

THE BOOK OF

ESTHER

Commentary by **ROBERT JAMIESON**

CHAPTER 1

ESTHER 1:1-22.

AHASUERUS MAKES ROYAL FEASTS.

1. *Ahasuerus* — It is now generally agreed among learned men that the Ahasuerus mentioned in this episode is the Xerxes who figures in Grecian history.

3. *made a feast unto all his princes and his servants* — Banquets on so grand a scale, and extending over so great a period, have been frequently provided by the luxurious monarchs of Eastern countries, both in ancient and modern times. The early portion of this festive season, however, seems to have been dedicated to amusement, particularly an exhibition of the magnificence and treasures of the court, and it was closed by a special feast of seven days' continuance, given within the gardens of the royal palace. The ancient palace of Susa has been recently disinterred from an incumbent mass of earth and ruins; and in that palace, which is, beyond all doubt, the actual edifice referred to in this passage, there is a great hall of marble pillars. "The position of the great colonnade corresponds with the account here given. It stands on an elevation in the center of the mound, the remainder of which we may well imagine to have been occupied, after the Persian fashion, with a garden and fountains. Thus the colonnade would represent the 'court of the garden of the king's palace' with its 'pillars of marble.' I am even inclined to believe the expression, 'Shushan

the palace,' applies especially to this portion of the existing ruins, in contradistinction to the citadel and the city of Shushan" [LOFTUS, *Chaldaeae and Susiana*].

6. *Where were white, green, and blue hangings*, etc. — The fashion, in the houses of the great, on festive occasions, was to decorate the chambers from the middle of the wall downward with damask or velvet hangings of variegated colors suspended on hooks, or taken down at pleasure.

the beds were of gold and silver — that is, the couches on which, according to Oriental fashion, the guests reclined, and which were either formed entirely of gold and silver or inlaid with ornaments of those costly metals, stood on an elevated floor of parti-colored marble.

7. *they gave them drink in vessels of gold* — There is reason to believe from this account, as well as from ^{<TRG>}Esther 5:6 ^{<TRG>}7:2,7,8, where the drinking of wine occupies by far the most prominent place in the description, that this was a banquet rather than a feast.

9. *Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women* — The celebration was double; for, as according to the Oriental fashion, the sexes do not intermingle in society, the court ladies were entertained in a separate apartment by the queen.

10-12. *On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine* — As the feast days advanced, the drinking was more freely indulged in, so that the close was usually marked by great excesses of revelry.

he commanded ... the seven chamberlains — These were the eunuchs who had charge of the royal harem. The refusal of Vashti to obey an order which required her to make an indecent exposure of herself before a company of drunken revellers, was becoming both the modesty of her sex and her rank as queen; for, according to Persian customs, the queen, even more than the wives of other men, was secluded from the public gaze. Had not the king's blood been heated with wine, or his reason overpowered by force of offended pride, he would have perceived that his own honor, as well as hers, was consulted by her dignified conduct.

13-19. *Then the king said to the wise men* — These were probably the magi, without whose advice as to the proper time of doing a thing the

Persian kings never did take any step whatever; and the persons named in ^{<5014>}Esther 1:14 were the “seven counsellors” (compare ^{<5074>}Ezra 7:14) who formed the state ministry. The combined wisdom of all, it seems, was enlisted to consult with the king what course should be taken after so unprecedented an occurrence as Vashti’s disobedience of the royal summons. It is scarcely possible for us to imagine the astonishment produced by such a refusal in a country and a court where the will of the sovereign was absolute. The assembled grandees were petrified with horror at the daring affront. Alarm for the consequences that might ensue to each of them in his own household next seized on their minds; and the sounds of bacchanalian revelry were hushed into deep and anxious consultation what punishment to inflict on the refractory queen. But a purpose was to be served by the flattery of the king and the enslavement of all women. The counsellors were too intoxicated or obsequious to oppose the courtly advice of Memucan was unanimously resolved, with a wise regard to the public interests of the nation, that the punishment of Vashti could be nothing short of degradation from her royal dignity. The doom was accordingly pronounced and made known in all parts of the empire.

CHAPTER 2

ESTHER 2:1-20.

ESTHER CHOSEN TO BE QUEEN.

