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**Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews
from the Church of Scotland in 1839**

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(1843) Third Edition

By **Andrew Alexander Bonar, Robert Murray M'Cheyne,**

(p. 212)...

Mr. Bonar engaged a very affable Jew to show him the road to *Jacob's Well*, who, after leading him through the town, gave him in charge to another that knew the place. They went out at the Eastern Gate and proceeded along the Vale of Sychar, keeping near the base of Gerizim for nearly two miles, till they arrived at a covered well, which is marked out by tradition as the memorable spot. It is immediately below the rocky path by which we had travelled the day before, at that point of the road where we turned from the spacious plain into the narrow vale, between Ebal and Gerizim. The guide removed a large stone that covers the mouth of the low vault built over the well; and then thrusting himself through the narrow aperture, invited Mr. Bonar to follow. This he accordingly did; and in the act of descending, his Bible escaping from his breast-pocket fell into the well, and was soon heard plunging in the water far below. The guide made very significant signs that it could not be recovered, "for the well is deep." * The small chamber over the well's mouth appears to have been carefully built, and may have been originally the ledge which is often found round the mouth of Eastern wells, affording a resting-place for the weary traveller. But the well itself is cut out of the rock. Mr. Calhoun, who was here lately, found it seventy-five feet deep, with ten or twelve feet of water. In all the other wells and fountains which we saw in this valley the water is within reach of the hand, but in this one the water seems never to rise high.

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About eight o'clock, the rest of our company paid a visit to the town, to visit the Jews and Samaritans. Under a spreading nabbok-tree near the gate, we came upon five or six miserable objects, half-naked, dirty, and wasted by disease. Immediately on seeing us, they sprang up, and stretched out their arms, crying most imploringly for alms. We observed that some had lost their hands, and held up the withered stump, and that others were deformed in the face; but it did not occur to us at the time that these were lepers! We were afterwards told that they were so,—lepers on the outside of the city gate, like the ten men in the days of Jesus, who lifted up their voices, and cried, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us !" Our Master, had he been with us, would have stood still, and said, "I will; be thou clean." On the nabbok-tree were hung many rags of cloth, of different colours. These are intended as sacred offerings, in accordance with a superstition of the Mahometans, which was never fully explained to us, and which we saw frequently in other parts of the country.

We passed through the streets, and found a good example of the Eastern bazaar. It is a covered way, with a few windows in the roof; abundantly dark, but very cool and

pleasant. There is a deep pathway in the middle unpaved, about three feet in breadth, along which mules or camels are allowed to pass. On each side of this, there is a raised stone pavement, very smooth and slippery, which is used as a place for the shopkeepers to sit or to display their goods. When not thus occupied, it may be used for walking. It is a strange sight to walk along, and observe the turbaned and bearded sellers sitting cross-legged, and smoking in every door-way. The presence of a stranger excites little curiosity among them in general. Often they disdain to lift their eyes. Finding out the Jewish quarter, we went to the synagogue, into which several Jews followed us. The little children also came round us, and the women looked in at the door. Our Hebrew Bible was soon produced, and the prophecies concerning Messiah formed the subject of our broken conversation. Dan. ix, Isaiah ix, liii, Ezek. xxxvi, xxxvii, and Jer. xxiii, were the passages read and commented on. The men were most willing to hear, and (p. 215) JEWISH AND SAMARITAN SYNAGOGUES.

some of the children clung to us; but the women seemed displeased and impatient. At one turn of the conversation, Ibraim, our servant, who understood what they were saying, cried out, "Hear how that woman is cursing you."

While we were thus engaged, a Samaritan came into the synagogue and sat down. He was much better dressed than the poor Jews; his scarlet mantle and tidy appearance showing plainly that he was better off in the world. He invited us to visit the Samaritan synagogue, an invitation with which we willingly complied. The Rabbi was seated on a carpet in the stone court, a clean pleasant place close by the synagogue. He was a reverend-looking old man, with large uplifted eyebrows, handsomely attired; he received us kindly, and conversed with great freedom.

