

KAPPOROTH

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THE cock, which customarily serves the orthodox Jew as a sort of vicarious sacrifice on the day previous to the day of atonement, was regarded in no ordinary light by the nations of antiquity. Although Aristophanes regarded Persia as the original habitat of the cock and Ginzburg credited India as the original home of that fowl, yet a number of authorities are of the opinion that Europe was the original home of this bird. Hyde, however, discussing the subject contends that the cock was originally brought from Europe to Persia while Wilkinson claims that it was later introduced into Asia.

The Cabbalists as well as the Persians attached great importance to the cock inasmuch as it announced the coming of the dawn when man was to arise and pray. "Never sacrifice a white cock," was one of the sayings of Pythagoras, who regarded the bird as sacred to the moon; but some of his fellow countrymen carried this notion still further and regarded all such birds, white or colored as sacred to either the sun or the moon, and laid down the rule, "Rear a cock but do not sacrifice it for it proclaims the hours." It was also thought that the cock was created by God to oppose all the demons. According to Anquetil du Perron the Persians in the Vendidad termed the cock *parodarsh* (forseer).

The Parthians must have attached special importance to this bird, for one side of the several Partian coins, that have come down to us, is surmounted by a cock. This is also true with regard to the Cretan coinage. The Greeks regarded the cock as sacred because they announced the good or evil or on the other hand the approval or disapproval of the gods. In the Catacombs at Rome, a picture of a cock is found by the side of St. Peter. This is supposed to represent resurrection.

The cock has not lost its significance in modern times. The Chinese still emphasize an oath in three ways, i. e. (a) By breaking a porcelain cup. (b) By burning a piece of paper. (c) By cutting the throat of a *pure white cock*. If the latter is to be done on board a ship, it is related "The sailors there in time of imminent peril offer a cock to the spirits of the waters. The head of the bird is wrung off and committed to the deep while its warm life blood is sprinkled on the deck, the mast, the anchors and the tackling and some of its feathers stuck up as a charm in convenient places. Various libation with holocausts of tinfoil and gilded paper follow, which duly accompanied with prayers, etc., conclude the strange proceedings."

In Tonquin a child is presented with a cock when it first enters school. The fire worshippers offer up a cock on the *Nouz* (New Years).

Among the orthodox Jews, the cock still serves as a means of atonement. Gentiles who have dealings with Jews generally know about what time of the year it is to their interest to take their best poultry to the Jewish market for sale. Happy is that poulterer whose fowls are white cocks, for he is sure of a good price for them; and happy is that Jew who can secure a white cock for his *Kapparah*, for, in that case, though his "sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Speckled and partly colored fowls have their value all the year around, and are eagerly bought up in honor of the Sabbath, but the value of a white cock for propitiation on the eve of the Day of Atonement is far above rubies. Although the custom of the *Kapparah* has been strongly opposed by such men as Nahmanides, Solomon ben Adret and Joseph Caro as a Pagan one in conflict with the spirit of Judaism which knows no vicarious sacrifice. It has, however, been approved by such men as Jehiel ben Asher as well as by his son Jacob and by Samson ben Zeadok and others who have followed the authority of Hai Gaon and the other Geonim.

Let us now devote a few words to the ceremony proper among orthodox Jews known as the *Kapparah*. The ceremony known as *Kapparah* is a sacrifice not mentioned in Bible nor Talmud. It is doubtless an invention of a type of Oriental mysticism. It is based upon the Hebrew words, "*Gever*," which words often occurs in Scripture and always in the sense of "man." In the Talmud, this word occurs only once in the sense of "cock." This word "*Gever*" has a two-fold significance, and means both "a man" and "cock."

Tradition has built up the theory of *Termurath Gever b' Gever*, that is. "the substitution of a cock for a man." This theory finds

expression now as an annual custom, and custom is law to the Jew. The Rabbis taught in the Babylonian Talmud that "a man should not deviate from an established custom." And the Palastinian Talmud says, "Custom sets aside the law." With that in mind, there is no need for wonder that the annual custom of the *Kapparah*, "The atonement of the cock," is still in vogue among the orthodox Jews. "None can by any means redeem his brother nor give to God a *Kapparah* for him, but the *Kapparah* of a white cock is in all sufficient atonement."

