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*The Alps of Arabia:*  
*Travels in Egypt, Sinai, Arabia and the Holy Land*  
By **William Charles Maughan**  
Henry S. King & Co.  
65 Cornhill & 12 Paternoster Row, London  
1873

(p. 290)...

From this point we rode along the cornfields in the hollow of the valley until we rejoined the main road to Nablous. For a while it winds through a green plain surrounded with dark hills, and we observed several small hamlets on the hill-sides, with the ruins of one or two *khans*, or castles. The valley, whose narrow course we now followed, has a cultivated, fertile look, and we stopped for lunch in the midst of very rich cornfields, near the village of Hawara. Near this we had crossed over a rocky ridge in the hills, from the summit of which we gained a most extensive view. The plain is seen extending for some miles in front, one rich billowy green expanse, with clumps of fine old olive trees scattered over its surface. A range of low hills bound the plain on the right, on the left is the rugged form of Mount Gerizim where stood the sanctuary of the Samaritans, with Mount Ebal beyond, and far away to the distant north is seen the dome-like, snow-clad summit of Hermon. This is the fertile plain of Shechem, and there is a richness and soft beauty about it which is in striking contrast with the sterility and barrenness of Judaea.

We determined to ascend to the summit of Mount Gerizim before entering Nablous, so hired a guide from Hawara, who took us by a pathway, leading from the main road, a short distance from the village. Travellers almost invariably ascend the mountain from Nablous, but ours was a more expeditious way, and an easy enough ascent. After a pretty steep climb, we stood on the highest point, close to the extensive ruins of the Samaritan temple. The view is unquestionably very fine. A confused mass of dark mountains, stretching all along the eastern side of the Jordan valley until they join on to the peaks around Hermon, whose snowy summit towers above all, bounds one side of the picture. On the other side the blue Mediterranean is seen, with a broad belt of sand intervening between the green plain of Sharon and the sea. Round about us are the mountains of Ephraim, and the fertile plain of Shechem at the base of Gerizim. On the opposite side of the valley in which Nablous is situated, the rugged, barren form of Mount Ebal, the 'Mount of Cursings,' arises.

The ruins of the Samaritan temple occupy an extensive (p. 291) portion of ground, and took us some time to examine. A large rectangular enclosure first claims attention, 255 feet by 240 feet, surrounded by walls nearly 6 feet thick and 12 feet high in some parts. The remains of square towers are to be seen at the corners, upon one of which a white Mohammedan mosque has been erected. The ruins of an octagonal building, said by Captain Wilson, who explored the ruins some years ago, to be the church of the Virgin, are seen near the centre of the large enclosure. This building probably is a part of the fortress erected on Mount Gerizim by the Emperor Justinian to protect the Christian church from the attacks of the Samaritans, and there are traces of a solid platform of massive stones below, which may once have supported the Samaritan temple. There is another large enclosure near this, divided into three compartments, with massive walls and flanking towers, seemingly of Roman construction. The line of great

slabs, which the Samaritans hold to be the twelve stones of the tribes brought up by Joshua from the Jordan, are seen at the base of the wall of the larger enclosure. This, however, is extremely doubtful, and in all probability these massive stones were the foundation of the Roman fortress. To the south is the Samaritan 'Holy of Holies,' a long sloping bare rock, with a deep pit at its end. To this all devout Samaritans turn in prayer, and they take off their shoes as they approach this spot. Here, according to their tradition, Abraham was about to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice; here he met Melchisedec; Jacob had his heavenly vision on this place; and on it the Ark was set up.

(p. 292) We visited the scene of the Samaritan feast of the Passover, to the east of the ruins, a mere trench built of rough stones, with a circular pit in which the lambs are roasted. The whole community, now 134 in number, assemble and encamp near this spot. Towards sunset, a few men in white surplises recite a form of prayer near the pit, after which they proceed to make the fire ready for roasting the lambs. After a while they are joined by all the full-grown men, who also take part in the prostrations and prayers which continue till near sunset. At the moment of sunset, the priest repeats rapidly the words of the 12th chapter of Exodus, in which the assembly of Israel are directed to kill the passover. The lambs are killed while the priest is speaking, and after being carefully skinned and cleaned, their bodies are placed in the oven formed in the pit, and kept till thoroughly roasted. When all is ready, the covering of the pit is opened up, and the bodies of the sheep drawn out one by one, and placed on brown mats previously prepared for their reception. They are taken to the trench and laid out in line between the two files of the Samaritans, who now have shoes on their feet and staves in their hands, as directed in the sacred ordinance. After a further short recitation of prayers, they suddenly all seat themselves on the ground, and commence to eat silently and rapidly, until the whole is consumed.

