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**GATH TO THE CEDARS  
EXPERIENCES OF TRAVEL IN THE  
HOLY LAND AND PALMYRA,  
DURING 1872.  
BY S. H. KENT.**

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(p. 119).....

Jacob's Well at first sight was the greatest disappointment we experienced in the Holy Land, it was so utterly unlike that which we had unconsciously pictured it in our mind's eye: that is, a well such as we had seen dozens of in the land, with a round mouth and solid parapet; such, indeed, as Jacob's Well must originally have been, before the Crusaders built a church over it, and possibly to obviate the inconvenience of so large an opening being in the floor, subdivided it into the present small dual openings. Eusebius and Jerome both mention this chapel, which has crumbled away into its present ruinous heap; and the Samaritans—*they say*, the Mahommedans—having mischievously all but filled the well with stones—*le voila!*—as we saw it. All around were *debris* of stones and rock and grass, with flowers —one especially fine black arum growing amongst them. We looked at a little building near it, which seemed to be an underground stable, with a cistern overhead; and then we rode up the narrow rocky road below Gerizim, up which the disciples must have gone into the city to buy bread, while the Lord tarried at the well; and the same way also down which the Samaritan woman may have come, pitcher on head, to draw water; little wotting of what an hour was to bring forth, and that while ministering to the wants of a tired, thirsty wayfarer, she was to see Him whom to know is life eternal. (p. 120)

In a few minutes we were in the centre of the pleasant valley, hedged in by Gerizim on our left, and Mount Ebal on our right; and passing a long low building, evidently a barrack, we entered a grove of fine olive trees. Skirting a burial-ground, by a path between walls sheltering rich gardens, and which led past the towering houses of the picturesque town of Nablus standing on the site of the ancient Sychar, we reached the bare open space on the rise of the hill, just outside one of the gates of the town, in the neighbourhood of another encampment, above which floated the Stars and Stripes of America. It was not the choicest spot to have selected for pitching our tents in; and we looked down with longing eyes on the rich gardens below us, with their pomegranate, fig, walnut, and olive trees, and pleasant flowing streams. There were many things, however, to be considered in pitching so many tents as we travelled with: space was the chief thing required; not only for the tents, but for our large force of mules and horses also; and to be

in the vicinity of water was indispensable, not so much for our own use as for the needs of the animals; then, it was unpleasant to pitch on rocky or uneven ground, though sometimes a necessity—and many a merry laugh it gave us when Ibrahim's attempts to procure a level balance for the dinner-table or our chairs by props of stones resulted in a downfall, more amusing to the spectators than the sufferers.

The same catastrophe used to attend the use of one of our camp bedsteads which became injured during the journey, and, although repaired as our men best could, was in the habit of suddenly collapsing under its occupant, leaving him or her head downwards, or else doubling them up in the midst. However, this unfortunate couch was very fairly taken in turn by our party, and at its worst we were never hurt: only afforded subject for mirth.

(p. 121) Chapter XIII.

Sichem and Gerizim

Robbing in Tent- Nablus- Ancient Samaritan Synagogue- Ancient Pentateuch Roll

Ruins- Joseph's Tomb- Jacob's Well- Lepers

DURING our ride having gathered a large bunch of flowers, and feeling too tired to arrange them in my flower-press, I had placed them in a glass of water to preserve them till the following morning. The table on which it was placed was drawn across the back opening, which I never used. From the time of my alarm with the horse at Gath, I had, in addition to the buttons which fastened my tent, and which could be undone as easily from without as from within, been in the habit of securing it with large safety-pins, a gross of which, amongst needles and other things, I had brought out for gifts to the Arab women. At daybreak next morning I was roused by hearing the Doctor, whose tent was next to mine, calling loudly for Ibrahim and Achmet, and on their responding, followed the excited inquiry, "Where is my bag? My bag is not here; where is it?"

Then followed Ibrahim's solemn assurance that he had of a certainty put it into the tent with his own hands, begging leave to enter and look for it himself. There was a hasty negative on Mrs. B's part, as she was at her toilette, and Ibrahim retired. But in a few moments again resounded the cry, "Ibrahim, (p. 122) Ibrahim! my portmanteau's gone! It is gone! It is not in the tent!

"Doctor," I cried out, "*is your wife gone?*"

"No," came the cheerful answer, "I am all safe; but we are robbed: everything is taken!"

