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Travels in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land

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(p. 339) ...

April 29. We recommenced our journey at half past seven A.M. Our muleteers will not be ready at an earlier hour, say and do what we will to hasten their tardy movements. We pay them by the day. It is their interest, therefore, to idle away as much time and to make as short journeys as possible. The feed of their animals costs them nothing, all the pastures and, in default of grass, the wheat fields being common. Their own food is little more expensive. It consists almost exclusively of black bread, which they bake in the ashes in the form of thin cakes. We pay fifteen piasters per horse, the groom always included. This is certainly cheap enough, but both would probably be unemployed and faring worse at-home, and it is only matter of prudent economy to delay as often and as long, and to travel as tardily as our remonstrances will allow. Our cross-grained Armenian vociferates in loud and angry tones if we happen to fall into a trot.

Our road, after leaving Howara, continued along the western side of the Wady Sahl, close to the base of the mountain. At the end of about an hour we saw a small village on our left, in a high and inconvenient position, which, for the sake of greater security, or in obedience to ancient custom, seems always to be preferred in this country, where the nature of the ground permits. Three or four large villages were at the same time conspicuously seen upon the hills which bound this fertile and populous valley on the east. In another half hour we had crossed a low ridge which shoots out from Mount Gerizim towards the east, and entered the narrow Valley of Nablous, the ancient (p. 340) Shechem. The Wady Sahl still stretches out northward, while the one which now gave direction to our road opens from this point of junction towards the west-northwest. Our faces were now turned towards Nablous, still about a mile distant, in the deep, narrow vale. On our left, and towering, perhaps, a thousand feet immediately above us, was Mount Gerizim. On the opposite side of the opening ravine, and distant, it may be, a half mile, was Ebal, "the mountain of cursing," only a little less elevated than Gerizim. A few rods only from our path, and close to the base of Gerizim, was Jacob's Well; and near the middle of the interval between the two mountains, but nearer to Ebal, was the Tomb of the Patriarch Joseph, "in the parcel of ground which Jacob gave to his son Joseph, which he bought of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver."¹ Perhaps there is no spot in Palestine, out of Jerusalem, richer in thrilling historical recollections than that upon which we now stood. Sichem, or Shechem, was the first place in the land of Canaan which was visited by Abraham after his departure from Haran.² In this beautiful plain "before Shechem," Jacob bought the field of Hamor, and resided, till his

¹ John, iv., 5, and Joshua, xxiv., 32

² Genesis, xii., 7.

sons, in revenge for the injury done their sister Dinah, plundered and destroyed that city, which the patriarch thenceforward claimed as his conquest, “ which he took out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and his bow.”³ The territory thus acquired by war and purchase seems to have been of considerable value and extent, as Jacob sent out his flocks from Hebron to graze here.⁴ It probably embraced a large portion of the Wady Sahl, which is “before,” or east of Shechem, and may have been tilled while the numerous flocks of the patriarch found pasturage upon the surrounding hills, the right to which would naturally follow his title to the valley. It was on Mount Ebal that God commanded to be reared up an altar, and a pillar inscribed with the law; and the tribes were to be assembled, half on Ebal and half on Gerizim, to hear the fearful maledictions pronounced by the Levites upon all who should violate this sacred code. The terrible ceremony was performed here to the letter by the Israelites under Joshua, who assembled the entire nation a second time in the same place, to receive his dying admonitions.⁵ It was from the top of Gerizim that Jotham delivered his celebrated parable against the ungrateful Abimelech and the Shechemites before his flight to Beer. What gives the highest interest to this most historical locality, it was here that Jesus, “being wearied with his journey, sat on the well,” and held his inimitable conversation with the Samaritan woman; and it was upon this “parcel of ground,” the beautiful plain “before Shechem,” that the apostles were commanded to “ lift up their eyes and look,” to be reproved for the dulness of their spiritual perceptions, and to have their latent missionary zeal roused into life by a most affecting emblem of the pressing wants of the human race.

