

THE  
SECOND DAYS OF THE FESTIVALS.

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A SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE NEW SYNAGOGUE, GREAT ST.  
HELEN'S, ON THE SECOND DAY OF  
PASSOVER, 5628.

BY THE

REV. DR. ADLER,  
CHIEF RABBI.

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## THE SECOND DAYS OF THE FESTIVALS.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

WE observe on this the *second* day of Passover, the first of the Omer, a day that, even in Jerusalem, and at a time when the temple was still standing, was celebrated with the greatest solemnity, and as an important holiday.\*

In our days a cry has been raised against the solemnisation of the second days of the festivals—days that have been kept sacred for nearly two thousand years. It were, indeed, to be wished, that a little more knowledge, more deference to our ancient teachers, and less assurance, less self-conceit, would be brought to bear upon the discussion of the subject. And we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that there are some, however small their number may be, who act upon the delusive and specious arguments that are advanced; there are some, who imagine that because those arguments are not answered, they are unanswerable. We cannot conceal from ourselves the fact, that unless serious attention be drawn to this subject, cavils will lead to doubts, and doubts will engender laxity.

I, therefore, feel it my duty to explain to you the reasons for the observance of the second day. For

\* Menachoth, p. 68; Maimonides Hilchoth Temidin, c. vii.

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this purpose I draw your attention to a passage from Scripture that has just been read to us (Lev. xxiii. verses 1, 2):

וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר : דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת  
אלהם מועדי ה' אשר תקראו אתם מקראי קדש אלה הם  
מועדי :

“The Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.”

‘Ye shall proclaim,’ says the Lord, *i.e.*, ye shall fix and appoint the days on which the several festivals are to be solemnised. This passage by itself shows that the fixing of the days of the festivals was left to the judgment and decision of the recognised authorities of the nation. With a view to enforce this upon the minds of the people, the same idea is still more emphatically expressed further on (v. 4),

אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אתם במועדם :  
“These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.”  
You yourselves shall proclaim them.\* As these days

\* Vide Rosh Hashana, p. 24a—א"ר פפא אמר קרא אשר תקראו—  
אותם קרי ב"י אתם, ר"נ בר יצחק אמר אלה הם מועדי הם יאמרו  
מועדי :

Cf. Maimonides ומי שצוה לשמור, c. ii., § 10, ה' קדוש החדש  
המועדות הוא צוה לסמוך עליהם שנ' אשר תקראו אתם במועדם וכו'

“He who gave the command to observe the festivals, at the same time commanded that implicit reliance should be placed upon the authorities of the nation.”



are the landmarks of the year, it follows that the entire computation of the calendar was placed in the hands of the wise men and legislators of the nation.

Guided by the text I have chosen, I shall proceed to show you—

- (1.) That the celebration of the second days of the festivals is intimately connected with the whole system of our chronology.
- (2.) That it serves as the bond of our nationality, and
- (3.) That it is in full accordance and entire consistency with our holy law.

### I.

The very beginner in theological studies must know that our system of chronology has been handed down by tradition. All that the Torah says of our calendar are the words הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם וְכֹן. "This month shall be to you the beginning of months."\*

Now you naturally ask to what month does the word הַזֶּה 'this' point. You also ask, what sort of month is here spoken of. A solar month? This cannot be signified by the חֹדֶשׁ of Scripture, for חֹדֶשׁ means renewal; but nothing is changed in the appearance of the sun at the end of 30 or 31 days to show that a calendar month has elapsed. The word חֹדֶשׁ can, therefore, only refer to the synodic revolutions of the moon, *i.e.*, the time which the

\* Exodus xii. 2.



moon takes in performing her journey round the earth, the change of her appearance at the end of  $29\frac{1}{2}$  days being visible to all. But then another question arises. Our festivals are closely connected with the produce of agriculture, and, therefore, with the influence of the sun. On this day, the first of Omer, the first ears of rye that had been brought to maturity by the sun of spring was offered in the temple. The Pentecost was to be celebrated as the festival of first fruits. We are commanded to solemnise the Feast of the Tabernacles when we have gathered in our corn and our wine. Now, how could that be done if the lunar year were adopted? A lunar year consists of only 354 days, and therefore differs from the solar year by 11 days, so that we would celebrate the Passover one year while it is still winter, then in autumn, then in mid-summer. We should, in fact, retrograde through all the seasons in little less than a score years. The verse quoted above would have remained perfectly unintelligible, had not the Lord explained its signification to Moses, who, in his turn, taught the meaning of this verse, as of all the other precepts\* in the Bible, orally to the children of Israel. Now, those who deny the divinity of the Oral Law must become involved in endless difficulties and contradictions. It is impossible for them to give a satisfactory account why they observe