1-3. *After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased*

— On recovering from the violent excitement of his revelry and rage, the king was pierced with poignant regret for the unmerited treatment he had given to his beautiful and dignified queen. But, according to the law, which made the word of a Persian king irrevocable, she could not be restored. His counsellors, for their own sake, were solicitous to remove his disquietude, and hastened to recommend the adoption of all suitable means for gratifying their royal master with another consort of equal or superior attractions to those of his divorced queen. In the despotic countries of the East the custom obtains that when an order is sent to a family for a young damsel to repair to the royal palace, the parents, however unwilling, dare not refuse the honor for their daughter; and although they know that when she is once in the royal harem, they will never see her again, they are obliged to yield a silent and passive compliance. On the occasion referred to, a general search was commanded to be made for the greatest beauties throughout the empire, in the hope that, from their ranks, the disconsolate monarch might select one for the honor of succeeding to the royal honors of Vashti. The damsels, on arrival at the palace, were placed under the custody of “Hege, the king’s chamberlain, keeper of the women,” that is, the chief eunuch, usually a repulsive old man, on whom the court ladies are very dependent, and whose favor they are always desirous to secure.

5. *Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew* — Mordecai held some office about the court. But his “sitting at the king’s gate” (¹⁷²¹Esther 2:21) does not necessarily imply that he was in the humble condition of a porter; for, according to an institute of Cyrus, all state officers were required to wait in the outer courts till they were summoned into the presence chamber. He might, therefore, have been a person of some official dignity. This man had an orphan cousin, born during the exile, under his

care, who being distinguished by great personal beauty, was one of the young damsels taken into the royal harem on this occasion. She had the good fortune at once to gain the good will of the chief eunuch (^{<17B>}Esther 2:9). Her sweet and amiable appearance made her a favorite with all who looked upon her (^{<17B>}Esther 2:15, last clause). Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, that is, “myrtle,” which, on her introduction into the royal harem, was changed to Esther, that is, the star Venus, indicating beauty and good fortune [GESENIUS].

11. *Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women’s house* — The harem is an inviolable sanctuary, and what is transacted within its walls is as much a secret to those without as if they were thousands of miles away. But hints were given him through the eunuchs.

12. *Now when every maid’s turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus* — A whole year was spent in preparation for the intended honor. Considering that this took place in a palace, the long period prescribed, together with the profusion of costly and fragrant cosmetics employed, was probably required by state etiquette.

17. *the king loved Esther above all the women* — The choice fell on Esther, who found favor in the eyes of Ahasuerus. He elevated her to the dignity of chief wife, or queen. The other competitors had apartments assigned them in the royal harem, and were retained in the rank of secondary wives, of whom Oriental princes have a great number.

he set the royal crown upon her head — This consisted only of a purple ribbon, streaked with white, bound round the forehead. The nuptials were celebrated by a magnificent entertainment, and, in honor of the auspicious occasion, “he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.” The dotation of Persian queens consisted in consigning to them the revenue of certain cities, in various parts of the kingdom, for defraying their personal and domestic expenditure. Some of these imposts the king remitted or lessened at this time.

ESTHER 2:21-23.**MORDECAI, DISCOVERING A TREASON, IS RECORDED IN THE CHRONICLES.**

21. *In those days ... two of the king's chamberlains ... were wroth and sought to lay hand on the king*, etc. — This secret conspiracy against the king's life probably arose out of revenge for the divorce of Vashti, in whose interest, and at whose instigation, these eunuchs may have acted. Through the vigilance of Mordecai, whose fidelity, however, passed unnoticed, the design was frustrated, while the conspirators were condemned to be executed and as the matter was recorded in the court annals, it became the occasion afterwards of Mordecai's preferment to the place of power and influence for which, in furtherance of the national interests of the Jews, divine providence intended him.

CHAPTER 3

ESTHER 3:1-15.

HAMAN, ADVANCED BY THE KING, AND DESPISED BY MORDECAI, SEEKS REVENGE ON ALL THE JEWS.

1. *After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman ... set his seat above all the princes* — that is, raised him to the rank of vizier, or prime confidential minister, whose pre-eminence in office and power appeared in the elevated state chair appropriated to that supreme functionary. Such a distinction in seats was counted of vast importance in the formal court of Persia.