And so it proved. In the darkness some thief must have undone the fastening of the back part of their tent, and carried off from under Mrs. B's hand—for, being far from well, and exhausted, she had placed it open beside her bag and the Doctor's portmanteau—all their money, &c.; and, what the Doctor lamented above all, an antique bowl dug up at Bethlehem, and some native trinkets he had purchased at Jerusalem.

I observed that the tumbler holding my bouquet was upset, and on further examination discovered that all the buttoning of the tent was unfastened, and that the midnight visitor's hand which had done this had been the means of upsetting my flowers; and that my tent had not also been rifled was, humanly speaking, owing to the safety-pins, which had obstructed his entrance, the thief not knowing how to unfasten them. So much for my patent locks.

Neither had the S's tent escaped an attempt. J--- ,

sitting up writing far into the night, was startled by a small thin hand protruding between the fastenings of the flap, a few inches from her face, her startled exclamation causing its

hurried withdrawal and awakening her husband, who, on hearing the cause, declared it must have been one of the muleteers seeing to the fastening of the tent. The thief having been emboldened by the fact that the usual guard—hired specially from the town or village near which we encamped—had been on this night omitted, owing to Yusuf, who was suffering considerably from the effects of his fall, having gone to his bed on arriving. A strong guard of soldiers was, however, about the adjoining American camp. We were debating on the steps best to be taken for the (p. 123) recovery of the lost property, when Mr. C---, the Jewish missionary at Nablus, having heard of the event, kindly arrived to offer his assistance, accompanied the gentlemen up to the *Kaimakan* or Governor, and sent a telegram to our Consul at Jerusalem. Soon after we noticed some soldiers proceeding from the town to the gardens, for the purpose of searching there for the stolen property.

Under the guidance of Jacob esh Shelaby, the well-known Samaritan who has visited England in search of sympathy for his people, and done much to raise schools for them, we visited the town, the most picturesquely situated in Palestine. It lies more to the south and the base of Gerizim than of Ebal, in the verdant and well-watered luxuriant valley lying between these two mountains; fruit orchards frame the white-domed roofs of the town; and the houses generally are handsomer and loftier than those of Jerusalem. The streets, however, are dark, many of them arched over, narrow, crooked, and bad. Manufactures, principally of soap, cotton, and oil, seemed numerous in the town. We first went to inspect a fine old Saracenic doorway at one of the mosques; and then a far greater object of interest the Samaritan synagogue, where for so many ages, the rival worship to the Jews was maintained, and where is preserved the celebrated ancient manuscript of the Pentateuch, which the Samaritans declare to be over three thousand years old, and written by Abishua, the grandson of Aaron.

I am well aware that almost every traveller who visits that synagogue wishes to see the ancient roll, and flatters himself he has done so; while those familiar with the subject declare that it is most zealously guarded from observation, and only exhibited once a year. I can only narrate what passed at our visit.

No sooner had we ascended the little flight of steps leading to the ancient building—an oblong apartment, with whitewashed walls, the roof having two domes in it, and recesses on each (p. 124) of the sides of the room, that on the left hand of the door being the sanctuary, veiled from view by a silken curtain—than we asked to see the Pentateuch, and a young man immediately brought a reading-desk, placed it before us, and fetched from behind the screen a roll in a rich case. It was an exact copy of the old manuscript written in old Samaritan characters, which resemble more the ancient Phoenician than the Hebrew. When we questioned its age, Shelaby frankly confessed it was not the old original, which could not be seen, but that it was a *facsimile*, with no difference, &c. Mr.--, however, being bent on seeing the old one, became urgent; and after much hesitation, the young Samaritan again went behind the veil, and returned bearing another rich case, which, on being unfolded, displayed a manuscript on vellum, evidently of great age. We looked at this with deep respect; but Jacob esh Shelaby seemed anxious to hurry us away; and we were leaving, when my friend's incredulity seeming invincible, he expressed his opinion that *that* manuscript might be *very old*—it evidently was—but that it was *not* the *oldest*. In vain the Samaritans assured us it was. Mr. was not to be persuaded, and at last the truth was confessed: it was *not* the ancient manuscript; whereupon we offered a