\* Exodus, xxi. 24; Deut. xii. 21; and many other passages; cf. Maimonides in the Introduction to his Commentary on Zeraim.



the festival of Passover just on this day. Indeed, the course of the Caraites, who, denying as they do the authority of tradition, leave the fixing of their principal festivals for each year to their ecclesiastical chief, is at least consistent and consonant with reason. But to prove to you the difficulties in which they are involved, I will mention to you a fact that is of quite recent occurrence, and which was related to me by a member of their body. Their spiritual head had fixed the festivals for the year, and had communicated the several dates to the few congregations, that are still extant. The Passover had been duly solemnised, but afterwards he discovered an error of one month in his calculations, and the festival had to be kept over again.

Now, whoever is even but slightly acquainted with the סוד העבור, the principles upon which the Hebrew calendar\* has been established, knows, that at the time, when the members of the great Sanhedrin were sitting at Jerusalem, the ocular observation of the new moon was indispensable,† but the results of this were always checked by astronomical computations.‡

\* This calendar has been so admirably regulated, that it has excited the admiration of some of the most learned astronomers and mathematicians. Scaliger, a distinguished *savant* writes: "There is nothing more perfect, nothing more exact than the Jewish calendar."

† Menachoth, p. 29*a*; Rosh Hashana, p. 20*a*, *et passim*.

‡ Cf. Rosh Hashana, p. 24*a*, Maimonides Kidush Hachodesh, c. ii. § 4. Jesod Olam, by Isaac Israeli, Book iv. c. 5.



Although the New Year was fixed for the date that had been arrived at by astronomical calculation, its actual solemnization did not commence until after the new moon had been actually observed. This observation had to be reported to the great Sanhedrin, who thereupon proclaimed the festival. When such observation had not been reported by the 30th day of Ellul, the following day was also observed as a festival in Jerusalem,\* but two days were invariably kept in all other places, both those situated in and out of the Holy Land.

At the present day, when there is no Sanhedrin, and ocular observation cannot be verified by authority, this doubt as to which is the proper day extends to all the other festivals, and in our anxiety to observe the proper day we keep two days.†

Now, it may be asked, such a procedure may have been perfectly correct at a time when astronomical science was in its infancy, but now that it has attained such perfection, there surely can be no doubt as to which is the right day. The answer to the argument is this: If at the present moment the Temple would be restored and the Sanhedrin re-established, the very same course as of old would be the only one that could be pursued, owing to the circumstance, that the fixing of the Calendar depended

\* Bezah, p. 4*b*. Rosh Hashana, p. 30*b*.

† Erubin, p. 39*b*; Pesachim, 51*b*, 52*a*; Bezah, 4*b*; Succa, 43*b*.; Menachoth, 68*b*.; cf. Maimonides, Talmud Tora, vi. § 5; Jomtob, c. i. § 5; Kidush Hachodesh, c. v. §§ 6, 7, 8.



entirely upon ocular observation of the new moon, and that calculation was only employed with a view to check and control that observation. Should therefore the new moon not be observed on the 30th of Ellul at all, or at so late a period of the day that the fact could not be reported to the Sanhedrin in time, two days of New Year would have to be solemnised everywhere.

## II.

But further,—the second day of the festival has been instituted on the basis of our Nationality. Close to our text the words are repeatedly stated—

חַקַּת עוֹלָם לְדוֹרוֹתֵיכֶם בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם

The observance of the several festivals shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.\* All Israel dwelling as they do in every quarter of the habitable globe shall solemnise the festival at one and the same time.

With regard to the Passover it is particularly stated, that its celebration should commence in the evening, “at the season that thou camest forth from Egypt.” † Now, how can this fixed time of the day be celebrated simultaneously by all the Jews in all the portions of the globe? You know the difference of time that there is in places of different longitude. You all know, how in coming from, or going to Australia a day is either gained or lost, according to

\* Leviticus xxiii. 14, 21, 31, 41.

