

Esther
The Captivity under Providence among the Gentiles.
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In the book of Nehemiah we have the last look which scripture furnishes historically at the remnant in Jerusalem, justly subjected to the world-power for their apostacy from Jehovah, yet provisionally kept for Messiah's advent. Alas! as we know they rejected Him to their own rejection, the call of the Gentiles following, till mercy take the Jews up again at the end of the age, and they fall at the feet of Jesus Messiah in glory, after manifold judgments, when "all Israel shall be saved."

Here we have another final view historically in the book of Esther; but it is in a quite different direction, for we have a picture of the secret providence which never fails to watch over them while they are scattered among the Gentiles. And this it is that accounts for no introduction of Jehovah or even Elohim in the book, which rationalistic ignorance alleges against its divine inspiration. Oh, the folly of heeding what these enemies of God (and therefore in divine things of man also) say about scripture! Were their learning and ability as great as they conceive for themselves and their school, nothing avails but faith for the true and spiritual intelligence of God's word. For their system excluding faith excludes God also, and is a constant crying up of man in any and every form; so that assuredly the issue is that the blind guides lead their blind followers into the ditch. Now to faith the absence of God's name is here in unexpected but exquisite harmony with the book, and its intrusion would not have been in perfect keeping with the secret working for the people (publicly Lo-ammi) preserved extraordinarily, while their enemies are completely, foiled and overwhelmed. It stands alone from beginning to end the deeply interesting witness of One unseen and unnamed Who none the less surely works in the anomalous state of the Captivity, carrying out by seemingly nothing beyond human means the vindication of those who, faulty as the people had been, secretly feared Him, and the catastrophe of their adversary, though in possession of assured and boundless means to compass their destruction.

The readers of Baxter's "Saint's Rest" know that the author, on Sandys' authority, says the Jews used to fling the book of Esther to the ground, because God's name was not there. But J. G. Wolfii Biblio. Heb. ii. 90 is opposed and imputes the act, where it may have been, to manifesting their abhorrence of Haman; for the book was notoriously venerated in the highest degree, however late in the

Canon. Luther was as wrong about it as about the Epistle of James. The interpolations in the Greek V. gave it an unfavourable aspect to Athanasius and others who did not know Hebrew.

Short as the book is, it is full of the most surprising circumstances which crowd its scenes and entrance the least sensitive of readers from the first chapter to the close. Without a touch of romance, it is instinct with the life of the Persian empire at that day. Yet though it seem unique and exceptional on the surface, underneath we may discern the constant story of scripture, the war that never ceases, while man is tried in the ages and dispensations (allowed for the wisest purposes by Him Who could terminate it in a moment) between Him Who is good and righteous, and "the old serpent, the devil." And in that it is in this world, though the springs be outside it and on high, we see in the book the godly Jew on the one hand who resists at all cost, and, not out of pride or personal feeling but uncompromising religious fidelity, refuses to honour the representative of a people with whom Jehovah swore from early days to have war from generation to generation. In Mordecai and Haman the question is here brought to issue, and the triumph of the chosen people is foreshown; not less is the shame and curse which will without a doubt fall on their enemies in the day that hastens. As Satan instigated the Amalekite to his exterminating hatred of God's fallen people, so He Who loved them notwithstanding all would punish condignly an enmity that began without cause against the object of His manifest favour.

It is remarkable, however, that while the book of Esther does not in its historical events transcend the provisional limits which characterise all the past captivity annals, it supposes that servitude to their Gentile masters to which apostate iniquity had reduced the people of God. But even in its most extreme form, outside the land, the temple, the sacrifices, and the priesthood, it demonstrates the surest action of divine providence on their behalf against their foes however deadly and powerful. We have also typical instruction which yields much more to the opened eye. He Who, though hidden and unmentioned, none the less does all things according to His sovereign will, does not fail to add very far beyond the living proof of watchful oversight, tender care, and overthrow of seemingly triumphant malice. For Vashti, in the typical point of view, by no means obscurely sets before faith the Gentile set aside because of insubjection to the supreme ruler, and this in that which He had so deeply at heart, the display of her beauty before the world; and the accomplishment of promise of old is in the call of Esther the Jewish bride to be the object of His love and the sharer of His earthly glory. This is the scheme that runs through the prophets as a whole, of which the things, here prefigured, are manifest characteristics: the everlasting overthrow of the dominion of the nations by divine judgment; the elevation of the earthly object of Jehovah's love, as set forth distinctly in the Psalms and Prophets, to say nothing of Canticles; and the administration for the Great King entrusted to Mordecai as the figure of the Lord Jesus.

