

MEGILLATH TAANITH.

"SCROLL OF FASTING."

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

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

[Concluded from the CHURCHMAN of July last.]

XII (ADAR).

1. **O**N the eighth and ninth of Adar is the day of the blowing of the trumpet for rain.¹

But if they blow the trumpet on the eighth day why was it necessary to do so on the ninth? The eighth is to be understood of one year, the ninth of another. In this scroll the terms first, second, and third do not refer to the order of events, but the events are put under the headings of the various months and assigned to the days of the month to which they belong.

2. **The twelfth is the day of Trajan.**

* The day when Lulianus and Pappus his brother were seized in Laodicæa. Trajan said to them, Are you of the people of Ananias, Misael and Azariah? Let your God come and deliver you from my hand, as He delivered them from Nebuchadnezzar. They answered, Ananias, Misael and Azariah were worthy men; so, too, was King Nebuchadnezzar, and it was fitting that a miracle should be wrought for him: but thou art a wicked king, and it is not fitting that a miracle should be wrought for thee. We are worthy of death, and if thou slay us not God has many who can do so; many bears, many lions, many serpents who can attack us: but if thou slay us God will require our blood at thy hand. It is said that Trajan did not move from where he was till a despatch arrived against him from Rome. So they split his head with clubs and with logs of wood.²

* Taan. 18 b; Sem. viii.

¹ The mention of "second Adar," the intercalary month, is first met with in Meg. i. 4. It is the thirteenth month of an embolistic year, and has twenty-nine days.

² Zeitlin says that the glossator cannot refer to Trajan, who died in A.D. 117, since he died a natural death, and not on the 12th of Adar. He thinks the day originated in the war against Rome in honour of the young Jews who volunteered for military service, *tiron* in Aramaic meaning "a military recruit."

3. The thirteenth is the day of Nicanor.^a

It is said that Nicanor was one of the prefects of the kings of Greece. He was journeying to Alexandria, and daily shaking his hand against Jerusalem, and reviling, and saying, When shall they fall into my hands, that I may destroy yonder tower? But when the Asmonæan house prevailed and conquered his armies, they kept on slaying them till they reached Nicanor's carriage. They cut off his head, the thumbs of his hands, his great toes, and hanged him before Jerusalem, and under the gallows wrote, The mouth which spake haughtily and the hands which shook against Judæa and Jerusalem and the Temple, this vengeance be done to them! The day when this was done to him they made a festival.

4. The fourteenth and fifteenth are the days of Purim,^b when one must not mourn.

On those days miracles were wrought for Israel by Mordecai and Esther, and they were made festivals. R. Joshua b. Korhah said, From the time when Moses died there rose no prophet who instituted any new commandment for Israel, with the exception of the commandment relating to Purim.^c The deliverance from Egypt was celebrated for seven days, that wrought by Mordecai and Esther only for one day. Another matter in this connection, —^dSince in the deliverance from Egypt the decree was against the males only, as it is written, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive^e; and in the deliverance by Mordecai and Esther the decree was against the males and the females, as it is written, Both young and old, little children and women in one day^f: how much the more are we bound to observe these days as festivals each year.

5. On the sixteenth they began to build the wall of Jerusalem,¹ on which day one must not mourn;^g

Because the enemy had destroyed it, and the day on which Israel began to rebuild it they made a festival; for it was a joy to God that Jerusalem should be rebuilt, as it is said, Thus saith

^a Taan. 18 b; Jer. Taan. ii. 14. 1 Macc. vii. 49; 2 Macc. xv. 36.

^b Meg. 5 b; Taan. 18 b; Shek. i. 1.; Esth. ix. 17 ff.

^c Meg. 14 a. ^d Ibid. ^e Exod. i. 22. ^f Esth. iii. 13.

^g Jer. Taan. ii. 12, and parallels.

¹ Grätz (*Hist.* III, p. 575) sees here a reference to the work of Agrippa I in 43-2 B.C. Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* ii. 11, 6.