† Deut. xvi.6.



the direction in which the traveller is proceeding. There is a difference of twenty-four hours according to the geographical position of a place. It is clear, that, by allowing full forty-eight hours for the observance of the festival, all Israel in all their dwelling-places are enabled to observe one complete day of twenty-four hours simultaneously. In the days of old, when the nation was assembled at Jerusalem on the **שלוש רגלים**, the three great festivals, one day of twenty-four hours naturally sufficed. The signal for its commencement was given with the sound of the trumpet from a tower of the temple, which was used at the same time as an observatory.

At the present day our celebration of the festivals is very different from that of the time, when the temple was still standing. The chief duty on the **שלוש רגלים** was, that every male should appear before the Lord God in Jerusalem. Wherever the festivals are spoken of in the Law, they are mentioned as being intimately associated with the Holy Land. All the other precepts, that are connected with the Holy Land and the Temple, such as sacrifices, the giving of tithes, the observance of the year of release and the Jubilee, have been abrogated by the authority of the sages, and are not in force at the present day. The celebration of the festivals alone, though it be so absolutely connected with the temple, forms an exception to this rule. The object hereof is not only to keep alive amongst us the remembrance of the miracles that God wrought in our midst, but also to



preserve our devotion and allegiance to the Land of Promise, and to impress the fact upon us, that when the Temple shall be restored it will again be our duty to make a pilgrimage thither three times in the year, and to bow down before the Lord in His sanctuary. All these lessons are taught us by the observance of the second days. I would therefore ask those who cavil at, and question the propriety of the institution of that day, Why do you celebrate the first day? Why need the Passover be kept, when the offering of the paschal lamb has been abolished? Or, why observe the feast of weeks on the fiftieth day after the waving of the sheaf-offering, when such offering can be brought no more. Or, why celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles to rejoice before the Lord in the Temple, when the Temple has been destroyed. As you, however, follow the dictates of our sages and observe those festivals, you should be consistent and follow their directions in every respect, and attach the same importance to the second as you do to the first day. You ask, Why should all the congregations in the world solemnise the festivals simultaneously; why can they not fix their reckoning in perfect independence of Jerusalem? The reason is this.

The Passover is to be celebrated **בחדש האביב** in the "month of spring."\* In this part of the world that month falls in March or April. In the southern hemisphere September is the spring-month. Now, I ask you, would not the greatest confusion arise if

\* Deut. xvi. 1.



each congregation were to keep its own reckoning as regards the Passover? And we should meet with the same difficulty with regard to the feast of weeks, which is fixed for the season when the sickle is put to the corn, or with regard to the Feast of Tabernacles, which has to be observed at harvest time. You perceive, therefore, into what inextricable confusion we should be driven if we were to depart from the system which our ancient teachers have laid down with profound wisdom. I have, then, explained to you, that the keeping of the second days on the three festivals is necessary on account of their being connected with the seasons of the year, and in consequence of the obligation that rested upon our people to make pilgrimages on those occasions to Jerusalem. As regards the second day of the New Year, I have already shewn you that its celebration rests on different reasons, and that it was in many years even observed in Jerusalem.

These reasons, however, do not apply to the Day of Atonement. With respect to that day it is expressly stated,\* *מֵעֶרֶב עַד עֶרֶב תִּשְׁבְּתוּ שַׁבְּתֹכֶם* "from even unto even shall ye celebrate your Sabbath." Here the observance of the day is actually limited to twenty-four hours.†

Agam, you cannot argue, Why not keep two days

\* Leviticus xxiii. 32.

† I may mention, that there have been pious men, who have kept two days of atonement, but the practice was discountenanced on account of the danger with which the long abstinence from food



of Sabbath? The Sabbath is a day that did not need to be fixed and proclaimed by the Sanhedrin. It has been appointed to be kept with unvarying recurrence on the seventh day of the week; its solemnisation is to commemorate that in six days God created heaven and earth and rested on the seventh day.\*

### III.

You may ask however, Is the keeping of the second day not actually opposed to the law which enjoins upon us neither to add to nor to diminish from the commandments of the Lord.† But can we imagine that the sages of blessed memory, whose sole anxiety it was that every word of the Law should be conscientiously carried out, who sacrificed their lives in order not to transgress one of its behests—is it

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was attended. Vide Talmud Jerushalmi Challah, c. 1. בר אבוי דשמואל חש על גרמי וצם תרין יומין איפסק כרובי ודמך. The step-brother of the sage Samuel fasted two days of atonement, but ruptured a blood-vessel, and died. שאילתות דרב אחאי פ' בא, and Note 53 *ad locum*, by R. Isaiah Berlin, and מא"ח ס"ם תרכד.

