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THE SAMARITAN PASSOVER, 1861.

BY THE **REV. JOSEPH HAMMOND**

[The following account of the Samaritan Passover, as witnessed in the spring of 1861, requires a few words of preface. It is printed, with the addition of two or three sentences, as it was preached in S. Austell church a few weeks ago, on the occasion of a visit of two Samaritans to the town. This will explain to the reader its now didactic, now hortatory features. It was thought that such an account might fittingly be given from the pulpit as being perhaps the best exposition we can have of the narrative of Exodus xii And it is hoped that, notwithstanding its homiletic origin, it may have an interest for the readers of the *Monthly Packet* as being the account of an eye witness, largely written down at the time, while the Passover was in progress, of a ceremonial of profound antiquity, of deep scriptural interest, and one which at that date hardly a dozen Europeans had witnessed. It was seen in the following year by the Prince of Wales and his suite, and the rite was graphically described by Dean Stanley in vol. i. of his *Jewish Church*; but the ceremony, as witnessed by myself and my three travelling companions, differed in several particulars from the rite as there portrayed. I may add that the Samaritans *claim* to be of pure Hebrew descent, descendants of Ephraim, or Manasseh, with three families of the tribe of Levi, but the true account of their origin is that they are the representatives of those emigrants from Cuthah, and Ava, and Hamath, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings, xvii 24), which Esarhaddon, King of Assyria, and the 'great and noble Asnapper' brought over about B.C. 670, and planted in the cities of Samaria, in the place of the Israelites whom Shalmaneser had transported to the cities of Media. These immigrants would intermarry with the small remnant of Jews left in the land, and this mixed race became the parent stock of the modern Samaritans. They now (1884) number 145 souls.]

THE entire Samaritan race—all but a few women detained at home by ritual reasons—is assembled here, on this ancient mount, 2,600 feet above the sea level. Centuries of oppression, and of late years constant intermarriage, have reduced their numbers to about a hundred and forty. A century ago they had synagogues both in Damascus and Gaza; now they are found at Nablous only. Here, then, are the representatives of those Samaritans with whom our Lord sojourned, and over whom His tender heart yearned; those Samaritans to whom Philip preached, and for whom SS. Peter and John prayed. They are assembled to perform the most sacred rite of their ancestral faith. 'As did their fathers, so do they unto this day' (2 Kings, xvii. 41), a sentence, it is worth remembering, penned about Samaritans over 2,000 years ago. Still they worship in this mountain, still they cling to their local *cultus*. Not yet have they learned that 'neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall men worship the Father,' nor that 'they that worship Him must worship Him in *spirit* and in *truth*.' (p. 361)

The view is impressive: in the foreground the white tents of the Samaritans; in the distance, the purple mountains of Moab to the east, the blue Mediterranean to the west; on the north the snowy head of Hermon, on the south the hills of Judaea; at our feet, the vale of Shechem, and the great plain of Mukhna, surrounded by a perfect network of hills and valleys. Fit scene for worship and sacrifice!

The first thing that I observe is a Samaritan washing his feet. I am at once reminded of that blessed act of humility which preceded the *great* Passover—the one *true* Passover—the washing of the *disciples'* feet. I now see the meaning of the words, 'He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.' This man had doubtless performed the customary lustration of the body at home. It was only the *feet*, soiled by ascending the mountain, or by the dust of its summit, which needed to be washed now.

There are eighteen tents in all, the homes of the Samaritans for the week. The oven where the lambs are to be roasted—a circular pit dug in the ground, about two feet in diameter, and rising up into a bank or mound of earth, about three feet square—a common Eastern oven, that is to say, on a large scale—the oven has been filled with wood, and the flames are now leaping forth. I observe *six* lambs browsing on the scant herbage of the mountain-top. I had understood that the usual number offered was seven—the perfect, the covenant number—and I ask my guide why there are only six. He answers me that this year the Samaritans are too poor, or too few, to offer more; again reminding me of the words of Holy Writ—'If the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it, according to the number of the souls.' I see a little Samaritan boy—it was his own idea, no doubt, but to me it was touching and beautiful—go up to one of the lambs, clasp its head in his arms, and kiss it on its brow. Would that Christ, our Passover, had as warm a place in our hearts! Who would not kiss His dear hands and feet!

And now the little band of *men*—for the women are merely spectators, and take no part in the ritual; it is only our blessed Christianity knows no distinction of 'male or female' in drawing near to God—the men turn with their faces toward Gerizim, the *Kiblah*, or holy place of the Samaritans, just as the Jew worshipped '*toward* the temple,' just as Daniel prayed 'with his face toward Jerusalem.' Now they kneel, and now they stand and chant the monotonous hymns of the East with great vehemence. It was just such worship as this that our Blessed Lord witnessed, just such music as this that He heard. They are all clad in holiday costume, many of them in garments of pure white. Again I am reminded of the

