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**The Treasury**

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(p. 580)



Mount Ebal from Mount Gerizim

**THE SAMARITAN PASSOVER**

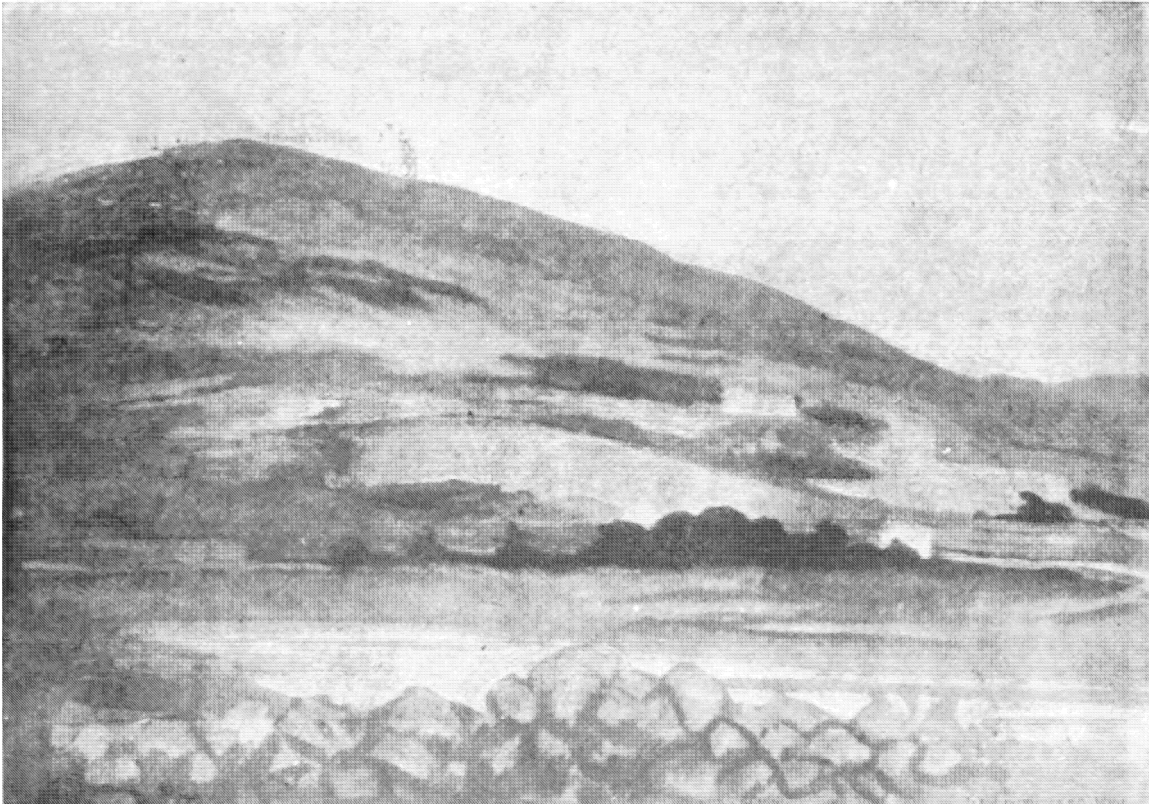
Written and Illustrated by J. EADIE REID

[About 410 B.C. Manasseh, a man of priestly family, married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, and therefore was expelled from Jerusalem by Nehemiah (Nehem. xiii. 28). He fled to Samaria, and helped Sanballat to set up a temple on Mount Gerizim, where a rival worship to that of Jerusalem was conducted. In 130 B.C. the temple was destroyed, but the Samaritan worship on Mount Gerizim was continued, and survives to this day. Our readers will not need to be reminded of the consequent hostility between Jews and

Samaritans, turning on the point whether the sacrifices should be offered 'in this mountain'—*i.e.* Gerizim (St. John iv. 21)—or in Jerusalem.

