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A Land March From England to Ceylon Forty Years Ago

By **Edward Ledwich Mitford**, F.R.G.S.
Ceylon Civil Service (Retired)

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(p. 196)....

This valley is certainly a romantic and beautiful spot, and forms one of the exceptions to the general desolation of Palestine. Nablous is a large town superabundantly watered, with long streets of shops and some covered bazaars. It is backed by high cliffs. The inhabitants are a spirited race, and gave the Egyptian army under Ibrahim Pacha much opposition before they were quite subdued.

(p. 197) Besides the Mohammedan population, of which I did not ascertain the number, there are seventy families of Christians and thirty of Jews. There is also here a remnant of the Samaritans, who have a separate synagogue. It is a curious fact, with respect to this race, that they never number more than forty male adults; if a boy lives and arrives at manhood, an old man is sure to die, to maintain the limited number; I could scarcely give credit to the statement, although assured of its truth on the spot; it is generally believed in Syria, and I was afterwards told, by educated persons, who had lived long in the country, that there could be no doubt on the subject. I was unable to account for this unheard-of barrenness until I met with an extraordinary coinciding prophecy in the latter part of the 9th chapter of Hosea, which this seems to fulfil. On my return from Jerusalem, I went to the Samaritan synagogue to obtain a sight of the celebrated Pentateuch, which is preserved here. I had been told that they generally endeavoured to avoid showing the original one, by producing a copy of a later date, so I determined to see them both. On entering the chapel, which is a plain whitewashed room, the Cohen, priest, or Levite, called my attention to the lamp suspended from the ceiling, which, he said, "wanted oil;" which, of course, I understood as a gentle hint for money to buy it; he then produced from a recess a curious cylindrical case, apparently of brass, which contained the five books of Moses, written on parchment and rolled in equal proportions round two rollers; the ink of this appeared rather black for the age attributed to its transcription; about 3300 years: they say it was written by Abishua, the son of Phinehas.¹

¹ Basnage gives the title, "L'an 59 de l'Exode 13 ans apres l'entree dans la Canaan, moi Abishua, fils de Phinees, fils d'Eleazar, fils d'Aaron, j'ai ecrit cet exemplaire de la Loi." And adds in a note, "Les Samaritans

Pretending not to doubt its authenticity, I asked to see the other copy, which, after some demur, was produced: (p. 198) it was rolled on pins like the former, but the parchment was not in such good condition, and the ink with which it was written was faded and brown; this was stated to be 400 or 500 years old. I am not a Hebrew scholar, so cannot decide their relative merits from the character of the writing; but from appearances I should say the latter was the real antique. I inquired if they kept up a correspondence with any others of their sect in distant countries. They said they had no intercourse with them, but they had heard that there were Samaritans (called by them Somarra) at Bunder-bushir (Bushire in Persia) at Iskelund (?) and in Cashmire.

The town seems populous, and well supplied with provisions and fruit; the streets are badly paved with round stones, and, owing to the heavy rains, were not in pleasant walking order. Leprosy is very common, and many cripples from this cause were sitting begging on the roads near the town gates.

January 9.—Leaving this picturesque valley, we proceeded through a fertile undulating district; near the town is a fine well of water, overflowing its mouth, where some natives were washing. Jacob's Well is on the mountain to the left, at the distance of an hour's walk, and near where the ancient Sychar stood (that is, according to tradition). A great many women were coming to the town, carrying baskets on their heads, in which were yaourt, burgool, eggs, fruit, etc. We followed the foot of the hills.....

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