words—' They shall walk with Me in *white*. . . . He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment.' A few aged men with long grisly beards are conspicuous among them. I take my stand by the side of the old (p. 362) priest—or, rather, Levite, for the Samaritans say the last of their priests, *i.e.*, of the line of Aaron, died a few years ago—the Levite Amran. I observe a great diversity in the complexion and physiognomy of those present. Most of the faces, however, appeared to me to have a decidedly Jewish caste, though some travellers have asserted the contrary. They hold MS. prayer-books—the Samaritan liturgy—in their hands. I notice that forms of prayer are no innovation; the Christian Church has inherited them from its Jewish predecessor. I observe, too, that the chanting is *artiphonal*, or responsive, like that of Miriam and her maidens: like that of many a homely village choir. But I cannot help remarking, at the same time, the apparent—I say *apparent*—absence of *devotion*, of spiritual worship, in the service. The old priest is an exception to the general rule; the rest go through their prayers and chants and prostrations in a seemingly perfunctory and matter-of-fact way. But then, I am reminded, alas, that the worship of Gerizim is not singular in this respect: one has too often seen this kind of thing much nearer home! But it is sad to think that Samaria, where the true idea of worship was first expounded to the world, has still to learn that blessed primal lesson—that 'the Lord looketh at the heart.'

The sun is very near the horizon; it is dipping in a sheet of flame over the western sea, the Mediterranean, which is distinctly visible from this point. A sheep has been brought, the wood is laid in order. The children of the community squat, as the Easterns commonly do, on the ground, near two large iron cauldrons filled with boiling water. The persons appointed to this service now bring the other sheep, and the little ones rush forward to see the sight. The Levite Amran and his nephew Jacob presently consult together and ascertain the time by watch. The lambs are arranged alongside the cauldrons, between us and the group of men, who are still sonorously chanting their prayers. At the bidding of Amran the six lambs are placed in a circle round the furnace, each head facing the other's tail. The men gird up their long flowing garments, so as to be ready for their work. The six *Shochetim*, or slaughterers, appointed to slay the lambs, take up their station by the side of their victims. And now the chanting ceases, and the voice of the young Levite Jacob alone is heard, loud and clear. The rest fold their hands and repeat their prayers. Now and then Jacob prolongs the note—a signal to the rest to respond. Here again, we may recognise the influence of the East upon the West, of the Mosaic order upon Christianity ; for a similar note is sometimes heard in our own churches. The sun dips lower and lower into its watery bed. At last, just as it disappears, and the paschal moon is revealed at the full, Jacob has reached the verse—the 6th verse of Exodus xii. —' the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening,' or, as the margin has, 'between the two evenings,' *i.e.*, according to Samaritan ideas, between sunset and deep twilight, or, (p. 363) as we read in Deut. xvi. 6, 'at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt.' He recites this verse, and as he pronounces the word וישחטו '*they shall kill it*,' the six lambs are seized, and six knives are, in a moment, drawn across their throats. They are held till their quiverings have ceased, *i.e.* till life is extinct. But not a cry escapes them, not one plaintive bleat. They die in profound silence. 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth,'

'Seven times *He* spake, seven words of love;
And all *three hours* *His* silence cried
For mercy on the souls of men.'

The gentle victims are then lifted up and passed on from hand to hand, and are laid round the fire. At a signal, the crowd rushes forward to strip off the wool. But I observe that immediately after the throat was cut, and the blood, 'the life of the flesh,' gushed forth (a reminder of that moment of which it is written 'Forthwith came there out blood and water'), some of the elders dipped their fingers in the crimson tide, and streaked it on the foreheads of the young children. I was subsequently told that the spot of blood was only marked on the brow of each *first-born* child, a touching reminiscence of that first passover, when the blood was sprinkled on the 'lintel and the two side posts,' in order that the first-born of Israel might be spared. I was also told that this brand of blood is allowed to remain on the forehead for a day or two. And no sooner had this red stamp been put upon the brow than—touching spectacle—brother gave to brother, Samaritan to Samaritan, the kiss of peace. ('Greet ye one another,' says S. Paul, 'with a holy kiss.') Every man of the community—so far as I could see—embraced each and all of his brethren. Two kisses were bestowed, one over each shoulder; but the young men kissed the *hands* of their elders. It was not only a moving, it was an instructive sight to see this small and stricken remnant of a once numerous people, thus proclaiming their charity and brotherhood on their solemn feast-day; a lesson to us that our sacrament of love should be a seal of forgiveness, and pledge of brotherly kindness. But the Passover Feast is now being prepared. While some are busy stripping off the skins, others, book in hand, are reciting the portions of their liturgy appropriate to this office. The women now gather round the cauldrons and watch the men dressing the lambs. A youth goes round, bearing a rude tray made of straw, on which are little morsels of unleavened bread, each inclosing a piece of bitter lettuce—for these are 'the days of unleavened bread.' The children, who do not understand its significance, clamour for more. Thoughtlessly moved by curiosity, I ask my guide if I may not taste it with the rest. He tells me 'No, the Samaritans would not allow it on any account.' They are only true to the Divine precept. 'A foreigner (p. 364) shall not eat thereof.' 'No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.' By this time the dressing and preparing of the lambs is completed. I stand almost rooted to the spot with astonishment as I observe that each lamb in turn is suspended on a rude cross of wood. This is merely designed, no doubt, as a spit; as a convenient instrument for holding the lamb both while it is being dressed and when it is placed in the oven, and also for exposing the interior of the carcase to the flame; but it gives me a thrill to find the Passover lamb fastened to a tree, hung upon a cross. How close, though all unconscious, the correspondence between type and antitype! Nor is this any innovation of later days, for Justin Martyr, one of the early Christian fathers, who was a native of Nablous, tells us that in his day, seventeen centuries ago, the Samaritans did the same. For seventeen centuries, that is to say> possibly for three and twenty, the Samaritan paschal lamb has hung upon a wooden cross. The cleaning and disembowelling of the lambs was a long process; but it was made a religious service, for the chanting or recitation was never discontinued. The entrails, I hear, are always buried. And from each lamb, when suspended on these cross poles, a shoulder was cut off. I ask the meaning of this. I am told it is the portion of Levi, the part assigned to the priest. 'And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice . . . they shall give unto the priest

