The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE


Editor: Dr. Paul Carus.

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PROFESSOR MILLS AT HOME.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.
THE SAMARITAN PASSOVER.

BY WILLIAM E. BARTON, D. D.

SOME of the characteristic institutions and customs of the Jewish people are now best to be observed in that small and once despised sect, the Samaritans. Wonderful as is the phenomenon of the persistence of the Jewish people, preserving many of their time-honored traditions in their ages-long dispersal among the nations, that dispersion has not been without its modifying influence. The Jews as we know them are far from being a homogeneous and unchanged people. Time and travel and lack of national bond and
of temple service have wrought their influence on race and rite. But the Samaritans cling to their ancient mountain, and there worship God according to primitive custom. By studying the customs of these people we may discover in contemporary processes the means of transmission of sacred books from before the time when printers destroyed one art that they might preserve all others: for the Samaritans have no printing presses, and their manuscripts are copied with the same utensils and with the same methods that have been employed for ages. We may speculate concerning textual transmission, but the identical and contemporary processes are available for our present study. In like manner we may find, only a day's journey from Jerusalem, (which is a city that is a dozen cities each built on the ruins of its predecessors) another city and a sacred shrine, older than Jerusalem, and continuously inhabited from the times of the patriarchs, where the Passover is observed every year in conformity to the requirements of the Law of Moses.

Now, the Passover of the Jews had been extensively modified even in the time of Jesus. Our Lord and his disciples did not eat with shoes bound on their feet, nor standing, nor with staves in their hands. They did not hastily depart when supper was over, nor burn what was left from the paschal feast. They ate reclining, and
at leisure: their shoes were removed, and their feet were washed, as at the ending, not the beginning of a journey. They sat for a long time after the meal was ended, and had bread left with which to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In short, the details provided for in Exodus xii. 11 were ignored. This doubtless was because the customs of the time had altered, and Jesus was quite indifferent to form.

But on that same midnight when Jesus and his disciples assembled in the upper room the Samaritans were celebrating the Passover. And their shoes were bound on, and their staves were in their hands. And the customs as then observed are observed to-day. I have before me letters descriptive of the Passover as observed on Mount Gerizim in the years 1906 and 1907, involving so much of interest that I am glad to share it with others.

The Samaritan community lives in Nablous, at the foot of Mount Gerizim. Their number in 1901 was 152, of which number 97 were males and only 55 females. Only the men participate in public worship. The women have some authority in domestic affairs, as I have myself witnessed; but they are not permitted an actual share in the public life of the congregation. There is a synagogue in Nablous, opening out of the court of the High Priest's house; but their great festivals are celebrated on Gerizim.
The Passover of 1907 was celebrated on Friday, April 26. In that year Easter, as celebrated by Christians, fell on March 31. The regular day for the Samaritan Passover would have been Saturday, April 27; but they do not celebrate on the Sabbath. For this reason, as I suppose, the service was held in daylight; though in other years it is celebrated at midnight.

I am much indebted to Dr. Gaskoin Wright, Surgeon in charge of the Church Missionary Hospital in Nablous, for a description of this service. Though I have visited Nablous, and count the High Priest among my friends, I have not been able to be with them at Passover time; and Dr. Wright, who has been for some years resident in Nablous, and who has written me many valuable letters concerning the Samaritans, kindly offered to attend this Passover, and let me see it through his eyes and camera. He carried with him to the top of Gerizim the proofs of a previous article of mine in The Open Court, which he read on the mountain to the High Priest, together with letters in which were conveyed to him on that day the greetings of American friends.

On that morning, Friday, April 26, the whole Samaritan community was encamped on the top of Mount Gerizim in tents much like the circular tents familiar to tourists in Palestine. The camp-
ing place was not on the very top of Gerizim, but a plot about ten minutes below the summit, purchased for them from the Muslims about 1750 by a benevolent member of the community. There they celebrate not only the Passover, but Pentecost and the Feast of Booths.

