

V.

THE AUTHENTICITY AND GENUINENESS OF  
THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

THE Book of Esther presents itself to us as a true narrative of a momentous episode in the history of the children of Israel. The scene is laid in Shushan the palace during the reign of a king who is designated in the English version as Ahasuerus—"this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces." Which of the royal names found in the pages of the Greek and Latin authors Ahasuerus corresponded to was long a most perplexing question that received various answers from commentators. The decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions has furnished the true solution. We now know that in אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ we have the Hebrew form of what in Old Persian was *Khshayarsha*.\* This is the word that appears as Xerxes in the other histories with which the scholars of Europe and America were familiar before the long-silent records of Eastern rocks and mounds began again to speak.† The king intended is evidently the son of Darius, who reigned from 485 to 465 B.C.; Xerxes II was assassinated after sitting on the throne not more than two months.‡

The Jews, to whom, according to St. Paul, were intrusted the oracles of God, considered Esther as part of the sacred Scriptures. Although it is not quoted in the New Testament—in which respect it is not unique—the evidence is conclusive that it formed

\* The prefixed א may be compared with that of אַחַשְׁרַפְּנִים "satrapies," derived from the Persian *khshatrapavan*.

† Another foreign representation of the name is אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ; this occurs in the Aramaic portion of the bilingual tombstone found at Sakkara in 1877. The hieroglyphical forms may be seen in Lepsius' *Königsbuch der alten Aegypter*, Taf. XLIX.

‡ *Artakhshatra*, the native form of the name of King Artaxerxes, cannot be represented in Hebrew by the letters in the text, but is almost exactly the אַרְתַּחֲשַׁתְּרָא of Ezra and Nehemiah. The mistakes that have been made in the attempts to identify Ahasuerus are instructive. The Septuagint and Josephus call him Artaxerxes, showing that as early as the time when the Greek translation of Esther was made the true equivalent of the Persian name was unknown to the Israelites in Palestine and Egypt. It is evident that what we have before us could not have originated where such ignorance was prevailing.

part of the common Hebrew canon endorsed by Christ and His apostles. It was among the books recognized by Josephus. The passage in the works of that author, in which he gives an account of the writings received as of divine authority by his fellow-countrymen, is well known :

“For we have not thousands of books discordant and conflicting, but only twenty-two, containing the record of all time, which have justly been believed to be divine.\* And of these, five are the books of Moses, which embrace the laws and the tradition of the creation of man, reaching to the death of Moses. This period is little short of three thousand years. And from the death of Moses down to the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who succeeded Xerxes, the prophets who came after Moses related the things done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and practical directions for men. From the time of Artaxerxes to our own time, each event has been recorded, but the records have not been deemed worthy of the same credit as those of earlier date, because the exact succession of the prophets was not continued. But what faith we have placed in our own writings is seen from our conduct ; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared either to add anything to them or to take anything from them, or to alter anything. But it grows up with Jews from their very birth, to regard them as decrees of God, and to abide by them, and if need be gladly to die for them.”†

This distinctly states that none of the historical works composed after the time of Artaxerxes was accounted part of the Scripture. Josephus, a man of priestly descent and scholarly tastes who had given special attention to religious questions, must be accepted as a competent witness to testify to what was the current opinion in the best-informed circles of his day on the matter here spoken of. How could such a production as the one we are examining, if it were a mere romance, ever have attained to canonical authority ? It favors no priestly or other special class in the community whose members may be imagined as foisting a lie on the populace from motives of personal aggrandizement. When it was first numbered with the writings looked upon as emanating from prophets in their official capacity, *i.e.*, as spokesmen of Jehovah, the proof in favor of its right to the place must have appeared conclusive. “God is not a man, that He should lie” had long stood in the Mosaic law rolls. The presence of several books in the Septuagint that were never admitted into the Hebrew Bible demonstrates that the religious heads of the people were not too prone to stamp with the seal of canonicity all candidates for that high honor.