\* Cf. Chulin, 101b, and Maimonides, Kidush Hachodesh, c. i. § 5. אין ראית הירח מסורה לכל אדם כמו שבת בראשית שכל אחד מונה ששה ושובת בשביעי אלא לבית הדין הדבר מסור עד שיקר שוהו בית דין ויקבעו אותו היום ר"ח הוא שיהי ראש חדש שנ' החדש הזה לכם עדות זו תהי מסורה לכם

“While the fixing of the Sabbath is in the power of each individual, for every one has to count the six days of the week and rest on the seventh day, the fixing of the New Moon has been delegated to the chief ecclesiastical authorities of the nation.” Cf. Kusari, c. ii. § 20.

† Deut. iv. 2.

credible, that these men would have dared to act contrarily to one of its precepts? I affirm that those who adduce this argument do not know the import, do not understand the meaning, of that prohibition. The Torah commands us to give a tithe of our property to the poor.\* Surely it would not be acting in opposition to this law to give a fifth part to the poor. It has also been commanded, that we should leave one corner of our field to the widow and the orphan.† Would that law be violated by giving up two corners to them? Again, it has been said,‡ “When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof.” Would that law be violated by constructing a double battlement? The true signification of the prohibition is, that we must not add to, or diminish from, any precept, so as to alter its nature and character. We have, *e.g.*, been commanded to take four vegetable productions, and rejoice with them before the Lord,§ on the feast of Tabernacles. We must not add to or diminish from this command, by taking five *different* plants. We should be transgressing this prohibition also, if we would institute a *new* festival, and make it as binding as those commanded in the law.|| But how different is the case with respect to the second days of the festival? Can we be charged with adding to the Divine command, if—

\* Deut. xiv. 28.

† Lev. xix. 9.

‡ Deut. xxii. 8.

§ Lev. xxiii. 40.

|| *Vide* Nachmanides ad locum, Rosh Hashana, p. 28*b*, Sanhedrin, 88*b*; cf. Maimonides Mamrim, c. iv. § 3.



labouring; as we are, in doubt, whether the first or the second be the proper day—we consider ourselves religiously bound to keep both days holy?

I may illustrate the subject thus to you:—Suppose one of you would arrive at a seaport town in England from Australia, on what you and the other passengers on board the ship call Sunday. You will, of course, have observed the preceding day as Sabbath. Now, you find, as soon as you land, that the day *you* call Sunday is in reality Saturday. Unless you wish, then, to be continually out of reckoning, you would have to consider that day again with your brethren as Saturday, and observe it as the Sabbath. Would anyone object that your keeping holy those two days successively was adding to the law? You have as little right to call the celebration of the second day of the festival, which has been appointed from a similar cause, an addition to the law.\*

I therefore implore you, brethren, to withhold from violating an institution, that has been kept sacred by our

\* A somewhat similar argument is adduced in the interesting Response of Rabbenu Hai Gaon, sec. 1, in the תשובות הנאונים, published at Lyck, 5624. Suppose a man suffers shipwreck, and is thrown on a desert isle. His hardships cause him to forget whether the day on which he departed was Tuesday or Wednesday. He, therefore, would not know whether the coming Friday or Saturday would be the Sabbath. In his conscientious desire not to desecrate the true Sabbath he would keep both those days holy. In reading his prayers, he would call them both the seventh day. Would you charge this man with adding to the Divine commandments?



