

Reproduced from the Library of the Editor of
www.theSamaritanUpdate.com
Copyright 2011

**THE INNER *LIFE* OF
SYRIA, PALESTINE,
AND THE HOLY LAND.
FROM MY PRIVATE JOURNAL, BY
ISABEL BURTON
WITH MAP, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND COLOURED PLATES
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II.
HENRY S. KING & CO.
LONDON
1875**

April 28th, 1871—
(p. 203)

We went over endless stony hills, relieved by fruitful valleys, olives, cultivation, and occasional wells. The people in this part of the world are boorish and stupid. About an hour and a half before reaching Nablus, I felt too ill to go on, so I fell behind with two of our servants, hoping to get better, and let the rest go on to prepare the camp. However we lost our way afterwards, and galloped back part of the road we had come, and then found out our mistake, and had to retrace our steps. My husband, alarmed at missing me for so long, waited for me at Jacob's Well, where our Lord asked the Samaritan woman to give Him to drink.

We arrived at our camping ground by a stream, amidst olive groves and gardens, outside Nablus, at 4.30 p.m., having been out ten hours. This is the boundary between the Damascus and the Jerusalem Consular jurisdictions, so we may now consider ourselves once more upon our own ground.

(p. 204) CHARTER XXIX.

CONTINUATION, AND LAST OF OUR PILGRIMAGE.

THE lepers and a large crowd collected on the hill to stare at us. I felt very thankful to feel settled for a few days, and to have a long sleep, and got well here. The population is said to consist of 16,000 inhabitants, chiefly turbulent Moslems, a few Catholics and Greek Orthodox, 135 Samaritans, and many Jews. The people of Nablus are supposed to be so lawless that the Governor sent us a guard of soldiers at dusk, who were relieved till daylight. We found them extremely civil. They were not fanatical, but showed us everything with much pleasure, and stood up and saluted us as we passed; except being on the outside of and beyond the town, we incurred no other risk; and beyond being serenaded by jackals, and the owls hooting in the trees above, we heard no sounds.

Nablus is a very pretty and prosperous-looking town, with good stone houses and Egyptian-looking windows, and owning a nice Suk, or bazar. It is situated in a fertile wady, or valley, between the two famous mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, which form natural fortifications for the town. It is well cultivated and planted with thriving trees, especially quinces, and well watered by streams which run several miles. One end opens towards the sea, and the other towards the plain, so that there is always a fresh breeze blowing through it, and nevertheless the only bad thing in it was its foul smells. There is also an ancient aqueduct. We passed all the 28th, 29th, and 30th here.

We went up Mount Ebal the first morning, from which is a splendid view. In the afternoon we rode up to Mount Gerizim. (p. 205) by far the most interesting. It is a difficult ascent of an hour and a half. On the top are the ruins of a Christian church, and a temple, marked by a little "wely," as English travellers say, and an immense debris. The mountain is entirely covered with stones. Here are encamped at the top all the Samaritans now existing on the face of the earth. They number 135, and are governed by their Chief and High Priest, Ya'akub Shalabi. Here live entirely apart from the rest of the world eighty males and fifty-five females, including children, and here they celebrate their Passover on the 3rd of May. We were invited, and wished for an excuse to remain, but if I felt well before the 3rd of May we were bound to proceed.

They showed us a small Square, with stone walls, where they celebrate their Passover exactly as the Old Testament dictates.¹ From here there is a beautiful view of the Sea, and Moab, and the Plain; also of Jacob's Well and Joseph's Tomb beneath. The Samaritans were very hospitable. I noticed that they did not like my dog to go near them; and suspecting that it rendered them "unclean," according to their faith, I tied him up.

I will describe the Samaritan women's dress, and will take for a model the wife of Ya'akub Shalabi, who was more richly dressed than the others. She wore large leather shoes, cotton trowsers gathered in at the ankle, red-striped silk petticoat to the knee, a jacket or bodice over it. She had on five jackets of different colours, open at the bosom, and each was so arranged as to let the border of its neighbour be seen. A girdle was around her waist, a necklace of chains clasped her throat, and another of large gold coins hung round her neck. Her hair was not shaved or tucked under like our Jewesses, but dressed in a thousand little plaits down her back, a thousand worsted plaits to imitate hair covered her own hair, and hung down her back below the waist, and were fastened off with and covered with spangles and coins of value. Upon her head she wore a coat of mail of gold, and literally covered with gold coins, of which a very large one dangled on her forehead. She wore diamond and enamel earrings, and a string of pearls coquettishly arranged on one side of her head in a festoon. A yellow handkerchief covered her head, but hung (p. 206) down loose upon her shoulders. Her eyebrows were plucked out, and in a straight line in their place patterns were thickly marked in ink. I thought wrongly that they were in Hebrew characters, but they presented that appearance. A silver charm, like a jewel etui, and a little silver book containing a charm, she wore upon her heart. I forgot to add a third thick chain of gold around her neck, and that all the head ornaments were surmounted by a large crescent studded with jewels.