Jehovah, I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem : and Jerusalem shall be called, The city of truth ; and the mountain of Jehovah of hosts, The holy mountain :^a and again, I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies ; my house shall be built in it, etc.^b : and again, He shall build my city, and he shall let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward, saith Jehovah of hosts.^c

6. On the seventeenth the Gentiles rose against the remnant of the scribes in Chalcis and Beth-Zabdin,¹ and there came release to the house of Israel ;^d

Because when King Janneus came down to slay the sages, they fled before him and betook themselves to Syria, and dwelt in Chalcis. There the enemy gathered against them, laying siege against them to slay them ; they greatly perturbed them, and smote them with great slaughter. The remnant betook themselves to Beth-Zabdin, stopping there till it was dark, when they fled. R. Jehudah says, Each had a horse bound for him at the gate of his house, so that everyone who saw the horse thought that there was no Jew in that house.² They stopped there till it was dark, and then fled ; and the day on which they fled was made a festival. R. Hīdka says, The day on which the enemy sought to destroy the wise men of Israel the sea rose and destroyed a third part of the inhabited world.

7. On the twentieth the people fasted to obtain rain, and it came down for them ;^{3 e}

Because there was a famine and dearth in the land of Israel, for the rain had not fallen for three consecutive years. ¹When they saw that the greater part of Adar had gone by without rain they

^a Zech. viii. 3.

^b Ibid. i. 16.

^c Isa. xlv. 13.

^d Ibid. ; Meg. i. 4.

^e Taan. 23 a ; Jer. Taan. iii. 9.

^f Taan. 23 b.

¹ Grätz (op. cit. III, p. 570 f.) thinks this is the incident referred to in Josephus, *Antiq.* xiii. 14, 2 ; but against this is the fact that the persecution mentioned in the Megillath Taanith was by Gentiles. Zeitlin takes מְפָרֵיט not as "scribes," but as the name of the city Sepphoris, translating "the refugees of Sepphoris," and sees here a reference to the persecution of the Jews by the Gentiles in consequence of the victory over Cestius : cf. Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* iii. 4, 1.

² Either it was the Sabbath, or there was a decree in existence that no Jew should ride a horse.

³ Cf. Josephus, *Antiq.* xiv. 2, 1.

went to Honi, the circle-drawer, and said to him, Pray for rain to come down. He replied, Go and collect the Passover ovens that they may not melt. He then prayed, but the rains came not down. What did he then do? He drew a circle and stood in the midst of it, just as Habakkuk the prophet did, as it is said, I will stand on my watch, and set me upon the fortress, and will look forth to see what He will speak by me, and what I shall answer concerning my complaint.^a He said, O Lord of the world, Thy children have addressed themselves to me because I am like the son of the house before Thee^b; I swear by Thy great Name that I will not move hence till Thou have compassion on Thy children. The rains then came down in drops. They said to him, We are persuaded that we shall die, for we are of opinion that these rains have only come down to loose thee from thy oath. He said to them, My children, you are not going to die. Then he prayed, O Lord of the world, it was not this I asked for, but for rain to fill the pits, the ditches, and the caves. The rains then began to descend in torrents, so that each drop was such as could fill the mouth of an earthen wine jug, and the sages estimated each drop at the measure of a log. They said to him, We are persuaded that we shall die, since we are of opinion that such rains have only come to destroy the whole world. He replied, My children, you are not going to die. Then he prayed, O Lord of the world, it was not this I asked for, but for a rain displaying Thy good will, bringing a blessing and abundance.^c Then the rain came down in due measure, so that the Israelites went up from Jerusalem to the Temple mount because of the abundance of the rain. They said to him, As you did pray that the rains might descend, so now pray that they may cease, and that what has come may go. He replied, One should not pray against abundance of good; nevertheless go and bring me a bullock to offer thanksgiving over.^d They brought it to him; and, laying both his hands on it, he prayed, saying, O Lord of the world, lo! Thy people Israel, whom Thou didst bring forth by Thy great power and with a stretched-out arm,^e since they were unable to stand, neither before the greatness of Thine anger, nor before the greatness of Thy goodness (for when Thou wast angry with them they could not stand, nor could they when Thou didst pour out Thy goodness upon them), let it be Thy

