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Bible gives data of the seasons that fit in with much greater accuracy with the minimum time of 11 days given in Deut. i, 2.

Numbers x, 11, gives the date that the Israelites started from Mount Sinai as the 20th day of Zif, the second month of the Jewish year. If we take the minimum allowance for the time of the return of the spies, viz. :—11 days for the journey from Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea, and 40 days for the duration of the reconnaissance (Numbers xiii, 25)—we reach the date of the 12th of Tammuz. On the other hand, if we allow four months for the journey, and forty days for the reconnaissance, the spies would not have returned until the beginning of the month of Bul.

Now Numbers xiii, 23, states that the spies, on their return, brought from the Valley of Eshcol a cluster of grapes which they bore between two on a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and the figs. A reference to the Calendar will show that the earlier date of Tammuz is much more suitable to this narrative than the month of Bul. In the former month we are told that various fruits are ripe (in the previous month, Sivan, the grapes begin to ripen), and the country becomes parched and dry, the Bedouin being driven from the valleys to feed their flocks on the mountain pastures. In the month Bul, on the other hand, ploughing and seed-time would have commenced, and the rains be well begun, while the grapes would have entirely disappeared from the greater part of the country. True we are told that on the hills the seasons are about a month later than those given in the Calendar, but then the seasons in the valleys are stated to have been one and a half months earlier, and we are told the grapes came from the *valley* of Eshcol.

Again, we have the report of the spies (Numbers xiii, 27), "the land floweth with milk and honey." Honey, we are told in the Calendar, is collected in the months of Sivan and Tammuz, in the Jordan Valley; whereas after the latter month the country is parched and dry, and milk would be by no means plentiful.

December 22nd, 1895.

REMARKS ON THE DESERTS OF THE HOLY LAND.

By J. G. O. TEPPER, F.L.S.

IN reading some of the back numbers of the *Quarterly Statement*, I find that the writers disagree as to the route taken by the Israelites; one of the chief objections to particular ones being, that such a tract could not have furnished sustenance for man and beast.

This objection would be a very conclusive one, if it were not based on the assumption that those deserts (Tih, &c.) were then very like what they appear now to be, viz., devoid of vegetation and water. This, however, is by no means quite sure. Australia, notably the drier portions, affords a very striking analogy, in my opinion, how a fair,

even rich country, is by injudicious denudation of its perennial, woody vegetation, and extinction of its native fauna, gradually converted (by a handful of short-sighted people) into just such deserts as those in question, not even excluding the Sahara.

It is nearly half a century since I first knew and enjoyed this country. Ever since early boyhood I have observed and studied its nature and characteristics in every direction, from the standpoints of a mere lover of plants and animals, amateur sportsman, farmer, trader, &c., and will sum up my observations in a few words. What was then, and till within some 20 years, a beautiful garden in many parts, or else fair or rich fields, is now degenerated largely into real desert, yielding little or no crops, or grass, simply through rendering all equally bare of shrubs and trees. The same amount of rain may now fall, as then; the same alternation of moister and drier seasons occur, but it has no longer the same effect. The loose, rich surface soil has become exhausted by cropping, depasturing, and burning over, and has assumed a hard, stone-like consistency, becoming exceedingly hot and impervious in summer. The rain descending thereon cannot enter now as then, and flows off rapidly, carrying with it more and more of the little remaining fertility to sea or salt swamp. Unsavoury weeds form the main vegetation; rabbits, locusts, &c., complete the work initiated by man in his endeavour to get all he could, and as quickly as he could. In a few decades, large regions will, undoubtedly, present the same aspect as the Old World deserts, which yet were at one time smiling landscapes, peopled by innumerable small life, and yielding to the early settlers rich, or at least fair, returns. Just in a similar manner, I opine, the Old World deserts were produced; probably the forty years' wanderings of the Israelites were the very cause of those regions becoming what they are now, and have been ever since. No sane man can imagine that large and populous cities were established in hot, glowing, treeless wastes. Man made them so, no doubt, in his ignorance of God's eternal laws, and in no time so quickly as now, under the pretence of progress and science.

The only known natural way in which solar energy is arrested and converted into fertility of soil, is by means of *living* vegetation, notably the woody and perennial. Man's ways are only means of exhausting, transferring, stimulating, or preserving the original stock locally, he cannot create fertility as plants do. Hence, everywhere in hot, dry countries, he converts the paradise into desert, and calls it cultivating the ground. Why? Concentrated wholly upon his own small interest, he loses sight of the large interests of nature, of which he is a part, but not its God. History repeats itself.
