



The Rock Rimmon

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movement 5 or 6 miles round the north-east end of the lake. An hour and a half would accomplish both together, the *aggregate* being 17 or 18 miles instead of "40 or 50 or more."

Moreover, these movements were *before*, and not "during the battle," and they were deliberately planned beforehand, with plenty of time for their accomplishment at leisure.

I believe that if Mr. Wright had studied the evidence of the monuments and maps his impressions would have been very different. My object is to have these brought fairly to bear upon a survey of the ground, especially taking account of the levels for 5 or 6 miles round the lake of Homs.

H. G. T.

THE ROCK RIMMON.

It seems from the last *Quarterly Statement* that Lieutenant Conder recently went down in the harvest time to the Rock Rimmon, into the cave of the six hundred, and stumbled over some startling conclusions.

I do not wish, like the Philistines, to rob his threshing-floor in Lehi (Hebr. belehi), but I should like in the strength of a Samson to beat out his gleanings with the *inquisitorial* rod, and to winnow the wheat with the *critical* fan, so that the chaff may be driven away by the wind of *sound* opinion. I will not discuss the meaning of Rimmon, as I can afford to leave it untranslated in Judges xx; 1 Sam. xiv, 2 (where A. V. has "pomegranate") but will pass on to the following points given in *Quarterly Statement*, 1881, p. 247, as the results of careful examination.

- (a.) The Rock Rimmon was at the present village of Rummôn.
- (b.) The site of the latter "could not be more correctly described than by the term *Sel'a*."
- (c.) "The Hebrew word (*sela*) has not the meaning of precipice."
- (d.) The surviving Benjamites did not take refuge among the precipices of Wâdy Suweinîf, east of Jeb'a, and so could not have hidden themselves in the cave called Mughâret el Jai.
- (e.) The cave "will not hold the number of fugitives mentioned in the story."
- (f.) "The name Rimmon no longer occurs in the vicinity."

The question of the true position of the Rock Rimmon has frequently been touched upon in these pages, viz. : 1879, pp. 103, 112-129, 170; 1880, pp. 106, 173, 236.

To sift the matter thoroughly, I will take the ears gleaned by Lieutenant Conder, one by one.

Sela.—This is a word against which several wrong identifications are dashed to pieces. I have stated (1879, p. 127) that "*sela* always means a precipitous rock, *i.e.*, a cliff . . . height alone does not entitle to the

name." On the other hand Lieutenant Conder urges and claims to show that *the word has not the meaning of precipice.*

He can hardly be unaware that such authorities as Dr. Stanley and Grove have rendered *sela* by cliff (another translates it crag), so that to remove this great obstruction, I must have recourse to a petard.

I take the following from a picturesque writer :—

"There is a great gorge called the 'Valley of Rocks,' a narrow but deep chasm, *impassable* except by a detour of many miles, so that Saul might have stood within sight of David, yet quite unable to overtake his enemy ; and to this 'Cliff (*sela*) of Division' ; there is no other place near Maon where *cliffs*, such as are to be inferred from the word *Sela*, can be found." Again he writes : "The heat and glare were oppressive, and I was glad *at noon* to rest under a white, chalk *cliff*, and was able to realize the force of the poetic language of Isaiah, 'The shadow of a great rock (*sela*) in a weary land'" (Is. xxxii, 2). Again, referring to the Rock (*sela*) Etam, he gives "eagle's nest" as the meaning of Etam. See "Tent Work," 1880, pp. 142, 245, 246. Yet even this testimony seems hardly sufficient to move Lieutenant Conder, who says my quotations are "scarcely sufficient to prove that *sela* should be rendered precipice."

I must, therefore, next call a *myriad* of witnesses from the land of Edom. "And other ten thousand left alive did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock (*sela*), and cast them down from the top of the rock (*sela*) that they were all broken in pieces" (11 Chron. xxv, 12). It is pleasant to observe that the LXX here translate *sela* by *κρημνός* (a precipice), and not by the indefinite word *πέτρα*. Five figures must be allowed to be sufficient to prove one point, so I conclude that *sela* does mean *a precipice*, here and also throughout the Bible, as I cannot find a single instance where such a meaning is out of place.

Lieutenant Conder urges, however, that in some passages *sela* can scarcely be understood as meaning a precipice, quoting two, viz., Ps. xviii, 2, "The Lord is my rock ;" but as the next words are "and my fortress," it is clear that a rock with (rather than without) precipitous sides best suit the Psalmist's meaning. He also quotes Ps. xl, 2, "Set my feet upon a rock"—adding, "a position hardly to be considered as one of safety and comfort." It is almost unnecessary to reply that here "upon a rock" means *on the top*, not on the side of a precipice, just as the watchman in Jezreel (2 Kings ix, 17) stood *on* (the same Hebrew word as in Ps. xl, 2) the tower, *not on its side*, in perfect "safety and comfort."

By thus conclusively demonstrating that *sela* means *a precipice*, we have at once disposed of the points *a, b, c*. The Rock (*sela*) Rummôn, as we have seen, was undoubtedly *a precipitous* rock, and therefore is not to be placed at Rimmôn, which Lieutenant Conder assures us "could not be more correctly described than by a word which, he urges, has *not* the meaning of precipice."