^a Hab. ii. 1.^b Cf. Ber. 34 b.^c Cf. Ps. lxxviii. 10.^d Cf. Lev. xvi. 21.^e Deut. ix.

pleasure that they have relief. Immediately the wind blew, the clouds were scattered, the sun shone, and the ground was dried up. Then they all went forth into the fields, and saw that they were full of morils and fungus. Simeon b. Shetaḥ sent to Ḥoni, saying, If thou wert not Ḥoni, the circle-drawer, I would excommunicate thee, for if these years had not been like those in the time of Elijah, would not the Name of God have been profaned by thee? But what can I do to thee, for thou sinnest against God like a child who lords it over his father, who nevertheless does what he asks him? When he says, Bring me something hot, it is brought to him; when he says, Bring me something cold, it is brought to him; when he says, Give me nuts, they are given to him; when he says, Give me pomegranates, they are given to him; when he says, Give me peaches, they are given to him. Of thee the Scripture says, Let thy father and mother be glad, and let her that bare thee rejoice.^a So of this day when the rains descended they made a festival; since rains do not come down but for the merit of Israel,¹ as it is said, Jehovah will open unto thee his good treasury of the heavens to give the rain of thy land, etc.^b "To thee," that is, on account of thy merit, for on thee the matter depends. And again it says, And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.^c "In thee," that is, for thy merit do both the rains and the dew come down. And again it says, And I will give you your rains in their season.^d ^e There is a story that in the days of Samuel the Little² they fasted, and the rains came down before the first sparklings of the rising sun; and when they thought that this was in their honour he said to them, I will make a comparison; it is like a servant seeking his fare from his master, who said to those by him, Give it to him, and let me no longer hear his voice.^f Samuel the Little decreed another fast, and the rains came down after sunset. When the people thought that it was in honour of the congregation, he said to them, You are like a king who was angry with his son, and said to his steward, Do not give

^a Prov. xxiii. 25.

^b Deut. xxviii. 12.

^c Gen. xxviii. 14.

^d Lev. xxvi. 4.

^e Taan. 25 b.

^f Cf. Succ. 29 a.

¹ See Marmorstein, *Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinical Literature*, pp. 84, 90, 130, *al.*

² A tanna who arranged the benediction concerning the Mirim (Ber. 28 b). Called "The Little," either to distinguish him from Samuel the prophet, or because of his humility (Jer. Sota. ix. 24 b).

him his food till he weeps and makes supplication before me.

8. On the twenty-eighth the good tidings came to the Jews that they would not any longer be embarrassed by following the decrees of the Law¹; and on that day one must not mourn;

Because the Kings of Greece had decreed that the Israelites should not busy themselves with the study of the Law, should not circumcise their children, should not observe the Sabbath, but should serve false gods.^a But the covenant made with Israel was that the Book of the Law should not be moved from their mouths, as it is said, For it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed^b; and again, If these ordinances depart from before me, etc.^c; and again, This is my covenant with them, etc.^d What did Jehudah b. Shammua and his associates do? They rose up and went to a certain matron to whom all the great Romans were accustomed to come, and asked counsel of her.^e She said to them, Come and cry out at night. So they stood and cried at night, saying, O heavens! are not we thy brethren? are not we all of one father and of one mother?^f why then are we distinguished from every other nation and tongue by thy hard decrees against us? They did not move thence till they received permission to practise the three commandments, to circumcise their children, to observe the Sabbath, to study the Law, and that they should be exempted from idolatry. And that day on which they were permitted to keep the three commandments they made a festival.

