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**THE TENT AND THE KHAN:
A JOURNEY TO SINAI AND PALESTINE.**

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(p. 407).....

We had scarcely passed the last stragglers of the cavalcade ere we reached the summit of the hill, where a new and exciting prospect was unfolded to our view. Below us lay a long wide fertile valley called Wadi Miikhna, which extends towards the north far beyond the entrance of the valley in which Nablous stands. Bounding this (p. 408) wadi to the left, at a couple of hours distance, was a pile of mountains streaked with layers of chalk, famous both in the history of early Israel and of the Samaritans. It includes both Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal; but the former obstructed all view of the latter, except in so far as it formed a part of the eastern face of the pile in the far distance. A range of lower hills separates this plain from that of the Jordan on the east. Far away in the north-east rose a majestic mountain covered with snow, which sparkled brightly under the sun's rays. It was Ghebel es Sheikh, the famed Mount Hermon, henceforward to be one of the most prominent landmarks during my journeyings in Syria. The descent to Wadi Mukhna was steeper and more encumbered with stones than the road on the other side of the hill, but our sure-footed animals managed it without any accident. At 10.30 we had opened another wadi to the left, which runs towards the Mediterranean, carrying off the surplus water from Wadi Mukhna. There were two villages in sight in it, about a mile or a mile and a half distant from our path, one bearing the name of Ain Abous, and the other of Kuza; and just at the southern base of Gerizim, above our path, there was another larger than either of these called Howara. Van de Velde mentions having seen between this and the entrance to the valley of Nablous a ruin in the plain, from which it derives its name, called Ain Mukhna; but it escaped our observation, unless it were a large birket which we saw to the right, not far from Howara. On the opposite side, dotting the low eastern hills, were the villages of Beita, Shuba, Awertah, Azmut, Deir el Hatab, and Salim. We are indebted to Dr Robinson for the identification of the latter with 'Shalem, a city of Shechem,' to which Jacob came after his return from Padan-aram (Gen. xxxiii. 18); and as his grandfather Abraham also made his first sojourn in Canaan in the neighbourhood of Shechem, it is extremely probable that Wadi Mukhna is none other than 'the plain of Moreh' (Gen. xii. 6), where he pitched his tent.

Nablous is situated in a narrow but beautiful valley, which runs out of the Wadi Mukhna to the west, and is flanked by Mount Gerizim on the south, and Mount Ebal on the north. After skirting the base of Gerizim for an hour beyond Howara, the path ascends a shoulder of the hill, thus cutting off an angle at the entrance of the wadi. We had

followed this for a little way ere we perceived that it was taking us entirely away from the plain, when we retraced our steps, in order to visit Jacob's Well, which lay at the base of the promontory, among fields sown with wheat. Many of the fellahin were labouring in the fields around; and when one of our dragomen (p. 409) dashed across the green corn at a gallop, they immediately began to shout and warn us off, as they had done to the American party when they were attacked. We pulled up to learn what the matter was; and their reasonable request having been explained and carefully attended to by us, we found them, as they crowded round us at the well, perfectly civil and good-natured. It requires an effort of imagination to picture what the well was when Jesus sat upon it, and, conversing with the woman of Samaria, told her of 'the living water, of which if a man drink he shall never thirst again;' for that spurious Christianity which turns to idolatry every place in this land which has, or is supposed to have, any connection with the Saviour's history, has been busy at work here. Some granite pillars, which once belonged to a Christian church that enclosed the well, are still standing only a few yards from it, and the well itself has been vaulted over, and enclosed in a low narrow chamber below the level of the floor where an altar once stood, at which the Greeks said mass.¹ In endeavouring to look into the well, one can see no farther than to the bottom of this little chamber, and the aperture in its floor is so immediately below the one through which access can be had to it, that though the Arabs offered to take us down, not one of the party would venture. I made the attempt indeed; but when I saw the yawning hole below me, I remembered Mr Bonar's Bible, and shrunk back from a similar fate. Dr Wilson's exploit in fishing it up is remembered, and was recounted to us; and one of the bystanders announced himself as the explorer who went down in search of it. By throwing down two or three stones, and listening for the splash when they came in contact with the water, we could not only satisfy ourselves that 'the well was deep,' but also that there was much water in it. I would fain have had a draught of that water of which Jesus had asked to drink; but there was neither rope nor bucket at hand, and the thing was impossible. Thanks be to God there are no such hindrances in drawing water out of 'the wells of salvation,' for the means are always at hand for those who desire to drink of them.