golden bribe, which was indignantly rejected. But as we were passing out, one of the Samaritans beckoned us back, and re-entering, hastily locked the synagogue door behind us; and then, the gold being irresistible, brought forth a roll encased in a handsome gold- and silver-embossed cylinder, covered over with a gorgeous scarf; and the cylinder opening down the middle, revealed a very yellow and, in some parts, repaired page of vellum, about fourteen or fifteen inches wide; the two ends of the roll being, as is usual with Hebrew rolls, rolled round rods. The writing was in columns, and of course brown with age. We were only allowed a couple of minutes' inspection of it, so eager was the man to replace it in its shroud behind the veil; then un- (p. 125) locking the door, he hurried us out of the synagogue. We felt very pleased afterwards, on reading the description given in Murray's "Handbook," to find that it corresponded with what we had seen; and also, subsequently, when we met other travellers at Damascus and elsewhere on their journey, who assured us they had seen *the* manuscript; but by their description we knew they had never gone beyond the second manuscript we had seen. Whether we had also been "done" with the third one, is a matter our Samaritan's conscience alone can reveal.

We visited Shelaby's house, saw a fine lad of twelve, whom we understood to be his son; and when we emerged again into one of the streets, found ourselves the centre of an excited Arab crowd, all shouting what we soon understood to be news that the stolen property was found, and the thief in custody, and that we were to go up at once to the Governor's house and see him.

On reaching it, we entered a long low room, the hall of justice, in a corner of which we found a party of Turkish soldiers engaged examining the contents of Dr. B 's portmanteau—unrolling socks and holding up other articles of dress to inquisitive gaze. True enough, there it was; but, as it had been locked, the robber had gained access to its contents by slitting each side from corner to corner. The clothes their owner pronounced all safe, and rejoiced exceedingly over some notes that, probably through ignorance of their value, had been left untouched. But where was the rest of the stolen property—the bag that contained all the silver, and, above all, that "precious basin"? How had it been recovered?

The soldiers I had seen going down to the gardens had made diligent but ineffectual search, till they came upon *a fellah* with a sack on his back, after the manner *the fellahs* carry their burdens. What had he in his sack? Corn he was carrying back to his village. But, lo! the contents of the sack proved to be the missing portmanteau. The man was in custody, of course; the Howajee should see him; and there, his hands (p. 126) bound—small emaciated hands, which J--- at once recognized as resembling those of her midnight alarmist—a poor, miserable, weeping wretch was ushered in before us, clad only in the one cotton garment of the poorest class of *fellahs*, and looking so wretched that the ladies hoped he would be let off.

The poor wretch persisted in saying he knew nothing of the bag. He had found the portmanteau amongst the trees, and put it in his sack. I am afraid he made a slight mistake as to where he found it.

We had finished luncheon, and Mrs. B was sitting in my tent talking over the event of the night, when loud shouting was heard, with the familiar word, "*baksheesh*" preponderating.

"The bag is found!" I exclaimed; "come, quick!" and, rushing out, we saw a herd of boys, Yusuf and Ibrahim in their rear, all running in one direction, immediately beyond my tent. A happy impulse taking us over a wall, and through various other impediments, we made a short cut, which brought us up with them as they reached a low cave, the entrance almost shrouded with brushwood, in the depth of which reposed—the bag! With exclamations of delight Yusuf drew it forth, and, immediately emptying its contents with still greater delight, I discovered, all safe, the precious basin the Doctor had never ceased lamenting; and, leaving the rest of the bag's contents to the care of others, I made all speed back to the camp to cheer the kind Doctor's heart with a sight of his lost treasure.

To see his delighted face was worth anything. Every other valuable in the bag had been taken; "But I do not care," said he: "the basin is safe!"

"I shall demand *baksheesh*" said I, "for bringing it to you;" and with *baksheesh* the good Doctor presented me, that very evening, in the shape of a tinkling anklet (safe in my curiosity-case in old England), which I value exceedingly, in memory of the kind friend whose gift it was, and of the circumstances under which I became possessor of it.

(p. 127) But the basin was not long to remain in the Doctor's possession. With great alarm Yusuf told us that it must, with all the other contents, be restored to the bag, and the bag handed to the *Kaimakan* just as we found it; and away the poor Doctor had to go again up to His Excellency, who, having telegraphed to Jerusalem the recovery of the portmanteau, had now to telegraph that of the bag, and the loss of all its valuable contents.

A strange specimen of justicial dignity was witnessed at this second interview: the Governor, sitting on his divan, had the accused again brought in before him; and stationed at the end of the long room, all trembling and weeping, he protested his innocence.

"Son of a dog, what have you done with the silver that was in this bag?"