9. But every one who ere this has made a vow to fast will bind himself by his vow.^g

How is this to be understood? If an individual take upon himself to fast on the second and fifth days of the week, he must fast the whole day. But if either or both these days happen to be festivals named in the Megillath Taanith, then he should not fast. This is the general rule: every one who has made a vow before our decree, our decree is abrogated because of his vow; but if our

^a Taan. 18 a; Rosh. H. 19 a. ^b Deut. xxxi. 21. ^c Jer. xxxi. 36.

^d Isa. lix. 21. ^e Cf. Sabb. 127 b. ^f Cf. Mal. ii. 10.

^g Taan. 12 a.

¹ Grätz (*op. cit.* iv. p. 185) accepts the glossator's view, and dates the event A.D. 139. Derenbourg (*op. cit.* p. 59) is inclined to see an allusion to the letter of Antiochus V (2 Macc. xi. 22-32) giving the Jews permission to follow the commands of the Law.

decree was made before his vow, his vow is abrogated because of our decree.

^a There is no distinction between the first Adar and the second Adar, save in the reading of Esther and the distribution of gifts to the poor. Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says,^b Every commandment which has reference to first Adar has not reference to second Adar, except those of mourning and fasting, which are common to both. ^cIn legal documents they write "first Adar," and in case of second Adar they only write "second." R. Jehudah, however, says "second Adar" is written.

^d Who wrote the Megillath Taanith? The followers of R. Eliezer b. Hananiah b. Hezekiah b. Garon. Why? Because the Israelites hitherto had not been accustomed to persecutions, and frequent persecutions had not come upon them; but at this time, when they were accustomed to persecutions which frequently came upon them,^e if all seas and rivers were ink, and all reeds and forests and trees were pens, and all men were scribes, and the heavens and the earth were parchments, they would not be sufficient to write of all the persecutions which came on them every year, and of all the deliverances and victories which were wrought for them.

Another matter:—One laden with sorrows becomes indifferent to new afflictions; and a dead man's flesh does not quiver under the surgeon's knife.^f

XIII

These are the days on which they fast as if it were commanded by the Law, and every one fasting thereon neither eats nor drinks till the evening:—

1. NISAN. The first, when the sons of Aaron died.^{1g} The tenth, when Miriam the prophetess died, and the well was sealed up.^h The twenty-sixth, when Joshua b. Nun died.

2. IYYAR. The tenth, when Eli the priest and his two sons died, and the ark was taken into captivity. The nineteenth, when Samuel the prophet died, and all Israel mourned for him.

3. SIVAN. The twenty-third, when the firstfruits ceased to be

^a Cf. xii. i. ^b Meg. 6 b; Shek. i. i. ^c Ned. 63 a. ^d Sabb. 13 b.

^e *Ibid.* 11 a. ^f Sabb. 13 b; Jer. Taan. iii. 8.

^g Tanchuma, Achare, 6; Lev. x. i. ^h Taan. 9 a; Tos. Sota xi, cf. Sabb. 35.

carried up to Jerusalem in the days of Jeroboam b. Nebat.¹ The twenty-fifth, when Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel, R. Ishmael b. Elisha, and R. Ḥanina, the adjutant high priest, were slain.^a The twenty-seventh, when R. Ḥanina b. Teradyon was burnt, and the scroll of the Law with him.^b

4. TAMMUZ. The seventeenth, when the tables of the Law were broken, the daily offering ceased, and Apostomos burnt the Law, and set up an image in the Temple.^c

5. AB. The first, when Aaron the high priest died.^d The ninth, when it was decreed that our fathers should not enter Canaan,^e when the first and the second Temples were devastated, when Bethar was captured and the City ploughed up.^f The eighteenth, when the western lamp was extinguished in the days of Ahaz.^g

