

FOUNTAIN IN THE VALE OF SHECHEM.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LAND OF SAMARIA AND THE CITY OF SHECHEM.

ἡ δ' ἄρ' ἔην ἀγαθή τε καὶ αἰγινόμος καὶ ὑδρηλή·  
οὐδὲ μὲν ἔσκεν ὁδὸς δολιχὴ πόλιν εἰσαφικέσθαι  
ἀγρόθεν, οὐδέ ποτε δρία λαχνήεντα πονεῦσιν.  
ἐξ αὐτῆς δὲ μάλ' ἄγχι δὴ οὖρεα φαίνεται ἔρυμνα  
ποίης τε πλήθοντα καὶ ὕλης· τῶν δὲ μεσηγὺ  
ἀτραπιτὸς τέτμητ', ἀραιὴ γλυφίς, ἐνθ' ἐτέρωθε  
γῇ διερχὴ Σικίμων καταφαίνεται, ἱερὸν ἄστν  
νέρθεν ὑπὸ ῥίζῃ δεδμημένον· ἀμφὶ δὲ τεῖχος  
λισσόν, ὑπώρειαν δ' ὑποδέδρομεν αἰπύθεν ἔρκος.

(Description of the Vale of Shechem by the Hellenistic poet Theodotus, in Eusebius, *Præp. Evang.* ix, 22, with Ludwig's emendations.)

The central district of Palestine is Samaria, one of the three divisions of the Holy Land well known to all students of the New Testament. But the name Samaria as applied to the district is comparatively recent; it is the Hellenized form of Shomeron, the capital which Omri founded in the IXth Century B.C.,<sup>1</sup> and the name of the city was extended to the district only towards the end of the following century, when the Assyrian advance cut off from Northern Israel Galilee and Across-Jordan, and reduced the once proud kingdom of Israel to a dependent province named after its one important city.<sup>2</sup> The older name of the land is Mount Ephraim, or more correctly the Highland of Ephraim.<sup>3</sup> It is the northern section of the rugged upland region, whose

<sup>1</sup> 1 Ki. 16, 24. See Additional Note A.

<sup>2</sup> Amos uses the word only of the city, but Hosea, writing after the land had become an Assyrian dependency (739 B. C.), always — six times — of the land.

<sup>3</sup> Highland (*har*) of Ephraim, *Jos.* 17, 15; also once the Highland of the Amorite, *Dt.* 1, 7, and later the Highland of Israel, *Jos.* 11, 16.

southern part bore the corresponding name of the Highland of Juda,<sup>4</sup> the two sections being connected by a narrow neck of land, from which deep wadies descend eastward and westward, forbidding communication across the border except by that rocky ridge.<sup>5</sup> And alike and unlike, connected and separated, have been the two lands since the beginning, as well in politics and religion as by nature. The reader of the Old Testament recalls that ancient monument of Hebrew literature, the Song of Debora, in whose count of the tribes Juda is missing, while he knows how the ancient separateness of North and South was perpetuated by the fateful schism under King Rehoboam, which caused the Judaite historians to look upon the North as schismatic and renegade. In the history of Judaism, Southern Israel's precipitate of the people of Moses and David, Samaria appears almost as a blank upon the map, and the student of the New Testament likewise knows how, while the Gospel history is enacted on Judæan and Galilæan soil, and even in half-heathen Peræa, it refers to Samaria only in episodes. Jesus himself, like any Jewish rabbi, was an unwelcome guest in Samaria; it was an epoch in his Church's life when it established itself in that hostile region. The absence of information concerning Samaria and its people in the historical sources that are generally accessible to both Jew and Christian, naturally prompts the question: Who were the Samaritans?

But if left stranded by subsequent historical developments, and ignored by orthodoxy, the people of Samaria may claim the privileges of both nature and early history. In marked contrast with rocky and barren Juda, Samaria is a verdant hill-country, in which the traveller marks a constant succession of smiling valleys.<sup>6</sup> Even the eastern

<sup>4</sup> Highland of Juda, *Jos.* 11, 21, etc., cf. *Lu.* 1, 39.

