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**The Lands of the Saracens:
Or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily and Spain**

By **Bayard Taylor**

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(p. 93).....

Nablous is noted for the existence of a small remnant of the ancient Samaritans. The stock has gradually dwindled away, and amounts to only forty families, containing little more than a hundred and fifty individuals. They live in a particular (p. 94) quarter of the city, and are easily distinguished from the other inhabitants by the cast of their features. After our guide, a native of Nablous, had pointed out three or four, I had no difficulty in recognising all the others we met. They have long, but not prominent noses, like the Jews; small, oblong eyes, narrow lips, and fair complexions, most of them having brown hair. They appear to be held in considerable obloquy by the Moslems. Our attendant, who was of the low class of Arabs, took the boys we met very unceremoniously by the head, calling out: "Here is another Samaritan!" He then conducted us to their synagogue, to see the celebrated Pentateuch, which is there preserved. We were taken to a small, open court, shaded by an apricot-tree, where the priest, an old man in a green robe and white turban, was seated in meditation. He had a long grey beard, and black eyes, that lighted up with a sudden expression of eager greed when we promised him backsheesh for a sight of the sacred book. He arose and took us into a sort of chapel, followed by a number of Samaritan boys. Kneeling down at a niche in the wall, he produced from behind a wooden case a piece of ragged parchment, written with Hebrew characters. But the guide was familiar with this deception, and rated him so soundly that, after a little hesitation, he laid the fragment away, and produced a large tin cylinder, covered with a piece of green satin embroidered in gold. The boys stooped down and reverently kissed the blazoned cover, before it was removed. The cylinder, sliding open by two rows of hinges, opened at the same time the parchment scroll, which was rolled at both ends. It was, indeed, a very ancient manuscript, and in remarkable preservation. The rents have been carefully repaired and the scroll (p. 95) neatly stitched upon another piece of parchment, covered on the outside with violet satin. The priest informed me that it was written by the son of Aaron; but this does not coincide with the fact that the Samaritan Pentateuch is different from that of the Jews. It is, however, no doubt one of the oldest parchment records in the world, and the Samaritans look upon it with unbounded faith and reverence. The Pentateuch, according to their version, contains their only form of religion. They reject everything else which the Old Testament contains. Three or four days ago was their grand feast of sacrifice, when they made a burnt offering of a lamb, on the top of Mount Gerizim. Within a short time, it is said they have shown some curiosity to become acquainted with the New Testament, and the High Priest sent to Jerusalem to procure Arabic copies.

I asked one of the wild-eyed boys whether he could read the sacred book. "Oh, yes," said the priest, "all these boys can read it;" and the one I addressed immediately pulled a volume from his breast, and commenced reading in fluent Hebrew. It appeared to be a part of their church service, for both the priest and *boab*, or door-keeper, kept up a running series of responses, and occasionally the whole crowd shouted out some deep-mouthed word in chorus. The old man leaned forward with an expression as fixed and intense as if the text had become incarnate in him, following with his lips the sound of the boy's voice. It was a strange picture of religious enthusiasm, and was of itself sufficient to convince me of the legitimacy of the Samaritan's descent. When I rose to leave I gave him the promised fee, and a smaller one to the boy who read the service. This was the signal for a general attack from the (p. 96) door-keeper and all the boys who were present. They surrounded me with eyes sparkling with the desire of gain, kissed the border of my jacket, stroked my beard coaxingly with their hands, which they then kissed, and, crowding up with a boisterous show of affection, were about to fall on my neck in a heap, after the old Hebrew fashion. The priest, clamorous for more, followed with glowing face, and the whole group had a riotous and bacchanalian character, which I should never have imagined could spring from such a passion as avarice.

On returning to our camp, we found Mentor and Telemachus arrived, but not on such friendly terms as their Greek prototypes. We were kept awake for a long time that night by their high words, and the first sound I heard the next morning came from their tent. Teletnaehus, I suspect, had found some island of Calypso, and did not relish the cold shock of the plunge into the sea, by which Mentor had forced him away. He insisted on returning to Jerusalem, but as Mentor would not allow him a horse, he had not the courage to try it on foot.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not located 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

Bayard Taylor (1825 – 1878) was an American poet, literary critic, translator, and travel author. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayard_Taylor

His visit: May 1852

There are later editions of the above book and again the above selection was also placed in another of Taylor's books, *Prose Writings of Bayard Taylor*, Revised Edition. Lands of the Sarcen. By Bayard Taylor pg. 93-6. New York: G. P. Putnam, 532 Broadway. 1862