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MEGILLATH TAANITH.

"SCROLL OF FASTING."

ENGLISHED, FOR THE FIRST TIME,
FROM THE ARAMAIC AND THE HEBREW.

BY THE REV. A. W. GREENUP, D.D.

[Continued from the CHURCHMAN of January.]

V (AB).

1. **T**HE fifteenth of Ab is the Feast of Wood-offering, when one must not mourn ;

Because when they came up from the first captivity without bringing wood-offerings it was ordained that these should be brought on the ninth of Ab. The sages said, Some future time when the captives come up they too will need to bring some. So the sages ordained the fifteenth of Ab for bringing the wood-offerings. And every one who brought an offering to the sanctuary, even if it were only wood, was freed from the mourning of that day : and it is not necessary to say that such was the case when they brought sin-offerings, trespass-offerings, vows, freewill-offerings, first fruits, tithes, thank-offerings, or peace-offerings. Therefore it is said, Every man who brings wood-offerings or firstfruits.^a

But what is the meaning of " the time of the wood-offerings of the priests " ? It is what is meant by saying ^b that on the fifteenth of Ab the sons of Zethuel b. Jehudah, and with them the priests and the Levites and the Ishmaelites, the sojourners and servants, the Nethinim, and the bastards, and whoever had forgotten to what tribe he belonged, and the sons of Gonebe-Eli, and the sons of Kotsi-Ketsioth, and the sons of Salmal of Netofa (were appointed to bring the wood).

^c And who are these sons of Gonebe-Eli, and these sons of Kotsi-Ketsioth ? Once upon a time the Kingdom of Greece decreed against the Israelites that they should not bring up firstfruits to Jerusalem ; and the kings of Greece set guards on the routes, just as Jeroboam b. Nebat had done at the borders to prevent any

^a Jer. Pes. IV. 1 ; Jer. Hag. I. 4. ^b Taan. 26 a ; Jer. IV. 5.
^c Taan. 28 a ; Tos. Taan. iii. 7.

from among the ten tribes going up to Jerusalem. What then did those who were worthy and who feared sin in that generation do? They took firstfruits and put them into baskets, and covered them with figs (*ketsioth*). They then lifted the baskets on their shoulders. When they approached the guard, who asked them, Are you going up to Jerusalem? they answered, No, but we are going to make two cakes of pressed figs in this mortar we have here with the pestle (*eli*) which is on our shoulders. So when they had passed by them they decorated their baskets and brought them up to Jerusalem.

And who are the sons of Salmi of Netofa? Once upon a time the wicked Kingdom of Greece decreed that the Israelites should not bring wood for the altar; and the kings of Greece set guards on the routes, just as Jeroboam b. Nebat had done at the borders to prevent any from among the ten tribes going up to Jerusalem. What then did those who were worthy and who feared sin in that generation do? They brought two pieces of wood and made them like ladders. Putting these on their shoulders they began their journey. When they came to the guard, they were asked, Are you going up to Jerusalem? They answered, No, but we are going to get pigeons from yonder cote with this ladder (*sullam*) which is on our shoulders. So when they had passed the guard they undid the boards, took them apart, cast them from their shoulders, then took up the pieces of wood and carried them to Jerusalem. ^a And since they had exposed their lives to danger in fulfilment of the commandments a good name is written of them in this scroll and a good memorial for all generations; and of them and all like them it is said, The memory of the righteous is blessed ^b; but of Jeroboam b. Nebat it is said, But the name of the wicked shall rot.^c

But why should the sons of Zethuel b. Jehudah have a good name and a good memorial for all generations, since not every one who wishes to obtain a good name can do so? ^d Because when the captives returned and found no wood in the chamber, these men offered wood willingly of their own store, and handed it over to the congregation, so that by means of it they offered the congregational sacrifices. So the prophets amongst them decreed that, even were the chamber full of wood derived from the congregation, yet, since these men had willingly offered the wood at that time,

^a Jer. Taan. IV. 4.