2. *all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman* — Large mansions in the East are entered by a spacious vestibule, or gateway, along the sides of which visitors sit, and are received by the master of the house; for none, except the nearest relatives or special friends, are admitted farther. There the officers of the ancient king of Persia waited till they were called, and did obeisance to the all-powerful minister of the day.

But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence — The obsequious homage of prostration not entirely foreign to the manners of the East, had not been claimed by former viziers; but this minion required that all subordinate officers of the court should bow before him with their faces to the earth. But to Mordecai, it seemed that such an attitude of profound reverence was due only to God. Haman being an Amalekite, one of a doomed and accursed race, was, doubtless, another element in the refusal; and on learning that the recusant was a Jew, whose nonconformity was grounded on religious scruples, the magnitude of the affront appeared so much the greater, as the example of Mordecai would be imitated by all his compatriots. Had the homage been a simple token of civil respect, Mordecai would not have refused it; but the Persian kings demanded a sort of adoration, which, it is well known, even the Greeks reckoned it

degradation to express. As Xerxes, in the height of his favoritism, had commanded the same honors to be given to the minister as to himself, this was the ground of Mordecai's refusal.

7. *In the first month ... they cast Pur, that is, the lot* — In resorting to this method of ascertaining the most auspicious day for putting his atrocious scheme into execution, Haman acted as the kings and nobles of Persia have always done, never engaging in any enterprise without consulting the astrologers, and being satisfied as to the lucky hour. Vowing revenge but scorning to lay hands on a single victim, he meditated the extirpation of the whole Jewish race, who, he knew, were sworn enemies of his countrymen; and by artfully representing them as a people who were aliens in manners and habits, and enemies to the rest of his subjects, he procured the king's sanction of the intended massacre. One motive which he used in urging his point was addressed to the king's cupidity. Fearing lest his master might object that the extermination of a numerous body of his subjects would seriously depress the public revenue, Haman promised to make up the loss.

9. *I will pay ten thousand talents of silver ... into the king's treasuries* — This sum, reckoning by the Babylonish talent, will be about \$10,000,000 in our money; but estimated according to the Jewish talent, it will considerably exceed \$15,000,000 — an immense contribution to be made out of a private fortune. But classic history makes mention of several persons whose resources seem almost incredible.

10. *the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman* — There was a seal or signet in the ring. The bestowment of the ring, with the king's name and that of his kingdom engraven on it, was given with much ceremony, and it was equivalent to putting the sign manual to a royal edict.

12-15. *Then were the king's scribes called ... and there was written* — The government secretaries were employed in making out the proclamation authorizing a universal massacre of the Jews on one day. It was translated into the dialects of all the people throughout the vast empire, and swift messengers were sent to carry it into all the provinces. On the day appointed, all Jews were to be put to death and their property confiscated; doubtless, the means by which Haman hoped to pay his

stipulated tribute into the royal treasury. To us it appears unaccountable how any sane monarch could have given his consent to the extirpation of a numerous class of his subjects. But such acts of frenzied barbarity have, alas! been not rarely authorized by careless and voluptuous despots, who have allowed their ears to be engrossed and their policy directed by haughty and selfish minions, who had their own passions to gratify, their own ends to serve.

15. *the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed* — The completeness of the word-painting in this verse is exquisite. The historian, by a simple stroke, has drawn a graphic picture of an Oriental despot, wallowing with his favorite in sensual enjoyments, while his tyrannical cruelties were rending the hearts and homes of thousands of his subjects.

CHAPTER 4

ESTHER 4:1-14.

MORDECAI AND THE JEWS MOURN.

1, 2. *When Mordecai perceived all that was done* — Relying on the irrevocable nature of a Persian monarch's decree (²⁷⁰⁵Daniel 6:15), Hamman made it known as soon as the royal sanction had been obtained; and Mordecai was, doubtless, among the first to hear of it. On his own account, as well as on that of his countrymen, this astounding decree must have been indescribably distressing. The acts described in this passage are, according to the Oriental fashion, expressive of the most poignant sorrow; and his approach to the gate of the palace, under the impulse of irrepressible emotions, was to make an earnest though vain appeal to the royal mercy. Access, however, to the king's presence was, to a person in his disfigured state, impossible: "for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth." But he found means of conveying intelligence of the horrid plot to Queen Esther.

4. *Then was the queen ... grieved; and ... sent raiment to ... Mordecai* — Her object in doing so was either to qualify him for resuming his former office, or else, perhaps, of fitting him to come near enough to the palace to inform her of the cause of such sudden and extreme distress.

