

# OUR MONTHLY.

A

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### THE THEBAN LEGION.

BY PROF. W. M. BLACKBURN.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### REFUGE.

THE desert was fearful to the people of the East, on account of its deathly influences. A shelter, a retreat, a place of refreshment was rarely to be found; but if one were found it was appreciated by the traveler, exposed to the burning heat or drifting sands. Hence the reference of the prophet to a time when "a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest: as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Such should a king be at a future day. But no such king, prince, or emperor appeared in the East during those years of which we are writing. The imperial breath was as the deadly wind, making a desert on which were dying thousands of heavenward pilgrims.

The man, who was as a shadowing tent in the daytime from the heat, "and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from the storm," was usually to be found in humbler life. Here and there was a shield for the saints of God.

No house was better known as a refuge, than that of Otho, the innkeeper of Ancyra. It was called a Noah's ark. It was a *rendezvous* for the persecuted of all that region. It was a home in which plundered Christians were supported; a hospital for beaten and tortured confessors, or for the eyeless and the hamstrung heroes, who groped and limped along their way of escape; a church wherein bread and wine were furnished gratuitously to those who refreshed their souls in the supper of the Lord, and forgot their sufferings when they remembered Calvary (at this time everything sold in shops and markets was first offered to the gods).

Otho and his wife were worthy of the portrait drawn by the orator Tertullian, when he had in his eye a Christian home. Of such a wedded pair he says: "How shall we find words to express the happiness of that marriage which the Church effects, and the oblation confirms, and the blessing seals, and angels report, and the Father ratifies? What a union of two believers, with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit, and one flesh! Together they bow, together they pray, together they keep their

## THE PROMISED LAND.

BY EDWARD P. HUMPHREY, D. D.

**A** PAPER published in the June number of this magazine showed that Palestine was given, by the Almighty, to the Hebrews, as their earthly inheritance. It was also stated that the chosen land was thoroughly adapted to the chosen seed.

I. Its narrow territorial limits offered to the people of Israel the advantages of compactness and facilities for special training in religious knowledge and worship.

II. The land of Israel was secluded from all other nations in the early ages and central to them all in later times; and by these two opposite characteristics the country afforded a nursery for the kingdom of God, and, then, at the proper time, it offered a point of advantage from which the kingdom might be spread throughout the earth.

These inquiries are to be pursued in this paper.

III. The settlement of the Israelites in the rugged heights of Palestine answered another part of the divine plan. This was to protect the chosen people from foreign wars until the true religion should take root among them, and after that to expose them to the rage of the heathen until they should be dispersed. The topography of the country supplied both of these conditions. Israel was the only great nation which, in that age of the world, inhabited a mountainous region. Assyria occupied the plains of the Euphrates. Egypt had taken possession of the Nile. India, if it existed as a state at the calling of Abraham, had risen on the banks of the Indus. But to the Israelites a home was assigned in the mountains of Canaan. The country west of the Jordan, or Palestine proper, naturally distributes itself into three narrow parallel divisions, running side by side from the desert of Paran,

northwardly to the wall of Lebanon. The divisions are the plains fronting the Mediterranean, the valley of the Jordan, and, between the river and the sea, the central range of mountains. The average height of this range is about eighteen hundred feet above the level of the Mediterranean, and three thousand feet above the level of the Dead Sea; although certain centers of elevation, of which Jerusalem, Hebron and Bethel are examples, rise from eight to twelve hundred feet higher still.

Now among these mountains the Hebrews, the two and a half tribes excepted, had their dwelling places. When Abram first entered Canaan he came along the hill-country; he built altars on the heights of Sichem, Bethel and Hebron; he purchased a family burial place on one mountain, and the patriarchs who died in Egypt were buried on another. The Hebrews on their return from Egypt made their way directly to the mountains. In due time they built a line of cities and towns on the summits, all the way from Dan to Beersheba. What with the altitude and steepness of the highlands, their defiles and gorges, and the deep gullies through which the torrents discharged themselves into the river or the sea, it required but little engineering skill or personal courage to impede the march of an invading foe. These conditions also imposed limitations on the spread of corrupting influences from abroad. History, both ancient and modern, casts much light upon the strength of these natural defenses. The resistance offered by the Canaanites to the Hebrews at the conquest is an instance in point. Strategy, not force of arms, gave Ai and Luz to the army of Joshua; and a miracle was required to reduce the walls of Jericho.