The origin of the Samaritans is narrated in the Second Book of Kings. The colonists, who had been placed by the Assyrians in the cities of Canaan when Israel was carried away into captivity, attributed the pest of wild animals with (p. 293) which they were infested to their ignorance of the worship of the gods of the land. They petitioned for Jewish priests to instruct them, and some strangers did come who professed to teach the Mosaic law, but in after times the true Jews of Jerusalem utterly refused to hold any communion with these impious dwellers in Samaria, who had embraced a mutilated creed. The Samaritans therefore resolved to erect a sanctuary of their own upon Mount Gerizim, and this was done under the supervision of their high priest Manasseh, who had married a daughter of Sanballat, to the great displeasure of Nehemiah. He brought with him a copy of the law of Moses, no doubt the original of the copy of the Pentateuch which the Samaritans boast is of such immense antiquity. This was about the year 420 B.C., and from this date may be considered the rise of Shechem as the capital of the Samaritan sect. The Jews always had a bitter hatred to the Samaritans, and they attacked their temple with an army under John Hyrcanus, and completely destroyed it.

During the reign of Vespasian, Shechem was rebuilt and called 'Neapolis,' which has been gradually changed into Nablous. The city surrendered to the Moslem invaders of Syria, and suffered considerably during the wars between them and the Crusaders. Its Samaritan inhabitants dwell here, scarcely attracting the most cursory notice from travellers or historians, and their literature is of the scantiest description. The copy of the Pentateuch, a collection of hymns, a manuscript professing to be the Book of Joshua, a few commentaries on the Law, and a history of their (p. 394) nation from the Exodus to Mahomet, are all they possess, according to Porter. He gives a minute description of the celebrated copy of the Pentateuch, which is a roll 15 inches wide, and from 20 to 30 yards long, made of coarse parchment, very old and

stained in appearance. It is rolled upon two rods, and the writing is in transverse columns, each column 13 inches long by 7 wide, and containing 70 lines. There are 110 columns in all; the characters are of the old Samaritan type, and many parts bear traces of correction or change. Porter judges from the vellum and character of the writing that the sixth or seventh century of the Christian era is about the date it was written. The Samaritans declare it was written by Abishua, the son of Phinehas, 3,500 years ago. They hold their venerable Pentateuch to be the divine standard of faith and morality. They believe in one God and in one law-giver and prophet, Moses; also in the advent of a Messiah, who is, however, to be merely a human being. The resurrection of the body and a belief in future rewards and punishment is held by them, and they observe all the great feasts enjoined in the Pentateuch. Their Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday, and on Saturday they have three services of worship in the synagogue.

We now descended to the city, after inspecting the extensive ruins on the summit of Mount Gerizim, but before entering it, turned aside to see one of the most deeply interesting spots in Palestine. This is Jacob's Well, at the entrance of the valley of Shechem, and where Our Lord held that remarkable discourse with the woman of Samaria which (p. 295) is narrated in the 4th chapter of St. John's Gospel. There are several ruined buildings about the well, which is covered over with a vaulted chamber, in the floor of which the mouth of the well is seen. This is undoubtedly the spot where Our Saviour sat and talked with the woman on his journey from Judaea, for here was the 'deep' well at the base of Gerizim, to which the woman evidently referred when she said, 'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.' This, then, is the parcel of ground that Jacob bought of Hamor, the father of Shechem, where he erected his altar and sank a well. The vaulted chamber is part of a Christian church, built in the fourth century over this sacred spot, and which subsequently became a ruin. There is an air of complete solitude and seclusion from the haunts of men about the scene that gives it an especial charm, for here you can calmly meditate upon the gracious words Our Lord spoke to that sinful woman.

