

what a world of meaning and hope would lie in the assurance that One in our nature did once live free from bondage to the flesh, even in its sublimated forms, as befitted One from above, who yet represented the true destiny of His fellows. But has such really been? "Come and see," reply the gospels: "come with your deepened sense that He who could live a perfect life amid imperfect, earthy men, must be superhuman, supernatural, not from below, but from above." If then men come, and read His life through their own inmost consciences, and find Him like as man, yet as the Perfect all unlike, what may be the issue? May they not ask Him, saying, "Perfect in life, august yet humble, what hast Thou out of the perfect mirror of Thy heart to tell us of Thy Source, Thy Whence"? And He make answer: "From the Father, from My Father and your Father; I know My Whence and Whither." And may not His self-witness, which yet is of Another, convince the earnest heart and kindle "faith" that shall brighten to the perfect day?

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THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY LAND.

IV. JUDÆA.

HAVING gone round about Judæa, and marked well her bulwarks,¹ we may now draw some conclusions as to the exact measure of her strength. Judæa has been called impregnable, but, as we must have seen, the adjective exaggerates. To the north she has no frontier; her southern border offers but few obstacles after the desert is passed; with all their difficulties, her eastern and western walls

¹ Expositor for April. The Central Range and the Borders of Judæa.

have been carried again and again; and even the dry and intricate wilderness, to which her defenders have more than once retired, has been rifled to its furthest recesses. Judæa, in fact, has been overrun as often as England.

And yet, like England, Judæa, though not impregnable, has all the advantages of insularity. It is singular how much of an island this inland province really is. With the gulf of the Arabah to the east, with the desert to the south, and lifted high and unattractive above the line of traffic that sweeps past her on the west, Judæa is separated as much as by water from the two great continents, to both of which she otherwise belongs. So open at many points, the land is yet sufficiently unpromising and sufficiently remote to keep unprovoked foreigners away. Thus Judæa was designed to produce in her inhabitants the sense of seclusion and security, though not to such a degree as to relieve them from the attractions of the great world, which throbbed closely past, or to relax in them those habits of discipline, vigilance and valour, which are the necessary elements of a nation's character. In the position of Judæa there was not enough to tempt her people to put their confidence in herself; but there was enough to encourage them to the defence of their freedom and a strenuous life.¹ And while the isolation of their land was sufficient to confirm the truth of their calling to a discipline and a destiny, separate from other peoples, it was not so complete as to keep them in barbarian ignorance of the great world, or to release them from those temptations to mix with the world, in meeting which their discipline and their destiny could alone be realised.

All this receives exact illustration from both Psalmists and Prophets. They may rejoice in the fertility of their

¹ In the *Least of all Lands*, Principal Miller has some very valuable remarks upon the influence of the physical geography of Palestine upon the character of the people.

land, but they never boast of its strength. On the contrary, of the real measure of the latter they show a singularly sagacious appreciation. Thus, Isaiah's fervid faith in Zion's inviolableness does not blind him to the openness of Judah's northern entrance: it is in one of his passages of warmest exultation about Zion that he describes the easy advance of the Assyrian to her walls.¹ Both he and other prophets frequently recognise how swiftly the great military Powers will overrun Judah; and when they except Jerusalem from the consequences, it is not because of her natural strength, but by their faith in the direct intervention of God Himself. So at last it happened. In the great crisis of her history, the invasion by Sennacherib, Judah was saved, as England was saved from the Armada, neither by the strength of her bulwarks, for they had all been burst, nor by the valour of her men, for the heart had gone from them, but because, apart from human help, God Himself crushed her insolent foes in the moment of their triumph.² The most concise expression of this is found in the forty-eighth Psalm, where, though *beautiful for situation is Mount Zion in the sides of the north*,³ and *established for ever*, it is God Himself who *is known in her palaces for a refuge*; and when the writer has *walked about Zion and gone round about her, and told the towers thereof, marked well her bulwarks and considered her palaces*, it is yet not in all these that he triumphs, but this is the result of his survey: *this God is our God for ever and ever, He will be our Guide even unto death*. Judah was not impregnable, but she was better—she was in charge of an invincible Providence.

