

Tent and Testament
A Camping Tour in Palestine,
with some notes on Scripture Sites

By Herbert Rix
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(p. 27).....

On issuing from the little chapel I noticed carefully the relation of the floor of the cell to the level of the surrounding plain. Standing on the mound of debris which covers the well and looking around me, it was very obvious that the floor of the chapel must be exactly on a level with the surrounding country. The well, in fact, was just like others which we had seen in our journey—a plain circular opening in the level ground, guarded by a stone curb to keep the earth from falling in—only, this particular well was of unusual depth and was constructed with special pains, for the upper part is protected to some distance from the surface by carefully built stone-work, and the lower part is cut through limestone rock.

And that, by the way, is just one of the puzzles about this remarkable relic of antiquity—why such a laboriously constructed well should exist in such a place? The place is within easy reach of wells and streams. Askar has its spring and Nablus its running brooks. The natives, indeed, claim that the latter has over twenty springs. Who, then, could have dug such a well in such a place, and for what purpose did he dig it?

The readiest answer certainly seems to be that it was dug by some one who was an alien to the owners of the neighbouring waters. Jacob may be an eponymous hero or a real person; but this well surely goes back to those "patriarchal" times when tribes or families fought together for possession of the springs and jealously excluded all new comers from their use.

The fact which I have just mentioned, that Askar has its own spring, suggests another puzzle. If the story of the Woman at the Well is a story of fact, and if Askar is to be identified with Sychar, why did the woman come so far to fetch her water? The objection is not that the well was too far away, for many villages in the East are half a mile from their wells, but that there was no need to come at all. The well of Askar (so I was informed by the natives) is in the middle of the village, with a convenient passage leading down to the water's edge; and it is used at the present day (p. 28) by all the inhabitants. Why then should the Woman of Sychar come to Jacob's Well? Formerly, when Sychar was supposed to be identical with Shechem or Nablus, the objection had even greater weight, for Nablus is still more distant and has still more water!

The answer may be that she came just because it was Jacob's Well. The well was in some sort sacred in the time of Jesus, and these holy wells were and still are frequented by people from a distance who value the water from them for its supposed healing and medicinal qualities. On the other hand, the woman is made to speak as though it were for the mere quenching of thirst that she came this weary journey, and would gladly have a spring of living water nearer home. So that one has to confess with a sigh, that even if the fiction is, as I hold, founded on fact, the fact is very difficult to separate from the fiction.

The path by which we had approached Jacob's Well continues northward, bearing slightly to the east, and passes the village of Askar. But in that path we did not now continue, but turned instead sharply to the west along the Vale of Shechem, Ebal being now on our right hand, and the mountain-slopes of Gerizim upon our left.

At this turn to the west, I noticed how closely the spurs of Ebal and Gerizim approached each other, making possible the traditional reading of the law from the two mountains, if we suppose the lower slopes of the mountains to be meant. The Bible narrative does not, indeed, require even that modification of the tradition, for, whether with the Authorised Version we read that the Israelites stood "over against" Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, or with the Revised Version, that they stood "in front of" either mountain, the

reading of the law was quite possible. The only thing that is impossible is that the reading took place, as has been so strangely fancied, from the *summits* of the two mountains.

Nablus, the Shechem of the Bible, is not visible from Jacob's Well, being entirely round the corner, and a good half-hour's ride to the west.¹

At the entrance of the town we passed the Turkish barracks, where a number of soldiers were loafing about in the sun. A little further on we dismounted, and presently (p. 29) found ourselves walking through the streets of this most ancient place. The bazaars of Nablus are beyond description picturesque—narrow of course, and cut, like those we had already seen in Cairo, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, into masses of brightest light and blackest shade by the cloths and awnings stretched at short intervals from roof to roof across the street. But there was a colour here and atone, a variety of form and general flavour of antiquity, which surpassed those of the other places mentioned. The costumes of the natives, too, were purely Oriental without that admixture of Western garb which in Jaffa and Jerusalem one cannot but feel to be a disfigurement, and they were mostly of brightest hues with a preponderance of yellow.

At my desire we were now led to the Samaritan quarter. We passed through narrow streets, along which every now and then long files of camels threaded their way, leaving small space for foot-passengers on either side, through the market where corn was being bought and sold, then bearing to the left we were taken to the south-western part of the town, and there, crowded among a dislocated mass of houses, stood the tiny synagogue in which the Samaritans worshipped.

So small was the little whitewashed room that I did not at first understand that this was the synagogue which I had so much wished to see. I supposed it to be a vestibule, and wondered when we should be taken through it to the main building. I noticed, however, that it contained a kubla, or niche, towards which prayers were directed, and, inferring that it was therefore holy, asked whether I should remove my shoes. The high-priest, who was showing us the place, answered that it was unnecessary to do so; but before we were allowed to step upon the floor, he turned back the corner of the matting with which it was covered.