the shoulder,' &c. At last the six lambs are duly prepared for roasting. They are now lifted up, and a goodly number of men stand with them, again in a circle, round the fire. The recitation of the liturgy is resumed, and, at a certain point of the prayers, they are simultaneously, as by the arm of one man, plunged into the open mouth of the furnace, which has just been plentifully fed with thorns, the flames again leaping forth to the great delight of the children. All the prayers or hymns are taken from the Samaritan Prayer-book. All is done—so the Levite Amran assures me—in exact accordance with the law. A stout wooden or wicker framework is then placed upon the mouth of the pit. This is covered over with grass. Earth is heaped on to this, and the whole is cemented and plastered down with water. Thus, as Jonah was in the whale's belly, so 'the paschal lamb is buried' in the heart of the earth. The type, as shown on Gerizim, that is to say, speaks both of crucifixion and of burial. For awhile we stand watching the dull smoke ascending slowly into the quiet heavens whilst 'the moon that shone in Paradise,' looks down on the weird spectacle, and then we retire into the chief's tent to rest awhile. But whilst we are sleeping, all through those silent hours—

'Curling to the skies

Smokes on Samaria's mount her scanty sacrifice.'

At half-past ten I am roused by my hospitable friend to witness the Passover *feast*. So far I have spoken to you only of the *sacrifice*. (p. 365) Now follows the *feast* upon the sacrifice, a type of Him who not only died for us, but gave His flesh to be the food and life of the world. The Sheykh tells me the lambs will shortly be eaten, as it was judged from the smell that they were by this time sufficiently cooked. As before, the men take up their position round the fire, and the congregation—still in the same monotonous tones, I had almost called them Gregorian—joins in the appointed prayers. They have reached a certain point, when the pickaxes are raised in the air, the mound is opened, the earth is cleared away, and one after another the lambs are taken out—surely a rude foreshadowing of a resurrection. The use of the cross now becomes apparent. Only thus could the lamb be handled. I observe how much the carcasses have been charred and burnt. 'His visage,' I am reminded, 'was so marred more than 'any man, and his form more than the sons of men.' I am told that especial care is used in removing the baked or roasted lamb from the oven, that it should not touch the sides of the pit. 'A bone of him shall not be broken.' When taken out, they are placed on trays or mats of straw, and carried to the spot where they were before they were killed. Now the paschal feast commences. Crouching on the ground, sitting on their haunches, 'their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, their staff in their hand,' like men in haste they eat the Passover. Some, I observe, take a morsel, and walk about while eating it. They are arranged in groups, a group round each lamb. A considerable time is occupied over the feast, notwithstanding that they eat in haste. At the close the bones and fragments are carefully collected, according to the law, and burnt with fire—thus fulfilling the injunction of the text, 'And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning, and that which remaineth of it until the morning, ye shall burn with fire.' I have understood that on some occasions the ground is searched with lighted candles lest any fragment should escape them; but this was not done in the year 1861.

My kind host (who is amongst us to-day) was anxious that we should spend the night on the sacred mount. But we were wearied with the long journey of that day, under the tropical sun, and therefore after some conversation with Amran (who has since gone to

his rest), after trying to lift his thoughts from the type to the blessed antitype, we preferred to descend to our tents at Nablous. The paschal moon touched the mountain-top, and every leaf and blade of umbrageous Shechem, with liquid silver, and glorified the sides of Mount Ebal, and illumined the endless chain of hills and valleys, as, with chastened and thankful hearts, we left the Samaritan encampment and the historic race. Like the first Passover in the land of Egypt, it was 'a night to be much remembered unto the Lord,' and we felt as we descended, silently and full of thought, to the valley, that we had seen what 'many prophets and kings desired to see,' and that our feet had stood on holy ground.

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

*The author cited in this article is **Rev. Joseph Hammond** (1839 - 1912). There is also an article referenced to by the name **Charles Edward Hammond** (1837-1914), entitled "The Samaritan Passover of the year 1861." referenced # 2094 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. This Joseph article was published in 1884, while the Charles article was published in the *JTVI* 36 in 1904, therefore this appears to be the original publication. I have not seen the Charles article to compare, but I suspect that they were either brothers or cousins.*