With their admission of the weakness of Judah's position, there runs through the prophets an appreciation of her unattractiveness, and that leads them, and especially Isaiah,

¹ Isaiah x. 32. See EXPOSITOR for April, p. 316.

² 2 Kings xviii., xix.; Isaiah xxxiii., xxxvii.

³ Probably a phrase for the sacredness and inviolableness of its site.

to insist that under God her security lies in this and in her people's contentment with this. Though they recognise how vulnerable the land is, the prophets maintain that she will be left alone if her people are quiet upon her, and if her statesmen avoid intrigue with the great foreign powers. To the kings of Israel, to Ahaz, to Hezekiah's counsellors, to Josiah, the same warnings are given: ¹ *Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses.* ² *Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses and trust in chariots. In returning and rest shall ye be saved: in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.* ³

Thus we see how the physical geography of Palestine not only makes clear such subordinate things as the campaigns and migrations of the Old Testament, but signalises the providence of God, the doctrine of His prophets, and the character He demanded from His people. It was a great lesson the Spirit taught Israel, that no people dwells secure apart from God, from character, from commonsense. But the land was the illustration and enforcement of this lesson. Judæa proved, but did not exhaust, nor tempt men to feel that she exhausted, the will and power of God for their salvation. As the writer of the Hundred and Twenty-first Psalm feels, her hills were not the answer to, but the provocation of, the question, *Whence cometh my help?* and Jehovah Himself was the answer. As for her prophets, a great part of their sagacity is but the true appreciation of her position. And as for the character of her people, while she gave them room to be free and to worship God, and offered no inducement to them to put herself in His place, she did not wholly shut them off from danger or temptation, for without danger and temptation it is impossible that a nation's character should be strong.

¹ Ahaz, cf. 2 Kings xvi. with Isaiah vii.

² Hosea xiv. 3, cf. xii. 1.

³ Isaiah xxxi. 1, xxx. 15.

From the borders and bulwarks of Judæa we pass to survey the plateau in which the main part of her consists. This plateau, as I have already said, is little more than thirty-five miles long, reckoning from Bethel to the group of cities south of Hebron—Carmel, Maon, Esstemoh, Juttah, Zanoah, and Kiriath-sepher. The breadth varies from fourteen to seventeen miles, reckoning from the western edge of the plateau above the valley which separates it from the Shephelah, to where on the east the level drops below 1,700 feet and into desert.

A large part of this plateau consists of level moors, treeless and stony, upon which rough scrub and thistle, reinforced by a few dwarf oaks, contend with multitudes of boulders, and the limestone, as if impatient of the thin presence of soil, breaks out into bare scalps and prominences. Some patches there are of cultivation, but though the grain springs bravely from them, they seem more beds of shingle than of soil. The only other signs of life, besides the wild bee, are flocks of sheep, or goats, or a few cattle, cropping far apart in melancholy proof of the scantiness of the herbage. There is no water: no tarns breaking into streams enliven the landscape as upon even the most desolate moors of our north, but at noon the cattle go down by dusty paths to some silent cistern within the glaring walls of a gorge. Where the plateau rolls, the shadeless slopes are for the most part divided between brown scrub and grey rock; the hollows are stony fields traversed by torrent beds of dirty boulders and gashed clay. Where the plateau breaks into ridge and glen, the ridge is often crowned by a village, the greystone walls and mud roofs looking from the distance like a mere outcrop of the rock; yet round them, or below in the glen, there will be olive-groves, figs and perhaps a few terraces of vines. Some of these breaks in the tableland are very rich in vegetation, as at Bethany, the Valley of Hinnom, the Gardens of Solomon, and other spots round