This rivalry still continues. But the Samaritan race is fast dying out; writing in 1902, Mr. Kelman (in his 'Holy Land') puts the number of survivors at less than 200. Consequently, the Samaritan worship will soon be a thing of the past. This fact adds to the interest of Mr. Eadie Reid's narrative. Moreover, very few European travellers have been present at the Samaritan Passover, and it is believed that no account of it, written by an actual eye-witness, has previously been published.—ED. THE TREASURY.]

MY fellow-traveller and I had been riding since early morning, and it was now mid-day. The fierce sun was blazing overhead: the dusty white road gleamed before us up the long slope leading to Nablous. Only those who have ridden or walked in Palestine can realise what intense pleasure it was to turn our horses into the shady grove and throw ourselves from our saddles upon the soft turf. Here we were joined by a picturesque figure, Solomon, our new guide and friend, who to our surprise plunged at once into an animated description of the historic ceremony to take place on Mount Gerizim at sunset of the following day. For the moment, the suddenness of his (p. 581) news and the importance of the event almost took our breath away, and it needed little of his persuasive gestures to decide us to remain there for the night. A messenger, hastily sent after our tents and baggage, soon returned leading our followers in triumph. The bare, dusty camping-ground speedily presented a home-like appearance, and after a humble repast of bread, fruit, and wine we set forth to climb the powdery hillside.



Sychar from Jacob's Well

Nablous lay below us, with its many minarets and domed roofs stretching along the valley, while on the opposite side rose Mount Ebal, its great flank gashed with white,

and" gnarled olive trees struggling at its base, straining every fibre in battling with the stony ground for bare life. As we looked we pictured the great multitude of Israelites who stood 'half of them over against Gerizim,' which lay behind us, and 'half over against Mount Ebal.' Above the hum of the busy town rose the voice of the muezzin as he called the people to prayer, and for an instant we imagined the voice of Joshua strong and clear, ringing across the valley as he proclaimed the words of the Law, the curses and blessing.

Descending in the cool of the evening, we walked through the town, in itself of little interest apart from its antiquity, but remarkable for its manufacture of soap - evidently not for home consumption. Mounting our horses, which we found waiting for us at the gate, a pleasant ride brought us to Jacob's Well, the most sacred of all places in Palestine, the spot over which no dispute of authenticity has arisen; for Jew, Mohammedan, and Christian are at one in their traditions concerning it. The grooves deep cut by the ropes of succeeding generations of water-drawers, and the ledge upon which Our Lord sat as He spoke to the woman, were but the details of a picture familiar to us from our childhood. His presence seemed to fill the dimly-lit vault, and we felt indeed that we stood on holy ground.

(p. 582) When we re-ascended into the 'garden enclosed,' the shadows had already engulfed Sychar, showing grey against the brilliant orange glow of the hills beyond in the sunset. With reluctance we turned away and set our faces to Nablous and Mount Gerizim, now a dark and threatening mass of black shadow forming a background to the white houses touched here and there as if with a delicate pencil of moonlight silver. The night fell with its usual accompaniments of camp life. Soon, with the exception of howling dogs, the bray of our donkey, and heavy sounds from huddled-up figures as they 'guarded' our tents, all was quiet.

Next morning we were eager for our expedition, and by mid-day our horses were climbing the rocky and steep path up the side of Mount Gerizim, in company with many sightseers from the town. At length, with much effort on the part of our horses, we reached something like level ground, and before us we saw the Samaritans' encampment. The summit of the mountain, crowned by a solitary Moslem tomb, was still above us. Making our way through the nondescript crowd of Moslems and Samaritans, we were ushered into the presence of the High Priest. After the usual greetings and compliments had been interpreted on either side, the invariable coffee was handed round; then the Pentateuch, with its curiously worked brass case, showing the various parts of the temple and its sacred vessels, was carefully examined, and we made our bows, the richer for a photograph of the high priest holding the roll.

