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(p. 457)

EXCURSIONS, IN PALESTINE.<sup>1</sup>—No. II.

SECTION II. NABLUS, ITS INHABITANTS AND TRADITIONS.

ANGELINA—THE SAMARITANS—VISIT TO THE GOVERNOR—THE PENTATEUCH—BELIEF  
OF THE SAMARITANS —ABU SHELABI—THE YOUNG RENEGADE—EXCURSION TO MOUNT  
GERIZIM SALIM AND JEN ON—TOMB OF THE HIGH PRIEST ELEAZAR—HEBREW  
TRADITIONS—JACOB'S WELL—JOSEPH'S TOMB—CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY—NATIVE  
HOSPITALITY.

*Tuesday, May 31st.*—I had brought with me, from the Bishop of Nablus, who resides in the Patriarchal Convent of St. Constantine at Jerusalem, a letter of introduction to a Christian lady in this town, named Angelina. This I had last evening entrusted to a Greek (p. 458) priest, whom we encountered at the well. Early this morning I received an answer from Angelina, expressing her regret that we had not made her house our home during our visit to Nablus, and her hope that we would honour her with our company to breakfast. Accordingly, as soon as we were ready, we were guided by the priest to her house, where coffee and eggs, and the best bread I have seen in the country, furnished us with a substantial breakfast. The house was very poor, and the furniture mean. The mistress of the house, however, was a very lively and intelligent person, and complained bitterly, as do all Christians, of the expulsion of Ibrahim Pasha, and the restoration of Turkish monarchy. " Ah !" she said, " in his days I, woman as I am, could have passed

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the work of as found in a footnote: "1 Kings, xxii. 89. For many interesting particulars of the places and country round Sychar (now called Nablus) see the **Rev. George Williams's Excursions in Palestine**, Nos. I. and II., in the Colonial Church Chronicle for November and December, 1857." *The Messiah*, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1861, Printed by Truscott, Son & Simmons, Suffolk-lane, City. p. 96, f.7.

through the land from one end to the other, with a bag of gold in my hand, and no one would have dared to molest me. It is not so now."

Taking leave of Angelina, we went to visit the Samaritans, and called first on their Chief Levite, named Selami. He was an old man, of not a very prepossessing appearance; but his son Amran, to whom he appears to delegate most of the duties of his sacred office, is a very handsome man, with a decidedly Jewish physiognomy, and seemed better disposed towards us than his father, whose good-will was evidently not conciliated by the presence of a canine friend of one of our party, answering to the pagan name of Juno. Having left our shoes at the door, we were introduced into the sacred building, which we found to correspond in its simplicity with the Jewish synagogues, with a wooden ark containing the law. We observed that there were other volumes ranged on shelves around the room, which the priest informed us were sacred writings of their wise men, mostly expositions of the law. We, of course, requested to be shown their celebrated copy of the Pentateuch, and the request was immediately complied with. An ancient roll was brought out from the ark, and submitted to our inspection, and we were gravely assured that this was the penmanship of Abishna, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest. It was beautifully written on vellum in the ancient Phoenician character, preserved only among the Samaritans, and the rollers were mounted with silver, having a silk covering attached. We had a suspicion, however, that this was not their precious manuscript after all; but I believe none of us knew the grounds of our doubt, except the notorious mendacity of the Orientals. We intimated to the priest that he was attempting to deceive us, and that this was not the writing we were in quest of. The old man, with an affectation of the greatest sincerity, assured us that he had nothing more to show. On our persisting, he produced first some loose sheets of printed folio, and subsequently a second roll, apparently of great antiquity, and more carefully preserved than the former, only a small portion being opened in the middle, which bore marks of having been much used, while the remainder was carefully sewn up to prevent it from being unrolled. What possessed us I know not; we still hesitated to receive this as the veritable roll, and we asked still for the very old one, the original of the great grandson of Aaron. The elder Kohen was amazed at our incredulity. (p. 459)

He appealed to his son, who had been standing by, an unmoved spectator of the scene. He was not so well practised in hypocrisy as his father, and we observed a smile in his eye. We were now confident that our hesitation was well grounded, and took a course which was sure to succeed. We produced a piece of gold about four shillings in value, and promised another of the same amount, if they would exhibit the venerable relic. Their eyes sparkled with delight, and the victory was secure. The old man was, indeed, somewhat abashed; but his son relieved him in his embarrassment. "The fact is," he said, "before we can show this precious volume, it will be necessary to cense the synagogue. I must go to the bath, and other preparations must be made. If you will come again in an hour's time, you shall see it."

