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Two Months in Palestine: or,
A Guide to a Rapid Journey to the Chief Places of Interest in the Holy Land
By **James Monteith**
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(p. 165)

CHAPTER XIII.

WE now come " on that highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah." The hill-sides were clothed with olives and cultivated terraces, presenting a more healthy appearance than anything we had seen on this journey; and as we approached Nabulus, riding along the slopes of Mount Gerizim, the scenery became magnificent. Below us was a long fertile valley, which needed nothing but good farmsteading to give it the appearance of some of our own rich straths; but here there is no safe home for the farmer, who has to carry his plough and produce to those miserable villages perched on the face of the hill, where he can find safety both for his small flock and for his crop. Before entering the Valley of Nabulus, we made a short detour to " Jacob's Well," memorable for the interview between our Saviour and the woman of Samaria. This is now surrounded with ruins. Under a broken arch is a vault or cave, such as we see everywhere through Palestine. At the (p. 166) bottom of the vault is the mouth of the well. We were told that this was some fifty or sixty feet deep. We threw down, some stones, and found there was water at the bottom, but no use is now made of it.

We next proceeded up the richly watered and cultivated valley to the city, and not venturing to pitch our tents, we took up our quarters at a large and comfortable khan. This being Sunday, we enjoyed the rest of the day, and read up our Bible history and scriptural events. Next morning, our dragoman informed us that the tents, etc., were so saturated and heavy, that it was necessary to have them dried, and as the day proved fine, we took advantage of the sunshine to turn out our books and linen for the same purpose. At noon, we ascended Mount Gerizim to see the ruins of the Temple, and the place where the Samaritans still hold the Passover. This is a hard pull on foot, being more than 1,000 feet above the town, and over a steep and rugged road. We might have had donkeys, but did not estimate the difficulties of the journey. The present massive ruins have nothing of the Jewish character about them, but are Roman, and the foundations of a Christian church may be as late as the period of the Crusaders. The summit is covered with extensive ruins. The large stones pointed out (p. 167) as covering those that were Drought up by Joshua from the Jordan, have more the appearance of scarpd rock than natural stones. The view from the summit of the mountain is among the finest and most extensive in Palestine.

I was fortunate enough to have an introduction to M. Fallscheer, who is in charge of Bishop Gobat's school. After we had heard the boys read portions of the Scriptures in Arabic and English, and sing an English hymn, he was good enough to be our guide

through the city. There are few objects of sufficient interest to reward one for wading through the narrow and dirty streets. There is throughout the town and valley a profusion of water, but instead of being guided by aqueducts for use and ornament, much of it is allowed to run at large, mingling with accumulated dirt and offal, till the streets become almost impassable. They have a number of marble fountains or troughs throughout the city, which from their style of ornamentation seem to have been Greek and Roman sarcophagi. This profusion of fine water renders the whole valley rich and fertile. The olive, orange, lemon, and fig trees yield abundant crops, and all table vegetables are cheap and plentiful; and in the hands of an industrious people, and a just and liberal (p. 168) government, the beauty of this valley would be unrivalled. Groping our way through dark arches, and along the margin of open sewers, we reached the Samaritan synagogue. The old rabbi, a man of pleasing manners and intelligence, received us very kindly, led us into the synagogue, and brought out the celebrated scroll from behind the screen, or altar. This scroll is said to be very ancient, and is a copy of the "Pentateuch." The depth of the parchment is about fourteen inches, and it is said to measure about eighty feet. It is rolled on two metal bars, and enclosed in a silver embossed case, which bears the appearance of Venetian art of the 12th or 13th century. He offered to show us several other ancient MSS., but our curiosity was satisfied with the one to which I have referred. It is a poor, small, and bare building, and forms the residence of the rabbi and his family. There are altogether about 150 Samaritans in Nabulus, and one wonders how these few, so intelligent and enterprising, should have held so long to their ancient traditions, as they were not Jews or bound to the Jewish faith. The Crusaders have here, as elsewhere, left some relics of their perverted Christianity. Their church is now an empty neglected mosque; near it there is a building called "the Crusader's Tower," of the same date, (p. 169) from the top of which we had a fine view of the city, and down the green valley as far as "Jacob's Well," and the slopes of the two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal. This is one of the most ancient cities mentioned in sacred history. Here Abraham first pitched his tent, in "the Land of Canaan." The modern town of Neopolis, corrupted into Nablous, or Nabulus, founded by the Romans in the time of Vespasian, is well up the valley between the two mountains; but it is generally believed that the ancient Shechem lay farther down, towards the mouth of the valley, where "Jacob's Well," to which the woman came to draw water, and the "Tomb of Joseph," would be in the immediate vicinity of the town.

M. Fallscheer informed me that the population is increasing since the cotton trade sprang up, and is now estimated at 14,000, of whom about 1,000 are Christians. I found none of that fanaticism among the Mohammedan inhabitants to which former travellers have referred. We walked through the bazaars, peeped into the courts of their houses and mosques, and chatted with the inhabitants, through our interpreter, without any symptoms of insolence or insult.

Our dragoman and his men were glad of these (P. 170) two days' rest, as it enabled them to get their tents and coverings dried, and to lay in some provisions.

On Tuesday morning, the 15th December, we started at 7.30 A.M., horses, mules, and donkeys all in good working order, and Mustaffa, the cook, and refractory muleteer, in better humour than they had been for some days. A ride of two hours brought us to Samaria. The day was fine, and we were able to spend an hour pleasantly among the ruins of this ancient capital. The "Hill of Samaria" occupies a very fine and commanding situation, rising about 600 feet above the surrounding valleys, in a semicircle, and a

succession of neglected terraces. I need scarcely refer to the Bible history of the city which crowned this hill. Those familiar with the sacred volume will remember that it was long the capital of the ten tribes, and must have been both a strong and populous city, as it resisted the powerful army of the Assyrians for three years. From the time of its destruction, we hear nothing but of its guilt and condemnation, till its history is revived by Josephus in his glowing description of this magnificent city of Herod, which he called Sebaste. The most prominent and interesting ruins now to be seen are those of St. John's Church of the Crusaders.

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