

In Scripture Lands
New Views of Sacred Places

By **Edward Livingston Wilson**
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(p. 253)

Coming up from Shiloh you soon cross the line which separates Judea from Samaria. After a good, invigorating climb along the shoulder of Mount Gerizim, a descending bridle-path appears which leads down to the most sacred spot in all the Vale of Shechem—to Jacob's Well. You will not always feel satisfied with the "sacred spots" indicated by the guide-books, nor will your views always accord with the persuasive associations draped around possible sites by the simpering monk who serves as your guide. But here is a site which seems to satisfy the desire to stand very near to some place hallowed by the sacred presence of our Saviour. It is Jacob's Well. Not very far away, surely, must be the very spot where He held that marvellous conversation with the Samaritan woman. Beneath one of the ruined arches of the church which once stood here, some feet below the surface and reached by a few rude steps, is the mouth of the well. The sides of (p. 254) the well are splendidly walled as far as one can see, and at the depth of sixty or seventy feet you can see your face reflected in the water. The original depth was over a hundred feet, and the well is seven and a half feet in diameter. A person not acquainted with the oriental character might wonder why so much expense of time and money was undertaken in order to provide such a well, when a grand abundance of water is supplied to the neighboring valley by Mountains Ebal



and Gerizim. Question a native on the subject, and he will answer that "it was the custom of the country," but the real truth is it was done as a safeguard against marauders. It is also true that the custom of sinking wells on an estate began as far back as the time of Abraham and Isaac, if not further, and they were guarded with the most jealous care. In our land the generous husbandman says to the wayfarer, "Take as much of my fruit as you can eat, but do not break my trees." The patriarchal husbandman went deeper, and said to his nomadic kinsmen, "Pasture your flocks on my hills and plains, but let my wells alone." His descendants are too indolent to follow his example by digging more wells, but they guard their water-supply with the same jealous care their fathers did. My old Samaritan guide, Jacobes-Shellaby, sat by the old broken arch which covers the well while the photograph was made, and then led me down to the great flat stone which lies over the mouth of the well. Through a circular hole in the stone the natives pass down their skin vessels and bring up the water, which flows alike from the deeply sunken arteries of the Mount of Cursing—Ebal— across the valley—and from the Mount of Blessing—Gerizim—near to the base of which it is. It has been a blessing to the land for many a long century. The Jew, the Samaritan, the Christian, and the Moham- (p. 255) medan alike reverence it, and it is no uncommon thing to find them praying together near at hand—one with his face turned religiously toward Gerizim, another as punctiliously facing the east; a third gesticulating in the direction of the vale between the mountains; while the fourth is bowed with his face meekly turned toward the scattered ruins of the church which the crusaders erected over the sacred site. Many changes have taken place in the historical valley since Jacob superintended the construction of the noted public work which bears his name —many since his divine descendant argued his own case with the despised and wily Samaritans; but nature has not changed very much. The exuberant stream comes tumbling and singing down the fertile valley and keeps going its tender strains of cheery music, just as it did when the dazed woman of Samaria heard the voice of Jesus say, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." The mountains are there just as Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, and Jesus saw them—Ebal northward with its high terraces of prickly pear; on the south Gerizim rises from its rich grain-fields and groves of walnut and sycamore. The same soft air pervades the Vale of Shechem which caught the prophetic warnings of Jesus as they fell from his lips and started an evolution which has gone on and on ever since "from the rivers unto the ends of the earth," as ceaselessly as the waves of the sea.

