

Shechem of the Scriptures.

AN INTERESTING SKETCH ON BIBLICAL HISTORY.

The plain of Moreh is about twenty miles in length from north to south, and four miles in width. It is bounded on the west by a ridge of mountains five or six hundred feet high, and on the east by an irregular line of hills. Near the center of the western range is the opening or valley of Shechem, which varies from one-quarter to half a mile in width, running from east to west. It was facing this valley, and within a short distance of it, on the plains of Moreh, that Jacob, when he came from Padanaram, pitched his tent, and there, as it was written, "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." (Gen. xxxiii, 19.)

The lands thus purchased lie on both sides of a living stream of water, and no doubt afforded him an abundant support both in pasture and water for his numerous herds of cattle. The mildness of the climate at all seasons allowed the cattle running at large during the entire year. The pasturing is much better during the rainy or winter months than in the midst of summer; for then the soil is dry and the herbage parched with the scorching heats, except where the ground is irrigated by a supply of water, as is the case on this great plain.

Jacob's well, of which so much has been spoken and written, is situated on the south side of this stream. Over it formerly stood a large church, built in the form of a cross, erected by that great and devout patroness of the Holy Land, the Empress Helena. But the ravages of time, aided by the sacrilegious hand of the Moslem, have left of it only a few broken columns and a portion of the foundation walls. The well is now nearly filled with rubbish, and no water is to be seen in it.

On the north side of the stream, and opposite to the well, stands Joseph's tomb, on the lot which Jacob gave him. Its enclosure is circular in form and open on the top. Within this tomb, the body of Joseph was deposited by the Israelites on their return from Egypt, and here it still reposes. Joseph was one of the noblest characters depicted in the ancient history of the world, even when contrasted with illustrious kings, warriors or law-givers. His tomb, and also the small mosque within which it is inclosed, are covered with the names of the thousands who have visited it, traced in every written language of which we have a knowledge. This tomb, it is said, is now venerated equally by Jews and Samaritans, Muslims and Christians.

The city of Shechem is called Nabelus by its present inhabitants. It is situated between two and three miles from Jacob's well, and is on the line of the central route from Jerusalem to Galilee. It contains upwards of ten thousand inhabitants. The famous summits of Ebal and Gerizim—the mountains of blessing and cursing—bound the valley on the north and south, and rise about eight hundred feet in height.

The town itself has ever been memorable in the history of the Jewish nation, and is beyond all doubt, one of the oldest cities within the limits of Palestine. Long before Greece or Rome was heard of, its meridian age had passed. It was known and distinguished as Shechem before Abraham, by divine command, removed with his kindred and servants from Haran in Mesopotamia to this, which then was, to him, a strange land. It was here that he pitched his tent two thousand and thirty-five years before Christ, and while the Canaanites were still in possession. It was on this hallowed ground that the Lord appeared unto him and said, as we read in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, "Unto thy seed I give this land;" and here, as it also is written, "he buildeth an altar to the Lord."

I felt satisfied while passing through this city and beautiful valley, that my feet were pressing the very ground that had once been trod by that illustrious patriot exactly three thousand nine hundred and ninety-four years ago. Here, too, was enacted the terrible tragedy, connected with the dishonor of Dinah by Shechem, the son of Hamor, the prince of the country. In consequence of this act, all the male inhabitants of the city, together with Hamor and Shechem, were slaughtered by the sons of Jacob, who, with his entire household, immediately thereafter removed to Bethel.

It was here that the Israelites, after their return from Egypt, ratified the law of the Lord. Six tribes on Ebal, and as many on Gerizim—the ark and the attendant priests in the valley below—pronounced the blessing and the curse, and all the assembly responded to heaven with a solemn amen. (Deut. xxvii.) And here Joshua assembled the hosts for the last time, and revoked and renounced the covenant between them and the Lord. (Joshua xxiv.) This place was also the scene of the treachery of Abimelech, and the parable of Jotham. (Judges ix.) And above all it was at Jacob's well, but a short distance from the city, that Jesus, in the middle of his second day's journey from Jerusalem seated himself for rest, while his disciples passed up the valley to the city for the purchase of provisions; and it was while awaiting their return that the Savior conversed with the women from Samaria, who had come to draw water from the well. (John iv.)

