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Alhammneh

Lake Tiberias, Syria

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Dear friends!

Biblical students believe that at least in two instances the name of this valley is recorded in the old Testament. First it is in the second Chronicles chapter 8. verse 3rd and 4th:-

"And Solomon went to Hamath - Zobah, and prevailed against it. And he built Tadmor (Palmyra, in and around Damascus) in the wilderness, and all the store cities which he built in Hamath."

Likewise in the book of Joshua chapter 19th verse 35th it is mentioned as one of the many fenced cities:-

"And the fenced cities are Liddin, Ler, and Hamath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth."

All through this vast country there are old remains of an ancient civilization. For example the situation of Beisan (two stations above this) is very remarkable, commanding a view of the Jordan valley. The ruins are very extensive, occupying an area of over two miles. Amongst them are the remains of a castle, a temple with standing columns, a theatre, a Roman arch, and all around are traces of a massive wall. The history of Beth-shan or

Beth-shan (House of Quiet), the ancient name of Beisân, is full of interest. The town belonged to Manasseh (1 Chron. viii. 29.), though within the original limits of Issachar (Joshua xv. 11). The Israelites ^{were} unable to drive out the Canaanites but placed them under ~~the~~ tribute (Joshua xvii. 12 13, 16). When the Philistines came to strip the slain on Mount Gilboa, after the fatal battle, they found Saul and his three sons fallen ^{on} in Mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtoroth; and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Samuel xxx. 1. 8. 10. 12). When the Scythians overran the country, it is stated by later historians that a colony established itself here and the name was changed to Seythopolis and it was a city of Decapolis, or the League of Ten cities. It was a prosperous place in the twelfth century. Finally, it was demolished by Saladin. The railway, running east, leaves to the south the beautiful plain in the center of which is the station of Beisân. The line now approaches the Jordan, not far from the ford named "Ma'kadel-el-Abareh," "The Ford of the Crossing," which Colonel Conder, supporting the theory held by Origen, supposes to be the Bethabara where John the Baptist exercised his ministry (John 1. 28). To our left as we proceed, we notice,

crowning a hill-top, the ruins of the Crusading Fortress of Belvoir, built by King Fulk in 1140, and taken by Saladin in 1182. The line now crosses the Wady Bireh, and then running north by north-west, along part of an old Roman road, passes the station of Jisr-el-Mejmaia, on the right bank of the river. The Jisr el-Mejmaia, or Bridge of Assembly, probably derived its name from an ancient market which was held in a now ruined Khan ⁽ⁱⁿⁿ⁾ not far off. The bridge is a Saracenic structure consisting of a large pointed arch flanked on either side by a smaller and lower one. A causeway supported on three other arches runs above the small side-arches to the level of the great middle one. About 3 miles N. E. of this bridge the line crosses the Yarmuk, and ^{about} five miles beyond reaches the station of Es-Semath (a light here for Tiberias, which is reached by boat crossing the lake) on the southern shore of the Lake of Galilee, having, after crossing the Yarmuk, passed on the left, first the red-tiled roofs of the Jewish Agricultural Colony of Sejrah. The view of the lake and its surroundings, as seen from Es-Semath, is magnificent. Part of Tiberias is visible, whilst Tell-Hum, or Capernaum, is clearly seen at the northern end of the lake, not far from the northern in-flow of the Jordan. On the hills

beyond we see Safed and some villages, whilst towering above all and in the distant background, is snow-crowned Hermon, whilst to the S.E. perched on a mountain-top, are ruins of Umm Keis, the Gadara of the Gospels.

Leaving Es-Semakh (699 feet below sea-level) the train proceeds for about four miles S.E. towards the mouth of Yarmuk ravine. The Yarmuk is the Hieromax of the Ancients, and not mentioned in Scriptures, though its name does occur in the Talmud. The interesting little plain, where we are camping lies just inside and beyond the narrow entrance to the great ravine. It is asserted that this enclosed plain is to the Bedouin an inviolable sanctuary or place of refuge. It is about two miles long from east to west, and about one mile width. The area is occupied by patches of the cultivated lands on the northern slope and bits of jungle, amongst which are numerous clumps of wild date palms and other sub-tropical trees and underwood, amongst which lie ruins of the ancient baths, temples, theatres, churches and tombs of Gadara, the sad relics of a civilization which once thrived here, but was put an end to by the great battle of ^{the} Yarmuk, which in A.D. 636-7, first made Mohammedanism triumphant in the Holy Land. Here are the remains of a small

Roman amphitheatre as well as of a Roman bath. The chief hot spring is found on the right bank of the river and the water in which the Master bathes every day is about 120° Fahr and is impregnated with sulphur. This region is visited every year in the spring by large numbers of sick persons and those who desire to take these hot baths.

