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An Eastern Afterglow:
or, Present Aspects of Sacred Scenery
By **W. S. Wood**
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(p. 382) ..

Riding out of Shiloh by the second valley, W. Lubban, through fields of corn, and past a spring, and an inn called Khan Lubban, we issued on the northern main-road again, nearly opposite to the village of Lubban (Lebonah). A level stretch which follows, enclosing the village of Sawieh and its old khan, is bounded by the wide and shallow W. Yetma. This crossed, we had to mount in pouring rain a long steep pass, from the crest of which Mt. Gerizim loomed darkly into view, all beyond being hidden in gloom. Here we lunched, obtaining our water from a spring at the bottom. After a steep descent, the road crosses a depression, and enters the long plain of El Mukhna, fertile with spreading corn-fields. On one side (the left) are the slopes of Gerizim, where numerous flocks of black goats pasture, on the other a lower line of hills, and upon both several gleaming little villages are perched, notably Hawara and Awerta to left and right.

(p. 383) Jacob's Well, which we stayed a short while to look at, is situate at the further corner of the plain. And turning here to the left, up the valley, between the lofty twin mountains Gerizim and Ebal, which amazingly reproduce one another in every turn and curve, past a square pool named Ain Defna, past the new barracks, where squads of soldiers were being instructed in the goose-step, preparatory to being drafted to the Turkish War, past some curious ash-heaps, whence the town is well seen, we reached our camp on the further side of Nablus.

(p. 384) CHAPTER XLVIII.

SHECHEM AND SAMARIA.

NABLUS (Neapolis), the ancient Shechem, is a charmingly-situated town, of considerable size and population, nestling under the shade of Gerizim. A few minarets, a number of square-domed houses, glance whitely from amid foliage of every shade of green. Orange-trees, lemons, mulberries, pomegranates, walnuts, palms, vines, figs, olives, all are here, while masses of prickly pear-bushes climb half-way up Mt. Ebal and intrude far into the valley. Is this plant, I wonder, "the bramble" of Jotham's parable from Gerizim to the men of Shechem?

The interior of the town is threaded by narrow winding streets, often spanned by arches or vaulted above. Ill-paved, and that only in parts, they were now running down with streamlets caused by the rain, which is unusual and injurious at this time of year; in one field outside the town the corn had been entirely washed away by the rush of water. Fountains are many; and trees hang over walls, and throw stray branches into the roadway. In one quarter large new covered bazaars have sprung up, and that rare sight in Palestine of

a carriage and pair is not, I believe, unknown in the outskirts of the town. In contrast, a band of female lepers abide outside the southern gate, and come to the camp of the passing stranger to crave a bakshish. And at night the distant howling of jackals may be heard.

(p. 385) The Rev. Y. E. Karim (Yohanna El Karim in full), the Protestant pastor of Nablus, who was acquainted with our dragoman, very kindly acted as our cicerone while here. He is a native of the town, who has lived and lectured long in England, has an English wife, and speaks the English language fluently. One evening that he dined with us, he amused us with a number of curious anecdotes of his earlier life and struggles. He has now returned as a missionary to his countrymen, and in his mission-house, which we paid a visit to, seventy girls and twenty-five boys attend school; there is a women's sewing meeting for just five minutes daily, and a Protestant service every Sunday, at which more than a hundred attend.