We determined to occupy the interval with a visit to the Mutzellim, or governor, whose house was at no great distance. The Serai, or official residence, was undergoing considerable repairs, and we passed some large and very deep pits, dug in order to lay the foundations of the new buildings on the native rock, a necessary precaution against the earthquakes, so frequent in this country. We found the Governor in his garden, reclining under the shade of some orange-trees, and surrounded by his suite. We were courteously

received and entertained with sherbet, pipes, sweetmeat and coffee, and enjoyed the cool shade of the shrubs, and the murmur of a rippling stream which watered the garden, reminding us agreeably that this ancient city still retains one of the characteristics for which it was formerly celebrated. Among the attendants of the Governor was a venerable old man, with a long beard of silvery white, and a peculiarly pensive cast of countenance. This was Abu Shelabi, the principal and wealthiest of the Samaritan community, formerly chief secretary of the Mutzellim, but now holding a subordinate employment. Poor old man! he had abundant cause for his pensive, anxious, careworn expression, as he sat apart from the Moslems, and looked like a stranger and an alien among them ; he never raised his eyes from the ground, nor ventured to address us ; but at our departure he sent a messenger to implore us to pay him a visit, which we promised to do.

Duly, at the expiration of an hour, we presented ourselves at the Samaritan synagogue, where we found all in readiness. The young Levite, evidently just returned from the bath, was awaiting us at the door, barefooted, and dressed in sacred vestments of white silk, with a bonnet on his head. We entered the synagogue, now redolent of incense. The doors were closed; but an iron grating in the roof of the building afforded the Samaritan ladies an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity, excited partly by the presence of English strangers, and partly by the precious manuscript, which is rarely exhibited to the vulgar.

With much solemnity did Amran approach the ark, and brought out a volume of portentous size, carefully enveloped in a coloured silk wrapper. Having deposited the treasure on a stool, he unfolded (p. 460) the cover. A similar wrapper appeared beneath, and we counted no less than sixteen silk envelopes, of various colours and ages. When the sacred volume at length appeared, he bowed his head and did obeisance. Then kissing it with much apparent reverence, he opened it for our inspection, informing us that this was the first time it had been exhibited for 150 years. Long did we feast our eyes on the mystic tome, which was indeed worthy of admiration, both on account of its undoubted antiquity, and for the beauty of its execution. It was a large volume of quarto shape, written on skins of vellum, stitched with green silk, bound in bare wooden boards. It was in a most perfect state of preservation, scarcely soiled. The characters were large and legible; identical, of course, with those of the other Samaritan books which we had seen ; but unhappily we could none of us decipher it. The young Levite, however, read us some passages from the book of Genesis; and we remarked a peculiarity in the pronunciation of the Hebrew, varying from that of either of the great families of the Jews. The writing was unpointed, as in all Samaritan books. We next inquired why the manuscript was not in the form of a roll, which we understood was the most ancient form of binding? The Levites replied that it is a very ancient form, no doubt, perhaps the most ancient: but at the very remote period when this copy of the law was written, the art of binding was wholly unknown. Books were then written on separate skins of parchment, as was this manuscript; until, about a thousand years ago, a high priest of the Samaritans had it bound in its present form, and furnished it with the undermost of the silk wrappers; from that time to the present, when a wrapper has become decayed through age, it has been a practice with the high priests to present another, but still to preserve the former. The date of the binding is noted on the inside cover, with the name of the high priest who directed it. The unwillingness of the Samaritans to show this sacred treasure, which they so highly prize, arises, no doubt, from an apprehension that attempts may be made to deprive them of it by fraud or force. I shall not attempt to determine the value of the tradition which

