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Travels in the Three Great Empires of Austria, Russia, and Turkey

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(p. 383)....

To the student of Scripture history, the site of ancient Samaria is fraught with interesting associations. Soon after the first city was built by Omri, B.C. 925,¹ it was besieged by Benhadad, whose army was twice discomfited and given into the hand of Ahab king of Samaria.² On the third occasion, after the death of Ahab, the siege was prosecuted with such rigor by the relentless Benhadad that the distress was never equalled, before or after, except in the days of Titus in the sister capital of Jerusalem; for "an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver."³ Then, too, was fulfilled in Israel the prophecy of Moses which was subsequently accomplished in Judah, "the tender and delicate woman, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye (p. 384) ANCIENT SAMARIA. shall be evil towards her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates;"⁴ for it was in the siege and straitness of this war that one woman proposed to another to give her son that they might eat him one day, offering her own for the morrow's meal; and she "boiled" her "son and did eat him."⁵ Nor did the miseries of Samaria end here; it was successively besieged, and more or less depopulated, by Shalmaneser, Sennacherib, and Esarhaddon, till the final removal of its remnant of Israelites into Assyria, and the establishment of a heathen colony from whom sprang the Samaritans.

Though the occupation of Samaria by a class of idolaters who hated the Jews was calculated to keep the inhabitants in ignorance of the great truths which the preaching of the Christian dispensation revealed, yet we have evidence that the gospel was preached to them at a very early period; for, not to mention the woman of Sychar who has, not inaptly, been regarded as one of the first teachers of Christianity, we read that, within two years of our Lord's crucifixion, "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and (p. 385) ARAB TRAITS. preached Christ unto them." Even in that day, it appears that the people, though professing to observe the law, had been addicted to sorcery, following after

¹ 1 Kings xvi. 24.

² 1 Kings xx. 21

³ 2 Kings vi. 25.

⁴ Deut. xxviii. 56, 57.

⁵ 2 Kings vi. 28, 29.

Simon Magus and regarding him as "the great power of God;" "but when they believed Philip, they were baptized, both men and women."⁶

The villages in this neighbourhood are numerous. One of them is called *TUvrtxapti* (Pentekome), and probably belonged to a district designated the five villages, as Decapolis is known to have been the appellation of another containing ten cities. While we were inspecting the church of Sebaste, the natives examined, with Arab curiosity, everything about our persons. The women so far forgot themselves as to throng round us with uncovered faces, and the men took hold of my watch-chain and other articles, scrutinizing minutely and then showing them to the women. One of the crowd asked if many Franks would come to see these ruins. My companion answered in jest, "So many that, if each were to take a stone, there would be none left." "The more the better," he replied. This is a specimen of the feeling which pervades the mass of Syrians, whose hatred to their government has been converted by the late (p. 386) NABLOOS, OR SYCHAR. conscriptions into open animosity, and now they long for the Franks to take them under their protection. "The country is yours," say they; "why do you not come quickly? we know you are coming, and you are welcome." Can their feelings be wondered at, if it be true, as is stated, that the pasha's conscription has recently taken ten thousand men from the mountains of Samaria alone?

Nabloos is an hour and a half from Sebaste; it is built near the site of the ancient Shechem, Sychem, or Sychar; between the mountains on which the twelve tribes stood to proclaim the blessings and the curses of Jehovah. On the south, immediately above it, rises Gerizim; and exactly opposite, the barren Ebal. Its present appellation is contracted from Neapolis, or the new city, a name which it acquired under Vespasian, by whom it was restored. It contains about ten thousand Mussulmans, five hundred Christians, eighty Samaritans and twenty Jews.

The day of our arrival at Nabloos was the festival of Courban Bairam. The women were all on a plain in front of the city, amusing themselves with swings and other bagatelles; decked out in new dresses made for the occasion, principally of scarlet, red, or pink; and the brightness of the colors rendered the scene very (p. 387) NABLOOS. picturesque and gay. The Arab females, both Moslim and Christian, are fond of what is gaudy; and, like the women of all eastern countries, they love ornaments. On the wrists and ankles they wear circular pieces of glass or metal, similar to the Indian *bangles*; and they disfigure themselves by fastening round the face strings of silver coins close to each other in a circle. It was probably on some such festive occasion as the Courban Bairam and to this very spot, that Dinah, allured by female curiosity, "went to see the daughters of the land" regaling themselves, within a quarter of an hour's walk of the "parcel of a field where" her father "had spread his tent,"⁷ when "Shechem's soul clave unto" her; and the bloody tragedy ensued which robbed Simeon and Levi of the birthright⁸ devolving to them by Reuben's instability; that birthright with which was connected the unrivalled honor of being the ancestor of the Messiah.