Mr. Bonar having missed the rest of us, and hearing that we were gone to the Samaritan synagogue, persuaded a Jew to guide him thither. He led him to a shop in the bazaar, where a fine-looking man, tall and cleanly dressed, was sitting. The Jew's look was that of contempt, as he pointed out this man, saying he was "a Samaritan." The Samaritan kindly left his shop, and leading the way through many streets, arches, covered ways, and lanes, brought Mr. B. to the Synagogue. The old priest having made sure of obtaining a handsome present from us, now unlocked the door, and we, after taking off our shoes, were permitted to enter the synagogue, a clean airy apartment, having the floor covered with carpets. One-half of the floor was raised a little higher than the rest, and seemed to be used for sitting on during the reading of the law. On one side, there was a recess which we were not allowed to enter, where the sacred manuscripts are kept. After long delay, and the promise of a considerable sum (for he told us the sight was worth 150 piastres at any time,) the priest agreed to show us the copy of the Torah, or five books of Moses, which is so famed for its antiquity. They said that it was written by the hand of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, and is 3600 years old. It was taken out of its velvet cover, and part of it unrolled before us. The rollers were adorned with silver at the extremities, and the back of the manuscript was covered with green silk. It was certainly a very ancient manuscript. The parchment was much soiled and worn, but the letters were quite legible, written in the old Samaritan character. If this was the real copy (p. 216) SYCHAR—JEWS AND SAMARITANS.

so much boasted of, the Samaritans have lost some of their superstition regarding it, for they allowed us to touch it. Several of their prayer-books were lying about, all written with the pen in the Samaritan character.

The Samaritans can speak very little Hebrew; their language is Arabic, but by means of our servant Ibraim, and a Jew who kept by us, we got our questions answered, and a good many remarks were made on both sides upon passages of Scripture. The son of the priest was an interesting young man, candid, and anxious to hear the truth. He admitted that the prophecy regarding "the seed of the woman" referred to the Messiah: and said that they still expect a prophet "like unto Moses." The Samaritans do not believe in the restoration of the Jews. They told us that there are about forty who attend the synagogue, and about 150 souls altogether belonging to their communion. The enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans is not now so great, nor so openly manifested, as once it was; but we could perceive that it still existed. We had seen a Samaritan sitting in the Jewish synagogue, and the Jew who accompanied us was now seated in the Samaritan synagogue: yet it was easy to see that the Jew was jealous of the attention which we paid to the Samaritans. After taking leave of the priest and his son, we were conducted again to the Jewish quarter. We found a Rabbi, an old grey-haired man, sitting in the synagogue, reading the Talmud. We spoke a good deal with him in Hebrew, chiefly pointing out "the Lord our righteousness." It was pleasant to speak even a word to a Jew, in the city where Jacob often dwelt; and to a Samaritan in the very place where Jesus said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to the harvest." Our Jewish guide next led us to a handsome fountain of water at the west end of the town within the walls. It seemed to be supplied from Mount Gerizim. He said that Jacob had built the walls of it.

A little Jew boy,

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Note to page 212.

* It is a somewhat curious occurrence, that the remnants of this Bible were found and drawn up from the bottom of the well, in July 1843, by Dr. Wilson and his fellow traveler, who employed a Samaritan from Sychar to descend and examine the well. (See Memoir of M'Cheyne, published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication.)

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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(p. 491) '20th.—Had a most interesting morning with the Jews of Sychar. Saw many of them, also the Samaritans, in their synagogue. Same evening visited Samaria—a wonderful place—and encamped at Sanoor.'

It was June, 1839 according to the book. *Life and Remains, Letters, Lectures, and Poems, of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*. Minister of St. Peter's Church, Dundee, by Rev. **Andrew A. Bonar**, 6th American edition from the 21st Edinburgh edition New York: Robert Carter, 58 Canal St. 1848.