Bethlehem, and especially in the neighbourhood of Hebron, the famous Vale of Eshcol, or "the Vine Cluster." There, indeed, are verdure and shade as much as heart could wish. With these exceptions to the general character of the hill-country of Judæa, goes another of a different kind. Between Hebron and the wilderness there are nine miles by three of plateau, where Maon, Ziph and the Judæan Carmel stood, where David hid himself in the *thicket*¹ and the farms of Nabal lay.² Here the soil is almost free from stones, and the red and green fields, broken by a few heathy mounds, might be a scene of upland agriculture in our own country.

But the prevailing impression of Judæa is of stone—the dry torrent beds, the paths as stony, the heaps and dykes of stones gathered from the fields, the fields as stony still, the moors strewn with boulders, the obtrusive scalps and ribs of the hills. In the more desolate parts, which had otherwise been covered by scrub, this impression is increased by the ruins of ancient cultivation—cairns, terrace-walls, and vineyard towers.

Now if you add to this bareness two other deficiencies of feature, you complete that dreariness which so many bring away as their chief memory of Judæa. On all her stony tableland the only gleams of water are the few pools at Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron; and I do not suppose that from Beersheba to Bethel there are more than six or seven tiny rills. There is no lake, river, or cascade. No water to soothe the eye, there are also no great hills to lift it. There is no edge or character upon the horizon. From the western boundary of the plateau, of course, you see the blue ocean with its border of broken gold, and from the eastern boundary the Moab Hills, that change their colours all day long above the changeless blue of the Dead Sea. But in the centre of the hill country, there is nothing to

¹ 1 Sam. xxiii. 15.

² Id. xxiv.

look to past the featureless roll of the moorland, and the low blunt hills with the flat-roofed villages upon them.

Was the land always like this? For answer, we have three portraits of ancient Judah. The first is perhaps the most voluptuous picture in the Old Testament.¹

*Binding to the vine his foal
And to the choice vine his ass's colt,
He hath washed in wine his raiment,
And in the blood of the grape his vesture :
—Heavy in the eyes from wine,
And white of teeth from milk.*

This might be the portrait of a Bacchus breaking from the vineyards of Sicily; but of Judah we can scarcely believe it, as we stand in his land to-day. And yet on those long, dry slopes with their ruined terraces—no barer after all than the banks of the Rhine in early spring—and in the rich glens around Hebron and Bethlehem, where the vine has been restored, we perceive still the possibilities of such a portrait. *Heavy in the eyes from wine, and he hath washed in wine his raiment*: but Judah now has no eyes, and his raiment is in rags. The landscape of to-day is liker the second portrait—that drawn by Isaiah—of what Judah should be after his enemies had stripped him. *In that day shall the Lord shave, with a razor that is hired, the head and the hair of the feet and the beard. And it shall be in that day, a man shall nourish a young cow and a couple of sheep; and it shall be, because of the abundance of the making of milk, he shall eat butter,—for butter and honey shall all eat, that is left in the midst of the land. And it shall be in that day, that every place in which there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings—for briars and for thorns shall it be. . . . And all the hills that were digged with the mattock, thou shalt not come thither for fear of briars and*

¹ Gen. xli. 8-12.

thorns ; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen and for the treading of sheep.¹ With the exceptions named above, this is exactly the Judah of to-day. But we have a third portrait, by the prophet Jeremiah,² of what Judah should be after the Restoration from Exile, and in this it is remarkable that no reversion is promised to a high state of cultivation, with olives and vines as the luxuriant features of the country, but that her permanent wealth and blessing are conceived as pastoral. . . . *For I will bring again the captivity of the land as in the beginning, saith Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of Hosts: Again shall there be in this place—the Desolate, without man or even beast—and in all its cities, the habitation of shepherds couching their flocks. In the cities of the Mountain,—or Hill-Country,—of Judah, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the suburbs of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, again shall the flocks pass upon the hands of him that telleth them, saith Jehovah.* Now, though other prospects of the restoration of Judah include husbandry and vine culture,³ and though the Jews after the Exile speak of their property as vineyards, oliveyards and cornland, along with sheep,⁴ yet the prevailing aspect of Judah is pastoral, and the fulfilment of Jacob's luscious blessing must be sought for in the few fruitful

¹ Isa. vii. 20 ff.

