



Jacob's Well, Its History and Associations

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men whom he had slain, and then add, "With this right hand I slew them! Do what you can." He was laid down with his face to Mecca and slaughtered like a goat, his throat being cut with the short sword, according to the usual way of slaying sheep or men. By appealing for mercy to one of those present, he might have saved his life. But that is considered too great a disgrace for any one who considers himself "*a man*."

Next to resignation to the will of God and bravery in battle, one of the very highest virtues is that of hospitable entertainment of strangers and guests. With this many interesting customs are connected, but we have no space to speak of them on the present opportunity.

JACOB'S WELL, ITS HISTORY AND ASSOCIATIONS.

THE plain of Mukhna, thought to be the same as the ancient plain of Moreh, is situated in the very centre of the Holy Land. In journeying from Shiloh to Shechem, about midway between the two places, we ascend to the crest of a ridge of hills, and from the summit obtain the first view of this fertile plain. It runs almost due north and south, and extends about seven miles in length, varying from one to two miles in breadth. This great plain, unbroken by fence or village, presented to our eyes during the spring of last year a scene of fertility and rural beauty not to be surpassed throughout the whole of Palestine.

The main road, winding through the plain, could easily be seen by its light appearance, and the clumps of aged olive-trees growing by the roadside, while all around the fields smiled with ripening corn. Many peasants were busy in the cultivation of the soil, and from one spot alone we were able to see at least one hundred yoke of ploughing oxen. The greater part of El Mukhna is enclosed by low undulating hills, and at the north-east extremity, towering high above the other hills, stand the celebrated twin mountains of Ebal and Gerizim. Far away on the northern horizon, on a clear day, can be seen the lofty hill of Great Hermon.

Between Ebal and Gerizim, running at right-angles to El Mukhna, the far-famed vale of Shechem.

The patriarch Abraham, when commanded to leave his home and country, ultimately pursued his journey across the Syrian desert, until he came to the borders of the Promised Land. On arriving at the banks of the Jordan he crossed the river and continued his way towards the west until he came "unto the place of Sichem unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abraham and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord." The first recorded halting-place of Abram is not without significance, for Sichem stood in

the centre of Palestine, insomuch that it was designated the middle or more correctly the navel of the land; and thus by Divine guidance did he proceed to the central spot of the country intended as the future home of his favoured posterity. The patriarch Jacob, journeying from Padan-aram to Canaan, seems to have followed in the footsteps of his grandfather Abraham, and first purchased a possession in the Promised Land not far from the Vale of Shechem. In this valley, after the conquest of the land, the national gatherings of the Israelites took place, and here Joshua, in his old age, assembled all the people that they might hear from his lips for the last time the whole counsel of God.

At the bend of the path, where the road turns into the Valley of Shechem, a low spur rising at the base of Mount Gerizim runs for a short distance in a north-east direction, and thus separates the valley from the plain. On arriving at the low ridge we turn aside from the main road, and follow a little path on the right hand. In a few minutes we come to a low crumbling wall, where, after clambering over loose stones, we step upon a mound composed of heaps of ruins, and the fragments of large granite columns. This mound lies at the meeting of the two valleys and links together the sacred history of upwards of three thousand years. At the south-east corner of this mound the traveller is led forward to a hole broken through the roof of a vaulted chamber with a pointed roof. On looking through this opening into the chamber beneath, several large stones are observed, probably the fallen arch-stones, scattered over the floor, and about the middle of the little chamber is a small dark aperture, the mouth of the shaft of Jacob's Well. Standing on the ground by the vaulted chamber we notice that the landscape is both extensive and impressive. Westward stretched the fertile Valley of Shechem, on the north of which rises the rocky slopes of Ebal, while on the south side rises abruptly to the height of 800 feet the sacred Mount of Gerizim. Southward, stretching as far as the eye could reach, was the wide-spreading plain of El Mukhna, over which we had passed. Due eastward, across the plain, El Mukhna sends forth a broad green arm among the hills. This arm is still called the Vale of Shalem, and takes its name from a hamlet of that name standing on the rocky acclivity on the north side of the valley. This village has been identified by Dr. Robinson with every show of probability as occupying the site of that Shalem—a city of Shechem—before which Jacob pitched his tent on his return from Padan-aram to Canaan. Down that valley the little stream from Shechem drains into the Jordan, from which river Jacob ascended by that wady, and halting where the vale opens into the plain, pitched his tent before Shalem.

