

APPENDIX.

WE think it will please our readers to have placed before them the following letter, written by a Gentile who had witnessed the services at the Second Temple on the Day of Atonement. We give the entire extract as it is translated in "Shevet Jehudah" by Solomon Aben Virga, who translated it from a letter written by Versovius to King Alfonso the Pious, although it began with the Feast of Passover, part of which is already mentioned in Tract Pesachim, as it will be of much interest to the historian to know some details of the Jewish services at the Temple.

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER WRITTEN BY VERSOVIUS TO KING ALFONSO THE PIOUS, WHO COPIED IT FROM A WRITTEN REPORT SENT BY MARCUS, CONSUL OF JERUSALEM, TO ROME.

. . . *Tenth*.--Concerning the service at the Temple, these Jews were reluctant to inform me about it, as they declared it was against their law to inform a Gentile about the manner of their serving God. They have enlightened me upon two subjects only, part of which I saw with my own eyes, and was greatly rejoiced thereat. One was the sacrifice which they brought on the feast that they call Pessach, and is considered to be the greatest of all their feasts; and the second is the entrance of the high-priest, whom we call *sacerdote mayor*, into the Temple on the day which to them, in regard of holiness, purity, and strengthening of the soul, is the most important of all the days in the year. The Pessach sacrifice, which I have partly witnessed, as also, as I was told, the entire ceremony, takes place in the following manner. When the beginning of the month which they call Nissan approached, by the command of the king and the judges, swift messengers visited every one in the vicinity of Jerusalem who owned flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and ordered him to hasten to Jerusalem with them, in order that the pilgrims should have sufficient animals for sacrifices and food; for the people were then very numerous, and whoever did not present himself at the appointed time, his possessions were confiscated for the benefit of the Temple. Consequently all owners of flocks and droves came hastily on, and brought them to a creek near Jerusalem, and washed and cleaned

them of all dirt. They believed that in regard of that Solomon said [Solomon's Song iv. 2]: "A flock of well-selected sheep, which are come up from the washing." When they arrived at the mountains which surround Jerusalem, the multitude was so great that the grass was not seen any longer, as everything was turned white, by reason of the white color of the wool. When the tenth day approached--as on the fourteenth day of the month the sacrifice was brought--every one went out to buy his paschal lamb. And the Jews made an ordinance, that when going forth on that mission, nobody should say to his neighbor, "Step aside," or "Let me pass," even if the one behind was King Solomon or David. When I remarked to the priests that this was not seemly nor polite, they made answer that it was so ordered, to show that there is no rank before the eyes of God, not even at the time of preparing to serve Him, more especially at the service itself; at that time all were equal in receiving His goodness. When the fourteenth day of the month arrived,

they went to the highest tower of the Temple, which the Hebrews called Lul, and whose stairway was made like those in our church towers, and held three silver trumpets in their hands, with which they blew. After the blowing, they proclaimed the following: "People of the Lord, listen! The time for slaughtering the paschal lamb has arrived. In the name of Him who rests in the great and holy house!" As the people heard the proclamation, they donned their holiday attire; for since midday it was holiday for the Jews, being the time for sacrifice. At the entrance of the great hall stood twelve Levites on the outside, with silver staves in their hands; and twelve within, with gold staves in their hands. The duties of those on the outside were to direct and to warn the incoming people not to injure one another in their great haste, and not to press forward in the crowd, to prevent quarrels; as it previously happened on one of the feasts of Pessach, that an old man, together with his sacrifice, was crushed, in consequence of the great rush. Those on the inside had to preserve order among the outgoing people, that they should not crush each other. They were also to close the gates of the hall when they saw that it was already full to its capacity. When they reached the slaughtering place, rows of priests stood with gold and silver bowls in their hands: one row had all gold bowls and another row had all silver bowls. This was done to display the glory and splendor of the place. Every priest who stood at the head of the row received a bowl full of the sprinkling blood. He passed it to his neighbor, and he to his, until the altar was reached; and the priest who stood next to the altar returned the bowl empty, and it went back in the same manner, so that every priest received a full bowl and returned an empty one. And there occurred no manner of disturbance, as they were so used to the service that the bowls seemed to fly back and forth, as the arrows in the hand of a hero. For thirty days previous they practised that service, and,