² Jeremiah xxxiii. 12–13. The passage begins with ver. 10.

³ Micah iv. 4 and 1 Kings iv. 25 give the ideal state, as *every man under his own vine and fig-tree*. Jeremiah xxxi. 24, in his picture of the future, places husbandmen before *them that go forth with flocks*. Habakkuk puts vines, figs, and olives before flocks, iii. 17. Isaiah lxxv. 10 says, *Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to couch for My people that have sought Me*; but in ver. 21, *they shall plant vineyards, cf. Isaiah lxi. 5, strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and vinedressers.*

⁴ Nehemiah v. Haggai speaks only of husbandry. Malachi sees both flocks and vines. Joel catalogues corn, wine and oil, figs, pomegranates, palms, and apples (chap. i.). Cattle and herds with him are in the background. New wine and milk are the blessings of the future, iii. 18.

corners of the land, and especially at Hebron, which, as Judah's first political centre, would in the time of her supremacy be the obvious model for the nation's ideal figure.¹

But this has already brought us to the first of those three features of Judæa's geography, which are so significant in her history: her pastoral character; her neighbourhood to the desert; her unsuitableness for the growth of a great city.

1. If, as we have seen, the prevailing character of Judæa be pastoral, with husbandry only incidental to her life, it is not surprising that the forms which have impressed both her history and religion upon the world should be those of the pastoral habit. Her origin; more than once her freedom and power of political recuperation; more than once her prophecy; her images of God, and her sweetest poetry of the spiritual life, have been derived from this source. It is the stateliest shepherds of all time that the dawn of history reveals upon her fields: men not sprung from her own remote conditions, nor confined to them, but moving across the world in converse with great empires, and bringing down from Heaven truths sublime and universal to wed with the simple habits of her life. These were the patriarchs of the nation. The founder of its one dynasty, and the first of its literary prophets, were also *taken from following the flocks*.² The king and every true leader of men was called a shepherd. Jehovah was the Shepherd of His people, and they the sheep of His pasture. It was in Judæa that Christ called Himself the Good Shepherd,—as it was in Judæa also, that, taking the other great feature of her life, He said He was the True Vine.³

¹ One is tempted to ask whether any inference as to the date of Gen. xlix. can be drawn from its representation of Judah as chiefly a wine-growing country; but I do not think any such inference would be at all trustworthy, as may be seen from a comparison of the passages cited in the above notes.

² 2 Sam. vii. 8; Amos vii. 15.

³ Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, xiii.

Judæa is, perhaps, as good ground as is in all the East for observing the grandeur, the indispensableness of the shepherd's character. An Eastern pasture is very different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar at home. It is vast and often practically boundless; it has to be extensive, for the greater part of it is barren—in fact the Hebrew word for desert and for pasture is the same. The mass of it consists of dry stony soil, out of which, for a great part of the year, the sun has sucked all life. In this monotony the breaks are few, and consist of paths more or less fitful, gorges or thickets where wild beasts lurk, and oases of pleasant grass and water. Now in such a landscape of mirage, illusive paths, lurking terrors, and infrequent herbage, it is evident that the person and character of the shepherd must mean a great deal more to the sheep than it means to sheep with us. With us a flock of sheep without a shepherd is a common experience: every day we may see them left to themselves in a secure field, or scattered over the side of a hill, with a far-traveling wire fence to keep them from straying. But I do not remember ever to have seen in the East a flock of sheep without a shepherd. On such a landscape as Judæa he and his character are indispensable. He must be vigilant and sleepless, a man who knows his ground from horizon to horizon, and who knows every one of his sheep: the shelter as well as the guide of his flock, and ready every day to risk his life for them.

