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Tarsus and the Cilician Gates.

BY THE REV. M. LINTON SMITH, M.A.

IN the course of a somewhat extended journey in the summer of 1907, certain impressions of which have already appeared in these pages, the writer was fortunate enough to spend some days on a stretch of road which ranks very high among the thoroughfares of the world, that which crosses the great wall of the Taurus Mountains, and forms the main avenue of land-borne traffic between Syria and Anatolia.

Our starting-point on the north of the range is Kizli (Kilise) Hissar, the site of the ancient Tyana, whose early importance is witnessed, not only by a fine Hittite stele, the two portions of which, long separated, have now after many adventures found a resting-place in the Constantinople Museum, but also by a very remarkable fragment discovered on our journey of a dedicatory inscription in archaic Greek or Phrygian lettering, set up by King Midas, who has been rescued from the legendary position to which he had been relegated by the Greek historians by the discovery of his tomb in northern Phrygia, and by the occurrence of his name on the historical inscriptions of Sargon, the Assyrian conqueror of Samaria: it is now a series of low black mounds, crowned with the usual mud buildings of a Turkish village, with a broken aqueduct of Roman times, the graceful arches of which run eastward across the plain. The track, for at first it is no more, runs southward over level ground, but as soon as the foothills are reached a well-metalled road from Eregli (Heraclea Cybistra) comes in from the west, and climbs for some hours through land which is not unfertile, though very scantily tilled; water is plentiful, and the banks of the streams are fringed with poplars and low shrubs.

After a while the streams are left behind, a little khan marking the last convenient stopping-place, and the road runs upwards till the summit of the ridge is reached, and there

bursts upon the eye the great barrier of the Taurus : for days past its gleaming summits have formed the southern horizon of the traveller from the north, but now the bare limestone streaked with snow appears suddenly to have come within reach ; the impenetrable majesty of that long range, stretching apparently unbroken east and west as far as the eye can reach, seems to refuse passage to all but the hardest mountaineers, and to defy the ingenuity of man to find a road by which he may traffic or fight with the regions beyond. But the clearness of the air is deceptive, and there remain two other ridges each rising, as does that on which we stand, to a height of 7,000 feet, before the foot of the rocky wall is reached ; one of these is crossed by the main road into the valley of the Tchakut-Su, which at this point is broad and open ; above on a spur of the ridge which has just been surmounted stands the castle of Loulon, a frontier fortress of the Byzantines against the Moslems, with its black mass standing clear against the sky.

The road follows the valley, or at least the line, of the Tchakut-Su ; but it is far more interesting to strike across country, and climb the last ridge of the foothills to Bulgar Maden, a small mining town, the silver-workings of which date back to Hittite days ; the track leads across the broad glen with its fields, and gardens, and poplar-fringed streams ; but the character of the country soon changes, and we now are riding over bare red soil from which spring clumps of scented herbs, and stunted firs filling the air with their resinous fragrance ; the streams no longer babble over pebbly beds, but dash down from rock to rock, and from pool to pool, and the summit of the pass with its spring of ice-cold water is covered with low flowering shrubs, which with their pink and yellow blossoms might stand for heather and stunted gorse ; but the only flower which is really familiar is the forget-me-not, which grows abundantly among its thornier neighbours. Now right over against us towers the huge mass of the main range, greyer and grimmer than when distance softened its outlines, its ridge capped and its sides streaked with snow. The houses of the

little town lie beneath, but we need not linger there, and soon we find ourselves on the road which leads down the valley of the tributary of the Tchakut-Su which rises just above Bulgar Maden; the scene is one of singular beauty; across the stream on our right the grey wall towers up into the clouds, its lower flanks clad with pine-forests; while the slopes of the hills which we have just crossed are terraced for gardens above and below the road. An occasional spur of rock runs out and falls, sometimes a sheer precipice to the level of the stream, the road being cut round it, sometimes a sloping surface, burying its feet in the débris which have fallen from above; on one such rock-face an incised Hittite inscription has been discovered, in five lines or compartments; the surface has flaked rather badly in places, and it is hard to distinguish natural markings from carved signs; but soon the eye gets used to the task, and the heads and hands, and feet, and circles, which form so large a proportion of the known hieroglyphs, are clearly distinguishable.

