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*A Diary of a Journey to the East:  
In the Autumn of 1854,*

By **William Beamont**, Esq.  
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(p. 120).....

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2.

I WAS in the saddle this morning at seven o'clock, and having taken leave of my son, I shortly afterwards rode under the Jaffa gateway in company with a much valued (p. 121) friend, who, like me, was going to Nablouse, but unlike me, was going to take up his abode there. ....

(p. 126)....

Joseph's tomb, which we passed at a short distance from the well, is doubtless the real place of the patriarch's burial. It is kept in repair by the Mahometans, who have made it a wely.

After our strange adventure at the well, we rode on for two miles or more, through a gorge between lofty hills, which by shutting out the moonlight, made the gloom of the evening seem still more gloomy. In our impatience to reach our quarters on arriving at Nablouse, whose five gates are happily not shut as in other Syrian cities at too early an hour, we entered the city by the first gate we came to. But after floundering about for some time in the dark streets, we were compelled by finding ourselves in a *cul-de-sac*, to retrace our steps and to re-enter at another gate; and after another series of flounderings, we at length alighted at the hospitable door of Halhil Azeem, a much respected native of Nablouse.

My journey of twelve hours on horseback to-day had been very severe exercise, and when my friend observed how much I was exhausted by it, he ordered coffee and a sheshah. Both were brought in with oriental state by slipperless attendants, and after sipping the coffee and inhaling a few (p. 127) whiffs of the djebely, which acted like a sedative, I felt so revived, that in a very short time, I was able to give the Arab schoolmaster, who sought that aid from me, some lessons in English grammar as he sat at my feet, while I reclined on the divan, and in the course of an hour, I was able to go in search of the wonder of Nablouse, the ancient Samaritan pentateuch. I owe it to my friend, who was known and much respected at Nablouse, that I was visited by Salem, the high priest of the Samaritans, and by his eldest son Amram, who, at my friend's suggestion, consented to show me the pentateuch, even at this late hour. Fancy then a procession with fanouses and lanthorns, winding its way through the dark streets of Nablouse at ten o'clock at night, when everybody and everything but owls and antiquaries were in bed, and you will see us following with some attendants, the two priests; the one

a venerable old man of seventy, with a grey beard, a turban, and flowing robes, and the other a hale man of fifty, who boasts through his father, an unbroken descent from that other Amram, whose son's potent rod—

"\_\_\_\_\_Up called a pitchy cloud  
Of locusts, warping on the eastern wind  
That o'er the realm of impious Pharoah hung  
Like night, and darken'd all the land of Nile."

(p. 128) This Amram had a face which reminded me very much of some of Rembrandt's portraits of rabbis in the temple. One public place lighted by our lanthorns as we passed looked Moorish and picturesque. In the centre there was an octagon basin in which a pattering fountain was playing, while all round the place, which was also an octagon in shape, were rows of handsome alcoves, where no doubt the inhabitants resort to smoke, and hear stories in the daytime. The synagogue, which we came to in due time, is a very humble structure reached by a flight of stone steps. There taking off our shoes and leaving them at the door, we followed our two conductors to the sanctuary, where they unlocked the depository of their treasures and produced the sacred manuscript. It was enveloped in the rich folds of a cover of scarlet silk, with Hebrew letters embroidered upon it in gold. The priests reverently unfolded it, and resting it upon its silver staves, exposed it to our view, and read to us the 23rd chapter of Leviticus relating to the day of atonement. It did not seem to me to be written on one consecutive roll like Hebrew manuscripts, but to be on skins fastened together upon some cloth fabric. In some places the writing was nearly effaced by much use, and in many places the manuscript was greatly worn, and had been carefully (p. 129) patched and repaired. The high priest who read it to us, without being conscious that we did not understand him, told us that the language, and the character were both *ancient* Hebrew, and the very same in which the ten commandments were given upon Mount Sinai. The letters have certainly no resemblance to modern Hebrew. He told us also, what I daresay he believed, that this copy of the pentateuch was made only thirteen years after the children of Israel had entered the promised land. The preservation of such a manuscript whatever its age, by a people who are their enemies, "For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," is a strong confirmation, if any were needed, of the genuineness of the Hebrew pentateuch.<sup>1</sup> The honour of first making known to scholars the existence of the Samaritan pentateuch, I believe, is due to Scaliger, but the ancient copy preserved at Nablouse was never seen either by him or any other scholar acquainted with the character of ancient manuscripts. Basnage thought, from the best evidence he could obtain, that this copy was not more than eight hundred years old, but I came to the conclusion from the style and appearance of the writing, and some marks of decay by age, that it was written about (p. 130) a thousand years ago. It is in the true Hebrew character which the Jews used before they were carried away captive to Babylon, and was very probably made from a copy written about the time when Josiah restored the law. Nablouse, which I had an opportunity of seeing afterwards by daylight, is situated in a gorge between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, once the scene of one of the most awful transactions either in Jewish or any other history—for on one of these mountains six of the tribes were ranged to pronounce blessings on the keepers of the law, and on the other the six remaining tribes were placed

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<sup>1</sup> See an account of the Samaritans in Robinson's Palestine, v. III. 127 et seq.

