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(P. 481)

A FORTNIGHT'S RIDE EAST OF JORDAN.

THE following pages are the unaltered notes of a journal, kept during a fortnight's riding expedition on the eastern banks of the River Jordan, from the site of the ancient city of Heshbon, to Gadara, under the escort of the Scheik of the Adwan tribe, during the early spring of 1865; including a short account of the Samaritan Passover on Mount Gerizim, as witnessed by the writer.

April 8.—We left Bethel in good time, and arrived at Nablus before four o'clock. This beautiful valley is looking very fresh and green; the town is quite embowered in fine trees. We are encamped in a glorious place, right under Gerizim, above the town, and looking straight across the Vale of Shechem to the steep ascent of Ebal. It is not the usual camping-ground, and no one has been allowed to pitch tents in the orchard where our sleeping-tent is now pitched, except the Prince of Wales and Prince Arthur. We had some difficulty in getting leave for even one tent, but we tried hard, for it is such a perfectly beautiful spot. In the orchard are some large rose-bushes, all covered with opening buds, and the proprietress gathered me a lovely bouquet after she had relented, and given us leave to stay here. Close to our tent is a swift streamlet, so that we have abundance of good water. The trees in this valley are a great size, and comprise immense mulberries and walnuts, besides the usual olive, fig, vine, and pomegranate of these regions. You might grow anything in this little paradise, it is so abundantly watered. It is now clear moonlight, so bright that you can see right across the valley. The Passover takes place to-morrow (Sunday night), beginning at sunset. We have not seen our friend Jacob Shellaby, the chief of the Samaritans, yet. I suppose he is up on the top of the mountain.

April 9.—Palm Sunday. It is only mid-day, but I must write up my journal so far, for we are going up Gerizim at four o'clock, and shall stay up there till the Passover is finished, most likely, and that will not be much before midnight, I fancy. The view from our tent door in the early morning light was very beautiful. Our tent is not only divided by a wall from the rest of the camp, but it is pitched on a terrace above it, and we have a regular scramble each time we go up or down. We have had two visitors this morning,

Captain Wilson and Jacob Shellaby. To-morrow we meet our Adwan friends at the ford of the Jordan, and encamp there.

April 10.—We did not return, as I anticipated, from the top of Gerizim until midnight, so I must now detail what we saw of the Samaritan Passover. We rode up to the top of the mountain an hour before sunset, and were received by Jacob Shellaby outside the little encampment of tents, which contained the whole Samaritan community, some hundred and thirty-five persons. Marrying as they do Strictly among themselves, this number has neither increased nor decreased for the last few years. We left our horses in Achmet's care, and went with Shellaby to his tent, where were his three little children and his wife, a handsome woman, with a fine collection of (p.482) gold coins on her forehead, curiously fastened like a fringe in the plaits of her long black hair. After we had sat talking for a short while, we proceeded to the top of the mountain, some five minutes' walk from the place of the sacrifice. It was a fine, clear, cold day, with a wind from the sea. On such a day one can see the roadstead of Jaffa on one side, and snowy Mount Hermon on the other. As the sun descended in the western heavens, we wandered down again, and took up our places on the east side of the place of sacrifice, facing the setting sun. This spot of ground belongs to the Samaritan community, and here they worship. It is not, however, the site of their ancient temple, which they show near the summit of the mountain. An oblong strip of grass, surrounded by a very low, dry stone-wall, is the sacred spot. At the northern end of this is a pit dug in the ground; fire was burning here, and over some cross stakes of wood were two caldrons of boiling water, for scalding the fleeces off the slaughtered lambs. Beyond this, again, was a deep circular pit, lined with stones, in which a good fire was also burning. Here the lambs are roasted whole. We sat and watched these preparations, taking note also of the innocent little lambs, seven in number, who were feeding close around us. We were soon joined by Captain Wilson and Doctor Chaplin, and four other travellers, German and English. There were a few Mohammedan spectators, and one Latin priest, besides these gentlemen. The whole of the Samaritan men were by this time gathered in the enclosure. The high priest, Amram, took his place facing the setting sun, and some twenty-five men ranged themselves in two rows opposite to him. They chanted or recited rapidly, after the Eastern manner, prayers and psalms. On a carpet in front of the priest was a copy of the celebrated Samaritan Pentateuch. Over their ordinary dress the men wore the prescribed white linen garments. While the reciting continued, about twenty of them gathered round the caldron of water; the lambs were driven in, and each one was seized, and held quietly on the edge of the deep trench. As the sun sank below the horizon, unleavened bread, in small morsels, with bitter herbs, was handed round. All partook rapidly; the reciting grew louder, and changed from psalms to the chapter in Exodus instituting the Feast of the Passover. As this concluded, the lambs were suddenly thrown down; the long bright knives flashed out, and in an instant more the lambs lay lifeless before us. *Six* only were sacrificed; the seventh was found at the last moment to have a slight blemish, and was set aside. Then came a pause and short silence, after which the kiss of peace was interchanged by the whole community, and the little children were marked on the forehead and nose by the fresh blood, warm from the sacrificial knife. This was the most interesting part, although what followed was very curious. The women were not present up to this time. Preparations now began to fit the lambs for roasting, and as this took fully an hour and a half, we went into a tent where Captain Wilson and two friends were being entertained as

Jacob Shellaby's guests, and waited for a summons to tell us when these preparations were completed. When we returned to the spot, we found the men standing round the pit of fire, awaiting the subsidence of the flames. Six of them were holding each a (p. 483) lamb, with a pole passed through the fore and hind legs, and a piece of cross wood below the animal, to prevent it from going too far down into the red-hot embers. At the right moment, and with continued recitations, the lambs were plunged into the pit, wooden hurdles were thrown over their mouths, bushes of shrubs piled on the hurdles, and over all some wet clay. And so ended this part of the rite. I forgot to mention that each lamb had been deprived of its right shoulder and breast, before being roasted. We asked the meaning of this, and were told, that there was not the proper number of priests to claim these parts, their due, and that they were consequently burnt with the refuse on the other fire. We again retired into the tent to await, for some three or four hours, the eating of the feast. About eleven o'clock P.M. we were summoned. We found the men gathering together at the south end of the low enclosure. The reciting began again; then the pit was thrown open, and the thick volume of smoke arose like a white column into the still night air. The glorious paschal moon shed a flood of light all around. The lambs were quickly withdrawn, thrown down each on a mat placed for its reception, and carried to the south end of the enclosure; unleavened bread and bitter herbs were again handed round; the men had their linen dresses girded round them, and each his staff in his hand. When all was ready, they crouched down round the lambs; *some* stood, and ate rapidly, and as "men who are hungry." It was soon over. The remains were all carefully collected, and burnt with fire; and the small community began to disperse to their tents. We said farewell to our friend Captain Wilson, and, leading our horses, began a rapid descent to our tents, which we reached at midnight.

We left Nablus with many regrets this morning early. Shellaby came down to say good-bye to us. We are an immense party now, for we have three additional mules laden with provisions for the Adwan during the time they are our escort, and two muleteers with their donkeys.....

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**Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com**

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