The poor wretch protested, of course, that he knew nothing of the bag or its contents; whereupon, from his divan rose the *Kaimakan*, and, walking down the length of the room, smote the man's cheeks with resounding slaps.

"You liar! and son of a liar! and great-grandson of a liar! declare what you have done with the silver!"

Very dignified, truly! Well, to end this subject, the trinkets were utterly lost. Some months afterwards, their value, judicial expenses deducted, was sent the Doctor, while the arrested man had six months' imprisonment, with I know not what amount of bastinadoing.

We had a delightful excursion to the summit of Gerizim, which is 2,600 feet above the sea, and 800 feet higher than the town, Jacob esh Shelaby being our guide. We rode up the greater part of the ascent, by a road through a beautiful glen to the south of the town; a meet approach for the "Mountain of Blessings;" and then, passing from the shade of trees, alive with the song of birds and the murmur of water, we had a tough pull up a narrow winding path to the dreary stony plateau, along which we proceeded due west, towards a *wely* which conspicuously (p. 128) occupies the summit of a rocky knoll, below which Shelaby pointed out to us the\* site of the Samaritan camping-ground at the time of the yearly celebration of the Passover.

A little farther on to the east was a level, on which was a trough still filled with black ashes, the remains of the Passover lambs burnt there according to the Mosaic law; there were two other pits beside it, where they are slain and cleaned.

A little above this spot are the huge slabs of stone, cropping out of the hill-side, which some have asserted to be merely a ledge of rock accidentally divided by cracks, but which the Samaritans declare to be the twelve stones brought by Joshua out of the Jordan, although Scripture declares they were to be erected on Mount Ebal.

Above them runs the wall of a large enclosure, which contains the principal ruins of Gerizim. On approaching the centre, Shelaby removed his shoes, as it is the spot of their "Holy of Holies," all that remains to them of their once splendid Temple. Merely a smooth surface of natural rock of irregular shape, about forty-five feet in diameter, shelving down towards the west, and having, beneath, a cavern such as exists under the rock in the Sakhrah at Jerusalem, evidently intended for the reception of the blood of sacrifices; such is the spot they claim as the one on which Abraham offered up the ram instead of his son.

When Tiglath Pileser conquered the land, and carried off the Jews to his own country, the deserted city became colonized with strange people, Cutheans and others, who brought from their various countries their several forms of idolatrous worship. Wild beasts, however, ravaged the land; as we ourselves knew, they are still to be found about the Jordan and Hermon; and occasioning much havoc and terror amongst the settlers, these poor people considered them as avenging powers, sent by the deity of the country they were dwelling in, to punish their neglect of his worship. Anxious to avert his wrath, they (p. 129) sent to the few Jewish teachers remaining in the land, and demanded to be instructed in their worship, which they added to their own idolatry. Thus, we are told, "they feared the Lord, and worshipped their own gods," a mingling of truth and error not unknown in the present day, but which caused the Jews indignantly to reject their coadjutation in the building of the second Temple. Thus rejected, the Samaritans resolved to build a Temple for themselves. A son of Joiada, the High Priest, having married a daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite, was expelled from Jerusalem in consequence, as Nehemiah tells us. Sanballat then obtained a grant from Darius Nothus, King of Persia, to build this Temple on Mount Gerizim, which thenceforward became the refuge of all the apostate Jews. The Jews published a curse against the Samaritans, prohibiting all communication between them, excluding them from ever being received as proselytes, and barring them, as far as they could, from having any part in the resurrection of the dead unto blessedness. A knowledge of the extent of the enmity that existed between these nations gives an increased depth to the lesson of charity our Lord sought to convey to the Jews, when He selected a Samaritan, in His parable, as the real neighbour of him that fell amongst thieves. The Samaritans rejected all Jewish traditions and writings except the Pentateuch, and declared their Mountain Gerizim to be the place that Moses had indicated as the site of the Sanctuary; they, however, celebrated the Feast of Purim, which had its origin in the deliverance of the Jewish nation by Queen Esther, declaring it to be really in commemoration of Moses' mission to Egypt for the deliverance of Israel. They also looked for a Messiah, as promised in Deut. xviii. 19. The Temple on Gerizim was utterly destroyed B.C. 129, by John Hyrcanus, but the Samaritans continue the observance of their rites on its ruined site down to this day. Numerous ruins cover the summit of Gerizim; they are the remains of a fortress and a church of the time of Justinian. One of the four towers flanking (p. 130) the corners is now a Moslem *wely*, and

from thence, on the eastern side, ye commanded a splendid view of the fine plain, and of the little village on a rocky acclivity, to the north, called Salim, identified as the site of the ancient Shalem, where Jacob pitched his tent on his return from Padan-aram. Before us stretched the great wall of mountains beyond the Jordan; to the west, glimpses of the Plain of Sharon and the sea beyond were to be gained through openings in the hills; and on the north, towering over its foreground of mountains, rose snowy Hermon. Quantities of the black arum I had already seen by Jacob's Well grew amongst the ruins, as well as many other flowers.

