JERUSALEM AND PALESTINE.

(A Lecture delivered to the P.N.E.U. at St. Agnes School, (Babbacombe).

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MY only qualification for attempting to deal with this subject is the fact that I have travelled myself on horseback from Jerusalem to Damascus; and in that journey I became convinced that a knowledge of the geographical configuration of Palestine is an absolute necessity to an intelligent understanding of the stories of the Old and New Testaments.

But this geographical understanding need by no means be confined to those who have been able to travel. The same appreciation of the historical geography of the Holy Land can be acquired, and then transmitted to children, if only a map is used which gives in different colours the physical configuration of the country.

The best book on this great subject is "The Historical Geography of the Holy Land," by Professor George Adam Smith, to whom I desire to express my indebtedness for the main facts of this lecture. All teachers should try to possess a copy of this invaluable work.

A name of a place to the child's mind is merely a name, which it remembers as a parrot remembers a sound. For instance, the word "Nazareth." What we have got as teachers to do is to quicken the child's imagination, so that it sees a mental photograph of the size of the town, the configuration of the place, the description of the distances and the roads between it and various other places, the houses of the people, their dress and their habits. To take the simplest illustration: You are telling that story in the

Acts of the men who were sent from Cæsarea to Joppa to fetch Saint Peter. Now, unless you have a contour map before you as you teach this story (and, if possible, some pictures of Joppa), the average child has not the foggiest idea whether the two places were five miles apart or fifty miles apart. And even if it knew that; unless some geographical description of the journey is given, the child cannot visualise it so that it is never forgotten.

If, on the contrary, you shew the child how their route lay all along the beach by the side of the breaking waves, through the sand dunes and the marshes; how the servants of Cornelius had to ford across four rivers which run down into the sea; that the distance was almost exactly 37 miles; that to reach Joppa at mid-day, travelling at the rate of four miles an hour, the little cavalcade of servants and mules would have started in the middle of the night, and the description of the dawn coming up over the high mountains on their left, and then the change from the baking sand and shingle of the trackless sea shore to the green orange and lemon orchards which encircle Joppa; and then how it was possible for St. Peter to have been saying his prayers on a roof at all. Then you have given the children a visualised geography lesson which they cannot forget.

If you apply this principle of working out distances and geographical configurations to other great Scripture narratives:

The journey of St. Paul to Damascus;

or, The journey of the Blessed Virgin from Nazareth to Bethlehem;
or, The flight into Egypt;
or, The travels of our Lord from village to village;

the whole Bible becomes illuminated with new meaning to a child's intelligence.

History is so intimately linked with geography that it is impossible to teach the one without the other; but the geography must be illuminated with touches of description of scenery and local custom if it is not to degenerate into catalogued lists of names and places which convey nothing to the mind of the child.

Geographical configuration is ultimately one of the deciding factors of commerce and war, and of individual success or failure, as well as of the destinies of nations.

For instance, the average child has heard of the Capture of Jerusalem from the Turks, with the same set of ideas in its mind as it has heard of the Capture of Gaza, except that the one place looms more important in its vocabulary than the other. But once

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the child has grasped what was really meant to bring up the artillery and food and water and ammunition from sea level, up and up and up, barrier beyond barrier of mountain bastions, and range beyond range of impregnable positions, as hill succeeds hill, through dried-up and waterless and treeless nullahs; up to the great plateau of the lofty table land of Judæa, with the temperature at 90 by day and below freezing point at night, the child's mind gradually assimilates the meaning of that tremendous achievement, carried out in the fact of every conceivable difficulty designed by nature to render the Holy City one of the most unassailable fortresses in the world.

Now, first of all with regard to the form of the land itself. The main fact to get into the children's mind is that Palestine is disposed between the sea and the desert in a series of four parallel lines running North and South.

The traveller to Palestine is given the choice of three points where he may land: Beyrout, Haifa, Joppa. But as the majority of pilgrims make their journey thither from Egypt, it is only Joppa and Haifa which concern us practically. As the Turkish or Russian steamer nears the coast there are few hearts which do not beat high as the hazy outlines of the great central range loom on the horizon. But as the ship gets within two miles of the shore courage begins to fail. Look where you will, ten, twenty miles to north or south, nothing meets the eye save a long line of tossing surf breaking on the shore. A landing is a matter of sheer good luck. Standing on the deck of the steamer with me the day I landed was an English gentleman who had been trying for nearly three weeks to set foot in the streets of Joppa. Each time he had come, the south-west wind was blowing hard, and he was compelled to take a returning steamer to Port Said and try once again.