ESTHER 1.

For a Jew the circumstances under the great king were most anomalous. The opening scene is as if Israel were, like the name of God Himself, not even whispered. The brightness of the silver empire, more apparent than real, alone shines. Outwardly it was still more extensive than when its first and greatest monarch reigned, the conqueror of Babylon, of whom, near two centuries before the prediction was fulfilled, Jehovah by name said, "He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built; and to the temple, Thy foundations shall be laid" (Isa. 44: 28). When Darius the Mede received the kingdom there were a hundred and twenty satrapies; now seven more were added, though the day of vast conquest was over, and one sat on the throne disposed to lavish display of the riches of secret places, the treasures of darkness, and of luxurious enjoyment.

What indeed could one naturally have looked for in those who seemed content to linger among the Gentiles when leave, nay encouragement, had been proclaimed by the highest earthly authority to return to the land of promise? A remnant from the dispersion had gone back with the heir to David's throne, and the high priest, to rebuild the temple and the city and, for such as had faith, to await the long, expected Messiah after a term now for the first time defined. The multitudes that stayed behind could not plead the extreme old age of the prophet by the Hiddekel. But if they lacked zeal for the things that remained ready to die, He Who is unnamed did not fall when a greater danger threatened Israel than ever their fathers know in the murderous tyranny of Egypt. How this was, by secret providence, without a miracle, not only averted but turned to the destruction of their enemies, is the story of this book. The details of it all are told with equal simplicity and graphic power, and the chief characters alike kept up skilfully according to the truth, and culminating with breathless interest in the downfall of evil and pride, and in the vindication of the righteous oppressed without cause. Hence the ground of a feast, added to the original ones of the law, which carried its own special record of merciful interposition in a day so evil that utter reticence was kept of all that was most excellent and cherished by faith. For who can justly say that, however confession might be unheard, faith was unreal that fasted and prayed and looked for deliverance, as we read in Esther 3? Who but a rationalist could charge with revengeful spirit her who pleaded before the king (Esther 7: 3-5)? That the persecuted were saved, and those who sought the sword fell by the sword, is what was seen before, and will be yet more triumphantly at the end of the age. It is natural that the enemy should dislike and denounce all this; but He who has given this moral in the past will not fail to fulfil it yet more completely when He comes Whose right it is to judge all wrongs.

"And it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus who reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces) — that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him: when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even a hundred and fourscore days. And when these days were fulfilled, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. There were white, green, and blue [hangings] fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble; the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and white, and yellow, and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none could compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus" (vers. 1-9).

It is a vivid picture of earthly splendour, without a thought of God, true or false. Nebuchadnezzar brought in religion of a base sort, and sought to compel it on all. Xerxes, for he it seems to be who now possessed the general title here used, showed himself, as Daniel said long previously, "far richer than all before him," thought of no one higher, and gave himself up to ostentatious indulgence, all the more after the utter failure of his invasion of Greece. Underneath worldly grandeur in efforts so unparalleled can be discerned shame and fear, with the desire to gratify the peoples of his vast dominions, and to efface the remembrance of foreign disgrace which might be ruinous.

But a check came and a gloom over all was cast when least expected at the close, after the princes and nobles had been feted, and the seven days followed for all the people small and great, present in

Shushan.

"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that ministered in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times (for so was the king's manner before all that knew law and judgment; and the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, [and] Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom), What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not done the bidding of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to' all the peoples that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes, when it shall be reported. The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. And this day shall the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the deed of the queen say the like unto all the king's princes. So shall there arise contempt and wrath enough. If it please the king, let there go forth a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the kin., give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his kingdoms (for it is great), all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan. And he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and should publish it according to the language of his people" (vers. 10- 22).

If the demand of the king was unusual, the refusal of the queen was an affront not to be passed over. The seven chamberlains were duly charged to attend her; but she was rebellious, where compliance would have done her no real harm, but cast whatever of blame might be due on her lord. In the antitype, how true it is that the Gentile has been faithless and refractory, seeking self-will and wholly failing to show the world the beauty of one so favoured! The consequence will be, as here it was, the call of Zion to be a crown of beauty in the hand of Jehovah and a royal diadem in the hand of her God; when she shall no more be termed Forsaken, nor her land any more Desolate, but she shall be called Hephzibah and her land Beulah.

