

SACRED LEGENDS.

TENTH PAPER.

THE HOLY PEOPLE.—II.

Besides the Old Testament the Jews had their traditional literature. The thoughts of a thousand years of the national life of the Jewish people is embodied in the Talmud; all their oral traditions, carefully gathered and preserved, are to be found in this immense collection of the Rabbis, the recognized teachers of the people. The written law, which it was forbidden to add to or diminish, was the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the first five in the Bible; the unwritten law, the Talmud, filled twelve folio volumes. The guardianship of both of these was committed to the Scribes. These instructed the people, preached in the synagogues, and taught in the schools. Although they were accounted of the highest rank, many of them were humble tradesmen, and so it came about in the Jewish economy that "an humble tradesman is the equal of the most learned doctor," in the words of one of the common sayings of the time. A Jewish carpenter in the first century of the Christian era, ranked socially as a merchant or lawyer with us; the trade of fisherman was held in high esteem, so that viewed at the time, the occupations of our Lord, of His foster father, and of His disciples were as honourable as could be found among the Jews.

One half of the Talmud is devoted to legends, using the word in the sense of an allegory or tale, though sometimes there are legends in the modern sense of that word. The whole of these stood more in the relation of sacred tradition to the Jews. It is said that the Lord gave to Moses, besides the Decalogue, six hundred and thirteen precepts; these were repeated to Aaron, then to the seventy elders of the people, and then to the people themselves. The precepts were written on parchment; the oral explanations were the basis of the Talmud. Moses, it is said, wrote thirteen copies of the Pentateuch—one for each tribe, and one to be placed at the side of the Ark. The legends in the Talmud, beginning with Adam, rehearse the Bible narratives with greater or less prolixity. The dispute between Cain and Abel began by reason of Abel's flock crossing the ground which his brother was tilling. Cain is banished, but finally gets rest, and calls his son Enoch, which signified that he was no longer a fugitive and a wanderer. Adam's third son, Seth, had a son named Enoch, and by reason of the corruption of their descendants the land also became corrupt, and brought forth only thistles. The Enoch mentioned in the Bible was the son of Jared, and he reigned over the human race for three hundred and fifty-three years. He, and Seth, and Methusaleh buried Adam with great honours. Enoch was a hermit, but came at intervals and preached to the people. First he appeared once a week, then once a year; then he became so holy that the people feared to look on his face. He then announced his summons to heaven, retired by himself and warned the people not to follow him. Some returned on the sixth day, but of those they left behind them not one returned. "And on the seventh day Enoch ascended to heaven in a whirlwind, with chariot and horses of fire." There is a tradition that he and Elias will return to the earth and be put to death in their character as prophets.

There are many traditions of Noah. His wife was a daughter of Enoch, and his three sons married the daughters of Methusaleh. Five years is given for building the Ark; the animals assembled in great numbers opposite it. Those which lay down were led into the Ark, and the others were abandoned. The storm was so great that "each animal, according to its nature, uttered its cry of fear, of rage, of helplessness, and the noise was loud and terrible." The people came and clung to the Ark, beseeching Noah for help, but he told them he had preached to them for one hundred and twenty years, and that it was "now too late."

Nimrod, the mighty hunter, is a prominent figure in the Talmud. He was a grandson of Ham; the secret of his

great strength and might was the possession of a certain coat of skins that God had made for Adam. When Adam died Enoch became the owner of the coat, and he gave it to Methusaleh who gave it to Noah. Ham stole it from his brother and so it came to his grandson. Then war arose with the sons of Japhet: Nimrod was victorious and became King of Shinar, where afterwards they began the Tower of Babel. The legends do not give the height of the tower except that it "was exceedingly tall." A third part sank into the ground, a second part was burned, and the remaining third was standing when Babylon was destroyed. If these thirds are to be regarded as the same it must have been about two thousand feet in height. Abram, according to the Talmud, was taught the way of the Lord by Noah, and lived with him for thirty-nine years for that purpose. And a number of stories are told of his father and King Nimrod. The events in the lives of the succeeding patriarchs are embellished with a great many particulars, many of them holding up the Hebrew character in no enviable light. The infant that was saved at the request of the King's daughter is the subject of an harangue by an Egyptian magician that has much truth in it. King Pharaoh was at the banquet table when the young Israelite stretched forth his hand and, taking the royal crown from Pharaoh's head, placed it upon his own. "Think not," says the magician, "because the child is young that he did this thing thoughtlessly. Such, my lord, hath ever been the way of his people, to trample down those who have dealt kindly with them, to deceitfully usurp the power of those who have reared and protected them. Abraham, their ancestor, deceived Pharaoh, saying of Sarah, his wife, 'she is my sister'; Isaac his son did the same thing; Jacob obtained surreptitiously the blessing which rightfully belonged to his brother; he travelled to Mesopotamia, married the daughters of his uncle and fled with them, secretly taking large flocks and herds and immense possessions; the sons of Jacob sold their brother Joseph into slavery; he was afterwards exalted by thy ancestor and made second in Egypt, and when a famine came upon the land, he brought hither his father with all his family to feed upon its substance, while the Egyptians sold themselves for food; and now, my lord, this child arises to imitate their actions." After this and more the King called his judges together and they ordered two plates to be placed before the child, one containing fire, the other gold. It was thought if the child would grasp the gold he was a being of understanding and worthy of death. But the child grasped the fire, put it into his mouth, so that he burned his tongue, and Moses was thereafter, as the Bible says, "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." The test saved his life.

A word or two may be said on the Jewish festivals. The Jewish year began on the 1st of October. They commemorated the creation of the world on that day; it was the day on which Adam was created and on which he ate the forbidden fruit. That is with the Jews the day of final judgment. The feast of Tabernacles was in this month—it relates to the fact of the Jews living in tabernacles or booths for forty years. The Passover was an April festival to commemorate the deliverance of the first-born in Egypt when the destroying angel passed over the Jewish houses whose door-posts were sprinkled with the blood of a lamb, and at the same time slew the Egyptians. It was on the seventh day of the Passover that the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land. The Pentecost was seven weeks after the second day of the Passover, and was called the Feast of Weeks. It was the anniversary of the delivery of the Commandments to Moses. The seventh day was the Jewish Sabbath; the seventh year was a year of rest; after seven times seven years, or after seven Sabbatical years there was the Jubilee, or release. Seven days was Jericho surrounded, and seven priests took seven trumpets and marched round its walls seven times upon the seventh day.

There were also the Feast of Dedication referring to the Temple after it had been defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes; and the festival of Purim. This latter was held in March, and was in high repute after the return from the captivity.