The Jordan Valley and Its Lakes: Discussion

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the midst of majestic mountain chains where, if viewed from the lake-side, every valley stands out with a brilliant clearness. I shall never forget the exhilaration of the rides before dawn across the Jericho plains, the brightening light and ever-changing cloud effects as the light strengthened, until at last the sun commenced to pour its hot rays over the summits of Moab. But even more do I recall the brilliant moonlight nights when on the Dead Sea shores one watched the distant wavelets like rows of diamonds in the reflected moonbeams. One recalls baths taken long after sunset in the waters so warm that it was a shock to raise one's body into the gentle breeze. I am not traveller enough to know what sites are its rivals, but I venture to say that to most people who can combine into one the romance of history, of science, and of beauty the Jordan Valley must ever remain a region apart—absolutely unique upon this globe.

Before the paper the PRESIDENT said : Our eyes lately have been turned very much in the direction of the Holy Land, and our thoughts must often have been with those who so recently had the extraordinary privilege of spending their Christmas at Bethlehem. Therefore it is with the deepest interest that we shall listen to what our old friend Dr. Masterman has to say about the sacred Jordan, that extraordinary river, unique in its historical associations and also in its geography.

(Dr. E. W. G. Masterman then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.)

The PRESIDENT : We have had a delightful address from Dr. Masterman, full of interesting detail, and I must congratulate him on the excellence of the photographs which he has shown, which have brought home to us the scenery of the Jordan and its surroundings in a way nothing else could have done. Out of such an address many points of great interest arise. I will call first on Mr. Zangwill.

Mr. ISRAEL ZANGWILL : When Dr. Masterman referred to Masada he said how wonderful it was that the Romans should have been enabled to send an army to this sterile rock and defeat the Jews there. I thought that a wonderful topsy-turveydom. The wonder to me was that the Jews should have been able to sustain themselves there for two years. That was not really the end of the Jews, because a couple of centuries afterwards there was a further revolt. I do not know whether it is right to talk about anything but geography here, but the really interesting thing is how the Jews came to fight against Rome. The reason was, as the master theologian told us, their absolute faith in their being the Chosen People and having God on their side. They had already seen so many great empires dissolved, that they thought there was no possibility of Rome being able to conquer them. They had held out so thoroughly against the Greeks and the culture which tried to overwhelm them several centuries before that they made a Feast called Chunucha. After two thousand years Jerusalem has fallen on the very eve of that Feast, and the city has now been promised to the Jews, which is an extraordinary example of their holding out in history. My remarks are all tending to be non-geographical. The utmost I can do is to say that from the pictures we have seen, Palestine is not a place overflowing with milk and honey. It really never was : it was all artificial irrigation. And if it does not flow with milk and honey now, it is owing to the

mis-rule of the Turk, whom I call the Lord of Mis-rule. Whatever one may think of Imperialism, one must admit that there cannot be any natural right of the Turks to go on holding a country which they have mis-ruled so long. My other claim to speak consists in the fact that although I am not a geographer I have helped to strengthen the cause of geography in others. While it seemed quite impossible that the Jews should have any chance of getting Palestine from the hand of the Turk, I occupied myself in a movement for looking round the world, to see if there was any other possibility of a land in which the Jews could form an autonomous State. There appeared to be many possibilities, but only two which seemed worth investigating. One was Cyrenaica, which was examined by a brilliant member of this Society who is now in India, Prof. J. W. Gregory. I had the honour of sending him out with an expedition to Cyrenaica, and after that there was the expedition to Angola, which Prof. Gregory also undertook. Upon this I pride myself, as giving me some claim to a place in the geographical world, though I have little to say about geography. If I said anything more at all, it would be to tell you how extraordinarily happy the Jews are, to think that they will form part of the great British Empire.

