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THE WATER OF JACOB'S WELL.

By Dr. HENRY J. BAILEY.

THE subject of Jacob's Well is without doubt one of the most interesting we could have to deal with, for not only is the well itself one of the few undisputed sites in the Holy Land, but "on the brink of Jacob's Well we may stand in the very footprints of Christ" ("Twenty-one Years' Work in the Holy Land," p. 99).

In this same most interesting little volume, a veritable *multum in parvo*, we have the axiom laid down by Colonel Conder:—"When the traditions of Jew, Christian, and Moslem unite, there is strong presumption for believing that they are right. . . . No one doubts, for instance, the site of Hebron, Rachel's Tomb, and Jacob's Well." In the case of the Jacob's Well we might add that Samaritan tradition confirms the authenticity of this site, and may well be considered of the highest value, for the Samaritan community has ever clung to the locality where once their Sacred Temple stood, and to this day survives there and there alone. I am not, therefore, surprised that my notes on the quality of the water in Jacob's Well should have called forth some further suggestions upon the subject dealt with. With regard to the first of these in the January number of the *Quarterly Statement*, in which Dr. Turnbull, of Philadelphia, suggests that the woman came to the well to draw water for the toilers in the fields near by, I think this explanation of her presence there, and *at that hour*, a likely one. The early morning and evening are the usual times of resort to springs and wells for water supply, as being the times when the atmosphere is coolest for the conveyance of water (always kept cool with scrupulous care in the East), and the times when flocks and herds are watered.

Jacob's Well at the time of our Lord had long ceased to be a *necessity*, as during the times and under the circumstances in which its cautious and diplomatic founder caused it to be excavated. It would not in our Lord's time be very generally used, and if the woman came, as was suggested in my notes, to supply water for some richer persons, she would have come at the usual hours. Her presence there during the heat of the day was for some special purpose, and the supply of water to workers in the adjoining fields is a likely supposition, especially on the grounds of her being poor and dependent upon the labour of carrying water for her livelihood.

The second letter, in the same number of the *Quarterly Statement*, in which Dr. Masterman suggests the *sacred* character of the well as forming the sole reason of her presence there, I need, perhaps, scarcely point out is the usual and most natural theory, and the one mentioned

by many writers when referring to this subject. My notes as to the quality of the water in the well were given, not in dispute of this usually accepted theory, but as an interesting tradition, based upon apparently good grounds, confirming the truth of the Gospel narrative of the presence of a woman at the well at an unusual hour and for a purpose not easily appreciated, when the distance from her home and the presence of a fountain of *living* water at her very door is taken into account.

That there is an *essential* difference in the quality of the water of this well as compared with the usual supply from the numerous springs surrounding it there cannot be a doubt. In the valuable little volume mentioned above I find (p. 197), Mr. Mills, in his "Three Months' Residence at Nablus," quoted as observing, "that the well is not an *'ain*, a well of living water, but a *ber*, a cistern to hold rain water." The observations of various writers confirm this view, which well accords with the fact that for many years comparatively little water found its way into the well, as the surrounding surface has been neglected and in a ruinous state. An examination of the spot shows that the *true* mouth of the well is some distance below the surrounding surface, and was made in such a position as to ensure a large quantity of rain water finding its way into the well. The Greek custodians have lately cleared the surroundings and mouth of the well, and the immediate result, in spite of the many feet of accumulated rubbish in the well itself, is a far better and more constant supply of water. There can, therefore, be little doubt that rain water plays a large part in the supply of this well, and that the keen and accurate perceptions of the natives have long detected an *essential* difference in the quality of the water as compared with the surrounding springs.

I have no wish to weaken the arguments as to the *sacred* character of the water proving the cause of the woman's presence at the well, but would suggest, as another explanation, that she might have resorted thither during the heat of the day to supply the wants of passing travellers, who, after all, were the only likely customers for *sacred* waters. We do not find that residents usually duly appreciate the sacred waters so easily within their reach unless for some *essential* goodness!

In conclusion, I may say that the "simple explanation" of the *actual* fact of the well in that situation, as offered by Dr. Masterman, is the one and only explanation, and is given as such by many writers. Both of his suggestions have therefore been anticipated by others, *e.g.*, in the "Land of Israel," Canon Tristram remarks:—"How truly in keeping with Jacob's peace-loving character was this act of sinking a well in the plain at such an enormous cost, so near the city and its abundant springs and rills; fearing lest his sons should be brought into collision with the men of Shechem concerning that water which was far more precious than land"; and in "Tent Work in Palestine," p. 38, Colonel Conder says:—"By digging the well Jacob avoided those quarrels from which his father had suffered in the Philistine country, pursuing a policy of peace which appears generally to have distinguished his actions"; and

in Thompson's "Land and the Book," the same explanation is given in yet minuter detail.¹

BISHOPSTOKE, HANTS,

May 15th, 1897.

THE DAMASCUS RAILWAYS.

By Dr. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

FOR some two years now, two railways have been in regular working order connected with Damascus. These are the Beirût-Damascus and the Beirût-Mezerib (Hauran) lines. Though these two lines were constructed by different companies, the former by a French and the latter by a Belgian company, they have from their opening been amalgamated under the French company known as "Chemins de fer de Beyrouth-Damas-Hauran et Beredjik sur l'Euphrate." The extension to Beredjik, it is scarcely needless to remark, is not yet begun. Both railways consist of a single line on the one metre gauge and the plant is common to both. The large station at the *Meidan* end of Damascus is the starting place for trains to both Mezerib and Beirût.

¹ [The Rev. Alexander A. Body, on p. 80 of his "Christ in His Holy Land," published by the S.P.C.K. in 1897, has the following remarks on this subject:—

"With Selim el Gômri, the Syrian Deacon of Nâblus, I sat on the same Jacob's Well. We looked down into its depths, and then we lowered some lighted candles on a small frame; as they slowly descended they lit up the old stones placed there in the days of the Patriarch, and which actually were there when Jesus rested here. These very stones heard His sweet voice. 'You might wonder,' said Selim, 'why Jacob made a well here, when already there were so many springs of water in this neighbourhood. It was, I think, that he might avoid strife between his herdsmen and the men of Shechem. This would be his own well, and so none could complain.'

" 'Will you tell me,' I said to this Deacon of Nâblus, 'why the Samaritan woman came to this well, and why she came at mid-day.'

" 'I think that she was at work in the fields here. She would bring out from home in the morning some food for her dinner, and also her small jar and a long, light piece of rope. At noon she would leave her weeding for awhile and come here to drink this water, on which she may have set some special value of a medicinal or superstitious character. She belonged, I think, to El Askar, that village at the foot of Mount Ebal over yonder. That is where Sychar is said to have stood in those days.' (It is thought by some that this well (or pit) was chiefly a store for surface water, and that it contained softer water than could be found in the abounding springs of this Shechem vale)."—
ED.]