<sup>5</sup> See G. A. Smith's brilliant chapters upon the comparison of Juda and Samaria, *HG* xii, xvi, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Buhl, *Geographie des alten Palaestina*, 21; *HG* 324.

slopes, which in their southerly prolongation end in the waste and precipitous Wilderness of Juda, are gradual in their fall and contain many a fertile spot.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Juda too, Samaria is rendered accessible by the valleys east and north and west, which keep the land in easy communication with the world beyond. This comparative openness of the district may have contributed to the depravement of Israel's religion and morals, through the ready contact with the Mediterranean highway, heathenish Galilee, Tyre and its seductive Baal-worship, Damascus and its luxuries (*Am.* 3, 12). It was Juda's geographical isolation which contributed to its final spiritual development and the preservation of its sacred fruit. But withal this catholicity of the northern land has given a richness to its history and literature which we miss in the South. Except for the episode of David and Solomon, the North occupies the stage of history until the city Samaria's fall; there was the seat of the early prophetic guilds, with their seething life, pregnant of weal and woe for Israel's religion. The contrast may be most clearly marked in the comparison between the one writing prophet of the North, Hosea, and his southern contemporary Amos. Both insist equally on the exclusive claims of Yahwe and his righteousness, but it is the former who preaches the long-suffering love of God, with a depth of passion and a variety of imagination, which outbid the colder South. And the divine Heart never lost its sympathy for the North: "Go," speaks the Voice to Jeremiah, "Go, and proclaim these words unto the North: Return, Backslider Israel, says Yahwe!" (*Jer.* 3, 12).

And along with the charms of nature and the corresponding endowment of a richer, more passionate character in the people of the land, is associated the privilege of history. Straight into the inviting uplands of Ephraim went the tribes of Israel, or such as were associated under the leader-

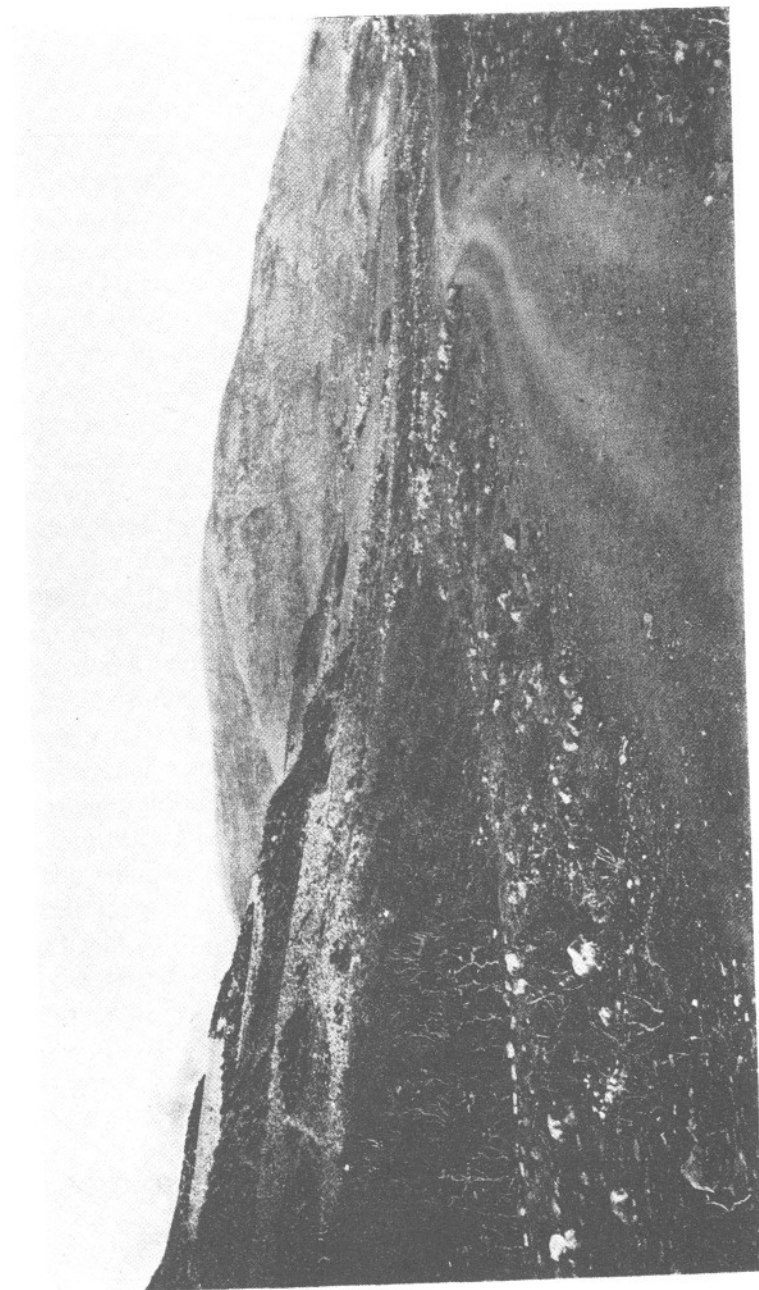
<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *LBR*, 296; Buhl, *op. cit.* 22.