With some difficulty we led our horses over the *debris* and rugged ground, round to a sort of pulpit plateau overhanging the Valley of Shechem, and directly opposite to a similar one on Ebal. We had sent a man up there, for the purpose of ourselves putting to the test the objection often raised, that the human voice could not carry from the one mountain to the other. A strong wind had arisen, blowing right over from Mount Ebal; notwithstanding which, our voices reached the man stationed there, and with great distinctness we heard his replies. So much for the distance which the human voice can be conveyed in the clear air of the East! How easily we could in imagination repeople the slopes of the mountain below us, and those of Mount Ebal before us, with the thousands upon thousands of the Children of Israel, as they clustered up—the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin, on Mount Gerizim, to assent to the blessing; and Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali on Ebal, to the curse; the Levites standing in the midst of the valley to utter the blessings and the curses, to which on the one side and from the other came the responsive and mighty "Amen!" What a scene it must have been!

Some travellers have remarked that Ebal looks more barren (p. 131) and desolate than its twin mountain. There is a close resemblance in the projections and hollows of the mountains, except that the green slope of Ebal, towards the south, is not so bold as the face of Gerizim.

The descent from the side which we had reached to test the communication with Ebal was a very trying and steep one, and we had to dismount and lead our horses, the path being narrow and slippery. We were anxious to revisit Jacob's Well, and Joseph's Tomb, near it; though Shelaby tried to dissuade us; and when we reached the plantations at the bottom, he excused himself from accompanying us, as his Sabbath was close on its commencement: with the Samaritans it is on the Friday night observed with prayer in their own houses.

Bidding him farewell, we rode down the luxuriant narrow valley which opens on the Plain of Shechem. A hamlet, with a few small houses, almost fills the mouth of the valley north of Jacob's Well: passing through this, in a few minutes we alighted at the little white building—an area of some twelve feet square, enclosed by a high white wall, with a plaster-and-whitewashed tomb, about three feet high, placed diagonally across the floor, south-east, reputed to be that in which, according to his desire, the bones of Joseph were laid, "which the Children of Israel brought up out of-Egypt," and "buried in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." (Josh. xxiv. 32.) The tomb lies between Jacob's Well and the little village of Askar.

We gathered some twigs from the wild vine that grows over the wall, at the right-hand corner on entering, which by a singular coincidence recalls the prophetic blessing pronounced on Joseph by his dying father: "Joseph is a fruitful bough by a well, whose

branches run over the wall." The walls are covered with Hebrew writing, pencilled or scratched upon them.

Remounting, we retraced our steps through the village, to the low spur projecting from Gerizim, on the point of w???? (p. 132) are the ruins of Jacob's Well. Once more we sat over against it, to try and realize the circumstances of the scene which make it so precious a spot. Far away stretched the plain, white unto harvest; along which—most probably by the same path we had pursued since the Lord also had come from Jerusalem—Jesus sat Himself down to rest, by that most frequent of all resting-places in the East—a well.

It has been frequent matter for wonder how, the well being so deep and a work of great labour to dig, the patriarch should have taken this expensive toil in a spot where water is abundant to a degree not frequent in Palestine; and it is a question which must suggest itself to every one who has visited the place. But the Eastern traveller understands, as he never could in Europe, what the immense value of water is—a treasure for which, from the earliest patriarchal days, men strove, and of which the owners were niggardly to strangers; and thus it is explained, " that to possess a well" at any cost, on his own land, would be Jacob's first care—not only for his own convenience, but for the preservation of peaceful intercourse with his neighbours.

It is also suggested as unlikely that the woman of Samaria came all the way from Shechem, where water was abundant and so much readier to her hand to procure; and that, therefore, she probably dwelt in one of the little villages at the mouth of the valley.