Among the women in the valley not a single man was to be seen. Our old guide thought that we approached too near, though we considered ourselves at a very respectful distance; and, stroking his beard deliberately, he muttered *sotta voce*, "It is a shame." We took the (p. 388) NABLOOS. hint, and retired. In the course of our ride we saw

⁶ Acts viii. 5. 10. 12.

⁷ Gen. xxxiii. 18, 19.

⁸ Gen. xxxiv, and xlix. 5—7.

outside the gates of the city several lepers with their fingers, toes, arms and legs, more or less eaten off. Nabloos, as before mentioned, is one of the three cities assigned to these pitiable objects.

While these notes were being penned a number of Greeks, apparently in great anxiety, entered the damp hovel we occupied, which afforded no accommodation whatever but the shelter of four walls: they stated that they had obtained leave to supply it with a door for the benefit of future Christian travellers, and purposed to avail themselves of the permission that very night; but an order had been received from the *cadi*, insisting that the door should be so low as to compel a man to stoop on crossing the threshold. The *rayahs* have long been obliged to submit to this indignity; but, as Franks under the government of Mohammed Ali are treated with respect, the poor Greeks hoped our intercession might be productive of good, and the object of their visit was to solicit this kind office. Accordingly, we waited on the *cadi*, who was sitting with the governor to whom we had been specially introduced by Shereef pasha; and after many difficulties raised on his part, it (p. 889) NABLOOS. was decided that *for our sakes* the Christians should be permitted to furnish their apartment with a door six feet high.

The state of the Christians here, as throughout Syria, is sadly depressed. The Greek priest waited on us like a servant, bringing the saucepan, boiling the water, and performing every menial office in co-operation with our own attendants. For such services he would have been thankful to accept the smallest remuneration; and a donation induced by regard to his sacred profession was acknowledged with gratitude painfully humble. Where such is the state of the teachers of religion, who ought to occupy a high post in every community, the condition of the laity may be inferred.

The mode of preparing leather in Nabloos is peculiar. The raw hides are stretched on the ground in a public thoroughfare under an arched way which skreens them from the weather; every passer-by necessarily walks over them, and in due time they are seasoned for use, as by tanning. Whether any of the material called *tan* be laid under them, or what anterior or subsequent process they undergo, we did not ascertain.

The bazaars are well supplied with Bedouin head-dresses and various kinds of cloth manufactured at Bagdad, Aleppo, and Damascus.
(p. 390) WELLS OF SAMARIA.

The valley in which Nabloos is situate abounds with water, and is said to be enriched by three hundred and sixty-five springs. Such a supply in so hot a country could not fail to make Sychar a favorite city of the Samaritans. It was one or more of these springs that fed the well by whose brink our Lord taught the woman of Samaria to ask for that "living water" of which "whosoever drinketh shall never thirst;"⁹ and it was, doubtless, the abundance of this necessary of life that gave a special value to the land Jacob "took out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and with his bow," and which he gave, on account of its excellence, as a token of peculiar love, to Joseph, "a portion above his brethren."¹⁰

The well, known by the name of Jacob's well, stands at the extremity of the valley of Shechem, just where it opens into a fertile plain, in the direct road to Jerusalem: it is "deep," but now dry, and partially choked with rubbish said to be the debris of a temple erected by Helena; nor is it improbable that it is, as she believed it to be, the well referred

⁹ John iv. 11. 14.

¹⁰ Gen. xlviii. 22.

to by St. John; for, First, springs supplied by mountain streams generally find their exit in a valley; Secondly, our Lord was traveling (p. 391) JACOB'S WELL. from the holy city into Galilee when he halted to refresh himself, and must necessarily have passed this way; and Thirdly, the scene of his conversation with the woman is placed near Sychar;¹¹ which, there is little doubt, stood on the hill directly above the reputed well. Thus, independently of the weight due to tradition and to the evidence supplied by the temple built over the ancient well within three centuries of the crucifixion, the site of the modern carries with it strong presumptive evidence in favor of the general opinion. But if the identity of Jacob's well be established, no doubt can remain as to the "parcel of ground;" for it contained that well, of which the patriarch "drank, himself, and his children, and his cattle:"¹² and the valley is so narrow that the paternal gift doubtless included its entire width.