Gerizim is declared by the Samaritans to be the highest mountain in the world. It would be useless to oppose this tenet with the assertion that the barometer shows Gerizim to be but 2848 feet above the sea, while despised Ebal, directly opposite, is 3076. It is the oldest of mountains, too; and the Eternal Mountain. For it the Samaritans have twice seven holy names,* and with it they connect the sacrifice of Isaac, the erection of the Altar and the Law, and almost every sacred rite from the beginning of Hebrew history to the present time. Jerusalem is to them a modern innovation, and

even Shiloh a schismatic and dishonest shrine. As for Bethel, Gerizim is Bethel, the place of Jacob’s vision, and the true House of God.

Upon each tent is smeared the blood of the sacrifice, that the death-angel’s passage over the homes of the true Israel may be fittingly commemorated.

It was a stormy day, and the air was chill on the mountain; but a large company of Muslem spectators had assembled, and were finding places to view the celebration. Not always do they permit the service to proceed without interruption; but this year there was no disorder.

The High Priest received Dr. Wright, whom he was expecting, and talked over with him in advance the ceremonies as they were to be conducted. About noon the men and boys assembled in an open space surrounded by a rough stone wall. The men sat in rows, and
the priests, of whom there are several, sat among the people. At times the High Priest faced the congregation, and at other times faced with them toward the summit of the mountain, in a direction about East by South East from the place of meeting. All the men wore white garments except the High Priest whose robe was a golden yellow. In the photograph it appears black, but he never wears black.

The service began with a hymn in praise of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then followed a prayer of thanksgiving to Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth. These prayers, and most of the remainder of the service, were in Hebrew; but these were followed by a prayer in Arabic, for the Sultan; this was offered for the benefit of the Muslim spectators. These opening prayers occupied about a half hour. Then the four chapters Exodus xii-xv were read by the High Priest.

At the conclusion of this service seven lambs were brought. They were all males of the first year. All were carefully examined by two men, one a priest and one a layman. One lamb was found to have a torn ear, and was rejected. Then at a given signal the six lambs were killed by having their throats cut, the people shouting in unison, "There is but one God!" One priest and one layman did the killing, and a third man caught the blood in a vessel, and
hastened to the camp, where each of the forty tents was smeared with the blood. The photograph shows the blood on the door posts; it was smeared also on the lintel. A bunch of hyssop was used in this service, and the whole proceeding was as commanded in Exodus xii. 22: “And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason.”

A pathetic curiosity held the spectator’s attention as the lambs were killed. Not one of them made a sound. They were led as lambs to the slaughter, and they opened not their mouth. The

Samaritans do not recognize the Hebrew prophets, but the visitor was forcibly reminded of Isaiah liii. 7: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearsers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

A great fire was already blazing under caldrons of water. The water was now poured over the sheep, and the wool was pulled off, and the entrails were removed and salted. It was about half past two when the lambs were ready for the roasting. They were cleaned
of all their wool, but the skin was left on; and great care had been taken to break no bone. The fire had been burning in a pit, and had burned down to a bed of coals. Into this furnace of hot coals the

![Samaritan Tent Showing Blood on Side-Posts.](image1)

![Samaritans Removing the Wool from the Passover Lamb by Caldrons of Boiling Water.](image2)

lambs were thrust on a pole; and the pit was sealed with earth and grass. The right foreleg of each sheep was removed and placed
on a separate pole, as the priests' portion. During this whole time
the shouting continued, "There is but one God."

About an hour before sunset the men and boys assembled
again, with shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands. Their
loins were girded, and their preparations for the ceremonial jour-
ney were complete. There were 87 men and boys at this service.
In the earlier service Dr. Wright was able to count only 70. All
the boys over 4 years of age were present, and apparently every man

except Sha'ek, the eldest son of the High Priest, who was ill, and
who remained in his tent, where Dr. Wright gave him medicine.*

* A letter from the High Priest, dated Dec. 12, 1907, confirmed the news
which had already come to me of the death of this son, whom I knew per-
sonally through purchases made from him in his home, and by manuscripts in
his handwriting. The father is in deep sorrow. He had hoped that this son
would succeed him in the priesthood; though the office does not descend by
primogeniture, the High Priest is elected from the sons of the priest-family.
The letter says in part:

"My esteemed brother and friend, Dr. William Barton: (May God pre-
save you): Anxious for tidings concerning you, I would inform you about
what probably has reached you already, namely the death of my oldest son,
Sha'ek, after lingering as a prisoner in his bed for a period of nine whole
months. I suffering in the meantime no less than he. How much I have re-
Kneeling on mats, the men went through a long form of prayer, removing their shoes for the prayer. The prayer was offered in a sing-song tone. From time to time the men bent forward in their prayer, following the High Priest, and with hands stretched out, touched the ground with their foreheads, after the custom of the Muslims.