This fact of an inhospitable coast, with no harbour, has been a factor in the history of the world. The coast all through Scripture is Israel's Border. The Hebrew name for "the west" is the sea. It was to the Jews not a highway, but a barrier.

In the course of Palestinian history men tried to tame the mighty sea to their will by erecting harbour walls and moles at Beyrout, at Tyre, at Sidon, at Carmel, at Caesarea, at Joppa. Now and again for a time they succeeded. Caesarea, in the days when St. Paul was taken there, had a remarkable harbour, but to-day nought remains save a few crumbling stones silted over by the all-devouring sand.

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We reached Joppa on a morning when the sea was in a quieter mood. Dropping anchor a mile off the beach, large boats manned by Arabs shot away to meet us, and, piloted through the hole in the reef, we set foot (not without tears) on the most remarkable country in the world. Two hours afterwards the wind freshened. We could see our steamer getting up her anchor. Had we been just a little later we should have not been able to land at all.

From the forbidding line of breaking waves on a desolate coast we think secondly of the maritime plain—the Plain of Sharon. Now, though the coast is forbidding, repelling, harbourless, this great plain is open at both ends to the march of the invader. It has ever been (and the writer believes will be again) one of the most famous war paths of the world. Because it is the bridge between Europe and the East. Here came Thothmes, the Egyptian King, going north, and Rameses to the River Euphrates. Hither came Tiglath Pileser, Shalmaneser and Sargon, going south. So later marched Sennacherib to Egypt (detaching a brigade to climb that range which proved the defensive strength of the virgin daughter of Zion). So Cambyses passed with his armies. So Alexander the Great majestically moved. Here the Antiochi and the Ptolemies met in the clash of arms (watched afar off from the mountain heights by the Tribesmen on the Seane hills). From the 11th to the 13th century Moslem and Frank and Briton met here in the Crusading Wars. Here in 1799 Napoleon brought up his army from Egypt. And hither in 1917 marched British troops to cover General Allenby's advance up the Southern Ramparts of the Central Range.

It is of great importance to make children realize the position of the Philistine towns in the maritime plain: Gaza, Askelon, Ashdod, Ekron, all of which are on the high road of commerce and of war.

I pass further west to the Shephelah—the Lowland, or the Downs. The Shephelah is the debatable ground between Israel, perched secure on her mountains, and the enemies which lay all around her in the plain. It is the stepping stone, the step upwards to Judæa.

Three main valleys there are around and about which, to secure which, to hold which, Israelites and Philistine, Jew and Gentile, Christian and Moslem, fought intermittently all through the chequered history of this wonderful land. And there the Turks, under their German masters, contested the British sweep northwards. The reason is not far to seek. These valleys were

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the passes into the strongholds of the Hill People; channels through which the tide of invasion could pass. They are:—(1) The Valley of Ajalon. (2) The Valley of Sorek. (3) The Valley of Elah.

This hill country is the scene of the guerilla warfare of Joshua and the Canaanites, Samson and the Phillistines [sic], David and Goliath, the Maccabees and Syrians, Richard and Saladin.

But from here we pass to the third great parallel belt of country, the great Central Range.

This is divided into two parts by the plain of Esdraelon, connecting the highways of the north with the maritime plain through the passes of Carmel, and which has altered the history of empires.

I am going now at this moment to speak only of the hill plateau of Judæa proper, from Bethel to Beersheba. Samaria I will speak of separately. The land of Judæa proper. First, have

you realized how small it is? It is within 15 acres the exact size of Devonshire. Judæa is about 2,000 square miles, Devonshire is 2,015 square miles. From Bethel to Beersheba it is about 55 miles long, some 25 or 30 miles broad. Now, I want you to realize something more. Its aloofness, its isolation, a high and broken tableland, between 2,000 and 3,000 feet above the level of the sea. Jerusalem stands as high as Snowdon. The hills stand round about Jerusalem.

The steep uphill path from the west through the Shephelah, through the dark limestone gorges, goes up, ever up, either by horseback or in the little railway train that pants from the maritime plain to the summit of the plateau.

But this line of Judæa's defence on the west is as nothing compared with the abysmal drop from her mountain battlements upon the east. You cannot travel in the country east of Jerusalem without realizing the depth of the aweful gulf across which you look to the Mountains of Moab; the great gulf of the Jordan Valley and the dead salt sea. Let me impress the phenomena on your mind. On the west the tableland of Judæa rises 3,000 feet above the sea. On the east lies a gulf whose bottom is 1,300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean; in other words, a drop of 4,300 feet. Here is the geographical reason to impress upon the children why it was that in the midst of surrounding peoples the Jew was able to preserve his nationality exclusive, markedly, individual.