It seems most natural not to put "the president" last among the seven princely counsellors of state, but to infer that judgment was sought, beginning with the youngest, whose opinion so commended itself on the question proposed that all accepted it at once; and letters were sent accordingly that a better than Vashti should take her place, and that family order should stand in the honour of the head in his own house throughout all the kingdom.

ESTHER 2.

The design of providence to shield from impending destruction the Jews, unworthy as they were, and to punish their unrelenting enemies, here manifestly advances. Nothing could have seemed less connected with it than the Persian story of the preceding chapter which ended in the repudiation of

Vashti. A further step was now taken. A lofty one was put down, a lowly one is exalted. But God alone wrought in this secretly. The king's servants had neither issue before them, any more than the king himself. Afraid that Ahasuerus might violate the policy of the empire, and that the restoration of the queen might be to their own imminent danger, they propose that the king should choose as consort the fairest maiden in his dominions that might please him best.

"After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what, was decreed against her. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hegai the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given [them]: and let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so" (vers. 1-4).

How did this affect the poor people of God? It soon appears in the germ. For was it chance that gave an orphan of Israel a beauty beyond all in those wide provinces?

"There was in Shushan the palace [or, fortress] a certain Jew, whose name [was] Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that [is], Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maiden [was] fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter. So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with her portions, and the seven maidens, which [were] meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he removed her and her maidens to the best [place] of the house of the women. Esther had not showed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not show [it]. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. Now when the turn of every maiden was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that it had been done to her according to the law for the women, twelve months, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with the things for the purifying of the women,) then in this wise came a maiden unto the king, whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, who kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name. Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the bounty of the king" (vers. 5-18).

Whatever may be thought of Mordecai or of Esther in the matter (and Scripture is here silent, neither accusing nor excusing), we have not long to wait before the vital question was raised, and the Jews must perish or be delivered beyond all outward hope, yet without sign, wonder, or miracle.

Accordingly a new fact is ordered of the utmost moment in providence. Mordecai is the instrument of making known a plot aimed at the king's life by two of his chamberlains.

"And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. Esther had not [yet] showed her kindred nor people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those who kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who showed [it] unto Esther the queen; and Esther told the king [thereof] in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition. was made of the matter, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king," (vers. 19-23).

The traitors were thus found guilty; but the benefactor was strangely forgotten till the time of direct need arose, all the more surely to be rewarded to the confusion of the enemy at last. Secret providence ordered all aright, however trying appearances might be. This again, as to the conspirators and Mordecai, the means of warning the king was no more fortuitous than the downfall of Vashti or the elevation of Esther. All was in His hand Who ruled unseen.

ESTHER 3.

It was after divine providence had wrought in ways so remarkable as to elevate one of the chosen people to be imperial consort, to use another in discovering and defeating a deadly plot against the monarch, that we bear of the sudden rise of a new personage, the Jews' enemy. This was no casual fact; it was a move in the great conflict ever enacting in this fallen world. So it had been in Egypt; when Pharaoh arose to oppress and destroy God's nascent people. So we see in the beginning of the wilderness journey, when Amalek appeared to oppose Israel; as at its end Balak and Balaam sought curse for them and their ruin in every way. So again from within Absalom and Adonijah rebelled shamelessly against Jehovah's purpose when the kingdom was set up. And here, in the days of captivity and dispersion, the same traits re-appear; the elevation of the Jew in any measure during the eclipse of the people is met by the counterpart of the old and deadly hostility in an equally unexpected way.

"After these things king Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that [were] with him. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed down and did reverence to Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not down, nor did [him] reverence. Then the king's servants that [were] in the king's gate said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he [was] a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not down, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. But he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shown him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that [were] throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, the people of Mordecai" (vers. 1-6).

What makes the rise of Haman into the highest place next the throne so surprising is that we

have not had the least trace of him before. Privy counsellors and chamberlains- many have been personally named. But now at this juncture comes forward no Mede or Persian, but a stranger to the ruling races, into a seat above all the princes that were with the monarch. He, like his father, is described as "the Agagite," which seems to have been the royal seed among the Amalekites. No doubt Saul had crushed them, and David yet more. But here in the highest and most, influential position is, not an Amalekite only, but "the Agagite" to whom Mordecai refused reverence. The king had commanded it on his behalf; but Mordecai bowed not. Had not Jehovah caused it to be written down that He would utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens? He persists and takes the consequence, whatever the fury of Haman, and his resolve to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire.