6. ELUL. The seventh, when those who brought an evil report of the land died by the plague.^h

7. TISRI. The third, when Gedaliah b. Aḥikam and the Jews who were with him were slain.ⁱ The fifth, when twenty men of Israel died, and R. Akiba b. Joseph was bound in prison and died.^j The seventh, when it was decreed against our fathers that they should die by the sword and by famine and pestilence. The tenth, when they that made the golden calf died.^k

8. MARḤESHVAN. The sixth, when they put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and slew his sons before his eyes.^l

9. KISLEV. The eighth, when Jehoiakim burnt the roll which Baruch had written at the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet.^m

10. TEBETH. The eighth, when the Law was written in Greek in the days of Ptolemy the King,ⁿ and darkness came over the world for three days. The ninth, for what reason our fathers have not written. The tenth, when the King of Babylon drew close to Jerusalem to devastate it.^o

11. SHEBAT. The fifth, when the righteous in the days of Joshua the son of Nun died.^p The twenty-third, when all Israel was

^a Echah Rab. ii. 2; Mid. Till. ix.

^b A.Z. 17 b.

^c Taan. 26 a; Jer. Taan. iv. 6.

^d Taan. 9 a.

^e *Ibid.* 26 b, Seder Olam R., 8.

^f Rosh. H. 18 b.

^g Cf. 2 Chron. xxix. 19 (?).

^h Numb. xiv. ⁱ Jer. xli. 2. ^j San. 12 a.

^k Cf. Seder Olam R., 6.

^l Jer. lii. 10, 11.

^m *Ibid.* xxxvi.

ⁿ Meg. 9 a; Sof. i. 8.

^o Rosh. H. 18 b; Ezek. xxiv. 1, 2.

^p Cf. Judg. ii. 7.

¹ We do not find any place where this is ascribed to Jeroboam. We should probably read "in the days of the Greeks": cf. v. 1.

gathered together against the tribe of Benjamin on account of the concubine in Gibeah,^a and on account of the image of Micah.^{1b}

12. ADAR. The seventh, when Moses our master died.^{2c} The ninth, when a fast was decreed because of the divisions between the house of Shammai and the house of Hillel.^d The twenty-fourth (Second Adar), when the Alexandrians put the great Name on a precious stone idolatrously, and the Israelites fasted.³

These are the days of fasting which the Israelites received as if from the Law. And, moreover, our fathers decreed^e that there should be fasts on the second and fifth days of the week for the sake of three things, the destruction of the Temple, the burning of the Law, and the blasphemy of the Name. But in the days to come the Holy One (blessed be He!) will change them into days of joy and gladness, as it is said, I will turn their mourning into joy, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.^f

R. Eliezer said,^g R. Haninah said that the disciples of the sages multiply peace in the world, as it is written, And all thy children shall be disciples of Jehovah, and great shall be the peace of thy children^h; and,

Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sakes,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God
I will seek thy good;¹

and,

Thou shalt see thy children's children
And peace upon Israel;¹

and,

Great peace have they that love Thy law,
And have no occasion of stumbling;^k

and,

Jehovah will give strength unto His people,
Jehovah will bless His people with peace.¹

^a *Ibid.* xix. 1 ff.

^b *Ibid.* xvii. 4.

^c *Meg.* 13 b; *Taan.* 9 a; *Kid.* 38 a; *Sota* 12 b; *Sed. Olam* x.; *Deut.* xxxiv. 5 ff.

^d *Cf.* *Sabb. Jer.* i. 4; *Yeb.* 86 b.

^e *Sof.* xxi.

^f *Jer.* xxxi. 13.

^g *Bar.* 64 a.

^h *Isaiah.* liv. 13.

ⁱ *Ps.* cxxii. 7-9.

^j *Ibid.* cxxviii. 6.

^k *Ibid.* cxix. 165.

^l *Ibid.* xxix. 11.

¹ Two distinct events are apparently alluded to here.

² In Josephus, *Antiq.* *iv.* 8, 49, it is stated he died on the first.

³ The last sentence is missing in many MSS.