We have a lasting monument to the historical truthfulness of the Book of Esther in an annual celebration. We can say at the

\* These were the same as the books that now form the Old Testament of Jews and Protestants.

† *Contra Apion*, I. 8.

present time, as could Josephus of old, that all the Jews in the world now observe the days of Purim because of the orders issued by Mordecai.\* This is the only explanation of the origin of the festival that has ever been given by the people who keep it; they have spoken with a consistent voice in all parts of the earth and throughout the centuries.† The anniversary exists and a story purporting to account for it exists, but how came the two to be joined to each other so strongly that nothing has separated them during more than two millenniums? If the former were before the latter, how did the true explanation disappear without leaving the slightest trace and the present so completely take its place? If the tale were first current, how was the initiation of the observance brought about? The book itself states that the memorial was established immediately after the occurrence of the events which it is to keep fresh in mind. This would have been a stumbling-block in the way of adding the festival at any subsequent date, for at once the disagreement between the actual fact and the allegation of the previous observance would be apparent. Thus the denial of the authenticity of the Book of Esther would lead us into inextricable difficulties. Admit its historical character and all is easy—we have an adequate cause assigned for the visible effects. There was a good reason for the first rejoicing; the command of the Persian vizier and the thankfulness felt by those who had experienced the deliverance would support the custom until it became a fixed part of the life of the people.

The simplicity of our narrative speaks strongly in favor of its genuinely historical character. There is nothing fabulous or absurd in it. Without admitting in the slightest that the supernatural is an objectionable element in a writing for which inspiration is claimed, it may be noted that here we have no recourse to it. Providence is, indeed, plainly visible, but it is only such as many a child of God can see in his own life—we have before us perhaps the most exquisite and masterly delineation to be found of the ordinary way of the Lord's carrying out His plans in the world. As this was a popular story, numerous additions were made to it, but they contain incongruous elements from which the original text is entirely free. Mordecai, for instance, is recorded as having discovered a conspiracy against the monarch (ii. 21–23), but it is not said, as in one of the Targums, that he was able

\* *Antiq.*, XI. VI. 13. The anniversary is even called by that worthy's name, "Mordecai's day," in 2 Macc. xv. 36.

† The attempts made within the last forty years by a few German scholars to find in this feast a metamorphosed heathen festival are mutually destructive because of the discrepant results supposed to be reached and are without the slightest support in Hebrew tradition.

to do so because he possessed a knowledge of all the languages of the seventy nations into which the population of the earth was traditionally divided. How simple are the words in vi. 1: "On that night the king's sleep fled," compared with the expansions the story of that night subsequently received! Would any ancient romancer, untrammelled by the necessity of adhering to truth, be able to so restrain himself from taking advantage of the many opportunities offered for embellishing his tale?

It has been said that there are improbabilities and impossibilities in the narrative; but most of the particulars given in support of the assertion are puerile or evince a lack of familiarity with Eastern life. "Is it at all likely that the provinces would be left without government for so long a time?" one writer gravely asks in connection with i. 3, 4—utterly regardless of what should have at once suggested itself to his mind, that there was nothing to prevent the direct appointees of the crown, when called to the capital, leaving the affairs of their districts in the hands of trusted under-officials, who would be responsible to them as they were to the king. That Esther could have kept up communication with Mordecai after having been taken into the harem of the "jealous and amatory Xerxes" should not surprise us. Nowhere, not even in ii. 22, is it stated that the two came into direct contact with each other, and in iv. 5 *sqq.* a go-between is mentioned by name. Even if the restrictions placed on women at the time were as severe as they now are in Moslem countries, the proverb would prove true that "Where there is a will, there is a way"—at least Oriental literature with its tales of forbidden intercourse, seems to show that such would be the case. The statements in the first half of the ninth chapter will cause us no trouble, with the harrowing accounts of the doings in the Turkish empire a few years ago before our minds. The circumference of Susa was variously estimated by ancient authors as one hundred and twenty or two hundred stadia, *i.e.*, about fourteen or twenty-three miles. The figures given for the slain in this large city—five hundred on the first day and three hundred on the second—certainly look moderate. The number in ver. 16 affords no just ground for impugning the historicity of the passage. The Jews were attacked in spite of the second decree, and the governors and other officials helped them. There is no improbability here. Asiatic rulers, however willing to preserve peace, cannot always prevent bloody conflicts between the representatives of different races and religions. When the man next the king was a Hebrew who had shown himself active in the interest of his co-religionists, on which side would those enjoying crown appointments naturally be