“And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram, 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 the children of Hamor, Shechem's

father, for an hundred pieces of money, and he erected there an altar."

"The practical wisdom of the shepherd prince who crossed the Jordan with his staff and came back at the head of two great bands was never more signally displayed than in securing a possession in this the garden of Canaan, and in afterwards prospectively bestowing it on his favourite son." This parcel of ground became the homestead of the patriarch and his household, and over it and the adjoining plain his flocks freely roamed. When Jacob had removed to the hill country of Judea he still retained his purchased possession, and from the Vale of Hebron sent forth his beloved son Joseph to see how fared his brethren and their flocks in the Vale of Shechem. "And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee: see whether it be well with thy brethren and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the Vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem." To Joseph and his descendants did the dying patriarch bequeath this purchased possession, and Joseph's dying request was that his bones might be buried there. "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

This injunction after a long period of years was strictly obeyed, for when the Israelites set forth from Egypt for the Promised Land they carried with them the mummy of Joseph. "And the bones of Joseph which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph." It seems somewhat strange that nowhere in the Old Testament is it stated that Jacob dug a well, although the existence of the well at the present day in the parcel of ground, and the distinct statement of the Samaritan woman that Jacob gave the well, put the fact beyond a doubt.

The geological structure of Palestine is largely composed of limestone; and as the well penetrated far beneath the surface, and was generally bored through the rock, it will readily be seen that a deep well was a work both gigantic and abiding. Sinking a well in the East is a greater undertaking than the erection of a castle or the construction of a fortress; but when once the well is bored through the rock it remains almost indestructible, so that while temples fall into decay and pyramids gradually crumble before the ravages of time, the boring through the solid rock remains sure and steadfast; a link of connection between the centuries, and a bond of union that knits together the successive generations of the sons of men. Such wells were made at an enormous cost, and the name of the constructor was handed down from age to age as a benefactor to posterity. Not only are the scenes of sacred history identified by the imperishable wells, but their very existence tends to establish the historical character of the word of God.

The wells still to be seen at Beersheba are witnesses of the life of Abraham; and the well of Jacob in the Vale of Shechem is an abiding monument of the earliest and latest events in sacred history. They were usually sunk at the foot of the hills, where the best supply of water was likely to be found, and were places of resort for many classes of people. Shepherds in ancient days led their flocks, and shepherds even at the present day lead their flocks to the well's mouth, that the animals may drink of the cool refreshing water drawn from the deep rocky bed. A well was the natural halting-place of caravans, and way-faring men looked forward to it as a resting-place for the night. The women of the neighbourhood assembled in the evening to talk and to draw water from the well; thus it was by a well that Eliezer met Rebekah, Jacob met Rachel, Moses met Zipporah, and Our Saviour met the woman of Samaria. Thus do the wells of the East suggest to the mind pictures of the ancient life of the country, and lead back our thoughts to the days of the prophets and the patriarchs.

It has been urged that there is abundance of water at no great distance from Jacob's parcel of ground, and therefore it is highly improbable that the patriarch dug a deep well in his purchased possession.

In answering this objection it ought to be noticed that the first assertion forming the premises of the argument is quite correct, for in the neighbouring Vale of Shechem there flows a bountiful supply of water. Within half a mile of the well we crossed over a gushing stream, and close by are three springs or fountains from which water bubbles forth in a never-failing supply. In company with El Karey, the missionary, we walked through Nablus, which occupies the site of ancient Shechem, and is situated about a mile and a half from the well. In the streets and suburbs we noticed many springs, and were surprised to learn that in the town and neighbourhood there are over seventy perennial fountains, so that the Valley of Shechem is the best watered, and consequently the most fertile, valley of Palestine. Notwithstanding this, however, I think the conclusion that Jacob did not dig the well is false, and believe that, even if no other evidence existed than the known character of Jacob, and the fact that the well is in the parcel of ground, the probability is in favour of the well being constructed by that patriarch.