"In the first month, which [is] the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that [is], the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, [to] the twelfth [month], which [is] the month of Adar. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws [are] diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it [is] not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring [it] into the king's treasuries. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver [is] given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. Then were the king's scribes called in the first month, on the thirteenth day thereof, and there was written according to all that Haman commanded unto the king's satraps and to the governors that [were] over every province, and to the princes of every people; to every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and it was sealed with the king's ring. And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth [day] of the twelfth month, which [is] the month Adar, and [to take] the spoil of them for a prey. A copy of the writing, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published unto all the peoples, that they should be ready against that day. The posts went forth in haste by the king's commandment, and the decree was given out in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was in consternation" (vers. 7-15).

Thus the enemy had recourse to the casting of lots for a day favourable to his murderous project. This, divine providence took care in result to defer so long as to admit of a fresh decree (change or revocation being inadmissible) for the Jews to stand in self-defence and destruction of their enemies. But at first no issue was more contrary to all appearances; in the end Satan as ever defeated himself. Haman's plea to the king was plausible. God's people, just because they are His, are always an offence to the rest of mankind, especially the proud and vain-glorious; and this remains, even when through their unfaithfulness they forfeit His open favour, as was the actual fact. "There is a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws diverse from [those of] every people, and they keep not the king's laws; and it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." So Haman proposes their destruction, offering a round sum for the exchequer in return. That such a one, wild and capricious to the last degree, as then ruled Persia should decree accordingly, and remit the favourite's payment, is in no way strange, even if we had not inspired testimony to the transaction. Worse has been repeatedly, and in modern times. Armed with the fullest authority Haman dictates, and the royal secretaries write to the governors over every province and to the princes of every people. And posts or couriers were sent throughout the empire hastened by the king's command,

besides the publication in Shushan the fortress. How graphic and life-like the close of the chapter thereon! "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was in consternation." It was not the Jews only who were so deeply moved. Nor did heartless banqueting at such a crisis relieve men's hearts about the great actors or the victims.

ESTHER 4.

It may be well to add that the believer is in no way bound to defend the procedure of Mordecai, save just so far as we recognise his real faith. We do not learn that he was under compulsion to present Esther to the monarch, nor was he called to conceal that she was a Jewess; nor can it be made out that he could not bow in civil respect to Haman, Agagite though he was. Certainly we read of Abraham bowing down to the sons of Heth, though of the cursed line of Canaan. And we find Jacob blessing Pharaoh though head of those to afflict his seed four hundred years, and to be judged of the Lord Jehovah. It was the unbending spirit of the Jew in exile, who hated the deadly enemy of the chosen people, and believed in the day of vengeance of their God. They are the simple facts of the case, which we are taught and can judge according to the far deeper principles of Christ in the gospel.

Our chapter opens with the profound grief of Mordecai and among the Jews where the king's decree penetrated. The report of it soon reached the queen, as it was meant to do; for Mordecai fully counted on relief and deliverance through her means, and, till it came, utterly refused even her to divest himself of sackcloth and ashes.

"And when Mordecai knew all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry: and he came even before the king's gate; for none might enter within the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandments and his decree came, [there was] great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. And Esther's maidens and her chamberlains came and told [it] her; and the queen was exceedingly grieved: and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take his sackcloth from of [him]: but he received [it] not. Then called Esther for Hathach, [one] of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and charged him to go to Mordecai, to know what this I was], and why it [was]. So Hathach went forth to Mordecai unto the broad place of the city, which [was] before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and the exact sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show [it] unto Esther, and to declare [it] unto her; and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, and to make supplication unto him, and request before him, for her people" (vers. 1-8).

But it is striking to observe how the furnace may be heated seven times before the rescue comes. For Esther fully realises that her life was at stake in the charge her cousin laid on her. It was universally known at court and through the provinces how rigorously the law hedged the king's majesty, whom none dared approach, on penalty of death, unless called. And it was so ordered that even she had not been called to come to the king for the last month. Mordecai however is only the bolder in his demand, and the strength of his faith is as plain as that of Abraham.

"And Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Then Esther spake unto Hathach, and gave him a message unto Mordecai, saying: All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, [there is] one law for him, that he be put to death, except such to whom the

king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai bade them return answer unto Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether boldest thy peace at this time, there shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for [such] a time as this" (vers. 9-14)?