After stopping for a few moments to take a hasty survey of this deeply-interesting field, and for a brief indulgence of the sentiments and recollections which it is so well adapted to inspire, we continued our progress towards the city, in the hope of obtaining a guide, in whose company we might visit in a more satisfactory manner the various objects that invited our attention. We soon came to a copious spring of cool, clear water, which rises boldly from the earth and passes off towards (p. 342) the lower plain, supplying a fountain and irrigating a garden in its way. We here deviated from a direct course to the right to examine some sepulchres excavated in the base of Mount Ebal, on the opposite side of the valley. They are evidently ancient, and differ in some respects from the old tombs about Jerusalem. The first which we examined consists of a quadrangular excavation in the face of the cliff, nine paces in length and seven wide, in the right-hand or eastern side of which is a species of alcove, containing three repositories for dead bodies. In the rear are two apartments, one containing also three sarcophagi, and the other being a simple square chamber. The second tomb is a niche, semicircular in form, with a single sarcophagus in the rear. This is four feet from the ground, and is reached by steps cut in the rock. The next excavation is four paces in length by three wide. It is entered by a door six feet in height, has a concave ceiling, and contains three sarcophagi, with small, square entrances. We saw a number of excavations farther up the valley, which we did not examine, satisfied, in our haste, to take those described above as specimens of all.

Nearer the city of Nablous the valley is thickly planted with olive-trees, which grow with the greatest luxuriance in the hard, stony soil of which this part is composed. We advanced to the eastern gate of the city, which was guarded by soldiers, while its approaches were occupied by a great number of leprous persons, who are not allowed to enter the town, but take their position here to levy contributions upon passengers. It is not very easy to

³ Genesis, xxxiii., 18, 19, and xlvi., 22

⁴ Genesis xxxvii., 12.

⁵ Deuteronomy, xxvii., 12; and Joshua, viii, 33, and xxiv., 26.

understand what objection may exist to their residence within the walls which does not apply with equal or greater force to their presence in this crowded thoroughfare.

We did not enter the city, but turned aside to enjoy (p. 343) the shade of some olive-trees near by. Our presence soon attracted a number of people to the spot, and among them an intelligent and gentlemanly-looking Mohammedan, dressed in a gay silk robe, red slippers, and a green turban. We soon found that he was an inhabitant of Nablous, and well acquainted with all the localities which we desired to visit. I felt some hesitation at proposing to a personage of so dignified a bearing, and of so much apparent consequence, to act as a guide. He manifested no reluctance, however, and was only careful to stipulate for what he esteemed a liberal bucksheesh, consisting of either five or ten piasters.

In company with Mr. Stakes, I put myself under the conduct of this respectable cicerone, who led us back towards the entrance of the valley, and, after proceeding for a few minutes along the base of Mount Gerizim, we began its ascent near a Mussulman tomb that stands in the mouth of a small ravine, about half way between Nablous and the beautiful fountain which we had passed in approaching the city. We rode for a short distance, but soon found the way too steep for the horses, which we sent back to the olive grove to await our return. Our course was nearly southeast, along the side of Gerizim, whose brow overhung us on the right; while upon our left, considerably below us, was the narrow ravine which indents the mountain from its base quite to the summit. This is an ancient road, excavated in the side of the mountain with much labour, and, in the steeper portions of the ascent, fashioned into a regular flight of broad stone steps. These are somewhat injured by the action of rains and the wear of centuries, and are occasionally encumbered by stones and debris that have fallen or been washed down from the higher rocks, but they still afford a safe and tolerably easy ascent to the traveller. (p. 344) This, I presume, was the principal approach to the ancient city, whose ruins cover the top of the mountain, and that pursued by the religious processions in their way from the Valley of Shechem to the Samaritan Temple.

The most conspicuous object upon these heights is a Mohammedan tomb, situated near the eastern brow of the mountain, on the edge of an extensive field of ruins. Leaving this to the right, and, for the present, unexplored, we passed on to a second summit, separated from the first by a considerable depression, and distant from it perhaps two or three hundred yards, towards the northeast. This is a high point of the mountain, which pushes out between Wady Sahl and the Valley of Nablous, and the particular elevation overlooks the vicinity of Jacob's Well and Joseph's Tomb. The rounded summit is surmounted by an ancient citadel, now in a very ruinous state, but easily traceable on every side. Portions of the wall, consisting of large square stones, are seen in several places. From others the materials have evidently been removed; but a mound of mortar and smaller stones preserves the continuity of the enclosure, which is a quadrangle sixty-eight steps in length by forty-four wide. South of this area are considerable ruins; and there are appearances upon the north and east sides which indicate the former existence of a second wall in advance of the first, and considerably lower down the declivity.

