

THE JEWISH HERALD.

VOL. 1

HOUSTON, TEXAS, JANUARY 21, 1909

NO. 18

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THE SABBATH CANDLES.

(By Julius H. Greenstone.)

Poet, painter and novelist have attempted to represent the beauty of the Jewish home on a Friday night. Its charms have been expressed in verse, its magnificence has been put on canvas, its powers have been described by authors—all endeavoring to give to the outside world a faint glimpse of the inner glory of this noble institution. It has appealed to the pious and to the infidel, its charms brought back man a prodigal son to the paternal roof, many a wayward Israelite to the fold of his religion. The Sabbath eve, with its serenity and solemnity, with its ceremonies and romantic surroundings, with its background of centuries of glorious traditions, has a foremost place among the institutions of Judaism. It is certainly one of the most potent elements in the long range of influences that preserved the purity of the Jewish home. It has been the poetry of Jewish life, the strength of the Jewish family life, the glory of the Jewish religion.

Nothing is more beautiful, nothing more inspiring in the ceremonies connected with this institution than the candles with which the pious housewife ushers in this sacred day of rest. It is not a Biblical commandment, and still has been observed with anxious care and loving devotion throughout all the centuries of trial and persecution. The Rabbis, with their deep insight into the human heart, with their lofty poetic sentiments, with their tender affection for their beloved faith, introduced this custom and appointed the Jewish woman, the guardian angel of the home, to fulfill it. So important was this custom considered to be, that almost a whole chapter

of the Talmud, is devoted to the description of its observance—the kind of oil or wick that may be used, the manner of lighting the candles and the blessing to be pronounced over them. It was compared to the perpetual light that burned in the Temple, and when the housewife lights her candles, spreads out her fingers in front of her eyes, not to look at the light before pronouncing the blessing, and then recites her blessing with some additional prayer, she may indeed be regarded as holy as the priest who lit the lamp in the Temple, she, the minister of the home, the present temple of the Jew. Her face, wrinkled perhaps by poverty and suffering, now beaming with a peculiar light reflected from the burning tapers without, and from a perfect faith and hope within, her hands shrivelled and shrunken, now stretched over the heads of her children in blessing, she indeed appears to us with all the glory and holiness that surrounded the priest of antiquity.

We are accustomed to hear the praises of the Jewish home, to boast of the purity of the Jewish family life. But the Jewish home without Jewish ceremonies cannot exist. The

Jewish family life is such because of the observance of these customs. when the Jewish woman had to hide herself in an inner chamber or in an obscure corner to light her Sabbath candles. There were times when the seven-branched candelabra was the cause of throwing families into the dingy prisons of the inquisition and often delivering them to the flames of the autos-de-fe. With trembling hands and a frightened look the Jewish housewife would then light her candles. With a broken heart and vehement spirit she would pronounce her blessing and recite her prayer. But light them

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