

LETTERS FROM MR. E. H. PALMER.

I.

*Convent of St. Catherine, Sinai,
December 31st, 1869.*

WE have succeeded in gaining admittance to the archbishop's apartments, in which the most valuable part of the MSS. treasures are kept, and have inspected some of the most important ones. The well-known Codex Aureus is a beautifully-written copy of the four Gospels, containing illuminated portraits of the Evangelists and other sacred personages. It is attributed to the Emperor Theodosius, the Colophon (of which a fac-simile is enclosed) giving the date, and transcriber's name in the abbreviated Uncial characters. A collation of this MS. would, doubtless, prove of great value in determining the accurate text of the Gospels, although the date, A.D. 1413, which is assigned to it, is not sufficiently remote to give it any very high authority. A person exercising *tact*, and remaining sufficiently long at the convent, might copy, and, perhaps, photograph every leaf. I have endeavoured to impress upon the monks that no other design prompts an investigation of their books than that of benefiting sacred literature by a description of the works in their possession. There are other very interesting works in the collection, amongst them an ancient copy of the Psalms in Georgian, written on papyrus, and a curious copy of the Psalms, written in a small female hand, on six small pages, but without a date. Amongst a pile of patristic and other works of no great age or interest, are some curious old Syriac books and one or two palimpsests. Our necessarily hurried visit prevented us from examining these with any great care; but they would, no doubt, well repay investigation. The proximity of the Convent to civilised parts, the frequent intercourse of the monks with European scholars and travellers, and more especially the renown of the Codex Sinaiticus, are causes that militate strongly against any chance of procuring much of bibliographical interest from Sinai, beyond the possible results of a thorough examination of the library. But we have been enabled to gather much information as to the contents of other Greek and Nestorian convents in other parts of the East, especially in one or two remote districts in North Syria, and on the confines of Armenia and Persia, from which we are very sanguine of success. If funds were provided—say not less than from £150 to £200—we will proceed, after our work in the Tih and in Palestine is completed, to investigate those of which we have been told, and others in their neighbourhood; but as they lie so much off the beaten track, and the necessary arrangements with the Arabs and monks are so troublesome and expensive, we dare not undertake the task unless the money be remitted to us by the time of our reaching Jerusalem, in the early part of April, 1870.

E. H. PALMER.

*The Convent, Mount Sinai,
December 31, 1869.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Although I have not yet reached the Tih, the scene of my future explorations, it may interest you to hear of my movements thus far. As the direct route from Suez to Nakhl by the Hajj road is utterly devoid of interest, I deemed it best, even at the expense of a few more days' journey, to proceed thither *via* Sinai, in order to examine the passes and determine accurately the outline of the Tih mountains, as well as to save the expense and inconvenience of going twice over the same ground. Making a slight deviation towards the sea-coast, we first visited the well called Bir Abu Suweirah, and proceeded thence along Wady Amárah, in order to ascertain whether the reports that water existed there were correct or not; but we found that, besides the well above mentioned, there is not a vestige of water in the valley. This is an important point, as the supposition that water did exist there, taken in conjunction with the *sound* of the name, has led some persons to identify this spot with the "Márah" of Scripture. Leaving Wady Amárah, we followed Wady Gharundel up to its head, where I commenced a careful route-sketch of Wady Wutáh, assisted by Mr. C. F. Tyrwhitt Drake, who accompanies me as the representative of the University of Cambridge, for the purpose of making natural history researches. The part thus surveyed will complete—with that piece of country through which we shall enter the Tih—the survey of the Peninsula of Sinai immediately south of the Tih, and, as we shall have examined the other roads and passes, will determine the accurate outline of the mountains which form its boundary. It will, therefore, be unnecessary to spend time in retracing my steps from Nakhl southwards, and I shall have more leisure for the exploration of the unknown and more interesting portions of the country.

I hope to reach Nakhl in another fortnight, as I shall stop on my way to examine the passes of Ereikhem, Wursáh, &c., and to trace the course of Wady Zellegah, and the connection, if any, between El 'Ain el Elyá and 'Ain Hudhera. I leave for the latter to-morrow morning.

I will write again from Nakhl at the first opportunity, and enclose a tracing of the route-sketch already made—the correct outline of the Tih range—and the results of my work up to that point.

I have already established a depôt at Nakhl, having procured a letter to the governor there. I have forwarded two months' provisions by an Arab, and have written an Arabic letter of instructions myself, which I have sent with them.

Our mode of travelling is not cumbersome; four camels carry all our tents, camp furniture, and a months' provisions; and we have one dromedary between us, which, however, is seldom used for anything but the instruments and sketching materials. Having no servants but an old Arab, who was with me last year and has already been for two successive years with Mr. Holland, we can get over the ground quickly and easily. My sheikh is a great friend of the Teáhah Arabs, and, from his account of them, I anticipate no difficulty in carrying out my investiga-

tions. It seems likely, from what I have heard from the Arabs, that many Scripture names may be recovered in the wilderness of the Tih; for example, I have already found that the mountain set down in the maps as J. Thellah is called J. Dhallel—a word which, like the name Tih itself, signifies “going astray,” and which I believe can refer to nothing but the wanderings of the Israelites. However, when I see more of the country I shall be able to write more fully.

For the present, I remain, yours very truly,

H. E. PALMER.

II.

*Cala'at Nakhl, The Tih,
January 19th, 1870.*

SINCE my last letter, dated from the Convent of Mount Sinai, I have reached the point from which my exploration of the interior region of the Tih commences. By entering the country from the Sinaitic side, I have not only saved much of the time which would have been consumed in proceeding southward from Nakhl and returning over the same ground, but have been enabled to investigate the general outline of the mountains which form the edge of the Tih plateau, and to clear up several doubtful points respecting the geography of the north-eastern corner of the Sinaitic Peninsula. From Jebel Musa we proceeded to 'Ain Hudherah, examining on our way the curious remains at Erweis el Ebeirig, the head of Wady Saal, which as I have said in a former notice of my visit last year, I believed to be the vestiges of an Israelitish camp. A second and more careful inspection of the spot has fully confirmed my previous opinion. The situation is a most commanding one, and the hill-sides and more elevated portions of the water-shed are covered for more than a mile in every direction with curiously arranged stones, evidently the remains of a large encampment; but differing essentially from any others that I have seen in the country, whether Arab or otherwise. The larger inclosures occupied by the more important personages, the hearths or fire-places, &c., are still distinctly to be traced. At some distance are large heaps of stones, obviously burials without the camp; and a conspicuous stone erection on the hill to the right hand is surrounded by a regular series of smaller heaps, different, however, from the rest in their order and construction. The extent of the remains, indicating the assemblage of an unusually large concourse of people; the distance from Sinai on the one hand and 'Ain Hudherah (the probable site of Hazeroth) on the other; and above all, the curious story of the lost Hajj caravan, all tend to confirm the supposition that we have here really a vestige of the Exodus.

Our next object was to determine the connection, if any, between 'Ain Hudherah and el 'Ain el 'Elyá. We found that a communication does exist between them; but the road is impassable for camels; but as there was also another road beside the one already known, we determined to follow it and approach Jebel el 'Ejmeh (the point at which we intended to enter the Tih) from that direction. The enclosed tracing of the route sketch will show our course and the nature of the country through which

we passed, and will, I trust, prove of interest in a geographical point of view.

Near el 'Ain el 'Elyá we discovered some very interesting remains, (*nawámís*) similar in character to those described by Mr. Holland and investigated last year by the Sinai expedition; but in a much more perfect state of preservation than any others which we had seen in the country. The word *námús*, plural *nawámís*, signifies mosquitoes, and is applied by the Towarah Arabs to any kind of stone hut, the origin of which is unknown to them, from the tradition which exists amongst them, that they were built by the children of Israel for a protection against the plague of mosquitoes sent by Heaven as a chastisement for their rebellion and sins. The other Arab tribes do not know the name, and call them merely *gusúr* or castles.

These *nawámís* in question are similar in construction to those at the head of Wady Hebrán; but as they have remained for the most part undisturbed, their character and use can be more distinctly ascertained. Several human bones were found in a small cist in the centre; but from the size of this, and the fact that the bones in no case indicated the presence of a perfect skeleton, it was at once apparent that they were not tombs, but, as every feature of the building suggested, human dwellings. Beside the cist or store above mentioned, there was in each case a small hearth, and in these, ashes and pieces of charred bone were found. There are more than sixty others around those which we examined; all of them, however, more or less imperfect; and it would seem that the neighbourhood of el 'Ain el 'Elyá once contained a large colony of their inhabitants.

From this point we travelled up Wady Biyár to Jebel el 'Ejmeh. This wady is so called from the wells (*Bi-ár*) which exist near its head, and which in their form and use remarkably illustrate the passage in Genesis xxix. 7—9: "Till they roll the stones from the well's mouth, then we water the sheep." The water in them is very bad, being strongly impregnated with a medicinal salt; and as there was no other watering-place on our road between this and Nakhl, we suffered considerable inconvenience from it. The head of this valley also contains some most interesting ruins, stone circles, and heaps similar to the tombs at Jebel el Hadíd and at the mouth of the Nagb Hawa, and at a short distance from them the remains of a large city, to which the cemetery was evidently attached. The enclosed sketches, made to scale by Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake, both of the *nawámís* already mentioned, and of these ruins, will give a better idea of their appearance and arrangement than any description could convey.

We next crossed Jebel el 'Ejmeh by a pass called Nagb el Mírád, the existence of which has not before been made known, and from thence ascended the highest point of the mountain. Observations taken from here, and at various other places on our journey, have enabled us to define the outline of the Tih range, and to mark correctly upon the map the various passes by which it may be entered. (The reading of the hypsometer on the summit was 204.10; thermometer, 51; aneroid No. 1, 26.37; do. No. 2, 25.01.)

The name '*Ejmel*' I believe to be an Arabic corruption, or rather, adaptation of the Hebrew word *Tim* (as in *Ije-Abarim*), "low hills or tumuli," a description which would exactly apply to the country which meets the eye on reaching the top of the pass, and through which the journey for the first two days lies. A glance at the route-sketch will show one or two names, such as *Jebel 'Arádeh*, &c., which would suggest some of those mentioned in the list in Numbers xxxiii.; but without the Hebrew text before me, I do not like to venture upon any attempt at identification.

At *Ain Hudherah* we left the country of the *Towarah* Arabs, and came successively amongst the *Emzaineh*, *Haiwátt*, *Terábin*, and *Taiyáhah* tribes. These appear to be in a descending scale of ignorance and superstition, and the one prevalent idea amongst them is that we have come for the express purpose of cutting off their supply of rain. All our attempts to disclaim either the power or the wish are treated with open and avowed incredulity. At first this occasioned us no trouble, as they seemed rather disposed to propitiate us on that account, but it has on several occasions proved a source of great annoyance and inconvenience.

We have at last come to an understanding with the *Taiyáhah*, who have agreed to take us all over their country and subsequently to hand us over to the sheikh of the *Dhahariyeh*, the northern district of the mountains lying between *Beersheba* and *Wady Marreh*.

These arrangements were not concluded without considerable trouble, and, indeed, some risk; and two days were consumed in noisy altercation, and in resisting their attempts at extortion and intimidation.

The greatest caution and firmness are necessary in dealing with them, and every point is contested with equal obstinacy on both sides. Having at last signed and sealed the contract with them, we have no hesitation in committing ourselves to their good faith; but poor old *Sálem*, our Arab attendant, was so much impressed that he forthwith decamped to his own more peaceful mountains, and we accordingly have the additional trouble of cooking, washing, &c., thrown on our own hands.

The country is now peaceable, the war which recently raged between the *Taiyáhah* and the *Terábin* being now at an end; but the '*Azázimeh*' tribes, occupying the country between *El 'Aujeh* and *Beersheba*, still present some difficulty.

By exercising proper caution, and by a skilful application of *backshish*, we shall, I have no doubt, be able to visit these interesting relics as well. The *Taiyáheh* say that we are not like any other travellers; and I fancy our camp appointments justify the remark. But we tell them that, as that is the case, we do not intend to allow ourselves to be hurried through as other travellers are.

The prevailing opinion at the fort is that we are harmless lunatics, and the four soldiers who are appointed to guard our tent while we remain upon the *Hajj* road regard us with mingled alarm and curiosity.

I have already ascertained much that is of importance with reference to the unexplored parts of the district, into which we are now on the

eve of starting. This, should it prove correct, with what we have already ourselves observed, will show I fear that the accuracy of former maps and accounts will not prove very great; but I prefer leaving this subject to a later report.

As we are already acquainted with the plains, and the course of Wady el'Arish and other valleys, we shall first examine the southernmost parts of the mountainous region which lie immediately within the limits of the Tiyúhah country; thence we shall proceed northward to Beersheba, making detours to the ruined cities in the 'Azázimeh district, and descend by Tell Arad into the Dhahariyeh north of Wady Marrah. The examination of these will occupy the rest of our stay in the Th, which we shall leave by way of Wady Musa. Although I shall, I trust, have then completed the objects for which the grant was made me from the Palestine Exploration Fund, I, as well as my companion, Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake, will endeavour to gather as much information as possible in the course of our journey thence to Jerusalem by the north-east of the Dead Sea. I cannot conclude without expressing my sense of the great value of Mr. Drake's hearty co-operation in forwarding the objects of the expedition. Should the Committee of the Fund be disposed to make a further grant for the purpose of continuing our investigations in Jerusalem and Palestine, I shall be obliged by their paying in the amount to my bankers, Messrs. Foster and Sons, Cambridge, in order that I may draw the necessary amount for my journey on my arrival at Jerusalem.

E. H. PALMER.

ARABIC GLOSSARY.

THE subjoined short Glossary, which has been asked for by several subscribers, is extracted from the "Handbook for Syria and Palestine," by the kind permission of Mr. Murray:—

<i>Abu</i> , father.	<i>Khurbah</i> , ruin.
' <i>Ain</i> , pl. ' <i>Ayán</i> , fountain.	<i>Kubbah</i> , dome.
<i>Ard</i> , plain.	<i>Kurn</i> , pl. <i>Karun</i> , horn.
<i>Báb</i> , door; gate.	<i>Kul'ah</i> , castle.
<i>Bahr</i> , sea.	<i>Kusr</i> , castle.
<i>Balaat</i> , village.	<i>Már</i> , saint.
<i>Bakshish</i> , present.	<i>Merj</i> , pl. <i>Muráj</i> , mead &c.
<i>Beit</i> , pl. <i>Buyát</i> , house.	<i>Múhráb</i> , prayer niche.
<i>Belád</i> , district.	<i>Náhr</i> , pl. <i>Anhur</i> , river.
<i>Btul</i> , pl. <i>Beaáb</i> , daughter.	<i>Nakhíl</i> , pl. <i>Nakhál</i> , palm-tree.
<i>Bir</i> , well.	<i>Néba</i> , prophet.
<i>Birkah</i> , pl. <i>Burák</i> , pool.	<i>Néba</i> , fountain.
<i>Deir</i> , convent.	<i>Nukb</i> , pass.
<i>Emír</i> , pl. <i>Umara</i> , prince.	<i>Rás</i> , head; cape.
<i>Ibn</i> , pl. <i>Beni</i> , son	<i>Sheikh</i> , pl. <i>Shaykh</i> , chief.
<i>Jámi'a</i> , mosque.	<i>Tarbásh</i> , fez; cap.
<i>Jebel</i> , pl. <i>Jibal</i> , mountain.	<i>Tell</i> , pl. <i>Tulál</i> , dim. <i>Tulcil</i> , hill.
<i>Jisr</i> , bridge.	<i>Tin</i> , fig.
<i>Ká'a</i> , plain.	<i>Turfa</i> , tamarisk.
<i>Kabr</i> , pl. <i>Kubár</i> , sepulchre.	<i>Umm</i> , mother.
<i>Kády</i> , judge.	<i>Wády</i> , valley; watercourse.
<i>Kefr</i> , village.	<i>Wely</i> , saint's tomb.
<i>Khán</i> , caravansary.	