^c *Ibid.*

^d Cf. Ber. 17 b.

^b Prov. x. 7.

no sacrifice should be offered unless the wood were first taken from them, as it is written, And we cast lots, the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn upon the altar of Jehovah our God, as it is written in the law.^a And it says, For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances.^b See how that on account of these things the great ones of Israel agreed to make that day a festival.

And on those days^c it was forbidden to mourn and to fast, both before and after the destruction of the temple. R. Jose says, After the destruction of the temple it was allowed, since that was a grief to them. ^dR. Elazar b. Zadok said, I am of the grandsons of Sanuah b. Benjamin, and when the ninth of Ab happened to be on a Sabbath we fasted, but not the whole day, because it was to us a festival.

2. On the twenty-fourth we returned to our Law.¹

In the days of the Kingdom of Greece they were judging by the laws of the Gentiles. ^eBecause the Sadducees said, The daughter should inherit with [the daughter of] the son, Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai disputed with them, saying to them, How do you dolts prove this? There was none amongst them who could answer him a word, except a garrulous old man who said, If the daughter of my son, who was born of the strength of my strength, obtain my inheritance, should not much rather my own daughter, who is born of my own strength, obtain my inheritance? Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai read to him this passage, These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land, etc.^f; and another passage which says, And these are the children of Zibeon, Aiah and Anah^g; whence you learn that Zibeon had intercourse with his mother (sister?) and begat Anah of her.^h The old man said to him, Rabbi, with this would you dismiss me? He replied, You most foolish person in the world, is our perfect Law to be compared

^a Neh. x. 34.

^c R. H. 19 a; Tos. Taan. iii.

^e Bab. Bath. 115 b; Tos. Yad. ii. 9.

^g *Ibid.* xxxvi. 24.

^b Ezra vii. 10.

^d Erub. 41 a; Taan. 12 a.

^f Gen. xxxvi. 20.

^h Pes. 54 a.

¹ See *Revue des Étud. juiv.* lxiii. 51-62. Zeitlin is of opinion that this section was not in the original text of the Megillah (*Op. cit.* x. 279).

with your own vain meditation? The old man said, With this would you dismiss me? He replied, If the daughter of my son succeed, it is because she has a stronger legal right than where there are brothers; but you would say of my daughter that the legal right to share with the brothers is impaired, and so the judgment is that she should not succeed to my inheritance. When the Asmonæan house overcame them and abolished their teachings, judgments were again given after the laws of Israel; and that day on which their teachings were abolished was appointed a festival.

VI (ELUL).

1. The seventh of Elul is the day of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem,¹ and on it one must not mourn;

Because the Gentiles had destroyed it; but when the power of Israel prevailed it was rebuilt. So it says, So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth of Elul.^a But though the wall was rebuilt, yet the gates were not set up, as we read, Though even unto that time I had not set up the doors in the gates^b; and again, He built it and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, etc.^c; and again, And the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed^d: since they cannot add to the city or to the courts of the temple without the presence of a king, a high priest and prophet, Urim and Thummin, and the great sanhedrim, accompanied by song and with two thank-offerings,^e since it is said, And the other thank-offering went in the opposite direction and I after them.^{f 2} And the court was moving slowly after them, as it is said, And after them went Hoshaiah and half of the princes of Judah.^g The inner bread was eaten by the priests, and the outer burnt.³ And if the city had not been sanctified by all these things, whoever came there was not held guilty.⁴ ^h Abba Saul says, There were two ponds in

^a Neh. vi. 15.

^b *Ibid.* vi. 1.

^c *Ibid.* iii. 15.

^d *Ibid.* vii. 1.

Shebuoth 14 a.

^f Neh. xii. 38.

^e *Ibid.* xiii. 32.

Nid. 24 b; Shebuoth 17 a; Tos. San. iii.