assigns it such a remote antiquity; for I neither know the facts on which they rest their faith, nor am I capable of ascertaining the date from an examination of the writing, as some antiquarians might do. That we at length succeeded in seeing the oldest MS. in their possession, the real Samaritan Pentateuch, so widely celebrated, I had no doubt, at the time; although I have since had reason to believe that they have one still more ancient. It would well repay a pilgrimage to the East, if there were any prospect of ascertaining the value and authentic history of these most ancient codices. I would merely suggest whether they may not possibly be still in possession of the identical copy of the law, brought by the priest, whom Tiglath Pileser sent to instruct the idolatrous settlers in Israel, and which has been the means of preserving and transmitting the old Hebrew characters among the Samaritans, even to this day? This theory would, of course, be untenable, should it prove, on examination, to contain the interpolations or explanations ascribed to Ezra; but nothing but a careful collation of this volume can set at rest the interesting and important questions suggested by this manuscript; and it is evident, from what has been said, that the Samaritans themselves cannot be trusted to make a careful and faithful collation. Old Selami mentioned the name of the great French Orientalist, M. De Sacy, and boasted of having many letters from him. If that learned scholar thought he was dealing with a person like himself, on whose statements he might place implicit reliance, and in whose friendly and disinterested cooperation he might confide in the prosecution of his important labours, he was sadly deceived in the person with whom he was in correspondence.

Having satisfied our curiosity with a full examination of the MS., we made it our business to ascertain something more of the Samaritan creed, the following particulars of which may be found interesting. They utterly ignore the Jewish account of their origin, and claim to be the veritable children of Abraham; the remains, in fact, of the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel. They acknowledge that they were led captive by the Syrians, but they returned shortly from their captivity. The schism, which they charge upon the Jews, dates, they say, from the days of Eli, the high priest in Shiloh, who usurped the dignity, when they held with the lawful successor to the Aaronic priesthood. They acknowledge David and other prophets as good men, but schismatics, and have no knowledge of the book of Psalms. Their Levitical family (the Kohens) did not intermarry with the other families, until the diminution of their numbers, and the barrenness of the females threatened the extinction of the line of which Amran is the last representative. They still expect a Messiah; but we found some difficulty in ascertaining their belief on this point, as the young Kohen was evidently anxious to frame his answers according to his idea of our wishes, rather than to represent faithfully their belief on the subject.

With regard to their account of their early history, it is certainly remarkable, considering they do not possess the historical books of the Jews, that they should have singled out Eli as the priest who introduced the schism; for it is, in fact, apparent from these books that there was some irregularity in his succession—an irregularity nowhere accounted for, so far as I can find. The genealogies give Aaron four sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar: the two former died in their rebellion in the wilderness, leaving no children; the two latter assisted their father in his sacred functions during his lifetime, of whom Eleazar succeeded him at his death. The ready zeal of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was rewarded by the covenant of an everlasting priesthood, and his name occurs in the genealogy in the first Book of Chronicles as father of a long line of priests.

But Eli's name nowhere appears in the genealogies, nor did he belong to the family of Eleazar, but of Ithamar. The substitution, therefore, of Zadok the priest for Abiathar, who was deposed by Solomon for political offences, was but the restoration of the legitimate line, with (p. 462) which the covenant had been made—for Zadok was "of the sons of Eleazar," whereas Abiathar, the great grandson of Phinehas, the son of Eli, was, of course, of the sons of Ithamar. Whether Eli himself, or one of his ancestors, had usurped the dignity, does not appear in the sacred narrative. Josephus asserts that Eli was the intruder ; but the interruption of the legitimate line probably took place during the troublous period which followed the death of Joshua, when there was no king in Israel, but every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Leaving the synagogue, we were conducted to a garden to see a tomb standing in a ruined mosque, which the Samaritans believe to be the burial-place of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, whom Jacob "buried beneath Bethel under an oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth;" for these people, in common with the Jews and Moslems, are adepts in confounding localities which have no connexion ; and as the Moslems make Jerusalem the Bethel of Jacob's vision, so the Samaritans identify their holy mountain with the "Gate of Heaven," and are so far consistent in their tradition of the tomb of Deborah.