ship of Joseph; their objective was Shechem, the natural capital of the district (*Jos.* 1-9). Upon its two holy mountains was performed, and this according to Judæan tradition, the first formal covenant of the people with Yahwe in their new home (*Jos.* 8, 30ff; *Dt.* 27). In Israel's memories or legends of the past, Mount Ephraim was the land frequented by Abraham and beloved of Jacob, and many a site might be pointed out where Yahwe had appeared to his favorites. And now again the land was consecrated by the graves of Joseph and Joshua and Eleazar (*Jos.* 24, 29ff), even according to an early tradition by the tombs of all the Twelve Patriarchs (*Acts*, 7, 16). This was the land of Gideon and Samuel and Saul, of Elija and Elisha, in a word the land of *Israel*, whereas the South possessed no better title than its tribal name *Juda*, a provincial designation, over against the noble succession of the North. If holy places were counted, *Juda* could boast only of Hebron and Beersheba, and of the very modern sanctity of Jebusite Jerusalem, but the North was full of sanctuaries where Yahwe had appeared and where his heroes lived and died. Strange outcome that the one-time separatist tribe became the Church of Israel, while the North has at last given home to the smallest and most insignificant sect in the world!

But only in one place is the modern remnant of that ancient sect to be found, in historic Shechem, once the capital of the tribes of Israel,<sup>8</sup> the sanctuary of their Covenant-God;<sup>9</sup> and thither they have drawn back to die in the first home of national Israel. In Shechem and its neighborhood is the quintessence of the natural charms and historic traditions of the land of Samaria. As the traveller from Jerusalem pushes his journey northwards along the barren ridge which connects *Juda* with Samaria, at last his eye, wearied

<sup>8</sup> Add to previous references, 1 *Ki.* 12, 1, 25.

<sup>9</sup> It contained the sanctuary of Baal-berith, or El-berith, *Ju.* 9, 4, 46, i. e., the God of Covenant.



MOUNT GERIZIM AND MOUNT EBAL

with stony ledges is refreshed, hard by the village of Kuza, with the view of a long and broadening valley, rich in season with waving grain. Eight miles or more the fair sight stretches before him to the north, and in direct alignment beyond appears the snowy peak of distant Hermon. Into this plain, al-Machna, he descends, and on the left there begins to loom up a pair of promontory-like mountains, which, as he approaches them, reveal a narrow vale nestled between their steep slopes. Under the eastern front of the first of the mountains, Gerizim, he makes his way, and, whether Jew or Gentile, doubtless pauses to rest at Jacob's Well, where once Jesus as he sat, held converse with a Samaritan woman in words which alone would immortalize her sect. From this point he gains a full view of the vale of Shechem stretching to the west, and turns in thither between the heights of Gerizim and its northern mate Ebal, by the road which from immemorial times has connected northern and southern Palestine. For a mile and a half he proceeds into the narrowing valley, through fields of grain and olive orchards, with the walls of his destination lying before him — ancient Shechem, the modern Nablus.<sup>10</sup>

Travellers rival one another in describing the charms of Shechem and its vale.<sup>11</sup> Its climate is attractive, the mountains warding off the chill winds of the north and the hot blasts of the south. The abundant waters of the valley, springing from Gerizim's side temper the dry air of Palestine, which here, for one spot at least, is enriched with the

<sup>10</sup> Nablus, properly Nabulus (as Abu'l Fida points it), is the Arabic corruption of Neapolis, the name — more fully Flavia Neapolis — which Vespasian gave to the new city with which he replaced the elder Shechem; see below, p. 89. This is said to be the only case in Palestine where the Arabic nomenclature has preserved a Greek place-name, in lieu of its Semitic predecessor.