Thirty years after the time when the Israelites entered on their inheritance, the heathen held numerous walled towns throughout the country. (Joshua, chap. i.) The period of the Judges, covering about four hundred and fifty years, took its character from the obstinacy with which the Canaanites disputed with the Hebrews the possession of the Promised Land. Nor were the Jebusites dislodged from the stronghold of Zion until the reign of David. Very early in that reign, the Philistines had reason to repent of their rashness in attacking these strongholds. They penetrated the valley of Rephaim, and pushed forward as far as Bethlehem. David gave them battle with signal success, capturing their images and pursuing the enemy from "Geba until thou come to Gaza." (1 Samuel v. 17-25.) In the wars of Rehoboam it required an army of twelve thousand chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and other troops innumerable to enable Shishak, king of Egypt, to march upon Jerusalem. (2 Chron. xii. 3.) And, to come down to modern times, it is well known that the ablest soldier of the present century thought it would be a waste of time, or worse, to storm the heights of Judea or Samaria. In the campaign of 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte marched from Egypt into Palestine by the way of the sea-coast. After overrunning the lowlands, and taking Gaza, Jaffa and Ramleh, he announced to the Sheikhs of Jerusalem and Nablous that he had no intention of making war against them, saying in so many words that the highlands did not lie within the base of his operations.\*

From these statements some proper judgment may be formed of the resistance offered by the topography of the promised land to the progress of conquering armies and to the spread of corrupting influence from abroad. Within their impregnable fastnesses and gorges of the mountains, and behind the well-watched walls of the cities, on the tops of high hills and in the fruitful valleys between them, the

chosen people dwelt in safety for a thousand years. Throughout all these tranquil ages they were educated into the knowledge of the true God and of eternal life through the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah compares the land to a vineyard, fenced in, guarded, and planted with the good seed. (Isaiah v. 1.) Balaam described the home of the people when he said: "Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock." (Num. xxiv. 21.)\*

But it was no part of the plan of Providence to allow the Hebrews as a nation to survive Judaism as a religion. The divine judgments stood prepared for the land, when the time to execute them should come. Accordingly, the physical geography of the country presented a feature which from the beginning gave warning of the destruction of the kingdom. The famous plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon was the weak point in the defenses of Palestine. At the bay of Akka, the central range of mountains is broken down, and this beautiful plain spreads itself westward to the Jordan. When, after many ages, the time approached for Judaism to pass away, and the people, for their sins, to be trodden down of the Gentiles, the armies of the aliens entered the land through this open door and stormed all its strongholds. The pit into which Joseph was cast near Dathan, on the edge of Esdraelon, was an apt token of the disasters which should befall his descendants on that fertile and beautiful plain.

Into this gateway the enemies of Israel entered to lay waste the sacred inheritance. Not only that, but Esdraelon was the natural highway for the armies of the east and west; As-

\* The concentration of the Hebrews in the highlands explains two circumstances which have attracted some attention. For the first: the maritime plain was held by the Philistines, in full force, down to near the close of David's reign. For the second:—even as late as the time of Christ, the banditti infested the plains; they rarely molested the inhabitants of the mountains, a state of things just to the reverse of that which to this day continues in Spain, Italy and Greece. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves." (Luke x. 30.)