expected to cast their influence? Has not royal favor always been a potent converter (viii. 17)? Some of those in authority probably were not averse to seeing a little disturbance in their districts, and did what they could with safety to themselves to produce a conflict. Such double-dealing would bring an opportunity to win profit and credit. Ah, one must go to the East to learn diplomacy! In secular history the wife of Xerxes is called Amestris. That person, if the account we have of her be correct, is not to be identified with either of the queens of the Book of Esther. There is room for all of them. Chap. ii shows that women were no great rarity in the Shushan palace—as, indeed, they never were in those of Oriental monarchs. At one time Vashti was the reigning favorite, the one preferred by the king above all the rest, and at another Esther occupied that position. May we not read between the lines of the narrative of the overthrow of the first and the selection of the second? The seven princes of Persia and Media (i. 14, 21) were ready to advise the putting away of Vashti, perhaps because she had usurped the place of the wife drawn from their own circle, but it will be noticed that it was “the king’s servants that ministered unto him” (ii. 2) that suggested the plan for securing another fair virgin. Esther has her place in Bible history because of her connection with the deliverance of the chosen people from a calamity that threatened their destruction. That, however, was not a matter of world-wide interest at the time. To the Greek historian, not looking on affairs with Jewish eyes and not so intimately acquainted with the secrets of the harem as was the writer of the book we are considering, Amestris was a more public character and of greater importance because of her relation to the Achæmenian dynasty. The most aristocratic blood of the land coursed through her veins; her father was one of those who helped to set the crown on the head of Darius and the leader of the (in the stricter sense) Persian contingent in the Grecian expedition; her son succeeded her husband on the throne.

The book of Esther affords strong internal evidence of the time and the place of its origin. We have not here a colorless piece of literary work that may with equal ease and probability be assigned to any one of several widely separated periods and regions. Its local and temporal coloring is perhaps more pronounced than that of any other portion of the Old Testament.

The fact that there is no mention of Jerusalem or the temple in this book is in harmony with the theory of its origin in Persia not long after the date of the principal occurrence spoken of. The decree of Cyrus granting the exiles permission to return to Pales-

tine was issued in 538 B.C., and many went thither with Zerubabel. They met with much opposition from their neighbors and matters did not prosper greatly, looked at from a worldly point of view. The revival of patriotism under the lead of Ezra and Nehemiah did not take place until the reign that followed the one in which the scene of our story is laid, that of Artaxerxes. The new generation had been born and brought up in the region whither their fathers had been carried captive, and knew no other home. They had about them a vast and wealthy population, among which they might exercise the money-making instincts of their race. The return would necessitate more or less financial sacrifice. Josephus says that many of the Jews "remained in Babylon, since they were disinclined to relinquish their property."\* Thus the absence of any evidence of a longing for the Holy Land is thoroughly in accord with the other indications of the state of feeling in regard to that matter among the Hebrew subjects of Xerxes.

