



YUSEF; OR THE JOURNEY OF THE FRANGI: A CRUSADE IN THE EAST.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

ADVENTURE WITH THE SAMARITANS.

WITHIN three miles of Djenin we passed the spot where the attack was made by the Arabs upon Mr. Alwynn. It was a lonesome and desolate valley, between two ranges of barren mountains, and seemed a fit abode for banditti. Keeping a sharp look out, however, on both sides, and occasionally behind, we were determined to seize at once upon any bad characters whom we might discover prowling about, and hang them up to the first tree on the roadside; but they must have suspected from our general appearance and the efficient manner in which we were guarded, that we were people not to be trifled with, for we saw nothing of them.

In about two hours we reached Kubatayeh, a village inhabited chiefly by a population of Turks. Soon after, we came to a mountain pass, from which we had a fine view of the rich plain below. The village of Sanean on the opposite side is prettily situated on an eminence, and is surrounded by ruinous walls and the remains of an old castle, which any person who has the time to spare may find worth looking at. On the left, two hours farther on, is the village of Jeba, a picturesque collection of ruins embosomed in olive groves. This part of the country abounds in groves of fig-trees and olives, and we saw a number of Arabs plowing in the fields, very much as the fields must have been plowed three thousand years ago. What would a farmer think at home, in this the nineteenth century, to see the ground rooted up with a forked branch of a tree, with a pair of oxen fastened to it by a string?

At Jeba, we diverged from the main road, sending on our mules to Nablous, and took a by-road to Sebestia. From the summit of a mountain not far from Jeba we had a fine prospect of the valleys on both sides, with their flowing streams bordered with green shrubbery. The mountains were terraced in every direction, and fig-orchards and vineyards flourished luxuriantly on all the arable grounds. In the distance gleamed the bright waters of the Mediterranean--the most welcome sight we had enjoyed from the time of leaving the cedars of Lebanon. It is wonderful how the heart is gladdened by a glimpse of a familiar object, after one has been shut in for some time among strange scenes. I really felt as if I could hug old ocean, when I beheld his honest face shining in the sunbeams.

On our descent from the ridge, we passed through Burka, where we were stared at by the inhabitants with vacant wonder; and some distance below we crossed a deep valley and ascended on the other side a mound-like hill, upon which was situated in ancient times Samaria, the capital of the Israelites. Nothing now is left of the ancient city but broken columns and cornices, scattered throughout the fields on the hill-sides, some of which are partially imbedded in the ground; and a double row of columns, said to have formed a portion of a temple built by Tiberius. The whole site of Samaria, covering several hundred acres of ground, now rudely cultivated, is strewn with these relics of the ancient city. One of the most picturesque objects to be seen there, is a ruined mosque, built perhaps during the time of the Saracens. The view in every direction is very fine; and the position of the old city must have been one of the most charming in Syria for salubrity, convenience, and scenic effect. Of the present town of Sebastia, little need be said. A description of one Syrian village, answers with little variation for all the rest; low square huts, with flat tops; a lazy, beggarly population of picturesque Arabs, are the principal features in all these villages. The inhabitants of Sebastia seemed to be still more rude and debased than any we had yet seen in our wanderings, probably from being farther removed from the ordinary traveled route. Some had a brutish and idiotic appearance.

We sat down by the ruins of the old mosque, and spread our table-cloth and provisions on a stone, and while we ate our lunch, the natives began to gather round us in large numbers, and stare at us with undisguised astonishment. Yusef was very much disgusted with their rudeness, and gave vent to his displeasure in English, which struck us as somewhat remarkable, inasmuch as it was not to be supposed that these poor wretches were learned in that tongue. The number increasing, we began to think they meditated a descent upon our chicken, and I assumed the responsibility of telling Yusef that he had better drive them away. He looked embarrassed and distressed (doubtless he felt humiliated by their want of manners), but mustering up his usual spirit, he addressed them in Arabic, and they all talked together with great violence for some time. At last I saw that the Arabs were getting very forward and excited, and our dragoman very pale. I knew that Yusef was going to be furious, and that the next thing would be a general fight, which, considering the odds against us, I was rather anxious to avoid. With this view, I told him to let them alone, and by no means to attack them. At the same time, in order to appease their ferocity, I threw them the bones of a chicken which I was picking and some crusts of brown bread, which I told them in good English was the best I could do for them, as I was very hungry, and had eaten most of the provisions. Instead of being thankful for small favors, they became perfectly incensed at this, and asked Yusef, as he declared himself, if I meant to say that they were dogs. I have reason to suspect that he denied the charge most emphatically; for after a great deal of exciting talk, he picked up the chicken-bones and the bread, and in their presence, devoured both the one and the other with amazing avidity. No sooner had he done this (and I was certain it was not from hunger; than his jaws began to chatter, and he said: "Gentlemen, we had, better go on. It will take us till night to reach Nablous;" and at the same time he pulled out his purse and distributed a large amount of *backshish* among the crowd; caught up the remnants of our lunch and thrust them into a bag, which he cast over his saddle, then mounted Syed Sulemin, dashed spurs into the sides of that noble animal, and led the way down the hill with uncommon celerity. My friends and myself mounted as fast as we could; for to tell