The ruined temple on the summit was yet unexplored, and, as there was still a little time before the sacrifice, we continued our ascent of the Mount of Blessing—claimed by Samaritan tradition to be the mountain where Abraham offered up Isaac. The Holy Place is a great threshing-floor of rock. There are also ruins of a fortress, built probably by Justinian. But it is time to return to the scene of the coming sacrifice, so, pushing our way through the crowd, we come near to the circular pit or oven from which issue dense smoke and flame, as great piles of green twigs are constantly being thrown in. This is done by a tall, cadaverous Samaritan grotesquely swathed round the jaws and face with a red headdress. Tremendous excitement prevails. A body of Turkish soldiers have arrived, and are busily engaged in a vain endeavour to keep the ever-moving crowd in position, who are eager to gain places of vantage upon either side of the Holy of Holies, where the sacrifice and Passover are to be eaten. The guard is not unnecessary, as the small body of

Samaritans had complained of ill-treatment from the insolent Moslems during the week. They received a due amount of observation from the military, which raised the ire o' Solomon, who endeavoured to raise ours; but nevertheless cameras and sketchbooks were looked upon with suspicion, and the use of the former was forbidden by a pompous little officer. Even the sketch-book was only permitted on condition that no soldier should have his portrait drawn. In time, after some energetic pushing and scrambling, we were ushered to our places upon the low stone wall enclosing the worshippers. The large tent, which would have hidden them from our view, was thrown down, and priest and Samaritans took their places upon the fallen canvas.

A prostrate column made a platform for the high priest, who alone was dressed in green robe and white silk turban. The worshippers wore a long white robe with wide sleeves, while the soldiers were garbed in the usual loose trousers and short coats, with the red Turkish fez. Over the trench containing lire —to the left of the congregation—stood three large pots filled with water. The sheep stood in huddled groups, while children caressed their doomed pets. A monotonous reading and chanting of the passages from Exodus describing the Passover continued without ceasing. Suddenly the men seized the sheep and stood in a circle round the fire while the priest carefully examined the animals and found that one of them was blemished and unfit for the sacrifice. Without a moment's hesitation it was seized by its owner and carried off to the camp. He returned almost immediately with a fresh and unblemished lamb. The nasal chanting grew louder and (p. 583) still more discordant. The seven sheep were now held- two men to each- crouching almost to the ground waiting for the signal of death.

As the sun sank, the great grey shadow crept up the mountain side, throwing the little company of Samaritans into gloom. Their dresses seemed to change from orange to dull grey tones, touched with weird gleams of red from the leaping fires. The brilliant colour of the background, made up of gaily dressed Moslems, the purple-grey uniforms of the soldiery, and the dominant note of crimson fez, formed a spectacle dramatic in contrasts, and beyond the range of pencil or pen to render in full justice.