We now went to pay our promised visit to Abu Shelabi We found him in the occupation of a fine large house, situated in a dark and narrow street, commanding a magnificent prospect from its upper terraces and windows. We looked down a green valley, Wady Nablus, in the mouth of which are Jacob's well and the tomb of Joseph; then across the wider valley, El-Mukhna, to the opposite mountain range, while on either side the view was shut in by the lofty sides of Ebal on the left, and Gerizim on the right, all names associated with transactions of Scripture interest. Abu Shelabi received us in a spacious room, handsomely furnished in the Oriental style ; and the well-stocked shelves which ran round the room, exhibiting a variety of cups and plates in glass and china, bespoke the prosperity of the owner.

But the pensive, careworn face of our venerable host indicated a mind ill at ease; and when the first civilities were over, he unburdened to us his griefs. Poor man! it was a melancholy tale. There was in the room an interesting and intelligent lad about sixteen years of age, who was the subject of the following affecting narrative, related by the old man in Turkish for greater security, and translated to us in Italian by our dragoman.

Two or three years ago the brother of Abu Shelabi died, leaving a wife and two children—a son and daughter. The woman having continued a widow for a time, changed her religion and married a Mohammedan, and the children went to live with their uncle Abu Shelabi. This marriage took place about a year and a half ago. About three months since commenced a series of persecutions on the part of the mother, in order to induce her children to apostatize, that she might have the control of their property, which she had lost on changing her faith. The daughter was easily terrified into submission—not so the son. Though only sixteen years of age, he was sincerely attached to the faith of his fathers, and was proof against the allurements which the dominant religion held out. When promises failed, (p. 463) threats were tried. The lad was cruelly bastinadoed, which he endured with wonderful constancy; next, he was imprisoned for a fortnight without food—still he was unmoved ; lastly, he was threatened with a *cap of red-hot iron*, when his resolution failed. He pronounced the confession of Islam, and was proclaimed a

convert. Great were the rejoicings in Nablus on the day of his public profession. He was paraded through the streets mounted on a white horse, having exchanged the red head-dress of his tribe for the white turban of the Moslems, and assumed the name 'Assaad for the patriarchal Ysa'ak. Here, then, he was, present with us in the room; in heart, in conviction, in affection, a Samaritan; hating and detesting, as was natural, his barbarous persecutors. Poor child! he was an object of deep sympathy to us; such strength of principle, fortified by Divine grace, would have made a glorious Christian martyr, had it been his privilege to confess the faith of Christ crucified. No wonder that his aged uncle always wears that melancholy expression, and meditates a departure from the place. He was urgent with us to use our interest to procure him a vice-consular appointment, which would secure him and his community against a repetition of such outrages; and it were, indeed, much to be wished that so long as the great European powers think it necessary to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, they would have some consideration for the subjects of the Porte, and guarantee to them liberty of conscience and freedom of religious profession. This was enjoyed by the inhabitants of this country during the temporary sway of the Viceroy of Egypt, when equal law was administered to all, and peace and security for life and property was established. The only persons whom we hear speak favourably of the Government are the sheikhs of the fellahin and Bedowin, who were envious at the Christians being admitted to equal privileges with themselves, and hated the heavy bridle which Ibrahim Pasha found it necessary to apply in order to curb those deeds of violence which have kept the country in perpetual agitation since the period of his expulsion.

It was dark when we returned to our tents.

*Wednesday, June 1.*—Having yesterday secured the services of the younger Kohen to conduct us to the summit of Gerizim and other sacred localities, we left our tents on this excursion soon after breakfast, and had, on starting, an instance of the scrupulous observance of the Mosaic law by the Samaritans. We had mounted a young man of that community, Yakub-esh-Shelabi by name, who was to bear us company, on a sorry animal, which might well justify a doubt as to its classification among quadrupeds. Having heard the priest inquire with much earnestness of the young man whether it was a *mare* he was riding, we inquired whether there was any impropriety in his being so mounted, and were answered that he only wished to satisfy himself that it was not a *mule*.

