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(p. 533) NOTES OF A TOUR IN THE EAST.

XII. JACOB'S WELL NABLOUS GERIZIM SAMARIA ESDRAELON, NAZARETH.
ON Wednesday morning the 6th of April, the third day after our departure from Jerusalem, we were early in the saddle, and on our way to Nablous. Our resting-place had been Lubban, the *Lebonah* whose site is well defined in Judges xxi. 19. Lubban is a pleasant sequestered village, on the border of a small plain among the mountains of Ephraim—one of those sweet spots which are found here and there throughout the hill-country, relieving the impression of rocky ruggedness which its general aspect leaves upon the mind. The little plain, as we wound through it, was richly green with growing crops, and we met frequent groups of decent-looking country people passing towards the village. Rounding a hill to our left, and turning more directly northwards, we soon reach the extremity of the plain, and then, leaving behind us the ruins of an ancient khan, and ascending to the brow of a low, rough ridge, another scene of great beauty opens on our view. This is the rich plain of El-Mukhna, from the eastern side of which, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, opens the valley of Shechem, in which lies the modern town of Nablous, occupying probably the site of the Old Testament Shechem, and the Sychem or Sychar of the New. The prin-(P. 534) cipal plain—that now called El-Mukhna—is about seven miles in length by from one to two in breadth. It seems everywhere fertile, and the portion through which we passed is covered with growing corn. Towards the east it is closed in by a line of not very prominent hills; but on the western side, to which we are nearer, the boundary is finely formed by the bold range of which Gerizim is the crowning summit. From the ridge overlooking this plain Hermon is sometimes visible; but though we strained our eyes to catch a glimpse of the hoary chief of the northern mountains, the haze shrouded him from our view.

On reaching the plain, a pleasant ride through the corn-fields brought us by noon to *Jacob's Well*. It lies a few yards to the right of the path, just where the Valley of Shechem branches off from the plain of Mukhna. Some fragments of ancient building lie about, vestiges probably of the church which once covered the venerable fountain. Part of an arch is still standing, while on the level of the well's mouth another arch covers the shaft, which can only be peered into through an opening over which is laid a rough and not

closely-fitting stone. 'The well is deep,' as in the days of old—some seventy-five feet; but it seems to contain very little water, and to be entirely disused. Dropping a stone through the opening, we heard it plunge far below. We rested for an hour on this memorable spot, recalling how our Lord 'sat thus on the well,' 'about the sixth hour,' 'being wearied with His journey,'—having come from Jerusalem, in all likelihood, by the very road which we had just been travelling. We read the story of His interview with the 'woman of Samaria,' from the fourth of John, thinking of the 'living water,' and realizing the reference of the words, 'Our fathers worshipped in *this mountain*,' as we glanced towards Gerizim, and remembered how the Temple of the Samaritans once occupied its summit. Around us lay the 'parcel of ground' which Jacob 'bought at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father,' and 'gave to his son Joseph.' A ploughman was at the moment turning up the soil which the patriarch had owned. A few hundred yards off, in the very mouth of the valley of Shechem, is Joseph's tomb—an ordinary well, surrounded by a low white wall

Leaving the well, we now enter the valley of Shechem proper, with Gerizim towering on our left, and Ebal on our right. We are here on the scene of not a few historical incidents and events, notable among which is the solemn gathering of 'all Israel' in the days of Joshua, to hear the law read, when six of the tribes stood on Gerizim to bless, and six on Ebal to curse, with their loud 'Amens,' as the Levites from the altar on Mount Ebal read out the injunctions and prohibitions which the Lord commanded Moses.¹ The local setting of this striking picture can here be fully realized, and the relative positions of Ebal and Gerizim, with their distance from each other, are seen to satisfy all the requirements of the sacred narrative. Passing up the vale—in which, we do not forget, Abraham raised his first altar on coming into the land of promise—we soon reach by an excellent road a pretty and copious fountain, at which many modern representatives of the 'woman of Samaria' are busy drawing water, and some of them washing; then we ride through shady olive groves, and in about half an hour arrive at Nablous, on a gently rising ground, on the farther side of which we encamp. Nablous is the most prosperous town in Palestine. Its population is said to be about 8000, of whom about 500 are Christians and 100 Jews. The bazaars are not attractive, nor any of the streets more clean or salubrious than is common in Eastern cities; but every (p. 535) where there are signs of industry—soap-boiling, oil-pressing, tanning, and dyeing seeming to be extensively carried on. The people are said to be exceptionally fanatical; but though we moved freely about, both within the gates and in the environs, we encountered not the slightest trace of incivility.

The most interesting spot in the neighbourhood of Nablous is the summit of Gerizim, to which we made an expedition on the evening of our arrival, ascending without difficulty by a glen which opens immediately behind the town. The Samaritan passover was near at hand, and we were fortunate in finding the Sheikh of the Samaritans—Jacob Saleeby by name—encamped on the hill-top, in waiting for the festival. Jacob is a character, with a good deal of native shrewdness, and not a little worldly wisdom, which he has picked up during a chequered career, in course of which he has mingled, in various capacities, with other peoples besides his own. He speaks English well, resides usually in Cairo, and comes to Nablous once a year at passover-time. The remnant of the old Samaritan race—if race it can be called—still lingers in Nablous, numbering about thirty families,

¹ * Deut. xxvii.-xxviii.; Josh. viii. 30-35.