syria marching on Egypt, Egypt marching on Assyria. Thus the plain became the debatable ground, and the seat and prize of innumerable wars. The kings of Syria hastened thither in their chariots of war to dispute the march of the kings of Egypt, whose transports landed their troops at the bay of Akka. The bloody battles fought out on the soil of Palestine inflicted upon the Hebrews innumerable calamities and indignities. The plain was laid waste; the northern tribes were severed from the southern; and the Hebrews themselves became involved in the strife. The attentive reader of the books of the Kings and the Prophets will find, in the wars waged by the heathen with the heathen, on the soil of Palestine, the clew to the decline and fall of the Hebrew monarchy. Between the upper and nether millstones, Israel was ground to powder. When Egypt was arrayed against Syria, and the Romans against the Parthians, and their fierce hosts pitched their tents in Esdrælon, it was impossible for the Hebrews to maintain their own neutrality. The kings of Israel and of Judah formed alliances with one or the other heathen power. Alliances and hostilities with those barbarous tribes were alike unnatural. It was hard to say whether victory or defeat were worse for the Hebrews; whether they suffered most from the fierceness of their enemies or the perfidy of their allies. Both enemy and ally overran the hill-country, and laid siege to Jerusalem itself. The attention of the reader is fatigued by the complication of their history, by the alliances and cross-alliances between Israel and Judah on the one hand, and Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Syria on the other. But every form of the complication terminated in disaster to the Hebrew state. After the kingdom was divided, Israel was confederate with Assyria, and Judah was confederate with Egypt. Samaria fell, and the kingdom of Israel was overthrown. The mournful tragedy in which afterward, Josiah, king of Judah, perished at the hand of his ancient ally was, both in the story and the catastrophe,

the type of the ruin which fell upon his kingdom. Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, declared war against the king of Assyria. The two armies met in battle on the plain of Esdrælon. King Josiah went up against Egypt, and was slain. Pharaoh, on his retreat, carried king Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, into Egypt. The king of Babylon, soon appeared before Jerusalem, reduced the city, and bore away the nobles and leading families of Judah into captivity. Few historical scholars have the patience to follow the fortunes of the Promised Land through the weary ages: patiently tracing the degradation of David's kingdom into a province of Babylon; the transfer of the province from Babylon to Medo-Persia by the conquests of Cyrus; from Medo-Persia to Macedon by the conquests of Alexander; from Macedon to Syria by the division of Alexander's kingdom; from Syria to Egypt, and from Egypt back to Syria through the desolating wars between the Seleucidæ and the Ptolemies, fought out on the soil of Judea; from the barbarous rule of Antiochus Epiphanes to the mild authority of the early Maccabees; thence to the sedition of the later Maccabees; terminating in the siege of Titus and the destruction of Jerusalem. Nor is the story yet told. It recites the desolations, infinite in number, diversity and terror, inflicted on Judah and Jerusalem by the Romans, by the Mohammedans at the conquest, and by the rival Kalifs, by the wars of the crusaders terminating in the disastrous battle of Hattin on Esdrælon in the end of the twelfth century, by the contests waged for the possession of the country between Tartars and Mamalukes, and by the long consuming reign of the Ottomans.

By these judgments the purposes of God, although apparently incompatible, were accomplished; and that by means of the topography of the Holy Land. In its infancy, God's visible kingdom was entrenched within the walls of Zion. But when Judaism had fulfilled its purpose, and the gift of God was ready to be distributed to the Gentiles

the Jewish nation became the helpless prey of the heathen. Then the strong- holds so long impregnable became traps in which the people were taken	captive, and prisons in which they were held in custody. This study will be continued in an- other number.
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### A WOMAN'S FAREWELL.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT.

I SHOULD not love thee less if thou wert shown  
 Thrice worthier of my scorn than now.  
 I can not hate, having loved; but thou  
 Vainly shalt plead. Henceforth I walk alone.

Godlike in other days I held thee. Why  
 Recall the allegiance of those days?  
 I praised thee once with rapture. Praise  
 Dies on my lips, as sweet confessions die!

And all that, life to life, we twain have been,  
 Is mockery and sorrow. Speech  
 Were tamely impotent to reach  
 The sword of my rebuke, stern, cold and keen.

Rather let Silence wield the sword—that king  
 To whom weak words are vassals weak.  
 The fault is past my pardon; seek  
 Some higher grace than earthly pardoning.

Only at farewell I have wish to say:—  
 This hurt-stung heart is living still,  
 And eagerly battles against will,  
 And fails, and loves thee, and shall love away!