The linguistic characteristics of the Hebrew text indicate that it was composed in Persia. A comparatively large number of words of Persian origin are found in it. The names of the principal actors come from that language—those of the king, as already stated; of both the queens, Vashti and Esther; of Mordecai and of Haman, the son of Hammedatha.† So also do most, if not all, of the twenty-seven in i. 10, 14, ii. 21, v. 10 and ix. 7-9. The form **הרן** "India" (i. 1, viii. 9), is nearer to the Persian form *Hidhu* than to the Syriac *Hendu* or the Sanscrit *Sindhu*. Also **אחשרפנים** (iii. 12, viii. 9, ix. 3), **אחשתרנים** (viii. 10, 14), **כרפס** (i. 6), **פרתמים** (i. 3, vi. 9) and **פתשנן** (iii. 14, iv. 8) are non-Semitic words that came to the author from Persian sources. The presence of these names of persons and things connected with the government shows the familiarity of the writer with the life of the court, and is best accounted for by the supposition of his actual participation in it.

The author was well acquainted with the place in which he makes the events of his story occur and with its customs and manners. Susa was a town of mud bricks until Darius, the father of Xerxes, erected marble structures in it. Mounds now cover the site of the once gay city. The remains of the royal palace were examined by Loftus in 1851-2 and an account of the explorations was published in 1857.‡ The great hall "consisted of several magnificent groups of columns,

\* *Antiq.*, XI. 1.

† For Jews bearing heathen names cf. Dan. i. 7.

‡ "Travels and Researches in Chaldaea and Susiana."

together having a frontage of three hundred and forty-three feet nine inches, and a depth of two hundred and forty-four feet." Some of the columns bore inscriptions in three different languages recording the fact that it was built by Darius. "It stands on an elevation in the centre 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' [of Esth. i. 5, 6], with its 'pillars of marble.'" The explorer was satisfied after careful examination "that the outer groups or porticos stood distinct from the central square of columns, or connected simply by means of curtains. It seems to be to this that reference is made in the 'hangings fastened with cords to silver rings and pillars of marble' at the feast of the royal Ahasuerus." "The habitable portion of the Susian palace, erected by Darius and his successors, undoubtedly stood on the south of and immediately behind the columnar hall. Traces of brick walls were there uncovered, but, the depth of earth being so shallow above them, it was useless to excavate further in that quarter."

An exhaustive treatment of the account of the festivities in the first chapter would suffice to prove that we have before us the production of a writer who would not suffer any untruth to flow from his pen. It may seem improbable to a person acquainted with the modern customs of most Asiatic countries that Xerxes would under any circumstances call upon his queen to appear in public (i. 11); but we have evidence in Herodotus (V. 18; IX. 110 *sqq.*) that it was not then unusual in Persia for the women to be present at the table on the occasion of great feasts. Wine flowed in abundance before the royal guests. At a later time, after the issue of the cruel decree of destruction against a whole people, "the king and Haman sat down to drink" (iii. 15), and it was at banquets of wine that the evil was undone. The ancient Persians were noted for their love of wine. Herodotus says of them that "they are very fond of wine, and drink it in large quantities.

. . . It is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk" (I. 133). The vessels of gold diverse one from another and the couches of gold and silver are not a mere product of Oriental imagination. After the defeat of the Persian hosts at Plataea in 479 B.C., there "were found many tents richly adorned with furniture of gold and silver, many couches covered with plates of the same, and many golden bowls, goblets and other drinking-vessels."\* The war-tent of Xerxes, which the king on his departure from Greece had left with his

\* Herod., IX. 80.

general, Mardonius, was also captured; in it were "hangings of divers colors," "couches of gold and silver" and "tables of gold and silver."\* Herodotus, who tells us of these riches, wrote of them not very long after the Greeks took them as booty, having been born about the year that Xerxes ascended the throne. These references are specially pertinent. We have in them independent non-Jewish evidence that Ahasuerus possessed in abundance just such small and large utensils and articles of furniture made of the precious metals as are mentioned in Esth. i within about three years after the date there assigned to the occasion on which the writer says they were used. Another "great feast," made by the same king "unto all his princes and his servants" shortly after the return from the disastrous Grecian expedition, is recorded in ii. 18, but there nothing is said of those expensive objects of luxury. There is thus in this matter a remarkable agreement between the two authors. The special significance of the date of the feast will be referred to in a later paragraph.