5. *Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her* — Communication with the women in the harem is very difficult to be obtained, and only through the medium of the keepers. The chief eunuch receives the message from the lips of the queen, conveys it to some inferior office of the seraglio. When the commission is executed, the subaltern communicates it to the superintendent, by whom it is delivered to the queen. This chief eunuch, usually an old man who has recommended himself by a long course of faithful service, is always appointed by the king; but it is his interest, as well as his duty, to ingratiate himself with the queen also. Accordingly, we

find Hatach rendering himself very serviceable in carrying on those private communications with Mordecai who was thereby enabled to enlist Esther's powerful influence.

8. *charge her that she should go in unto the king* — This language is exceedingly strong. As it can scarcely be supposed that Mordecai was still using authority over Esther as his adopted daughter, he must be considered as imploring rather than commanding her, in the name of her brethren and in the name of her God, to make a direct appeal to the feelings of her royal husband.

11. *whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called* — The Persian kings surrounded themselves with an almost impassable circle of forms. The law alluded to was first enacted by Deioces, king of Media, and afterwards, when the empires were united, adopted by the Persians, that all business should be transacted and petitions transmitted to the king through his ministers. Although the restriction was not intended, of course, to apply to the queen, yet from the strict and inflexible character of the Persian laws and the extreme desire to exalt the majesty of the sovereign, even his favorite wife had not the privilege of *entree*, except by special favor and indulgence. Esther was suffering from the severity of this law; and as, from not being admitted for a whole month to the king's presence, she had reason to fear that the royal affections had become alienated from her, she had little hope of serving her country's cause in this awful emergency.

13, 14. *Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther* — His answer was to this effect, that Esther need not indulge the vain hope she would, from her royal connection, escape the general doom of her race — that he (Mordecai) confidently believed God would interpose, and, if not through her, by some other deliverer, save His people; but that the duty evidently devolved on her, as there was great reason to believe that this was the design of Providence in her elevation to the dignity of queen, and therefore that she should go with a courageous heart, not doubting of success.

16. *so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law* — The appeal of Mordecai was irresistible. Having appointed a solemn fast of three days, she expressed her firm resolution to make an appeal to the king, though she should perish in the attempt.

I ... and my maidens — It is probable that she had surrounded herself with Jewish maidens, or women who were proselytes to that religion.

CHAPTER 5

ESTHER 5:1-14.

ESTHER INVITES THE KING AND HAMAN TO A BANQUET.

1. *Esther put on her royal apparel* — It was not only natural, but, on such occasions, highly proper and expedient, that the queen should decorate herself in a style becoming her exalted station. On ordinary occasions she might reasonably set off her charms to as much advantage as possible; but, on the present occasion, as she was desirous to secure the favor of one who sustained the twofold character of her husband and her sovereign, public as well as private considerations — a regard to her personal safety, no less than the preservation of her doomed countrymen — urged upon her the propriety of using every legitimate means of recommending herself to the favorable notice of Ahasuerus.

the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house — The palace of this Persian king seems to have been built, like many more of the same quality and description, with an advanced cloister, over against the gate, made in the fashion of a large penthouse, supported only by one or two contiguous pillars in the front, or else in the center. In such open structures as these, in the midst of their guards and counsellors, are the *bashaws*, *kadis*, and other great officers, accustomed to distribute justice, and transact the public affairs of the provinces [SHAW, *Travels*]. In such a situation the Persian king was seated. The seat he occupied was not a *throne*, according to our ideas of one, but simply a chair, and so high that it required a footstool. It was made of gold, or, at least, inlaid with that metal, and covered with splendid tapestry, and no one save the king might sit down on it under pain of death. It is often found pictured on the Persepolitan monuments, and always of the same fashion.

