twenty-five new species of birds to add to his collection. Among them he names the Palestine nightingale, the Indian blue kingfisher, the Egyptian turtle-dove; the sun-bird, hitherto only known in Europe by one specimen; the long-tailed wren, Galilean swifts, and the wildest of rock doves in swarms. Beyond Jericho, and in the wild region near Jerusalem, he finds a new desert lark, with rich russet-red plumage and varied note, and the beautiful little partridge of the Dead Sea basin, with bright orange legs and beak, and its flanks striped with black, white, and chestnut—the very bird that David must have had before his eye when he compared himself to a partridge hunted in the mountains.

The last region, by which we quit the Jordan Valley, is as different as possible, in its bare and rugged desolation, worn by winter torrents and burning with summer heats, from the cheerful district round the site of Jericho. It is the steep road by which the Samaritan in the parable "went down." It is the steep road by which the Saviour "went up," in the days immediately before the Crucifixion, to Bethany and the Mount of Olives.

J. S. HOWSON.

---

ART. V.—PROFESSOR ROBERTSON SMITH ON THE  
PENTATEUCH.<sup>1</sup>

**A** WISE teacher has recorded his conviction that increase of knowledge brings with it an increased burden of sorrow. Study raises difficulties. Whenever we penetrate beneath the surface of a question, whether it relate to things physical, social or philosophical, we meet with what is inscrutable, if not harassing; and where moral and spiritual interests are concerned, our sensibilities are frequently jarred by discoveries which threaten to undermine the deepest convictions of our soul. A man will usually think twice before making these perplexities known even to his friends; whilst to publish them to an unlearned and unthinking world would be the height of cruelty and immorality. He will give his mind time to recover its balance, letting the activities of social life and industry exert their due claim upon him, and refusing to admit as an element of his belief any principle which does not work in with the requirements of daily life. A visit to the cottage of a poor man, or to the bedside of a dying Christian, will often dissipate the lowering clouds with which speculation and criticism have overshadowed the spirit; and a renewed appeal to the Father who seeth in secret has restored the weary thinker to peace.

There are times, however, when the student must speak out, and when the conclusions to which he has been brought after long and anxious research must be made known to others. All knowledge ought to be public property. If a man has ascertained, for example, that the earth goes round the sun, and not the sun round the earth, the fact ought to be published abroad; similarly, if it were ascertained beyond the possibility of a doubt that the writings usually ascribed to Herodotus were the work

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church." By W. Robertson Smith. Black.