About an eighth of a mile across the valley from Jacob's Well, and near the base of Mount Ebal, is the traditional tomb of Joseph. It is marked by a, rude enclosure twenty feet square and twelve feet high. The interior of the structure is divided into two sections, of which the one to the south is the tomb. It is about six feet long and four feet high. It resembles the common tombs erected in memory of the Moslem saints in all parts of the country. No more lovely spot could have been chosen for the honored resting-place of the beloved dead of any nation. I do not remember any more enchanting walk in Palestine than the descent from Shechem, along the valley, to where it begins to widen, and then northward to Joseph's



Joseph's Sepulchre.

sepulchre. Early morning affords the best time to make the visit. If you go in time to greet the sun as he makes his first appearance over the hills of Ephraim, you will have a rare sight. Each particular dew-drop is transformed into an individual jewel and sparkles with the glories of the prism. The line of splendor formed by them widens with the ascending orb, and the shadow as gradually sinks out of the picture. The unnumbered songs- (p. 256) ters, startled from their dewy nests, rise and mix their matin-songs with the rosy glow which melts away their drowsiness and warms them into life. The rugged peaks of Moab puncture the hanging mist, catch their share of color, and look like islands of fire in a billowy sea. Foot by foot the broad expanse becomes a lake of glory. The gnawings and scranchings of time have not done so much to keep up appearances, but their relentless treatment of the rocky face of Ebal supplies a fine contrast with the highly cultivated fields of the valley and with the splendid olive-groves. Three largo springs in this delightful vale unite in forming the broad stream already alluded to, and send more water Jordan-ward than all the sources as far down as Hebron do, combined. The deep-cut,

solemn pools of Solomon have never ceased to do good (p. 257) service, but there is none of the life about them which is carried along 'wherever it goes by such a merry, bounding stream as the one which courses the vale of Shechem.

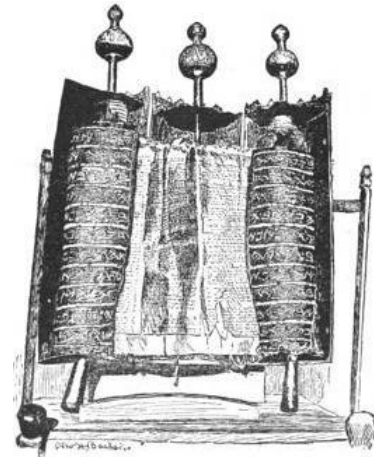
Jacob, with his usual shrewdness, knowing well the value of such a tract of land by water blest, made the best bargain he could for it with Hamor, the father of Shechem, and then hastened to secure it to his son Joseph lest an added hundred pieces of silver should tempt him to part with it. Joseph, too, held a warm affection for it and made request that his body should be buried there. Many curious scenes are enacted about this tomb. On the roof, while a venerable Arab, with face turned toward Mecca, may be seen praying with fervor almost bordering upon fury, a gray-bearded son of Israel, on bended knee, instructs a little modern Joseph in the history of his ancient namesake. There seems to be a fascination about the spot to all sorts of people. The sun creeps well upward before you are willing to leave the place again. Only a little of the dew remains when you return, and the birds seem to have all disappeared in the mountains for food. Now you may see Shechem in a fine light. For the best view, Shechem should be approached from the south, and just at the close of day. Then the long, wide shadows of Mount Gerizim, projected upon the plain, are welcomed by the husbandman who has been toiling all day under the cloudless sky. The first lowering of the temperature is the signal for the flocks to break away from their flower-besprinkled pasture and to turn themselves toward their folds; the men and the women, often laden with some product of the field, also turn homeward. A great finger seems to have been placed across the lips of Nature, so still and so quiet all becomes with the departure of the sun and the advance of the twilight. It must have been at that same hour when " all the congregation of Israel, with the women and the little ones, and the strangers (p. 258) that were conversant among them," congregated, "half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal," while Joshua read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings. Arid it must have been so silent, too, when a quarter of a century after this a solemn renewal of the covenant took place, and Joshua "set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem."



