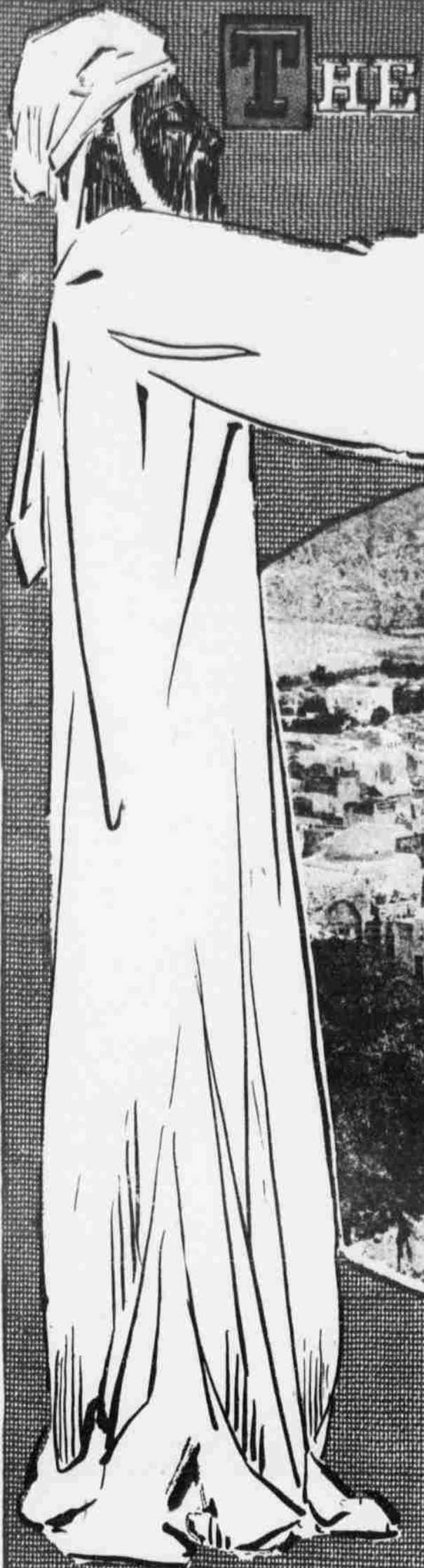


THE ONLY SPOT ON EARTH WHERE THE SACRIFICE OF THE PASCHAL LAMB IS STILL OFFERED †



NABLUS AND MOUNT EBAL

written by hand in ancient Hebrew, are said to date from the captivity, and are, therefore, considered too precious to be handled by strangers, so to satisfy the curiosity of tourists some reproductions are shown to visitors on receipt of a fee. Tourists are also privileged to buy a photograph of the interesting old high priest and of the rolls, vestments, and other accessories to the Samaritan worship.

The celebration of the Passover is the most peculiar of all their ceremonies. This sacrificial rite is most impressive and interesting, being celebrated at night under a moonlight sky, and exhibiting a strange combination of Jewish devoutness and pagan fanaticism. It appears to the spectator, first, because it is a relic of the old Jewish ritual now nowhere observed by the Jews themselves, for, with the destruction of the temple by Titus, all vestige of sacrifices disappeared, offerings not being lawful anywhere but in the temple at Jerusalem.

At each recurring eve of the Passover, which corresponds nearly to our Easter, and which commemorates the hasty meal eaten by the Israelites on the eve of their departure from Egypt, the Samaritans gather on the summit of Mount Gherizim, overlooking their village. Here the sacrificial service is held. The Jews in Palestine also celebrate this feast of the Passover, but they omit the sacrificial element, and the rabbis have introduced so many variations that the service is no longer the same as when it was first instituted.

Sacred Panorama Seen from Mount.

There is a primitive simplicity about this ancient ceremony in Gherizim which recalls vividly the events of the first celebration in Egypt. The solemnity and stillness of the hour awe the spectator, the service being held between sunset and midnight. At early dawn the worshippers can still be seen kneeling within and around their tents, clad in white garments, leaning on their staves.