Adjacent to the enclosure, upon the north, is a ruinous cistern, forty-six paces in length by twenty wide. A portion of its wall, now standing, is seven feet thick by twenty in height. A fig-tree finds root among its ruins, and there is a broken doorway in the northern side. After spending half an hour or more in and about this (p. 345) ancient fortress we turned back to the Mohammedan tomb upon the southern summit. This monument occupies a noble and commanding position in the northeastern angle of a vast quadrangle, one hundred and thirty-three paces in length by more than half as great a breadth. It was evidently a fortress, less ancient, probably, than the one already described. It is built of massive stones, hewn and

bevelled, and consists of two parts or compartments, the work, perhaps, of different rulers or ages. The walls are three paces in thickness, and large portions of them are still solid and entire, as if untouched by the hand of time. The south, or, rather, southwest compartment of this fortress was strengthened by towers at the four angles, six and a half paces square, and built in the same massive style. There is a similar tower in the middle of the south side, containing several small rooms, and under it a deep pit or well, the approach to which was encumbered by fallen blocks of stone. The other sides of the quadrangle were also fortified by towers, which are in a much more ruinous state.

The interior of this part of the fortress was occupied by an octagonal edifice, built also of hewn stone, and in a very substantial manner, which I took to be a Christian church. The walls are traceable on five of its sides by regular courses of stone, which still remain in their places. The diameter is twenty-four paces, and the sides, two or three of which I measured, are nine paces each in length. The eastern end is rounded, evidently for the accommodation of the altar and its appurtenances, after the fashion of the old Greek churches.

The grand entrance to this fortress is on the north side, between two high, strong walls, which are still almost entire. On the same side, and west of the en- (p. 346) trance, are the massive remains of a capacious cistern. East of the fortress, on the very brow of the mountain, here sloping towards the plain, are considerable remains of a pavement, connected, perhaps, with some ancient approach on this side; and there are considerable ruins seventy or eighty paces lower down the steep declivity.

South of the fortress is a large field of ruins, covered with square stones and piles of rubbish, the evident remains of a considerable ancient town. I judged that these remains extended at least one third of a mile from north to south, by a breadth rather less considerable. I saw a number of dry cisterns in walking among these ancient foundations. One spot, a little south of the castle—a bare rock, with remains of a large enclosure around it—is esteemed holy ground by the people, I did not learn on what account. North of the grand enclosure, and near its northwest angle, are some Turkish graves. On the same side of the citadel, not far below its northeast angle and the Mohammedan tomb, is the holy place of the Samaritans, where, as we subsequently learned from them, they celebrate their four great yearly festivals.

The summit of Gerizim affords another instance of— what I have often had occasion to remark—the close affinity, or perhaps I should say proximity, of Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan rites. Here is the spot where the passover is still prepared and eaten—the remains of a splendid church, and a Mussulman cemetery, Santon's Tomb, and place of prayer.

The top of Gerizim affords a commanding view of a considerable region, chiefly occupied with mountains of inferior elevation, but also embracing several fruitful valleys, especially those of Nablous and Wady Sahl, through which we had travelled in our way from Jeru- (p. 347) salem. A great number of villages are seen all along its eastern side, but upon high and apparently precipitous spurs of the mountains, which push out into the valley from the main ridge. This valley had the appearance of being the most populous, as well as the most fruitful, region I had seen in Palestine. Cultivation is carried quite to the top of the mountains, which are adorned with plantations of fruit-trees; while every level spot, and a vast number of small fields, supported by terraces, were sown in wheat. Considerable portions of the table-land on the summit of Gerizim itself, and the higher parts of the ravine, which lies parallel with our ascent up the mountain, exhibit marks of recent tillage, though I saw no crops growing at the time of our visit.

Mount Ebal, of which a good view is obtained from the top of Gerizim, like the latter, spreads out into a table-land, though apparently more broken and rocky, and less susceptible of cultivation. It may be less elevated than Gerizim by one hundred feet or more, still there is considerable resemblance in their general features. We saw, or imagined we saw, some ruins upon the summit of Ebal, nearly opposite to Nablous, but were unable to make a nearer examination after the fatigue we had already undergone.

