

LECTURES ON THE HISTORY
OF THE
JEWISH CHURCH

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Appendix III

The Samaritan Passover

The illustration, which I have endeavoured to furnish of the original Jewish Passover from the Samaritan Passover, was drawn from a description given to me in 1854 by Mr. Rogers, now Consul at Damascus. During my late journey with the Prince of Wales, I was enabled myself to be present at its celebration, and I am induced to give a full account of it, the more so as it is evident that the ceremonial has been considerably modified since the time when it first recounted to me. Even to that lonely community the influences of Western change have extended; and this is perhaps the last generation which will have the opportunity of witnessing this vestige of the earliest Jewish ritual.

The Samaritan Passover is celebrated at the same time as the Jewish-namely, on the full moon of the month of Nisan. In the present instance, either by design or by a fortunate mistake, the Samaritan community had anticipated the 14th of the month by two days. It was on the evening of Saturday the 13th of April that we ascended Mount Gerizim, and visited the various traditional localities on the rocky platform which crowns that most ancient of sanctuaries. The whole community- amounting, it is said, to one hundred and

fifty-two, from which hardly any variation has taken place within the memory of man—were encamped in tents on a level space, a few hundred yards (page 461) below the actual summit of the mountain, selected on account of its comparative shelter and seclusion. The women were shut up in the tents. The men were assembled on the rocky terrace in sacred costume. In 1854 they all wore the same costume. On this occasion most of them were in their ordinary dress. Only about fifteen of the elder men, amongst whom was the Priest Amram, were clothed in long white robes. To these must be added six youths, dressed in white shirts and white drawers. The feet both of these and of the elders were at this time of the solemnity bare. It was about half an hour before sunset, that the whole male community in an irregular form (those attired as has been described in a more regular order) gathered round a long trough that had been previously dug in the ground; and the Priest, ascending a large rough stone in front of the congregation, recited in a loud chant or scream, in which the others joined, prayers or praises chiefly turning on the glories of Abraham and Isaac, and contained in alphabetical poems of ancient Samaritan poets Abu'l Hassan and Marqua. Their attitude was that of all Orientals in prayer; standing, occasionally diversified by the stretching out of hands, and more rarely by kneeling or crouching, with their faces wrapt in their clothes and bent to the ground, towards the Holy Place (page 462) on the summit of Gerizim. The Priest recited his prayers by heart; the others had mostly books, in Hebrew and Arabic.

Presently, suddenly, there appeared amongst the worshippers six sheep, driven up by the side of the youths before mentioned. The unconscious innocence with which they wandered to and fro amongst the bystanders, and the simplicity in aspect and manner of the young men who tended them, more recalled a pastoral scene in Arcadia, or one of those inimitable patriarchal *tableaux* represented in the Ammergau Mystery, than a religious ceremonial. The sun, meanwhile, which hitherto had burnished up the Mediterranean in the distance, now sank very nearly to the farthest western ridge overhanging the plain of Sharon. The recitation became more vehement. The Priest turned about, facing his brethren, and the whole history of the Exodus from the beginning of the plagues of Egypt was rapidly, almost furiously, chanted. The sheep, still innocently playful, were driven closely together. The setting sun now touched the ridge. The youths burst into a wild murmur of their own, drew forth their long bright knives, and brandished them aloft. At this instant the recitation from the book of Exodus had reached the account of the Paschal Sacrifice; and the Priest recited in a louder key, to be heard distinctly by the sacrificers, 'And the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.' In a moment the sheep were thrown on their backs, and the flashing knives rapidly drawn across their throats. Then a few convulsive but silent struggles,—'as a sheep—dumb—that 'openeth not his mouth,'—and the six forms lay lifeless on the ground, the blood streaming from them; the one only Jewish sacrifice lingering in the world. In the blood the young men dipped their fingers, and a small spot was marked on the foreheads and noses of the children. A few years ago, the red stain was placed on all. But this had now dwindled away into (page 463) the present practice, preserved, we are told, as a relic or emblem of the whole. Then, as if in congratulation at the completion of the ceremony, they all kissed each other, in the oriental fashion, on each side of the head. Whilst this was going on, the first stanza of an alphabetical poem was recited, and the account of the original continued.