The well, as a fact, does exist now, and has existed from time immemorial, and at enormous cost and labour must have been sunk by some person of wealth, who desired an abundant supply of water independent of the adjoining springs. Whatever objections, therefore, are urged against the patriarch being the constructor, are equally applicable to any other person; and since the well has been dug, there is no person in the history of the district so likely to have undertaken this gigantic work as the patriarch Jacob, the great shepherd prince of ancient Israel. His grandfather Abraham, a man very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold, dug wells of water in the hill country of Judea, and in consequence of some disputes with the inhabitants regarding the ownership of the

well, Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech, and to confirm the oath named the well Beersheba—that is, the well of the oath. Isaac also had many contentions with the inhabitants of the land respecting the wells, for not only had he to dig again the wells of his father, which had maliciously been stopped by the Philistines after the death of Abraham, but when he found it desirable to sink other wells, the natives persistently strove for the possession of them.

On arriving at the plain of El Mukhna by the Vale of Shechem, Jacob, for his part, doubtless recalled to mind the fierce contentions that both his father and grandfather had with the inhabitants of the land. He could not but remember also that the root of that contention lay in the fact that both Isaac and Abraham had digged wells in ground that was not their purchased possession; and consequently Jacob wisely resolved to buy a parcel of ground of the people of the land, so that no disputes might arise respecting the heritage of the soil. His household was very extensive, and it was necessary that every day he himself, his children, and his cattle, should have an abundant supply of water. Many springs of water were bubbling forth perennial streams; but the patriarch was a stranger in a strange land, and the abundant supply required daily for his flocks might incite the anger of the children of Hamor, and be urged as a plea for that jealous contention so often endured by Abraham and Isaac. Under these circumstances it appears natural to suppose that the peace-loving Jacob secured for himself a never-failing source of living water by digging a deep well in his own purchased possession.

“How truly,” says Dr. Tristran, “in keeping with Jacob’s peace-loving character was this act of sinking a well in a plain at so enormous a cost—so near the city and its abundant springs and rills—fearing lest his sons should quarrel with the Shechemites concerning the water more precious than land. The land might be roamed over by the flocks, for the people were few; but the springs were not to be drunk up by the herds of the stranger. Therefore, following the examples of his father and his grandfather, Jacob determined to sink a well, but profiting by the remembrance of their experience at Beersheba, with characteristic caution he first purchased the piece of land of the lord of the country, of Hamor the father of Shechem.” The well at one time must have been of considerable depth, probably the deepest in Palestine; and being in great measure bored through the rock, this gigantic undertaking, when once consummated, would remain as a valuable legacy to posterity. It is never once alluded to in the Old Testament, but this may arise from the fact that wells became common in the country, and the neighbourhood of Shechem being well supplied with water the people were not dependent upon it for their supply. It could not, however, be destroyed.

That, however, which gives an undying interest to Jacob’s Well, and renders it one of the most interesting spots in the world, is the fact that Our Blessed Lord sat one day by the well’s mouth, and in conversation with a Samaritan woman unfolded to her the spiritual

nature of that dispensation He came from heaven to proclaim. One day in the month of May of the present year we sat down by Jacob's Well, and it was to us a deep delight to sit on a spot where the Saviour once sat, and to gaze upon the wide plain, the fertile vale and towering Gerizim just as they met His sacred gaze eighteen hundred years ago. Taking out our Bible we read the fourth chapter of St. John; and the passage read by the well seemed to acquire additional freshness, and brought vividly to our minds the truth and accuracy of the Scripture narrative. "Then cometh He to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's Well was there. Jesus, therefore being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour." He must have left Jerusalem very early in the morning in order that He might walk during the cool hours of morn, even as pilgrims do at the present day. Passing over the heights of Benjamin, Christ would pursue His way by the main road, going through Bethel and near to Shiloh, both of sacred memory. Over that ridge of hills on the south side of El Mukhna, and along that dusty road which for five miles runs through the plain, both hills and path being seen by us as we sat at the well's mouth, our Saviour must have continued the long and toilsome journey. Midday had come, and therefore for some hours the sun had poured upon the solitary traveller his fierce rays, and therefore it was natural that He, weary with the journey, should quench His thirst with the cool water drawn from its rocky bed.