One special point of interest in the place is the continued existence here of a small body of Samaritans, who still uphold their ancient faith and worship. They have a synagogue, in which the noted Codex Samaritanus or Samaritan Pentateuch is preserved. The high-priest, who admitted us and shewed us the roll, was dressed in a red turban, brown jacket, striped shirt, and silk waistband; and both he and his two sons who were present wore their hair uncut, and had a decidedly Jewish cast of features. He himself was a middle-sized man of about thirty, and had a great-grandmother then alive, said to be upwards of 110 years old. The office is hereditary in the family. The synagogue, around which the Samaritan quarter is gathered, is a little vaulted, whitewashed room, entered by a porch from a courtyard. It has a seat running along the wall, and two recesses, one opposite the door, the other on the left side of it, and covered by a curtain, within which the chest holding the national manuscripts is kept. They are of course very reserved about shewing to strangers their special treasure, and, as usual, a less valuable manuscript, enclosed in an elegant case adorned with Venetian scroll-work, and covered with a silk cloth, was first brought out, and the attempt made to palm it off on us as the true Codex. This device is sometimes repeated several (p. 386) times, the same manuscript being withdrawn and brought back with the case changed. So said Mr. Karim, who was fortunately at hand to check their plots. The genuine Codex is contained in a brass cylinder chased with silver, which opens out into three compartments, the two outer ones engraved with Venetian scroll-work, the inner one (of which rubbings are readily sold) embellished with a portraiture of the Tabernacle, shewing all its furniture from the ark with the cherubim above to the knives in use in its service. A beautiful blue silk cloth embroidered with Samaritan characters, and (then) 153 years old, is thrown over this. The roll inside, age unknown, but probably not much older than the tenth century A.D., consists of pairs of dirty columns of Samaritan characters, gold on vellum, each column being fourteen inches long by seven wide, and containing forty to fifty lines.

The Samaritans once possessed a more spacious synagogue, but it has long been taken from them by the Moslems, and converted into a mosque, with a prettily-carved mihrab, and a chequered pattern in red, black, and white on the half-circle of an arch near the door. It stands in the middle of an orchard, with a tank of water in front, and an old tower rising beyond. Three other mosques are noticeable: the Jamia el Chadra, once a church; the Jamia en Nisr, the scene of a massacre of the Christians by the Saracens; and the Jamia el Kebtr, also a Frankish church at one time. To enter the mosques would be dangerous here, with the known fanaticism of the inhabitants, but of the last-mentioned three different views are

obtainable from the outside, revealing Corinthian columns within, and a pretty fountain in the court; and a grand deep gateway abuts on the street, with Corinthian pillars of marble supporting its serial arches, the intervals of which are carved in dog-tooth style, and the whole painted over in various colours. Close by a huge column lies stranded in the roadway.

A showery morning was devoted to an excursion to Sebas-
THE TABERNACLE AND ITS FURNATURE.



COPIED A QND MUCH REDUCED FROM A RUBBING OF THE CASE OF VENETIAN WORK (14TH OR 15TH CENTURY A.D.)

IN WHICH THE CODEX SAMARITANUS IS KEPT.

(Shown between pages 386-387)

(p. 387) tiyeh (Sebaste), once royal Samaria. The direction lies at first westwards from Nablus along the valley. A brook, which in its course flows through an aqueduct and works a water-mill, and some lesser streamlets, irrigate it on this side; fields of corn, orchards of quince-trees, and groves of olives, with -which the mistletoe intertwines, shew its fertility; and tiny villages peep out from the opposite slopes. Then bending northwards over the "shoulder of the ridge, and descending through olives to a stream, we climbed a steep pathway and entered under an arch into Sebastiyeh.

On the outskirts of the modern village stand the remains of the Church of S. John, built by the Crusaders in honour of the Baptist, who is said to have been buried here, but now used in part as a mosque, to its great detriment. It is entered by a squareheaded gateway, from a sunken court, in which and in a small adjoining area there are a couple of wells. The walls are finely built of squared stone, and strengthened by buttresses. The windows are pointed within, rounded without. Portions of a groined roof remain; also the central apse at the east end, and one or two of the Corinthian columns, which originally parted the nave from the aisles. A little domed weli in the centre encloses white marble tablets, formerly marked by