<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to enumerate the descriptions travellers have written; for a few, see the Bibliography. For brief objective descriptions of the town and its sights and inhabitants, we may note *Baedeker*, 246; *JE*, s. v. *Samaritans*. For the topography, consult Rosen, *ZDMG* xiv, 634; Guérin, *Samarie*, i, cc. xxii-xxviii, and *SWPM* ii.



atmospheric effects which only humidity can give. The water and the warmth of the narrow valley, which in one place is only 100 yards wide, nurse a luxuriant vegetation, both in grain crops and in orchards; no place in Palestine would be more fitting for Jotham's Parable of the Trees (*Ju.* 9, 7ff). The more picturesque descriptions tell of the myriads of birds singing amidst the trees, among them the bulbul's voice being heard.<sup>12</sup> The streets of the city are cooled with the water-channels that run through them, from the fifteen springs that are found in the town and from others outside.<sup>13</sup> Above the town lie green fields and orchards, while higher up again the more genuine Palestinian scenery reappears in the steep and stony heights of the two mountains, a contrast which must make the oriental Neapolitan more than ever content with the beautiful valley in which his lot is cast. "Little Damascus" the town has been fondly called,<sup>14</sup> and such an epithet, the Prophet of Islam being witness, is the highest compliment an oriental can pay. At all events to the senses of the wearied traveller it must appear as a veritable Garden of the Lord, while the thriftiness of the town is a welcome relief to one who is accustomed to the ruins and desolation of the ancient cities of Palestine.

Shechem is not only at the heart of Samaria, but is also the junction of the natural routes traversing this hill-country. Through it runs the ancient highway connecting Juda and Galilee, on the line of which the Romans built one of their noble roads. Its springs feed the Wady ash-Shair, which runs northwest, giving the natural road to the ancient city of Samaria, and finally to Cæsarea and the cities of

<sup>12</sup> For impartiality's sake, I should refer to Mills, who gives a much more prosaic account of Nablus' charms: *Three Months' Residence at Nablus*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Rosen gives a list of these springs, *l. c.*

<sup>14</sup> Mukaddasi, quoted by Le Strange, *Palestine Under the Moslems*, 511.

the northern Maritime Plain. Just east of Shechem is the watershed between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, and the Wady Fara here affords easy access to the latter valley, while the great plain of al-Machna is the natural confluence for many roads from all directions. Shechem's commercial importance in modern times is signified by the fact that it is the junction of two telegraph lines from the west, one coming up from Joppa, the other over the western heights from Galilee, meeting here, and thence running across the Jordan to as-Salt.

The early existence of Shechem is proved by the traditions concerning Abraham (*Gen.* 12, 6) and Jacob (*Gen.* 34), and also by two extra-Biblical references of the II<sup>d</sup> Millennium B.C. Knudtzon now reads the name in a Tell-Amarna tablet,<sup>15</sup> and a reference to it and its holy mountain is found in the Papyrus Anastasi I.: "the mount of Shechem" (Sakama).<sup>16</sup> The Old Testament is witness to its importance in Israel's history, at least before the rise of the new capital Samaria, which eclipsed it, until with Samaria's decay in the III<sup>d</sup> and IV<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.C., Shechem again outstripped the rival and recovered its position as the chief city of the district.

In this connection reference may be made to the question whether Shechem always occupied its present site, for in the Orient the identity of name does not involve continuance in the same locality. Nothing in the Old Testament disproves the identity of old Shechem with Nablus, and the scene of Jotham's parable capitally suits the present site of the city. However it is to be observed that Josephus and

<sup>15</sup> Knudtzon, in *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, 1899, p. 112, to Tablet B. 109 (Winckler, 185), lines 21-24. He reads: "Lapaya and Shechem (mat Shakmi) have given (pay ?) to the Chabiri." See Steuernagel, *Einwanderung der israelitischen Stämme*, 120, who connects the passage with the transactions in *Gen.* 34.

<sup>16</sup> W. Max Müller, *Asien u. Europa*, 394; Sayce, *Patriarchal Palestine*, 211. The date of these *Travels of a Mohar* is about 1300 B. C.

Pliny assign Vespasian's foundation of Neapolis to a place originally called Mabartha.<sup>17</sup> Shechem may then have lain more to the east, and if it is to be placed on the watershed already described, its name, "shoulder," can be explained. This distinction between the elder Shechem and the "New-City" of Vespasian is borne out by Patristic authorities and also by archæology. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux (*circa* 333) writes as follows: "Civitas Neapoli. Ibi est Agazaren (Gerizim). . . . Inde ad pedem montis ipsius, locus est cui nomen est Sichem. Ibi positum est monumentum ubi positus est Joseph, in villa quam dedit ei Jacob pater ejus. . . . Inde passus mille, locus est cui nomen Sechar, unde descendit mulier Samaritana ad eundem locum." Eusebius writes (*Onom. s. v. Συχεμ*): "Sychem and Sikima, which is Salem, Jacob's city, now deserted." The Mosaic Map of Madaba likewise distinguishes between Neapolis and Sychem. The archæological evidence obtained by the English Survey may also be quoted here:<sup>18</sup> "The ruins of Nablus extend for a distance east of the modern town. Vaults were excavated in digging the foundations of the barracks [about half-way towards Jacob's Well], and persons in the city claim to have title-deeds of buildings and shops in the same direction. A long mound with traces of a rude wall exists between Balata and 'Askar, and there is a tessellated pavement just east of Joseph's tomb, in which neighborhood ruins are mentioned in the fourteenth century, and were supposed to be those of ancient Thebez (Marino Sanuto)."

In this connection rises the question concerning the identity of the city Sychar of *Jn.* 4, 5, which it has now become the fashion to identify with the Ain Askar lying 1250

<sup>17</sup> *BJ* viii, 4, 1: Mabartha, so Niese, var. Mabortha; Pliny, *Hist. nat.* v, 14, Mamortha. This name is doubtless to be explained, with Schwarz, *Exercitationes historico-criticae in utrumque Sam. Pent.*, 25, as representing the Aramaic *Ma'abarta*, i. e., Pass.

<sup>18</sup> *SWPM* 206; cf. Rosen, *ZDMG* xiv, 639.

meters NE of Jacob's Well. As we have seen, the Bordeaux Pilgrim distinguishes a Sychar apart from Shechem and Neapolis. Also Eusebius, treating of Sychar, says that it is "before Neapolis, near the place which Jacob gave to Joseph, his son." On the other hand Jerome knows nothing of a place Sychar, and insists that it is a mistake for Shechem, which he also identifies with Neapolis.<sup>19</sup> These IVth Century authorities therefore by no means agree. It is to be observed that the elder Shechem once lay as close to Jacob's Well as does Ain Askar, so that the Samaritan woman could easily have come to draw water at the former place. Further, the Fourth Gospel describes Sychar as a Polis, and there is absolutely no evidence for the existence of a city Sychar. As to the dispute between Jerome and the opposing authorities, inasmuch as Jerome takes pains to make denial of the existence of a Sychar, it may be argued that he is right, and his opponents were rather depending upon some tradition originated in support of the Gospel text. Finally, while it is quite possible that Askar is an Arabic corruption of Sychar, nevertheless in its simple meaning of 'askar as a camp, may it not be the later Arabic translation of *machna*, the name of the plain, which itself in Hebrew means a camp?<sup>20</sup> Ain Askar would then be the Well of Al-Machna. It appears to the present writer that a strong case can still be made out for the identification of Sychar with Shechem, on the supposition, with Jerome, of a text-corruption in the text of St. John,—*Συχεμ*, a variant of *Σιχεμ*, having accidentally become *Συχαρ*. The reception of Jesus in the home-city of the Samaritans would be no more strange than the hospitality accorded to Simon Magus or to the Jerusalem Apostles (*Acts*, 8).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Epitaphium Paulæ; Quaestiones in Gen. ad* xlvi, 22; *Onom.* lxvi, 20 (in Migne, respectively: xx, 888; xxiii, 1055; 965).