Mount Gerizim derives its chief interest from having been the seat of the Samaritan worship from the time of the Babylonish captivity to the present day. The pagan colonists, who had been transplanted from Mesopotamia to the mountains of Ephraim, were led to the adoption of the Jewish religion; and, after some overtures to obtain a participation in the national worship in Jerusalem, which were rejected with scorn and abhorrence by the pure descendants of Abraham, they erected a temple upon Mount Gerizim, about three (p. 348) hundred and thirty years before Christ, and established independent religious services, conformed in all respects but the place to the institutions of Moses. A renegade of the stock of Aaron became their priest, and thus gave the semblance of a legal, and even Divine, authority to the new establishment. The erection of an altar, and of a pillar inscribed with the law, as well as the residence of the ark at Shechem, and the performance of that most impressive religious and national ceremony between Ebal and Gerizim by Joshua, had probably given to this place an early reputation for sanctity, which made it the more easy to secure the concurrence of the people in this bold innovation. These transactions laid the foundation of an undying enmity between the Jews and Samaritans, of which the Old and New Testaments give many intimations, and which still exists in undiminished force among the representatives of those ancient races. In one of the collisions to which this hostile spirit gave rise, the Temple on Gerizim was demolished by the Jews, more than a century B.C. Christianity was planted among this people by the Saviour himself; but the Samaritans continued to exist as a sect in vast numbers, and they early transferred to the Christians a portion of their hereditary hatred to the Jews. It is not known that their Temple was ever rebuilt after its destruction by their ancient rivals, though they positively affirm that their Worship has always been maintained upon Mount Gerizim, with the exception of one short interval, from its first establishment there to the present day. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the changes that have befallen this singular people to enable us to decide upon the justness of their claims in this respect. The existence of the magnificent church upon Mount Gerizim, which, from its style of architecture, must have (p. 349) been the work of one of the early Christian emperors, is sufficient evidence of the early establishment and ascendancy of the Gospel in the territory of the Samaritans. Is it not probable that the more ancient ruins upon the neighbouring summit, which I have ventured to call those of a citadel, are really the remains of the demolished Samaritan Temple? If so, then the Christians, in their season of triumph, were content to plant their splendid fane by the side of the holy enclosure of the ancient worshippers on Gerizim without encroaching upon it. The ruined bulwarks, already described as having encompassed the ancient summit, may have formed the walls or the foundations of the Temple, while the vestiges of a second enclosure, lower down the declivity, may define the position and extent of a fortress designed for its security; like the immense quadrangle encompassing the ruined church upon the adjacent height, which was not improbably an imitation of the more ancient construction. The Samaritans celebrate their passover near the Mohammedan tomb, and they have another holy place south of the quadrangle. We were assured also, on our subsequent visit to the Synagogue, that some of the stones of Joshua's altar still exist upon the mountain, and that they are held in peculiar veneration by the Samaritans ; but whether they are held to be identical with some stones

seen at each of the holy places just referred to I was unable to learn, nor could I obtain more satisfaction as to the precise spot occupied by their Temple. Indeed, I think the chief of the Synagogue was himself doubtful upon this point, and that the worshippers are influenced in their veneration for these particular spots by traditions not connected with the precise site of the ancient Temple. The two holy places pointed out to us are too remote from each other to have been included in the (p. 350) sacred edifice. After all, we are left without any decisive evidence on this point, and I think the substructions on the southeastern summit at least give some countenance to a conjecture that the Samaritan Temple stood there.

We took a different route in our return to Nablous from that by which we had ascended the mountain. Our course was at first north or northwest, over the tolerably level table-land, and then northeast down a pretty steep declivity, and along a beautiful ravine, which soon opens upon the city—in the mouth of which, indeed, a considerable portion of the city is built. No contrast could be more perfect and delightful than that which unexpectedly met our eyes in passing from the dreary ruins and heights of Mount Gerizim into this charming valley. Upon turning an angle in the steep gorge, we found ourselves, as if by enchantment, in the midst of fruitful gardens, filled with vegetables, flowers, and fruit-trees, and all in the highest perfection of luxuriance and beauty. Olives, vines, acacias, pomegranates, figs, mulberries, and several species of trees which I did not recognise, are crowded together in small enclosures, forming an impervious shade, as well as impenetrable thickets; and yet the capabilities of the soil seem not to be overburdened. Each separate tree and plant thrives to admiration, and seems rather to profit than suffer from the thick, dark canopy of branches and foliage, which entirely excludes the sun's rays from the tangled huddle of trunks and roots. A beautiful mountain stream winds through the midst of this forest of gardens, in a channel mostly artificial, and sometimes covered; but the water often rises into small fountains, and forms several cascades. In one place, convenient for the purpose, it is collected in a large reservoir for the use of the city, from which (p. 351) it flows off again in open conduits accessible to washerwomen, who were plying their art in considerable numbers. Higher up the ravine is a mill. We did not enter the town, but, continuing along its southern and eastern walls, returned to our horses in the olive groves, and, after a few moments of repose, set out on a visit to Jacob's Well.

This is rather more than a mile from the eastern gate of Nablous, by a route which we had already twice performed, and which again carried us near the Moslem tomb at the mouth of the ravine, and the beautiful fountain already described. The water passes off through the "parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph," and by some opening in the eastern mountain to the Jordan, if, indeed, it is not exhausted in irrigating these verdant, fruitful fields; while the far more considerable stream, south of Nablous, runs in the opposite direction, towards the Mediterranean Sea.

