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(p. 257) TRAVELS IN PALESTINE.

(From Notes of a Visit to that Country.)

NABLOUS, or Nabulus, is a large and flourishing town, containing a population of probably not less than 8,000 inhabitants. It is a place of considerable importance, not only from its relative magnitude, but likewise from the central position it occupies in a country so thinly peopled as Palestine.

It is a great change of scene on coming into Nablous, and contrasting it with the solitary places through which the traveller must previously have passed, from whatever quarter he may have approached the town; and this remark is especially applicable when approaching it from the north, namely, from Galilee. As I rode through the Bazaars, the numerous shops or stalls on both sides of the long narrow avenues, or thoroughfares, through which I passed, appeared to be well supplied with commodities.

The Bazaars here were the most extensive and busy-looking by far of any town I had yet seen in Palestine. Nablous is an ancient town, and here and there might be seen evidences of its antiquity, in a broken column or other fragment of old date. The streets are arched over in some places, and the houses are built over them; thus they form vaulted or covered ways, which wear, however, a (p. 258) gloomy aspect, as the traveller passes through them. Nablous is celebrated for the manufacture of a peculiar kind of sweetmeat, called *sesame*, which is held in high repute. It is so called, from the oil of sesame constituting one of its ingredients. I paid a visit to the Samaritan Synagogue, and saw an ancient MS. copy of the Pentateuch, which the Rabbi, or high priest, brought out and placed on a stand for my inspection: he unrolled the volume a little, and appeared very careful of the treasure committed to his custody. The synagogue is but a small building, though probably of considerable antiquity. The Samaritan community it seems does not now amount to more than 40 or 50 persons; their number too is gradually decreasing; so that the Samaritans will, at no distant period, most likely become extinct as a sect. Four times a year they go up to Mount Gerizim in solemn procession to worship. These seasons are: The Feast of the Passover, when they pitch their tents upon the mountain all night, and sacrifice seven lambs at sunset; the day of Pentecost; the Feast of Tabernacles, when they sojourn here in booths built of branches of the arbutus; and lastly, the great day of Atonement in autumn. They still maintain their ancient hatred against the Jews; accuse them of departing from the law, in not sacrificing the Passover, and in various other points, as well as of corrupting the ancient text; and scrupulously avoid all connection with them. They appear to be the last isolated remnant of a remarkable people, clinging now for more than two thousand years around this central spot of their

religion and history, and lingering slowly to decay, after having survived the many revolutions and convulsions, which in that long interval have swept over this unhappy land; a reed continually shaken with the wind, but bowing before the storm.

At Nablous, I met with Yakoob, or Jacob-esh-Shellabi, a well known member of the Samaritan synagogue, and the same individual, who some years ago, descended to the bottom of Jacob's Well, and by that means ascertained its depth.

A sad occurrence took place here about a year or somewhat more before my visit to Nablous. An American missionary it seems was met by a Mohammedan, who begged alms of him, and while doing so, he approached too near the gun which the Missionary carried with him, the consequence was, it accidentally went off, and shot the man, and was the occasion of his death. As it happened altogether unintentionally, no one could regret the lamentable result which ensued more than the Missionary himself. But it excited the rage of the Mohammedan population of Nablous to such a degree, that they were determined to be revenged on the Christians. They (p. 259) attacked a young man, a servant of the Missionary, and beat him most severely about the head, but by some means or other he escaped with his life, and afterwards went to reside in Jerusalem, where subsequently I saw and conversed with him on the sad affair. The Missionary himself providentially escaped, but much of the Mission property was destroyed.

The present town of Nablous is said to stand near, or on, the site of the ancient city of Sichem, or Shechem, of the Old Testament, or Sychar, as it is called in the New.... (p. 265).... **James Milnes**

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

The Author is **James Milnes**

This author may have been **James Milnes Gaskell** (19 October 1810 – 5 February 1873) was a British Conservative politician.

James Milnes-Gaskell was the only child of Benjamin Gaskell (1781-1856) of Thornes House. He was born on the 19th October 1810 and was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He was M.P. for Wenlock from 1832-1868 and first Lord of the Treasury from 1841 to 11 March 1846. In 1832 he married Mary Wynn, daughter of the Right Hon. Charles Watkyn Williams Wynn, and they had two sons and two daughters. He died at 28 Norfolk Street, Park Lane, London on 5 February 1873.