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An Enscribed Stone From Shechem.

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(Read November 27th, 1895.)

This marble slab was the dedication stone formerly placed over the doorway of an ancient Samaritan synagogue at Shechem. The doorway (as is common in such buildings) was recessed under an arch, so that the stone was protected from the action of the weather. The ancient synagogue had fallen into the ruins and was not rebuilt, and the stone was sold by the officers of the Samaritan church to the chief Rabbi of the Dutch Jews, and for him it eventually passed into the hands of my father (the late Alfred Fryer, of Wilmslow), who purchased it in the East in the year 1870, and had it sent to England.

The inscription consists of two portions. The first portion occupies the upper three lines and the center portion of the fourth line, and is in the ancient Samaritan character of the fourth line, and is in the ancient Samaritan character, which was the old Hebrew. The square-headed Hebrew, which is now in use, was brought back from Babylon after the captivity. It is believed that this inscription was cut when the synagogue was originally built, probably some years before the Christian Era. The words are read from right to left. The uppermost line a general inscription "In the name (of) God Almighty." The second and third lines appear to be a paraphrase of part of the blessing which Jacob pronounced on Joseph on his death-bed: "- the God of thy fathers shall bless thee; and the Almighty shall bless thee." The text in the Book of Genesis is:- "Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under." (Genesis xlix, 25). The central part of the fourth line is occupied by the word "Amen."

It would appear that, at a much later date, the unoccupied portions of the stone were utilized for another inscription, in Arabic. This might refer to extensive repairs, or a rebuilding of the synagogue, or to some other building in the town. It is no uncommon thing to find the Arab conquerors carving their inscriptions on ancient tablets. The Arabic inscription is translated thus:-

"The building of the house which was built in the fifth month of the year 1193."

The fifth month of the Mohammedan year was Gioumadi or Jomada I, and of course the date of the year is in the Mohammedan computation, dating from *Hegira*, or "Flight of the Prophet," the day on which Mohammed entered Medina after his flight from Mecca, Friday the 16th of July, AD., 622.

It is interesting to think that perchance the eyes of our Saviour Jesus Christ may have rested on this stone.