Not far hence is a spot held sacred by Jews, Samaritans, Christians and Mussulmans. It is the reputed burial-place of Joseph in the ground which Jacob his father bought of the sons of Hamor,¹³ and to which the children of Israel carried his bones from their resting place in Egypt. Here too reposes all that was mortal of Eleazar the son of Aaron, and of Joshua (p. 392) SOLE REMNANT OF. "the servant of the Lord ;"¹⁴ and the sides of the mountains are full of sepulchres.

But if such recollections connect Nabloos with all that is solemn, it has an interest of a very different character from the intimate association between the ancient city and the story which first attracted our childish notice and drew our earliest regards towards sacred Scripture. It was in Shechem that Joseph's "brethren went to feed their father's flock,"¹⁵ and to Shechem that the lad was sent by Jacob when his envious brethren "conspired against him to slay him" and finally sold him to a "company of Ishmaelites from Gilead," the country situate just across the river.

The only Samaritans in the world are now at Nabloos. They are reduced to eighty persons, the little remnant of the descendants of those whom Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, brought together to Samaria from the surrounding nations to supply the place of the children of Israel who had been carried away to Babylon by Shalmaneser.

Some have regarded the Samaritans as a sect of the Jews; but that they were not so considered by our Lord seems evident from the command to his disciples, "Into any city of the (p. 393) THE SAMARITANS. Samaritans enter ye not, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;"¹⁶ and it is expressly stated in the second book of Kings,¹⁷ where their history is given in detail, that they were originally idolaters; for, to prevent the land from being utterly desolate, "the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria *instead of* the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." Moreover, in the account of the opposition offered to Nehemiah in building the wall of Jerusalem, upwards of two hundred years after, the Samaritans are classed with the Arabians and Ammonites and Ashdodites who

¹¹ John iv. 5.6.

¹² John iv. 12.

¹³ Gen. xxxiii. 19.

¹⁴ Josh. xxiv. 29—33.

¹⁵ Gen. xxxvii. 12.

¹⁶ Matt. x. 5. 6.

¹⁷ 2 Kings xvii. 24—41.

scoffingly asked, "What do these feeble Jews?" and to whom Nehemiah replied, "Ye have *no portion, nor right, nor memorial* in Jerusalem."¹⁸ It is worthy of remark that the Jews still designate them Cuthites in token of their origin from that heathen stock.

The Samaritans had not been long in possession of the capital of the kingdom of Israel before "the Lord sent lions among them" on account of their idolatries, intimation of which (p. 394) THE SAMARITANS. being conveyed to Esarhaddon, he ordered back from Babylon one of the Hebrew priests who had been carried captive, that he might teach this new colony "how they should fear the Lord." Still, they followed their own gods, only admitting Jehovah into their system of polytheism; and in this state they continued till the time of Sanballat, the Horonite, governor of Samaria, whose daughter was married to Manasseh, the son of Joiada the high-priest of Judah. He, being enraged at Manasseh's expulsion from Jerusalem on account of his marriage with his daughter, resolved to set up a new religion in opposition to that of the Jews, and to erect on mount Gerizim a rival temple. In this he was joined by many Hebrews, friends of Manasseh and similarly yoked to heathen wives; who, going over to Samaria and taking with them a copy of the law, succeeded almost entirely in reclaiming the Samaritans from their idolatries, while they stimulated the hatred already subsisting between them and the orthodox Jews. Of this rival temple Manasseh was made high-priest; and here he offered sacrifices, read the book of the law, and officiated regularly according to the rites prescribed for the priests in God's favored temple on mount Sion.
(p. 395) THE SAMARITANS.

From that time Samaria became the resort of all Jews who felt the restrictions of their ceremonial law to be irksome, and wished for a relaxation of its rigorous discipline. By their brethren at Jerusalem these were regarded as apostates; and the greater the influx of Hebrews into Samaria and the more complete the adoption by the Samaritans of the Jewish faith, always excepting the one unchangeable tenet of Judaism, that "in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship,"¹⁹ the more violent was the hostility and rancorous hate fomented between the parties. This continued to increase, till, at length, the Jews published against their rivals the bitterest anathema that could be embodied in words; "declaring the fruits and produce of their land to be as swine's flesh, excluding them from being ever received as proselytes to their religion, and debarring them from any portion in the resurrection to eternal life."²⁰ How rigidly this extreme separation was maintained is manifest from the question addressed to Christ by the woman of Samaria, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me which am a woman of Samaria?"²¹
(p. 396) THE SAMARITANS. as also from the words of the Jews themselves, who, when they wished to testify their extreme abhorrence of our Lord, said, "Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil;"²² as if (as has been observed) it were equally infamous to be a Samaritan and to have a devil.