It is a strange experience to pass through the lovely vale of Shechem and, gazing at Ebal on the right and at Gerizim on the left, to think of how many noted people journeyed likewise long before Christ came. The list of sojourners and travellers includes Abraham, Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Joseph (buried here), Joshua, Abimelech, and Rehoboam. Jesus was a visitor here, and Shechem was the birthplace of Justin Martyr. The Roman sceptre, the Christian cross, and the crescent of Islam have all held sway in Shechem. The garrison whose bugle awakens the echoes of Ebal and Gerizim to-day recalls memories of blessing and cursing, and with American-made rifles, though under command of Ottoman officers, keeps peace among the turbulent people. Shechem is a cosmopolitan place, and some of her people represent the oldest races. For example, about all



the Samaritans that are left congregate there. Within the whitewashed walls of their tiny synagogue is the inscribed "original" of their Pentateuch. This document varies in many particulars from the Pentateuch of the Jews, and is under careful watch. They hold that it was written by Abishua, the son of Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. The officiating priest is a young man who claims to be a direct descendant of Aaron. After the proper persuasion of backsheesh, he consented to exhibit the antique document and to stand beside it in the synagogue court while its photograph was made. Its great silver case and the rods make it very heavy, so that an assistant was required to help the priest (p. 259) carry it. After placing it upon a chair, they very carefully unfolded the embroidered scarf of crimson satin which covered it, and thus displayed the engraved silver case. In time the doors of this were thrown open, and the precious document was made visible. It was rolled like a Jewish scroll upon two metal rods that are much longer than the scroll. These rods protrude at each end for the protection of the parchment. The letters are Samaritan, but they are written in the Hebrew language. The engraved scenes upon the case are said to represent the ground plan of the Tabernacle. In their ceremonies they follow the injunctions of Exodus xxviii. and Leviticus viii. Once a year the Samaritans hold their religious feasts upon the summit of Mount Gerizim, "the mountain of blessing." It is their Moriah. As we move up the highway now, we may see above the tapering minarets and the swelling domes, the golden crescent sparkling in the sunlight. Further on, rising from a great mass of olive-trees, is the picturesque old tower half covered by clinging vines, called "Jacob's Tower." It is said to have been the home of the patriarch when he sent Joseph over to Dothan to look after his brethren. The nearer you approach it the higher it seems to reach up the side of Mount Gerizim, near to which it stands, and the great trees are dwarfed by it. Within a short distance is the "station" used by the dragomen for the sojourner. Lepers congregate there and make one hide beneath the shadows of the olive - groves to 1 escape the repulsive creatures.



The present in- (p. 260) habitants of Shechem devote a great deal of time to their "religion." It is the most frequent topic of conversation, and even in the coarse talk of those who, in their hearts, care very little about it there is a religious tone which is quite noticeable. If you ask a man if he will go to the mosque after dinner or complete a bargain for a rug, his answer always is "inshallah" —God willing. A blessing comes with every salutation and a curse follows every Christian, for it must not be understood that religion in this valley is by any manner of means synonymous with morality. It is not. This "very religious" people, however, influences a great many religious gatherings in Shechem, and you may often see great multitudes there which give a holiday appearance to the town. They are often in a tumult. One experience with an Arab crowd whose words you cannot understand, and whose gestures and imprecations are a riddle to you, is enough to cause you to avoid them ever after. It is interesting and picturesque, however, to see such an assemblage form on a "religious day." The people come in from the neighborhood in companies. A beautiful scene is presented by the forms of the young and the old dressed in every variety of gay clothing, moving along without much apparent purpose through the shade of the splendid trees. Many stop at the wells and quench their thirst, while others lave in the stream or rest upon the rocks and grass. Then the scattered groups of the highway thicken gradually into a numerous throng and press onward to some designated place. As the multitude increases the excitement grows, and animated conversation often leads to a stoppage in the ranks, while in all directions heated

debates go on. At last a low building, flat-roofed, with a great open space near it, is reached and the people halt. On the house-top, wearing a green turban, stands the "holy man." He works his audience up to a frenzied condition and then sends them away, ready for any violence their fanaticism may lead them to Shechem is not a pleasant place for Christians.

[Itching:] Houses in Shechem.



