

PURIM

ESTHER (q.v., § 6 f.); cp Esth. 11 r, the Epistle of PHURIM (RV PHURAI, ΦΡΟΥΡΑΙ [BL] 'Α [N*] 'IM [N*]).

According to Esth. 9.26 the name is from PUR (𐤀𐤃; φρουρα [BN*vid. AL.] φρουρα [N*]), which is explained in 37 as 'lot' (ἐβαλεν κληροῦς [BN*AL.]). This derivation of the name, however, has but a slight connection with the story; still it has a better claim on our acceptance than the narrative in which it occurs (cp ESTHER). Because Haman, the arch-enemy of the Jews, cast lots to ascertain the day favourable for the execution of the decree against them, the festival (we are to believe) was called in grim irony 'the Lots.' Nothing, however, in the essentials of the festival itself required that the name of it should be of that meaning. On the other hand, if a good independent reason be found for a name Purim, in the sense of 'lots,' it is worth considering whether the name, being already in existence, may not have suggested the insertion of the episode of Haman's casting lots, into the story, after its association with the festival.

As actually observed, the institution commenced with a fast observed on the 13th of Adar. This was called 'the fast of Esther,' and explained as in memory of the fast which Esther and her maids observed and which she, through Mordecai, enjoined on the Jews in Shushan (Esth. 4.16). This fast was so integral a part of the observance that if the 13th fell on the Sabbath, the fast was put back to the fifth day of the week, the sixth being impossible for a fast, as the preparation of food for the sabbath and the feast days which would follow necessitated tasting the dishes prepared. The 14th and 15th of Adar were feast days. As soon as the stars appeared on the night of the 13th, when the 14th began, candles were lighted in all the houses, as a sign of rejoicing, and the people repaired to the synagogue. After prayer and thanksgiving, the reading of the Roll (Megillah) of Esther began.

This was accompanied by a running translation, with comments, in the vernacular of the district. The reading was dramatic in style so as to bring out the full force of the passages, and the congregation punctuated it with curses on Haman, or 'the ungodly' in general, whenever the name was uttered. This afforded an opportunity to exprobrate Christians as well as Persians, Macedonians, or Amalekites; the name in the narrative being understood to cover the others according to the nationality most prominent as oppressors at the time. After the Megillah is read through, the congregation solemnly curse Haman, Zeresh, idolaters in general, and pronounce a solemn blessing upon Mordecai, Esther, the Israelites, and even the Gentile Harbonah, because he hanged Haman.

Then the people return to a light supper of milk and eggs. In the morning of the 14th, after prayers in the synagogue, the lesson from the Law (Ex. 17.8-16) relating to the destruction of the Amalekites, of whom was Agag, the ancestor of Haman (Esth. 3.), is read and the Megillah is read again in the same manner as before. It is a sacred duty for all to attend this reading. The 14th day is looked upon as the actual day of deliverance, and in 2 Macc. 15.36 is called Mordecai's day. When the ceremony in the synagogue is over, all give themselves up to rejoicings and feastings, which are continued on the 15th. Excess on these occasions is excused. The gifts given to the poor, and the mutual interchange of gifts, are a custom much honoured. So great was the esteem in which the feast was held that its observance was regarded as certain to survive when the temple and the prophets had failed. If a second Adar occurred, the festival was repeated, if not the fast.

There seems no reason to doubt that all this, not intimately connected with the temple, nor altogether in keeping with dominant religious sentiment, was the embodiment of a national feeling of intense joy at some deliverance and a bitter, if veiled, resentment against some specific oppressors. The Jews had but

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too good reason to perpetuate a feeling of resentment, changing the people aimed at, from time to time.

The details of the observance may not always have been the same; but in its essential character we can recognise no great change. If we dismiss the account given in the Megillah itself as impossible historically, there seems no event so likely to have been the occasion of the institution as the defeat of Nicanor by Judas Maccabæus, on the 13th of Adar, 161 B.C. (1 Macc. 7.49). This gave rise to a festival kept on that day as Nicanor's day, perhaps afterwards transferred to the 14th, as the day on which the victory became known. Such at least is the view taken by Erbl, *Die Purimzeit*, 80. Even the name of Hadassah, Esther's first name, may be a reminiscence of Adassa, where the battle took place. It seems evident that, at this period, no general observance of Purim by the Jews was in force. In times of such national extremity, popular festivals may have been neglected, even if the religious feasts were kept up.

But the question arises: Was there no Purim feast before the event just mentioned? Many attempts have been made to assign to it a more general meaning. A full-moon feast of Adar is a natural suggestion, made by Ewald (*GVV* 24.6 ff.). Wücker regards Purim, Saturnalia, Sakaia, etc., as primarily the festival of the supernumerary *hamasdu* at the end of the year, which was regentless, and an interregnum in the calendar, whence emerged (by lot?) the consuls, eponyms, or other regular annual rulers. His theory serves to connect many of the Esther personages with astral divinities, but seems to demand the last week in Adar for its celebration.

(a) *Oppert and Lagarde*.—The assumptions that there was such a Purim feast in older times, and that the story of the Megillah is borrowed from non-Jewish sources and is radically connected with Purim, have led to many attempts to discover the source of both in close combination. Guided by the indications of the Megillah itself, Oppert, *Revue des Études Juives*, 1894, p. 34 f.,¹ found many words that he regarded as Persian, more or less corrupted. Lagarde, however, showed that the resemblances were fallacious and involved too great a stretch of the imagination. Above all, he showed that no Persian word for 'lot' could be the origin of Purim. He fell back on Ἐ and especially Lucian's reading of the name, as φουρδία, as a foundation for the theory that Purim was a lineal descendant of the Persian Farwardigān, or New Year's Feast. There certainly were elements in the observances of that day which have counterparts in the Purim. Even, however, if we admit the white-washing, etc., of the tombs, vouched for by Schwally, as Persian in origin, there is no evidence of its essential connection with Purim, and all the poetic description of the Persian feast given by Lagarde only shows its dissimilarity to Purim. At both, gifts were distributed to the poor and to mutual friends.

The foundation itself is too slight. The name φουρδία may be taken as a mere error for φουραία as is done by Erbl, or may be the attempt of a learned Greek to connect the festivals. The Egyptian colouring of the translation throughout, shows rather that the translator was unfamiliar with Persian terms and aimed at finding an etymology in his own tongue. He may have derived Purim from φουρερ and given it a form φουραία to help his derivation.

The transfer of a New Year's feast to the 14th of Adar remains unaccounted for, and such a change is always a thing difficult to accomplish in practice.

(b) *Jensen*.—The publication by Jensen of his *Elamitische Eigennamen* (*WZKM* 437, etc.) brought into prominence the Babylonian affinities of some parts of the Megillah. He showed that whilst Esther and Mordecai recall the Babylonian Ištar and Marduk, Haman can be taken to be Hirmān the Elamite chief

¹ Cp *Annales de philosophie chrétienne*, Jan. 1864.