The yellow rays of the declining sun lit up the grey mouldering walls of this ancient city as we slowly rode into it through an old gateway. There appeared to be some festival, or *fantasia* as it is called, going on, for a great number of the inhabitants were amusing themselves under the shade of some old olive-trees at the foot of Gerizim. The women and children were mostly clad in white garments, and there were various games and amusements for the children, whose cries of delight and merriment were heard from afar. The town itself struck us as being very ancient, with its arched doorways and smooth stone fronts to the houses, some of them with fragments of columns and capitals (p. 296) built into the walls. The bazaars were crowded gloomy alleys full of a busy, fierce-looking population, who hardly took the trouble to glance up at us as we passed along. They have a bad character for turbulence and lawlessness, and are particularly hostile to strangers. Our camp was pitched on a plateau of land, on the Samaria side of the city, near a running stream, surrounded with fine old trees. The present city stands on the right side of Neapolis and of the original city of Sychar, just above the watershed of the valley. The stream near which our tents were pitched descends from Mount Gerizim, and after passing through the city, flows in a westerly course along the fertile valley towards Samaria. This valley is filled with a succession of beautiful gardens, in which may be seen the olive, the fig, the bright green walnut, the pomegranate with its rich crimson flower, the thorn, terebinth and sycamore trees, whose combined verdure give to Nablous its peculiar charm of situation.

Accompanied by a guide, we set off to visit the Samaritan synagogue, a modern building with rough whitewashed walls, their ancient one having long ago been taken by the Moslems. It is approached through dirty tortuous streets, and the building itself has very dark narrow entrances and passages. The interior of the synagogue is mean-looking, but you are not

permitted to enter. The rabbi brought out, and placed on a chair near the door for us to look at, the ancient copy of the Pentateuch, which is an old-looking roll of vellum, with a richly-inlaid metal case, the whole enveloped in a (p. 297) thick silk covering, also finely embossed and decorated. We were only allowed a very hurried glance at the sacred roll, and were then taken by our portly and consequential Samaritan guide to the roof of his house, from which a good view of the town is obtained.

After dinner that day we were favoured with a visit from the Rev. Mr. El Karey, of the Palestine Christian Union Mission, an agreeable, chatty young Syrian, who has been here for seven or eight years. He seems to have rather uphill work of it at Nablous, and has but a poor opinion of the Samaritans. His work is amongst the Moslem population, and he has about thirty resident converts, though sometimes nearly a hundred persons assemble when he preaches. He says that the Samaritans are annually diminishing in number, and that there is great fighting amongst the young men for brides, owing to the limited numbers available. We were rather disenchanted by his assuring us that the copy of the Pentateuch we saw was not the veritable old one, which they dare not show to strangers unless a large sum of money was paid. In the original, it seems, they have altered the name of the mountain of worship, substituting Gerizim in its place. Our reverend guest enjoyed a glass of claret and a cigar, and sent us a large melon as a present after his departure.

Next morning we were off by seven o'clock, and followed the valley for some distance, after which we struck up the hill-side and came down upon a beautifully-wooded glen, at the foot of the heights on which Samaria stands. Passed several old villages on both sides of our track, all of them (p. 298) characterised by those curious square buildings, and by nine o'clock we mounted the steep ascent to the ancient and celebrated city of Samaria. It is placed on a commanding situation, with a lofty range of hills behind, and the small plain of Samaria at its foot, which opens out again on to the great plain of Sharon. Two other ranges of hills encircle the plain of Samaria, so that the city is almost surrounded by mountains. The ground slopes away on all sides from the city, and valley, plain, and mountain-side are alike covered with cultivated fields and olive-groves.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

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William Charles Maughan (1836-1914) Edinburgh, Scotland.

He left Jerusalem headed north on April 3, 1872.

He visited with Rev. Mr. El Karey

He traveled with a Mr. Sim

Had dinner with a Mrs. Green and the British consul.

He and Mr. Ashton met the Bishop of Jerusalem, Dr. Gobat, who helped support the Samaritan school in Nablous.