The next process was that of fleecing and roasting of the slaughtered animals, for which the ancient temple furnished such ample provisions. On the mountain-side two holes had been dug, one at some distance, of considerable depth, the other, close to the scene of the sacrifice, comparatively shallow. In this latter cavity, after a short prayer, a fire was kindled, out of a mass of dry heath, juniper, and briars, such as furnish the materials for the conflagration in Jotham's Parable, delivered not far from this very spot. Over the fire were placed two cauldrons full of water. Whilst the water boiled, the congregation again stood around, and (as if for economy of time) continued the recitation of the Book of Exodus, and bitter herbs were handed round wrapped in a strip of unleavened bread: 'With unleavened bread and with bitter herbs shall they eat it. Then was chanted another short prayer. After which six youths again appeared, poured the boiling water over the sheep and plucked off their fleeces. The right fore-legs of the sheep with their entails were thrown aside and burnt. The liver was carefully put back. Long poles were brought, on which the animals were spitted; near the bottom of each pole was a transverse peg or stick, to prevent the body from slipping off. As no part of the body is transfixed by this cross-stake- as, indeed, the body hardly impinges on it at all- there is at present but a very slight resemblance to a crucifixion. But it is possible that in earlier times the legs of the animals may have been attached to the transverse beam. So at least Jewish rite is described by Justin Martyr: The Pascal Lamb, that (page 464) 'is to be roasted, is roasted in a form like to that of the Cross. 'For one spit is thrust through the animal from head to tail,' and another through its breast, to which its forefeet are attached.' He naturally saw in it a likeness of the Crucifixion. But his remark, under any view, is interesting: first, because, being a native of Nablus, he probably drew his notices of the Passover from this very celebration, which, as it would thus appear, has, even in this minute particular, been but very slightly modified since he saw it in the second century; and also because, as he draws no distinction between this rite and that of the Jews in general, we have a right to infer that the Samaritan Passover is on the whole a faithful representation of the Jewish. That the spit was run right through the body of the animal in the Jewish ritual, and was of wood, as in the Samaritan, is clear from the account in the Mishna.

The sheep were then carried to the other hole already mentioned, which was constructed in the form of the usual oven (*tannur*) of Arab villages- a deep circular pit sunk in the earth with a fire kindled at the bottom. Into this the sheep were thrust down (it is said, but this I could not see), with care, to prevent the bodies from impinging on the sides, and so being roasted by anything but the fire. A hurdle was then put over the mouth of the pit, well covered with wet earth, so as to seal up the oven till the roasting was completed. 'They shall eat the flesh in that night roast with 'fire.' 'Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire.'

The ceremonial up to this time occupied about two hours. It was now quite dark, and the greater part of the community and of our company retired to rest. Five hours or more elapsed in silence, and it was not till after midnight that the announcement was made that the feast was about to begin. The Pascal moon was still bright and high in the heavens. (page 465) The whole male community was gathered round the mouth of the oven, and with reluctance allowed the intrusion of any stranger to a close inspection; a reluctance which was kept up during the whole of this part of the transaction, and contrasted with

the freedom with which we had been allowed to be present at the earlier stages of the ceremony. It seemed as if the rigid exclusiveness of the ancient Pascal ordinance here came into play- 'A foreigner shall not eat thereof; no uncircumcised 'person shall eat thereof.'

Suddenly the covering of the whole was torn off, and up rose into the still moonlit sky a vast column of smoke and steam; recalling, with a shock of surprise, that, even though the coincidence may have been accidental, Reginald Heber should have so well caught this striking feature of so remote and unknown a ritual-

