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SAMARITAN CUSTOMS.

THE first answers yet obtained to the "Questions" as to the natives of Syria come from Shechem (Nablus), and relate to one of the most interesting of the mixed nationalities of Palestine, viz., the Samaritans. The Rev. C. Fallscheer, to whom I wrote, is on very friendly terms with the present Samaritan High Priest, Jacob, and I attach the more value to his notes because they are in great part derived from the best Samaritan authority.

Some of the most interesting replies are here detailed, with an occasional note, showing relative value or due to personal observation.

Feast of Tabernacles.—"Is celebrated every year, on the 15th day of the seventh month. On the first day of this feast every Samaritan father (p. 234) of a family ornaments his room (see Levit. xxiii, 40) with boughs of palm, pomegranate, lemon, orange, and some kinds of grass, all the branches being hung from the ceiling. They dwell in this room seven days, and remove the adornment on the eighth day."

NOTE.—Among the Jews, I believe, the booths are never made inside a room but in the open court (*cf.* Neh. viii, 15), or on the roof. Booths on the roof are commonly used in Palestine for living in in summer.

Fant of the Atonement.—On the 10th of seventh month. From sunset on the 9th till sunset on the 10th all the congregation, except sucklings, fast. There are special prayers for the day, and during the night they repeat the Books of Genesis and Exodus by heart, no lights being allowed in the houses. After sunrise they use books for the prayers, and read Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch is completely read during the twenty-four hours. During these two festivals, and at Pentecost, special prayers are said on Gerizim for the restoration of the Temple on the mountain.

Circumcision.—Takes place in the father's house on the eighth day after the child is born. Special prayers are said, and passages in the law concerning the rite are read; an ancient hymn invoking blessing on parents and child is sung.

"In this hymn they pray for a certain Roman soldier named Germon, who was placed as sentinel over the High Priest's house by some Roman Emperor; because of his kindness

in not preventing the rite of circumcision. They offered him money, but he would not accept, only asking to be remembered in their prayers for the future."

Talith.—The Samaritan High Priest wears a talith (or sacred scarf) on his head, when raising the Roll of the Law for the congregation to see during the service.

The Red Heifer.—In answer to the question, how impurity can be removed in absence of the ashes of the Red Heifer, it is remarked that these ashes purified only after contact with a dead body. As there is now no Temple, the Samaritans never touch a corpse; even when a Samaritan mother sees her child about to die she leaves it, and the dead are washed and prepared for burial by Moslems.

The Water of Jealousy.—This is not now used, since the destruction of the Samaritan temple.

Loosing the Shoe.—This ceremony is still practised by the Samaritans.

NOTE.—It also still is practised by the Jews, but I am informed that the woman does not spit in the man's face, but only "before his face."

Divorce is said to be uncommon. The number of women is comparatively very small. When a woman is divorced for misconduct the dower is forfeited to the husband.

The Poor.—The Samaritans are said to be very charitable to their poor.

Kabbala.—The Kabbala is still in existence among them, as shown by the following story: The missionary, having urged that the law alone was not sufficient for salvation, a priest replied :—(p. 235)

"You know that the first letter of Genesis in our language is *Ba* and the last letter of Deuteronomy is *Lam*. These two letters make the word *Bal*, meaning 'enough,' and also *ba* in arithmetic is 'two,' and *lam* is 'thirty,' or together thirty-two; and thirty-two is the perfect number of the teeth of man. Therefore the Pentateuch is sufficient for salvation."

Charms.—The Samaritans prepare charms, but say that these are forbidden by the law, and not to be used by their own people, but by strangers. The charms are written by the priests to heal sickness, to make women conceive, to promote love, &c.

Alexander the Great.—The Samaritans relate the same story of his visit to Gerizim which Josephus relates of his visit to Jerusalem.

NOTE.—If I remember right, not having the book by me, this comes from the Samaritan "Book of Joshua," which some writers have confused with the Samaritan Chronicle.¹

Complexion.—A few are red-haired with blue eyes; the majority have dark eyes and black hair.

NOTE.—I have seen some handsome specimens of red-haired Jews (with blue eyes, I believe) among the North African Jews in Jerusalem.

Language.—The commonly spoken language is Arabic, but the priests can still speak Samaritan.

Dress.—The women are veiled in public. They arrange the hair in ten or twelve plaits or pigtails. There is no difference of dress between married and unmarried, and the children's dress is much like that of adults—the ordinary Oriental costume of Syria. The distinctive mark is the red turban (a tinge crimson) of the men; unmarried women do not wear gold ornaments, rings, ear-rings, necklaces. The Samaritans do not wear the "lovelocks " of the Pharisees.

¹ Dr. Robertson Smith has spoken of the Samaritan Chronicle as a tissue of absurd fables. Evidently he confuses this matter-of-fact work with the Samaritan Book of Joshua. (See my paper on Samaritan Topography Survey Memoirs, Vol. Special Papers.)

Cutting the Hair.—When first cut the priest cuts off the first lock, the barber finishes the work.

Trades.—The men are merchants, clerks, weavers, tailors, carpenters. The women are engaged in household employment.

Education.—Reading in Samaritan and Arabic, writing, and arithmetic; also singing the old hymns without any instrumental music.

Taxes.—In addition to other taxes they pay the *Askeriah*, or exemption money from military service, about 10 fr. a year per man.

Amusements.—The women employ a female Muhammadan singer who beats a drum; they join in in the song, but sing badly. The men sing by themselves in Hebrew (Samaritan ?) and Arabic. They relate Bible stories to the children or stories of their forefathers, but the priests say the law forbids them any games. They read no books but their own, and some Arab newspaper from Beirut. (p. 236)

Birth.—Salt water is poured on a child when born, and it is then swaddled.

NOTE.—The rubbing with salt is a very old and widely observed custom.

Marriage.—The men at the age of sixteen, the women of fourteen. A few have more than one wife. The eldest son inherits two parts, the other sons one part ; the daughters each a half part of property.

Burial.—All the law is read up to Deut. xxxii before leaving the house and the rest at the tomb. The family mourn seven days, during which the priests read the law in the room of the deceased. Both men and women follow the corpse to the grave. During the year after death the family visit the tomb once every month.

Genealogy.—They claim to possess the genealogy of the High Priests from Aaron to the present day.

Nothing new has yet been elicited concerning Samaritan literature beyond what is already well known to scholars.

Music.—They appear not to have any instrumental music.

There are many other answers which I have not yet been able to compare with the questions.

C. R. CONDER.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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