There is a peculiar charm about the site chosen for the service. This historic mountain, rising gloomily, and grandly in the midst of such a landscape, a rocky, bare mountain, towering above fertile valleys, and crowned by a little white stone "way"—the tomb of a saint—which marks the site of the ancient Samaritan temple. All around rise other hills made memorable by sacred lore—Hermon, Labor, and Gilboa. Against the distant horizon the Mediterranean can be seen like a bright silver thread stretching all the way from Carmel to Gaza, and down in the intervening plains dotted here and there are mud but villages. At the foot of the mountain lies the vale of Shechem, where Jacob pastured his flocks.

This height in Samaria certainly offers the most wonderful panorama in all western Palestine, and forms an appropriate site, ennobled by sacred associations, on which to celebrate this ancient rite.

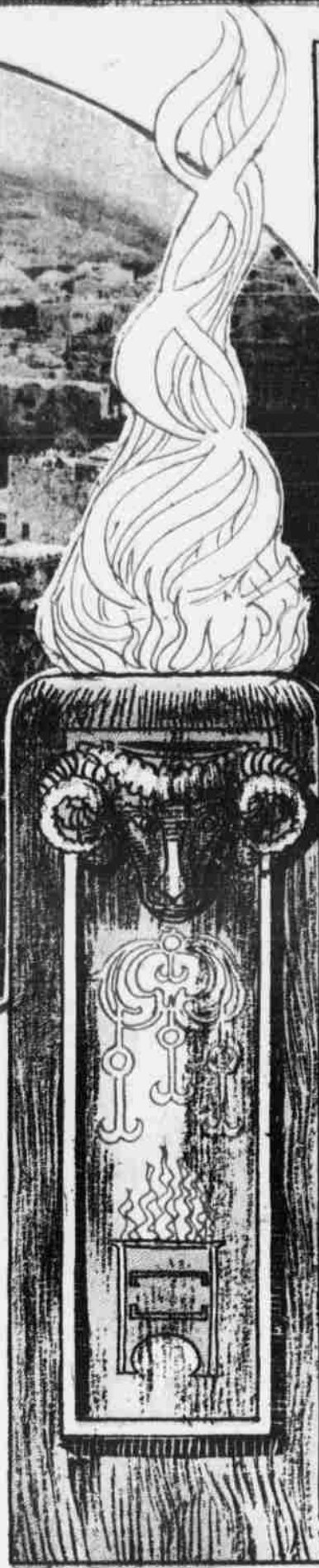
Preparations for Ancient Rite.

These thoughts filled our minds as we ascended the mount one bright afternoon in anticipation of the service which it was our privilege to witness. Toward the close of day we saw that preparations were being made for the evening sacrifice. Two fires were lighted at a little distance from the ruins of the ancient temple, not far from some tents which had been pitched for the worshippers. Each family had a separate tent. One of the fires was in a trench within a walled inclosure, where the sacrifices were to be offered. This was for the heating of water in immense cauldrons, to scald the slaughtered lambs. The other fire, outside the inclosure, was lighted within a pit, some seven or eight feet deep, like a well, walled inside with stones, to serve as an oven for roasting the lambs for the evening meals after the ceremony.

Half an hour before the setting of the sun the high priest appeared, attired in a pearl colored silk surplice, wearing a white turban. He knelt solemnly on a scarlet rug before a primitive stone lectern facing the east, where stood the ancient temple of old. Before him lay the seven white lambs ready to be slain. Behind him knelt two other priests and their children.

A semicircle of tents formed an effective background, and in these the congregation worshipped, facing the east. At one end of the semicircle were men dressed in pure white. These were the "sacrificers," awaiting the summons to bring forward the victims. The high priest prayed aloud, beseeching God to accept the sacrifice offered according to his command to Moses. As at the Jewish celebration, the congregation recited the story of the deliverance from Egypt and of the first Passover supper in a mournful intonation. Whenever the name of Jehovah was pronounced the people prostrated themselves in oriental fashion.

