

Miscellaneous.

THE WELL AT SYCHAR.

[From Mrs. Charles's Journal of her "Wanderings over Bible Lands and Seas."]

Towards evening we reached the entrance of the valley of Nablous, one of the few places in Palestine which has preserved the intrusive Greek name (Neapolis), instead of the earlier scriptural one, Shechem or Sychar.

It is said that no place in Palestine is more absolutely identified as connected with an event in the history of our Lord than this spot. And this spot at the meeting of the valleys, links together the sacred history of more than three thousand years.

Here is Jacob's well, dug by the prudent patriarch (whose father, Isaac, had had so many disputes about wells), in the parcel of ground he bought from Hamor, and, perhaps, gave at once to Joseph, then the only son of Rachel. Here the children of Israel laid the body of Joseph, which they had brought embalmed from Egypt.

We turned off a little to the right to see this sacred spot, but a very great disappointment awaited us. Until last January, they told us, the well had been preserved—a relic of three thousand years, and of one hour worth them all! Until last January you could sit on the edge of the well and look down into the depths too deep for Him to draw from.

Near this melancholy ruin is the tomb called Joseph's. It is a holy place of the Moslem's, plastered and domed like the tombs of Mohammedan saints. But there is one interesting feature about it in connection with Jacob's blessing to Joseph, comparing him to the "fruitful bough by a well whose branches run over the wall."

As we rode to and from this tomb some peasants, working in the fields, warned us from the place with furious gestures, but whether they thought our own infidel feet would desecrate Joseph's tomb, or our horses' feet injure their fields, we could not make out.

We passed once more before entering the valley of Sychar, by the sacred ruined well. Except that sacred relic itself, all was unchanged. Down that narrow valley, the woman came with her pitcher, whilst Jesus was resting on this well. The Saviour and the sinner met alone, and to her at first He was nothing more than a stranger and an alien from her race.

Up this valley, which we were entering, He walked with that listening company and the wondering disciples. Beside this stream they went to that white cluster of flat-roofed houses, nestling among the thick trees.

It was Saturday evening as we rode up that lovely valley. Our tents were pitched outside the town under the thick shade of trees, amongst a chorus of streams flowing on every side. And here we were to remain for nearly two days, from Saturday until Monday.

A dim desire and longing had lived on. The Christ was coming, the expectation of Jew and Samaritan alike. One who could answer all the heart's questionings was coming. One who could read all the heart's secrets—was before her. In words, at least, she made no inference, but all the secret aspirations of her soul were poured forth.

And she found the answer to which, perhaps, her heart had already almost sprung. "I that speak unto thee am He." Then, also down this valley, unless they had bought bread in that village on the hill-side nearer, came back the disciples.

The woman had placed her pitcher by the well. It was not in her hands. She had not drawn any water for herself or for Jesus. But she had understood Him, as so few did. Water-pot, water, all were forgotten. There were men in Sychar who wanted the Christ as she had: there were hearts there who looked for him. She had good news to take. And up that valley, to the city out of sight behind the folding of those hills, sped her eager steps.

The disciples loved their Master, they had followed Him faithfully; they had gone to buy Him food while He rested. But when we turn from the Samaritan woman to them, it is like turning from earnest, intelligent eyes which read your every glance, to a dull prosaic countenance—beaming, indeed, with the best intentions, but understanding neither glance nor illustration, but exactly the literal words you say and no more.

Women and the Pharisees often understood our Lord best. The Pharisees, because their understandings were sharpened by dislike and fear, and "they knew He spoke these parables against them;" and women, because their hearts were warm—they felt what He meant, felt that sinners might bathe His feet with tears; that he must help a mother whose young daughter was possessed, whether Phoenician or Hebrew; that He would welcome the love which broke the alabaster vase, and poured out the precious ointment.

Probably the eye of the Master directed them to the explanation, as, turning from the broad valley behind them, green with the young corn, He said: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields white for harvest," and as He said so, glanced up the valley of Sychar, and watched the Samaritans coming to Him,—the golden first-fruits of the harvest of the Gentiles.

They came down that deep valley, probably guided by a woman, no doubt conversing in eager groups as they came, and questioning her, on account of whose saying they had come. And when they reached the well where the Saviour and the disciples were still lingering, they besought Him that He would tarry with them.

It was a new incident in that life spent among bitter enemies, and disciples so slow in understanding and heart. The people of Sychar had seen no miracle, they had heard none of those unequalled discourses. They had only heard that One sat on the well, at the opening of their valley, a stranger, who saw with prophetic insight into the inmost heart and the past life, a Jew who did not scorn to have dealings with Samaritans. They came all that way in the evening from their city, simply because they had some dim hope of finding the Messiah there. And when they found Him, they recognized Him. We do not read that He wrought any wonders among them. We might think it was impossible for Him to come to any place without being troubled with compassion by its sorrows as well as by its sins, and healing bodies as well as souls. But we are told nothing of the kind. And for eighteen hundred years since then, His heart being the same, and His arm not shortened, He has been content, whilst healing souls, to let bodily sickness fulfil its work of discipline. Perhaps He could trust these Samaritans enough to treat them in the same way. He abode there two days.

Up this valley, which we were entering, He walked with that listening company and the wondering disciples. Beside this stream they went to that white cluster of flat-roofed houses, nestling among the thick trees.

Here, in the bosom of the hills, amongst the figs, pomegranates, and mulberries, festooned with vines, on the fresh grass under the shade of the grey olives, and among the delicious sound of many waters, our Lord abode and taught for two days, and the Samaritans understood Him as, perhaps, neither Pharisees nor apostles had yet done, to be not only indeed the Christ, but "The Saviour of the world."

It was Saturday evening as we rode up that lovely valley. Our tents were pitched outside the town under the thick shade of trees, amongst a chorus of streams flowing on every side. And here we were to remain for nearly two days, from Saturday until Monday.

I may add some lines which were written that Sunday at Nablous, to give some consolation for our great disappointment about the ruin of the well.

ON JACOB'S WELL RUINED BY THE ARABS. They have stopped the ancient well, Which the patriarchs dug of old; Where they watered the patient flocks at noon, From the depths so pure and cold.

Where the Saviour asked to drink, And found at noon repose: But the Living Spring He opened there No human hands can close.

They have scattered the ancient stones Where at noon he stopped to rest; None ever shall rest by the well again, And think how His accents blessed!

But the Rest for the burdened heart, The shade in the wearied land, The riven Rock with its living streams For ever unmoved shall stand.

Earth has no Temple now, No beautiful House of God; Or earth is all one Temple-floor Which those sacred feet have trod.

But in Heaven there is a Throne, A Home and a House of Prayer: Thyself the Temple, Thyself the Sun; Our pilgrimage endeth there!

NABLous, Sunday, June 22d, 1856.

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