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Travels in three continents, Europe, Africa, Asia

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CHAPTER LIII.

Shechem, Samaria, Jenin.

Events of Sacred History Connected with Nabulus—The Modern Town— Samaritans—Samaritan Codex of the Pentateuch—Across the Valley of Samaria—Street of Columns—The Plain of Esdraelon—Jenin.

FROM Gerizim we had seen the beautiful valley of Nabulus, and our road now led through it. This is ancient Shechem, also called Sichar, Sichem, and Sychem. Abraham was the first biblical visitor to the place, and the land was then owned by the Canaanites. Jacob found it in the possession of the Hivites, and governed by Hamor, the father of Shechem. Simeon and Levi took it and murdered every male, for which they were cursed by Jacob on his deathbed. It must have been near here that Joseph was seized by his brethren. Rehoboam and Jeroboam met there and divided the kingdom, and then Shechem became the seat of Jeroboam's government. To Christians it is peculiarly interesting because, after the captivity, the Samaritans made this their sacred place. The woman who drew from Jacob's Well the water for Jesus lived here.

The place has about a thousand Christians, a few Protestant and the others either Latin or Greek; a larger number are Jews, but the majority of the people are Mohammedans. Down to a recent period the town was bitterly intolerant toward Christian visitors, whom they pelted with stones, at the same time crying "*Nozrani!*"

The buildings are solidly built of stone, and some are ornamented; but the streets are dirty and narrow. An extraordinary traffic in soap, the principal ingredient of which is olive oil, is carried on, there being more than twenty manufactories.

In Nabulus dwell all the Samaritans in the world, less than one hundred and fifty. They are of "noble physiognomy" and of magnificent physique. The men would attract attention anywhere by their proportions; and have so little of the Jewish cast that they would not be taken as belonging to that (p. 439) race. On being introduced to the teacher of the school, a man fully six feet in height, we asked to see the ancient Samaritan Codex of the Pentateuch, one of the oldest manuscripts in the world. The teacher solemnly assured us that he brought it forth, but, having been warned that an attempt is made to palm off a more recent copy upon travelers, we sent for the high priest and tried to ascertain whether we saw the original. In a few moments he acknowledged to Selim that the real original manuscript had not been shown. It was then brought forth and reverently kissed by the Samaritans. They say that it was written by a grandson or great-grandson of Aaron, which must be classed with the instances, so common in the Eastern world, of drawing the long bow. Nevertheless those competent to judge regard it as being nearly two thousand years old.

The high priest is handsome; and, paying him a compliment, we learned that he had his photographs, and was not above selling them. George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, declares that none are so proud of their photographs, or give artists more trouble, than doctors of divinity who have renounced the world. When it is considered that a stock trade is done by photographers in Great Britain and the United States in pictures of ministers and of bishops in their prelatical robes; that peddlers of photographs of the successful revivalist follow him in his spiritual labors, and that a snug sum is derived from their sale, I will say nothing against this man, who, so far as personal beauty is concerned, had a better reason for putting his photographs upon the market than a majority of those who find so much pleasure in it.

A peculiarity of the Samaritans is scrupulous cleanliness. We were curious to see Jacob, a Samaritan who visited England a few years ago, and was suspected of dealing in false antiquities. He came forth, and was ingratiating in manner and of splendid physique. His countenance was indicative of high intellectuality; he spoke English, and is said to be learned in other modern languages.

A pleasant incident was the glimpse we had of the Samaritan children, for it is seldom that one can see the entire rising generation of an historic people.

(p. 440) The Samaritans fought against the Jews, Christians, and the Roman emperors. In the sixth century they were numerous and dangerous, and Justinian dispatched a great army against them. Some fled to Persia and others became Christians. For a long time after that they are not mentioned in history. There were a thousand of them in the twelfth century, but since then they have diminished to about one hundred and fifty, averaging three to a family. They believe in the Pentateuch, reject the rest of the Scriptures, worship one God, and hate idols. Three times a year they make a pilgrimage to the top of Mount Gerizim. At the Feast of the Passover they offer sacrifices. A Samaritan, when performing any service in the synagogue at Nabulus, looks in an oblique direction toward Mount Gerizim; and from that point the feet of successive generations of Samaritans, from the time of Nehemiah until now, have worn a path to the summit of the mountain.

They are as antagonistic to the Jews as were their fathers. Some day they will be reduced to one or two, who will have a fortune in that ancient manuscript of the Pentateuch, and probably in future ages it will repose' in the British Museum, or some other endowed repository of antiquities.

I bought in Nabulus some sesame, grain much cultivated in the East, resembling oats, and often spoken of in oriental legends. In the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, in the story of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," when Cassim was in the cave, he forgot the magic words which alone would open the door. Vainly he tried "Open, wheat," "Open, barley." "Sesame" he could not recall, and so died for his curiosity and cupidity.

Nabulus stands on the great divide, and we saw brooks running eastward toward the Jordan, and westward toward the Great Sea. It took us nearly three hours to cross the charming valley which had been so long in sight. Then we began to ascend the hill of Samaria.....

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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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