Prof. LEONARD KING (Chairman, Palestine Exploration Fund): The Palestine Exploration Fund is peculiarly interested in the subject of the lecture. Dr. Masterman's are the only observations on the varying levels of the Dead Sea that have been carried out systematically and over a period of years. They were undertaken in the first instance at the suggestion of our Executive Committee, and the results have been recorded regularly in the pages of the Fund's journal. I think Dr. Masterman is to be congratulated on the perseverance and ingenuity required to obtain results under the difficult conditions prevailing in Palestine before the war. We hope that he will be able to continue his researches in the future under more favourable circumstances. The figures he has given for the difference between the summer and winter levels of the Dead Sea demolish an accepted opinion by proving that the average difference is much less than 15 feet. He has shown that over the period of years during which his observations have extended it is really less than 2 feet, and I should like to point out that that has an important bearing on at least one problem connected with the future prosperity of Palestine: the uses to which the water of the Jordan Valley may in future be put. The figure at one time accepted for the seasonal rise and fall of the Dead Sea is related to another figure widely held with regard to the amount of water received daily by the Dead Sea, which in modern works of reference, including the latest edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, is put at no less than six million gallons. But that statement is made with equal confidence in books that appeared before the publication of Dr. Masterman's researches. Though I have not yet traced it to its source, I venture to think that the two statements are really interconnected, and if we reject the one we must suspect the other. But even if we must disregard that very optimistic figure of the daily supply to the Dead Sea, there is, I think, no doubt that a large quantity, drawn in great measure from perennial sources, is still running to waste in the Jordan Valley as in the rest of Palestine. I will give one instance to illustrate the latter point. Most travellers who have passed through Beirut or visited the Nahr-el-Kelb have made the acquaintance of Mr. Martindale, for many years before the war the very able head of the Beirut water-works. Some years ago he was asked by the Turkish authorities to visit Ras-el-Ain to the south of Tyre, and report on possibility of the water supply. That suggestion was probably due to the fact

that the famous plain near the springs was the private property of the late Sultan, Abd-ul-Hamid. I forget the figures he obtained as the result of his test, but I believe the daily output of each spring was between two and three million gallons ; and in the opinion of Mr. Martindale the force of water at the head would suffice to develop a considerable amount of power in addition to supplying the city of Tyre with water and irrigating a great part of the plain. But after turning a couple of mills, most of the water, I believe, is still running to waste into the sea. That is typical of conditions in Palestine generally, and of the Valley of the Jordan in particular, for there the possibilities of water-power are obvious in view of the very great fall in the valley from end to end. And this also applies in some degree to the more important tributaries such as the Yarmuk, and in a lesser degree to certain of the smaller streams such as the Wadi Fejjas. This comparatively short wadi, which drains the Sahel-el-Ahma, falls into the Jordan from the west, to the south of Lake Tiberias, and in antiquity by means of an aqueduct supplied the city of Tiberias with drinking-water and turned a large number of mills, of which only the foundations now remain. In conclusion, it seems to me this question of water-power is of very great practical value in any plans that are made for the future of Palestine, in view of the fact that great areas are unsuited for irrigation. Under those circumstances if you have cheap water-power that can be conveyed to different parts of the country in the form of electrical supply, then the establishment of skilled industries would be encouraged, and the population which the country can support would be considerably greater than if reliance was placed upon agriculture alone.

Colonel C. E. YATE, M.P. : I should like to ask Dr. Masterman a sportsman's question. We were pleased to hear of the many species of birds in the country ; would he describe to us the animal called a coney. Is it a hare, a rabbit, or a rat ?

Dr. MASTERMAN : The coney is an entirely separate species, rather like a large rat, with a very rough skin. It stands zoologically quite by itself, and has a different structure from any other animal. Its proper name is Hyrax. It is the animal referred to in the Bible as the coney. It has no tail ; merely a stump. It is, I think, a vegetable-eating animal, and lives entirely on the herbs on the shore of the lake. It was forbidden the Jews as unclean, but I believe the Arabs eat it, and it is quite wholesome.

The PRESIDENT : There is one question I would like to ask. Dr. Masterman has referred to certain springs near the Jordan still famed for their medicinal properties. I should like to know whether in the waters of the Jordan river itself there are any healing qualities. Those large deposits of salt in the Jordan Valley remind me of the salt caves in the islands of Kishm, in the Persian Gulf, where there are great domed caverns in which the salt has taken every variety of colour, in stripes of vivid scarlet, black, lemon, or salmon. We are especially interested in the seiches of the Dead Sea water and the Lake of Tiberias, and should be obliged to Dr. Masterman if he would let us have the full benefit of all his observations on the subject. I ask you to join in a very cordial vote of thanks to Dr. Masterman for the able and interesting paper he has read.