We walked about with them and sat in their tents for a long while, and then we came down by a different way, very pretty but very steep. I was suffering, and had to go to bed

¹ Exodus xij. 1-13.

without any dinner, and was ill all night. The jackals and owls seemed company. There was a delicious rain all night, which refreshed us much.

Next morning we went to the Suk, and bought some rough leather tobacco pouches, which please travellers. Some morning visits had to be returned, and we were attended by Khwajah Jirius, formerly Dragoman to the Russian Consulate at Damascus. We called on Abdu Effendi, the Wakeel, or agent, of Mohammed Said Pasha, the Kaim-makam, or Governor. Abdu was not civil enough to rise off his divan to receive us, and had to be taken in hand. Abdullah Effendi, the Treasurer, was very hospitable, and a sister of our already mentioned Dragoman, Hanna Asar, was married to one of the authorities, who gave a beautiful garden fete for us in a fair-sized pretty orchard, containing a summerhouse and a large birket (fountain). Under an arch was spread a nice European dinner, and actually, though so far from civilization, there was beer and claret, beside the native coffee, sherbet, and narghilehs. All the best of Nablus was there, and included two French abbes and some missionary ladies, amongst whom was one English lady, Mrs. Youhannah el Karey, of the Palestine Christian Union Mission. The French priests were l'Abbe Bost, of Nablus, and l'Abbe Maritain, of the Village des Pasteurs (Bayt Sahur). There were all the materials for a pleasant day; and it was pleasant, but I was too unwell to appear to advantage, much as I was disposed to enjoy it.

We then went to Ya'akub Shalabi's house in the town. He took us to their present synagogue, a miserable small groined (p. 207) room, hung with a few indifferent lamps. A recess was hidden "by a long white counterpane, which had a Hebrew inscription worked upon it in gold, hiding another curtain 350 years old, also inscribed. He then sent out of the room a few Samaritans, and showed us a cupboard containing several old MSS., kept in gold and silver cases, ancient, carved, and scroll shaped. One is held most sacred; it is a copy of the ancient Jewish law, written on vellum, and said to be 3374 years old. This venerable Pentateuch dates 1500 B.C., to Abishua, son of Phineas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron.²

Then we went back to the Samaritan Chief's house, a quaint old place enough, where we had coffee and pipes, and he gave me his photograph and that of his tribe in a group.

We visited the Mosque, formerly a Christian church of St. John, with a Crusader's gate, called in "Murray" Saracenic; the facade was built by the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre, in small imitation of the Sepulchre of Jerusalem. St. Justin was born here, and was martyred by Marc Aurelius. We climbed up the minaret, and had a good view. There is a stone in the wall of the Mosque tower with the Ten Commandments in Samaritan characters.

Then we went to the "Hisn Ya'akub," which is the wailing place of Jacob, "where he could not be comforted for the loss of Joseph," a small dark room without a window, just like a coalhole, and is on the site of the ancient Samaritan synagogue. A garden of orange flowers made the air heavy.

We then went through the Samaritan burial-ground at Ras el Ain, and paid a second visit to the Samaritans' tents on Mount Gerizim, returning to ours at night, exhausted by our exertions and the heat.

On the 1st of May I took my Bible, and rode back to Bir Ya'akub (Jacob's Well) and Joseph's Tomb, to enjoy them by myself. I found some Jews praying there, but we did not

² Read Ezra vii. 5.

disturb one another, as we were all doing the same thing. Jacob's Well is surrounded by a square wall and broken fallen columns, the skeleton ruins of a Christian church. The well itself is like all others, in a small cave beneath, and would be unnoticed now-a-days but for its tender associations. It was cut by the servants of Jacob through the solid rock, and it is more than 100 feet deep, with smooth sides.