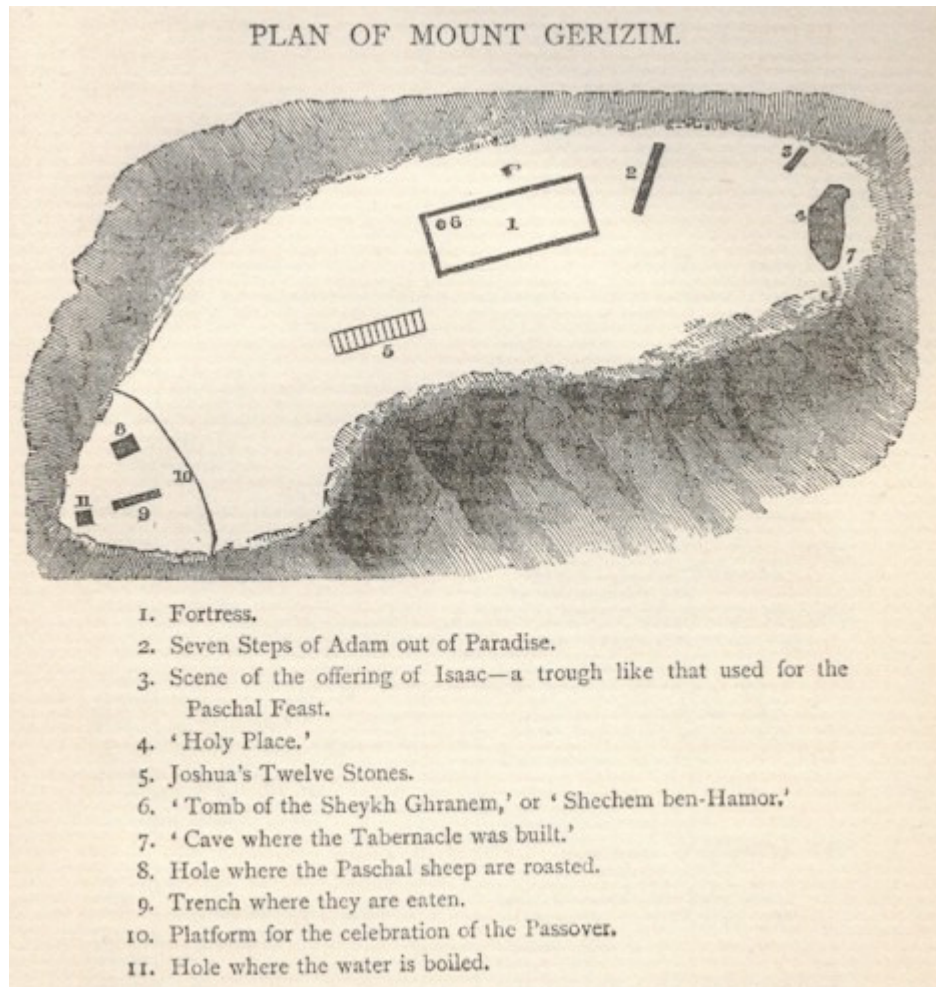
Smokes on Gerizim's mount, Samaria's sacrifice.

Out of the pit were dragged, successively, the six sheep, on their long spits, black from the oven. The outlines of their heads, their ears, their legs, were still visible- 'his head with 'his legs, and with the inward parts thereof.' They were hoisted aloft, and then thrown on large square brown mats, previously prepared for their reception, on which we were carefully prevented from treading, as also from touching even the extremities of the spits. The bodies thus wrapt in the mats were hurried down to the trench where the sacrifice had taken place, and laid out upon them in a line between two files of the Samaritans. Those who had before been dressed in white robes still retained them, with the addition, now, of shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands, and ropes round their waists- 'Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on their feet, and staves in their hand.' The recitation of prayers or of the Pentateuch recommenced, and continued, till it suddenly terminated in their all sitting down on their hauches, after the Arab fashion at meals, and beginning to eat. Thus, too, is a deviation from the practice of only a few years since, (page 466) when they retained the Mosaic ritual of standing whilst they ate. The actual feast was conducted in rapid silence as of men in hunger, as no doubt most of them were, and so as soon to consume every portion of the blackened masses, which they tore away piecemeal with their fingers- 'Ye shall eat it in haste.' There was a general merriment, as of a hearty and welcome meal. In ten minutes all was gone but a few remnants. To the Priest and to the women, who, all but two (probably his two wives) remained in the tents, separate morsels were carried round. The remnants were gathered into the mats, and put on a wooden grate or hurdle over

