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(p. 952) The Well Between Two Mountains.
BY ARTHUR C. KEMPTON.

.....Mount Gerizim.

It is an historic mount. Beneath its shadow Abraham first halted when he came from Ur of the Chaldees and there beneath the terebinths he built the first altar which the Holy Land had known, and worshiped God where naught but idols had been adored before. Moreover, some learned scholars would convince us that it was here and not at Jerusalem that Abraham met Melchizedek, the mysterious high priest; that upon this mount it was that he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac; and that upon this smooth sheet of rock at the top of Mount Gerizim the first temple was built to Jehovah.

Accompanied by an Arab guide two of us urged our reluctant horses up this steep and rocky mountain-side, and after an hour's hard climb reached the top. Spread before us was one of the most beautiful views in Palestine: Mountain and plain and fertile valley, fields of as many colors as Joseph's coat, Joseph's tomb, and Jacob's well, and the city of Shechem, all adding to the grandeur of the scene; while just across the vale in which Shechem lies is Mount Ebal, its bald head rising even above Gerizim. Bible in hand we recalled the history of the mount, reading how Jotham "went and stood upon the top of Mount Gerizim and lifted up his voice" rebuking the people of Shechem for their faithlessness in his beautiful parable of the trees which "went forth on a time to anoint a king over them." Finally they chose the bramble out of which came fire that destroyed the other trees. And when the fearless prophet shouted in their ears this parable foretelling their ruin, he "ran away and fled."

Several lofty cliffs of Gerizim literally overhang the city of Shechem and from any of these the prophet's voice might have been heard. Even, at the present time, the public crier of the villages of Lebanon resorts to just such places. "In the stillness of the evening, after the people have returned home from their distant fields, he ascends the mountain-side above the place, and there 'lifts up his voice and cries,' as Jotham did; and he gives forth his proclamation with such distinctness that all can hear and understand. Indeed, the people of these mountain countries are able, from long practice, so to pitch their voice as to be heard distinctly at distances almost incredible." So Jotham stood upon these cliffs and spake his warning.

Here on the slopes of Mounts Ebal and Gerizim occurred the most august religious assembly in the history of mankind. Soon after the Israelites came into the Holy Land with their thousands and tens of thousands, they were led by Joshua into this fertile valley, past Jacob's well, to the narrow vale between these mountains. While the ark of

the covenant of the Lord supported by the priests stood in the valley, the people divided, some going to the slopes of one mount and some to the slopes of the other, filling those two great natural amphitheaters, which may still be seen as though made by the hand of God for that day of solemn worship. Then Joshua "read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings," while the people on the one mount shouted the cursings after him, and the people on the other mount repeated the blessings. As we stood there upon Gerizim that night, we imagined the hosts of Israel gathered thus. The mountains are so close together "that they form a natural sounding-board." I shouted to hear the responsive echoes, and fancied how impressive it must have been when the loud-voiced Levites proclaimed from the cliffs of Ebal, "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven image," and then the tremendous "Amen" ten times louder, swelling from the lips of all the people, echoed from mount to mount and far out across the plain. It was the greatest religious assembly that the world has ever seen.

To this mountain Joshua came, late in life, summoning the ten tribes to appear before him, as though the very presence of those landmarks would remind them of the vows they had taken years before; vows, alas, which were so soon forgotten. Here the aged man of God stood before them and his clear voice rang out, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; * * * but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Then followed a grand consecration meeting in which the people pledged themselves again to Jehovah and his worship. And Joshua took down their vows and had them engraven upon a great stone "and set it up there under an oak which is by the sanctuary of the Lord." Then this aged servant died and they buried him in Mount Ephraim.

The Samaritans.

But alas for human constancy; both these solemn vows made here at Gerizim were forgotten. Israel turned from Jehovah after other gods, and was bitterly punished for her sin. The king of Assyria came down upon them, conquered them, and carried off the ten tribes into captivity. In order to repopulate their devastated land, he brought people from five different nations and "placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel." From the mixed blood of these people, mixed again by the blood of the Jews who had escaped exile, there sprang the Samaritan race. Originally idolaters they secured a Jewish priest to instruct them in the worship of Jehovah, the result being a mixed religion. They "feared the Lord," we are told, and "served their graven images." When the Israelites returned and began to build the temple at Jerusalem, these Samaritans volunteered to help them; but their generous offer was rejected by the haughty Jews, and that was the beginning of a strife that has continued to this day. The Samaritans erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. That stately temple was razed to the ground in the war of the Maccabees more than a century before Christ was born; so as Christ sat beside the well, an altar built upon these ruins was all that Gerizim could boast. We dismounted from our horses and rambled among the ruins of that ancient temple; and as we did so the words of the Samaritan would keep ringing in our memories: "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

The only Samaritans in the world to-day are to be found in Shechem, the little city between these mountains, and they are but a handful. Refusing to marry outside their own number, they have gradually died out until only about a hundred of them are left, and soon even they will be gone. "The oldest and smallest sect in the world," they still worship in their humble sanctuary at the foot of the mount upon which the temple of their

fathers stood. We visited their little synagogue and saw their venerable high priest. We had to remove our shoes before entering and to observe the greatest reverence. Here we saw what is perhaps the most ancient manuscript of the Bible in the world, known to scores as the Samaritan Pentateuch, and claimed by the Samaritans to have been written by the grandson of Aaron. This sacred roll is certainly "yellow enough to come out of the ark." It is kept in a silver case engraved with scenes and figures of the temple. The roll itself is wrapped in a cloth of crimson satin and is regarded with such reverence that when it is brought forth the Samaritans cast themselves upon their faces before it. The yellowish brown parchment is much discolored by use and is undoubtedly very old. When the Samaritans have all died it is to become the property of the British Museum.
Janesville, Wis.

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