Joseph's Tomb is the usual "Wely"—a white square room, without a roof and an open door, with a plain white Tomb in the centre. Who would say that this was a fit memorial for Pharaoh's right hand—and yet it meets with more reverence than the Pyramids or "Tombs of Kings." Here lies the Joseph who was the favourite and dutiful son, who was cast into the pit by his brothers' jealousy, and sold to the Midianite merchants, and was bought by Potiphar, a captain in Pharaoh's army³—this is the virtuous man who resisted Potiphar's wife, and interpreted the dreams from his prison, into which Potiphar cast him, who afterwards interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, and at thirty years of age became the Governor of Egypt, and saved it from famine. The affectionate and forgiving brother who received his ten brethren, Benjamin and his father, with all his House, and they were seventy souls in all Egypt; and Jacob died there at 147 years old, and Joseph, by Pharaoh's leave, buried him at Hebron. When Joseph died at the age of 110 years, he was embalmed in Egypt for a while, and there the brethren kept their oath, and carried him to the burial-place of his choice. Read the thirteen last chapters of Genesis upon this spot, for the life of Joseph.

Shechem became for a time the religious capital of the ten tribes, who cut themselves away from their brethren, and were in opposition to the two who remained in Jerusalem; also where Jacob once resided. These Samaritans have been here between 2000 and 3000 years, keeping to the old rules, rites, and ceremonies of their faith—living, labouring, acting, thinking, feeling, and worshipping, as did their Patriarchs and Prophets—tabooed by the world, and content to be so. They have dwindled to a handful, and have remained so for many generations, but always existing. There is constancy, strength of character, and something to be relied upon in this: think of the many religious sects they have seen rise, grow, and shiver into empty air. Some people who are in prominent positions to-day are proud of knowing who their great grandfathers were, (p. 209) and those who can tell back to our old Anglo-Saxon days, before the Norman Conquest, prefer their blue blood to the highest positions held by new men. But the high claims of the Samaritans are sadly discounted by the orthodox Jews, who declare them to be "Cuthim," converted Babylonians. Then to Shechem came Abraham to pitch his tent when God led him out of Haran with Sarah his wife, and Lot his nephew, and raised an altar to our Lord. Jacob, coming from Mesopotamia, also bought the field for 100 ewe lambs, of the children of Hamor, father of Sichern, and he made this well. Then Joseph lived in his father's tents and came from Mamre to find his brothers. Jacob left the field to Joseph as a heritage, and the Israelites here brought back his bones from his great Nile sepulchre, as shown in Genesis 1. and Joshua xxiv. 32.⁴

Between the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, Moses caused the Law to be proclaimed afresh, so Gerizim became a second Sinai. Joshua here called the tribes together, and said

³ Genesis xxxvii. 29-30; Genesis 1.24-26.

⁴ Joshua viii. 33, 34.

to them, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."⁵

On Mount Gerizim Joshua placed the descendants of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin, to bless the observers of the law; and on Mount Ebal—Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali to curse its transgressors. Sanabalat, Governor of Sichem, built a temple upon Mount Gerizim, which was the cause of the schism between the Samaritans and the Jews.

Manasses took to wife a stranger, a daughter of Sanabalat, contrary to the Mosaic law. The Jewish people in anger obliged him to put her away, and to come no more near the altar. Manasses went to his father-in-law and told him that, much as he loved his wife, this was more than he could bear. Sanabalat made him keep her, under promise of making him prince of Judah, and to obtain of King Darius leave to build a temple, and (p. 210) to appoint him high priest. Alexander the Great conquered Darius, so Sanabalat made the petition to the former, which was granted. In three years the temple was built, and Manasses was the Great Sacrificer 330 B.C. Several Jews joined him, and thus was accomplished the schism and enmity between Jews and Samaritans, who numbered about 11,000. A political and religious hatred had been confirmed by the Jews refusing to let them join in rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem, or to recognize them as descendants of Abraham after the captivity.

The principal chapters of the Old Testament which are interesting concerning the history of Nablus, or Shechem, are Genesis xxxiv., where the sons of Jacob slew the Shechemites for their sister Dinah; and Genesis xxxv., Joshua xvii. and xxiv., Judges ix., and a portion of II. Esdras (Ezra).

.....(p. 211).....We left Nablus at 6 a.m. (May 2nd),...

Note from this Editor of the SamaritanUpdate.com

The original footnotes used symbols; I have for time and less confusion I adopted numbers in their place.

This book is referenced # 846 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

⁵ Deuteronomy xxvii 11-14:—" And Moses charged the people the same day, saying, These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin: and these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice."