



SAMARIA AND PLAIN OF ESDRAELON.

MOSLEM SANCTUARY AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE VALLEY OF
SHECHEM.

The wild flowers represented are a peculiar kind of scabious, the *Scabiosa prolifera*, and a fine salvia, the *Eremostachys lacinata*.

THERE are few places even in Palestine in which, within so narrow a compass, so many interesting associations are centred, or where the history of the past is so vividly

illustrated, as in the narrow Vale of Shechem, which is formed by the near approach of the two terraced mountain ridges of Ebal and Gerizim; and certainly there is no spot throughout the Holy Land which can rival it in beauty.

All travellers, ancient and modern, speak in glowing terms of the peculiar loveliness of this valley, and many are the improvised songs which are sung in its praise, in the present day, in the pleasant gardens of Nâblus, by the Moslem successors of the Shechemites, who proudly quote their prophet Muhammed himself as an authority for saying that "it is the place beloved by Allah above all other places," and "His blessing rests upon it continually."

And Shechem must have been regarded as a specially favoured and hallowed spot in patriarchal times. It was the first halting-place of Abraham after he had passed over the Jordan and entered the land of Canaan, and the first altar erected to Jehovah in the Promised Land was that which Abraham then built at the "place" of Shechem among the oak-trees of Moreh, where it is said "the Lord appeared unto him" (Gen. xii. 6, 7).

To this neighbourhood, and probably to the same camping ground, Jacob in after years was attracted. "And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem" (Gen. xxxiii. 18). About three miles to the east of Shechem there is a little village called Sâlim. It is plentifully supplied with "living water" from two sources, one of which is called 'Ain Kebîr, the Great Fountain. Probably Sâlim is the modern representative of the city near to which John the Baptist found a convenient place for baptizing his disciples, "because there was much water there" (John iii. 23). This village, Sâlim, represented on page 237, vol. i., has also been pointed out as Shalem, the "city of Shechem" to which "Jacob came;" although the highest authorities among Hebrew scholars and annotators of the Bible agree that Shalem does not in this passage, indicate the name of a place, but simply means "safe," like the Arabic word *sâlim*, and the verse should be read thus: "And Jacob came *safe* to the city of Shechem and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, for a hundred pieces of money." Here he dwelt with Leah and Rachel, and their handmaidens and men-servants and women-servants; his wealth, like that of a Bedouin chieftain of the present day, consisting of "flocks and herds and camels."

That the "parcel of ground" acquired by Jacob was situated at the eastern entrance to the Valley of Shechem (see page 237, vol. i.), where it widens and meets the Plain of Mukhnah, there seems to be very little doubt, for here, at the foot of Mount Gerizim, we find the deep and unquestionably ancient well which bears his name (see page 230, vol. i.), and a quarter of a mile to the north of it, exactly opposite Nâblus, the ancient Shechem, stands the traditional tomb of Joseph, Israel's beloved son. The illustration on page 231, vol. i., does not show the interior of the irregularly shaped little court which encloses the tomb, so a few words must be added in description of it. From the entrance, in the north wall, a narrow, irregular, and rudely paved path leads to a Moslem prayer niche in the south wall. In the south-west corner, at about five feet from the ground, there is a splay in which is formed a round-headed niche, in the direction of the site of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, the Kibleh of the Samaritans. On the east side of the path there is a raised daïs about seven inches high, for the use of devotees who come to rest, or read, or pray. Opposite to it on the west side of the path the tomb itself appears on a raised base. It is a clumsy-looking simple structure of stone and plaster, about three feet high and seven feet long, and as it is not parallel with the west wall, near to which it stands, the effect is very peculiar. The top terminates in a blunt-pointed ridge. At the head and the foot a rudely formed pillar of plastered stone is set up, about the same height as the tomb. These pillars are seven-

teen or eighteen inches in diameter, and resemble rude altars, their summits being slightly hollowed. In the shallow basins thus formed I have seen traces of fire, as if votive offerings had recently been burnt there. It is said that small objects, such as kerchiefs of embroidered muslin or silk shawls and other trifles, are occasionally sacrificed at this tomb by Jews. The burial of Joseph in Shechem is recorded in Joshua xxiv. 32, and the next verse states that "Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in Mount Ephraim."

About three miles and a half due south of Joseph's Tomb stands the picturesque and flourishing little village of 'Awertah, surrounded by extensive olive-groves and fig-orchards. Numerous rock-cut tombs, cisterns, and wine-presses, unused for centuries, prove 'Awertah to be a very ancient place. It is regarded with great veneration by Moslems, Jews, and Samaritans, for here, according to the Samaritan chronicle, are "the tombs of the holy priests Eleazar and Phinehas." 'Awertah was inhabited by the Samaritans until the seventh century of our era. It is now occupied exclusively by Moslems. They, however, not only guard the sacred tombs reverently and keep them in good repair, but willingly and with evident pride point them out to passing travellers. The traditional tomb of Phinehas (Kubr el 'Azeirat) is a rude structure of stone and plaster, about fourteen feet in length and seven and a half in breadth, with a high gabled top (see page 238, vol. i.). The tomb of Eleazar (El 'Azeir) is on a mound on the west side of the village, in a large paved court, in a corner of which there is a mosque dedicated to a Moslem sheikh. This tomb is eighteen feet three inches in length and fifteen feet and a half in breadth. A low stone wall immediately surrounds it, and a grand old terebinth-tree overshadows it. A large jar of coarse pottery is generally kept here, filled with water for the use of pilgrims (see page 4).