We have in the eighth chapter a graphic description of the issuing of a royal decree and the forwarding of copies to the provinces. We know from other sources that there was no single court language in which alone official communications were addressed to the people. The great inscription of Darius at Behistan and several other records of the Persian monarchs are trilingual. There was a well-organized system of posts in operation in the time of Xerxes. Herodotus thus speaks of it in connection with a message sent by that king to Susa :

"Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. The entire plan is a Persian invention; and this is the method of it. Along the whole line of road there are men (they say) stationed with horses, in number equal to the number of days which the journey takes, allowing a man and horse to each day; and these men will not be hindered from accomplishing at their best speed the distance which they have to go, either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night. The first rider delivers his despatch to the second, and the second passes it to the third; and so it is borne from hand to hand along the whole line, like the light in the torch-race which the Greeks celebrate to Vulcan" (VIII. 98).

Other illustrations of the exact agreement between the representation of Persian life given in the Book of Esther and the reality as we know it from other sources of information could be given. It may safely be said that nothing, either trivial or important, is attributed to the age of Xerxes that only arose at a subsequent date.

Our author has made no mistakes in regard to the history of his country, but shows himself entirely familiar with the political

\* Herod., IX. 82.



matters of the time of his narrative. The empire of Xerxes is throughout, with one exception, spoken of as that of Persia and Media, a collocation that agrees with the relative importance of the two divisions. Under the Achæmenian dynasty Media, though not furnishing the king, was second only to Persia and stood in a different relation to it than did the other divisions of the country. The one departure from this arrangement of the terms is not due to a slip of the pen, but is in reality a token of the carefulness of the writer. It occurs in x. 2 in a formal reference to "the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia." The preëminence of the Median branch preceded that of the Persian, and of course in the official record of the combined kingdom the history of the former stood before that of the latter. Here in the title of the royal chronicles the order actually employed was the more correct, while elsewhere the other was the more appropriate.\* As in the name, so also in the extent of the territory over which the rule of Xerxes was acknowledged as supreme, our author is correct. In the opening sentence it is described as spreading "from India even unto Ethiopia." Had the writer but dated his work in the earlier part of the preceding reign and assigned the kingdom such boundaries, he could at once be convicted of an anachronism.

The representation of the character of the man at the head of the government of this vast empire agrees with that which we derive from other sources. Nöldeke refers to the great contrast "between Darius and Xerxes, who begins the series of weak and unworthy kings." Rawlinson thus sums up the portraiture found in the pages of Herodotus: "Xerxes, the second and inferior form of the tyrant, weak and puerile as well as cruel and selfish, fickle, timid, licentious, luxurious, easily worked on by courtiers and women, superstitious, vainglorious, destitute of all real magnanimity, only upon occasion ostentatiously parading a generous act when nothing had occurred to ruffle his feelings." The picture is a familiar one of his commanding the Hellespont to be given three hundred lashes and to have a pair of fetters cast into it while proud words were addressed to it. More sad is that of his infatuation for the wife of his brother Masistes; being unable to gain his wicked purpose, he married his son to her daughter, then transferred his attentions to the latter, and finally surrendered the mother to feminine fury. Another anecdote represents a certain Pythius as entertaining Xerxes and his whole army at Celæne when he was going against Greece. The host volunteered

\* These statements hold good whether the short tenth chapter is from the same pen as the rest of the book or not.

to give for the war all the money he had, "two thousand talents of silver and of gold four millions of Daric staters, wanting seven thousand"—a sum about double that promised by Haman for the destruction of the Jews (Esth. iii. 9). The king was pleased and replied, "Thou shalt be my sworn friend from this day; and the seven thousand staters which are wanting to make up thy four millions I will supply, so that the full tale may be no longer lacking, and that thou mayest owe the completion of the round sum to me. Continue to enjoy all that thou hast acquired hitherto, and be sure to remain ever such as thou now art." When a little later this same Pythius requested that one of his five sons might remain at home to be the support and stay of his old age, part of the answer of the royal friend was making the army march between the divided halves of the corpse of the eldest.

