

WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?—Exod. XII. 26.

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It was under circumstances of a very solemn and impressive character that the Old Testament rite of the Passover was instituted. The set time for the deliverance of the children of Israel from their grievous bondage in Egypt having arrived, the Lord had announced his purpose to go out about midnight into the midst of the land, and to slay all the first-born of the Egyptians, from Pharaoh downwards, together with the first-born of beasts. For the security of the Israelites in this appalling crisis they were directed to take a lamb, according to their families, a lamb without blemish, a male of the first year; to slay, and to roast it with fire, and to eat it with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs; and its blood sprinkled on the lintels and on the side-door-posts of the houses wherein it was eaten was to be to them for a token, and to shield them from the desolating inroads of the Destroyer as he sped on his work of vengeance through the gloom. So, accordingly, it happened in fact, and the liberation of the Israelites, enriched with the spoils of their Egyptian task-masters, forthwith followed. The Lord "brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes."

The rite which thus originated, when it had availed for the dread emergency with immediate reference to which it was appointed, was not thenceforward or soon to be consigned to forgetfulness. So far from this, on the chosen race it was enjoined that they should observe it as an ordinance to them and to their sons for ever. The night set apart for this purpose, as it annually recurred, was a "night to be much

observed unto the Lord for bringing them out of the land of Egypt," it was "that night of the Lord, to be observed by all the children of Israel in their generations."

The rite was one of a description evidently adapted to arrest the attention, and excite the curiosity, of such as should witness its celebration while yet unacquainted with its import. And hence, in the text, and the verses immediately connected with it, we find it assumed by Moses, in anticipation of the period when the Israelites should be settled in Canaan, that in its celebration there, it would engage the interest of their youthful offspring; and on this assumption, instruction is furnished as to the answer to be returned to their expected questioning concerning it. "It shall come to pass," he said, "when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as He hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass that when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, it is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses."

Thus the grateful and devout remembrance of the great things done by Jehovah for His ancient people, in the commencement of their history as a nation, was to be perpetuated among them, from age to age. And, in this relation, the language of the illustrious Hebrew Chief, which has just been adduced, is suggestive of a scene which the dullest fancy may easily realize, and on which it would be pleasant to dwell. It leads us to conceive