Not less fine is the reply of the queen. She is ready, now that all the truth is before her soul, to jeopard her life at least as worthily as Mordecai, and in a spirit far more gracious. Even here it is striking to observe that, though her faith shines, the Name is kept as secret as ever. Yet fasting without a doubt implied the most earnest prayer to Him Who dwelt in the thick darkness and would hear as surely in Shushan the palace, as in the temple at Jerusalem.

"And Esther bade to answer Mordecai, Go, gather together all the Jews that are found in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast in like manner; and so will I go in unto the king, which [is] not according to the law and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him" (vers. 15- 17).

It is the undaunted Jew who now complies with all that Esther enjoined. He had warned her faithfully and with solemnity of inevitable ruin to herself and her father's house if she were silent. But at the same time he expressed the fullest certainty that relief and deliverance should come from another place. This is the victory that overcometh, even faith, as we may surely apply here; and its effect was no less apparent with Esther than Andrew's was on his own brother Simon. The queen is ready if need be to perish in such a cause. strengthened by the unseen hand that sustains the universe, as the king's heart was to be turned at His will.

But may we notice in passing the strange misapplication so common among preachers! "If I perish, I perish" was not unbelief, but a martyr readiness in the queen's mouth, about to fall at such a despot's feet. Does it warrant a similar sentiment at the feet of Him Who came into the world to save sinners? Who has already declared that "him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out?"

ESTHER 5.

It is not necessary according to Jewish reckoning, as applied to the most important of all events (the death and resurrection of our Lord), to extend "three days, night or day" beyond the closing hours of the day when Esther appointed the fast, the next day, and the morning after; for any part of a day counted as a night and day. When the third day arrived, the queen acts on their solemn laying of the matter before Him Who governs all.

"And it came to pass on the third day that Esther put on royal [apparel] and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that [was] in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what [is] thy request? it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom. And Esther said, If [it seem] good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that it may be done as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that

Esther had prepared. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What [is] thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what [is] thy request? even to the half of the kingdom, it shall be performed. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request [is] — if I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request — let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king hath said" (vers. 1-8).

Whatever the circumstances, God remains God; and faith knows it and counts on Him. To all appearance it was a dangerous adventure. Even so Esther was ready to risk her life for the Jews in their lowest estate. But she knew no less than Mordecai that deliverance must arise, because God is pledged to it, Whose purposes of blessing for man on earth and glory to His own name are bound up with His promise to the seed of Abraham. This made her path clear to seek at all cost that the blow aimed at their destruction should be averted. The spurious additions of Jewish traditions strike one by contrast with the noble simplicity of scripture here as everywhere. But we do well to consider how Esther was led to defer making the request which filled her heart, when nature would have at once spread it before the king moved deeply as he was by her personal charms. And what a trial the delay even of a day so promising must have been to the Jews if not even to her cousin! But the Unseen was secretly guiding and would use that seemingly dangerous delay to work for her and all as well as for His own deep and good designs.

The second banquet gave rise to fresh pride and undisguised malice in the enemy, who sought immediate revenge destined to fall on his own head.

"And Haman went forth that day joyful and glad of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up nor moved for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and Zeresh his wife. And Haman recounted unto them the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and [all the things] wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow also am I invited by her together with the king, Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman: and he caused the gallows to be made" (vers. 9-14).

In the result we shall see how Satan outwits himself though all the power of the world seems on his side, and those who unworthily bear the Name are exposed to the last degree of peril. How encouraging then to look up! Yea, how sad if we do not who know His love incomparably more displayed than in Old Testament times, and have His word more fully communicated! who have His Son, and His Son now man glorified on high, and His Spirit sent forth to abide in us! If then we have little strength, as is undoubtedly true, let us keep His word and not deny His name. How great is the snare of not holding fast what we have!

ESTHER 6.

This portion opens with that which looks a slight matter under His hand Who works unseen; but it proved full of the most important consequences. The king could not sleep and asked for the strangest soporific that was ever sought — to hear the records of the kingdom. He had forgotten the

best deed yet rendered to him. When two of his chamberlains plotted against his life, Mordecai came to know their wickedness and saved the king. But unaccountably as it seemed, it was quite forgotten. The king, now on hearing, enquired what was done, and learns to his own shame that so great a debt was unrequited; which made him the more urgent to remember it now.

"On that night sleep fled from the king; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of those that kept the door, who had sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him" (verses 1-3).

Even so, though a neglected duty was now to be repaired, far more was in His mind Who wrought secretly, and, what was most surprising, by means of the bitterest enemy, not merely himself to honour in the highest decree him whose ruin he was at that moment come to seek, but to deliver a whole people, His own people, whose existence was at stake. The banquet which seemed abortive on their behalf, the delay which in all likelihood must have tried Mordecai, was just the occasion to prepare the way effectively for the overthrow of the enemy, and the exaltation of the instrument of a greater preservation.

"And the king said, Who [is] in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman said in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? And Haman said unto the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and on the head of which a crown royal is set: and let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most notable princes, that they may array the man [withal] whom the king delighteth to honour, and cause him to ride on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, [and] take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and caused him to ride through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour" (vers. 4-11).

So it is, the pride of the wicked blinds them to their own destruction no less than to hate the righteous they despise. He Whose eyes are over all is slow to act that men may show out what they are, while in the end He accomplishes His counsel manifestly to His own glory. Haman, after honours beyond example, assured that he only could be the one whom the king delighted to honour, and invited by the king to indicate its largest measure, was certainly unbounded in his suggestions; and thus did he fall into the pit which he had himself made, and which awaits those who ignore and defy Him Who never forgets His own, however faulty, or those who hate and would injure them. Mark however how all seems to flourish brightly for the enemy and to threaten unescapable danger for His own till the hour is about to strike.

Nor could any issue be more evidently righteous. The man (whose immense benefit to the king, in the discovery of murderous treason, had passed into oblivion) is justly honoured, and so much more

because of his own unselfishness and that of the queen his near relation. The man, who only sought his own things and the destruction of those who, owning the true God, stood in his way, by his own advice plays the part of attendant on the one whom he most abhorred, and whose immediate and ignominious death he appeared to have within the hollow of his hand. But no power in present things allowed to Satan annuls the will of the invisible God. What will it be, when the "old serpent" is consigned to the bottomless pit, and Immanuel takes the public rule of the world?

Meanwhile at the last moment the wicked man is not left without solemn warning, as is often given, before the blow of doom falls on his guilty head; and this warning from the last quarter whence it might be expected. His own mortification and misery prepared him for bearing the worst. What a contrast with the righteous who returned in peace and lowliness to his post of duty!

"And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house, mourning and having his head covered. And Haman recounted unto Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, [be] of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. While they [were] yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared" (vers. 12-14).

ESTHER 7.

The catastrophe soon follows the second banquet. The murderous plotter against Israel, in their low estate for their sins, perishes by that which he designed for Mordecai.

"And the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request" (vers. 1-3).

For the third time the king renews his desire to know and to grant the queen's petition. He who was made to remember his forgotten deliverer did not forget that some deeply-felt request of Esther remained behind. The moment ordered by His secret providence Who alone can order aught aright was now come. And the queen unburdened her pent up soul freely in terms the most pathetic as to her people, the most indignant as to their enemy. "For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's damage. Then spake the king Ahasuerus and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" (vers. 4, 5.)

Astonished to the highest degree, and with burning wrath, the king demands, who and where was he that could dare to do a villany so monstrous; now to learn, to his amazement, how he himself had been entrapped into it by his own prime minister. Esther however spoke only of him who had malice against her people. "And Esther said, An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen" (ver. 6). The king would feel his own part. No wonder that in his agitation he sought to be alone while Haman made abject supplication to the queen, for he could not doubt the fate that otherwise awaited him. His very earnestness exposed him to the king's mistaken resentment when he returned; and the information of Harbonah furnished the occasion for immediate execution. "And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine [and went] into

the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the couch whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he even force the queen before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Then said Harbonah, one of the chamberlains that were before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman hath made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. And the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified" (vers. 7-10).

When the favourite falls, not a voice is raised to shield him from those who till then had bowed most servilely before him; nay, he who was blamed for his presumption in refusing it to Haman is now praised for his service to the king. Such is man, inconstant as the wind, and not least so at court. But He who rules unseen accomplishes His righteous judgment wherever He sees fit, till the day when He will act immediately and perfectly by the One Whose right it is to the joy and peace of all the earth.

ESTHER 8.

