

THE DEATH OF ESAU.

His Tragic End as Graphically Described in the Talmud.

When Isaac died, Jacob and Esau wept together for their father's demise. They carried his body to the cave of Machpelah, which is in Hebron, and all the kings of Canaan followed with the mourners in the funeral train of Isaac. He was buried with great reverence, even as though he had been a king; his children mourned for him twelve months, and the kings of Canaan lamented sorely for thirty days.

Isaac bequeathed his cattle and all his possessions to his two sons. Esau said then to Jacob, "Behold, this which our father has left us must be divided into two portions, then I will select my share." Jacob divided all his father's possessions into two portions in the presence of Esau and his sons, and then addressing his brother, said: "Take unto thyself both these portions which thou seest before thee. Behold, the God of heaven and earth spoke unto our ancestors, Abraham and Isaac, saying 'unto thy seed will I give this land as an everlasting possession.' Now, all that our father left is before thee; if thou desirest the promised possession, the land of Canaan, take it, and this other wealth shall be mine; or if thou desirest these two portions, be it as it is pleasing in thy eyes, and the land of Canaan shall be the share for me and mine."

Before Esau replied and made his choice, he sought Nebaioth, the son of Ismael, who was in that country, and asked his advice as to the selection. Nebaioth answered: "Behold the Canaanites are now living in the land in peace and safety; at present it is theirs; let Jacob believe that he may inherit it some day; take thou the substance, the personal wealth of thy father."

Esau followed this advice, and taking the personal substance, he gave Jacob for his portion the land of Canaan from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river of Euphrates, also the cave of Machpelah, in Hebron, which Abraham purchased from Ephron for a burying place. Jacob took it as a burying place for himself and his seed forever. Jacob drew up a deed and recorded all the particulars of the contract, which was duly witnessed and sealed. The following is the expression of the same:

"The land of Canaan and all the cities which it contains, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Peritites and all the seven nations, from the river of Egypt, to

the river Euphrates; the city of Hebron, which is *Kiriath arbah*, and the cave which is in it, all this hath Jacob bought with money from his brother Esau, as a possession to him and an inheritance to his sons and their descendants forever." Jacob put his deed in an earthen vessel, that it might be kept safely, and gave the same as a charge to his children. Esau took what his father had left and parted from his brother Jacob, as it is written: "And Esau took his wives, and his sons and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle and his beasts, and all his substance which he had got in the land of Canaan, and went into another country from the face of his brother Jacob."—(Gen. 37:6.) He went with all of his possessions to the land of Seir, and returned to Canaan, which became an inheritance unto Israel for everlasting."

Subsequently as it is well known Jacob removed to Egypt and lived there for seventeen years, and all the years of his life were one hundred and forty-seven. And Jacob grew very sick, and being old and feeble, he sent for his son Joseph, and said to him: "Behold, I am going to die; listen, my son. The God of our fathers will surely visit you in the days to come, and carry back his people, as he has sworn, to the land which he has given to you and your descendants. Do not bury me in Egypt, but in the cave of Machpelah, in Hebron, in the land of Canaan, next to my parents." * * *

And when Jacob had finished these words he drew his feet into the bed, and was gathered unto his fathers. And when Joseph saw that his father was dead he fell upon the cold face, and wept bitterly, and cried aloud in anguish, "my father; oh, my father!" And the family of Jacob, his sons, and their wives and children rent their garments and clothed themselves in sack-cloth and ashes, and mourned for the patriarch. And the Egyptians who knew Jacob mourned for him also. Then Joseph commanded the physicians to embalm his father's body, and he, with all his family and relatives and Egyptian friends, lamented for seventy days. After these days of mourning Joseph approached Pharaoh the king, and said to him. "Let me go up, I pray thee, to bury my father; I will then return," and Pharaoh answered, "Go in peace and bury thy father."

Then the funeral proceeded to Hebron, to the cave of Machpelah. But when they reached the cave, lo, Esau and his sons and his followers, approached Joseph and his brethren,

saying: "Jacob shall not be buried here; this cave is ours and our fathers."

Then Joseph and his brethren were very wroth, and Joseph said to Esau:

"What is this which thou hast spoken? Did not my father, Jacob, buy from thee, after the death of Isaac, all thy possessions in the land of Canaan, aye, five and twenty years ago, for a large sum of money, that it might be an inheritance to his children forever? Why speakest thou in this manner?" and Esau answered: "I sold naught to Jacob." "We have the deeds," returned Joseph, "and thine own signatures shall prove that the truth is on our side." "Bring me the deeds then," said Esau, "and all that I have written will I do."

Then Joseph called his brother Naphtali, and said: "Get quickly to Egypt and bring to me the deeds for the cave, also the deed whereby Esau sold his birthright to our father; get these quickly and return in haste." And when Esau learned that Naphtali had departed upon his errand he stopped further proceedings in the funeral rites, and Joseph and his brethren guarded their father's body and burial cave.

With the next day a fight began between the two faction; Esau and his retainers on the one side, and Joseph, the Hebrews, and those who had followed the funeral train from Egypt, on the other. Now, among this latter party was Hushim, the son of Dan. He was dumb, and was placed to keep watch over the coffin containing the remains of his grandfather. Though not in the conflict, he noticed that something unusual was occurring, and asking by signs of those who came near him why the dead was not buried, he learned of Esau's interference, and the stoppage of the rites. It came to pass when he fully understood this, that his anger was roused, and hurrying into the midst of the combat, he singled out Esau, and struck his head from his shoulders with one blow. Then the children of Jacob prevailed over their opponents. Of Esau's company forty men were killed, while the other party suffered no loss.

Then Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah, and the sons of Esau witnessed the interment. For seven days Joseph and his brethren remained in their houses, mourning and attending not to their usual avocations; and after this, though they discharged their daily duties, they mourned for twelve months, and since that time such has been the custom of the Jews on the death of a near relative.