In nearly every mukâm, or shrine, held sacred by the Moslem, this welcome refreshment is provided either by endowment or by the dwellers in the neighbourhood, as a means of propitiating the goodwill of the saint or prophet to whom it is dedicated. On entering one of these sacred enclosures it is customary to say "Destûr ya Sheikh!" or "Destûr ya Neby!"—that is, "Permission, O Sheikh!" or "Permission, O Prophet!" as the case may be.

Every village in Palestine has its sacred "place;" sometimes marked only by a heap of stones or by a venerable tree on which votive offerings are suspended, but more generally by a whitewashed structure of plaster and stone, surmounted by a dome (kubbeh), built over the grave of a famous chieftain or a revered "wely," that is, a Moslem saint—in which case the building itself is familiarly called a "wely." Similar structures are erected on spots connected with traditions relating to heroes and prophets and saints of old, including Pagans, Hebrews, Samaritans, and Christians. A building of this kind is called in Arabic a "mukâm;" that is, a station, literally a "place," like the corresponding Hebrew word "makom."

Local traditions thus preserved, have in many instances assisted explorers in the recovery of Biblical sites. The entrance to these sacred enclosures is rarely provided with a door, and yet peasants often deposit their ploughs and other implements and tools within a mukâm, or

wely, or even outside it, close to the walls, and leave them with perfect confidence under the protection of the invisible guardian of the place, after perhaps lighting a little lamp to propitiate his or her goodwill. These localised saints and prophets are feared as fully as they are trusted,



for it is very generally believed that they have power to punish as well as to protect, consequently a promise made by a peasant in the name of the enshrined guardian or patron-saint of his village is a surer guarantee than any other. There are many such sanctuaries in

the Vale of Shechem, to which we will now return, pausing for a few moments on our way by Jacob's Well.

When Maundrell visited this well in March, 1697, it must already have been partly choked by the débris of fallen buildings, but he states that it was then one hundred and five feet in depth, and had fifteen feet of water in it. Dr. Robinson states that Messrs. Hebard and Homes, in May, 1838, found the well dry, but their measurement of its depth corresponded



THE APPROACH TO NÂBLUS, THE ANCIENT SHECHEM.

Through the olive-groves on the eastern side of the city; the gate is shown beneath the minaret.

exactly with that of Maundrell, namely, one hundred and five feet. In April, 1839, the Rev. S. Calhoun found ten or twelve feet of water in the well. In April, 1843, Dr. John Wilson induced Jacob esh Shellaby, then a boy of fourteen years of age, to go down to the bottom of the well to search for a Bible, which had been accidentally dropped into it three years previously by the Rev. Andrew Bonar of Callace, who states that in the act of descending into the vault built over the mouth of the well the Bible escaped from his coat-pocket, "and was

soon heard plunging into the water far below.” Jacob esh Shellaby was let down into the well by means of ropes supplemented by two long shawls, which formed the turbans of two Samaritans who were present. The well was fortunately dry, and after some searching among the stones (which are constantly being thrown into it by travellers), the Bible was found and conveyed safely to Dr. Wilson, to his very great satisfaction. It was currently believed in Nâblus that it was a book of necromancy for the recovery of which so much trouble had been taken. The well was at that time, 1843, found to be “exactly seventy-five feet deep,” consequently if the measurements made in 1838 were accurate, débris to the amount of thirty feet had collected in the well in the short space of five years!

In the month of May, 1866, Captain Anderson, R.E., in order to thoroughly examine the well, caused himself to be lowered into it by means of a knotted rope. He states that the mouth of the well has a narrow opening “just wide enough to allow the body of a man to pass through with arms uplifted; this narrow neck, which is about four feet long, resembling the neck of a bottle, opens out into the well itself, which is cylindrical, and about seven feet six inches in diameter. The mouth and upper part of the well are built of masonry, and the well appears to have been sunk through a mixture of alluvial soil and limestone fragments, till a compact bed of limestone was reached, having horizontal strata which could be easily worked, and the interior of the well presents the appearance of being lined with rough masonry.”

The depth was the same as it was in 1843, namely, seventy-five feet, and when Lieutenant Conder measured it in 1877 he found no alteration. Probably this represents not much more than half the original depth of the well, for it was “undoubtedly sunk for the purpose of securing, even in exceptionally dry seasons, a supply of water, which at great depths would always be filtering through the sides of the well, and would collect at the bottom.”

Captain Anderson’s descent into the well was rather a perilous one, for he fainted during the process of lowering. As the rope had fortunately been securely and skilfully lashed round his waist, and his feet rested in a loop, he reached the bottom safely though unconsciously. Suddenly he heard the people shouting to him from above, and when he began to move he found himself lying on his back at the bottom of the well, from whence “the opening at the mouth looked like a star.” Fortunately his ascent was accomplished in safety.

From Jacob’s Well the road, evidently an ancient one, takes a north-westerly direction, skirting the base of Gerizim. On the right is the ancient pasture-land of Jacob and his descendants, now well cultivated, and yielding abundant harvests of wheat and barley, and a good supply of beans, lentils, sesamum, cotton, and tobacco, and a wealth of wild flowers on every uncultivated patch of ground, especially mallows and anemones of many colours and ranunculi (page 230, vol. i.). A spur of Gerizim runs northward as if to meet a corresponding but less developed spur advancing southward from Ebal, the twin mountain opposite; the point of their nearest approach is the true entrance to the Valley of Shechem. As we follow the path, which takes a westerly direction round the northern extremity of Gerizim, the whole length of the valley comes suddenly into sight, with its terraced hillsides, its running streams,



ENTRANCE TO THE GREAT MOSQUE (JAMIA EL KEBÎR), NÂBLUS.
At the east end of the city; it was originally a church dedicated to St. John.