Part of the service was carried on in perfect silence, while all stood and prayed, covering their faces with their hands before each recurring mention of the sacred name, and at intervals stretching out their upturned hands, "to catch the blessing as it descended from heaven." The service continued, thus till sunset. Meantime every detail of preparation for the sacrifice had been attended to. The lambs had been carefully examined by an appointed assistant of the high priest, for they must be perfect and "without blemish." Bitter herbs were prepared and laid on a straw matting beside the cakes of unleavened bread.



DESCENT TO JOB'S WELL WHERE THE SAMARITANS WORSHIP - MOUNT GHERIZIM SAMARIA

As the sun's rays shed a rosy hue on the temple's site, crowning the white stone tower with a glorious wealth of color, we knew that the hour of the sacrifice was fast approaching. Ben Amram rose solemnly on to the stone bench. He stood looking westward, watching the sun slowly disappearing below the blue waters of the Mediterranean beyond the plain of Sharon. It was a moment of suspense and of intense interest. The story of the Passover was still echoing around us, for the people continued murmuring the Hebrew poem.

The attendants brought forward the lambs near to the cauldron fire and held them there. Not a sound of bleating was heard. The attendants flashed their knives. The intonation grew louder and louder.

As the sun slowly sank the interest of the worshippers increased, and at last, as it had disappeared, the high priest exclaimed loudly: "And the whole assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel shall kill it at even." This was the signal for the sacrifice to take place, for all the lambs must be slain at once.

Then followed a strange scene, breaking into the solemn stillness of a moment before. A struggle took place for the privilege of killing the lambs. The high priest hastened to the site of slaughter and, hurriedly disrobing himself of his silken gown, quickly and skillfully killed four of the seven lambs almost instantaneously. The victims were cut in the throat by a single stroke. The blood was saved in basins, and every member of the congregation dipped his finger in the blood and made a sign on his forehead with it. The doors of

the tents were sprinkled with blood in memory of the angel passing over the homes marked by blood in Egypt.

A sound arose from within the tents. The children, who had listened, began to wail at the weird sight.

With this act of sprinkling the ceremony ended, the sacrifice had been offered, and the new year entered upon. The people congratulated each other joyfully, and respectfully kissed the hand of the high priest.

Scene Changes to Rejoicing.

The scene changed suddenly from one of worship and stillness to one of loud rejoicing and bustle, for the men within the tents arose and hastily gathered at the chosen spot for the feast. The high priest and his attendants now appeared in pure white linen, girdled and carrying staves, appearing like Israelites on that memorable night in Egypt. They stood solemnly before the fire where the lambs were hidden, and there, by the still flickering red light of the sacrificial fire, they prayed. Then, taking off the covering of this primitive oven, they lifted out the stakes with the roasted lambs.

Within the dark pit the fire had died out. Baskets were ready at hand to receive the flesh as it was torn off the lambs. This was done hastily but carefully, for every piece of meat or bone falling into the fire had to be lifted out again by men who were lowered down into the hot oven for that purpose. A trench had been prepared for these baskets of food, where they were laid in a line between the rows of hungry people.

It was a strange scene. These girded pilgrims, as if ready for a journey, squatting in Arab fashion on the ground on the summit of the great mount, surrounded by other dark mountain tops frowning around on all sides, and casting heavy shadows on the otherwise bright landscape, illuminated by the brilliant light of an eastern moon. It was a truly oriental night in all its beauty, and a truly oriental scene. These people, seemed to our imagination, to be the Israelites of whom they had been singing, and this the first Passover supper. But there was no fear; all was peace and joy.

Women Barred from Feast.

Unlike the celebration among the Jews, where families are all united at this supper, here the women remained in their tents, true to oriental custom. There they received their portion of the feast, to which Gentile visitors, of course, were not invited. According to the biblical injunction, nothing was left. All remnants were gathered and burned ceremoniously.