When the number of Samaritans was so far swelled by apostate Jews that those of Hebrew origin preponderated over their brethren of pagan descent, and when the worship of other gods had entirely ceased among them, they endeavoured to forget their original

¹⁸ Nehem. iv. 2, and ii. 20

¹⁹ John iv. 20

²⁰ Prideaux's Connection; Part i. Book iv., to which the reader is referred for a more minute account of the Samaritans.

²¹ John iv. 9.

²² John viii. 48.

alliance with the heathen, and laid claim to a descent from Jacob, whom therefore they called their "father:"²³ at the same time, to gratify their spirit of hostility, they maintained that, in the person of Ephraim, their ancestor, they broke off from the common stock of Israel, and therefore ought not to be dishonored by the name of Jews. The first occasion when they boasted a connection with the Hebrews was when Alexander the Great granted certain immunities to that people and released them from the payment of tribute every seventh year. The Samaritans, desirous of sharing the advantages of their rivals, then besought the conqueror to show them similar favor, urging (p. 397) THE SAMARITANS. that they held the book of the law and did not cultivate the land on the seventh year. During the persecutions of Antiochus, on the other hand, they disclaimed all relation with the Jews; and, to please the tyrant, prayed that their temple might be dedicated to Jupiter; after which they professed themselves connected, or not, with the inhabitants of Judea, just as suited their purpose, though the Jews invariably disowned them. If any further evidence of their heathen origin were required, in addition to the testimony of history, which is abundant, it is yielded by the fact that the physiognomy of the existing little remnant of Samaritans bears no resemblance to that which characterizes Israelites of unadulterated blood.

It was with no common interest that we entered into the synagogue of these remarkable people, as a prelude to which they required that we should take off our shoes.²⁴ Their "cohen," or priest, showed us a copy of the Pentateuch on two rollers, which they maintain to be the oldest manuscript in the world, (p. 398) THE OLDEST MANUSCRIPT saying that it was written by Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. It bears marks of very great age, and is here and there patched with pieces of parchment. Some of the learned are of opinion that it is only a transcript from Ezra's copy, written again in the old Hebrew, or Phoenician, letter, out of which Ezra transcribed it into that of the Chaldeans, then first adopted and since commonly used by the Jews: others are disposed to regard it as an independent record which has been preserved ever since the days of Jeroboam, first by the ten revolting tribes, and subsequently by the Samaritans.²⁵ In either case it affords a remarkable testimony to the accurate preservation of the books of Moses during a period of two thousand three hundred years; for, as the rival sects of Christianity have acted as checks on each other to prevent the corruption of any portion of the Sacred Scriptures since the first schism in the apostolic church, so the quick-sighted jealousy of Jews and Samaritans has proved an infallible safeguard of the text of the Pentateuch since the days of their separation. In the earlier ages of society, when manuscripts were scarce and the knowledge of letters was con- (p. 399) IN THE WORLD. fined to a very few, it would have been easy for an unanimous priesthood to mutilate the inspired volume; but even suspicion itself can have no place in reference to a record of faith kept with equal veneration and care by men whose national and religious antipathies have separated them in every other respect; but who, in their agreement as to *that*, afford incontestible evidence to its genuineness. Like the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, as to which alone their manuscripts differ, they present a front of irreconcilable opposition; but their very hostility enhances the value of

²³ John iv. 12.

²⁴ The fact of the Samaritans requiring strangers to take off their shoes marks an interesting distinction between them and the Jews; as it intimates that they look on their place of assembly for worship as a temple; a light in which it is well known the Jews do not regard their synagogues.

²⁵ See Discours sur L' Histoire Universelle, par Bossuet.

their testimony, and renders them unconscious guardians of the truth of that Mosaic dispensation, a full belief in which neither party admits to be possessed by the other.

The "cohen" suffered me to purchase a small Samaritan fragment, written in the ancient character; a highly interesting memorial of a people now almost past out of existence. He also shewed us a much-esteemed copy of Walton's Polyglott, with the Hebrew, Samaritan, Chaldaic, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, and Latin versions; and the Targum of Onkelos.

Unlike the Jews, the Samaritans still boast an hereditary priesthood. The present and only "cohen" has one son, nor did we ascertain (p. 400) DIFFERENCES BETWEEN how his place would be, or whether it could be, supplied in the event of his dying without issue. There is not, perhaps, an individual in the world who can claim descent from Aaron with such semblance of probability as this man, who traces his genealogy from Manasseh the son of Joiada, the high priest of Jerusalem; and who can advance, as presumptive evidence, his tenure of a priesthood still strictly hereditary.