The men, as a rule, are fine-looking, pleasant in manners, and superior to the average Syrian. The women are lighter in color than their sisters in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and seem to be of a very different race. Their hair is black and wavy, and their dress is unlike that of the Mohammedans and Jews. They seem to be happy, and are devoted to their creed. Their strange little family numbers less than two hundred. The situation of Shechem is delightful. The whole vale, running (p. 261) east and west, is alive with gushing cascades and bounding streams, fed partly by the twin mountains Ebal, on the north, and Gerizim, on the south. Luxuriant olive-groves and fig-orchards, interspersed with fruit-trees of various kinds, are dotted hither and thither, everywhere. But the city itself is not so attractive. Many of its streets are cavern-like, for they run under the houses. They would afford an excellent

opportunity for the trial of some rapid-transit scheme, were it not that they are so very narrow and continually thronged with the noisy, hurrying multitude. The better view of life is had from the house-tops. They are reached from the streets by stone stairways. There the people take their leisure, do a great deal of their trading and much of their work. Thus the houses seem to be, as indeed many are, hoisted a story or two' in the air. There is no regularity of style about them, and it is all one's life is worth to try to find the way among them without a guide and a torch. Only from a height can the real beauties of, -Shechem be seen.. Thon the broad domes of the mosques and their (p. 262) graceful minarets stand out finely; the variety of houses shows forth, and the open streets are indicated, first by the sound which comes up from the multitude, and then by the gay bazars which line them. Fine views are had from "Jacob's Tower." Strangely enough, amid all the buzz and noise of the town comes the clatter of the cotton-gin, for Shechem is the great cotton centre of Palestine. It is also headquarters for the best olive-oil soap. All along the side of Mount Ebal, when the new covenant was made, Joshua mustered the tribes of Reuben and Gad, of Asher and Zebulon, of Dan and Naphtali. On the other side, against Gerizim, the tribes of Simeon and Levi, of Judah and Issachar, of Joseph and Benjamin were gathered. As one stands looking from the top of "Jacob's Tower" the present seems to vanish and the past arises again with a strange reality. Not a single feature of nature appears to have been touched out by the wizard pencil of time. Every light and every shade is accentuated by the long perspective of history. The pages recorded here

must face those of Sinai. The vale of Shechem is the consonant of the plain of Er Raha. Somewhere and somehow, running through the intervening pages, are the threads we have tried to gather up and follow, guided by the entanglements of tradition and persuaded by the reasonings of the modern explorer. The sounds of idolatry were left at Aaron's Hill, and the blast of the trumpets cheered the desolation of Wady es Sheik; then the departing hosts followed across the wilderness, where the manna and the quail were provided, through the enclosure of Hazeroth to the wandering-place of Kadesh-Barnea, where the provision of good water was followed by the long tarrying. On they went until, climbing the flinty ridges of the border, the place was reached where denuded nature grew more consistent and the long inclines were found clothed with lovely flowers. There the land, "with milk and honey blest," was seen as the spies had seen it. On and on, by the way of the desert wilds



Beggars by the Roadside.

again, to Nebo, to the sacred river, and across it to where all intrusion of barrenness ceased and the Promised Land was reached. Just so we may see it to-day.

