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**The Oriental world:  
or, New travels in Turkey, Russia, Egypt, Asia Minor and the Holy Land,  
With Graphic Sketches of  
Life and Adventures in the Orient.  
By Thomas Wallace Knox  
Hartford, Conn.;**  
**W.A.D. Worthington & Co., Publishers**  
**1878**

(p. 357).....

From Nazareth to Nablous, we cross the basin just described, and climb a long ascent to the crest of a ridge. Thence our road is through glens and over hills, but it is less rough than most of the routes we have heretofore traveled. Nablous is a city of about eight thousand inhabitants. This is the ancient Shechem, which was assigned to the Levites and made a city of refuge—a place where a man who had murdered anybody or otherwise shocked the fastidiousness of his neighbors, could live a virtuous and respectable life and be safe from harm. No extradition treaty could touch him, and he might hope in course of time, to become mayor or alderman in his new home, and have a finger in the city treasury. The authorities used to try the refugees who came there, and, in case of wilful murder, the fellows were delivered up to justice. But if the trials were anything like those of murderers in olden times, it was a pretty safe thing for a man to get into a city of refuge, as he could plead accident and insanity, especially the latter, and get off without trouble.

Shechem, or Nablous, is chiefly interesting to-day as the residence of the Samaritans; there are considerably' less than two hundred of them and they live now, as they did in Christ's time, and long before it, following the same occupations, obeying the (p. 358) same laws and worshipping after the ancient manner. We read in the New Testament that "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans," and the statement applies at this day and hour as it did when these words were written.

Down to a few centuries ago, there were colonies of Samaritans in three or four of the Oriental cities, but they have all disappeared except this one at Nablous. They date from the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the carrying of the people into captivity. They came from the East, to settle in the deserted cities, and added to their own religion some features of Jewish worship. Rejected by the Jews, they determined to have a temple of their own, and they erected it upon Mount Gerizim, one of the hills overlooking Shechem. They go there now, as they have always done, to celebrate the Feast of the Passover, and follow the mode prescribed in the twelfth Chapter of Exodus. Six lambs are roasted after the ancient method and eaten by the people, and no infidel Christian, Jew, or Moslem is allowed to touch any of the meat or any part of the culinary apparatus. They accept the first five books of the Bible as their gospel, but reject all others; they accept Moses as the only law-giver, believe that a Messiah is to come, believe in the resurrection of the body, and in a state of future rewards and punishments, and they keep all the feasts and fasts enjoined in the Pentateuch. They also keep the feast of Purim, on the ground that it celebrates the journey of Moses to Egypt to deliver the Israelites, and not as the Jews celebrate it for the release of their people by Queen Esther.

What a strange people! The only remaining adherents of a faith that was once wide spread through Syria—a link binding us to the mystic past, and carrying us back more than thirty centuries of time. They are born, they live, they think, they worship, they die as their ancestors have done for more than a hundred generations. To them the present is a dream, the past the only reality.

They have a synagogue, and by dint of energy and "backsheesh," we may visit it. They show us the famous Samaritan Codex, the copy of the Pentateuch, which is said to be the oldest MS. copy in existence. It is on parchment, about fifteen inches wide and twenty-five yards long, and is much

defaced and injured (p. 361) by time and handling. There has been much discussion concerning this parchment, and many pages have been written to prove or disprove its antiquity. The Samaritans claim that it is thirty-five hundred years old, and they give the name of the writer, but he is not there now to swear to the truth of the statement. As Sergeant Buzfuz would say, "his is in itself suspicious." That it is very ancient there is no doubt, and the reader may take his choice as to date of manufacture. The "Doubter" says that he saw in the parchment the watermark "Eagle Mills"—Jones and Smith, encircling a flying eagle with a shield in his claws. But I don't believe him.

We pass Gibeah, the ancient Geba, and next come to Bethel, now called Beitin, where Jacob lay down, as you see the Arabs lying now, with the earth for a bed and a stone for his pillow, and dreamed that he saw a ladder reaching to Heaven, and angels ascending and descending upon it. Abraham pitched his tent here, and here was buried Deborah, the nurse of Rachel, under an oak tree, which Jacob had chosen.

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

These references are not listed 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

**Thomas Wallace Knox** (1835 - 1896) was a journalist, author, and world traveler, known primarily for his work as a *New York Herald* correspondent during the American Civil War. As an author, Knox wrote over 45 books.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Wallace\\_Knox](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Wallace_Knox)