Jacob's Well is concealed from the view by what at first seems to be only a heap of rubbish, and the traveller would be likely to pass it without particular notice, unless, perhaps, his eye should be attracted by three or four columns lying in the midst of the accumulations. With the bad taste which usually marks the attempts of the earlier Christians to do honour to the holy places of Palestine, a church was built over this ancient well, as it is said, by the Empress Helena. It was long since demolished, or allowed to fall into decay; but an arch of solid masonry still remains over the well, at the height of several feet above the natural surface of the rock, through which the excavation was made. More adventurous travellers descend through this covering by an aperture, which has probably been made for the purpose by removing some of the stones. There was, however, so little promise of discovery or (p. 352) gratification in the low, dark vault, encumbered with rubbish, that I contented myself

with a more distant view, and with dropping some stones into the well as my best means of forming some conjecture as to its probable depth, and of ascertaining whether it contained water. The report satisfied us that the well was not dry, and that it was very deep. It has frequently been measured, as it seems to have been very carefully by Maundrell, who reports it to be “dug in a firm rock (limestone), to be three yards in diameter and thirty-five in depth, five of which were full of water.” Several travellers have found it dry; and the quantity of water, when the well contains any, is found to fluctuate. I had no means of measurement, and the experiment by dropping in stones only enabled us to determine that, at the time of our visit, the well contained water.

Mr. Buckingham either visited or heard of two or three wells in this valley, which produced some doubt in his mind as to which is the true Jacob’s Well. We heard of no difficulty or clashing traditions upon the subject. Our Mohammedan guide took us to the well just described as to a well-known monument of antiquity, and he told us that the people of his religion, as well as all others, regard this as the well of the patriarch. His account was confirmed by a Jew, who acted as our guide within the city; and among the Christians the tradition is received with no less confidence. It is, perhaps, one of the best authenticated, as well as oldest of traditions; liable to no serious objections but such as originate in obstinate or reckless incredulity, and is sustained by historical proofs, which extend from the earliest Christian ages, with few interruptions, to the present time. The general agreement between the simple and interesting account of John, and the position of the (p. 353) well in question, as well as of the surrounding objects, is perfect, as well as exceedingly striking, and, to my mind, it goes far to remove any doubt with regard to the identity of this venerable monument, while it affords the most conclusive evidence of the truth of the sacred narrative, and of the reality of the transactions recorded. This latter view of this passage has been dwelt upon with great effect by Clarke.

Our Lord was on his way from Jerusalem to Galilee, in which he “must needs go through Samaria,” which was on the direct and only road, as was also Sichar, the present Nablous, this narrow vale affording the only passage through these lofty mountains which occurs for a great distance. The nature of the ground determines the course of the road from Jerusalem along the base of Gerizim, where it now runs. The well is close to that road, on the southern side of the valley, and not in the lower ground in the middle, where it would more naturally have been expected. It is under Mount Gerizim, the holy place of the Samaritans, a circumstance distinctly implied in Christ’s conversation with the woman. “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.” “The hour cometh when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.” It is evident that this precise mode of expression, “this mountain,” would have been ambiguous had the well been situated midway between Gerizim and Ebal, and misleading if nearer to the latter mountain. The speakers would naturally look or point to the summit of Gerizim, which was directly above them, and upon which the splendid edifices whose ruins have described were probably conspicuous objects from their position.

There are other internal proofs which go to establish the identity of the well. Christ stopped before reaching the city, whither his disciples went to buy food, (p. 354) near “the parcel of ground” given to Joseph. This, we know, was “before,” that is, east of the city--the spot clearly indicated by the narrative. The route to Samaria passes along the northern side of the city, which is built close to Gerizim, to enjoy the benefit of the copious stream of water on that side, an arrangement which, with little doubt, prevailed at that time; so that Christ probably would not have entered the city at all but for the events that grew out of his conversation with the woman.

