

Exploration and Discovery.

RECOVERY OF A ROMAN MILESTONE.

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In going from Amman to Jerash, our intention had been to make a detour to visit Es-Salt on the way. But for some unexplained reason, Sheikhs Fellah and Ali, our own 'Adwan escort, were reluctant to show themselves at Es-Salt. It was evidently a delicate subject with them, and we did not press them for their reasons. Some trouble apparently between them and the military commandant, a few sheep stolen, it may have been, or a matter of tribute unpaid. It was, moreover, an inducement to take the more direct route, that our time was getting short, and as an additional bait to lure us from Es-Salt, Sheikh Fellah enlarged upon a certain "written stone" that we might see if we would let him choose the way, a stone that no one had ever been able to read. It had fallen on its face so as to hide the larger part of the inscription. A Frangi (European), with twenty men to help him, had tried to turn it over, but could not stir it.

Here was a temptation too strong to be resisted, an opportunity to make an original discovery. Where Europe with twenty men had failed, we flattered ourselves that America with ten men might succeed. So we gave up the route by Es-Salt, to the great satisfaction of Sheikh Fellah.

We found the stone to be a portion of a Roman milestone, a column about two feet in diameter and about three feet in length, broken square off at the upper end, but having at the other a massive cubical base that added nearly as much again to the weight of the column. It bore a lengthy inscription, a part of which had disappeared with the top of the column, while so much as remained was on the underside of the stone and bedded in the earth, except the ends of the lines. Not more than six men could get about it to work to advantage, and the square corners of the pedestal, while they gave something to hold by, made it impossible to roll it. Hence, our Frangi predecessor with the muscle of his twenty men had been unable to move it. After one or two puny efforts of five or six strong men pulling and pushing together, it became evident that what we needed was not muscle, but brains, of which we claimed to have the average Yankee's outfit. All that was needed was to dig a small hole under the pedestal, when the weight of the stone being thus divided against itself could be easily overcome and the column tilted to an upright position. It would not be necessary to secure an exact perpendicular.

We set to work with our hands to scoop out the earth. The only tool we could find among us with which to loosen the soil was the long, narrow blade of Sheikh Fellah's spear head, and when the good old man saw his graceful ancestral weapon and symbol of his authority degraded to do the menial work of pick and shovel, he trembled for its safety and devoutly wished he had conducted us by way of Es-Salt. When enough earth had been removed, a vigorous push and pull all together tilted the corner of the pedestal into the hole, and on wiping away the dirt, the inscription could be read. Mashallah! (what God wills), America's reputation with the 'Adwans was made, and the ancestral weapon might now return to its former office and recover its dignity as best it could.

The inscription proved the column to have been set up in the reign of Alexander Severus to mark a station on the military road from Jerash to Amman. Other traces of the road were to be seen along our way, the pavement still in place here and there, and the foundations of buildings whose superstructures had been carried away. Nowhere has Roman power left more traces of itself than in this country to the east of Jordan and the Sea of Tiberius, traces in military roads, milestones, inscriptions, coins, theaters and temples. Here was the frontier of the Roman Empire, to be held against the Bedouin Arabs, and demanding for this purpose strong and watchful garrisons at frequent intervals with means of easy communication between them. And so long as these garrisons were maintained in strength there was security, and wealth made its home here, and brought with it the wealth and refinements of Rome, such as they were, the baths, the aqueducts, the naumachia, the theaters, the gladiatorial shows, the forum, the temples, and the triumphal arch. What did Rome herself have that Jerash did not have? Even the Tiber had at Jerash on a proportionate scale its counterpart in the little brook that runs through the center of the town, which gave excuse for a magnificent stone bridge of three arches. For the dead, also, money was freely bestowed to house them in richly ornamented sarcophagi of black basalt, of which considerable numbers are still to be found in the adjacent necropolis.

Jerash was an epitome of the glory of Ancient Rome, and in its present state is typical of the fallen Roman Empire. But if you wish the fallen Roman Empire in a vest-pocket edition, go out on the old Roman road, a few miles toward Amman, and find our broken and prostrate milestone of the Emperor Alexander Severus.