<sup>20</sup> I find that Conder has already suggested this etymology; *PEFQS* 1876, p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> G. A. Smith sums up the case for the identification of Sychar with

Nablus itself is a long narrow town, about two-thirds of a mile in extent, surrounded by a dilapidated wall. In strategics the town has always been weak, as it lies in the hollow of an indefensible valley, and its walls could never have amounted to much more than police barricades. Indeed the history of the town shows that it never was strong enough to necessitate regular siege, its conquerors always easily pouring into its undefended bounds. This natural weakness was one of the calamities of Northern Israel, which was finally forced to leave its ancient capital for the new city of Samaria, whereas Shechem's southern rival Jerusalem again and again stood the siege of invaders when the rest of the land had fallen to the foe. Nevertheless Shechem has survived, in that way peculiar to oriental life, whereby a city is re-born like the phoenix out of the fire of destruction, and it contains within its walls the only fragment of the Hebrew race which has survived by unbroken succession on Palestinian soil.

In its structures the town does not differ from other oriental towns. It contains five mosques, four of which were originally Crusaders' churches, one of them going back to a foundation of Justinian's. The great arched bazaar which occupies a section of the principal street is said to be the finest in Palestine, and even to rival those of the largest cities of the Turkish empire. The shops are well-furnished with a great variety of commodities, while the productive power of the community finds vent in extensive manufactures of woollens and soap, the latter product being famous all over Syria.

The population of Nablus numbers about 24,000.<sup>22</sup> The Askar, in *HG* c. xviii. Cheyne has a good review of the data in *EB* s. v. *Sychar*, and concludes with the view above preferred, insisting on the purely Arabic character of 'askar. The earlier students of the question, such as Robinson and Guérin, rejected the identification of Sychar and Askar.

<sup>22</sup> These and the following are Baedeker's figures, ed. 1900. The town

great majority are Muslims, the remainder consisting of about 700 Christians,<sup>23</sup> 152 Samaritans (in 1901), and a number of Jews.<sup>24</sup> The town and district are under a local Mutesellim, who is subordinate to the governor of Jerusalem; with his Diwan, or council, are associated representatives of the Greeks, the Samaritans (including the Jews), and the Protestants, as according to Ottoman rule each community must have its responsible spokesman.

As in many another earthly paradise, so in Nablus, "only man is vile." No town in Palestine has so bad a reputation for the ill-disposition and violence of its citizens, and the Ottoman government handles the local elements only with greatest delicacy. Since the day of Lapaya, the marauder of the Tell-Amarna period, Shechem has been the scene of violence and murder. Here occurred the one blot upon the peaceful scutcheon of the patriarchs (*Gen.* 34); here the headstrong Abimelek made himself king, and fell into feud with the rebellious citizens (*Ju.* 9); here the tie with the Davidic dynasty was snapped, and the secession baptized in blood (*1 Ki.* 12), while its priests became notorious for murderous violence (*Hos.* 6, 9). It would be impossible to enumerate the conflicts which have taken place at Shechem between Samaritan and Jew, Samaritan and Roman, Samaritan and Christian; and when Islam conquered the region, although the turbulence of the Samaritans was then cowed forever, the Arabs too fell subject to the atmosphere of the place, and the town and its district have been notorious for the lawlessness which the inhabitants have shown toward the Ottoman rule.

seems to have grown considerably since Petermann's visit, when the calculations given to him by the residents varied between 12,000 and 20,000.

<sup>23</sup> Mostly of the Greek Church, but some of the Latin Rite, along with 150 Protestants.

<sup>24</sup> Baedeker says merely "some Jews." According to Petermann they numbered some 200. The Jews did not return to Shechem until the third decade of the last century, under the Egyptian régime.