No reader of O.T. prophecy can fail to note that the fall of the enemy, threatening the Jews with imminent destruction, coincides with their deliverance, joy, and honour under the Great King. So runs the word from Isaiah and before him to Malachi; and the N.T. so far as it discloses the future of the earth (for its main and peculiar witness is to Christ in heavenly glory) is to the same effect. Here we see the type continued which began in the last chapter. Judgment proceeds.

"On that day did king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy to Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he [was] unto her. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. And Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king; and she said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour before him, and the thing [seem] right before the king, and I [be] pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which [are] in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he stretched his hand against the Jews. Write ye also to the Jews, as it pleaseth you, in the king's name, and seal [it] with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse, Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third month, which [is] the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth [day] thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the satraps, and the governors, and the princes of the provinces which [are] from India unto Ethiopia, a hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to their writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and unto the Jews according to their writing and according to their language. And he wrote in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed [it] with the king's ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud: [stating] that the king granted the Jews who were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and

province that would assault them, [their] little ones and women, and [to take] the spoil of them for a prey, upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, [namely] upon the thirteenth [day] of the twelfth month, that [is] the month Adar. A copy of the writing, that the decree should be given out in every province, [was] published unto all the peoples, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

The couriers that rode upon swift steeds that were used in the king's service went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given out in Shushan the palace. And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple. And the city of Shushan shouted and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them" (vers. 1-17).

Mordecai no longer abides at the gate of the court, but is brought forward worthily to administer the kingdom here below, after service of the utmost value against treacherous men of blood.

So we read of the twelve called to sit, in an even higher honour when "the regeneration" comes, on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19). What meaning has this to those who see nothing more than the gospel followed by the judgment of the dead and eternity? They ought not to ignore the thousand years' reign, as distinct from the present as from the changeless day which is after the great white throne. It is this intermediate period of blessing which Israel enter after they say, Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah (Matt. 23). Jerusalem is trodden down by the Gentiles, but only till their times are fulfilled (Luke 21).

In Acts 3: 19-21 (cf. Acts 1: 6) we have a beautiful anticipation of that day of glory for all things, in contradistinction to the Holy Spirit now come and witnessing in Pentecostal presence. Then only will be the fulfilment of God's holy prophets, when "all Israel shall be saved," instead of a mere remnant now during the call of the Gentile complement (Rom. 11: 25-32). Then will not the Messiah only but the saints from on high judge the world and angels too (1 Cor. 6). Again, 1 Cor. 15: 54 furnishes the most instructive synchronism between the coming of the Lord to raise the saints from the dead, and the restoration of Israel nationally yet spiritually to honour and glory in the land of promise (compare Isaiah 25-27).

God will gather together in one all things in Christ, the things in the heaven and those on the earth — in Him in whom also we were allotted inheritance (Eph. 1: 10-11). For we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8, Gal. 4), the Reconciler of all things to Himself, whether earthly or heavenly (Col. 1: 20). This is not eternity, but the previous and predicted blessing of the Kingdom, which is again quite in contrast with the walk, while Satan reigns, of faith and suffering under the gospel. Now it is the kingdom and patience in Christ (Rev. 1), but then the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (Rev. xi.), the coming ace and habitable world to come of Heb. 2 and 6, when the rest of God shall be brought in for earth as well as heaven (Heb. 4), and the Father's will be done on earth as in heaven, the Father's kingdom having come (Matt. 6). If some complain of these distinctions as nice and difficult, let them learn that they are only such to souls fed on the traditions of men, so hindering the discernment of the things that differ, which is essential to genuine progress in revealed truth,

ESTHER 9: 1-19.

There is no assurance more clearly, frequently, and solemnly given throughout the Prophetic books than the final restoration of Israel to the joy of all the earth and the blessing of all the families of man. But there is no feature of it more characteristic than the execution of judgment on the wicked whatever they may be, especially on their enemies. Herein it stands in the fullest contrast with the church's hope in pure and heavenly grace — to be taken completely on high to join the Lord Jesus and be in the Father's house; just as Christ rose and ascended without the least sign of retribution for the world. The Jews pass through the fires of that day and are purified thereby. The church is simply caught up to be with Christ. We may readily see that the type of the earthly people's deliverance is pursued in what follows.

"And in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day thereof, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them (whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them), the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt. And no man could withstand them; for the fear of them was fallen upon all the peoples. And all the princes of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and they that did the king's business, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai was fallen upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces: for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. And in Shushan the fortress the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, and Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy, they slew; but on the spoil they laid not their hand. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the fortress was brought before the king."