This city, after the return of the Israelites, was for centuries their great gathering place, and on Ebal an altar was erected, upon which the law was inscribed. The Samaritan priests

could not inform me whether those great stones which God commanded Joshua to set up on Mount Gerizim were yet standing. I was shown, however, in their synagogue in the city, a copy of the Pentateuch, on two rolls, which the priest declared to be the oldest manuscript in the world. According to their statement, it was written by Abisnus, the son of Phineas, the son of Eleazer, the son of Aaron. Mr. Elliot, who visited here several years ago, examined it carefully, and coincided with the priests in regard to its antiquity.

Most of the sacred localities in the Holy Land have their advocates in respect to their identity, while many able writers deny their authenticity; but no one has ever questioned the identity of the city of Shechem. The Nabelus of to-day is the Shechem of upwards of four thousand years ago. And while their is but little in the city itself to attract the attention of tourists, yet I regard it as one of the most important points within the limits of Palestine.

The valley of Shechem or Nabelus is, so far as natural scenery is concerned, one of the finest and most verdant in Samaria. It sparkles with fountains and streams. It is full of delight in itself, and rendered surpassingly interesting by reason of its historical associations. There is a large olive orchard extending from the eastern side of the city to near the plains of Moreh; and on the opposite side, the valley descends gently toward the west, and every part of it is cultivated like a garden. The land is irrigated by living streams, and vegetables and fruit of all kinds are raised in perfection. It is said that many of the bearing olive-trees now standing were planted over one thousand years ago. The terraces on the sides of the mountains are in a better state than those I saw in Judea or any part of Samaria.

The inhabitants of the city are composed chiefly of Samaritans, Jews, Mussulmans and a few Christians, who are principally engaged in manufacturing establishments. The pastoral inhabitants of this region are exceedingly warlike in their appearance, and are armed with long guns, daggers and pistols, as if they were ferocious brigands instead of being the honest and industrious shepherds that they are. I presume they go armed to enable them to successfully defend themselves and cattle from the wandering Arabs, who sometimes visit the plains of Moreh.

A Scottish Covenanter.

In glancing anew over Sir Walter Scott's "Tales of a Grandfather," we were reminded of the days of Cameronian persecution, two centuries ago. Brown the Cameronian was by profession a carrier, and from his zealous religious principles was called the Christian Carrier. In May, 1685, Peden, one of the Cameronian ministers, was tracked to Brown's house, but escaped his pursuers, saying to Brown's wife, as he left, "Poor woman! a fearful morning—a dark and misty morning"—as indeed it proved to her directly after. To follow Scott's narrative:

"When Peden was gone, Brown left his house with a spade in his hand for ordinary labor, when he was suddenly surrounded and arrested by a band of horse with Claverhouse at their head. Although the prisoner had a hesitation in his speech on ordinary occasions, he answered the questions which were put to him in this extremity with such composure and firmness, that Claverhouse asked whether he was a preacher. He was answered in the negative. 'If he has not preached,' said Claverhouse, 'mickle hath he prayed in his time. But be ake you now to your prayers for the last time,' addressing the sufferers, 'for you shall presently die.' The poor man knelt down and prayed with zeal; and when he was touching on the political state of the country, and praying that Heaven would spare a remnant, Claverhouse interrupting him said, 'I gave you leave to pray, and you are preaching.' 'Sir,' answered the prisoner, turning toward his judge on his knees, 'you know nothing either of preaching or praying, if you call what I now say preaching;' then continued without confusion. When his devotions were ended, Claverhouse commanded him to bid good-night to his wife and children. Brown turned toward them and, taking his wife by the hand, told her that the hour was come which he had spoken of when he first asked her consent to marry him. The poor woman answered firmly, 'In this case, I am willing to resign you.' 'Then I have nothing to do, save to die,' he replied, 'and I thank God I have been in a frame to meet death for many years.' He was shot dead by a party of soldiers at the end of his own house."

The heroism of Brown's wife even surpassed his own. The brutal Claverhouse mocked and taunted her, as she stood horror-stricken at the terrible scene, with the corpse of her husband lying beside her, and her fatherless infant in her arms. But having boldly challenged the judgment of Heaven upon Claverhouse for his crime, "she placed the child on the ground, tied up the corpse's head, and straightened the limbs, and covered him with her plaid, and sat down and wept over him." Such names live for other generations.

—The Charleston Courier deprecates the raising of black flags, and says that it is urged principally by those who keep a safe distance from the war.

—The factory for making knit goods, including shirts, drawers, hosiery, &c., at Seneca Falls, N. Y., employs 4,000 laborers—men, women, girls and boys.

The French Army and Navy.