This well of Jacob has been dug at the very entrance of the valley of Shechem on the southern side, and almost in a line with it at the other side is a small domed building resembling a Mohammedan Weli, which is built over the tomb of Joseph. Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians, agree in their belief that this is the tomb of the Egyptian ruler; and from its situation in the neighbourhood of the well, and in the (p. 410) parcel of ground which his father gave him, there is every probability that the tradition is correct. The ground lying between the well and this tomb at the junction of the two valleys, is the parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, and the luxuriant crops which were waving on it gave evidence of the peculiar shrewdness of his choice. We now entered the narrow wadi in which Nablous is situated, and which rises very considerably above the plain of Mukhna. About five minutes' ride brought us opposite the ruins of a small town or village, which the Samaritan priest afterwards told me his people believed to be the ancient Sychar. It is generally supposed that Shechem (the present Nablous), and Sychar, are only different names for the same locality; and entertaining that opinion Dr Robinson says, 'A very obvious question presented itself to us upon the spot,—How can it be supposed that the woman should have come from the city, now half an hour

¹ 1 Robinson's Biblical Researches, vol. iii. p. 109.

distant, with her waterpot to draw water from Jacob's well, when there are so many fountains just around the city, and she must also have] passed directly by a large one at mid distance?'—John iv. 5. The answers which he endeavours to give to this question, though ingenious, are by no means satisfactory. He supposes that she was labouring in the neighbouring fields, or that she attached a peculiar value to the water of Jacob's Well, and hence took an hour's walk for the purpose of drawing water from it. The difficulty is entirely removed if we adopt the Samaritans' belief, which, by the way, I found to be held also by our consular agent, that this ruined place in the immediate vicinity of the well is Sychar, a totally different locality from Shechem. From this village she might either go westward to the fountain of El Defna, which is a little above the ruins, or to the well below it, for the purpose of drawing water; and as they are nearly equidistant, it is easy to understand why she should give the preference to the Patriarch's well. Considering that Shechem is fully half an hour distant from this well, the ruined village seems best to agree with the Gospel narrative, which describes it as 'near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.'—John iv. 5. Besides, the account of her leaving her waterpot and rushing into the city favours the idea that it was close at hand, for she could scarce expect to find the traveller still there when she returned from Shechem after an absence of more than an hour.

As we proceeded up the valley we passed Ain el Defna, the fountain referred to above, from which copious rills of water were flowing clown towards El Mukhna. We also passed, in a small recess among (p. 411) the roots of Mount Gerizim, a Mohammedan Weli over the tomb of one of their saints, called Amud, and presently entered a grove of venerable olive trees, through the branches of which we caught the first view of the minarets of Nablous. Though the mountains on either side were bare and craggy, the rich vegetation, the flowing streams, and the beautiful groves and gardens which surround the town, formed a most delightful contrast to the bare and barren aspect which hill and dale alike present in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. It was as if one had passed suddenly from the lifeless neglected abode of a hermit to the smiling luxuriance of a royal domain. Instead of entering by the eastern gate, we passed round the northern wall, by the foot of Mount Ebal, enjoying a view of gardens filled with palms and orange trees, figs, and almonds; the latter in full bloom. Having made a complete circuit of the walls, and crossed a stream rushing with impetuosity towards the west, we at last came to our camping ground in another grove of olives just outside the western gate of the town. The cactus, or prickly pear, grows in great abundance along the base of Mount Ebal, the bare face of which is full of ancient tombs; while higher up it is altogether devoid of vegetation, which some people of lively imagination ascribe to its being the mountain from which the curses of the law were read; but Gerizim, which is the mountain of blessing, is very nearly as bare. Its rugged cliffs absolutely overhang a considerable portion of the town, and were an earthquake shock to loosen them, there would be fearful destruction both of life and property.