Just before sunset they all shouted, "Jehovah passed over the Children of Israel and smote the Egyptians!" Then they bowed their heads and worshiped as the sun went down.

Unleavened bread and bitter herbs were now distributed, a few received from the kindness of men that I might spend it on him! How many physicians have I called, and how often have they disappointed me! Great is my sorrow. In fine, my son died after a most painful suffering, leaving me, as you know, a very sad old man."

Later in response to a letter of sympathy he wrote, "The letter has arrived in which you express your sorrow at the death of my son. Your sympathy is much appreciated. I bow my head, and say, Thanks be to God for this trial; it must be best, for He does only what is right. Of my ten sons, I now have only one left."
morsels being given to friends of the priest, among the others to Dr. Wright; but all the while the meat was jealously guarded, as it lay in seven baskets, and no stranger was permitted to touch a shred or bone of it.

Ten minutes after sunset they all stood up, with shoes on feet and staves in hand, and began to eat the meat, watching lest some Muslim steal a bone, and throwing every bone into the fire without breaking it. Portions were put aside for the wives of the men; and in time all adjourned to their tents to finish the meal with their families. A very few of the men sat down during the latter part of the meal, but most stood up throughout.

Ten of the women were menstruous, and were not permitted to eat the Passover. One woman was suffering much pain, and Dr. Wright was asked to prescribe for her. The ten women were in one tent and were very unhappy. They had all been crying, and the eyes of one of them were much inflamed with weeping. The whole burden of the Law was upon them; and they were distressed because of their unhappy condition.

It would be good to believe that this little community was
united and happy; but small as it is there are factional disputes within it: and Dr. Wright on this day went from tent to tent meeting now and then old patients, and gathering sad evidence that complete harmony among the Samaritans was lacking, even on that great day. But of this, perhaps it is not well that I write very much, although it is a matter which has come to me in many ways.

Dr. Wright's careful and scholarly observation is the best and most accurate description I have read of the Passover celebration, and I am glad to supplement it by some notes from the journal of my friend, Prof. George L. Robinson, of McCormick Theological Seminary of Chicago, who witnessed the latter part of the ceremony on the same day, April 26, 1907, and who has kindly copied the narrative for my use in this article.

"We reached Nablous too late to see the slaughter of the seven lambs; hence the first portion of the following description is from hearsay, partly from Prof. D. G. Lyon of Harvard, who witnessed the whole ceremony.

"About noon the colony of Samaritans who had pitched their tents near the top of Gerizim began to observe their Passover feast.
Only the men and boys participated. The women remained in the tents with their girl children. There were thirty-five tents.