This high-priest was a fine-looking man, tall and dignified, with lofty forehead, oval face, clear olive complexion, mild eyes, rather thick underlip, nose somewhat straighter than the usual Jewish type, beard black turning grey. The total impression was distinctly Jewish, but that of the very finest type of Jew, in which the sensuousness has almost disappeared, and a certain refinement which does not as a rule belong to the Jew has taken its place.² He was accompanied (p. 30) by his son, a very beautiful lad of fifteen or sixteen. The Samaritans are very clean in person, differing in this respect very markedly from those of their ancient enemies who are seen in Palestine.

Enemies to the Jews of course they still are. With the Jews of Nablus at any rate their feud is as acrimonious, so I was informed, as ever it was. It cannot, however, last much longer; it will die with the Samaritans themselves. For, this very ancient sect has almost disappeared. In the fifth century of the present era there were many Samaritans both in Southern Palestine and in Egypt, and they even had a synagogue in Rome. As late as the seventeenth century they had communities in Cairo and Damascus. But early in the last century they became extinct everywhere but in Nablus. The Samaritans of Nablus numbered about a thousand in the twelfth century; at the present time they number about 150.³

The outer clothing of the Samaritan consists, like that of any other town-dweller in Palestine, of the kumbaz, or long cotton robe tied about the waist with a girdle and having loose sleeves reaching to the tips of the fingers. But the turban is peculiar. Round the tarbush, and almost covering it, is wound a broad

¹ De Saulcy, Stanley, and other writers, who identify Sychar with Shechem, maintain that the ancient Shechem lay to the east of the rebuilt city of Neapolis (Nablus), founded by Vespasian, and that this saves the historicity of John iv. 30, 35.

² The generally accepted view as to the origin of the Samaritans is that they were the Cuthim, or strangers from Chaldea, who were placed in this district when Sargon carried away Israel into Assyria. Colonel Conder and others hold, however, that this is a biased account of the matter, invented by the Pharisaic party, and that the tradition of the Samaritans themselves, that they are of pure Jewish blood, is to be respected. See Conder's "Tent-Work in Palestine," p. 16 *et seq.*

³ Conder says 135, in 1872; Baedeker says 160; our dragoman informed us that the number is 150, of whom only forty are initiated. In an article in the *Daily News* (August 27, 1906) on a visit to London of a deputation from the Samaritans, the total number is given as 115 men and 85 women.

sash of crimson silk, arranged in picturesque folds. This colour belongs exclusively to the Samaritan. The high-priest, in addition to this characteristic turban, wears a long black cloth coat open in front and hanging loosely from his shoulders. This, Hanna explained, was worn only by his Holiness, and distinguished him from the rank and file of his flock.

This robe, which was not purchasable in the bazaar, I was anxious to add to my collection of costumes, and informed Hanna of my desire. He requested that I would leave the matter entirely to him, not appearing in the transaction myself, and he would then do his best for me. Followed, a lengthy dialogue in Arabic, much gesticulation, tones of surprise, indignation, indifference, explanation, firmness, (p. 31) concession, dignity, amusement, and suddenly the High Priest stripped off his official robe with a laugh and handed it to Hanna. Then the son was despatched to fetch the corresponding turban, and the transaction was complete.

The price I afterwards learned was fifteen shillings, below which figure his Holiness declared that he could not go, as the coat "had still two years' wear in it." Hanna told me at the same time (he never informed me of his lies till we were well away) that he would not have obtained it even at that price, only he had told the priest that the coat was wanted for an American gentleman who had written for it from New York and named a fixed price beyond which it was not possible for him to go. There was nothing for me to do, after Hanna made such confessions of deceit, but to express surprise and disapproval, which, however, did not have the slightest practical effect when the next occasion arose. The Arab is, in fact, incapable of understanding the Western attitude towards deceit. "The word of an Englishman" has become a synonym with them for truth and fidelity, but they seem quite unable to see that the same truthfulness would be either morally praiseworthy or commercially advantageous to themselves. Lying is an art with them, and I really believe they take an artistic pleasure in it. It is all one with their love for tales of adventure. The invention, the cleverness, and the pleasure of outwitting another, are at the root of their habitual deceit. An Arab appears very seldom to tell the truth unless there is a distinct and immediate advantage in doing so; and then he feels it to be a lost opportunity for playing his favourite and amusing game of competitive invention.