Long before dawn, on the day which precedes the day of atonement, there is a great stir in the Jewish home where there are a number of fowls being bound and got ready for the sacrifice of the atonement. As a rule, a cock is provided for each male and a hen for each female in the family, while a woman who is enceinte brings both a cock and a hen for reasons too obvious to need explanation. The head of the family first makes the atonement for himself because the high priest first atoned for himself and then for his family. He grasps with his right hand the tied legs of the bird, while with his left hand on its head he coaxes it to keep it quiet. He then proceeds to repeat as follows: "The children of men that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their hands in sunder.

"Fools, because of their transgressions, and because of their iniquities are afflicted. Their souls abhorreth all manner of meat; they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He saveth them out of their distresses. He sendeth His work, and healeth them and delivereth them from their destructions. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men."—(Ps. cvii. 10, 14, 17-20). "If there be for him an angel, an intercessor, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness, then He is gracious unto him and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a (*Kapparah*) ransom."—(Job xxxiii. 23.)

At this point, he lifts up the cock and swings it round and round his head, while he repeats as follows, "this is my substitute, this is my commutation, and this is my atonement. This cock goeth to death, that I may be gathered in and enter upon a long and happy life, and into peace!" After having three times repeated the above formula, and having duly swung the cock round his head for the third and last time, he grasps the bird by the neck, and throws it to

the ground in the most out-of-the-way corner of the room. All the members of the family, of whatever age, each with his or her fowl of corresponding sex, following in due succession to make the atonement as above described. When all is finished the fowls are immediately carried off to the duly authorized slaughterer, who cuts their throats and despatches them in quick succession. The Talmud, though it says nothing about the atonement of the cock, expressly says (in Yoma, 5a.), "There is no atonement but by the shedding of blood," or, as given in New Testament phraseology, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission."

One of the things which the casual observer overlooks regarding this custom of the *Kapparah* is, the conclusions that the Hebrews draw from the first letters of three Hebrew words mentioned above, i. e., *Chalapathi*, *Temarathi*, *Kapparathi*. If one will take the trouble and put together the first letter of each of these three Hebrew words, he will find that it spells, "*Chatach*," which signifies "to cut," and this word is the proper name of the angel who is appointed to cut off the measure of life for every human being, like the *atropos* of Greek mythology. "*Chatach*, the name of this angel, is spelt out also from the final letters of the three words (Ps. cxlv. 16), i. e., "Thou openest thine hand." *Chatach*, by Gematria, has the numerical value of 428; and 428 is also the numerical value of the Hebrew phrase, i. e., "This shall be an atonement for thee." *Catach* is the name of the angel who is the Lord of Life and the appointed minister of the atonement of the cock. This cock is appointed to die that the soul that sinneth may live. Sin is the transgression of the law and the penalties ordained by the Law for its violation are either stoning, burning, strangling, or beheading. In order to make full satisfaction for every possible crime, the cock, as the substitute for the sinner, has to undergo what is intended to be a representation of all four modes of capital punishment. The throttling of the victim resembles strangling, casting it to the ground symbolizes stoning, the cutting of its throat reminds one of beheading, and the cock after a fashion performs what does duty for burning, in cooking the cock of atonement for table.

The Talmud states in Sanhedrin that all criminals about to be executed were urged to confess because by making confession they secured a portion of the world to come, etc. It is also maintained that confession is necessary. While the cock can die as a sinner, he nevertheless cannot be made to confess as a penitent. It was therefore resolved to make every Jewish sinner confess on the

day of atonement, a custom which is regarded with the greatest reverence and held in the greatest sanctity.

The *Kapparah* as was contended above, by three great authorities on Jewish law was regarded as one of the relics of oriental paganism which the Jews must have brought from the banks of the Euphrates during their exile. Its heathen features can plainly be seen through the thin veil of Judaism, behind which certain mystics had intended to conceal it.