On some high, desolate moor, across which at night the hyænas howl, as you meet him, sleepless, weather-beaten, supple, far-sighted, armed, with his sheep around him, you understand why the shepherd of Judæa sprang so often to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of Providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice.

Sometimes we enjoyed our noonday rest beside one of

those Judæan wells, to which three or four shepherds come down with their flocks. The flocks mixed with each other, and we would wonder how each shepherd could get his own again. But after the watering and the playing were over, the shepherds one by one went up different sides of the valley, and each called out his peculiar call. And the sheep of each drew out of the crowd to their own shepherd, and so the flocks passed away as orderly as they had come. *The shepherd of the sheep . . . when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice, and a stranger will they not follow. I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of mine.*

2. With the pastoral character of the hill-country of Judæa we may take its neighbourhood to the desert—the wilderness of Judæa. In the Old Testament this land is called The Jeshimon, a word meaning *devastation*, and no term could better suit its haggard and crumbling appearance. It covers some thirty-five miles by eleven. We came upon it from Maon. The cultivated land to the west of Hebron sinks quickly to rolling hills and waterless vales, covered by broom and grass, across which it took us all forenoon to ride. The wells are very few, and almost all reservoirs of rainwater, jealously guarded through the summer by their Arab owners. For an hour or two more we rode up and down steep ridges, each barer than the preceding, and then descended rocky slopes to a wide plain, where we left behind the last brown grass and thistle—the last flock of goats we had passed two hours before. Short bushes, thorns, and succulent creepers were all that relieved the brown and yellow bareness of the crumbling limestone and scattered shingle and sand. The strata were contorted; ridges ran in all directions; distant hills to north and south looked like gigantic dustheaps; those near we could see to be torn as if by waterspouts. When we were not stepping

on detritus the limestone was blistered and peeling. Often the ground sounded hollow; sometimes rock and sand slipped in large quantity from the tread of the horses; sometimes the living rock was bare and jagged, especially in the frequent gullies that therefore glared and beat with heat like furnaces. Far to the east ran the Moab hills, and in front of them we got glimpses of the Dead Sea, the deep blue a most refreshing sight across the desert foreground. So for two hours we rode, till the sea burst upon us in all its length, and this chaos which we had traversed tumbled and broke down twelve hundred feet of limestone, flint and marl,—craggs, corries and precipices,—to the broad beach of the water. Such is Jeshimon, the wilderness of Judæa. It carries the violence and desolation of the Dead Sea valley right up to the heart of the country—to the roots of the Mount of Olives, to within two hours of the gates of Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

When you realise that this howling waste came within reach of nearly every Jewish child; when you climb the Mount of Olives, or any hill about Bethlehem or the hill of Tekoa, and looking east see those fifteen miles of chaos, sinking to a stretch of the Dead Sea—you begin to understand the influence of the desert on Jewish imagination and literature. It gave the Jew, as it gives the foreigner of to-day, the sense of living next door to doom; the sense of how narrow is the border between life and death; the awe of the power of God, who can make contiguous regions so opposite in character. *He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and watersprings into a thirsty ground.* The desert is always in face of the prophets, and its howling of beasts and its dry sand blow mournfully across their pages the foreboding of judgment.