Nablous is one of the few places in Palestine which has retained the name imposed upon it by the Roman conquerors of the country, instead of its ancient name. There cannot be any doubt that this is the Shechem of the time of Abraham, Jacob, and Joshua; but shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem it had imposed upon it the name of Neapolis, a corruption of which is easily traced in its modern appellation. Though the inhabitants are a most fanatical race, and uttered many a curse against us as we wandered through the streets, it is the only thriving town in the southern part of Syria. There was an

air of independence and substantiality about the citizens, and a noise and stir from the number of forges at work, that did one good after the listless, desolate condition of Jerusalem. Our patience, however, was somewhat tried by being followed by groups of urchins, who spit upon us and stoned us, bestowing the while such insulting epithets as *Nazrane, Kelb*, etc. Our first visit was to the house of Ahoudi Assam, the British Consular agent, to whom, as well as to the Protestant (p. 412) schoolmaster, Bishop Gobat had given me letters of introduction. Ahoudi was absent at his office; and while his wife sent to summon him, we were shown into the guest chamber, a nice clean room opening upon a terrace, the only furniture in which was a small cupboard in a corner, containing a quantity of English medicines. The parapet to the terrace was latticed with open brickwork, through which there was a view of the roofs of the town, and of the rugged cliffs of Gerizim. Though not very interesting, we preferred occupying ourselves with a survey of these to sitting in the cold unfurnished apartment. The house adjoining belonged to a Mohammedan, and in the courtyard the women of the hareem were moving about unveiled, engaged in various domestic duties. So much we had observed at the first glance; but as there was nothing either in the dames themselves or in their employments to excite any interest, none of the party bestowed another thought upon them. Presently, however, we heard shouting, scolding, and an indescribable shrill vibrating cry, which the Mohammedan women make by putting the tongue to the back of the palate, which had the effect of rousing all the neighbours. Looking down with curiosity to find out the cause of alarm, we found by their gesticulations that it was caused by our presence, and the Sitti Assam came hurriedly on the terrace entreating us to withdraw, as they felt aggrieved at Franks daring to look into the interior of their mansion. The request was instantly complied with, and the master of the house soon made his appearance. He kindly pressed us to take up our abode with him; but the invitation was declined, as we all had our own canvass establishments outside the gate, and after the disturbance we had unconsciously raised, we felt we should enjoy more liberty in them. After a short conversation, during which we learned from him that the population of the town was reckoned at about 8000 souls, of which there were above 400 Greek Christians, 150 Jews, 150 Samaritans, and 40 Protestants, he conducted us up back streets and through arched alleys to the Samaritan synagogue.

It is simply a hall in the house of the priest, who met us at the door along with his father, a frail old man, who had resigned the priesthood to his son some years before. We were not required to put off our boots before entering, as travellers used to be, but the door of the synagogue was at once thrown open, and we were invited to enter. It is a plain apartment without any ornament. The present priest is a tall and remarkably handsome man, apparently about forty years of age, but the furtive glance of his eye imparted an air of cunning to his otherwise pleasant features. We found both (p. 413) him and his father very communicative. In answer to a question, he informed us that the number of Samaritans in Nablous was 150 souls; that there were none of them to be found in the neighbouring villages; and that they knew of none of their race existing anywhere else in the world save in that city. I then asked some information respecting their observance of the Passover, which Mr Finn told me he had witnessed the previous year. The priest said that they observed the Passover annually upon Mount Gerizim, according as it was first instituted by Moses in the land of Egypt, and that they were obliged to pay every year a large sum to the Governor of Nablous for permission to do so. He told us that it wanted only 22 days to the time when it would be observed, and asked if we should be at

Nablous about that time, as we might then see all their ceremonial. Being answered in the negative, the priest told us that they sacrificed seven lambs, as that was sufficient for the number of their families; that they separated the victims from the flock four days before they were to be slain ; and that after he had killed them, they were roasted, and eaten by the people standing, as God at first commanded. They reject all the Jewish Scriptures, with the exception of the Pentateuch. They showed us several of their manuscripts: among the rest, one of considerable antiquity, which they wished to palm upon us as the celebrated copy of the Law said to have been written by Abishua, the son of Phinehas. As I was familiar with its appearance from the minute description which Dr Wilson had given of it, I told the priest he was deceiving us, because I knew it was covered with green silk, and begged he would produce it. He seemed somewhat surprised that a stranger should be able thus to describe it, and after a little hesitation the old man went to the Torah and produced the real Simon Pure. The writing is beautifully executed, and though the parchment in some places is much decayed, it is in a marvellous state of preservation, if it be, as represented, upwards of 3000 years old. At parting, the old man was not above asking a backshish for himself, though we had bestowed a handsome one on his son. As the representatives of a race from beyond the Euphrates and from the north of Syria, whom Shalmaneser introduced into the land of Israel after its conquest, whose religion—originally a cross between corrupt Judaism and Pagan idolatry—continued a nondescript even in our Lord's day (2 Kings xvii. 25-33, with John iv. 22), and who, though reduced to a mere handful, still retain a footing in the land where they were planted as colonists about 2600 years ago, we looked upon these Samaritans with the deepest interest ; and I could not but (p. 414) breathe a prayer that God would raise up another Philip to spread joy among them once more, by the preaching of the glad tidings of salvation.

