

which would perhaps allow of its having been the sepulchre of members of the Sanhedrin. The Judges mentioned in the Bible were buried each in the territory of his own tribe. The tradition connecting this tomb with the Sanhedrin, is mentioned as early as 1537 A.D.

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JEWISH SUPERSTITIONS.

It is well known that superstitions not based on the law of Moses are very firmly credited by the more ignorant of the Polish and other Ashkenazi Jews. Some of these, which are common among the Jerusalem Jews, may be noted, including the nail-parings, the blessing of the moon, the subterranean journey to the valley of Jehoshaphat, the Hand of Might, the Tashlich, etc. A volume of very curious information might be composed on Syrian superstitions, and I hope to collect some scattered notes on the subject, and to indicate the construction with older sources of superstition, when circumstances permit.

The English superstitions regarding the days on which it is lucky or unlucky to pare one's nails seem to be of Jewish origin. The very order in which the nails should be cut is detailed in the Cabbala, and the Friday is prescribed, but Thursday forbidden in order that the nails themselves may not break the Sabbath law by beginning to grow on the Sabbath. The parings are to be burnt or concealed, not thrown on the ground, as, if they chanced to be stepped over by a woman, it might bring her mischance. The Jewesses are careful to hide the nail-parings in cracks of the house walls, but it is said that they sometimes put them into puddings intended to be eaten by their husbands, in order to increase the affection of the latter. They put hair from their heads into puddings for the same reason. The Talmud notices the harm which may be done by leaving nail-parings on the ground (Tal. Bab. Moed Katan, 18a).

The blessing of the moon is a curious custom very much reminding the observer of moon worship. According to the Cabbala, it is only to take place when the moon is at least seven days old, and must be observed once a month in the open air. The worshipper about to sanctify the new moon is to stand, with one foot on the other, to give one glance at the moon, and then to bless in the name of the Holy One, of His Shekinah, and of the Hidden One (a Cabbalistic Trinity). The form of prayer commences "Blessed be thy Former, blessed be thy Maker, blessed be thy Possessor, blessed be thy Creator." After meditation the worshipper is to skip three times, pronouncing the words "Fear and dread shall fall upon them, by the greatness of thy arm they shall be as still as a stone," repeated thrice, and thrice backwards; next he pronounces loudly, "David, the King of Israel, liveth and existeth," and then salutes his neighbour.

This ceremony I once saw being performed, by a Polish Jew, on a house-top in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem, and was hardly able to believe my own eyes, so closely did it seem to me to approach moon worship. Further investigation, however, serves to explain the meaning of the performance. The standing in contemplation with one foot on the other is also observable among Derwishes.

The superstition that it is unlucky to see the new moon first through glass, common in Europe, is perhaps connected with the fact, mentioned in the Mishnah, that the evidence of a witness was not taken as to the appearance of the new moon, if he first saw it through glass or in water.

The Jews are apparently ashamed of such superstitions, and it is very difficult to obtain information on the subject. There can be little doubt, however, that the reason why many Jews wish to be buried on the Mount of Olives, is that they dread the subterranean journey (cf. Tal. Bab. Ketuboth, 111a), which they suppose the body must perform on the day of judgment from the place of burial to Jerusalem. In Poland it is said the Jews place small wooden forks in the graves to assist the dead man to dig his way. This curious idea is probably connected with the old Egyptian belief in the journey of the soul, as set forth in the "Book of the Dead."

The "Hand of Might" is a mark found commonly on Jewish (and sometimes on Moslem) houses, often elaborately sculptured. It brings good luck to the house. The mediæval talisman, called "the hand of glory," has no doubt a common origin. The Jewish wedding-ring in Jerusalem is in the form of a hand (as Dr. Chaplin informs me), and small glass hands are used as charms. In India the hand is the symbol of Siva, and indeed to write its history requires a volume by itself. It is interesting, however, to find this widely spread superstition also believed by the Jews.

The Tashlich, or ceremony of casting the sins of the individual into running water on new year's day (supposed to be supported by the words of Micah vii, 19), is strongly condemned by the cultivated Jews of Europe. I have not been able to find whether it is observed in Palestine, where water is scarce.

The mythology of the Talmud would form a rich treat to students, could it be extracted from the the crabbed Talmudic dialect. Many of the famous fables, which are common property of the Asiatic races, are to be found, with a Jewish moral attached, in the Babylonian Talmud. Among others the story of the man with two wives, which I have noted as existing among the Arabs east of Jordan, is applied in the Gemara (Tal. Bab., Baba Kama, 60b) to the two divisions of the Talmud which are mutually opposed, the Halacha or practical, and the Haggadah or poetical commentary.

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