"And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the fortress, and the ten sons of Haman; what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. And the king commanded it so to be done; and a decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. And the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand."

"And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand but on the spoil they laid not their hand. [This was done] on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth thereof they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth [day] thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore do the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwall'd towns, make the fourteenth of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another" (vers. 1-19).

In the first book of the law God gave the type of Him Who, rejected by His brethren after the

flesh, is exalted to administer the kingdom over the Gentiles, preserving His brethren as others also during days of famine, and at length made known to them. Herein the closing book of history in the O.T. we have not only the arch-enemy ignominiously destroyed who sought their destruction but the adversaries of the Jews everywhere put to the sword. So full is scripture of this mighty change yet to be accomplished, that it would be easy to point out phases of it in perhaps every book of the O.T., and in none more conspicuously than the Psalms, unless it be in the Prophets. But this it may suffice here simply to affirm. The N.T. pledges the same expectation from the first Gospel to the last, the Acts of the Apostles confirming it; the Epistles, while occupied with the heavenly people and their proper hope, in no wise forget the blessed vista for the earth in the day of the Lord; and the Apocalypse crowns the truth for both heaven and earth under Christ the Heir of all things.

ESTHER 9: 20-32.

The day comes when the enemies of God and His people shall fall, not by providential means only, but by predicted inflictions of extraordinary and unprecedented character, and finally by the manifest intervention and presence of the Judge Himself. But there will be another immense change antecedent of a spiritual nature. A residue, which in due time will be constituted a strong nation or its nucleus, will be humbled in heart and accept of the punishment of their iniquity, and instead of being as now since Pentecost added together as part of the church of God, will return (as Micah says) "unto the children of Israel." For the times will have then arrived to form afresh the broken links, and to prove publicly that God has not cast away His people, nor abandoned the land of His promise and oath to the patriarchs, but will fulfil every pledge of blessing to and in them completely and for ever. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

What we have in the book of Esther is no more than the witness of secret providence in the face of the extremest dangers looking onward to that grand public issue, and meanwhile yielding a striking and standing ordinance of Him Who delivers though unseen.

"And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all Jews that were in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.

"And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; but when it [or Esther] came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head; and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur. Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and [of that] which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come unto them, the Jews ordained and took upon them and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to the writing thereof, and according to the appointed time thereof, every year; and [that] these days [should be] remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and [that] these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. And Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew,

wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, [in] the matters of the fastings and their cry. And the commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book" (ver. 20-32).

Here again, it will be noticed, the book cleaves to its sincerely impressed character, and not even then is He named Whom ordinarily and naturally it were the highest duty to proclaim. Yet is the utter difference made plain in man's word; for the Talmud lays down that at the feast of Purim a man should drink till he know not the difference between "Blessed be Mordecai," and "Cursed be Haman." "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Judaism, and Christendom where Christ is ignored, each sinking into the driest ditch of heathenism, both dare to sanction a revelling carnival where had been a holy feast.

ESTHER 10.

The book terminates with a beautiful view of the great king whose authority extended over the land and the isles of the sea. In man's hand this is inseparable from a tribute laid on all his subjects, who must of necessity give to him, rather than he to them. Never will, never can, the just balance be reached to God's glory, till He fills the place of the giver manifestly and indisputably, as He assuredly purposes to do and will in Christ the Lord; Who has already proved it for life and redemption eternal, as He will come to display in the kingdom shortly. For the despised Messiah must return as the glorious Son of man in order to make good all promises and fulfil all prophecies.

Here is the foreshadowing when Israel broke down and were dispersed among the Gentiles; as Joseph exalted in Egypt furnished another prefiguration before they went down into that which was to be a land of bondage and oppression. It was not only that Mordecai was advanced to greatness: he was "next to the king and great among the Jews." How incomparably more will this be verified in Him Whom they once rejected to the uttermost!

"And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land and the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, [are] they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew [was] next to the king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren; seeking the good of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed" (vers. 1-3).

It is a beautiful picture of a king great in his power and his might, morally greater in the faithful administration of the premier, who never forgot that he was "Mordecai the Jew," and, if second to the king, sought neither favourite nor party, but yet "was great among the Jews and accepted by the multitude of his brethren." It was faith in the Unseen that sustained and guided him. Hence he sought not personal aggrandisement but the good of his people, and spoke peace to all his seed. The day hastens when the Son of man will do for the universe far more and better to the glory of God the Father.