A people chosen by Divine Providence to be an elect and

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peculiar nation protected from inroad by heathen tribes, and conversely prevented (but for their deliberately seeking alliance with them in marriage) from mingling with them by the desert character of the sloping country on the south.

And now, before we pass on to the north, having thus gone round about the bulwarks of Judæa, let us look a little more closely at the character of the country, the scene of the greatest drama in the world's history.

When you arrive on the great mountain plateau, and travel by horseback through it, what is the characteristic which strikes you most? In that answer lies chiefly the sense of disappointment which the average tourist experiences. It is a land of stone, and it is a land where there is no water. There is, of course, water at Jerusalem, at Bethlehem, at Hebron, but it is all carefully collected in wells, in cisterns, in rock-hewn basins, at the times of the early and the later rain. The rain falls from October for about six weeks, then from February for another six weeks. There is complete drought from May to September [sic] There are no lush meadows where the cattle lie by some flowing river in the green grass, no babbling brooks and waterfalls or tinkling streams. The thirsty sheep and goats are driven across undulating hillsides, where every few yards the naked bones of the scarped rocks shew gaunt and grey. A day's pasturage is scattered thin and sparsely over miles of the rocky hills, where the animals find precarious footing among the lichened rocks.

And this brings me to another aspect of the wild uplands of Judæa. It is bare and gaunt, a land where water is very precious, and it is a land of shepherds. The pages of the Scriptures are impregnated with a pastoral fragrance. You cannot go a mile outside any village in Judæa without coming across the Eastern Shepherd, armed with club and crook and an antiquated firearm or a cutlass. For, remember, still to-day the wild beasts' lair is occupied in the rolling wilderness, and the marauding Bedouin still prowls for what he may steal in the gaunt valleys of the lonely hills.

It is, as I said just now, the absence of vegetation, the cold howling wind which searches with the driving rain across the bleak moors of Judæa, where no tree ever meets the eye, save some stunted olive, no sign of life save some sentinel shepherd, sleepless, hawkeyed, accentuating the utter loneliness of the lonely hills, which makes the average tourist leave the land of his dreams with a chill at his heart and an aching sense of disappointment.
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But not to the man who has read, who goes knowing what to expect. He sees how this land produced the mystic, the prophet, the seer. His Old Testament glows with new light, his New Testament becomes a transfigured manuscript.

At the same time I would make a qualifying remark about the rain and the absence of water. There is no shadow of doubt but that the average rainfall of any country is affected by the presence or absence of trees. In a remarkable way the depth of water in all wells is affected by this, for a scientific reason too long to explain now. But in the last few years, since the Jewish colonies have got established, the result of their planting trees has had the effect of increasing the rainfall… But with the return of the Jews to Palestine, in accordance with the foretellings of prophesy, we shall yet see Palestine one of the most fertile countries in the world, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of the grape and olive and wheat and barley: When the land has enjoyed her sabbaths.

But we must not linger in Judæa. You have only seen one aspect of a country which possesses some characteristics of every land in the world.

We go northward, past Bethel, on our pilgrimage, and, as we go, we begin to see why it was that Samaria and Judæa were rivals all through their chequered history, rivals in their aspect upon life. We notice it as we slowly descend from the bleak tableland of Judæa to Samaria. Hitherto we have seen no water. Now fountains and springs break forth here and there. The bare, gaunt rocks give place to fertile slopes, where the fresh corn makes glad the laughing valleys. The vine and the sycamore, the olive grove and the plane tree are growing here by meadow land and glades.

What we notice more than these is the comparative ease with which we travel. Hitherto our Arab ponies have been literally picking their way, step by step, along stony, boulder-strewn tracks which a goat could hardly negotiate. Now we have something approaching the semblance of a road. Once again the Bible is made more clear. We recollect how it is in Samaria we have references to the chariot. Ahab, driven by the lash of the westerly gale, the gaunt prophet with his streaming hair under the deluging skies, racing in front of the speeding horses. That same king on
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his last chariot journey, with the red trail which marked his fatal return from Ramoth Gilead. Jehu driving furiously on his errand of vengeance. Naaman, with horses and chariots, stopping at the house of Elisha. Contrast such passages and many more with the only two references to chariots in Judæa recorded in Scripture. The death of Ahaziah (2 Kings, 9, 28) and the burial of Josiah (2 Chron., 35, 24), and you realize the difference between the level stretches of Samaria and the steep, tortuous trackways of Judæa. It was the difference between the ancient pack horse tracks across Dartmoor, where the Abbots of Tavistock went with their sumpter mules in single file, and the roadways of the inhabited valleys below the central waste of the moorlands.