But this is not the only influence of the desert. Meteoric effects are nowhere in Palestine so simple or so brilliant. And there is the annual miracle, when, after the winter

rains, even these wastes take on a glorious green. Hence the sudden rushes of light and life across the prophet's vision; it is from the desert that he mostly borrows his imagery of the creative, instantaneous Divine grace. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them: the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.*

Two, at least, of the prophets were born in face of the wilderness of Judah,—Amos and Jeremiah,—and on both it has left its fascination. Amos lived to the south of Jerusalem, at Tekoa. No one can read his book without feeling that he haunted heights and lived in the face of very wide horizons. But from Tekoa you see the exact scenery of his visions. The slopes on which Amos herded his cattle show the mass of desert hills with their tops *below* the spectator, and therefore displaying every meteoric effect in a way they could not have done had he been obliged to look *up* to them:—the cold wind that blows off them after sunset; through a gap the Dead Sea with its heavy mists; beyond the gulf the range of Moab cold and grey, till the sun leaps from behind its barrier, and in a moment the world of hill-tops below Tekoa is flooded with light. *Lo He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought; that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth on the high places of the earth, Jehovah, God of Hosts is His name; that maketh the Seven Stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out on the face of the earth—Jehovah is His name.*

Jeremiah grew up at Anathoth, a little to the north-east of Jerusalem, across Scopus and over a deep valley. It is the last village eastward, and from it the land breaks and falls away in desert hills to the north end of the Dead Sea. The vision of that maze of hills was burnt into the prophet's mind in contrast with the clear, ordered word of God. O

generation, see ye the word of the Lord: *Have I been a wilderness unto Israel, a land of darkness?*¹ He had lived in face of the scorching desert air—*A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people, not to fan nor to cleanse.* And in face of the chaotic prospect, he described judgment in these terms: *I beheld the earth, and lo it was without form and void . . . I beheld, and lo the fruitful place was a wilderness . . . at the presence of Jehovah, by His fierce anger.*²

The wilderness of Judæa played also a great part in her history as the refuge of political fugitives and religious solitaries—a part which it still continues. The story of Saul's hunt after David, and David's narrow escapes, becomes very vivid among those tossed and broken hills, where the valleys are all so alike, and large bodies of men may camp near each other without knowing it. Ambushes are everywhere possible, and alarms pass rapidly across the bare and silent hills. You may travel for hours and feel as solitary as at sea without a sail in sight, but if you are in search of any one, your guide's signal will make men leap from slopes that did not seem to shelter a rabbit; and if you are suspected, your passage may be stopped by a dozen men, as if they had sprung from the earth.

Of Engedi and of Masada—after Jerusalem fell, the last retreat of the Zealots, to which the Romans followed them—there is no room in this paper to speak.

But we cannot pass from the wilderness of Judæa without remembering two holier events of which it was the scene. Here John was prepared for his austere mission, and found his figures of judgment. Here you understand his description of his preaching—like a desert fire when the brown grass and thorns on the more fertile portions will blaze for miles, and the unclean reptiles creep out of their holes before its heat: *O generation of vipers, who hath taught*

¹ Jer. ii. 31.

² Jer. iv. 11, 23, 26.

you to flee from the wrath to come? And here our Lord suffered His Temptation. Straightway the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness. For hours as you travel across these hills you may feel no sign of life, except the scorpions and vipers which your passage startles, in the distance a few wild goats or gazelles, and at night the wailing of the jackal and the hyæna's howl. He was alone with the wild beasts.

3. But the greatest fact with which Judæa impresses you, is her unsuitableness for the growth of a great city. There is no harbour, no river, no trunk road, no convenient market for the nations on either side. In their commerce with each other, these pass by Judæa, finding their emporiums in the cities of Philistia, or, as of old, at Petra and Bosra on the east of the Jordan. Gaza has outdone Hebron as the port of the desert. Jerusalem is no match for Shechem in fertility or convenience of site. The whole land stands aloof, waterless, on the road to nowhere. There are none of the natural conditions of a great city.

And yet it was here that She arose who more than Athens and more than Rome, taught the nations civic virtue, and gave her name to the ideal city men are ever striving to build on earth, to the City of God that shall one day descend from heaven—the New Jerusalem. Her builder was not nature nor the wisdom of men; but the Word of God, by her prophets, laid her eternal foundations in justice and reared her walls in her people's faith in God.

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