Feeding the Furnaces

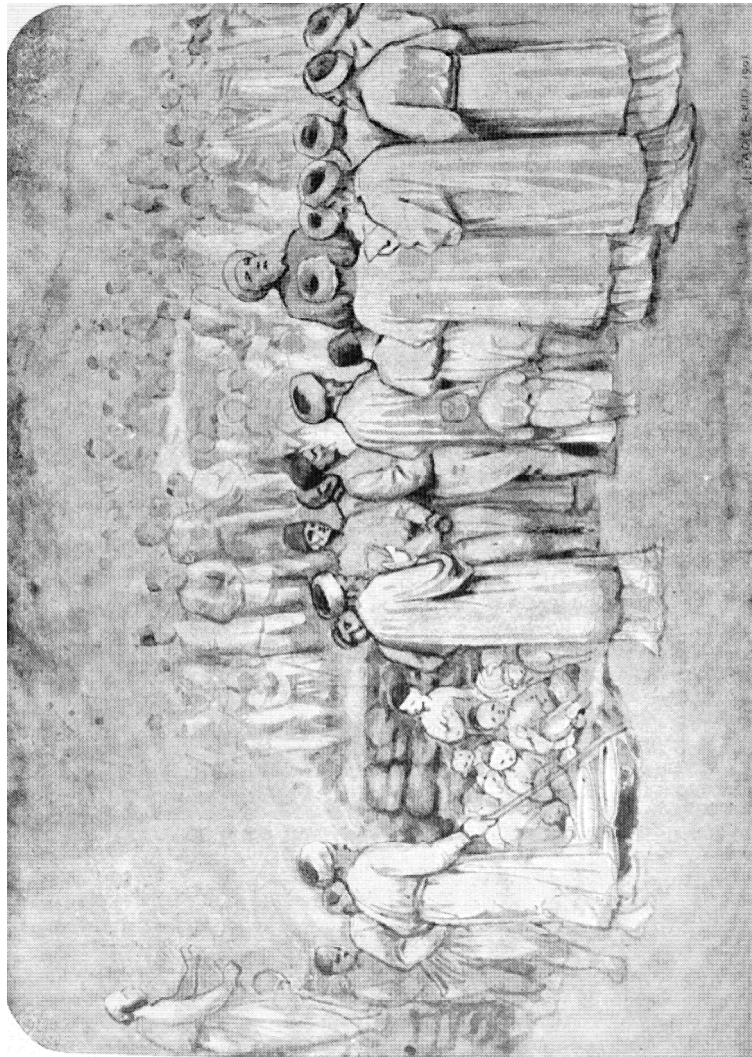
As the moon rose in its fullness over the shoulder of the mountain, the strange barbaric chanting became louder and louder, the worshippers rocking themselves to and fro in an ecstasy of enthusiasm. Lower and lower crouched the men, with their knives held in readiness over the struggling sheep. The last ray of the sun has been spent, and instantly the summit of the sacred mountain is plunged into the ashy greyness, and a last fierce shrill yell from the frenzied devotees gives the death warrant. Crimsoned hands and knives proclaim the sacrifice complete.

Hesitating, he stops at the last and pronounces with emphatic gesture that this lamb has not died immediately, and therefore the offering is unclean. It seemed for a moment as if the Samaritans had lost all control of themselves on hearing his verdict, and a scene of the wildest and maddest character followed.

The nervous hand of the butcher had slipped, and death had faltered on its way.

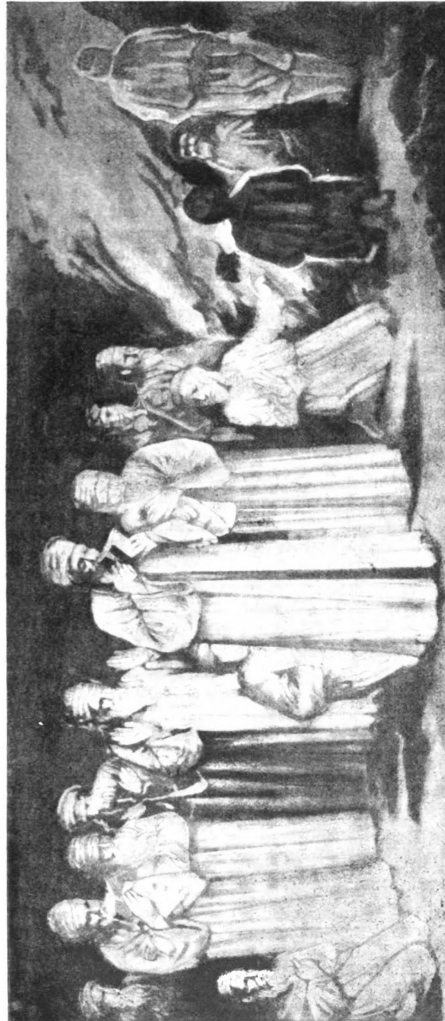
Pushing his way through the excited, gesticulating crowd, the priest carefully scrutinizes each carcass.