It is superfluous to prove to him the correctness of this, his own statement, by pointing out that houses at Rummôn are built upon the sides of

the knoll, that on the Survey map tracks are marked as approaching it from the four sides, &c. Therefore it could not be a *sela*.

The rival site has thus so completely vanished, that I need not bring into action my reserve passages, viz. : Job. xxxix, 28 ; Prov. xxx, 26 ; Cant. ii, 14 ; Is. xxii, 16 ; xxxii, 2 ; Jer. v. 3 ; xxiii, 29 ; xlviii, 28 ; Amos vi, 12. Still the remaining points *d*, *e*, *f*, have to be considered.

I have already shown, 1880, p. 236, that from the battle-field near Gibeah the Benjamites fled eastwards towards the wilderness. The exact position of Gibeah is still unsettled, but it was not far from the great north road (*id.*, p. 237), and is, in my opinion, probably identical with Gibeah of Saul, and to be identified with Gibeath Ammah, *i.e.*, the hill of the metropolis (2 Sam. ii, 24), and this I place at Khurbet'Adaseh, about two miles to the east of Gibeon. Be this as it may, the Benjamites fled from the battle-field somewhere south of the latitude of er Ram (Judges xx, 31), in an easterly direction towards Gibeah, *i.e.*, Jeb'a (Judges xx, 43), towards the wilderness, and this course would take them directly to the precipices of Wâdy Suweintt.

Here, on the southern side of the wâdy, we find Saul (1 Sam. xiv, 2) in the uttermost part of Gibeah, *i.e.*, Jeb'a, under *the Rimmon* (A. V. a pomegranate tree) which is in Migron (*i.e.*, the precipice) ; here, too, was "a sharp rock" (A. V., literally, tooth of a *sela*), facing over against Michmash. No better hiding place could be desired than some hidden cavern among the precipices of this wild mountain gorge ; and as the Hebrews hid themselves (1 Sam. xiv, 11) *in holes* from the Philistines, I cannot see that Biblical authority is needed for their having concealed themselves *in a cave* from enemies bent on waging a war of extermination after two disgraceful defeats.

Why in the world the 600 Benjamites should be made to parade themselves on Rummôn, like flies on a sugar loaf, instead of being hidden away in a safe place, I have never been able to understand ; and if to the English mind it still seems unsuitable for those who run to run to the nearest and best place of refuge, instead of crossing seven miles of "most difficult country," then, mindful of Cetewayo's fickle fortune, I appeal from Japheth to Ham to decide what Shem would do when outnumbered fourteen to one.

Meanwhile I claim to have disposed of objection *d*, if only the cave is large enough, and this brings me to *e*, which I shall treat as *chaff*, as it seems to be so intended.

The tradition clinging to Mughâret el Jai that "sixteen flocks of one hundred sheep have been folded at one time in its main chamber" is valuable on account of the *six* and the *one hundred* ; the *truth* of the statement is of no importance. Still it occurs to me that it is hardly fair to use the Negeb or *south-down* measurement for sheep in the highlands of Benjamin, for such seems to be forced upon us, "if more than three sheep could scarcely be packed into two square yards."

Again, in making a space of six feet by three feet a *sine quâ non* for men hiding for their lives, Lieutenant Conder appears to me to assume

that the survivors were respectable aldermen of the Eglon girth, and not young desperadoes of the Ehud cut.

Such palatial accommodation would not be needed for men scarcely more civilized than the modern Fellaheen. The total area of the cave is said not to exceed 970 square yards, while the main chamber is about 500 yards square.

Now the Education Department in Kirjath-Sepher fixes the space to be allowed for each street Arab at 8 square feet, while Lieutenant Conder will not allow a Benjamite, after all his valour, to escape for his life into a cave of which the large room allows eight feet per man, or 14 feet including the class-rooms. Better it seems for the six hundred to be slain by Israel, than to have to cross their legs, or for only part of the number to lie down at once.

It is fair, however, to point out that Lieutenant Conder is more dexterous than I am in packing, when he has in view the sinister object of fixing the battle of Gibeah at Jeb'a. He says (1877, 105; 1881, 89) that at the latter place, there was a *cave* large enough to contain the ambush (Judges xx, 33). How large then was the cave, and how large the ambush? Josephus says half the army, *i.e.*, about 160,000 men. *That* cave must have been close and hot indeed. Happily Josephus sometimes writes fiction, and the ambush clearly did not lie in wait in a cave but *round about* (Judges xx, 29) Gibeah.

Further, Lieutenant Conder finds it "difficult to understand why the advocates of a Rock Rimmon in Wâdy Suweint should have pitched on this particular cave (Mughâret el Jai), seeing that there are many other caves along both sides of the valley," curiously adding, "though unfortunately they are for the most part inaccessible."