forefathers, an institution that has been unanimously sanctioned by great and holy men from very remote times.\* Let me also draw your attention to the following two points. Even as far back as the days of the prophet Samuel it seems that two days of New Moon were kept.† It is also a noteworthy fact, that the second days of the festivals, even when the Temple was still standing, were distinguished by joyous festivities. Thus, on the second day of Passover, the Omer was brought; the second day of Pentecost was **יום טובה**, the feast of Sacrifice;‡ on the second day of Tabernacles the **שמחת בית השואבה**, the solemnity of pouring water upon the Altar was observed.§ Bear in mind, that with respect to institutions of far less importance the rule holds good, **אין ב"ד רשאי לבטל דברי ב"ד חבירו אלא אם כן גדול בהכמה ובמנין ממנו** that no court of law, no Sanhedrin, can abrogate or rescind an institution that has been established by another court, unless it be superior in wisdom and in numbers.|| And can this present age, in which the

\* Erubin Mishné, p. 39*a*, and Boraitha, 39*b*, וכן הי' ר' יוסי אוסר, 39*b*, prove that the second day had been established as a fixed institution long before the period in which R. José lived (within a hundred years after the destruction of the Second Temple): Cf. Beza, 4*b*, שלחו מתם הזהרו במנהג אבותיכם, ביריכם. They sent a missive from the Holy Land—"Be careful in keeping up the custom of your forefathers." R. Eleazer ben Pedath was the ecclesiastical head of Palestine at that time. (Sanhedrin, 17*b*.)

† 1 Samuel xx. 27, ממחרת החדש השני, is rendered by many translators the morrow, the second day of New Moon.

‡ Chagiga, p. 17*a*. § Succa, c. v.

|| Eduyoth, c. 1 § 5; cf. Maimonides Mamrim, c. ii. § 2.



study of the law is so sadly neglected, produce men superior in learning and authority to those of ages gone by, when the teachers of Israel devoted their days and their nights, their talents and abilities, to the study of the law?

I ask you to profit by the example of your neighbours, who, anxious to do honour to their day of rest, make the Saturday a half or even a whole holiday, and add an additional day to their feasts. Why will you incur the charge, that you are ever ready to imitate evil but not good examples; that you are inclined to copy your neighbours' faults, but not their virtues? Depend upon this, that when once the second day has been put aside, indifference towards the first day will ensue, and then even the observance of the Sabbath will be endangered. And, therefore, our sages said כל המחלל את המועדות מעלין עליו כאלו חלל את השבתות: He who desecrates the festivals is accounted as if he had already profaned the Sabbath,\* for one sin, one transgression, leads to another.†

You say that the number of festivals presses heavily upon you, that it keeps you from your business avocations, and that it prevents the poor from earning their daily bread. But has the Lord not announced to us,‡ “And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and

\* Sifra, Emor ix. 7.

† Cf. Aboth, iii. § 2.

‡ Lev. xxv. 21.



it shall bring forth fruit for three years." If our poor will but labour with the right energy and in the right spirit on the working days, they will not suffer want.

But do not think that our festivals have been given us to be spent in listlessness and idleness, to be devoted to indulgence in eating, and drinking, and vain pleasures. No, they have been given to serve as true resting places for the soul in the turmoil of life; they have been given for the improvement of our hearts, minds, and intellects. Our sages teach us,\* that the Sabbaths and festivals have been vouchsafed to Israel, that they might study the law. Gather your children around you on those days, and show them that you feel the festivals to be truly *מוערי ה'* days devoted to the Lord, so that their blessed influence may be felt throughout the working days of the year. You will not be losers by keeping the double festivals, but you will gain twofold strength and alacrity for the performance of your daily labours. Your readiness to bring sacrifices will be praised by your neighbours, your consistency will be approved of by your conscience, your obedience will be rewarded by your God.

Almighty God, Sovereign of the Universe, Thou hast enjoined upon us† that we should act according to the sentence of the law which our judges of old have

\* Cf. Sabbath, 119*a*; Beza, 15*b*.

† Deut. xvii. 11.



taught us. Thou hast ordained that the festivals which they proclaimed should be regarded holy, and Thy people Israel has faithfully obeyed their injunctions, and maintained them as the memorial of former remote generations, and the bond of their brotherhood. Grant that Thy children may not abandon the law of their teachers of old, may not despise that which their parents have kept sacred in seasons of sorrow and oppression. Fill our hearts with faith, with sincere love of Thy holy word, with devotion to our ancient institutions. Grant that our festival days may exercise their beneficent influence upon us, giving power to the faint, and might to the weary, so that we may all renew our strength, and mount up to Thee with wings as eagles. Hasten, we beseech Thee, the advent of the time when mankind will be redeemed, and bow before Thee in adoration; when Thou wilt send the Redeemer to Zion; when, as in the days of yore, the whole nation will flock to Thy sanctuary, and appear three times in the year before Thee, O Lord our God. Amen.