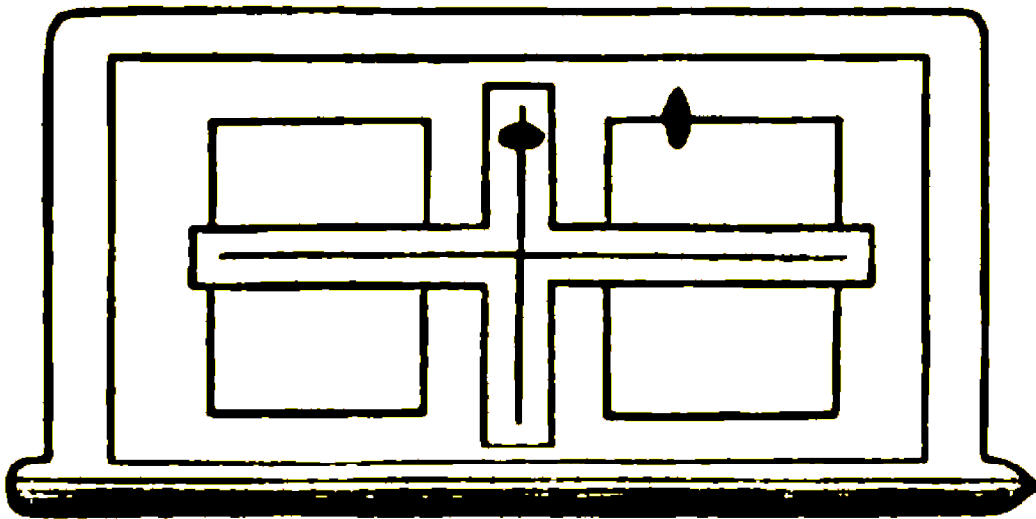
crosses (of which only the cross-bars have been left by fanaticism), of the Order of the Knights of S. John. And below the weli, down a flight of stairs, is a little crypt with fragments of mosaic pavement, and six loculi in two tiers of three apiece: this is the reputed sepulchre of S. John the Baptist. The heavy granite door, brought probably from Bashan, lies at the side; it is panelled, with an opening for a bolt, and one rounded edge has projecting pivots, which worked in sockets and acted as hinges. Rope-pillars occur in the mihrab in that portion of the building which (p. 388) is walled off as a mosque. Outside we find the isolated apse on the edge of a steep slope, as well as buttresses and towers.

The Church and the village by its side lie on one declivity of the round hill, whose flat summit, now tilled and sown, was once crowned by Ahab's and Herod's Temples. Above the village, foundations are seen of an octagonal church; and close by several columns without capitals stand or lie among the figtrees, where formerly Herod's Palace rose. On a

levelled terrace running round the hill the relics of a double row of columns, many of those on the south side still erect, but shorn of their capitals and deep sunken in the soil, shew the lines of Herod's Colonnade. A gateway flanked by two towers seems to have occupied the south-west corner; while on the northern side, near the base of the hill, yet another group of columns, equally maltreated with the rest, survive from Herod's Theatre.

The hill of Samaria, as it stands in a valley, encircled on all sides by higher mountains, resembles in its regularity of contour and isolation, a cup within a saucer, or a cone inside the crater of a volcano. Except the meagre hamlet few signs of life appear around, and only one village, that of En Nakurah, could I perceive from the top. As we descended again into the hollow to the south, women were washing linen in a tank, no other probably than that "pool of Samaria" where the chariot of dead Ahab was washed. Over bare and bleak hill-sides we regained the valley by which we had started, and returned to Nablus.

The same afternoon we ascended Gerizim, the mount of blessing, and the southern outpost of Shechem. Outside the gate the haunt of the lepers is passed, and near the foot of the ascent the Samaritan burial-ground, undistinguishable save for its covered wailing-place. A rock high up on the left with a cavern below, overlooking the town, is said to be the spot whence Jotham's parable was delivered.



The road winds up a glen, which, sloping gradually at first, at length becomes steep and very stony; and about three-quarters of the way up the Samaritan station or halting-place for the procession to the top at the time of the Passover is reached. The summit, a bare and extensive plateau, along which our path lay eastwards, is for some distance strewn with the stones of the Samaritan khans which housed the pilgrims in old days.