After leaving their synagogue we wandered through the streets, in the middle of each of which there was (rare sight in Palestine) a stream of clear running water. The bazaars, though not very extensive, were well stocked; and besides the manufacture of soap and working in iron, the dyeing trade seems to give occupation to a considerable number of the inhabitants. In the course of our promenade through the town we came to a handsome edifice, now used as a mosque, but which a single glance discovers to have been originally a Christian church. Admission was of course out of the question with so fanatical a population; but Mr Assam told us there is a stone in the court-yard, on which all the Christians resident in Nablous in 1821 were massacred, in retaliation for the war of independence which was being then waged in Greece against the power of Turkey. I have already mentioned the insults we met with from the children, and but for the presence of Mr Assam, who accompanied us through the city, it is not improbable that some of the adults might have joined them. It was the only place in all Syria where we met with such treatment. For Mr Assam's kind attention we were indebted to the letter I had brought him from Jerusalem ; and in the evening he called to request a letter to the bishop in return, certifying that he had showed us every attention, which we gave him most willingly. The schoolmaster whom the bishop had stationed at Nablous was also an interesting man. He called on me in the evening, and gave me some account of his school—which had been dismissed before our arrival—and of the meetings he had with the adults for reading the Scriptures and prayer. I believe that since I was there a missionary has been stationed in Nablous.

March 22.—Our tents were surrounded this morning, as they had been the day before, by lepers and sturdy beggars, who gave us great annoyance; but having seen our baggage mules despatched by the shortest way towards Saniir, we started at seven o'clock for Subastiyeh, the ancient Samaria, which lies to the north-west of Nablous. For half an hour our path continued down the rich valley in which Nablous is situated, among orchards and olive groves, by the side of a roaring stream, on which two or three mills have been erected. We then struck across the hills which form the northern boundary of the wadi, and in about an hour after leaving, were abreast of the village of Zawatah, which lay higher up the hill, a little to the right of our (p. 415) path. At the same time we had an extensive view of the Valley of Nablous and the hills on the southern side of it, situated on which, in the midst of olive groves, were the villages of Rafidiah, Beit Iba, and Beit Uzin. There is a charm about this valley from its trees and beautiful verdure, which T experienced nowhere else in the course of my journey, except on the banks of the Barada and in the immediate neighbourhood of Damascus. Shortly after passing Zawatah we descended into another deep wadi, and toiled up a still higher hill on the opposite side; but there were no villages in sight to break the monotony of the scene. From the summit of this second range of hills we looked down into the 'fat valley' of Samaria. Two hours after leaving Nablous we came to a beautiful fountain near the bottom of the valley, called Ain Nakurah, round which a number of women were gathered drawing water with their earthenware pots, which in this part of the country seem to have superseded the use of waterskins. A village of the same name stood on the hill to the left of our path.

The hill on which Subastiyeh stands was now full in view in the middle of the valley, with its miserable village and a ruin of large dimensions on its eastern side. It is isolated from all the surrounding hills; but the spurs of those to the east approach much nearer to it than the rest, and riding along them till opposite the village, we then turned west, and passing a fountain in the bottom of the valley, and one or two broken columns, began the ascent, which is very steep. The hill seems exceedingly fertile, is terraced to the very summit, and thickly planted with olive trees. The narrow road by which we scrambled up is hemmed in by steep embankments on both sides, composed of broken pillars, capitals, and large stones, which have been rolled down the hill, and have found their respective places without much of man's help. I have no doubt the terraces which encompass the hill have been formed in the same manner, for in this way alone can one account for the total absence of *debris* in the shape of masses of overthrown stones and foundations of edifices on the surface. The present state of the hill of Samaria is a striking fulfilment of the Prophet Micah's prediction:—'Therefore will I make Samaria as a 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.'—Micah i. 6. When I got to my tent in the evening, I read over Dr Keith's comments on the prophecies concerning Samaria, and admired greatly the minuteness and truthfulness of his illustrations. The hill rises about 400 feet above the level of the valley, and is (p. 416)

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