The only objections to the identity of the well in question with that of the patriarch are its distance from the city, and the existence of a fountain of good water on the way, which the people would not be likely to pass by in order to obtain water from a place more remote. This objection is rather plausible than strong. The ancient city was, in those days of prosperity and teeming population, much larger than it is at present, and may have extended so far eastward as to include the fountain, which would soon be exhausted by a large population, leaving a demand for water to be supplied from Jacob's Well, then only a small distance from the walls. I saw some mounds in this part of the valley, which probably mark the site of demolished habitations. They had, to my eye, the appearance of being ancient foundations, and suggested the hypothesis here stated. They extend into the valley north and northeast of the fountain. The less extensive and populous modern town would, of course, be built near the ample mountain stream and the rich valley, now so full of luxuriance and beauty, south and west of Nablous. Independent of these considerations, there is nothing in the account of the evangelist which compels us to believe that Jacob's Well was commonly resorted to from the city. The woman may have been at work in the fields (p. 355) near by, in the opposite direction, perhaps, from the fountain. There is no intimation that any other person was present during the conversation between Christ and the Woman, though it seems to have been protracted till the return of the apostles from the city. I think the impression left upon the reader is that they were alone, and that it was only after the woman had spread the news in the town that the audience became larger. This view is inconsistent with the supposition that Jacob's Well was frequented by the inhabitants for common purposes. It was upon the great road—a stopping-place for travellers, for whom even there were no conveniences to draw water. Jacob, "who drank thereof himself, his children, and his cattle," probably dug the well here in the field which he had purchased in order to be independent of the fountains of the city, which, however plentiful and convenient, were not likely to be enjoyed in common without the frequent occurrence of disagreeable and dangerous contests, of which we have several instances arising from this cause, in the history of his father and grandfather.⁶

Joseph's Tomb, which is situated north of Jacob's Well, a little beyond the middle of the valley, is also acknowledged by Jews, Christians, and Mohammedans. We learn from the Bible that this patriarch was buried in this portion of his inheritance, "in the field bought by Jacob of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem ;"⁷ and, so far as I am aware, tradition has uniformly conceded the claims of the site now marked by the Turkish monument. One Protestant writer, however, incredulous even beyond the common type, not only doubts concerning the well, but thinks. Joseph's Tomb should have been in the mountain rather than "in the field," and of the "description of the well-hewn grot- (p. 356) toes" in Mount Ebal. It requires some credulity to believe that such "well-hewn grottoes in the rock, some with arched, some with square doors," were much in fashion in this country in that primitive, pastoral age. The patriarch's tomb has, no doubt, often been remodelled and rebuilt. The existing structure has no pretensions to antiquity. It is a common Mohammedan tomb.

THE SAMARITANS.

On our return to the city we paid a visit to the Synagogue of the Samaritans. Leaving our horses at a khan, on the north side of what seemed to be the principal street, we entered the store of a Jew to inquire the way. He proposed to accompany us and act as our guide, an offer which we cheerfully accepted, as he appeared both intelligent and obliging. Instead, however, of conducting us to the Samaritan Synagogue, he led us to that of the Jews, -which is situated

⁶ Genesis, xxi., 25, and xxvi., 20, 21.

⁷ Joshua, xx.iv., 32.

upon the same street, nearly opposite to the khan. It is of small, dirty room, and everything about it has the appearance of great poverty. The rabbi, who, with about—a dozen men and boys, was in the-Synagogue on our arrival, though not engaged in worship, was an insignificant looking man, shabbily dressed. He was, however, sufficiently courteous, and readily showed us some manuscript copies of the Law, and other parchments and books belonging to the establishment. Still under the impression that we were in the Samaritan Synagogue, we inquired for the ancient and celebrated copy of the Law, which had been the subject of learned correspondence with European scholars. Our guide, who seemed to be a leading man among them, declared that an old and tattered manuscript, which had been shown us already, was the one in question. The rabbi, however, (p. 357) seemed a little confused with the business and hesitated to confirm this statement. We were now satisfied that our guide was attempting to impose upon us, probably to secure to his own synagogue the small gratuity which it is customary for visitors to leave on such occasions. We remonstrated with him for his unfaithfulness and falsehood, and walked out into the street.

He followed, and, after insisting for some time that this was, indeed, the Samaritan Synagogue, finally admitted that it belonged to the Jews, and proposed to guide us to the object of our inquiries, in a remote part of the city. We would gladly have discharged this faithless cicerone, but there was no other at hand; and as he had failed in his object of diverting a few piasters from the rival sect to his own, and could expect nothing for his trouble unless he should fulfil his engagements to us, we had the more reason to trust his fidelity. He conducted us quite to the southwest part of the city, along many dark alleys, and through the basements of several houses, perhaps to avoid the greater length of the public way. At length we reached the desired place, and were met in the court of the Synagogue by the chief rabbi or priest, accompanied by a dozen men and boys, two or three of whom appeared to be his assistants, and all were more cleanly and respectable in their appearance than the similar assemblage we had just parted from at the rival establishment.