¹ The reference is to 1 Macc. xiii. 10; the glossator's reference to Nehemiah's time is incorrect. See Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

² R.V. "and the other company of them that gave thanks went to meet them, and I after them." Many Jewish writers take the passage as our text does. See Maimonides on Shebuoth.

³ The Gemara disputes as to the meaning of this. It may mean that the one thankoffering was eaten by the priests, the other was burnt.

⁴ Even though he were unclean.

the Mount of Olives, one above and one below. The lower one had been sanctified by all these rites ; but the upper one only by those who came up from the captivity, without king and without Urim and Thummin. The lower one, which had been completely sanctified, the *haberim* and the common people assembled there to eat holy things of comparatively minor importance, and as a matter of course the second tithe. They assembled at the upper pool, which had not been completely sanctified, but ate neither the holy things of secondary importance nor the second tithe. But why was it not completely sanctified ? Because it was the weak point of Jerusalem ^a ; and thither they brought all the refuse of Jerusalem. So when they had finished the rebuilding of the wall they made that day a festival.

2. On the seventeenth the Romans withdrew from Judah and Jerusalem ; ¹

Because they oppressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem,^b so that they could neither enter nor leave the city by day, but only at night. How did the kings of Greece oppress them ? They placed *quæsitores* throughout the cities to carry off their brides, who were afterwards married to their men ; so they prevented the Israelites from rejoicing in their wives, that what is said might be fulfilled, Thou shalt betroth a wife and another man shall be with her.^c So no man was seeking to marry a wife because of the *quæsitores* (yet they afterwards introduced them secretly), as it is said, I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.^d ^eWhen they heard the sound of the millstones at Burni they said, It is the feast of circumcision, it is the feast of circumcision ! And when they saw the light of the lamp in Beror Hayil (?) they said, There is a marriage feast there, there is a marriage feast there ! Matthias b. Johanan, the high priest, had an only daughter ; and when the time came for her to be married the *quæstor* came to defile her, but they did not allow him to do so. Matthias and his sons were provoked to jealousy, and they prevailed against the Kingdom of Greece, and

^a Shebuoth 16 a.

^b Cf. II. 3 ; XI. 3.

^c Deut. xxviii. 30.

^d Jer. xxv. 10.

^e San. 32 b.

¹ The army of Agrippa was allowed by the Jews to withdraw. Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* ii. 17, 8.

the men thereof were handed over to them and they slew them.¹ So they made a festival of that day in which they subdued them.

3. On the twenty-second we again condemned to death the wicked ;

Because when the Gentiles were occupying the land of Israel the Israelites could take no action against the heretics in their midst ; but, after they had gone, three days were granted to the heretics for repentance, and if at the end of that time they had not repented they were slain. The day on which they slew them was made a festival.²

^a R. Eliezer b. Jacob said, I have heard that the court punished with lashes and killed some contrary to the Law. R. Simeon said, I have heard that the court fined and whipped some contrary to the Law, not because of what is written in the Law, but from what is said, And thou shalt put away the evil from the midst of thee.^b There is a story of a man who had intercourse with his wife publicly under a fig-tree. They brought him before the court, and he was flogged. Not that he deserved such punishment, but at the time it was necessary for the sake of example to others, because they imitated a custom of harlotry. Again there is a story of a man who rode on a horse on Sabbath in the days of the Greeks. They brought him before the court, and he was stoned. But had he deserved such a punishment ? No ! but at that time it was necessary for the sake of example to others. ^c Simeon b. Shetah hanged eighty women at Askelon. But had they deserved the punishments of slaying and hanging ? No ! but at that time it was necessary that other women should learn from their example, that all Israel might hear and fear.

VII (TISRĪ).

On the third of Tisri was abolished the use of the Divine Name in legal documents ;

^d Because once the wicked Kingdom of Greece decreed a persecution against Israel, saying to them, You have no part in the God

^a San. 46 b.

^b Deut. xiii. 16.

^c San. 45 b.