We tried to test the depth of the well; but, *helas!* we could only take Shelaby's word for it,—who as a boy had been lowered down it, for the recovery of Dr. Bonar's Bible, which, many years before, had been dropped in it,—for it was almost filled with stones and rubbish.

Surely, no more authentic or interesting spot exists in Palestine, or one more precious to the Gentile believer; and it is sad that it should be left in such a state of ruin and disorder. Some years ago it was purchased by the Russian Greek Church for, we were told, a thousand pounds; but they have done nothing (p. 133) towards its preservation from demolition at the hands of inimical fanatics—such as even the erection of a mere railing round the enclosure might afford. No one could ever desire that a building or even a wall—anything calculated to shut out from view the surroundings of nature—should be placed round it to mar its tender associations; but surely some little care might be taken of it—some effort made to rescue it out of the hands of those who seem not to heed whether it be obliterated altogether or not.

The fast-falling darkness warned us to depart, and we rode again along the path towards Nablus, for the first time during our Eastern journey unattended. We were not sorry when we met some of our men, whom Yusuf—much alarmed when he heard that Shelaby had left us—had sent in pursuit. By the glow of a blazing fire, lighted near our tents for the enjoyment of the strong guard furnished us, we saw a row of wretched creatures—I am inclined to believe them the most afflicted and miserable of human beings—" lepers," who, shrouded in their white garments, sat in a semicircle at a little distance, rattling their brass dishes and, with gurgling sounds utterly unlike the human voice, solicited the alms no heart could be niggardly enough to refuse. It is said that the leprosy of the present day differs from the leprosy of Old or New Testament times; but, be that as it may, it is still the most fearful of diseases— one which turns the whole flesh to a deadly white; which



eats or causes the flesh to fall off from the bones, and makes the leper one of the most fearful and loathsome objects the mind can conceive—a horrible object to himself as well as to others.

(p. 134) Chapter XIV

Samaritan Synagogue- The Mount of Blessing- Church of St. John-Samaria- Dothan.

VERY early next morning we made our way through the labyrinth of dark tortuous streets, with houses arching them over, to the almost concealed Samaritan synagogue. A small boy was our guide, and he first took us to a house to fetch a man—who had to be roused from his bed—to accompany us. The chanting had commenced: it was not loud, and not peculiarly pleasing, differing in intonation from that of the Jews. The small building was filled with men and boys clad in long white robes, who stood towards the Mizbeh, placed so that they faced Mount Gerizim, which is the Kubleh of the Samaritans; occasionally they bowed their faces to the ground, and some sat upon their heels in one of the postures which the Moslems use at prayer. There were some very young boys devoutly engaged in the exercise.

It was most interesting to watch this small remnant of a mighty sect, that had once not only been uppermost in the land and city of Samaria, but who had had extensive colonies in Damascus, Cairo, and some part of Europe; a mere handful being all that remains; who worship according to their unique faith, and feel they were descendants of those to whom the Gospel was first preached by the Saviour's own lips.

(p. 135) The Samaritans wear the usual Eastern dress, but a red turban is their distinguishing mark.

With last glances at the "Mount of Blessing," from which, when Abimelech, having seized Shechem, was proclaimed king "by the oak of the pillar that is in Shechem," Jotham his brother gave forth his beautiful parable; bidding farewell to the ancient spot where Abraham had first dwelt, and where Jacob had tarried—the male inhabitants of which Simeon and Levi had put to death, and which had been one of the chosen cities of refuge—we rode away from the chaos of property strewing our camping-ground in all the confusion of being packed, and descended the hill-side—in a recess in the rocks of which, the Doctor's bag had been recovered. Under the pleasant shade of trees, by a rustling stream, which we crossed, we pursued our way westwards, along the base of Ebal, which it had been a disappointment to us not also to have ascended. Riding down the vale, with its rich orchards and pretty villages on the terraced hills, we reached a large fountain, covered by a Roman arch; and soon afterwards passed an old mill worked by its waters. Then we turned off to the right, and, ascending by a tolerably good path a region of hills and dales grown with innumerable bright flowers, passed a crystal spring where shepherds were resting in the midst of their flocks. By noon we had gained the ridge from which the first sight of the picturesque ruins in the midst of the village of Sebustieh, the ancient Samaria, were visible.