The rabbi is apparently about sixty years of age, considerably above the middle stature, and has a decidedly intellectual face. His voice is loud and harsh, and the expression of his countenance rather stern, and he was handsomely attired in a red silk robe and white turban. We needed no prompting from our guide to induce us to pay our respects to this venerable old man as the veritable chief of the Synagogue. In reply to our re- (p. 358) quest to be allowed to see the famous manuscript, he said this would depend on our willingness to comply with two conditions—to take off our shoes, and to leave a gratuity or the benefit of the Synagogue. “To made no objection to these terms, and were soon admitted into a respectable apartment, covered with mats and carpets. The company of idlers came in after us, and, to my surprise, among them our Jewish guide, who readily entered into conversation with the men, with whom he appeared to be acquainted. This was a pleasing evidence that, though the Jews still “ have no dealings with the Samaritans,” their religious prejudices do not go the length of preventing social intercourse, and of mutual exclusion from their places of worship.

Without waiting to satisfy our curiosity by a sight of the ancient manuscript, which we had avowed as the principal object of our visit, the rabbi began at once to make inquiries about England, taking us for Englishmen, and especially if there were any Samaritans there. Upon telling him that I was an American, he asked the same question with regard to that country, and also inquired if I had ever fallen in with any persons of his religion in France, Holland, or other countries where I had travelled. I had previously heard that such questions are addressed to every visitor, and was prepared to listen to them as the mere commonplaces of the old rabbi’s politeness. He made these inquiries, however, and listened to our replies with

deep earnestness and marked attention, as if he still felt a lingering hope of hearing tidings from some lost pilgrim band of his declining race. In answer to our inquiries, he said there were formerly some Samaritans in Europe, and there were at present considerable numbers of them in the distant East, though he appeared to have no definite idea as to their places of abode. (p. 359)

After considerable conversation, and reminding him again of the object of our visit, the venerable man, with many expressions of reverence, in which the by-standers joined, advanced to the place where the sacred books are kept, and, removing a curtain, took out a time-worn parchment, which was first presented to his associates to receive their homage, and then held up before us as the most ancient copy of the law in existence, and a most precious treasure, which has been guarded with unwavering fidelity by the Samaritan race, from their earliest history to the present day. It did not answer the description we had received of the celebrated manuscript, and we had, besides, heard that an attempt is commonly made to impose on the visiter, or to test his learning and sagacity by showing another. We, of course, refused to be satisfied with the one first exhibited, and, after some hesitation and delay, another was finally produced, which, from the great sensation with which it was saluted by the spectators, as well as its appearance, we had no reason to doubt was the one held in highest veneration for its authority and antiquity. It is arranged upon rollers in the usual way, and preserved in a tin case. A considerable portion of it was exhibited to our inspection, though we, of course, did not presume to touch it. It has the appearance of great age. Many places have been mended with bits of new parchment, and rewritten with much care. This manuscript, according to the tradition and assured belief of these people, is the handwriting of a grandson of Aaron, and is now nearly three thousand five hundred years old. It is of higher authority than any other copy of the Pentateuch, and the possession of it is, in the estimation of this sect of the followers of Moses, is a triumphant and indisputable refutation of all the cavillings and exclusive pretensions of (p. 360) the Jews. Several copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch have been procured at different times within the last two centuries, and are now to be found in the libraries of Europe; and they have proved highly valuable, auxiliaries in revising and settling the text of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Samaritan Temple was on Mount Gerizim, though the rabbi could not tell us, and, as I understood him, did not profess to know, its precise site. The stones where the Samaritans offer their annual passover upon the mount, he said, are the same which Joshua brought from the Jordan and placed there. They are upon the spot where Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, and really offered a ram. There are about one hundred and twenty or one hundred and thirty Samaritans in Nablous. They are engaged in the trade and common "business of the place, and, though not wealthy, are in comfortable circumstances. The Jews, who are about one third less numerous, are nearly all poor.

There is much disagreement among travellers with regard to the number of these people, a fact the more remarkable, as it is so very inconsiderable. The above number was given us by the rabbi and by our Israelitish guide. The Samaritans keep the Sabbath (Saturday); even more rigidly than the Jews. They sacrifice sheep for the passover, and celebrate the Mosaic festivals with "solemn processions to the summit of Mount Gerizim.

The preservation of this people, the descendants of immigrants from Mesopotamia to the mountains of Ephraim, for so many generations, as a distinct race always true to their faith and corrupted Jewish usages, and to their primitive and invincible hatred to the followers of a religion confessedly the type and source of their own—must be regarded one of the most curious and interesting facts with which travel and history make (p. 361) us acquainted. In

spite of wars and revolutions, and almost exterminating persecutions, here they have continued to exist in their ancient religious metropolis, at the base of the holy mount where their fathers worshipped. They are now but a handful, hastening fast to decay and extinction. Should not some effort be made for their conversion to Christianity? The field is, indeed, narrow and unpromising, but the circumstances of this race are so peculiar, and their prospects so melancholy and affecting, as to justify some departure, in their behalf, from the prudent forecast and calculation which must be consulted in missionary no less than in all other enterprises.