The pride of Shechem is its olive groves. The olive, no matter how young, always looks old and careworn when it stands alone. When cultivated in orchards or groves, however, nothing in the country is more beautiful. The bark seems to granulate and crust as soon as it becomes of any thickness, and the short stems hopelessly twist before they have (p. 263) any girth; but Nature averages her favors, even with the olive, for abundant foliage is supplied to hide all deformities. When the cool breeze disturbs the leaves they turn first their green side and then their gray to the light, with the steady movement of the palm branch, and present an enchanting dissolving view. At the centre of the town the water-shed ceases to flow Jordanward and begins to meander westward on its journey to the Mediterranean. Soon after the mountains are left behind, a wide basin opens to view which presents a veritable terrestrial elysium. On either side the terraced hills incline gently like the banks of the lower Rhine. They are surpassingly lovely. The sounds of running waters and the songs of birds salute you as you ride on. The foliage is so luxuriant as almost to create a jungle, and though you are allured by the bewildering scene, your passage through is disputed by the hanging limbs and trailing creepers. Long lines of aqueducts, and now and then vine-covered Roman arches, rise up and remind you of the Campagna. As though the bounding streams were insufficient to give life to the wondrous growth, the water oozes out from the sides of the old-time conduits and gives a helping hand. The clatter of mills is heard and the sound of voices comes up from the jungle with harsh incongruity. The tingling of their bells announces the near presence of the flocks, and repeatedly you see an adventurous sheep or goat stationed on a protruding rock, lowering his head with threatening aspect and stamping his fore foot in anger at your audacious approach. Yet you push your horse on through the wild herbage. Your senses become involved, so suggestive is everything, and but little imagination is required to transport you to the days when Pan, who was once worshipped at the base of Mount Hermon, only a few miles away, slept in the heat of the noon-tide, and goatherds and wayfaring men laid down to slumber by the roadside under the welcoming olive-boughs. You look up every shady glen you pass for the remnant of some pagan altar hung with wreaths of flowers as of old, and shaded by lemon-groves where Nature was worshipped. Everything is basking in sunlight and glittering with exceeding brilliancy of hue. Your excitement again leads you to peer through the shades expectantly, lest you escape the ruins of some sequestered chapel of the crusade days. You are startled every time you hear the decayed branches crackle under the tread of the strolling flocks, lest the mirth-making dancers of the olden time worship pass by without your seeing them. Then, as you plunge (p. 264) into the thicket and some of the light goes out, the coolness of twilight pervades and you watch for withered old women and age-bowed pilgrims telling their rosaries, and belated shepherds crossing themselves while they intone their blessings upon Godfrey and Baldwin and call down curses upon Saladin. Secluded cloisters are suggested by the narrow pathways which lead in every direction. The echoes come down from the hills like the crashing of organs and the solemn resonance of distant bells. In the midst of nature's splendor your mind is led again and again to the Spirit which is above nature. The olive-trees lead you to Olivet; the garden and the broken reeds and the lilies of the field turn your mind repeatedly to the gentle One whose visit here made the whole neighborhood hallowed. He must have passed this very place. The white flowers abounding are called the "Star of Bethlehem." Only the beggars by the roadside annoy. But the wandering people who watch their flocks here now have no sympathy with us, and we (p. 265) leave them benighted, in possession of one of the loveliest spots on earth. After an advance of about a mile and a half westward, the glen narrows and the inclines on either side grow more precipitous. In a little time the dragoman leads northward, up a steep and stony road. The sound of the merry water is left behind, and the lovely trees and flowers are exchanged for the obtruding stones and rank thorn-bushes which dispute the way. Thrice repulsive are the faces of some of the fellahin you meet. Not a "good Samaritan" of the old school is discoverable in the whole posse of them. They are entirely out of harmony with the character of the land. They have only a sojourner's place, however. They are permitted by national custom to come with their flocks during the season of pasturage, but they are not welcomed by the husbandmen. They are against everybody, and nobody befriends them. Every single one holds a feud against some one in particular. It may be the hereditary foe of his tribe for generations, or it may be the newly made enemy of his latest marauding expedition. But in any case, if he kills his enemy fairly, after due notification of his intention to do so, he is held by his people to have rather performed a duty than to have committed a crime. But he finds it most prudent, after such a maintenance of his honor, to spend his future as much as possible in the dense tangles which have been described. There is scarcely an Arab family hereabout without a "bloodfeud," as they term it. From the parable of our Lord, so familiar to us all, it would appear that His day was not free from such tribulations as attended the poor man who was waylaid. Journeying