To return to the little synagogue; a chair was now set before us, and we were mysteriously told to wait and see what would appear upon that chair. That which appeared was an ancient parchment roll much torn and patched, which the priest placed there for our inspection. This was presently removed, and another was placed there, larger and in better condition. These manuscripts were written not in the square Hebrew to which we are accustomed, but in the more ancient "Samaritan" character. They were, the priest asserted, copies of the Pentateuch, the first which he showed us dating from the time of the Maccabees, and the second from "the thirteenth year after the Jews entered Palestine!"

Whether either of the scrolls was indeed the sacrosanct (p. 32) codex which is elevated in the Samaritan services like the host in a Roman Catholic church, it is impossible to say. It is affirmed that the most ancient copy is seldom or never exhibited to travellers. By the priest himself it is handled with the greatest reverence. Every time he touches it he exclaims, "In the name of God." It is, however, interesting to know that when it is "elevated" in their synagogue the congregation do not bow down to the scroll, but turn themselves obliquely and fall on their faces towards the eastern summit of Mount Gerizim, where of old their temple stood. In a tiny courtyard near the synagogue grew an orange tree which was just now laden with fruit. Here we rested for a while in the cool shadow conversing with our Samaritan friend. His part of the conversation consisted of only two words—the words "very good." But it was surprising into how many connections they fitted. Turning to the tree, he said "very good," in a tone of information. Pointing to my camera into which I had been putting some new films, he asked "very good?" in a tone of inquiry. Waving his hand toward the mountain up which we were about to climb for the sake of the view over Nablus, he exclaimed "Very good!" in a tone of pride: and so the conversation went merrily forward till we made our adieus and addressed ourselves to our journey.

(p. 33) CHAPTER VI

SHECHEM TO SAMARIA

AT the western boundary of the town we remounted and climbed a spur of Gerizim by a long slope, until we reached a kind of terrace from which there was a beautiful view of Nablus; and here under the shade of the olives, which are cultivated in terraces far up the side of the mountain, Mohammed spread our mid-day meal.

The place was a favourite resort of the inhabitants of Nablus, who came here to smoke and drink coffee and chat or sleep in the sunshine. Beside the road was a platform of stone, on which were placed a number of four-legged stools, several nargilehs, and a small charcoal stove. It was in charge of a short, broad, elderly man in a white turban, jacket and baggy trousers, and an old pair of slippers. He let out the stools and nargilehs, and sold sweet Turkish coffee, which he made upon his stove in a little metal vessel and served in tiny cups without handles (Fig. 5). The nargileh was originally made from the nargil or coconut, but those which you see in Palestine are mostly made of glass. Above the bottle or vase which contains the water is a small cup-shaped receptacle to hold the tobacco. The people of Palestine use large flaky tobacco, of which they take a handful, dip it in water and squeeze it together; then, laying it in the cup, they light it by applying a bit of burning charcoal with the tongs. The smoke passes downward from the cup into the water, through which it rises into the empty space above the liquid surface, and is thence inhaled by means of a long flexible tube. The smoke is drawn into the lungs.

This is the favourite form of smoking in Palestine when the smoker is at rest. Sometimes, indeed, I saw men even when riding horses or donkeys holding their "hubblebubbles" in their hands and smoking them as they travelled; but, for the most part, cigarettes are smoked when *en route*. (p. 34) The old-fashioned Turkish pipes with large bowls and long wooden stems seem almost to have gone out of use: I do not think I saw a single one in the course of our tour. It was very strange to find French cigarette papers lying on the ground even in remote places beyond Jordan, where one imagines oneself to be out of reach of civilisation.

After we had lunched, my fellow-traveller climbed the mountain where the Samaritan place of sacrifice is to be seen, upon which every year the passover-lamb is still slain; where also is the sacred rock upon which tradition says that the altar of their temple stood. As the horses could not do the climb, I had to deny myself the pleasure of seeing these interesting spots, being constitutionally incapable of the ascent on foot.

While my friend was gone therefore I sat in the shade and looked abroad over the valley beneath me, in which the white houses of Shechem lay clustered, with Ebal towering beyond. A stream of bright water ran by the roadside, whose musical voice mingled with the gurgling of the nargilehs, the hum of quiet talk, the distant laughter of a group of children dabbling in the brook, and the shrill chirp of a small bird up the mountain-side. Two youths, one in yellow, the other in blue, were lounging in the sun; in a shady corner a man in a striped cloak and a white turban lay dozing; while the old custodian in his baggy blue trousers and jacket was cooking his pot. Behind me rose the terraced side of Gerizim with its olives; below was a tangle of almond-trees, figs, and poplars, and those brambles which figure in Jotham's parable. It must have been from just such a spot as this that his parable of the trees was spoken.