About a quarter of an hour's ride brought us to the summit of Mount Gerizim, where we found considerable ruins, which our guide informed us marked the position of the temple. There are also dis- (p. 464) tinct traces of a massive tower, eighty-eight yards square, which are doubtless the remains of the fortress erected by Justinian for the protection of the Christian Church which he here established, in reprisals for sundry acts of outrage committed by the Samaritans on the Christians in Nablus. It was reserved for M. de Saulcy to recover the ground-plan of the Samaritan temple! This noble mountain commands an extensive view in all directions over the great plain of Esdraelon towards the north, and over the whole of Mount Ephraim southward, where the dim and distant heights of Judaea bound the horizon; Mount Gilead on the east, and the Plain of Philistia on the west, complete the panorama. Immediately below us was the fruitful valley up which we had passed yesterday, running from south-west to north-east, called in its upper part Saal Beit-Dajan, from a village on its eastern slope, which retains in its name a

memorial of one of the idols of ancient Canaan, whose worship extended throughout the East, from Egypt to Persia.

Towards the north-east extremity of the valley, on its northern side, was pointed out the village of Salim, perhaps identical with the Salem mentioned in connexion with Shechem, in the history of the patriarch Jacob, and almost certainly the Salem of St. John's Gospel, where the Baptist exercised his office ; for we heard of a village named Ain-un (AEnon) in its vicinity, with a copious stream of water. Salim was said to be an hour and a half distant from Nablus, and Ain-un an hour beyond, over the hill.

After enjoying this prospect for a considerable time, we descended the mountain on the south side, and in a quarter of an hour passed Kufr Khallil, on the left, in a valley, and in another quarter Ain Mukkeneh, from whence we crossed the valley up which lay our road on Monday, and mounted the opposite hills a little to the south of 'Awerta. Here we were conducted to the tomb of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the high-priest, who was " buried in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in Mount Ephraim."

The tomb is a huge, uncouth mass of masonry, thickly plastered, similar in character to the tombs of the Moslem saints in various parts of Palestine. It stands in the middle of a paved court, overshadowed by a noble acacia. On the north of the court is a small dark chamber, where a light was burning, which our Samaritan guides were careful to trim. A flight of steps on the west of the cenotaph leads down through the pavement to a chamber in the rock, beneath which the body is said to be deposited; and this tradition is received and acknowledged by Christians, Jews,<sup>2</sup> Samaritans, and Moslems. Many Hebrew names were written on the walls and buildings of the court.

We next proceeded to the village 'Awerta, close to which we were shown the tombs of Ithamar and Phinehas, the brother and son of (p. 465) Eleazar the high priest; and of the seventy elders of the first Sanhedrim appointed to assist Moses in the administration of justice in the wilderness. They are of the same general design as that of Eleazar, but not so carefully preserved. It does not admit of a doubt that Jewish and Christian tradition had consecrated these spots to the memory of the worthies whose names they bear, prior to the Moslem domination, though these last may have sought to fix and perpetuate the traditions by the erection of these cenotaphs. It would be impossible to account, on any other theory, for the veneration in which they are held by Samaritans, Jews, and Christians, who certainly would never have adopted a legend originated by the infidels, to say nothing of the improbability of the invention of the story by the Moslems, who might be willing to adopt the saints of the Old Testament, but would hardly feel sufficient interest in them to feign their sepulchres. Whatever the truth may be, we were well satisfied to believe the traditions at the time, and the recollection invests the neighbourhood of Nablus with additional interest.

We had advanced some distance from the village on our return, when we missed our young Samaritan of the sorry mare. As we were meditating to return to the village in quest of him, we saw him advancing towards us at full speed. The villagers had seized him under the idea that we were a party of Jews, on whom they are wont to levy heavy exactions for the privilege of visiting their fathers' tombs. The young man could with difficulty persuade them that we were Inglis, or procure his liberation; indeed, the

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<sup>2</sup> Yakob, of Paris, mentions all in his description of Sacred Tombs (A.D. 1258), apud Carmoly, p. 186, for he writes the village שרתא. Carmoly, in notes 96, 97, (p. 214,) cites earlier Jewish authorities. So, also, Gerson de Scarmela (1661); *ibid.*, pp. 386, 387 s and Uri, of Biol (1564); *ibid.*, p. 445.

