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Travels in the East;

The Religion of the East: with Impressions of Foreign Travel

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Hartford:

Published by Edwin Hunt.

1847

(p. 77) Chapter 7

BIGOTRY EXHIBITED AND REPROVED
IN THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

(p. 78)

On the morning of the 4th of last April,¹ having spent the preceding night in Nabulus, the ancient Schechem, afterwards Sychar, I left the town about nine o'clock, in company with several of my fellow travelers, and began to ascend Mount Gerizim, which rose before us to the height of about eight hundred feet, and stretched to the east, the point which we wished to attain. The ascent was steep and difficult; but after near an hour's hard toil, we reached the highest elevation, where the ancient Samaritans were wont to pay their worship, and where now the little remnant of them, residing at Nabulus, go in procession four times a year for the same purpose. Here is their *holy place*, where they sacrifice the passover, seven lambs among them all, and perform their various religious services, believing them to have a peculiar holiness and acceptableness to God, because performed on this particular spot. There is no temple there, though there are the ruins of one, and the fragments of buildings which lie scattered thick around, indicate that a large town once occupied this site. The view from this position is one of exceeding beauty and grandeur. Overlooking the intervening hills and valleys, (p. 79) you see in the west, at the distance of some twenty or thirty miles, the Mediterranean, bordering the broad rich plain of Sharon, stretching far to the north and south. Over against you, on the north, rises Mount Ebal, to an equal height with that of Mount Gerizim, but more bold and rocky if possible, and so near that voices can be heard from one mountain to the other, separated only by a valley of about five hundred yards wide. Beneath you, at the east, lies spread out a rich extended plain, including the tomb of Joseph, Jacob's farm as it is called, and also the well which bears his name. Along the foot of the Mount and on the edge of the plain, runs the road which leads from Jerusalem to Galilee, on which our Lord and his disciples were wont to travel, as they went to and from these places.

Standing on the summit of Gerizim, with the various localities distinctly marked and spread out in full view before me, I could easily imagine that I saw the blessed Saviour and his followers, on the occasion referred to in our text, wending their way along this road around the south-east base of the mountain, and drawing near to Jacob's well. There the Master, wearied with his journey and the heat of the day, seats himself by the well,

¹ 1844.

while his disciples pass up the valley a short distance, to the city, to buy food. At this point a woman of Samaria comes near to draw water. With a view to engage her in conversation, our Saviour asks her to give him to drink. Instantly her prejudices are roused, and she replies, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? There had been a controversy between the Jews and Samaritans of long standing. It related especially to the proper place of worshipping God,—the Jews claiming that it was in Jerusalem, and the Samaritans that it was in Mount Gerizim. This controversy ran so high, and was carried on with such bitterness of spirit, that it interrupted all the civilities of life, and even prevented common dealings with one another. This old enmity continues to the present day, and the little handful of Samaritans, about one hundred and twenty² in number, residing in Nabulus, still insist that on Mount Gerizim is the very place where God is to be worshiped, and all the world are wrong on this point but themselves.

(p. 84)So were the woman of Samaria and her countrymen, generally, bigots, because they believed that God could be worshiped no where, acceptably, but on Mount Gerizim, and were so intolerant in maintaining this dogma, that they bitterly hated their neighbors, the Jews, who worshiped God in Jerusalem. And never did bigotry appear to me more odious, or more contemptible, wicked and foolish, than when I saw it exemplified in the old Samaritan priest, a man about sixty-five years of age, and his son, who promises to be a worthy successor of his father. There they were, I saw them in their synagogue, the only two duly authorized priests in all the world, and the little company of their adherents, some one hundred and twenty, all told, the only true church on earth,—both priests and church having come down in the veritable line of succession from Aaron, and still having in their possession, the (p. 85) oldest and only true copy of the Pentateuch in the world,—it having been written by Abishua, the son of Phineas, three thousand four hundred and sixty years ago, all of which is to be received as a part of essential faith. ..

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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

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His visit was April 4, 1844.
He traveled with his daughter and a friend, Dr. Anderson.

² They are variously estimated from 120 to 150.