Surely the wish has never crossed his mind that we had pitched upon an *inaccessible* cave. The reasons, however, for fixing on Mughâret el Jai as the place of refuge for the Benjamites, are as follows:—

1. It is obviously the cavern mentioned to Mr. Finn, in 1852, as capable of containing several hundred men.
2. It is *accessible*, and from it it is easy to reach the concealed spring of Ain Suweint.
3. It is the best known (1879, 112) and apparently the largest cave in the ravine.
4. It is well screened from view, and therefore a desirable hiding place.

It has been used time out of mind for refuge by the neighbouring villagers, when prosecuted by the government; and the hiding place habitually used in modern times may well have been that resorted to in the days of Phinehas and even of Saul.

6. There must be some reason for the repeated mention of *six* in connection with *hundreds* in reference to Mughâret el Jai, and its occupation by the six hundred Benjamite survivors would be a likely and reasonable explanation.

It is not, however, necessary for all the fugitives ever to have been in

the cave at one time, still less for four months. After sunset they could doubtless come out like rabbits to get corn and water. The plain truth seems to be that the cave formed *the headquarters* of the Benjamite survivors, so that this stalk proves to be *altogether chaff*.

Mr. Rawnsley (1879, 126), among the names recovered in his expedition, gives the following, *Wády er Rumaman*, and *Wády er Rumman*, both obviously connected with Rimmon. Whether he was imposed upon in these names being given him, or Lieutenant Conder in their not being given, is a point on which no evidence is before us.

The present existence of the name Rimmon is, however, of no real importance, as there certainly was a Rimmon somewhere hereabouts in the time of Saul.

I think all objections recently and formerly made against this most interesting *cliff* and *cave* have now been fairly met and demolished, as I doubt not every future one will also be, for "*magna est veritas et prævalebit.*"

The sound results may be stated thus:—

The Rock Rimmon was *not* at Rimmôn because—

1. It is not a *sela*.
2. It is not a suitable place of refuge for men fighting for their lives.
3. It is probably not in the tribe of Benjamin.
4. It was seven miles distant from the field of battle, and another hiding place which was far nearer, was also far better.

That the refuge of the six hundred Benjamites was the great cavern called Mughâret el Jai, among the cliffs of the passage of Michmash, seems to me to be conclusively proved by the following chain of circumstantial evidence:—

1. The Benjamites were pursued "unto over against Gibeah toward the sun rising." This certainly brings them *towards* Jeb'a.

2. "They fled toward the wilderness unto the rock (*sela*) Rimmon." This must first have brought them *past* Jeba, and a mile and a half or two miles more in the same direction—"toward the wilderness," would bring them to Wády Suweint, where we find both *cliffs* and the name "*Rimmon* in the precipice" existing in the time of Saul. As these are the *first cliffs* they would come to, and the name Rimmon was once connected with them, it seems to me as clearly proved as any topographical point can be, that here was the Rock Rimmon.

3. Further, here is a great cavern—offering a most suitable hiding place, with a secret spring not far distant.

4. The Israelites often hid themselves in caves. This one has long been the recognised hiding place of the neighbourhood, and the Christians are said to have used it on one great occasion.

The Benjamites, unless different from other human beings, must be allowed to have hidden themselves in some cave or other, and it is most reasonable to suppose that they would do so in this.

6. Tradition says that this cave will hold six hundred men, just the

number of the Benjamite refugees, and that they did hide in it is the only reasonable explanation as to how six hundred is the number now named.

7. Modern measurement confirms the tradition that six hundred men could find shelter in this cave if pushed to extremities.

The Israelites, however, had probably gained too bitter an experience of the desperate valour of the slinging tribe, to dare to attack the wolf of Benjamin, when driven to bay in his *dernier ressort*. And most assuredly they would have caught a Tartar (as will probably every one who ventures to assail their famous stronghold*) if they had attempted to harass the fugitives in Wâdy Suweint, and so they discreetly let alone that little Benjamin who was destined afterwards to be their ruler. But still, why not make some excavations in the cave ?

W. F. BIRCH.

THE VALLEY OF HINNOM AND ZION.

MORE than 200 books have been written on Palestine, about 50 treat specially of its geography ; thousands of intelligent travellers have visited the Holy City, and yet to this hour the Christian world is not agreed as to where Zion stood.

Four faults have led most writers astray :—

- (1.) They have made wrong assumptions, in a matter in which hardly anything can safely be assumed.
- (2.) They have grounded their arguments on statements of Josephus, who is most unreliable, and at times flatly contradicts the Bible.
- (3.) They have not always verified their references.
- (4.) They have interpreted their quotations in a way sometimes at variance with the context.

Hence there are *four* opinions as to what hill is described as *Mount Zion*, and *five different views* about the real position of Zion itself, viz. :—

- (1.) The *high* ; north of the Temple ; advocated by Messrs. Fergusson, Thrupp, and Lewin.
- (2.) The *low* ; south of the Temple, on Ophel so called, held by the writer.
- (3.) The *broad*, which places Zion simultaneously on two or more of the following 1, 2, 4, 5, originated by Josephus and adopted by Lewin and Lieutenant Conder.
- (4.) The *mediæval* ; the south-western hill or upper city of Josephus, approved of by almost all writers from Jerome to the present

* The same may also be said of the stronghold of Zion, or the City of David which was situated on Ophel, so called, south of the Temple.