2. *the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand* — This golden scepter receives an interesting illustration from the sculptured

monuments of Persia and Assyria. In the bas-reliefs of Persepolis, copied by Sir Robert Ker Porter, we see King Darius enthroned in the midst of his court, and walking abroad in equal state; in either case he carries in his right hand a slender rod or wand, about equal in length to his own height, ornamented with a small knob at the summit. In the Assyrian alabasters, those found at Nimroud as well as those from Khorsabad, “the great king” is furnished with the same appendage of royalty, a slender rod, but destitute of any knob or ornament. On the Khorsabad reliefs the rod is painted red, *doubtless to represent gold*; proving that “the golden scepter” was a simple wand of that precious metal, commonly held in the right hand, with one end resting on the ground, and that whether the king was sitting or walking. “The gold scepter” has received little alteration or modification since ancient times [GOSS]. It was extended to Esther as a token not only that her intrusion was pardoned, but that her visit was welcome, and a favorable reception given to the suit she had come to prefer.

touched the top of the scepter — This was the usual way of acknowledging the royal condescension, and at the same time expressing reverence and submission to the august majesty of the king.

3. *it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom* — This mode of speaking originated in the Persian custom of appropriating for the maintenance of great men, or royal favorites, one city for his bread, another for his wine, a third for his clothes, etc., so that the phrase denoted great liberality.

4. *let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him* — There was great address in this procedure of Esther’s; for, by showing such high respect to the king’s favorite, she would the better insinuate herself into the royal affections; and gain a more suitable opportunity of making known her request.

8. *let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare* — The king ate alone, and his guests in an adjoining hall; but they were admitted to sit with him at wine. Haman being the only invited guest with the king and queen, it was natural that he should have been elated with the honor.

CHAPTER 6

ESTHER 6:1-14.

AHASUERUS REWARDS MORDECAI FOR FORMER SERVICE.

1. *the king ... commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles*

— In Eastern courts, there are scribes or officers whose duty it is to keep a journal of every occurrence worthy of notice. A book of this kind, abounding with anecdotes, is full of interest. It has been a custom with Eastern kings, in all ages, frequently to cause the annals of the kingdom to be read to them. It is resorted to, not merely as a pastime to while away the tedium of an hour, but as a source of instruction to the monarch, by reviewing the important incidents of his own life, as well as those of his ancestors. There was, therefore, nothing uncommon in this Persian monarch calling for the court journal. But, in his being unable to sleep at that particular juncture, in his ordering the book then to be read to him, and in his attention having been specially directed to the important and as yet unrewarded services of Mordecai, the immediate interposition of Providence is distinctly visible.

4. *Now Haman was come into the outward court* — This was early in the morning. It is the invariable custom for kings in Eastern countries to transact business before the sun is hot, often in the open air, and so Haman was in all probability come officially to attend on his master.

6. *What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?*

— In bestowing tokens of their favor, the kings of Persia do not at once, and as it were by their own will, determine the kind of honor that shall be awarded; but they turn to the courtier standing next in rank to themselves, and ask him what shall be done to the individual who has rendered the service specified; and according to the answer received, the royal mandate is issued.

8. *the royal apparel ... which the king useth to wear* — A coat which has been on the back of a king or prince is reckoned a most honorable gift, and is given with great ceremony.

the horse that the king rideth upon — Persia was a country of horses, and the highbred charger that the king rode upon acquired, in the eyes of his venal subjects, a sort of sacredness from that circumstance.

and the crown royal which is set upon his head — either the royal turban, or it may be a tiara, with which, on state processions, the horse's head was adorned.

9. *delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes ... array the man* — On grand and public occasions, the royal steed is led by the highest subject through the principal streets of the city, a ceremony which may occupy several hours.

11. *Then Haman took*, etc. — This sudden reverse, however painful to Haman as an individual, is particularly characteristic of the Persian manners.

14. *came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared* — Besides the invitation given to an entertainment, a message is always sent to the guests, immediately at the day and hour appointed, to announce that all things are ready.

CHAPTER 7

ESTHER 7:1-6.

ESTHER PLEADS FOR HER OWN LIFE AND THE LIFE OF HER PEOPLE.

4. *we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed* — that is, by the cruel and perfidious scheme of that man, who offered an immense sum of money to purchase our extermination. Esther dwelt on his contemplated atrocity, in a variety of expressions, which both evinced the depth of her own emotions, and were intended to awaken similar feelings in the king's breast.

But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue — Though a great calamity to the Jews, the enslavement of that people might have enriched the national treasury; and, at all events, the policy, if found from experience to be bad, could be altered. But the destruction of such a body of people would be an irreparable evil, and all the talents Haman might pour into the treasury could not compensate for the loss of their services.

ESTHER 7:7-10.