villagers of 'Awerta are an unruly set, and gave infinite trouble to their rulers, Egyptian or Turkish. It was only a few months subsequent to our visit that, they stopped an English gentleman on his journey to Jerusalem and robbed him of his arms, which were, however, recovered through the threats and remonstrances of his spirited young dragoman. We soon found cause to rue the release of the young Shormi, who had been our evil genius throughout the day, and had occasioned us and his Levite no little uneasiness; for as he pranced along in the rear of our line on his high-mettled Rosinante of doubtful breed, a loaded pistol, which one of our party had rashly entrusted to his care, was jolted from the holster. The bullet whizzed along our line close to our ears as we were advancing in single file, but, providentially, no one was touched. We passed between Jacob's well and Joseph's tomb, which here demand a more detailed notice, although we did not fully explore them until our return from the North.

It has been already remarked that the well stands at the mouth of the Nablus valley, where it opens into the larger plain El-Mukhna. "The well is deep," upwards of 100 feet, and was perfectly dry when we examined it, in June. Its mouth is seen by descending into a dark chamber through a hole in the earth, usually closed with a large stone, to be rolled away with much difficulty. This chamber is, apparently, a crypt of the church formerly built over the well, of which very few traces remain. Of its identity with the well of Scripture interest there can be no reasonable doubt; for although we find no mention of the digging of the well by the patriarch, and no notice (p. 466) whatever of its existence in the interval of eighteen centuries that elapsed between him and the earliest written record of it, yet, such is the authority of that record, that no Christian will dispute its authority or authenticity. The tradition from that time may be said to be continuous, for the longest break in the chain is absolutely insignificant compared with the long silence preceding; and from the period of our Saviour's visit, Christians were yet more interested than the Samaritans in preserving the memorial of the well. Accordingly, we find a church built over it in the fourth century, if not by St. Helena, at least very shortly after; doubtless the same cruciform structure which Arculfus described and delineated in the seventh century, probably replaced in the time of the Frank domination by a more magnificent erection, which shared the sack and pillage of the Saracenic conquerors under Saladin, from which time it has been abandoned to the veneration of the Samaritans, or the devotions of the casual pilgrim. And it is better so. For though my friend Nozrani suggests that all the kings and commonwealths of Christendom should combine "to rear over this spring and upon this rock the loftiest and noblest temple ever made with hands," wherein "all people, nations, and languages should bow down and worship," yet, to my feeling, the present temple, so beautifully described by himself, "whose floor is the earth of Palestine, and whose roof is the canopy of heaven," where the pilgrim "worships leaning on his staff," is a more appropriate sanctuary than any material building in which to enshrine the sublime truth here once enunciated by the Great Teacher, that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

The antiquity and traditions of the well are further confirmed by the structures which we examined by letting fall lighted paper, which, as it floated slowly down, enabled us to survey the masonry in a very satisfactory manner. It is admirably built; precisely similar in character to the noble wells of Beersheba, and other ancient wells in the south of Judaea, which we afterwards visited. But there is difficulty in accounting for the



existence of such a well within five minutes' walk of three most copious fountains of never-failing water, two in the middle of the Nablus valley—Bellaka, a little to the west of the well, and Daphne, farther up the valley; the third near the village Aksa, which stands opposite to the well at the foot of Mount Ebal—the tomb of Joseph, a wely similar to those already noticed lying halfway between. The fountains have no communication one with another, but are all distinct springs. What need of a deep well so close to such an abundance of excellent water? Two solutions suggested themselves at the time. The more probable is, that the fountains did not exist either at the time of Jacob or at the period of our Lord's visit, but have been since opened by some convulsions of nature, to which this land is subject; or, that the fountains were without the boundary of the field which Jacob had purchased, and he did not choose to be dependent upon the neighbours for his supply of water. The former is the most natural conclusion; and the traveller in Palestine will consider it easily admissible when he sees in so many (p. 467) parts evident marks of the opposite effects which the course of ages and the curse of God have wrought, in districts which once answered to the description of "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valley and hills;" but where now the curse of God has "turned rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground, a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