"There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water." It has been urged, and as it seems to us justly, that it is not likely that a Samaritan woman would walk from a town a mile and a half off, as the present Nablus is, to draw water from Jacob's Well, when there were abundant springs in Shechem itself, and many more springs which she would have passed in coming from Shechem. Many answers have been given to this objection. First, it is said that the veneration for the memory of the patriarch, and the superiority of the cool water, are sufficient reasons for the woman going a long distance. Secondly, it has been suggested that Sychar might not occupy precisely the same site as the ancient Shechem, or the present Nablus. Eastern towns often change their sites—*e.g.*, Hebron has ascended and descended the adjoining hills, extending and changing its site at different periods. The present Nazareth does not cover the exact site of ancient Nazareth, and while the modern barracks by Nablus were being built, which occupy a position midway between Jacob's Well and the town, the workmen struck upon many old foundations, which tend to prove that the ancient city extended a considerable distance down the vale, eastward of the modern town.

El Karey, the present missionary at Nablus, suggested to us that the woman did not go to the well to draw water for domestic purposes, inasmuch as the ancient custom was for women to draw it in the evening; thus we read that Abraham's servant "made his camels to kneel down

without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water;" and as the time when our Saviour spoke to her was mid-day, El Karey further remarked that the Samaritan woman was probably working in the adjoining fields, and during the noontide meal approached the well simply that she might drink.

All the foregoing suggestions are reasonable, and carry with them a certain amount of conviction to many minds, but in my own opinion the true answer to the objection may be found in the following consideration. As I sat by the well and looked northward, I noticed at the bottom of Ebal, at the south-east corner of the mount, about half a mile from us, a small village, and on further inquiry found it to be the village of Aschâr. The close resemblance of this name to Sychar is very evident, inasmuch as the two names contain the same consonants, and it is one of the fundamental laws of philology that in tracing a word through its successive changes, the consonants, and not the changing vowels, are the means by which words can be traced to a common origin. It is not surprising, then, that some have suggested that the present Aschâr occupies the site of the Sychar mentioned in St. John's Gospel. Dr. Thomson, in the "Land and the Book," speaking on this subject, says:—"If Nablus occupies the place of Shechem, it is one of the oldest cities in the world; nor is there anything improbable in this, for its natural advantages, great beauty, and abundant supply of water, mark out the site for a city. This latter fact, however, seems to prove that Shechem was not the Sychar mentioned in the fourth chapter of St. John. It is incredible that 'the woman of Samaria' should have gone two miles away from these fountains to draw water out of an immensely deep well. If we admit the identity of the present well of Jacob with that mentioned by St. John, there can be but little doubt that Sychar was a small Samaritan town not far from that spot; and there is a village north of it now called Aschâr. This is so like John's Sychar that I feel inclined to adopt it." It is gratifying to me that this view is adopted by Lieutenant Conder in his "Tent Work in Palestine." In vol. i., page 75, he writes:—"The little village of Askar stands on the slope of Ebal, within sight of Jacob's Well, about half a mile from it, and a little over a mile from Nablus. . . . It is here, no doubt, that we recognise the Sychar of the fourth gospel. An unaccountable confusion has grown up lately between Sychar and Shechem. . . . It will be evident to all readers of the Gospel narrative that Sychar, 'a city of Samaria,' near Jacob's Well, is a description hardly to be expected of Shechem, which is moreover mentioned by its original name in the New Testament (Acts vii. 16). The early Christians recognised the description, and place Sychar a mile east of Shechem, as noticed in the 'Itinerary of Jerusalem, 333 A.D.' It is clear that they refer to Askar, and the identity is maintained by Canon Williams and others; but a difficulty has always been felt by students because the modern name begins with a guttural, which cannot have occurred in

the name Sychar. This difficulty the Samaritan chronicle seems to me to remove, for in it we find a town mentioned apparently near Shechem called Ischar, which is merely a vulgar pronunciation for Sychar; and the Samaritans themselves in translating their Chronicle into Arabic call it 'Askar. Thus the transition is traceable from the Hebrew form, having no meaning in Arabic but originally 'a place walled in,' through the Samaritan Ischar to the modern 'Askar, a 'collection' or 'army,' in Arabic."

A Christian church seems to have been built over or near to the well in the time of Constantine the Great. The Bordeaux Pilgrim, who visited the spot in 333 A.D., saw no church there, but according to Jerome the noble lady Paula, in 383, entered a church built on the side of Gerizim—"circa puteum Jacob" (around Jacob's Well).