Today while the Beloved was walking towards the bath referring to some of his historical remarks concerning this most interesting spot he said: - "Although some of the simple folks believe that these ancient monuments of civilization are built by Solomon yet there is no foundation for it. It is true that David conquered these lands and Solomon extended the boundary of his father's conquests, but there were no public buildings at that time. When Alexander the Great (in 332 B.C.) conquered the Persian Empire, the territory of the Jews became a Macedonian province. Immediately after his death (in 324 B.C.) and the ^{dividing} partition of his vast Empire between his four able generals, his ambition of the world-conquest came to naught. Syria and Palestine became the share of Seleucus. Seleucus and his successors, by conquests and wars, added year by year large territories to their dominions. In the year 205 B.C. the Seleucidae, or descendants of Seleucus had established a Kingdom of Syria, extending

from the Mediterranean to the Indus. The Capital towns were Seleucia on the Tigris and Antioch on the Euphrates. Antiochus III. the Great laid the foundation of ten prosperous colonies in as many parts of Syria and Antolia and induced many Jews, by granting them special privileges, to migrate and settle permanently in those colonies. One of the cities built by Antiochus the Great is the city of "Mokeirs" on the top of this mountain, the dilapidated buildings of which are yet witnessed by the tourists. The two springs situated in the North and South of the valley were connected with each other with a system of arches over which people walked and viewed the smiling, prosperous plain dotted with buildings of many stories and men and women busily engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or work. Where are now those Greek Kings and Roman Emperors and Queely ladies who lived in their palaces, danced in the moonlight and bathed in the hot springs of this valley? They laid the foundations of these stately buildings so deep, and they reared their walls so high that they vainly thought the hand of time ^{would} not touch them. How would they feel if their ghosts ^{could} returned and looked upon this dismal picture of complete desolation! the wild, roving Arabs pitching their tents in the ruins of those gorgeous palaces, they have become

the dung-heaps of animals and men, stables for their asses and horses! Such sights give one much thought for reflection and contemplation! Now the flood of destruction hath reached its crest. From now on there will be a period of construction. This plain will be built and will become inhabited by ^a happy people. It will not take a long time this prediction will become fulfilled!"

This morning he entered my shady house unproclaimed and sat for some time. Tea was brought in and in his holy Presence we drank the ruby contents of the glasses. He spoke with Aga Sayad Ali Afnan and wished him to hasten some work which has ~~been~~ started on the Holy Tomb of Baha-ollah. "Whether I am there or not that Blessed spot must be always in the best condition," he said.

Then he retired to his tent and after awhile asked me to join him and translate for him a few more chapters of the Book of Budha. While I was thus engaged five Arabs from Adaseysh were announced. They were sent as a delegation by the farmers to present some of their needs and complaints to the Master. They were received with true Arab courtesy and hospitality. He listened to their complaints with wonderful patience and then read their long petition. He sent them and there for the men who are the heads of the village and instructed them in the most practical, business like way, thus securing

for the peasants the required redress. Amongst other things he ^{said} ~~told~~ them:- "Consider that Abidor-Rahman Pasha receives one fourth of the entire crop and produce from the farmers in his village, Inot Koibé, just next door to you. On the other hand you are charged only on ~~per~~ tenth and nothing more. For the ~~last~~ many years, personally I have not received one cent from this village, nay rather, as you all know very well, on various occasions I have expended many thousands piastres over the improvement of the place. You must be most thankful and praise God for His Bounties. I wish that each one of you be ^{really} ~~fully~~ comfortable and happy, and that the essential means of your livelihood be always amply provided. You are my children. Mix and associate with the Parsees. They will instruct you in many lessons of agriculture. They will teach you farming along modern lines. They are most industrious and you can ameliorate your conditions, ^{and} increase your crop by watching their way. Live a virtuous, upright, honest, truthful life. Walk in the path of the righteous and do not give your ears to the froward and the transgressor. Do not sow the seed of discord and jealousy amongst yourselves. Co-operate with each other and be always quick to learn. Shun slothfulness. Be diligent in your work. Have you not read in the Koran wherein it is revealed by the Lord:-

'Those farmers who believe in God, practice virtue, and are striving in their avocation, He will open before their faces the doors of heavenly blessings'. In Haifa there is a colony of Germans. They are all Christians. They have not even one tenth of your land, but as they are faithful and persevering they have become all wealthy, because they practice intensive farming. They are ^{all} better off than your Amirs and Shikhs. Why should you not be at least like them?"

In order that this large company of men and women may have as much fresh milk as they like to have every morning and evening, four large cows and their ^{little} calves are brought to our camp. A shepherd grazes them everyday and a woman Bedouin milks them ~~in the~~ morn and eve. The Master was telling Mirza Abdorra-ouf that the woman must wash her hands with soap before she milks the cows.

Every night one or two Persians with our Arab ^{guard} footman Mahmoud sit up all through ^{the} night and walk now and then around the camp so that no thief may rob anything. In order to test them ~~whether~~ they are really wide awake or not the Beloved has been getting up for the last two nights between 2 and 5 am and call their names aloud: - "Who is there sitting? Art thou awake?"

Mirza Hadi, my roommate left today for Haifa. He did not

know whether he ^{would} ~~will~~ come back or not.

The night was very attractive, calm and beautiful. The weather was cool and the moonlight was simply divine. My solitary walk was greatly enjoyed. The Beloved took his supper with about a dozen of the Persians in ^{my} Areeshah. I abstained from any food because I was attacked by one of those periodical headaches.

A most charming Areeshah is prepared for the Master just next to mine and he occupied it this afternoon for about two hours. When I joined him and was permitted to sit down on the rug as he was doing, he said:—"Here I am! my verdant and shady arbor is next to thine, but I am afraid I will give it up in a day or two. I never keep anything for myself."

While I was thus happily enjoying his heavenly presence all alone an Arab called and somehow the question of socialistic movement in Europe and America was brought in, and the Beloved gave a clear exposition of the demands of the labor socialists, the useful results of the strikes and the constant clash between the Capitalists and workers.

Then he dictated a very eloquent Arab Tablet and the interview was brought to a close.

"Let love and amity be the musical notes of your lives; joy and fragrance the harmonies of your hearts; sincerity and devotion the clarions of your souls" was his advice to a Turk.