the truth we did not altogether like the appearance of these modern Samaritans, and we departed in the rear of Yusef, with a very ticklish sensation about the backs, as if it would be unpleasant to be peppered with slugs out of the long guns, with which some of the Arabs were armed. It took us at least half an hour to catch up with him; and he then told us that we had made a most fortunate escape; that the rascally beggars at Sebestia had threatened to insult us, and that he (Yusef) had told them that if they did so he would not only cut their throats from ear to ear, but raze their village to the ground; in which event we might possibly find ourselves in difficulty with the Turkish Government upon our arrival in Jerusalem. This was the reason that he had compromised the matter--had he been alone he would never have rested content without their blood, but taking our interests into consideration, he had refrained from making an attack, and had ridden away hastily lest he should be provoked into it by their demonstrations of hostility. We were very glad that the adventure had turned out so well, and saw at once how prudently our dragoman had acted.

CHAPTER XLIV. NABLOUS.

WE had a very pleasant ride of two hours through the valley of Nablous. It was one of the richest and most luxuriant valleys we had seen in all Palestine, abounding in fine groves of olives, fig-trees, and thriving vineyards and gardens; the grounds were fenced in with good stone walls, and we passed several mills, situated on the bank of a stream, which courses down through the middle of the valley. In the spring it must be a perfect little Paradise. Travelers who have passed through it at that season, dwell with delight upon the beauty of its gardens, and the abundance of rich flowers that bloom on the roadside.

It was near sundown when we entered the old stone gateway of Nablous. Passing through a labyrinth of narrow, ill-paved and filthy streets, we found comfortable lodgings at the house of one Asam, a Protestant Christian. Learning that Dr. Mendoza and the Madam had arrived on the previous day, I lost no time in finding them out. They had procured tolerably good quarters not far from the house of Asam; and when I was ushered up the stone stairway, I had the pleasure of beholding them in all their glory, seated at a table, and glowing radiantly in the fumes of coffee and omelette. The Doctor's head was buried in a red night-cap; his face was of the purest olive color, and he bore evidence of having suffered the most intense physical privations. The Madam wore a large hat, about as broad in the brim as an umbrella, in order to preserve her complexion, which was already rather dark; and I saw with distress that her amiable features were dreadfully lacerated by the attacks of vermin. However, she smiled as sweetly as ever, and met me with her accustomed politeness and cordiality; and the doctor, although rather depressed in mind, became eloquent very soon on the subject of the accommodations of Palestine.

"Tis a 'orrible country," said he; "I no want to voyage here again. De ruin are interest, but the hotel not good. Very bad hotel. I shall be content to arrive in Jerusalem. De Madam are a little indispose; but he shall be better when he arrive in Jerusalem. Sit down; take some coffee. Mon Dieu! very bad country dis. To-morrow we shall depart on our voyage. 'Tis imposs to remain longer in Nablous."

We had some further conversation as we sipped our coffee, relative to the inconveniences and discomforts of Syrian travel; and it was a great source of pleasure to

both parties to find that we had all endured the most intense physical tortures from the time of our departure from Damascus.

It rained hard all night. In the morning, it cleared away, and we went out to explore the town. Nablous, called in Scriptural times Sychar, is a town of considerable importance, with a population of about eight thousand--chiefly Jews, Christians, and Turks. There are some good stone buildings in the principal streets; and it has some pretensions to bazaars. It is well supplied with fruit, and vegetables from the neighboring gardens, and oranges are brought up in large quantities from Jaffa. The streets are rendered rather more convenient for walking than those of most towns we had seen, by means of a deep pathway cut in the centre for camels and mules.

On the left, as we faced toward the Jerusalem road, is Mt. Ebal; on the right, Gezeroum, on which is situated the synagogue of Samaria. Ebal is barren and rocky; Gezeroum; also rocky, but cultivated to some extent. We visited the Samaritans, a sect claiming to have no relationship with any living tribe, and whose family records, it is said, extend back more than three thousand years. They are much like the rest of the population of Nablous, in physiognomy and dress; the number now living is about a hundred and fifty.