From the low hills of Samaria we easily emerge on our journey northward into one of

the most remarkable features of this remarkable country—the great Plain of Esdraelon. It is the land of the inheritance of the Tribe of Issachar. "Issachar is a large limbed ass stretching himself between the sheepfolds. He saw a resting place that it was good and the land that it was pleasant." But the prophecy in Genesis carries the simile further. "He had to bare his shoulder to bear the burden and became a servant under tribute." Open to the east and the west and the north this great stretching rich plain became the amphitheatre, the battlefield, of great empires; the prey and pasture ground of marauding Bedouin from the east of Jordan.

Here Barak encountered Sisera, and the River Kishon, which still meanders across the plain, swollen into sudden flood, converted the battle ground into a swamp which took off the chariot wheels of the northern oppressor.

Here Gideon crept down to the tents of the Midianites and, at the breaking of the pitchers and flashing torches, the startled enemy fled before the Syrian peasant army.

Here on Gilboa (immortalised in David's song) Saul cast away his life after the great defeat by the Philistines.

Here died great Josiah, at the battle of Megiddo, when the hosts of Egypt overflowed the land.

Here was the slaughter of the priests of Baal, under the shadow of Carmel, where Kishon ran red with the blood of the false prophets.

To-day, only the traveller, or some caravan from Damascus to Egypt, or the wandering Bedouin farmer ploughing is to be seen on the mighty plain. But it may be that the greatest drama of history will here too be unfolded, when East meets
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West in the final war, when "The Kings of the earth shall go forth to battle, to gather them together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty; and he shall gather them together unto a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Har. Mageddon."

Well does the lecturer remember emerging from this great plain (rendered by the latter rains into a quagmire where the horses floundered to their girths) on to the hills which mark the southern slopes of the uplands of Galilee.

The contrast between Judæa and this lovely province is more marked than in Samaria. It is a land of rivers and streams, of oil olive and vines, of forests and corn lands. "The land of Napthali [sic] which rejoices as a hind let loose." Professor Adam Smith calls it a "garden of the Lord." Moreover, as he succinctly puts it, "Whereas Judæa is on the road to nowhere, Galilee is covered with roads from everywhere."

From the hills above Nazareth you can see miles in three directions, a fact which profoundly influenced the growing consciousness of our Blessed Lord in the 30 hidden years. To the south, across the plains of Esdraelon, the children of Nazareth could watch the pilgrims making their way to Samaria and then on to Jerusalem; the merchantmen coming up from Egypt to Damascus; the Midianite caravans on their way from the fords of Jordan. Here were the highways of commerce and of war; what Isaiah calls "The way of the sea: Galilee of the Gentiles."

But the focus of the province of Galilee is, of course, the lake and the coast of the Sea of Gennesareth. First of all I want you to realize its position. From the moorlands, covered in the spring with a wealth of flowers—the scarlet anemone, the lilies of the field, the blue and purple cyclamens,—the traveller descends to nearly 700 feet. The lake is in shape like a harp and the

fingers which play upon its strings are the breezes and storms which sweep down upon its waves from the snows of Lebanon. In length it is some thirteen miles, its greatest breadth about eight.

Every place in Palestine has altered radically in the chequered course of 20 centuries, but none so much perhaps as the surroundings of the Lake of Galilee. To-day there is but one squalid straggling town—Tiberias. 2,000 years ago there were nine cities around the lake, each with a population of more than 15,000 people. To-day there are but one or two boats which take the tourists along its memorable coasts. In the days of the Apostles there were fleets of fishing craft which caught the fish—a kind of mullet—which were packed and salted in barrels and

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sent throughout the country. To-day you can scarcely see a tree. In those days great woods covered the surrounding hills. Ichabod! Truly, the glory is departed. The Scripture narrative has been literally fulfilled.

It cannot be pointed out with absolute certainty which of the mouldering stones (where the Lizard basks in the sun and the viper curls up in the noonday) is Capernaum or Bethsaida or Chorazin. “Thou Capernaum which art exalted to heaven shall be cast down into hell.”

The site of Magdala is fairly assured; but of the city walls, the synagogues, the wharves and factories, the temple and theatre of Herod, the Greek villas, the Roman garrison barracks, the dyeing and the tanning works, the boat building and fish curing (where the hum of tens of thousands rose in the busy streets), naught remains save the marshes where the wild fowl scream and the wandering Arabs pitch their long black tents.