As we resume our journey, the road, which has been engineered and constructed with some care, becomes badly broken, and quite impracticable for wheeled vehicles; "The road-making Kaimakam (governor) has gone" was the ample explanation offered. The stream brawls on over its rocky bed below, and soon a village, and cherry orchards in full fruit, come into sight, welcome refreshment on a long day's ride; the valley widens a little, the pine-trees on the mountain-sides are larger and finer, and at last there appears a break in that mountain wall which has blocked our passage southward; we rejoin the main valley, crossing its stream by a stone bridge, by which stands a Turkish guardhouse, Tchifte (*i.e.*, Twin) Khan by name, and find a good road which plunges with the stream into the heart of the range.

We are now again on the main line of communication, and the cuttings by which the road is carried through rocky spurs which break in upon the valley are often of ancient work. Pause for a moment, and think of those who have passed by this way: by it the West has sought the East with force of

arms ; Xenophon and the Ten Thousand whom the younger Cyrus led against his brother marched by this road to their unsuccessful attempt upon the Persian Empire ; less than a century later Alexander and his Macedonians passed along after one successful fight, to those two later battles which were to give the dominion of the East to a Western monarch ; and once more at a later time Godfrey and Bohemond and Tancred led the forces of Western Christendom on the first Crusade which established for nigh two centuries a Latin kingdom in the Holy Land. By it, too, Eastern forces have sought the West, and Harun-ar-Rashid and many another Moslem general advanced against the ever-weakening bulwark of Christendom, the Byzantine Empire. But the East sought the West not so much by force of arms, as with the influences of trade, of culture, and above all of religion. The most notable figure that has passed westward by this route is that of a bald-headed, beady-eyed, hook-nosed, bandy-legged little Jew, "with the face of an angel," whom we may picture as trudging manfully along the road as soon as it was clear of the winter snow, or more likely as crouching in the corner of a covered cart which he and his companions had chartered to save time and unnecessary fatigue. A great task lies before him ; he has to "stablish the churches" which he has already founded, and to found others in the centres of communication on the road to Rome, the *ganglia* of the great Imperial system. Twice at least in his life did Paul of Tarsus traverse this road which the energy of his own city had rendered practicable ; and of all those who have passed up and down along it he is to us the most interesting, if not the greatest.

An hour below the guard-house, a considerable stream comes in from the east, and just where it is crossed by a wooden bridge, Tahta Keupreu by name, a large khan with a shady tree in front stands back from the road ; timber is plentiful here, for the hill-sides are thickly clothed with pines, and night by night the carters and humbler travellers kindle a great bonfire, the flaring, flickering light of which sheds a glow

over the whole scene ; when the pass is clear, this khan is always busy, for it is the end of the first long day's stage from Tarsus, the half-way house to Eregli for the traveller who hurries westwards. Resuming our journey down the valley, which still is narrow with lofty hills on either hand, we come in a short two hours to another bridge, this time a single arch of stone, Ak Keupreu, just above which a great spring boils and bubbles up from the heart of the western mountain, changing with its deep blue waters the colour of the whole stream ; below this the valley widens out, as the hills recede on either hand, and we enter the valley of Bozanti (Podandus), a convenient camping-ground for armies traversing the defile ; the roadside here is dotted with little sheds, the owners of which dispense coffee to the passers-by, while some of them occupy the long hours of waiting in manufacturing the rude wooden implements of husbandry, threshing sleds, rakes, shovels, and pack-saddles for carrying corn, out of the plentiful supply of timber which the hills afford. Presently the Tchakut-Su plunges once more into a narrow defile, by which it joins in the plains below the Sihun (Sarus) which flows past Adana.