This city is long and narrow, extending along the base of Gerizim, and partly resting upon its lower declivity. Though the houses are solidly built, every thing, to the floors and domed roofs, being of stone, the streets are narrow and uneven, full of rubbish, stones, and various other obstructions, and very filthy. The bazars are shaded with mats, or arched much like those of Jerusalem, though very superior in their ample supplies of wholesome looking provisions, and in the various sorts of merchandise demanded by Oriental tastes and habits. Some portions of the city really present the appearance of active business and thrift. There are extensive manufactories of soap, held in high repute in the Levant. It is made of olive oil, of which considerable quantities are likewise exported. There are also manufactories of cotton. We saw a number of men employed in whipping it up with bowstrings, a substitute, I suppose, for carding, or designed to facilitate that operation. The cotton grown in this region is reckoned the best in Turkey. Seven thousand five (p. 362) hundred bales were exported from Nablous, chiefly to France, in 1838.⁸

The mountain district around Nablous is, perhaps, the best cultivated portion of Palestine, though very inferior in natural fertility to some of the plains that lie towards the Mediterranean Sea. The wandering Bedouins seldom venture among these fastnesses, so that the people enjoy a degree of security in their pursuits; at least, they have a prospect of being permitted to reap what they sow, though the harpies of the Egyptian treasury are only less rapacious than the lawless tribes who professedly live by robbery. The population of Nablous is commonly estimated at eight or ten thousand. Four or five hundred are Christians, and the rest, with the slight exceptions already enumerated, are all Mohammedans. They are reputed a valiant as well as turbulent race, and have struggled bravely against the Egyptian rule in some bloody rebellions, one of which occurred very recently. The Christians are of the Greek Church, and have a single place of worship. They have had some communications with the American missionaries, though no direct effort has been made for their benefit beyond the distribution of some books and tracts. I heard from the Rev. Mr. Lanneau of a very interesting visit recently paid him by some of these simple people, asking for religious instruction, and manifesting a very hopeful progress in their views of Christian truth.

Nablous is the Arab corruption of Neapolis, the name given by the Romans to Sichar or Shechem in the first century of our era. There are no ancient remains in the city, a proof, perhaps, that Sichar, though distinguished as the religious capital of the Samaritans, was never remarkable for massive or splendid edifices. The (p. 363) Temple itself was upon Mount Gerizim, and it is highly probable that the ecclesiastical residences, and other structures connected with the celebration of public worship and the maintenance of the national religion, were in its immediate vicinity, upon the top of the mountain, where we now see the extensive field of ruins.

We had spent a most laborious day in viewing the unusual variety of interesting objects clustered together in this beautiful valley, and upon the overhanging mountain on its southern side, and the sun was little more than an hour high when we set out for Sebaste, the ancient

⁸ Bowring's Report.

Samaria. Our baggage we had already sent on in advance. A part of our company, too, who felt unequal to the ascent of the mountain, and took less interest in some of the minor objects to which our attention was devoted, had preceded us by two or three hours, and were already waiting our arrival at “the Hill of Samaria.”

Upon passing out of Nablous we entered at once into the gardens and groves of fruit and shade trees, which not only occupy the beautiful ravine already described, on its southern side, but literally surround the city and fill the widening valley, which extends from its western gate far to the northwest, towards Sebaste. This is certainly the most delightful and verdant spot I saw in Palestine, nor do I remember to have seen in any part of the world the evidence of a more exuberant fertility. Besides the mountain stream already noticed, the valley is watered with a multitude of fountains that gush out of the bases of Gerizim and Ebal, and are conducted off to the gardens, which owe their fertility chiefly to the abundance of water rather than to any great skill or industry employed in their cultivation. We kept within the valley for about an hour, which for (p. 364) that distance, and as far as we could see beyond, continued to be well cultivated, and to exhibit signs of luxuriant fertility.

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

The time of the visit was April 29th 1840.

Stephen Olin (1797 – 1851) was an American educator and minister. He graduated Middlebury College in 1820 and was ordained into the Methodist Episcopal Church while teaching at the Tabernacle Academy in South Carolina and served a pastorate in Charleston. He became professor of belle-lettres at the University of Georgia in 1827. He was the first President of Randolph Macon College (1834–1837) and later was president of Wesleyan University (1839–1851).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Olin