^d Rosh. H. 18 b.

¹ See Midrash Maaseh Hanuka (ed. Eisenstein, p. 190).

² The glossator's interpretation is "not acceptable" (Zeitlin). The "wicked" are the Roman soldiers of Agrippa who would not withdraw on the 17th of Elul (see above). Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* ii. 17, 8.

of Israel, and you must not make mention of the Name of God. But when the Asmonæan house prevailed and conquered, it ordained that the Name should be written even in legal documents. And thus did they write, In such and such a year of Jonathan the high priest, servant of the Most High God.¹ When the sages heard of the matter they said, If mention is made of the Name in legal documents, afterwards when anyone is tearing up his document the Name of God will be found cast away on a dung-hill. So the day when this was abolished was made a festival.²

VIII (MARḤESHVAN).

1. On the twenty-third of Marḥeshvan the Sorag³ was broken up in the court of the Temple;*

Because the Greeks built a place in the court, in the midst of which they set up goodly stones. These were hidden by the Israelites till Elijah should come and decide whether they were impure or pure. They numbered them and hid them; and the day when they hid them they made a festival.

2. On the twenty-fifth the wall of Samaria was taken.⁴

What is "the taking of Samaria"? When they came up from the first captivity they went to a strip of land occupied by the Samaritans; and when these were unwilling to receive them they came to Sebaste,^b where they settled. They surrounded the city with a wall and joined with it many cities of Israel, and were calling it the city of Nibraḥta.^{c 5}

* Cf. 1 Macc. iv. 43-46.

^b *Al.* "the sea of Baste."

^c Cf. Nah. ii. 9 (8) and Targum.

¹ Cf. *Yad.* IV. 8, where it is said that on documents of divorce the Pharisees insisted on the insertion of the words "according to the Law of Moses and of Israel."

² Zeitlin thinks the glossator is wrong in ascribing this to the Asmonæan period. He assigns it to the Revolutionary period, when the Jews threw off the Roman yoke on the third of Tisri, A.D. 65, by exterminating their enemy; from that time the names of Cæsar and Agrippa were removed from public documents. See Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* ii. 17, 8.

³ The Sorag was the latticed wall of stone that enclosed the Ḥel, a place within the fortification of the Temple (*Midd.* II. 3). Here it refers to the stone altar set up by the Greeks in the Azarah, and on which sacrifices were offered. Cf. 2 Macc. x. 2, 3. See Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴ By John Hyrcanus, 108 B.C. See Josephus, *Antiq.* xiii. 10, 3; *Bell. Jud.* i. 2, 7.

⁵ On the text and interpretation of this paragraph see Derenbourg, *op. cit.*, pp. 72 ff.

3. On the twenty-seventh they offered again flour on the altar ;¹

Because the Sadducees were eating the meal-offering connected with the animal offering.^a Rabban Joḥanan b. Zakkai disputed with them and said, You fools, how do you justify this? None of them could answer a word except a garrulous old man who said, Because Moses loved Aaron his brother he said, Let him not eat the flour alone, but the flour with the flesh, like one who says to his fellow, Here you have a soft cake, here flesh. Rabban Joḥanan b. Zakkai read to him this Scripture, And they came to Elim, where were twelve springs of water, and seventy palm-trees.^b He said, Rabbi, you are laughing at us! He replied, You most foolish person in the world, is our perfect Law to be compared with your own vain meditation? The old man said, With this would you dismiss me? He answered, No! adding, the Scripture says, They shall be a burnt-offering unto Jehovah, with their meal-offering, and their drink-offerings, even an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah.^c

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(To be continued.)

^a Lev. vii. 13.

^b Exod. xv. 27.

^c Lev. xxiii. 18.

¹ Zeitlin rejects the glossator's explanation, and finds one in 1 Macc. iv. 42, 43, where, however, there is no mention of the meal-offering. It is possible, he thinks, that this is alluded to in 2 Macc. i. 8.

