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Backsheesh!
or, **Life and Adventures in the Orient.**
With
**Descriptive and Humorous Sketches of Sights and Scenes Over the Atlantic, Down the Daube,
Through the Crimea; in Turkey, Greece, Asia-Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt;
Up the Nile, in Nubia, and Equatorial Africa, Etc., Etc.**

By **Thomas W. Knox**
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1875

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES.—SAMARIA AND ITS PEOPLE.

The City of Nain—"Spoiling the Egyptians"—Ruins of an old Philistine City—Curious Strategy—The Torches in Pitchers—Kleber and the Turks—Ahab's Palace—Tropical Picture—A Crusader's Church—More "Backsheesh"—The Samaritans of To-day—The Mount of Blessings and the Mount of Cursings—A Despised People—A Strange Religious Belief—A Parchment Thirty-five Centuries Old—Jacob's Well—Its Present Appearance—The Tomb of Joseph—The Scene of Jacob's Dream—The Philistines' Raid.

A RIDE of less than an hour from Endor takes us to Nain, the "City" of Christ's time, but now a small village. The ruins show that the place was once important, and the guides point out the old cemetery, at whose gate the miracle is located.

As we ride on, we pass the valley of Jezreel, a fertile spot, which might be made productive in the hands of some other people than these lazy, shiftless Syrians. The inhabitants are a mixed lot, as they include, besides the regular hash of Moslems, Christians, and Jews, a colony of Egyptians brought here by Ibrahim Pasha. These fellows were put here, because of the richness of the soil, and the stern old warrior thought he had given them a good thing. But they have an impression that it is more honorable to steal than to work, and consequently make it rather disagreeable for their neighbors. The latter get even with them, by making occasional raids in return and justifying themselves by some remark or other about "spoiling the Egyptians." From what I can learn of their history, I think these Egyptians were pretty well spoiled before they came to Syria. (p. 356)

By going a little out of way we can visit Beisan, the ancient Bethshean, whose ruins cover an area nearly three miles in circumference. It was a city of temples; four of these can be distinctly traced in one group, and others are scattered around promiscuously. Bethshean was of Phoenician origin, and was the principal abiding place of the Philistine god, Dagon. The citadel stood on the hill, overlooking the city, and on its walls the Philistines hung up the bodies of Saul and Jonathan.

The "Doubter," on hearing this, looks for the bodies, and unable to find them, refuses to believe any part of the story.

Below the citadel is the theatre, semi-circular in shape, and nearly two hundred feet in diameter. Tradition says that Julian, the Apostate, used to give *matinee* performances here to his friends, at which he occasionally had a lot of Christians cut up. They were popular for a time, but the shrieks of the victims interfered so much with the conversation in the boxes and with peanut selling in the galleries, that the show had to be given up.

There is a large fountain—Ain-Jalud—in this valley, where Gideon is said to have fought his celebrated battle with the Midianites, described in the Old Testament, when he ordered his men to conceal their torches in pitchers, which they were to break when the proper signal was given. It was one of the best pieces of strategy on record, and was brilliantly successful.

Several battles have been fought in this valley and in its neighborhood. The latest was that between the French and Turkish armies in 1799. Gen. Kleber had moved from Nazareth to attack the Turks, and was met by the enemy near the village of Fuleh.

He formed his army into squares, with artillery at the angles, and in this way resisted the charges of cavalry for six long hours. He had three thousand men and the Turks were fifteen thousand strong, but the effective fire of the French held the enemy in check, in spite of their determined bravery. At the end of six hours, Napoleon arrived with fresh cavalry and infantry and attacked the Turks on flank and rear. Thus surrounded, the latter became panic stricken, and retired in disorder, with heavy loss. It was the discipline of Kleber's division and its powers of continued resistance, that gave the victory to the French.

We soon arrive at the modern village of Sebestieh, which (p. 357) stands on the site of Samaria and has a population of four or five hundred Moslems, badly disposed towards strangers. The Crusaders built a church here and dedicated it to St. John, but it has been converted into a mosque, that cannot be entered without the use of the magical "backsheesh." And this has to be applied skillfully, to avoid offense; a very good way is to take the keeper of the mosque into your confidence and do the "backsheesh" business through him give him a fair allowance of piasters to distribute to the crowd after you have gone, and he will generally set his cudgel at work among them. He is an honorable man, and you can feel certain that he will faithfully distribute the money—to himself. Samaria was a fine city in its time, and the ruins that cover the hill confirm the accounts of the historians. Many of the stones of the old temples and colonnades have been built into the walls and terraces of the modern town so that the extent of the city is not perceptible to a casual observer.

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. 359) *sketch of Jerusalem* (p. 360 blank) (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.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is 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 (June 26, 1835 - January 6, 1896) was a journalist, author, and world traveler, known primarily for his work as a New York Herald.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_W._Knox

Thomas Wallace Knox left New York in the Spring of 1873, arrived roughly Fall in Palestine, mostly likely September or early October.