The easternmost point of the plateau is occupied by a rocky knoll crowned by a weli. In approaching it, foundations of a synagogue are observed, and amid them a trough strewn with the ashes and burnt bones of the Passover lambs, hard by which is a deep circular pit wherein the lambs are roasted. Mr Karim gave us a full account of the ceremonies on this occasion, but, as we did not see them, I pass it over. On the south side of the knoll a smooth area of rock, shaped to an irregular oblong, with a deep oval cave in its edge, anciently formed the floor of the Samaritan temple upon Mt. Gerizim. A pathway of stepping-stones leads from the late synagogue hither, on which the Samaritans tread as they approach,

having taken off their shoes for fear of defiling the holy ground. In the Passover prayers they do not, however, incline towards it, because this would be the direction of hated Jerusalem.

A cyclopean wall surrounds the above-mentioned knoll; and at its base are shewn the twelve stones of the altar which Joshua reared on Mt. Ebal and inscribed with the words of the Law, these being by local accounts identical with the stones which the children of Israel brought up out of Jordan. *Credat Samaritanus!* They are in reality merely part of the substructions of the wall; in which quadrangular structure we have the remains of a citadel erected by Justinian to enclose and protect an octagonal church of the Virgin which stood here. The latter has been excavated, and its foundations, and those of one or two narrow chapels with rounded ends lying parallel to its sides, are now exposed to view; also a number of mosaic cubes from its pavement are scattered about. Of the four corner-towers of the wall the most easterly survives, and is now a Moslem well, standing on the extreme brink of the (p. 390) cliff, and commanding a fine view of the south and west, with the Mediterranean Sea in the far distance. The green plain of El Mukhna reposes just below, and throws out a broad arm, W. Salim, in front, on the further slopes of which the village of Salim (Shalem) is seen, whereby Jacob encamped on his return from Mesopotamia. Several other villages are also in sight, but the view to the north is shut out by Ebal.

Passing a cistern close to the top, we took a more direct route down the mountain, along another gully, where the pathway had been almost destroyed by the rain. On the way we had pointed out to us:—the hole under the terebinth where Jacob hid the images and ornaments of his household; the sepulchre of his sons (Joseph excepted), whose bones would thus seem to have quitted Egypt with their brother's *incognito*; and the scene of the reading of the Law to the tribes as they stood half on Ebal and half on Gerizim, this being a spot at the entrance of the Vale of Shechem, where low corresponding spurs run out from either mountain, and nearly approach each other, and the voice is said to be perfectly audible across. By a field near the foot of the gully, which the rain had denuded, and through a grove of fine olives, we re-entered the town.

Next day we climbed Ebal, the mount of cursing, and the northern outpost of Shechem. The way lay among prickly pear-bushes, past some cliffs, and then across walled terraces, to the top, which is an extensive plateau, a little higher than, but much like, the opposite summit of Gerizim, both the one and the other being over 3000 feet in elevation. A gazelle fled before our approach. Ruins of a church and other buildings are scattered about on the top. The prospect from the highest point was fine but hazy, embracing an exquisite view of Nablus beneath, of the sea, Mt. Hermon, the plain of Esdraelon, and the mountains of Gilead. And upon yonder hill-side, a short distance to the north, where the village of Telluzah is seen, of old stood lovely Tirzah, one of the royal cities of Israel in the time of her kings.

(p. 391) Where the Vale of Shechem debouches on the plain of El Mukhna, there is a charming verdure-clad pool at the foot of Ebal, called Ain Askar (perhaps a reminiscence of Sychar), which is fed by a stream running through a long vaulted passage. And between this and Jacob's Well lies Joseph's Tomb. The traditional spot, where the patriarch's bones were buried after being brought up out of Egypt, is represented now only by an ordinary Moslem sepulchre, within four white walls, with two English and a Hebrew inscription upon them, and a vine climbing up the corner.

Jacob's Well, so dear to the disciples of Christ, is in its present condition a most disappointing object. At the mouth of the valley, on the point of a low spur of Gerizim, within the ruined site of a church of the Crusades, stands a crazy vaulted chamber, half-full of stones, into which one drops through a hole in the roof. Here in the floor is a triangular hole, perfectly dry and choked with rubbish; yet this is the disfigured mouth of that deep clear well which Jacob dug and Jesus reclined beside.

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He visited in 1876 with W. Griffith, W. A. Hayes, his brother R. Hayes.

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