the hole where the water had been originally boiled; the fire was again lit, and a huge bonfire was kindled. By its blaze, and by candles lighted for the purpose, the ground was searched in every direction, as for the consecrated particles of sacramental elements; and these fragments of the flesh and bone were then thrown upon the burning mass. 'Ye shall let nothing remain until morning ye shall burn with fire.' 'There shall not anything of the flesh which thou sacrificest the first day at even remain all night until the morning.' 'Thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house.' The flames blazed up once more, and then gradually sank away. Perhaps in another century the fire on Mount Gerizim will be the only relic left of this most interesting and ancient rite. By the early morning the whole community had descended from the mountain, and occupied their usual habitations in the town. 'Thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents.'

With us it was the morning of Palm Sunday; and it was curious to reflect by what a long gradation of centuries the simple ritual of the English Church- celebrated then, from the necessity of the case, with more than its ordinary simplicity- had grown up out of the wild, pastoral, barbarian, yet still elaborate, commemoration which we had just witnessed of the escape of the sons of Israel from the yoke of the Egyptian King.

(page 467)



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See Lecture V. p. 107.

His account has since been printed in his sister's interesting, *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 281. An account is also given in Professor Petermann's *Travels* (i. 236-239). He witnesses it in 1853.

It is only in recent times that the Samaritans (chiefly through the intervention of the English Consul) have regained the right, or rather the safety, of holding their festival on Mount Gerizim. For a long time before they had celebrated the Passover, like the modern Jews, and, as in the first celebration of the institution in Egypt, in their own houses. The performance of the solemnity on Gerizim is in strict conformity with the principle laid down in Deut. xvi. 15—'Thou shalt keep a

solemn feast in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose'- and with the practice which prevailed in Judea till the fall of Jerusalem, of celebrating the Passover at the Temple.

Those women who, by the approach of childbirth or other ceremonial reasons, were prevented from sharing in the celebration, remained in Nablus.

It is stated in Miss Roger's *Domestic Life in Palestine* (249) that Amram is not properly a priest (the legitimate high priest- the last descendent, as they allege, of Aaron- having expired some years ago), and that he is only a Levite. He is, however, certainly called 'the priest' (Cohen). He has two wives. The children of the first died in infancy, and he was therefore entitled, by Samaritan usage, to take a second. By her he has a son, Isaac. But according to the Oriental Law of succession, he will be succeeded in his office by his nephew Jacob, as the oldest of the family.

These youths were evidently trained for this purpose; but whether they held any sacred office, I could not learn. In the Jewish ritual, the lambs were usually slain by the householders, but on occasions (2 Chron. xxxv. 10, 11) apparently by the Levites.

Petermann, i. 236.

Compare the attitude of Elijah (I Kings xviii. 42; xix. 13).

Seven sheep is the usual number.- *Domestic Life in Palestine*, 250.

'The whole assembly shall kill it "between the two evenings"' (Ex. xii. 6). 'Thou shalt sacrifice the Passover at 'evening at the going down of the sun' (Deut. xvi. 6)

I have taken this incident from Professor Petermann (i. 238).

Petermann, i. 238.

In the ancient Jewish ritual the lambs were skinned as in Western countries (2 Chron. xxxv. 11; Mishna, *Pesachim*, ch. V.9.). The process, as shown above described, was like our mode of taking off the hair from pigs after they have been killed.

Ex. xii. 8.

The right shoulder and the hamstrings (*Domestic Life in Palestine, 250*)

Dial. Cum Tryph. C. 40.

Pesachim, ch. vi. 7. It was to be wood, not iron, in order that the roasting might be entirely 'by fire,' and not by the hot iron; and the wood was to be pomegranate, as not interfering with the roasting. Whether the spits on Gerizim were of pomegranate I did not observe.

Ibid.

Ex. xii. 8,9.

Ex. xii.45, 48.

Ibid. 9.

Ibid. 11.

Ex. xii. li. The hasty *snatching*, which I had heard described, I was unable to recognize.

Ex. xii. 10, 46; Deut. xvi. 4.

Deut. xvi. 7.