The points of difference between the Jews and Samaritans are threefold: First, the Samaritans receive no other part of the Old Testament but the five books of Moses; Secondly, like the ancient Sadducees and modern Karaites, they reject all traditions, adhering exclusively to the written word: and Thirdly, they hold that Gerizim, not Jerusalem, is the place which God has chosen "to put his name there."

This last point they support with the argument advanced by the woman of Samaria, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;" to substantiate which they quote the examples of Abraham²⁶ and Jacob,²⁷ who raised altars on that spot; urging that it was in consequence of its consecration by the holy patriarchs that God selected it as the mount of (p. 401) JEWS AND SAMARITANS. blessings;²⁸ and that there Joshua built the first altar erected in Canaan after the Israelites received the land of promise as that of their possession. Hence in Deuteronomy xxvii. 4, and Joshua viii. 30, wherein the command is recorded, with its fulfilment, that the altar should be built on Mount Ebal, they adopt a different reading, substituting Gerizim for Ebal; and as a sort of presumptive evidence in confirmation of this version, they urge that it was more probable that a God of mercy should delight to receive a sacrifice from a mount of blessings than from a mount of curses.²⁹

The most plausible reasoning ought to have no weight in deciding a question which affects only the fact whether this or that be the word in an original manuscript; but, were the matter to be settled by argument, it might be urged on the other side that the *mount of cursing* was the appropriate place for the *altar of propitiation*.

The Samaritans, who form the little congregation now living at Nabloos, proceed once every year in solemn procession to the top of (p. 402) SAMARITAN GENTLEMAN. Gerizim, where they offer a sacrifice on the spot on which they maintain that Joshua erected an altar, and subsequently Sanballat a temple.

We paid a visit to their chief, a man of noble person and refined manners, who holds the office of secretary to the governor of the town. His figure is tall and slight, and his

²⁶ Gen. xii. 6, 7.

²⁷ Gen. xxxiii. 20.

²⁸ Deut. xi. 29

²⁹ The Samaritans deduce an additional argument from the present nature of the two mountains; the one, Ebal, which faces the south, being parched and barren; while Gerizim, which has a northern aspect, is in their eyes always beautiful and verdant.

features are rather of the Grecian character, without any resemblance to the Jewish. He gave us much information, and treated us with all the courtesy of an European gentleman. His peculiarly elegant mode of going through the form by which a well-bred Syrian expresses his readiness to comply with the wish of a guest commanded our admiration. Description can convey a notion of the attitude assumed, but not of the grace which accompanied it. Placing his two hands on his head and slightly bowing, he intimated by two Arabic words, "Upon my head," that he imposed it on his head, or held it thenceforth as a duty dear to him as the preservation of his head, to fulfil our desires.

While the Jew is so hated and despised throughout the world that his name is everywhere "a by-word and a reproach," it is emphatically so among the Samaritans, who, however, appear to entertain no peculiar hostility (p. 403) RELIGIOUS ANTIPATHIES. to Christians : but this is consistent with the character of religious antipathies in general, which seem to gain strength as the disputed points exciting them diminish in number and importance. Where the shades of difference are scarcely perceptible, hatred between the parties is deadly, while the antipodes of the theological sphere will meet together on a friendly footing. The heathen are pitied and perhaps despised, but seldom violently hated, by those who recognise but one God. The Mohammedan and the Jew, who, adoring a God in unity, regard as an idolater the worshipper of the Holy Trinity, view that idolater with more complacency than they entertain towards each other, whose chief difference consists in the acceptance or rejection of a prophet. But, if we would see theological hatred carried out to its full extent, we must turn towards the sectarian parties which divide the Pagan, Mohammedan, Jewish, and Christian worlds. If their power were equal to their enmity, Asia would be too small to contain the followers of Brahma and of Boodh, or the Sunnee and the Sheeah: the Rabbinist is authorized to make a bridge of a Karaite brother to save a Nazarene from drowning; and, to revert to the original source of this observation, (p. 404) RELIGIOUS ANTIPATHIES. the Jew, who differs from the Samaritan principally as to the site of a temple, excludes his opponent from eternal life. We are reluctant to trace further a parallel which is too applicable not to be humiliating; and we would throw a veil over the unchristian rancour which has so often animated Papists and Protestants with their respective rival sects, and diffused itself too subtly into the disputes of those who, wasting their time and talents on metaphysical points, have forgotten "the weightier matters of the law," and especially that holy principle which is superior to faith and shall survive hope.³⁰

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³⁰ 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

