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The Old World in its New Face:
Impressions of Europe in 1867-1868,
By **Henry Whitney Bellows**
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(p. 318) Sichem to Nazareth.

March 14.

(p. 319)

The Romans called Sichem Neapolis when they overran Palestine; hence the modern name Nablous. Struggles between the early Christians and the Samaritans were common and bitter. In 487 the Samaritans rose against the Christians, and the Christians drove them from Mount Gerizim and built there a church in honor of the Virgin, which Justinian surrounded with a fortress to protect it. Since then Sichem and Gerizim have been at one time in Moslem, at another in Crusading hands; but the sect of the Samaritans has never quite ceased to exist, and has a few disciples here to-day, men, women, children, all told, only one hundred and thirty-five, all of that name in the world! The Samaritans receive the Pentateuch, of which they claim to possess the only authentic copy. They sacrifice the Paschal Lamb upon Mount Gerizim—a privilege which Moslem malice or bigotry interrupted for twenty-five years at the beginning of this century. They believe in the resurrection, but only for the just. They await the coming of a prophet who will restore (p. 320) them their Temple and worship on Gerizim. The Samaritans at Nablous have always been obstinate and troublesome to the government they were under. The modern town is comparatively flourishing for a Syrian town, but in spite of its pleasant situation contains little of general interest, except the Church of the Resurrection and the Samaritan synagogue. There is little left of the church, the site of which is now occupied by a mosque. The Samaritan Pentateuch, the only valuable possession of the synagogue, is pieced and patched somewhat, and is grimed with use, particularly that central part of it which is displayed to visitors. It is of course on rollers, and possesses the air and no doubt the reality of great antiquity. What is to become of it when the small handful of people now owning it die out, as they certainly will do in a hundred years, probably in much less? They recognize the certainty of it themselves. Their chief man, Mr. El Shellaby, who accompanied us to Mount Gerizim to point out the genuine points of interest to himself and his people, distinctly recognized and acknowledged that the sect was in its death-throes. He had been in England fifteen years ago, and had seen all the principal scholars who have visited the Holy Land for the last twenty years. He seemed familiar with them and their opinions. He said that Bishop Bloomfield had offered the synagogue, through him, a thousand pounds for the Codex, but he had told him it was not to be bought. I think the time has come when it might be bought, and that it ought to be secured in the interests of the text of the Pentateuch before it becomes too late. Accident

or caprice might easily destroy it in this violent country, where Moslem jealousy and vindictiveness are so rife. The manuscript is clearly worth £5,000 to any great European library, and, with proper agents, I think that amount would probably secure it in a few years, if not at once. I regret to say that although some of (p. 321) *Ascent of Gerizim*. our party and of my own family saw the manuscript, I did not. I had to choose between a visit to Mount Gerizim or a visit to the synagogue, having only two hours to spare early this morning before starting for our heavy ride—considering the roads—to Djenin.

The ascent of Gerizim is very precipitous, and not safe on horseback. There is a mile of tolerable road after making two-thirds of the height, which we found horses convenient in passing over with the least loss of time. We led our horses up and down, and should have left them at the camp, if we had known the severity of the angle at which the path ascends. One hour's walking took us to the very top. A quarter of a mile before reaching the summit we found three tents pitched near what proved to be the spot where the Paschal Lamb is yearly sacrificed. The Samaritans or their leaders, it seems, pass the season of the Passover in camp on this spot. The stone on which the lamb is killed and cooked, and the places where it is eaten and the remnants then burned, were all shown to us. They are not very old in appearance, nor in good repair, nor is there any dignity about the arrangements. A small piece of earth, two rods square perhaps, just near the stone of offering, the Samaritans call their church- It is as vacant as an unowned acre of prairie land. On the top of Gerizim, and just on the verge of the mountain, as it descends steeply to the noble valley of Makhnah, containing Jacob's well and Joseph's tomb, is a gently inclined surface of rock, the natural bed, which, unfenced and in a complete state of nature, and about 20 feet square, Mr. El Shellaby pointed out as "the Holy of Holies" of the Samaritans—once, I suppose, within their Temple, and occupying the same relative importance in it as the summit of Mount Moriah in the Mosque of Omar. A few rods to the south, overhanging the brink, is the stone which Samari- (p. 322) tan tradition hands down as the place where Abraham offered up Isaac. Many learned men, and Dr. Stanley among them, favor the idea that Gerizim was the place of the offering.

The view from this spot is of unsurpassed interest. Here, between these two summits, Ebal and Gerizim, the blessings and curses of the Law were read to the assembled people of Israel. Below, in full view, are Jacob's well and Joseph's tomb. Sichem, so rich in sacred memories, nestles in between the feet of two mountains, with her palms and figs and olives and lemons, a place of beauty such as Palestine can not repeat. The rich broad meadow lies in spring greenness, running up far to the north, where Hermon's glorious summit, magnificently white, seems to form the very pivot of the Holy Land. The mounts of Benjamin and of Ephraim lie across the valley. Behind, to the west, is the broad Mediterranean, with its sands glistening, and Jaffa visible on the coast, with the plain of Sharon opening through the vistas of the Samaritan hills.

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

Henry Whitney Bellows visited the Samaritans in Nablus on March 14, 1868