Another difficulty which the first supposition would and the second would not remove, is, that the woman of Samaria should come to the well to draw, when she could have filled her pitcher without trouble at the neighbouring fountains; for I cannot think that the sanctity of the patriarchal well offered any attraction to the woman, being such as she was, who would gladly have been spared the trouble of coming thither to draw. The difficulty is increased if we imagine that the town of Nablus, which was in St. Jerome's time and still is rich in water—being permeated by streams from three copious springs—occupies the site of the ancient Sychar, a position, which on other grounds seems scarcely tenable. For it is inconceivable that the inhabitants of this town should have been dependent for their supply of water, on a deep well half an hour distant. Some writers, staggered by these facts, have placed Sychar on Mount Gerizim, a little above the well, and have fancied they have discovered ruins there; and it is, perhaps, from Frank travellers that the Samaritans have learned to speak of a Sykar at the base of Gerizim; but the name of the village on the opposite side of the valley so nearly corresponds to the city of the Samaritans, both in name and relative situation, that I am disposed to believe that it represents the site. Aska is little else than an anagrammatical form of Sychar, and is "close to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph;" supposing the tomb and the well to have preserved faithfully the memorial of that spot,—a fact which the known antiquity of one at least of the traditions will not allow me to question.

The situation of Nablus, and the appearance of its two mountains, is very accurately described by Benjamin of Tudela. "Mount Gerizim is rich in wells and orchards, whereas Mount Ebal is dry like stone and rock. The city of Nablus lies in the valley between these two hills." Its streets are narrow; but it appears to boast a larger proportion of respectable houses than Jerusalem, as far as we could judge from their exterior appearance.

The population, which can scarcely be estimated at less than 10,000, consists principally of Mohammedans; but there is a small community of Christians, reckoning 104 taxable males, all of the Greek rite, under the spiritual charge of two priests. They have a small and poor church, dedicated to St. George, their ancient edifices having been

converted into mosques; among which is one old church exhibiting towards the street some traces of ornamental architecture well executed—probably the remains of one of Justinian's buildings celebrated by Procopius. This church, the priest informed us, was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. There are also twenty-five Jewish males who pay the capitation tax, and thirty Samaritans. (p. 468)

It would be impossible to add anything to Dr. Robinson's exhaustive summary of the fate and fortunes of this city, and the history of the most interesting section of its inhabitants, as also the most ancient. Nor can I do more than allude to the interesting and important questions opened by St. Jerome, as to the identity of its neighbouring mountains with the Ebal and Gerizim of the book of Joshua. That most learned of the Latin Fathers does not hesitate positively to deny the authority of a tradition which he admits had long been established in his day, staggered apparently by the sudden and abrupt transition in the sacred narrative, from 'Ai to a place so distant as this. He would, therefore, fix the site of the two mountains of blessing and cursing to the neighbourhood of Jericho; and I could well believe that Quarantania is his Gerizim. But in answer to this objection, it may be maintained that even if it were manifest, which it is not, that exact chronological order is observed in the book of Joshua, yet it may be that the conquest of 'Ai opened the whole of central Canaan to the Israelites,—a theory which receives strong confirmation, from the fact that the subjugation of the south and north, Judaea and Galilee, are subsequently detailed, while we have no further notice of the reduction of the intermediate districts. In any case, Mount Gerizim is brought into such immediate juxtaposition with Shechem in the history of Jotham, that the authority of St. Jerome, great as it undoubtedly is, cannot invalidate the long-established prescription of this noble mountain of Samaritan veneration, unless we are prepared to transfer Shechem also to the neighbourhood of Jericho, which St. Jerome himself would not venture to do. But to proceed with our narrative and our journey.

On arriving at our encampment, we found our baggage ready to start, and directed our muleteers to proceed to Baca, on the direct road to Mount Carmel, intending ourselves to make a detour, in order to visit Samaria, after we had dined with a native Christian in the town. We happily retained one servant.