So far we have been following the proposed line of the Baghdad railway, which has already reached Eregli ; work has just been begun on the next section, which will be seen from the foregoing account to present very serious difficulties ; but now we diverge from its course which is to run down to Adana along the line of the stream which it has followed so far. Our road bends south-westward out of the valley up the course of a little brook which flows through a forest of magnificent pines ; the blazing sun brings out their fragrance, and the bracing mountain air takes off from the weariness of travel, while the eye is delighted by the graceful forms and restful colouring of the trees, a welcome change from the glare and bareness of the central plateau. At the watershed, the scene is one of singular beauty ; waterfalls splash down from the hills on the left and the sea of verdure is broken by little timber huts, the summer quarters of the herdsmen and shepherds ; a broad vale, ringed

by cliffs or tree-clad hills, slopes away at our feet, and beyond the heights that shut it in on the south-west, spurs trending southward rise range above range.

The road runs through the little vale, guarded on either side by Arab forts, and at its southern corner seems to be blocked by cliffs some 400 feet high ; a nearer approach does not reveal the exit, and it is not till within some hundred yards or so that a narrow gorge is seen to open, through which the stream escapes southward. The cleft was once wide enough for the waters of the stream alone, and could only have been used as a bridle-path when they ran low ; but the opening has been artificially widened, and on the west bank of the stream, an upright face of rock, some 50 feet high, shows the amount of limestone which had to be chiselled away to make room for a road by the side of the stream ; an isolated rock between torrent bed and roadway bears an inscription of Marcus Aurelius, and a few yards down the defile stands a Roman milestone ; but it is not to the resources of that great empire, or to the skill of its engineers, that this wonderful feat is due ; the road was six centuries old when Marcus Aurelius recorded the repairs he had executed ; it was the energy and foresight of one city alone which carried out the work, and by it changed the whole course of the traffic of the ancient world. Tarsus lay far south of the passes of the Anti-Taurus, over which the wealth and culture of the east passed westwards by the Royal Road ; she lay north of the ordinary course of navigation from Syria and Egypt to Crete and the Ægean ; but by cutting this road for wheeled vehicles through the Taurus range, she diverted the bulk of the land-traffic from the Royal Road to a shorter one which passed her very gates, and drew to the harbour, which she had formed out of a lagoon on the course of the Cydnus between the city and the sea, the ships of all nations : what the cutting of the Suez Canal has been to the traffic of the modern world, that the cutting of the road through the Cilician Gates in the fifth century B.C. was to the ancient. Does not this give new point and force to the boast of her greatest son, " I am a

Jew by race, a Tarsian of Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city (*οὐκ ἀσήμεου πόλεως πολίτης*, Acts xxi. 39)”? It was widened by Ibrahim Pasha in 1839, to allow his artillery to pass, but even now the gap through which road and stream run is not more than 60 feet wide.

The defile passed, the road winds down for two hours through a narrow gorge, with hills and cliffs rising on either hand some 2,000 feet, clad with pine and fir to their very summits; every turn brings fresh beauties to the eye; the banks are covered with creepers and grasses and flowering plants; the deep rocky pools of the stream suggest a refreshing coolness; a single shapely pine stands silhouetted against the clear sky above; the grey limestone cliffs tower overhead, viewed through a frame of green; and an occasional streak of snow near their summits reminds one of the height at which one is still travelling. At last the pass widens, and a little khan marks the exit from the gorge into the wider and more open valleys below; the character of the vegetation changes; oak and ilex and arbutus mingle with the pines, trees which would not disgrace an English park; and up and down over hill and dale, though ever trending downwards, the road runs through beautiful woodland scenery; cultivation and villages reappear, and the traveller begins as he nears the top of each ridge to expect from it a view of the blue waters of the Mediterranean. But this is not yet; piles of logs lie by the roadside, and here and there is a rude sawmill, worked by the abundant water-power of the mountain streams: strings of mules pass downwards, each with a heavy plank secured to its pack-saddle on either side, the hinder end trailing and bumping along the road, or with a dripping mass of frozen snow from the upper ranges packed in sacking, and hurried down in the cool of the night to the city that swelters in the plain below.

