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The Gospel in All Lands,
Devoted to Universal Missions
November 23, 1882
Volume 6
New York
Eugene R. Smith, Publisher
By Methodist Episcopal Church. Missionary Society

(p. 248) *THE SAMARITANS OF SYRIA.*

A recent Swiss traveller has given the following account of the Passover of the Samaritans which he saw celebrated on the side of Mount Gerizim: The sun was setting. Over a fire of brushwood, carefully maintained, were large boilers filled with water. A few steps further on, in a deep ditch, was burning another fire, continually watched. At the right of the first fire, and within a space enclosed by low stones, were standing twelve men in turbans and white mantles, arranged in the order of the twelve tribes of Israel; with their faces toward the direction of Bethel, they were chanting, in a monotonous tone, prayers and passages from the Scriptures. In front of them, his face toward the setting sun, a young priest was standing on a block of stone. The elders of the community, then advancing, came and seated themselves by the side of Amram, and silently joined in the prayers of the twelve. Men dressed in (p. 250) white, behind whom were pressing women and children, placed themselves around the fires.

The sun, while setting, was lighting up the sea with his rays; when the last had, little by little disappeared, the high priest repeated three times the chant of a passage, and said in a vibrating voice the sixth verse of the twelfth chapter of Exodus. Immediately some men, trying the sharpness of their knives on the end of their tongue, seized the lambs destined for the sacrifice, and cut their throats with the rapidity of lightning, while the congregation was intoning a prayer. The twelve then approached the place of sacrifice, continuing to read the Scripture. Arriving at the passage where it is commanded to the children of Israel to "strike with the blood of the victims the lintel and the two aide posts," they dipped their first fingers in the blood, still warm, of the lambs, and passed them along the foreheads of their children to the extremity of the nose. The chanting did not cease during the whole of the sacred repast— that is, until the high priest had distributed to each man and youth a part of the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs from a dish standing in front of him. The women came afterward and received what remained. In order not to interrupt the work of those who were killing the victims, the high priest put their portion in their mouths. In the midst of the noisiest gayety some young boys began to take off the wool of the victims, boiling water having first been poured on to facilitate the operation. As soon as a Lamb was stripped his hind legs were fastened to a stick, and then they held the body on their shoulders while the entrails were removed. These were very carefully examined, and they watched very scrupulously that no stranger should approach too near the victim for fear of profaning it. It happened that a lamb was pronounced by the high priest to have a blemish; immediately his wool, his

entrails, and the front legs of the other victims were thrown into the fire and burned. After the lambs without blemish had been rubbed with salt, they attached them to long poles, and, reciting prayers, carried them to the ditch already mentioned. They were placed at a designated spot and then they stopped up the entrance with twigs, the interstices of which were filled up with turf. After this the twelve returned to pray and read without cessation. During this time strangers went to an independent tent and tried to sleep, but in vain, on account of the cold. At midnight they were called for prayer. The ditch was opened, and the roasted lambs were withdrawn and carried in new baskets to the camp. Squatting on the ground, a staff in the left hand, these men ate the paschal lamb. It was a scene particularly striking; the moon, at its full, was shining in the sky, illuminating with its gentle, silvery light this midnight landscape; one perceived distinctly the temple on the summit of Gerizim, and the heights around disengaging their vapors; fields of grain were undulating in the wind like the waves of the sea, and the Mediterranean was sparkling in the distance. Then, to render the picture more dramatic still, there, in the midst of the camp, those Samaritans, dressed in white, celebrating their festival with the greatest collectedness.

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