As we proceeded to his house, we encountered, outside the gate of the city, a company of loathsome lepers, stretching forth their withered stumps to solicit alms of the passengers : for this city shares with Jerusalem the unenviable notoriety of perpetuating this disgusting disease, which is rendered hereditary by intermarriage. Familiarity with the wretched objects about the gates of Jerusalem, had in no way diminished the loathing with which we shrank from their touch.

Our host was one Serjus (*i. e.* George), to whom I had been recommended by one Tamus of Jerusalem, with an assurance that we should find him a rare exception to the rest of his countrymen for disinterested generosity and hospitality. But he plagued us during our whole visit with intimations of his desire to be appointed British Consular Agent, and earnest entreaties that we would forward his object; and at our departure he made no scruple to accept a very liberal *backsheesh* in return for his meagre fare; for, it must be added, the best part of the dinner was furnished from our own stores! Such is the disinterested hospitality of the natives of the East!

## 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

– *Shalma b. Tabia was the High Priest 1787-1855.*

GEORGE WILLIAMS, B.D.  
Williams, George, 1814-1878  
Fellow of *King's College*, Cambridge  
Member of Palestine Exploration Fund

Williams, George-Wikisource

“He was appointed by Archbishop Howley to accompany Bishop Alexander as chaplain to Jerusalem, and was in that city from 1841 to May 1843”

“The Rev. George Williams, an English clergyman who had resided fourteen months at Jerusalem, and who prepared his works with the aid of the accurate survey made in 1841 by the ordnance corps attached to the English force which recovered Syria from the Pacha of Egypt,” **Religions of the Empire [microform] a Conference on some living religions within the Empire, held at the Imperial Institute, London, September 22nd to October 3rd, 1924, under the auspices of the School of Oriental Studies (University of London) and the Sociological Society;**” p. 29.

Author of 'The Holy City' (1845), 'Historical Notices of Jerusalem' and other topographical works.

### **Also of interest from a Newspaper:**

Timaru Herald, Volume VI, Issue 198, 24 April 1867, page 3.

### THE SAMARITANS

The Times contains the following letter on the subject of this persecuted race, bearing the well-know signature of the Rev. George Williams, Fellow of King's College, a distinguished Eastern Traveller:-

Knowing how ready you are to espouse the cause of the oppressed in all parts of the globe, I venture to ask your permission to state the case of the members of the smallest nationality in the world, who have been suffering for many months past a vexatious persecution from those who should be their natural protectors. I do so in the hope that the simple statement of the facts in your columns may lead to a speedy and effectual redress of their grievances.

When I was at Nablous last September I found that the Samaritan community, now reduced to 150 souls, had been for three months past deprived of the use of their synagogue, and consequently of the opportunity of celebrating their religious offices, by the intolorances of the local authorities.

The pretext for the intervention of the Turkish Governor was absurdly frivolous. The Samaritans had heightened the street-door of their synagogue from four feet to above five feet six inches; they had also renewed some of the pavement of the synagogue itself, which had become decayed. These repairs were declared illegal by the Turkish official, who, accompanied by a mob of 200 or 300 fanatics, went himself to the synagogue, where he directed and superintended the demolition of the new work, which was so well executed by the mob that they left the building a complete wreck; in which I saw it. They finished by fastening up the principle entrance to the sacred precinct; nor dare the Samaritans re-open the door or undertake the reparation of the edifice.

These facts I represented to his Excellency Reschid Pasha, the Governor-General of Syria, in the hope that one who had protected the Jews at Smyrna might be inclined to interpose on behalf of the Samaritans at Nablous; but a recent letter from Palestine informs me that nothing has yet been done.

Our country has wisely adopted the policy of non-intervention; and the Foreign-office may reasonably hesitate to interfere between the Ottoman Porte and its subjects under ordinary circumstances; but is it too much to hope that the interest which has lately been awakened in this country by Dean Stanley, Mr. George Grove, and others in a small remnant of a once powerful race, now apparently on the verge of extinction, may lead to a friendly representation to the Central Turkish Government of the hardships which they are now suffering, and so in a speedy reparation of their grievances, and a restoration of the freedom of religious worship?