(p. 584)



Before the Sacrifice

(p. 585) The bitter herbs and unleavened bread had been eaten during the ceremony in vain for this wretched carcass, unfit for the Passover; it must be destroyed by fire until no particle of wool, hoof, or horn is left unconsumed.



After the Sacrifice

Handfuls of wool being torn off in rapid succession, it is but the work of a few minutes before the sheep are spitted upon the long pointed poles lying in readiness. All is ready for the roasting, and the first part of the sacrifice has been completed.

The crowd of onlookers is now hustled from the scene by the soldiers, who are forbidden to leave the place of sacrifice until all have gone. But there is still much to be seen, and we are loth to leave. A hurried consultation with our guide results in a retreat to the friendly shelter of the high priest's tent, where we are safe from the attentions of the military. Unleavened bread and pieces of cake, sweet and fatty, are served to us, and after a sufficient stay we are glad again to exchange the heated, crowded tent for the cool, clear night. We are just in time to see the white carcasses gleaming as they are lowered into the pit. A villainous steam rose immediately, white and nauseous. This was hastily smothered; first a wicker lid was passed over the projecting ends of the spits which were then covered (p. 586) with sods, grass and stones until not a wisp of escaping steam was to be seen.

The rejected carcase was now attended to. The pots which had contained the water were removed, and the miserable mutton was thrown into the flames. Beyond the glare, against the darkness of the night, the white dresses of priest and people were revealed by the light of the moon. A subject for the painter: moonlight and firelight struggling for the ascendancy; the swaying forms, now kneeling, now prostrate, while the steady, monotonous, nasal recitative rose and fell without ceasing as hour after hour passed; the attendants at the fire crooning and chanting as they moved in the lurid light. Grotesque in the flickering flames were the strong aquiline features of the Samaritans stirring and poking the blackened and twisted remains. As, wearied and exhausted, the greater number seated themselves round the fire, wrapping their thin white garments closer to them, the priest, yawning and impatient, drew his abayah round him, joining in the discussion which waxed warm over the tardy consumption of the sheep.

Still, a few of the more devout held their ground, and we could hear voices rising and falling and the refrain sometimes taken up by the impatient watchers.

At length but a few shrivelled and blackened bones remained in the trench, when suddenly activity seized the languid Samaritans once more.

With one accord we eagerly rush to the oven, and the covering is torn by many willing hands from its mouth, until soon the fiery glow of the heated walls illumines the excited faces seen through a veil of white choking steam.

Thrusting ourselves forward, we look into the pit and see the blackened carcasses, the first of which is quickly drawn up. The rest, however, are not to be so easily recovered, as the charred spits have collapsed on removing the first, and the sheep lie in a heap at the bottom of the pit.

The matter is quickly settled by their seizing one of their number and promptly lowering him by his wrists into the red-hot oven. Up comes the baked mutton, and the next instant the unfortunate, spluttering, coughing Samaritan is hauled out ignominiously. Each carcase demanded a victim, and four times a suffocated mortal was dragged up. To be outside was sufficiently unpleasant, as our smarting eyes and offended noses testified. The descendant of Aaron, whose guests we have been, is now in our midst. The calm dignity of the priest and host has been cast aside for the time being, and he is as excited and fevered as the lowliest of his flock.

Nothing remains now but to divide the blackened and scorched meat into portions, which are placed conveniently in baskets. The Samaritans stand in one great concourse, with loins girded up and staves in their hands, the weak light from the lanterns showing but feebly in the strong glare of the oven, now bursting into flames.

A chant of thanksgiving rises into the still night air, testifying that another sacrifice has been achieved. The food is quickly served out, and the Passover is eaten in the sacred enclosure. All is finished, and so, summoning Solomon, we pass rapidly through the dimly lighted camp and follow his long gliding footsteps as best we can down the steep pathway of the mountain side. Soon the welcome lights of our own encampment come into sight.

**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