

THE EXPEDITION TO PALESTINE

WORK upon the excavations at Beisan, having been interrupted for a year, was resumed upon September first. The season from November to March, inclusive, is the time of rains in the Jordan Valley but it is also the cooler and more salubrious season. The rains are not heavy and at no period continuous for many days at a time. Work may proceed during this season with little interruption and with more comfort and with greater energies than in the dry and hot season from April to September.

The Field Director of the Expedition, Mr. Alan Rowe, has formed the nucleus of his party of excavators from among Egyptians experienced and handy in the work, having had long training, either on our own excavations at Memphis, Thebes, Denderah and Giza, or else with one of the other expeditions from America or Europe that have during the last twenty years been at work at different sites in the Nile Valley. The transportation of this nucleus of trained workmen from Egypt to Palestine is both convenient and effective in organizing gangs of native labour. The native of Palestine though perhaps not less willing as a worker under European or American discipline and in scientific organizations has much less experience. The majority of Mr. Rowe's workmen are however recruited without much difficulty from the local Palestinian village of Beisan in the Plain of Jezreel, about seventeen miles from Nazareth.

The reorganization of the Expedition has been completed by the appointment of Mr. G. M. Fitzgerald, M. A. Oxford, as principal assistant in archaeology. Mr. Fitzgerald was a member of our Beisan expedition in 1922. He was also a member of the Joint Expedition to Ur in 1923-24 and has been, besides, Senior Student in the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

Mr. E. J. Davies, formerly assistant surveyor on the Palestine Government Surveys, has been appointed to the post of surveyor on the Expedition. Mr. Davies is an accomplished Arabic scholar and an experienced surveyor and practical architect. He has a special knowledge of the history and archaeology of Palestine gained at first hand during his studies of the topography and the geographical features of the Holy Land. The other members of the staff who will serve under Mr. Rowe are also experienced in their several departments.

The tasks that the Expedition has before it are both interesting and formidable. The great Tell or Acropolis of Beisan will again be the scene of the principal labours of the Expedition. The conditions on that Tell naturally become more complicated, more delicate and more refractory as lower levels are reached and earlier periods of occupation have to be disentangled from the mass. Though much more involved and difficult, these conditions become more and more absorbing. At the level to which the excavations should arrive in the course of the present season there should be found structures corresponding to the period of Saul's kingship and his tragic death on Mt. Gilboa nearby, a period during which the great fortress city of Bethshan (Beisan) was in the hands of the Philistines, as indeed it was for most of the time of the Hebrew struggles for supremacy in Palestine. The point where the excavations have arrived, therefore, is one to which unusual interest attaches and the further progress of the work will be watched with an uncommon interest.¹

The financial support of the Expedition to Beisan is provided in a large measure by a generous contribution from Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a contribution that insures the continuance of the Expedition through a period of three years.

¹Since this was written and while the JOURNAL was in press, a cable despatch was received from Mr. Rowe announcing the discovery of a stela depicting Ashtaroth with an altar and objects pertaining to the worship and cult of that goddess. The despatch contains a reference to First Samuel, 31. "And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the walls of Bethshan."

It is evident from the cabled despatch that Mr. Rowe believes that he has discovered traces of the Temple of Ashtaroth where the Philistines placed Saul's armour after the battle on Mt. Gilboa and after they had stripped his body and the bodies of his sons.

A second cable despatch from Mr. Rowe sent five days later than the first and received after the foregoing part of this note had been put in type announces the discovery of the actual temple of Ashtaroth.