At two o'clock we were on horseback again, and, regaining the valley, journeyed westward for about an hour under a burning sun. Our way lay through the fertile valley of Shechem, past fields carefully irrigated from the abundant stream which flows down its length. We passed two aqueducts. One of them, a Roman structure on a long series of arches, was still in use; though the sides were broken and cascades poured from it into the road beneath. These old Roman contrivances often fill one with wonder. It seems strange that so civilised a people should never have hit upon the fact, which was daily before their eyes, that water returns to its level; and that for want of this one little simple bit of knowledge they should (p. 35) have spent such enormous labour upon these wonderful but needless structures.

Then we turned to the right, and for another hour travelled by a still hotter road toward the north-west. The track lay between cultivated fields and continued to rise until, at the highest point, a great stretch of the Mediterranean came into view. A little further and Samaria lay before us on an opposing height.

The situation of the ancient city is superb. Between us and it lay a deep valley, from which the round terraced hill upon which the ruins stand rose to a height of four or five hundred feet; the elevation of Samaria above the sea being as much as 1450 feet. No other city in Palestine can approach it for situation except Jerusalem and Safed. Jerusalem, with its sheer gulf upon the east and south, is certainly impressive, but it cannot compare with Samaria for isolated grandeur; only Safed, the sacred city of Galilee, surpasses it in that respect. Omri, king of the ten tribes, certainly chose the site of his capital with judgment.

But the ruins which we see up yonder are not those of the city of Omri. That old capital, where Ahab reigned and sinned, where Jehu slaughtered the priests of Baal, and to which Naaman came to be healed of his leprosy, was completely wiped out of existence by John Hyrcanus. The ruins which crown the hill

to-day are those of Herod the Great's Samaria. Its modern name, Sebastiyeh, is but a slight departure from the name Sebaste, the Greek for Augusta, by which the tyrant indicated its dedication to Augustus. In the lifetime of Jesus there stood in the midst of the city a marble temple where the Caesar was worshipped as a god, and to this day amid the broken walls and scattered stones which cover the topmost plateau, a group of pillars stands erect, and marks the site of that abomination of all pious Jews.

We plunged into the deep ravine which surrounds the mountain of Samaria, passed through an ancient gateway, and climbing the terraced height upon which the ruins stand, soon reached our camp, which we found pitched in the very midst of Herod's temple. Of course we were soon surrounded by a group of villagers. One in striped aba and keffiyeh brought coins which his plough had turned up. Few of them were legible, but one was plainly a coin of Probus, one of the emperors who succeeded in restoring and, for a time maintaining, the unity of the Empire after that long and terrible period of anarchy during which it had (p. 36) been broken up into undefined military districts. When that coin was struck, some thirty years before Constantine, Samaria was still a place of some importance; for it lived on into Christian times and became an episcopal see. The very mosque in which these villagers worship, which stood hard by our camp, was once a Christian church.

As the sun got low a great flight of storks settled in the trees behind our camp. I tried to count them, but when I had got as far as fifty gave it up. The snapping of their multitudinous beaks made a curious rattling noise, and the branches of the trees swayed and bent beneath their weight as though they would break. It was March 13, a week earlier than the usual date for their arrival in Palestine, accounted for perhaps by this being an unusually warm spring. It interested me much to see these friendly immigrants, faithful to their old country in the day of her ruin and desolation. They are several times mentioned in Scripture, and Jeremiah (viii. 7) alludes to the regularity of their return in that pathetic passage, " Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the ordinance of the Lord."

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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This photo left is shown between pages 44 and 45 of the above book. The text box reads: Fig 5. Resting Place on Mount Gerizim.

The date was March 12-13, but the year is unknown, possibly 1898. Rix mentions a date of a concerning the spring of 1901 and there is also the following proof of the year: Her Rix (1850-1906), "Notes Taken on a Tour in Palestine in the Spring of 1901, "Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement 35.2 (April 1903): 159-162. [see journal here](#)

Yaacov b. Aaharon b. Shalma was the High Priest from 1874-1916.

His fellow traveler was is unknown.

Mr. Herbert Rix died on October 10, 1906 while this book was in press. Mr. Rix had his own camera for photographs. He was the Assistant Secretary of the Royal Society. But no photo is known of any Samaritans.

Rev. Dr. Merrill was at the author's words the United States Consul. There is also mention of a visit to Dr. Torrance at the Scottish Mission in Tiberias. Also mentioned be in Jerusalem, Professor George Adam Smith, photographer and scholar.

To right a photo of Dix, who appears to be the man sitting in the photo above. It is possible that the he is wearing the High Priests robe and turban.