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therefore, found out the place where there was the possibility that a mistake or a mishap might occur. There were also two tall pillars, on which stood two priests with silver trumpets in their hands, who blew when each division began the sacrifice [the paschal lamb was slaughtered in three divisions--see Pesachim], in order to give warning to the priests who stood on their eminence to begin Hallel amid jubilee and thanksgiving, and accompanied by all their musical instruments; on that day, namely, they brought forward all the instruments. The sacrificer also prayed the Hallel. If the sacrifice was not ended, Hallel was repeated. After the sacrifice, they went into the halls, where the walls were full of iron hooks and forks; the sacrifices were hung upon them and skinned. There were also many bundles of sticks; for when there were no more empty hooks, they put a stick upon the shoulders of two of their number, hung the sacrifice upon it, skinned it, and put the particular portion upon the altar, and went away rejoicing, as one who went to the war and returned victorious. The one who did not bring the paschal lamb at the appointed time, was eternally disgraced. During the service the priests were dressed in scarlet, that the blood which might accidentally be spilled on them should not be noticed. The garment was short, reaching only to the ankle. The priests stood barefoot, and the sleeves reached only the arms, so they should not be disturbed during the service. On their heads they had a cap, around which was tied a three-ell-long band; but the high-priest, as they told me, had a band which he could tie around his cap forty times. His was white. The ovens in which they roasted the paschal lambs were before their doors, in order, as they told me, to publish their religious ceremonies, also on account of the festival joys. After the roast, they ate amid jubilee songs and thanksgiving, so that their voices were heard from afar. No gate of Jerusalem was closed during Passover night, because of those who were constantly coming and going, who were considerable in number. The Jews also told me that on the Feast of Pessach the number of those, present was double of that which went out of Egypt, for they wished to acquaint the king with their number.

The second service was the entrance of the high-priest in the sanctuary. Of the service itself they did not tell me, but of the procession to and from the Temple. Some of it I have also seen with my own eyes, and it surprised me so greatly that I exclaimed: "Blessed be He who imparts His glory to His nation!" Seven days before that day which they call Atonement Day, and which is the most important in the entire year, they prepared at the house of the high-priest a place and chairs for the chief of the courts, the Nassi, the high-priest, his substitute, and for the king; and besides these, also seventy silver chairs for the seventy members of the Sanhedrin. The oldest of the priests got up and delivered an oration before the high-priest, full of earnest entreaty. He said: "Bethink thyself

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before whom thou enterest, and know that if thou wilt loose the devotion of thy mind, thou wilt at once drop down dead, and the forgiveness of the Israelites will come to naught. Behold! the eyes of all Israelites are turned upon thee. Investigate thy deeds. Perchance thou hast committed some slight sin; for there are sins which equal in weight many good deeds, and only the Almighty God knows the weight thereof. Investigate also the deeds of the priests, thy brothers in office, and have them repent. Take it to heart, that thou art going to appear before the King of all kings, who sits upon the throne of judgment, who sees everything. How darest thou to appear, when thou hast the enemy within thee!" The high-priest then makes answer that he has already investigated himself, and has repented all that which seemed to him sinful; that he has also already assembled all the priests, his brother officers, in the Temple, and by Him who rests His name there conjured them that each one should confess the transgressions of his brother officers, as well as his own, and that he prescribed for each transgression a corresponding repentance. The king also spoke to him kindly, and promised to shower upon him honors, when he should safely come out of the sanctuary. After that it was publicly proclaimed that the high-priest was about to take possession of his room in the Temple. Whereupon the people made ready to accompany him, and marched before him in the following order, which I witnessed myself: First went those who traced their ancestry to the kings of Israel, then those who were nearer in the priesthood; then followed those who were of the kingly house of David, and, indeed, in the most perfect order, one after the other, and before them was exclaimed: "Give honor to the family of David!" Then followed the Levites, before whom it was exclaimed: "Give honor to the family of Levi!" Their number amounted to 36,000. At this time the substitute Levites donned blue silk garments; but the priests, 24,000 strong, donned white silk garments. Then followed the singers, the musicians, the trumpeters; then the closers of the gates, the preparers of the incense, the preparers of the holy curtains, the watchers, the masters of the treasury; and then a corps which was called *chartophylax*; then all who were employed at the Temple, then the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, then a hundred priests with silver staves in their hands to make room, then the high-priest, and behind him the older priests in pairs. At the corner of every street stood the heads of the colleges, who spoke to him thus: "High-priest, enter in peace. Pray to our Creator for our preservation, so that we may occupy ourselves with the study of His Law." When the procession reached the mount of the Temple they halted and prayed for the preservation of the kings of the house of David, then for the priests and the Temple, whereat the *Amen* exclamation, because of the great crowd, was so loud that the birds overhead fell to the ground. After that the high-priest bowed before the entire

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people very respectfully, and, weeping, separated himself from them all, and two substitute

priests led him into his room, where he took leave of all the priests, his brothers in office. All that took place at the procession to the Temple; but at the procession from the Temple his honor was double, for the entire population of Jerusalem marched before him, and most of them with burning candles of white wax, and all attired in white; all windows were draped with varicolored kerchiefs and were lighted dazzlingly, and, as the priests told me, the high-priest, during many years, because of the great crowds and rush, could not reach his house before midnight; for although all fasted, nevertheless they did not go home before they convinced themselves whether they could kiss the hand of the high-priest. On the following day he prepared a great feast, to which he invited his friends and relatives, and made that day a holiday, because of his safe return from the sanctuary. After that he caused a goldsmith to make a gold tablet with the following inscription engraved upon it: "I, so and so the high priest, son of so and so the high-priest, have performed the service of the high-priest in the great and holy Temple, in the service of Him who rests His name there, in the year of creation so and so. May He who favored me with the performance of that service, favor also my son after me, to perform the service before the Lord."