Bishop Arculf, in 700 A.D., saw the church, sketched it, and describes it as cruciform in shape, built over the well. It was, however, destroyed before the Crusaders' time. Probably the ruins scattered round the spot at present belong for the most part to this ancient church.

Over the well is a small vaulted chamber, into which we descended through a large hole in the roof. The chamber is 8 feet high, 7 wide, and 12 long. At the end is a long vault running at right angles, and from this run three smaller vaults parallel to each other. These underground chambers seem to have been the substructures of some church, but as we discovered in them the pointed arch and groined roof, they certainly do not belong to Constantine's time, but are probably the work of the Crusaders of the twelfth century. The well's mouth, which is under the pavement of the small vaulted chamber, has been arched over. Some of the arch stones had been taken away, and through the opening we looked down into what seemed to be a dark hole. As we continued to gaze intently into this shaft, we noticed that the top part was lined with masonry, of good polished ashlar work. Deeper and deeper we traced the masonry, to a depth of about twenty feet, after which, as it seemed to us, the bore was through the rock. We then dropped a stone into the deep shaft, and while it was descending counted sixteen. This was repeated about a dozen times, with the same result. We therefore judged it to be about 80 feet deep. The stones made no splash on reaching the bottom, from which it was evident that there was no water then in the well, although we were afterwards told that water is sometimes drawn from its rocky bottom. The well was originally much deeper, but other travellers, like ourselves, keep dropping stones into it out of curiosity; and as this goes on from generation to generation, it is clear that a vast accumulation of *débris* chokes up the lower depths of the shaft. We therefore agree with El Karey in thinking that originally the well was probably 150 feet deep.

The Palestine Exploration Fund desire to clear out this rubbish and build a low wall round the well's mouth, such as would exist in the time of Christ. Lieutenant Kitchener, in 1877, was prevented from carrying out the work by the disturbed condition of the country. I

hope that before long it will be found possible to expend the small sum necessary to protect from further injury one of the most venerable monuments in the world.

Among the surrounding ruins we found fragments of three red granite columns lying prostrate on the ground. Half a mile up the valley we found a fourth column, fifteen feet long, lying by the roadside. On making inquiry we learned that this column had been brought from the well to form an entrance to the modern barracks. The idea, however, was not carried out, and the venerable column was cast aside, and now lies neglected by the roadside. The four reminded us of the columns in Helena's Basilica at Bethlehem, and perhaps formed part of the original church built in the days of Constantine.

The Old Testament, the Samaritan woman, external evidence and tradition extending back to at least the fourth century, testify that the well is the work of the patriarch.

Jews and Samaritans, Christians and Moslems, agree that this rock-cut bore is Jacob's Well, so that "of all the special localities of Our Lord's life in Palestine, this is, perhaps, the only one absolutely undisputed."

JAMES KING.

NEPHTOAH AND KIRJATH-JEARIM.

THE following notes may perhaps be useful as throwing some light on the question raised by Rev. A. Henderson in the October number of the *Quarterly Statement*, respecting the line of the boundary of Judah, between Jerusalem and Beth-shemesh:—

This boundary has usually been drawn westwards by Lifta (supposed to be Nephtoah), and Kuriet el 'Anab, supposed to be Kirjath-jearim.

There is, however, one very great objection to such a line, namely, the passage in the history of Saul (1 Sam. x. 2), which incidentally mentions the tomb of Rachel as being in the "border" of Benjamin. The word גבול, used in this passage, is the word used in the book of Joshua to define the "boundary line" between the tribal possessions. The Rabbinical writers agree with this statement, saying that Rachel died within the territory of Benjamin.

There is another objection also respecting Lifta, namely, that the Arabic does not contain the guttural of the Hebrew Nephtoah. No town of the name of Nephtoah is mentioned, either in the passage of Joshua (xv. 9) or elsewhere in the Bible; the place is called "the fountain of the waters of Nephtoah" (מַעֵין מִי נַפְתוֹחַ), and the word מַעֵין translated "fountain," means a group of springs, or a large supply of water, such as does not exist at Lifta.

The Babylon Talmud Commentary on the tract Yoma of the Mishnah (fol. 31a) informs us that Nephtoah was the same place as Etam (עֵתָם), whence an aqueduct ran to the Temple. The Etam in question has been recognised by Dr. Tobler and others as the present 'Ain 'Atān, close to the so-called Pools of Solomon, south-west of Bethlehem. From