maintaining their old worship, preserving with jealous care a copy of their venerable Pentateuch, written in the old Samaritan character, and waiting for the Messiah. They all assemble once a year on the summit of Gerizim, where, close by the ruins of their ancient temple, they still slay and eat the paschal lamb. Those who have read Dean Stanley's account of the celebration will not forget its vivid picturesqueness. Saleeby, who also chaperoned the Dean and his illustrious party, volunteered to guide us over the ruins; which he did with marvellous patience, keeping up a constant stream of commentary, which was full of interest as coming from such a man, but strongly tinged throughout with his Samaritan prejudices and prepossessions. Towards the brow of the hill, overlooking the valley below and confronting Ebal opposite, is one huge mass of displaced stones and varied architectural fragments, among which have been traced vestiges of a church and of an ancient fortalice. Among these wrecks of former grandeur, there stands now a white-domed wely. On a rough plateau of considerable extent, stretching back from these remains, and all over strewn with blocks of hewn stone huddled confusedly together, lies the site of the old Samaritan temple. With great veneration, and carefully removing his shoes before he approached the sacred spot, our guide showed us the position of the Holy of Holies in the now dismantled shrine. He pointed out to us also, near by, what he alleged to be the twelve stones which were taken out of the Jordan when the tribes passed over—for every tribe a stone; and with equal confidence he indicated the place where Abraham (according to Samaritan belief) was about to offer Isaac, when the ram caught in the thicket was provided for a substitute. On this last point we ventured to hint a doubt, and a preference for Moriah at Jerusalem as the scene of the patriarch's trial; but Saleeby grew indignant, and we forbore. "We followed him with scarcely less interest, when he took us—in a kind of hollow between the ruins and the place where his tents were pitched—to where the paschal rites of the Samaritans are celebrated at the present day. The whole service is conducted during the night, and under the canopy of heaven. There is, first of all, a small depression in the ground, in which the lamb is slain; then, at a little distance, a place on the turf, where the few faithful families gather together and eat the passover; and then a place for a rude altar, on which the remnants of the sacrifice are consumed by fire. A small rectangular enclosure, surrounded by a low wall, and looking simply like a decayed sheepfold, is all that this strangely belated people now possess in lieu of the splendid temple which once adorned their sacred hill. When he had (p. 536) shown us everything, our Samaritan friend invited us to enter his tent, introduced us to his frank and good-looking young wife, and, as we squatted on his carpets, regaled us in true Eastern style with coffee and narghilehs. He then bade us a courteous farewell, declining all backsheesh for himself, but accepting a small contribution for his poorer brethren. And so we sought our way down the face of Gerizim, choosing a different route from that by which we had ascended, and returned by the valley to our tents behind Nablous.

During the night we spent at Nablous the weather underwent a disagreeable change, and the next morning was wet and stormy. Our tents were thoroughly drenched, and we longed to leave them; but the heavens were so threatening, and our men had so much dread of the softened roads, that it seemed as if we must make up our minds for a day's detention. Taking advantage, however, of a slight improvement, we strongly urged departure; and by about ten o'clock the cavalcade was reluctantly in motion. Beyond Nablous there is a steep descent to a lower part of the valley; and here our horses had the

greatest difficulty in keeping their feet on the slippery track. Reaching the level ground, we advanced with greater ease, skirting the western and lower slopes of Ebal, and then falling again into a northerly course, through a well-cultivated country, with water-courses and mills. By mid-day we reached the site of ancient Samaria, occupying a central eminence in a kind of basin, and surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills. No situation could have been better chosen as the chief city and stronghold of a kingdom. The history of this city goes back to the evil days of Omri and Ahab. The father built it, having bought the hill on which it was to stand from *Shemer* (hence the name) for two talents of silver, and the son reared in it the temple of Baal.² After Shechem, Tirzah, and Ramah, Samaria became the capital of Israel, although Jezreel, in the plain of Megiddo, had also a royal residence. Herod the Great, in his day, rebuilt the ancient metropolis, restoring its splendour, and calling it *Sebaste*, in honour of his patron Augustus. A corruption of the later name is still retained by the village which lingers among the ruins, and is called *Sebustieh*. Climbing the hill which *Shemer* sold to Omri, we come first to a church (now a mosque) in tolerable preservation, which is traditionally associated with the name of John the Baptist and is said to contain his tomb. *Credat Judceus* ! Passing the church, and threading our way through the straggling village—some sixty miserable houses in all—we come to an open and grassy space of considerable extent, on the summit of the hill, where a few fallen columns are seen lying about. A little farther on, in a grove of trees, a cluster of similar columns, fifteen in number, are standing erect,—the remains of a circle of such which is said to have surrounded the space on the hill-top, and to have enclosed a church and monastery. These plainly belong to Samaria's more recent glories. But beyond the clump of trees, and a little way down the farther side of the hill, we came on another series of pillars, shooting up in line among the waving corn, which are undoubtedly much more ancient. About sixty of these pillars stand together, extending over a space of a thousand yards; and others are found, some erect and some prostrate, at other points in the circumference of the hill. They probably went round and round in a doable row—the rows fifty feet apart—and formed the line of some splendid street of the old city. But whether they belong to the age of Ahab or to that of Herod, it is difficult to say; most probably the latter. Various other architectural remains are scattered over the hill and in the surrounding valley, and the houses of the existing village are built of stones picked up among the ruins.

D.Y.

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**Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com**

*The author did a little research and there was a Rev. D.Y. Currie involved and mentioned in a couple of the United Presbyterian Magazines. This editor believes that D.Y. is Rev. D.Y. Currie. But I could be wrong!*

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<sup>2</sup> \* 1 Kings xvi. 24-32.