THE KING CAUSES HAMAN TO BE HANGED ON HIS OWN GALLOWS.

7. *he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king* — When the king of Persia orders an offender to be executed, and then rises and goes into the women's apartment, it is a sign that no mercy is to be hoped for. Even the sudden rising of the king in anger was the same as if he had pronounced sentence.

8. *Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was* — We do not know the precise form of the couches on which the Persians reclined at table. But it is probable that they were not very different from those used by the Greeks and Romans. Haman, perhaps, at first stood up to beg pardon of Esther; but driven in his extremity to resort to an attitude of the most earnest supplication, he fell prostrate on the couch where the queen was recumbent. The king returning that instant was fired at what seemed an outrage on female modesty.

they covered Haman's face — The import of this striking action is, that a criminal is unworthy any longer to look on the face of the king, and hence, when malefactors are consigned to their doom in Persia, the first thing is to cover the face with a veil or napkin.

9. *Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows* — This eunuch had probably been the messenger sent with the invitation to Haman, and on that occasion had seen the gallows. The information he now volunteered, as well it may be from abhorrence of Haman's cold-blooded conspiracy as from sympathy with his amiable mistress, involved with her people in imminent peril.

10. *So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai* — He has not been the only plotter of mischief whose feet have been taken in the net which they hid (^{<BIB5>}Psalm 9:15). But never was condemnation more just, and retribution more merited, than the execution of that gigantic criminal.

CHAPTER 8

ESTHER 8:1-6.

MORDECAI ADVANCED.

1. *On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman ... unto Esther* — His property was confiscated, and everything belonging to him, as some compensation for the peril to which she had been exposed.

Mordecai came before the king — that is, was introduced at court and appointed one of the seven counsellors. Esther displayed great prudence and address in acknowledging Mordecai's relation to her at the moment most fitted to be of eminent service to him.

2. *the king took off his ring, ... and gave it unto Mordecai* — By that act transferring to him all the power and authority which the ring symbolized, and promoting him to the high dignity which Haman had formerly filled.

Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman — as her steward or factor, to manage that large and opulent estate which had been assigned to her.

3. *Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet* — The king was then not reclining at table, but sitting on a divan, most probably in the Persian attitude, leaning back against the cushions, and one foot under him.

besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman — that is, to repeal the sanguinary edict which, at the secret instigation of Haman, had been recently passed (^{ESTHER} Esther 3:12).

4. *Then the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther* — in token that her request was accepted, and that she needed no longer to maintain the humble attitude of a suppliant.

5, 6. *reverse the letters devised by Haman ... to destroy the Jews* — The whole conduct of Esther in this matter is characterized by great tact, and

the variety of expressions by which she describes her willing submission to her royal husband, the address with which she rolls the whole infamy of the meditated massacre on Haman, and the argument she draws from the king's sanction being surreptitiously obtained, that the decree should be immediately reversed — all indicate the queen's wisdom and skill, and she succeeded in this point also.

ESTHER 8:7-14.

AHASUERUS GRANTS TO THE JEWS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES.

8. *Write ... in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring* — Hence it is evident that the royal ring had a seal in it, which, being affixed to any document, authenticated it with the stamp of royal authority.

which ... may no man reverse — This is added as the reason why he could not comply with the queen's request for a direct reversal of recall of Haman's letters; namely, that the laws of the Medes and Persians, once passed, were irrevocable.

10. *sent ... by posts ... and riders on ... camels, and young dromedaries* — The business being very urgent, the swiftest kind of camel would be employed, and so the word in the original denotes the *wind-camel*. Young dromedaries also are used to carry expresses, being remarkable for the nimbleness and ease of their movements. Animals of this description could convey the new rescript of Ahasuerus over the length and breadth of the Persian empire in time to relieve the unhappy Jews from the ban under which they lay.