to curse those who broke it.<sup>2</sup> The city, surrounded by gardens and plantations, which give it a rich look, has twelve thousand inhabitants. It is better built, has wider streets than any town I have yet seen in Syria, and its position is romantic and beautiful. Its ancient name was Sichem, and its present designation is a corruption from Flavia Neapolis, the name which was given it by Vespasian. For a long time the local government of Nablouse has been intrusted to one or other of the two great families of native proprietors, between whom unhappily jealousies exist, which have been followed here by the same consequences as have been produced by the same causes at Hawara. (p. 131)

Elijah and Elisha were both Samaritans. It is said that our Lord's miracle of healing the ten lepers was wrought near Nablouse, and we know that the grateful leper was a Samaritan, which might be one cause of the ready acceptance which the gospel found in Samaria, when it was afterwards preached there by Philip.<sup>3</sup>

Saewulf, an early traveller, states that the order to behead John the Baptist was given here; and such is the veneration in which Mount Gerizim, is held by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, that they pretend it was never covered by the flood. It was on this mountain that Jotham told his early and remarkable fable of the trees going to choose a king, the moral of which was seen when Abimelech overthrew the city of Sichem and sowed its ruins with salt.<sup>4</sup> At Nablouse, which is now a city of refuge to the Samaritans as ancient Sichem was to all Israel, Justin Martyr was born. The congregation of the Samaritans now in Nablouse does not number more than one hundred and fifty persons. The old priest made many inquiries after Dr. Wilson, the author of the "Lands of the Bible," who had spent some time in Nablouse, and for whom he evidently entertained a regard. The temple formerly standing on Mount Gerizim is in ruins, its sacrifices are interrupted, and the hour long since (p. 132) predicted has arrived, for neither on this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, can they worship the Father without the permission of their Mahometan masters.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3.

I WAS on the roof of my host's house this morning to see the sun rise upon Nablouse. As the sun rose, the city with its mosques, minarets, and palaces embosomed in gardens and vineyards, looked rich and beautiful. The accents of the twelve tribes are no longer heard sounding from its sentinel mountains, but with those mountains in sight, imagination is able to call up some faint idea of the solemn scene in which the Jewish people were then engaged.

At nine o'clock, having bid adieu to my excellent travelling companion of yesterday, I mounted my horse to pursue the rest of my journey alone. As I rode through the Bab-el-wad gateway, a great concourse of people were assembled "near the entering of the gate," just as it might have been when there were judges in Israel. From the remains of some ruined walls, which I saw outside the present city, I conclude that its circuit was once of much greater extent on this side. For a mile or more, the road on each side was bordered by gardens of vegetables, and an abundance of vines, fig-trees, and mulberries. Water seems abundant here, and everywhere in this country when water is properly *husbanded* and married to earth, the union of the two elements proves ever most fruitful and prolific. When the gardens cease, the olive yards begin, and they continue for another mile. The

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<sup>2</sup> Deut. xxvii. 12, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Acts viii. 5.0

<sup>4</sup> Judges ix.

trees in these olive yards seemed healthy and wellattended to, and in one of them there was a plantation of young trees. This neighbourhood seems more settled, and is evidently in the hands of some large hereditary owners, who are able to stand between the peasants and the government. When I had passed beyond the limit of the olive yards, there occurred a succession of water-mills; but the aqueducts that ought to supply them are in ruin, and they are consequently idle and silent, except when the heavens not only send rain, but do the work. From these mills, the road began to ascend towards Sebaste, the ancient Samaria, and after passing an old tower with a mill and a ruined aqueduct, I arrived on the summit of the hill upon which the city stands. The hill, which is very bold, commands a confined but beautiful view of the valleys towards the east, and on the west, the view is only bounded by the Mediterranean. Samaria, which Isaiah calls the head of Ephraim, was bought for two talents of silver from Shemer, by Omri, King of Israel, who made it the capital of his kingdom in 923 B. c, and such it remained until the carrying away of the ten tribes. Ahab, it is said, built a house of ivory there, but we are not to understand of this or the ivory palaces mentioned in Scripture, that the walls or exterior were of ivory. Ivory was probably used in them to inlay the floors, ceilings, screens, or walls of the chambers, just as I saw it used in the palace of Ras ed Deen, except that in Ahab's house it might be in greater abundance. When Ahab reigned in Samaria, it was the scene of many of those solemn transactions in which Elijah and Elisha bore a part. In his time also it was besieged by Benhadad, king of Syria. It was again besieged by the same monarch in Joram, his son's reign. During the latter siege the distress, we are told, was so extreme, that the fourth part of a cab of *chick peas* (not as our translation erroneously has it, a cab of doves' dung) was sold for five pieces of silver. The city received its original name from Shemer, its proprietor. Herod the Great who rebuilt it, and placed here a colony of six thousand persons, after it had been destroyed by John Hyreanus, gave it its present name in honour of Augustus

This book is not referenced in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005.

**William Beamont**, Esq. is **William John Beamont** (1828-1868), was an English clergyman and author. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_John\\_Beamont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_John_Beamont)

His visit to the Samaritans was Nov. 2, 1854.