Although, strictly speaking, we have reached the northern limit of Palestine proper and ought to turn at once to the Jordan Valley, I will say a word about Mount Hermon, the Lebanon district and Damascus. Mount Hermon is, as you know, the scene of the Transfiguration of our Lord. It is clothed in a garment of perpetual snow all the year round. “Like as the dew of Hermon which fell upon the Hill of Zion.” In the hot, sweltering days of summer, when men pant for moisture and it is to [sic] hot to sleep at night, you go upon the flat house top and the summer wind from the north passes over those ice snow-bound pinnacles and is borne in refreshing breeze southward over the whole land. From everywhere you can see Hermon, towering up like a finger pointing to heaven, reminding the city dweller of the eternal silences of Nature undefiled. It was little wonder that in those months of soul anguish before his coming death the Lord of Nature sought communion in the solitudes of the great mountains clothed in the cedar forests, fed by the waterfalls.

We come now to the consideration of the fourth long strip of country into which we divided the land. It is one of the most interesting of all—the Jordan Valley.

As we are up so far north there we will begin. The Jordan, like many other riers [sic], has really more than one source. It has at least three rushing, babbling fountains, which well up out of the spurs of Lebanon. From thence it descends, down, down, down, 160 miles till it loses itself in the Dead Sea.

“There may be something,” writes Dr. George Adam Smith,

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“on the surface of another planet to match the Jordan Valley. There is nothing on this planet.”

It is absolutely unique. I wish I could make you understand the nature of this gigantic

ditch, trench, valley; call it what you will; which begins in the north at sea level and, by the time it has reached the Dead Sea, is 1,300 feet below sea level. Get that clear: 1,300 feet below (not the level of Jerusalem) but sea level.

Through the beautiful wooded country of the Tribe of Dan rushes the mountain snow stream (over boulder and rock, like Teign or Dart rush by their cradle banks here in our Devon) down to the waters of Merom, and then it gradually widens and flows more slowly, through a delta of its own deposits, into the Lake of Galilee.

From the southern end of the Lake of Galilee the Jordan flows down 65 miles to its appointed end. But what a journey. Deeper, deeper grows the valley. The heat is like a green house, an unhealthy, fever-laden heat. The banks become salt and greasy with grey marl and slippery clay; ugly mud banks, foul with ooze and slime, and all along, in breadth about half a mile, each side grows a veritable jungle of rank vegetation, packed with tamarsk [sic] trees and tangled bush.

The traveller can understand when he sees this tropical valley the references in Scripture to lions and wild beasts which had their haunts in the fever laden undergrowth.

It is not until the river emerges through the plains of Gilgal, by Jericho, that signs of cultivation and human habitations are visible or possible, and in days of old this particular part of the river must have been wonderfully fertile. The dates and balms [sic] of Jericho were famous throughout the eastern world. Gardens of cucumbers and melons, fields of wheat and barley must have stretched across those miles of wide rich plains which separated Jericho from that river, across which the hosts of Israel moved to battle to take possession of the land.

The end of Jordan is as tragic as its beginning was romantic and full of promise. It empties all its waters into the Dead Sea, and though for thousands and thousands of years it has poured its flood into this inland lake the surface of that lake has never risen. Evaporation is the explanation.

By the banks of the Dead Sea the traveller is standing at the very lowest spot on all the surface of the globe, 1,300 feet below sea level.

From afar off there is no sheet of water in the world to com-

pare in colour with the deep azure blue of the Dead Sea, but that illusion is dispelled as you make your way to its desolate shore across the plains of the wilderness of Judæa.

George Adam Smith calls it “This awful hollow; this bit of the infernal regions come up to the surface; this hell with the sun shining into it.”

It is well called the Dead Sea. The salt and slime encrusted tree trunks around its shores are hoary with salt. No fish swims in its waters; waves so heavy with chemical deposits that, whereas the sea around our coast holds 6 per cent. of solids in solution, the Dead Sea holds 26. In length it is about 46 miles and in its broadest part some nine miles across.

I feel now that I have said enough to enable teachers to realize what a wealth of material is at their disposal with a map and a pair of compasses, a series of photographs and some of the many books published on Palestine, to make the Scripture lesson the most fascinating lesson of the day, instead of a dull, dry task. The History of the Jews is the key of God’s great design, and the land of this mysterious chosen people will be the land where the greatest event of the future will take place—the Second Coming of our Lord to this world. Just as for the past 4,000 years Palestine has been the centre from which has radiated out in ever

growing circles the Divine purposes which led up to and followed the fact of the Incarnation. So shall it be the centre of the Millennial Reign, when His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem upon the East.