11-13. *the king granted the Jews ... to stand for their life ... to slay ... all ... that would assault them* — The fixed and unalterable character claimed for Persian edicts often placed the king in a very awkward dilemma; for, however bitterly he might regret things done in a moment of haste and thoughtlessness, it was beyond even his power to prevent the consequences. This was the reason on account of which the king was laid under a necessity not to reverse, but to issue a contradictory edict;

according to which it was enacted that if, pursuant to the first decree, the Jews were assaulted, they might, by virtue of the second, defend themselves and even slay their enemies. However strange and even ridiculous this mode of procedure may appear, it was the only one which, from the peculiarities of court etiquette in Persia, could be adopted. Instances occur in sacred (^{206a} Daniel 6:14), no less than profane, history. Many passages of the Bible attest the truth of this, particularly the well-known incident of Daniel's being cast into the den of lions, in conformity with the rash decree of Darius, though, as it afterwards appeared, contrary to the personal desire of that monarch. That the law of Persia has undergone no change in this respect, and the power of the monarch not less immutable, appear from many anecdotes related in the books of modern travelers through that country.

◀208 ESTHER 8:15-17.

MORDECAI'S HONORS, AND THE JEWS' JOY.

15. *Mordecai went out ... in royal apparel* — He was invested with the khelaat of official honor. A dress of blue and white was held in great estimation among the Persians; so that Mordecai, whom the king delighted to honor, was in fact arrayed in the royal dress and insignia. The variety and the kind of insignia worn by a favorite at once makes known to the people the particular dignity to which he has been raised.

CHAPTER 9

ESTHER 9:1-19.

THE JEWS SLAY THEIR ENEMIES WITH THE TEN SONS OF HAMAN.

1. *in the twelfth month, ... on the thirteenth day of the same* — This was the day which Haman's superstitious advisers had led him to select as the most fortunate for the execution of his exterminating scheme against the Jews [^{<TRD>}Esther 3:7].

2. *The Jews gathered themselves ... no man could withstand them* — The tables were now turned in their favor; and though their enemies made their long meditated attack, the Jews were not only at liberty to act on the defensive, but through the powerful influence enlisted on their side at court together with the blessing of God, they were everywhere victorious.

the fear of them fell upon all people — This impression arose not alone from the consciousness of the all-powerful vizier being their countryman, but from the hand of God appearing so visibly interposed to effect their strange and unexpected deliverance.

5-16. *Thus the Jews smote all their enemies* — The effect of the two antagonistic decrees was, in the meantime, to raise a fierce and bloody war between the Jews and their enemies throughout the Persian empire; but through the dread of Esther and Mordecai, the provincial governors universally favored their cause, so that their enemies fell in great numbers.

13. *let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree* — Their enemies adroitly concealing themselves for the first day might have returned on the next, when they imagined that the privilege of the Jews was expired; so that that people would have been surprised and slain. The extension of the decree to another day at the queen's special desire has exposed her to the charge of being actuated by a cruel and vindictive disposition. But her conduct in

making this request is capable of full vindication, on the ground (1) that Haman's sons having taken a prominent part in avenging their father's fall, and having been previously slain in the *melee*, the order for the exposure of their dead bodies on the gallows was only intended to brand them with public infamy for their malice and hatred to the Jews; and (2) the anti-Jewish party having, in all probability, been instigated through the arts or influence of Haman to acts of spiteful and wanton oppression, the existing state of feeling among the natives required some vigorous and decisive measure to prevent the outbreak of future aggressions. To order an extension, therefore, of the permissive edict to the Jews to defend themselves, was perhaps no more than affording an opportunity for their enemies to be publicly known. Though it led to so awful a slaughter of seventy-five thousand of their enemies, there is reason to believe that these were chiefly Amalekites, in the fall of whom on this occasion, the prophecies (^{<1274>}Exodus 17:14,16 ^{<1259>}Deuteronomy 25:19) against that doomed race were accomplished.

19. *a day of ... feasting ... of sending portions one to another* — The princes and people of the East not only invite their friends to feasts, but it is their custom to send a portion of the banquet to those who cannot well come to it, especially their relations, and those who are detained at home in a state of sorrow or distress.

^{<1281>}ESTHER 9:20-32.

THE TWO DAYS OF PURIM MADE FESTIVAL.

20. *Mordecai wrote these things* — Commentators are not agreed what is particularly meant by “these things”; whether the letters following, or an account of these marvellous events to be preserved in the families of the Jewish people, and transmitted from one generation to another.