"The men and boys assembled about noon in the court or sanctuary of the consecrated area. They were about eighty in number, and for an hour they chanted their Passover ritual in Samaritan, kneeling, standing and sitting. The fires were kindled in the trench at the north end of the enclosure and in the circular oven near by. The wind was blowing cold and strong. At length about one p. m., three men with New Jerusalem knives parted the wool on the throats of the seven lambs (an eighth lamb was standing by in case any physical defect had been overlooked in the other seven), which had been thrown on their sides, and presently the lambs' throats were cut transversely to the bone. One man killed five, the other two men one each. The lambs were yearlings and males. The blood of the first and second killed was caught in a tin cup about ten inches deep and smeared on the tent doors. The rest of the blood was allowed to flow out upon the ground. As soon as the victims were dead, they began to pull off the wool, leaving the skin intact. To do so with greater ease, three caldrons of boiling water over the fire in the trench near by were used. They poured
the water, little by little, upon the carcases of the lambs, patting down the wool. The wool that was taken off was thrown near the fire and burned later on. All this time a roaring fire was burning in the oven or circular pit near by. When the entrails were removed, a gambrel-stick was inserted in the hind legs and the victims were each lifted upon the shoulders of two men, who held them aloft until the process of dressing was finished. The intestines were also thrown near the fire in the trench, the contents of the largest intestines being removed out of the camp before burning. The heart, liver, etc., were carefully placed inside the carcases, and their heads and legs were left on. The carcases were each carefully salted also. Then great wooden sticks were brought and the lambs were thrust upon them and held firm by means of a circular board which rested on a cross pin in the stick. These kept the lambs from falling into the fire. All being ready, they were taken to the oven to be roasted. The right shoulders were intended for the priest. The coals that remained from the fire which had been burning so furiously in the oven cavity were smothered over with earth, and then the poles with their sacrificial flesh upon them were lowered (the big end down) until they rested on the coals, all parallel to each other. Then quickly nine little round sticks were laid across the mouth of the oven and upon these nine others transversely, and these in turn were covered with grass and straw and on top of all wet earth or mud to prevent a draft which would produce a flame. The pit or oven being lined with stone, and now being very hot from the
fire which had been raging all noon for about two hours, the heat together with the coals at the bottom of the pit were enough to roast the lambs quite sufficiently. Indeed in three hours' time they came out quite charred. From 2:30 p.m. till 5:30 the lambs were in the oven; the people having returned to their tents.

"At 5:30 p.m. we arrived and were received by the second priest and shown into his tent. While sitting there we overheard him say to a visiting Samaritan that only fifteen minutes remained before the supper. Considering it wise to leave and not wishing to interfere with their sacrificial meal, we excused ourselves, intending to visit the tent of Professor Lyon. The priest showed us the altar of burnt offering, the oven, and Dr. Lyon's tent, whereupon we bade him adieu. Presently I saw a crowd gathering about the oven mound. Men and boys were there, also English women, one with a camera, and other spectators, all intently looking at what was going on in the center of the group. I approached, and looking
over the heads of certain bystanders, saw the Samaritans with gloved and bare hands removing the wet earth in the most savage way with pickaxes and sticks. Not knowing that the lambs were beneath, I asked what they were attempting to do and was informed that the sacrifices had been roasted beneath. Presently the mud was removed sufficiently so that the entire covering, including the straw, grass and sticks, was lifted up and thrown back. Then seven strong men seized the seven sticks and drew up the carcasses from the oven, each removing his lamb and putting it into a large basket. The sticks were thrown to one side. The baskets containing the lambs were then carried to the center of the sanctuary and set down in different places amidst more or less confusion. Upon each bitter herbs were thrown. Then the High Priest took his place by the column or pillar in the south-eastern corner of the court and sat down, a little boy sitting on one side of him and a man assistant at his other side. Soon the whole male population numbering about 80 or 82, removed their shoes and sat down, beginning to recite their ritual service in Samaritan most energetically. The wind blew cold and penetrating. Nevertheless they were able to make their monotonous voices heard above the breezes; sometimes loud, sometimes suppressed, sometimes here, sometimes there. Once they broke forth into a song. Sometimes they stood, sometimes they kneeled. More than once they stretched out their hands to heaven, their palms
lifted up towards the sky. Occasionally one would rise from his place and go over to the other side of the court, apparently for no necessary or ritual purpose. Towards the close of the long service, several volunteered to bring in the unleavened bread which was rolled up and contained within it bitter herbs.