on, after a tough grapple with a bare, bold ridge, the fertile valley and the babbling brook again greet the delighted traveller. The sides of the hills in all directions are dotted by families of fig and sycamore and olive trees. Apples, pomegranates, and apricots abound. Every knoll is crowned with a village, and life and prosperity are indicated by the sounds which come from them. The city of Samaria may soon be made out, though yet as much as three miles away. The narrow bridle-path, for such it is; is never wide enough to pass a single carriage. It follows the valley, descends through splendid groves, to the north still for a while, and then turning to the west abruptly, leads upward, say five hundred feet from the valley, to the summit of the oval hill upon which historic Samaria is located. Its surroundings fill all the requirements of war and of peace. Only the eastern side is approachable. (p. 266) It rises gently from the direction of Mount Ebal. In other directions the inclines are so regularly terraced and so thickly clad with verdure, that they have the appearance of being under a high state of cultivation. The hills encircling Samaria cause the elevation on which the place stands to look like a cone rising from a great crater. Herod made a glorious choice of location on account of its natural surroundings. Toward the sea, the top of Mount Carmel, and toward Galilee Mount Tabor, toward the Jordan, Hermon, Little Herman, and Gerizim are visible, while in the north, like the clouds that are above, betimes, the snowy peaks of Mount Lebanon rise. How glorious it must have been when the glittering rays of the sun fell upon the columns and pinnacles of Herod's temples and palaces, and sent the long lines of shadows through the splendid colonnade. Herod obeyed here, as he did whenever he undertook any work for the people, from whom his favorite tax-gatherer was expected to extract the funds, his passion for magnificence; for palaces, markets, temples, and porticos were erected according to his royal humor. Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Arabians were his guests from time to time, and it was the boast of the "Idumean slave " that he could always invite them to rest beneath the shade of their native trees; to set before them at table such fruits as tempted them most when they ate under their own vines and fig-trees, and to adorn their apartments with their native flowers; for he caused all kinds to be brought from every part of the world. A busy multitude of slaves found employment in caring for the grounds and buildings of the tyrant king.

The usual camping-place of the sojourner now is at the top of the hill, near some fruit-trees and but a short distance from the ruins of the old church of St. John. A requisition was made upon the camera there one morning, which resulted in a curious picture showing examples of architecture representative of three periods in the checkered history of Samaria. The first is the black tent of the Arab, in no respect different, probably, from the ones inhabited by the patriarchs when they watched their flocks in the adjoining pasture-fields; the second is the squalid stone domicile of the permanent dweller in Samaria — architecturally superior to the tent of the Bedouin, probably, but by no means so from a sanitary view; third, is a picturesque portion of the old church of St. John—the remarkable memorial of the indomitable energy and genius of the crusader, joined perhaps with suggestions (p. 267) from the Saracen. Every one of the trio suggests the ruined glory of the past, as does the entire neighborhood. The tragic story of Samaria began with its purchase of Shemer by King Omri for two talents of silver, about 900 B.C. Ahab succeeded his father and erected an idol temple at Samaria. The King of Damascus tried repeatedly to gain possession by siege, but was as often driven off. Elisha lived there for a long time, when some of the most marvellous events in his history were enacted. Again the city was besieged, and during the famine which followed the crazed and starving women boiled and ate their children, that hunger might be appeased. At that sore hour, when the stricken people wavered, the good prophet announced that on the morrow, notwithstanding the terror then reigning, the price of food should be reduced to a nominal sum. Four lepers who had been cast out of the city, not caring in what garb death met them, resolved to risk a visit to the camp of the besiegers and beg for food. When they carried their resolve into execution they found the besiegers had fled panic stricken, and had left their camp rich with the spoils of war. How these lepers gloated then, and began to hide of the plenty for themselves; until, conscience-stricken, they returned to the city and spread the glad news to their fellow-citizens. There was food for all, and the prophet's prediction was fulfilled the next day. For many a long century after that, history seems to have gathered nothing important concerning Samaria. But when Augustus came into power he gave that lovely site to Herod the Great. This vainglorious ruler enlarged and beautified it until some of his Roman guests declared that it out rivalled Baalbec and Palmyra. But it did not withstand the varied risks of time as have its rivals, for there are no such glorious ruins here as Baalbec and Palmyra have preserved to them. Herod made the summit of the picturesque hill on which his new accession stood more glorious by the erection of a magnificent temple in honor of Augustus. He enclosed the base of the hill by two rows of columns placed fifty feet apart and extending three thousand feet in length. Many of these splendid monoliths have been carried away, but a number of them, with capitals gone, are seen standing here and there in the surrounding fields. They serve as part of a fence at the edge of a grove near the ruins of the