26. *they called these days Purim after the name of Pur* — “Pur,” in the Persian language, signifies “lot”; and the feast of Purim, or lots, has a reference to the time having been pitched upon by Haman through the decision of the lot. In consequence of the signal national deliverance which divine providence gave them from the infamous machinations of Haman,

Mordecai ordered the Jews to commemorate that event by an anniversary festival, which was to last for two days, in accordance with the two days' war of defense they had to maintain. There was a slight difference in the time of this festival; for the Jews in the provinces, having defended themselves against their enemies on the thirteenth, devoted the fourteenth to festivity; whereas their brethren in Shushan, having extended that work over two days, did not observe their thanksgiving feast till the fifteenth. But this was remedied by authority, which fixed the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar. It became a season of sunny memories to the universal body of the Jews; and, by the letters of Mordecai, dispersed through all parts of the Persian empire, it was established as an annual feast, the celebration of which is kept up still. On both days of the feast, the modern Jews read over the *Megillah* or Book of Esther in their synagogues. The copy read must not be printed, but written on vellum in the form of a roll; and the names of the ten sons of Haman are written on it a peculiar manner, being ranged, they say, like so many bodies on a gibbet. The reader must pronounce all these names in one breath. Whenever Haman's name is pronounced, they make a terrible noise in the synagogue. Some drum with their feet on the floor, and the boys have mallets with which they knock and make a noise. They prepare themselves for their carnival by a previous fast, which should continue three days, in imitation of Esther's; but they have mostly reduced it to one day [JENNING, *Jewish Antiquities*].

CHAPTER 10

ESTHER 10:1-3.

AHASUERUS' GREATNESS. MORDECAI'S ADVANCEMENT.

1. *Ahasuerus laid a tribute* — This passage being an appendix to the history, and improperly separated from the preceding chapter, it might be that the occasion of levying this new impost arose out of the commotions raised by Haman's conspiracy. Neither the nature nor the amount of the tax has been recorded; only it was not a local tribute, but one exacted from all parts of his vast empire.

2. *the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai* — The experience of this pious and excellent Jew verified the statement, "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" [¹⁰³²Matthew 23:12 ¹⁰⁴¹Luke 14:11 ¹⁰⁵⁴18:14]. From sitting contentedly at the king's gate, he was raised to the dignity of highest subject, the powerful ruler of the kingdom. Acting uniformly on the great principles of truth and righteousness, his greatness rested on a firm foundation. His faith was openly avowed, and his influence as a professor of the true religion was of the greatest usefulness for promoting the welfare of the Jewish people, as well as for advancing the glory of God.

3. *For Mordecai ... was next unto King Ahasuerus ... great among the Jews*, etc. — The elevation of this pious and patriotic Jew to the possession of the highest official power was of very great importance to the suffering church at that period; for it enabled him, who all along possessed the disposition, now to direct the royal influence and authority in promoting the interests and extending the privileges of his exiled countrymen. Viewed in this light, the providence of God is plainly traceable in all the steps that led to his unexpected advancement. This providential interposition is all the more remarkable, that, as in the analogous case of Joseph, it was displayed in making the ordinary and natural course of things lead to the most marvellous results. To use the pious words of an eminent prelate, "though in the whole of this episode

there was no extraordinary manifestation of God's power, no particular cause or agent that was in its working advanced above the ordinary pitch of nature, yet the contrivance, and suiting these ordinary agents appointed by God, is in itself more admirable than if the same end had been effected by means that were truly miraculous." The sudden advancement of individuals from obscurity and neglect to the highest stations of power and influence is, in Eastern courts, no extraordinary nor infrequent occurrence. The caprice, the weak partiality of the reigning sovereign, or, it may be, his penetrating discernment in discovering latent energy and talent, has often "raised the beggar from the dunghill, and set him among princes" [1 Samuel 2:8]. Some of the all-powerful viziers in modern Persia, and not a few of the beys in Egypt, have been elevated to their respective dignities in this manner. And, therefore, the advancement of "Mordecai, who was next unto Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews," was in perfect accordance with the rapid revolution of "the wheel of fortune" in that part of the world. But, considering all the circumstances of Mordecai's advancement, not only his gaining the favor of the king, but his being "accepted of the multitude of his brethren, it was beyond all controversy the doing of the Lord, and was truly marvellous in his people's eyes."

accepted of the multitude of his brethren — Far from being envious of his grandeur, they blessed God for the elevation to official power of so good a man.

speaking peace to all his seed — While his administration was conducted with a mild and impartial hand, he showed a peculiarly warm and friendly feeling to all his countrymen when asked his counsel or his aid.