"At length, after about 45 minutes, or possibly an hour, during which we shivered with cold, they arose, were handed the unleavened bread, which was passed about, arranged themselves in groups about the six baskets, according to their families probably (one basket seems to have disappeared for some reason, perhaps it was assigned to the priest), and those whose work it was reached into the baskets, took out flesh of the lambs and divided it on different dishes. Then, one after another, they disappeared to their tents to eat the Passover with their families and friends. As we came out through the compound on our way home, I met a well-dressed Samaritan and approaching him began to ask him for a little piece of the unleavened bread, but he ran from me as from an enemy, their belief being that contact with a foreigner would have vitiated the spiritual value of the entire ceremony. The women had no public part in any of the service.
"The priests and Samaritans generally seemed to be very avaricious, ever wishing, even up to the time of the evening supper, to sell their books and other treasures. The priceless Samaritan Codex was brought up from the city for safe keeping to one of the tents and was there guarded. This was the first time, I was told, that they had ever killed the Passover at noon.

"Dr. Lyon was at first forbidden to take pictures of the noon ceremony, but afterwards they relented as they were desirous that

he should buy certain of their prayer books. The next morning we returned to Jerusalem."

In the preceding year a company of American people visited Nablous, and furnished me descriptions of the event. There has come to me, also, a manuscript written by a loung lady, Miss Naseef, prepared as an essay for the "Middle Sized Bears' Club" of Jerusalem, concerning the Passover of 1905, and read before that body of young people on July 10, 1905.
On this occasion the lambs were killed just at sunset, and the supper was eaten at midnight. She tells the story in these words:

"All the men and boys of the community were assembled dressed in white, waiting for sunset. The ceremony commenced about half an hour before the sun went down. They all began shouting a loud prayer, each one shouting with all his might, and quite independent of the rest. The priest then took his stand on a fallen pillar from the ruins of the ancient Herodian temple, and read aloud the twelfth chapter of Exodus, which gives the narrative of the first Passover.

At his feet stood six sheep, all of them males of the first year and without blemish. They were very particular that the sheep should not be killed a minute before or after the sun went down. Just as the sun dipped into the Mediterranean the sheep were killed, the people shouting all the time. The sheep were plunged into caldrons of boiling water to enable them to remove the wool easily. The wool and entrails were thrown into the fire. The hearts, too, were thrown into the fire. When the sheep were prepared they were put upon long wooden spikes. They were then carried to a cemented pit, where they had built a large furnace, where a hot bed of coals
was ready. Into this the stakes were thrust, and the top was covered with a mat of grass. The lambs were left to roast, because they must not eat the Passover raw nor sodden with water, but roasted with fire. The pit was left in charge of the younger men. The rest went to their tents to wait for midnight. Before dispersing they all embraced and wished each other a happy feast.

"The midnight hour was announced by a herald; and they all rose in haste, put on their sandals, girded up their loins, and took their staves in their hands. The pit was uncovered, and the lambs were placed on white cloths. Each family ate by itself; or if a family was too small, two families ate together. They ate in haste; and they gathered close around the lambs to prevent the Mohammedans, who come up to torment them, from snatching any pieces of meat or bone. As each bone was picked, it was thrown right into the furnace. The fire and the full moon lit up the scene. Everything left over was burned. When all had been burned or eaten, they congratulated one another and dispersed for the night."

Dean Stanley gives in the supplement of the first volume of his *Jewish Church* a description of the Samaritan Passover as it was
witnessed in 1854 by Mr. Rogers, English Consul at Damascus, an account of which was afterwards published in *Domestic Life in Palestine*, page 281. Dean Stanley himself later witnessed the Passover, and in the same article gives interesting recollections of it. Dr. Daud Katibah, in 1900, gave to Rev. Dr. Samuel Ives Curtiss an interesting account of the Passover as he had seen it, which Dr. Curtiss published in the supplement to his * Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*, p. 264.

It is very interesting to read this leaf torn out of the life of the
Old Testament as it comes fluttering down to us from the slope of Gerizim, and to feel the dead past warm with life as it is lived over in the ceremonies of this ancient congregation.

Although the day was unpropitious, Dr. Wright's camera caught a number of interesting snap-shots of scenes on the mountain. These reveal to us the events in all their interesting reality, and with a few secured for me on the previous anniversary, bring most of the details well within our vision. It is nothing more nor less than a contemporary bit of Old Testament life, solemn and instructive, which antiquity has saved for us out of the wreck and erosion of the ages; and we are fortunate in securing it with pen and camera before it loses itself with much that time has effaced and left for conjecture.