Having partaken of the feast, the worshippers did not retire to their tents, but remained out on the mount all night praying. Only at dawn of day did they withdraw to rest. During the eight days following the Samaritans encamped on this hill as a temporary home.



**ISAAC BEN AMRAM
PRESENT HIGH PRIEST
OF SAMARITANS**

DESCENT FROM ANCIENT TRIBE OF LEVI



A WOMAN OF SAMARIA

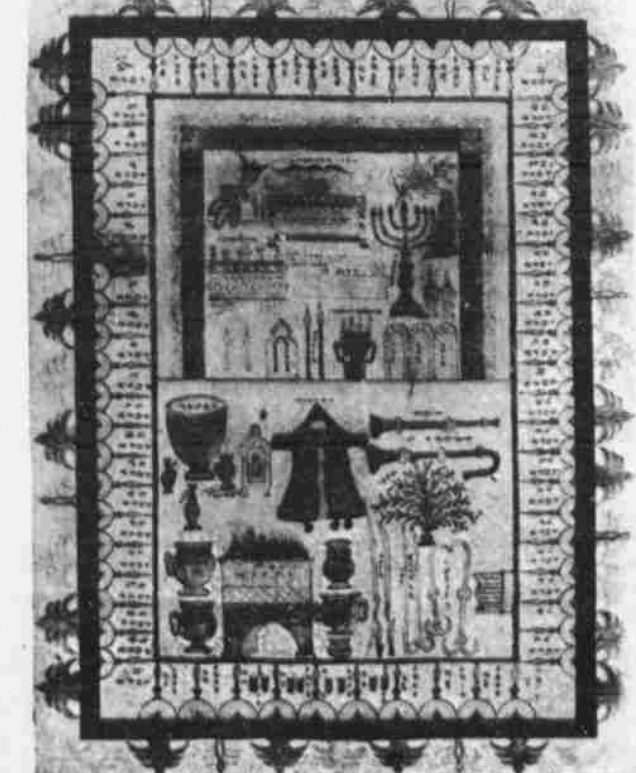
An intensely interesting sacrificial ceremony is held yearly on a lofty mount in Palestine, presenting a curious combination of Jewish ritual and Arab festivity. But it is not often the privilege of an outsider to witness this unique celebration of the feast of the Passover. There is but one spot on earth where the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb is still offered, but the site is not Jerusalem, as one might suppose, nor are the worshippers the descendants of the ancient "chosen people," the Jews.

The site made interesting by the observation of this ancient rite is Mount Gherizim, in Shechem, in the north of Palestine, and the people who perform it are the Samaritans. They are a small community, numbering 129 families, living in clanlike solitude in their picturesque home, Nablus.

This quaint village of white stone, flat roofed houses is built up over the site of the ancient Samaria, founded by Omri, king of Israel, at the time of the separation between Judah and Israel. As the dwellers have never migrated from this spot, they are a peculiarity of this section of northern Palestine, living entirely to themselves, and never intermarrying with those of other creeds. Their origin has been a subject of controversy, some people believing them to be descendants of the Israelites who returned after the Assyrian captivity; others claiming that they are merely of Assyrian stock who settled there and accepted the Jewish form of ritual.

Whatever may be their real origin, the fact remains that the Jews have always hated them, as seen in the story of the woman of Samaria. The little sect has clung tenaciously to its religion ever since it was adopted, and unflinchingly observes all the feasts and fasts of the Jewish religion, following most minutely every Mosaic injunction. But the Samaritans reject all Talmudic and Rabbinic interpretations and additions. This is one of the principal sources of animosity between them and the Jews. The head of their religion is the high priest, Isaac Ben Amram, who claims direct descent from the ancient Levites, by whom such services in the Jewish ritual have been performed.

There is a quaint old synagogue on the hill where their sacred literature is hidden from the curious eye of the traveler. These parchment rolls of the Pentateuch, which are



**VESTMENT OF THE SAMARITAN
HIGH PRIEST AND TEMPLE ACCESSORIES**