Descending through olive groves, and wending along a narrow valley, where I found a very beautiful orange flower, we ascended a path lined with ruins, to the noble remains of the Church of St. John, occupying the eastern brow of the declivity, and around which the modern village of about forty or fifty houses cluster. The church, the lower part of which is considered to be of much older date than the Crusades, is now perverted into a mosque; the transepts are covered in; but the (p. 136) nave and apse are roofless; the

walls which remain entire are of great height. We entered by a low door on the west a small sunken court, and saw the remains of the altar at the eastern end, which is richly ornamented. Several white marble tablets were pointed out to us, the Cross of the Knights of St. John being sculptured on them, and marking some of their tombs. A small *wely* covers the spot traditionally preserved as the grave of St. John the Baptist; and we descended by a few steps into a little vault, where he is said to have been beheaded. Some of the pillars remaining in the body of the church had fine pointed arches. A number of boys were squatted round a man engaged in teaching them; and I procured one of the children's slates—a sheet of zinc, with a border of wood round the top and side, and on the reverse; the same round the bottom and other side. It looked a dangerous enough thing to carry as I carried it—slung to my side; but there being in reality no edge left unprotected, in a fall which I had a few hours afterwards from horseback, right upon the slate, instead of wounding me it actually broke my fall.

No site could have been more commanding than that of the once royal city of Samaria, situated as it was on the brow of an oblong isolated hill, rising to the height of some three hundred feet from a basin, encircled by hills, and commanding an extensive view, not only of the chain of mountains, and nearer hills and glens, but of a portion of the Plain of Sharon and expanse of the Mediterranean. Of the splendid Temple once erected there by Herod the Great, of the colonnades that seem to have belted the hill, and the many splendid palaces that adorned the once royal city, numbers of blocks of marble and columns—fourteen devoid of capitals—many in other parts, still standing aboveground, and others which lie partly buried in the soil, or are built into the walls of the terraced hill-side,—remain to testify of the magnificence of the past, when from amidst the rich olive groves, gardens, and vineyards, the city rose—(p. 137) a crown of pride, a glorious beauty on the head of a fat valley;" now, of a truth, as a "faded flower." As we ascended the plateau (a rich corn-field interspersed with barley) and looked around on the stones, the fulfilment of the judgment rose to our minds—"I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard, and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof;" also Hosea's words, "Samaria shall become desolate, for she hath rebelled against her God."

As we wound round the hill, we could not fail to realize how easy a place it must have been to besiege, as was once done by the vast army of Benhadad, when, despite his boastful threats and extravagant demands, he was miraculously overthrown by a mere handful of Israelites. Later on, when he again besieged Samaria, and the siege lasted so long that the cruellest horrors of famine were seen in the city, and women devoured their own offspring, the marvellous interposition of the Lord delivered them, by sending a panic into the Syrian host, which caused them to flee, even as for their life. How often, from the spot on which we stood, may not the inhabitants, with despair, have looked down on their foe! In the plain before us, most probably, was pitched the camp into which the four wretched lepers—outcasts even from the midst of their miserable fellows, saying one to the other, "we can but die"—went forth to find it deserted, save by the horses and the asses and the wealth of the enemy. B.C. 720 Samaria was taken by the Assyrians; later on bestowed by Augustus on Herod the Great, who rebuilt and beautified it, and called it Sebaste, in honour of his benefactor, from which the Arab name of Sebestieh is derived. There Philip preached Christ and founded a church, where Simon

the Sorcerer was converted, and which became the seat of a Latin bishop under the Crusaders.

Descending the hill diagonally into the northern valley, which as well as that side of the hill, is treeless, we rode up a rocky ascent interspersed with shrubs, and then through a level covered with olive trees, to Burka, a village in a nook on the hill-side, and soon reached the summit of the ridge, from which we looked back on one of the most superb views in Palestine. Behind us in the distance, encircled by hills, rose the ruin-strewn green hill of Samaria—and most beautiful it looked, standing forth from its verdant surroundings; while on the other side stretched another of the green plains so frequent in this region. Descending slopes fragrant with thyme and other herbs, and going through fig orchards and vineyards, we reached Fendekumieh, and soon afterwards halted under a grove of old olive trees near Jeb'a, a large village situated on the slope of a hill overlooking the rich valley. How refreshing it was to partake of our meal under the shadow of one of the largest trees, our horses browsing the verdure round about! Our repast over, leaving the gentlemen to the luxurious stretch on the carpets, we ladies wandered about, and finally roosted in the forked branches of an ancient tree, the cavity in its venerable trunk affording easy ascent for our feet. The shady rests that we enjoyed in our nomadic life in Palestine were not numerous enough to make us lightly forget that of the wood under Jeb'a. Insects hummed about us and birds chirped above us, and occasionally a woman with bairn on shoulder would pass by from the village, or a couple of men, in their picturesque attire, paused at the sight of the Howajee, and stretched themselves in free and easy but not impertinent vicinity, under a neighbouring tree; or our horses, frenzied by an assault of insects, in a sunny place where the trees were wider apart, rolled savagely on the ground, to the manifest injury of our saddles and wrath of Achmet.