The Paris correspondent of the Boston Transcript gives the following information respecting the French army and navy:

All the cannon now used by the French are rifled. The equipment secures rapid movement over heavy grounds; and plenty of spare men, horses and material, make up for casualties and preserve efficiency in action.

The Emperor does not occupy himself much with new arms, but gives much attention to new modes of doing things, new drills, new tactics, new evolutions, new corps, organized works in the field, the siege, the trenches, the escalades, new ways of crossing rivers, ditches, marshes, climbing walls or houses and surmounting obstacles of all sorts, much practice in maneuvering large bodies massed, much athletic practice with arms, with sticks and without either, a great deal of target firing with guns, rifles and muskets at various ranges and over variable grounds, rapid marches and new paces, square, short, quick—a return, in some degree to the athletic drill and physical discipline of the Roman Legions—the central ideas being the development of athletic endurance, rapidity of movement, accuracy of firing, and, by the division of labor, speciality of employment, and perfection of evolutionary drill, to produce the highest combined effect, with a given force.

It is clear that the Emperor does not consider the number of men as any gauge of the strength of an army. Small armies have generally done the greatest work. The Russian army on its present footing is about 850,000; the Austrian, 740,000; the Prussian, 720,000; the French, 620,000; the English pretend to muster 534,000, but this includes 218,000 blacks in India, 18,000 Colonists, and 61,000 militia and yeomanry, 140,000 volunteers, 15,000 pensioners and 12,000 constables.

There are no breech-loading guns in the army. The Emperor thinks them too liable to blow out or get out of order, and too expensive; had experience of the Armstrongs in the China war alongside his own, and, on the whole, prefers the latter. The artillery arm of the French army, (for field work) consists of 32 batteries of horse artillery (6 guns) 192 guns; 10 batteries foot artillery, 60 guns; 6 squadrons trains pontooner, and 100 batteries mounted artillery; in all, 852 guns, 37,000 men, and about as many horses. The mounted artillery, 100 batteries, is the great arm; each gun, in marching order, is as follows: 1st, one gun, six horses and three postillions, (no men on the caisson); 2d, eight mounted gunners; 3d, one caisson, six horses and three postillions; 4th, eight mounted ammunition men; 5th, three spare wheels—that is to say, the fore wheels of a gun carriage, with gun caisson and spare wheel (making three) with two horses and one postilion; 6th, six spare horses and three postillions. The rack gun has sixteen mounted men, six postillions and four spare postillions, eight spare horses, three spare wheels and one spare gun caisson; in all, 26 men and 26 horses. Six of these form a battery.

It is difficult to arrive at a fair comparison of the naval forces of England and France; but I make it that the French are superior in steam and inferior in sails, and that, if the two entire navies were ranged in line of battle, the forces would be so nearly equal that it would be difficult to say which would win; and I judge from a speech of Lord Ellenborough, at an agricultural meeting, that he arrives at a similar conclusion, as he says, "It is useless to deny that we cannot rely on it, that we have any superiority of naval force."

Condition of the Jews in the United States.

The Jewish Messenger reviews the condition of the Jews in this country, and tells what the people have done during the past year:

New synagogues have been dedicated at Cincinnati and New York; new congregations formed at Boston and New York; literary associations have been founded at Cleveland and Hartford. A Hebrew free Sunday-school has been opened in one of our cities; a course of lectures, under the auspices of a Hebrew literary society, has been delivered at New York, where likewise a grand banquet in aid of the Jews' Hospital was given, yielding nearly ten thousand dollars to the fund of that institution.

The Pacific Messenger was started at San Francisco, but survived only a few weeks; the Occident ceased to be a weekly publication, and resumed its magazine form; the True Pacific Messenger and Der Treue Bote (in German) are now issued at San Francisco.

Preliminary steps, looking to a union among the Israelites of large cities for religious purposes, have been taken at Philadelphia and New York. The former movement has been thus far successful; the New York convention has for the time being suspended operations. The visit of Rabbi Abraham Nissan on a mission in aid of the Perushim Congregation in Jerusalem, resulted in the collection of a considerable sum among our co-religionists of the Eastern and Middle States.

CROWING.—"Read the rolls of the United States Army and United States Navy and ask where are the most of the names who have illustrated both branches of the service since the war of 1812-15. You will find them in the ranks of the Confederate Army or Navy. If we have not a numerical majority we have by long odds a qualitative majority of all who are old enough for experience, yet young enough for active service."—[Charleston Courier.]