church of St. John, and show rough treatment from the teeth of time. Jesus and Philip, and Peter and John, saw Samaria in all its splendor, and the voice of Simon the sorcerer rang across the valleys when he harangued the people from the Temple platform. The sixty squalid homes which top the noble site now are made of mud and stone, and a number of them are supported by columns whose polish was paid for by Herod the Great. The superstitious inhabitants claim that the spirits of the royal dwellers in Sebaste are seen & nights caprioling through the ruins of the broken colonnade, keeping time with the siren strains and the dance music which come down with the wind from the hill of Omri. Luxuriant trees and clustering vines have taken the place of exquisite statuary; the tessellated marble pavements, quarried from the Italian hills, are now so far buried beneath the Samaritan soil as to put the patience of the enthusiastic excavator who would find them to a crucial test. I know of no more captivating views of the same extent than those which must have met the eyes and delighted the senses of King, Prophet, and Evangelist alike here in the early years of the first century. The same sea-tempered breezes which came, from the west to cool the domiciles of wealth and power then, still come, but they are only met by the desolation which was promised in return for continued rebellion. All this can be easily reconciled; but it is a parallelism harder to understand, that substituted the dark and degenerating influence of the Saracen for that of the Crusader, as exemplified by the ruins of the old church of St. John. It looks as odd here as the Russian church on the Mount of Olives. Separated from its surroundings, it recalls some of the English and Scotch cathedral ruins. It was built in the form of a Greek cross. It is one hundred and fifty three feet long and seventy-five feet wide. Its well-proportioned nave and its two grand aisles, though lined now by broken columns only, show much beauty of construction. The order is Corinthian, although here and there some Saracen feeling is discovered. It is hardly possible that the natives can tell why, but there, erected inside the walls, is a rude mosque. From the door of this one can see, set in the opposite Avail, the great white tablets on which are the sculptured crosses of the Order of the Knights of St. John. Twenty-one steps lead down from the mosque to a tiny chamber excavated in the rock. Here, says tradition, is where the mourning friends of the forerunner of Christ brought his headless body from the castle of Machaerus, on the other side of the Jordan, where he was executed. Elisha and Abdias were his sepulchre companions, one on either side. But the dust of even such men as John was not respected by the apostate Romans, for when Julian (p. 269) came into power he caused the remains of John to be exhumed, his bones to be burned, and his ashes to be scattered to the winds. One finger, however, was left unburned—the one that had pointed to "the Lamb of God." It was preserved and became the nucleus of a church.

Sir John Mandeville, that most quaint and ancient of Palestine travellers, records that "there were many other churches there, but they are all beaten down. There was wont to be the head of St. John the Baptist, inclosed in the wall; but the Emperor Theodosius had it drawn out and found it wrapped in a little cloth and all bloody; and so he carried it to Constantinople; and the hinder part of the head is still at Constantinople; and the fore part of the head, to under the chin, is at Rome, under the Church of St. Sylvester, where are nuns; and it is yet all broiled as though it were half burnt; for the Emperor Julian above mentioned, for his wickedness and malice, burnt that part with the other bones, as may still be seen; and this thing hath been proved both by popes and emperors. And the jaws beneath, which hold to the chin, and a part of the ashes, and the platter on which the head was laid when it was smitten off, are at Genoa, and the Genoese make a great feast in honor of it, and so do the Saracens also. And some men say that the head of St. John is at Amiens, in Picardy; and other men say it is the head of St. John the bishop. I know not which is correct, but God knows; but, however men worship it, the blessed St. John is satisfied."

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

These references are not listed in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005

Year visited 1883

Edward Livingston Wilson (1838-1903) was a photographer, created many stereoviews Publisher, advocate, teacher and author. <http://www.paperbackswap.com/Edward-Livingston-Wilson/author/>
<http://dating-au.com/wilson-edward-livingston-1838-1903/>