Forth from the wood we reluctantly rode, past the path leading up to the village, and along a small plain, passing the fortress on a Tell of Sanur, said to be the ancient Bethulia, associated with the deeds of Judith. It belonged to a family of sheikhs of the Abu Ghaush, or robber chieftain stamp. Jezzar (p. 139) Pasha, the notorious "Butcher Pasha" of Acre, attempted its conquest; but after a siege of two months he had to abandon the attempt. In 1830, however, Abdullah Pasha, with the assistance of Emir Beshir and his mountaineers, again invested it, and laid it in ruins. We had now entered upon a plain, encircled by hills, the centre of which was covered with water collected from the hills during the winter: it was called the Merj el-Ghuruk, "The Drowning Meadow;" and an ugly enough morass I dare say it is. As we rode along the western side of the lake, on the greensward (springing out from its reddish soil), I had the fall aforementioned; not being thrown, but ignominiously tumbling over the off-side, as I overbalanced myself trying to reach a book that was slipping off my lap. Ascending a rocky slope, we obtained from the summit of the ridge a splendid view of the village of Kubatiyeh, nestling below us in a valley opening out into fertile plains, sprinkled with olive trees; and beyond all, over a lower ridge, we could see the vast Plain of Esdraelon stretching away almost out of sight.

By a series of deep winding ravines (the passes so often defended by the ten thousands of Ephraim and thousands of Manasseh) we were traversing the country which gave birth to the great warrior of Manasseh, Gideon; and were treading the ground Joseph must have trodden as he went in pursuit of his brethren to Dothan—a green *tell* about two miles west of Kubatiyeh, still bearing that familiar name.

The caravans from Egypt to Damascus still pursue the route lying past it. But Dothan, in Sacred Writ, has another association, as it was there Elisha the prophet was residing when the Syrian King, resolving to seize him, encompassed Dothan with chariots and horsemen; and when terror filled the heart of Elisha's servant, his eyes were opened in answer to the prophet's prayer, and he saw that the hill was full of horses and chariots of fire round about the prophet; another striking answer to prayer (p. 140) was vouchsafed in the Syrians being smitten with blindness, and led back to Samaria.

The glen, with its terraced sides, conducted us to a beautiful village situated at the mouth of the glen opening upon the Plain of Esdraelon—the borderland between Samaria and Galilee—erected at a height sufficient to overlook the plain; the houses springing up amongst rich and well-watered orange orchards, hedged with prickly pear, with date palms rearing their graceful heads—a pleasant remembrance of Egypt. We rejoiced that Jenin—the Engannim of Scripture, or the "garden-house," by the way of which Ahaziah fled from before Jehu (II. Kings, ix. 27) was to be our Sabbath Day's resting-place. The inhabitants have none of the best of characters; and a strong smell of decayed vegetation made us resort to prudential doses of quinine. But next day, any attempt at rest or quiet bidding in our tents was rendered impossible by the myriads of flies that swarmed in them—a very plague of Egypt. At times the tent roof seemed black with them, and when the servants came with towels and drove them out, it was only for them to effect reentrance by every hole and crevice, and buzz about our heads, and light on most ticklish features with maddening pertinacity. I got some sugar, and spreading it out, had wonderful peace till the sweet attraction was consumed, and then discovered' that many more thousand flies had been attracted to my tent. Rest was out of the question, and in the afternoon we first walked about the town—whose inhabitants were dressed in a long loose cassock girded by a red leather band, and were rather unmannerly—and then climbed the shrub-grown hill behind us, and resting near its summit, on one of the rocks that cropped forth under every tuft, enjoyed the fair expanse over the vast plain, till the rich golden and crimson sunset tinted sky and earth with gorgeous hues.

### **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

I have been unable to find the names for S. H. of S. H. KENT.