Siam and Siamese.

There is one peculiar feature in Siam which isolates it from every other empire of the earth: Siam has no cities! No strong built, well-fortified, elegantly-constructed towns and cities, with suburbs and suburban villas. The pagan in Hindostan rivalled in the architecture of his temple the most splendid efforts of Greece in her sunniest days.

The Taj Mahal was something exquisite in the conception of the brain that first conceived its existence in embryo. China and Japan have noble specimens also of architectural beauty, and all Christendom and the Ottoman Empire have something to show in the shape of what constitutes a city.

The tent of the Arab of the desert and the floating-house of the Siamese are very much assimilated. Now they are swallowed up in the vortex of some town or city constituting an item either central or suburban. Now they are isolated and lonesome. In fact, the Siamese may be called the Bedouins of the river.

While the Arab's faith clings tightly to his mare, on whose back he may deeply traverse the sandy wastes, pursuing or pursued, the Siamese relies upon the excellence and swiftness of his canoe, which constitutes his all in all, whether for pleasure or for flight, or for the remunerative services it renders him in fishing or in the conveyance and vending of the produce of the soil.

As in the desert we may encounter the solitary tent of an Arab, his spear stuck into the ground and his well-beloved mare fastened thereto, so, in desolate portions of the Menam are to be encountered single floating-houses, with the indispensable canoe chained to the front, and here, in fishing or some other occupation, the inhabitants pass the time in undisturbed tranquility.

The capital of Siam, Bangkok, is nothing more nor less than a congregation of wooden huts or cabins floating upon strongly constructed bamboo rafts, any score or two of which may at any given moment be loosed from their moorings and shift the scene of their future homes either farther up or lower down the river, thus weakening the city in the number of its houses and inhabitants. Or else, as is not often the case, some thousand-ton ship or junk of huge proportions swings suddenly to the tide, carrying away a small colony of houses, which drift away rapidly, to the astonishment and terror of the yelling inmates. With the exception of a few palaces and wats, a few monumental pillars and European residences, Bangkok has nothing substantial about it, and some unusual flood-tides might any night sweep away the greater mass of houses and population, and leave the astonished inmates of the more solid fabrics on terra firma positively alone in their glory. That a people so lodged should be almost amphibious in their natures cannot be a matter of surprise. The first duty of man, and of woman also in Siam, is to learn to swim, and infants barely able to toddle about take to the water as kindly as young ducklings. They may be said to be a scrupulously cleanly people if often lavation is a proof thereof, for one half of the day, excepting during the monsoons, they are paddling and swimming about, men, women and children, heterogeneously mixed up, and destitute of any sense of delicacy or shame as they almost are of clothing.

Yet with all this it cannot be said that the Siamese are an immoral people; indeed, in this respect, they are far superior to the natives of the continent of India, and there is much more of simplicity and gentleness about their disposition, and none of that crafty treachery and revenge which is the predominant feature of the Malays, to whom in every other respect they bear close resemblance.

As a rule, admitting of very few exceptions indeed, the Siamese, both men and women, are short of stature, but remarkably sinewy and strong about the legs and arms. Their complexion varies, according to their exposure to the sun, from a light fawn color to a deep copper, verging sometimes upon bronze. They have all flat faces with high cheek-bones, small sharp eyes, flat spreading noses with large nostrils, but, generally speaking, very fair mouths with beautiful white teeth, which the women disgustingly disfigure, according to their notions of beauty, by dyeing into a jet black with the aid of betel-nut.

Both men and women shave the head, leaving only an upright tuft of hair sticking up just in the centre of their low beetle-browed foreheads.

Their costumes consist, from the King downward, of a loose punjunah, or skirt, which fastens round the waist and hangs to just below the knees.

Unmarried girls wear in addition to this a loose white scarf flung over the shoulders so as to conceal the bust.

Indeed, the costume of the Siamese women is precisely the same, excepting only the head-dress, as the Nayar women in the Travancore districts; the great difference in their personal beauty, however, is immense.

WHAT A PIG DID.—By the disinterestedness of a lad in 1809, a garden gate in Rhode Island was left open, and a pig got in and destroyed a few plants; a quarrel between the owners of the garden and the pig grew out of it, which spread among their friends, defeated the Federal candidate for the Legislature, and gave the State a Democratic Senator, by whose vote war was declared in 1812, with Great Britain.

—Ex-President Van Buren is now sojourning at Clifton Springs, Ontario county, N. Y.