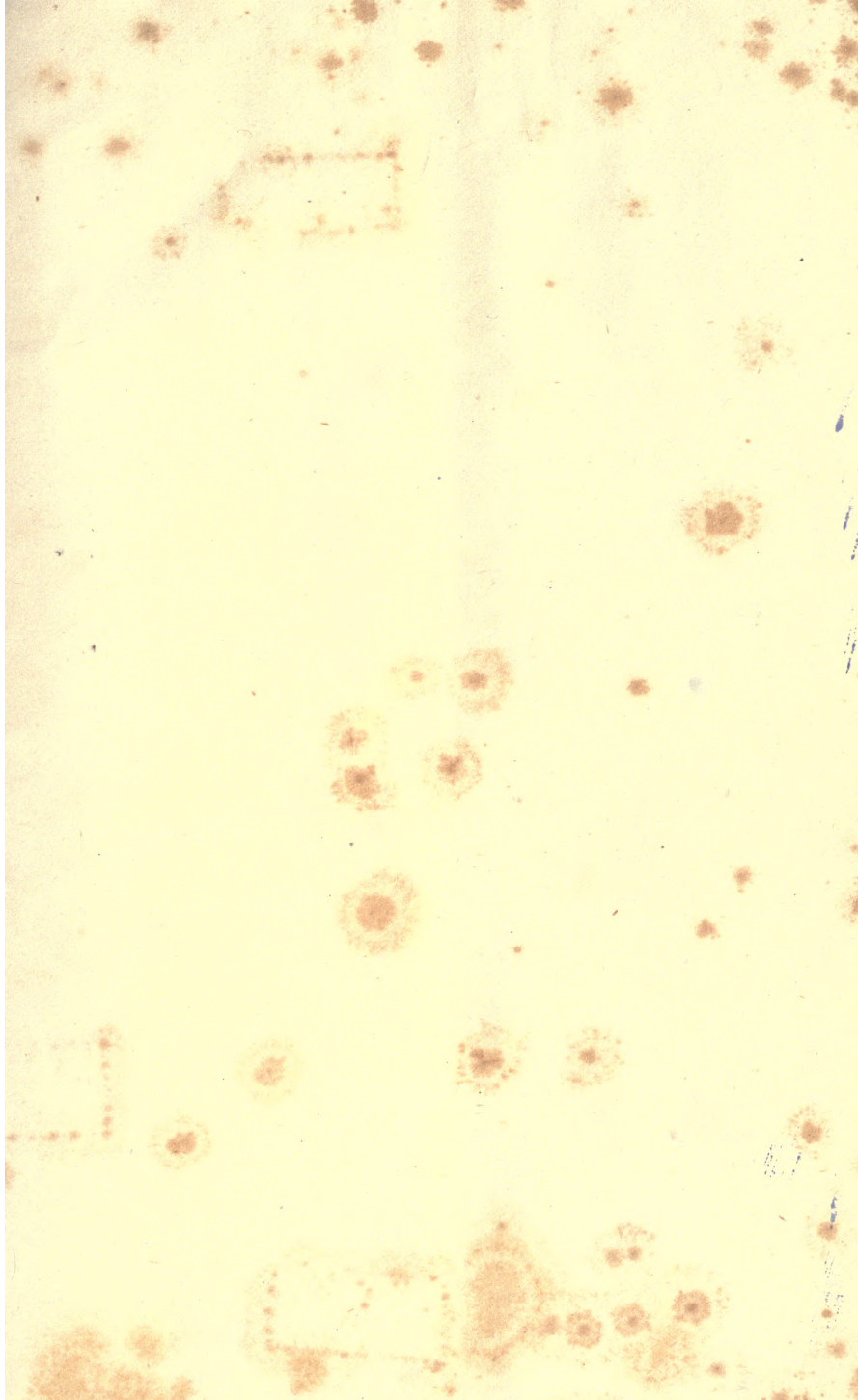
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