A little hamlet is passed, Mazar Oghlu Khan, in which a magnificent spring (possibly the ancient Mopsoucrene) bubbles out into a rocky basin, with a rough wooden platform built over it, thatched with leafy boughs, a cool sleeping-place in the hot

nights of summer ; then the road rises for half a mile or so, turns to the left through a rock cutting, and the whole scene is changed ; the woodland has vanished save in the valley on the right, and beneath us the foothills and the plain dance and shiver in the heat, while dimly through the haze can be descried the coast-line, with the waters of the Gulf of Issus beyond, and, closing the eastward horizon, the dim outline of the Giaour Dagh (Mount Amanus) on the North Syrian coast. The transformation is very sudden ; one moment you have looked back upon the ridges, and cliffs, and forests of the Taurus ; the next moment these are hidden from view, and the rolling foothills, barer and browner than those on the far side, from their southern aspect, descend to the plain and the sea. Down through them runs the road ; soon the oleander, with its blaze of blossoms, appears along the watercourses, and the fig-tree and the mulberry take the place of the cherry in the village orchards ; the domes and minarets of Tarsus become visible in the plain beneath, rising from a dark ring, the gardens which surround the town.

At last the low hills sink into the plain, and a weary ride of two hours along a level dusty track lies before us ; maize and sugar-cane are growing in the fields, which are intersected by sluggish watercourses full of croaking frogs. Presently a dull continuous roar fills the air, and before its cause has been made plain, the horses' hoofs are clanking against the metals of the Adana and Mersina railway ; this passed, we are standing upon the banks of the Cydnus, as it tumbles over a rocky ridge into the new channel formed for it without the city by the Emperor Justinian. A crazy wooden bridge leads across it past a mill, and then the road runs, ankle-deep in fine dust, between the high hedges and watercourses which enclose the gardens ; great water-wheels, between 20 and 30 feet in diameter, raise water in the troughs round their circumference to pour it into the irrigation channels ; orange-trees, and lemons, and an occasional date-palm, give evidence of the different climate, and grow with a luxuriance which is the joint gift of sun, soil,

and river. At length the dusty road yields to paved streets, and we pass through the houses and bazaars of Tarsus. Of its ancient glories nothing remains above the surface, though capitals and other architectural fragments are often turned up in digging foundations; the Bab Bulus (Gate of St. Paul) is really a fragment of the fortifications of Harun-ar-Rashid; the only relic of classical (or possibly earlier) times is the Deunuk Tash, an oblong erection with concrete walls over 20 feet thick, with only one entrance a yard wide, enclosing a long open court containing two other enormous masses of the same material: much speculation has arisen as to its origin and purpose, the most probable theory being that it is the sub-structure of a temple of Græco-Roman times: at present it is the burying-ground of the Armenians, who not unnaturally cling obstinately to that which is not only the last resting-place of their dead, but also a place of refuge from those sudden outbreaks of popular fury, which they have only too much reason to fear, a fortress upon which nothing short of siege artillery could make the least impression.

We have come to our journey's end; we have traversed the most interesting portion of the greatest road of the Christian era, which in its main direction and features remains unchanged, though its importance has long since gone; we have trodden it till it has brought us to the city to whose vigorous life it owes its existence; and in that city we must leave it; the energy and foresight of its citizens were never more clearly shown than in the greatest of them all; and within its walls Tarsus contains a signal proof of the triumph of the cause for which he lived and died. Is it not one of the ironies of history that the grave of Julian the Apostate should be in the birthplace of St. Paul?