How was Xerxes engaged during the first part of his reign according to extra-Biblical history? When he came to the throne in the beginning of the year 485 B.C., Egypt was in revolt. He marched against that country and reduced it again to subjection in the early part of 484 B.C., *i.e.*, after his second year had begun.\* After his return to the capital, "Xerxes, being about to take in hand the expedition against Athens, called together an assembly of the noblest Persians, to learn their opinions and to lay before them his own designs."† Allowing time for traveling, this consultation must have taken place in the third year of the king's reign. When the war had been decided upon, "all the Persians who were come together departed to their several governments, where each displayed the greatest zeal, on the faith of the king's offers."‡ Then followed the gathering of an immense army from all parts of the empire. Herodotus, in the first part of his Book VII, has a long description of the contingents from the various nations. We find mentioned by name Indians, Ethiopians, Arabians, Islanders from the Erythræan sea, and many others. "Was there a nation in all Asia which Xerxes did not bring with him against Greece?" exclaims the historian. The king set out on the march in 481 B.C., and spent the winter in Sardis. In 480 B.C. there followed the battle of Thermopylæ and other memorable events. In the latter part of that year Xerxes fled to Asia. Æschylus, a contemporary, represents him as going direct to Susa, but Herodotus makes him spend the spring and summer in Sardis (IX. 107). The former is the more probable course of action. Herodotus himself (VIII. 97-103)

\* Cf. Clinton's *Fasti Hellenici*, 3d ed.

† Herod., VII. 8.

‡ Herod., VII. 19.

states that the monarch was in a great state of alarm after the battle of Salamis, and was contemplating flight when the advisableness of his withdrawing was adroitly suggested to him. He thereupon appointed Mardonius to the supreme command of the part of the army left behind, committing the whole matter of the conquest of Greece to that general. He then started for home and journeyed with all possible speed. It is not likely that he would remain in Sardis any longer than was absolutely necessary, *i.e.*, beyond the time when the roads became fit for travel in the spring. Before beginning his retreat he sent "a messenger to carry intelligence of his misfortune to Persia," whose report produced sore dismay in Susa, which "did not cease till Xerxes himself, by his arrival, put an end to their fears."\* The state of public affairs would be favorable to usurpers and the absence of the man who had suffered so disastrous defeat dangerous to his continuance in power. The only prudent and statesmanly course open to the king was to appear in his capital with troops at the earliest moment he could reach there. This would bring him back to Persia in the summer of his seventh year.

Let us now see how the story in the Book of Esther agrees with the history just given. "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 shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days"; at its conclusion followed a feast for seven days to all the people in Shushan (i. 1-5). This may well have been the assembly of which Herodotus speaks, but the purpose of our author did not require him to mention its cause. The weather and conditions of traveling doubtless had much to do with determining its time and duration. On the last day of the festivities, which cannot have been long before the close of 483 B.C., and probably was in the following spring, Vashti gave dire offense. Upon consultation with "the wise men, which knew the times," her permanent exclusion from the presence of the king was decreed. The plan for choosing another in her place was suggested "after these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was pacified," and his thoughts had begun to dwell again on his former favorite (ii. 1, 2). How long a period had elapsed we are not told; let us suppose that it was short and that the advice was given in the early part of the year 482 B.C. It was in the tenth month of the seventh

\* Herod., VIII. 97, 99.

year of the king's reign that Esther met with favor (ii. 16). The interval is apparently great, but the explanation is simple. It must have taken some time to make the conscription of virgins, but the twelve months of purification required in the case of every one (ii. 3, 12) alone carry us into 481 B.C., the very year in which Xerxes, according to secular history, left Susa for Sardis *en route* to Greece. He did not return to the capital until his seventh year and shortly after his arrival occurred the advancement of Esther.

The way in which the statements of the Book of Esther and those of reliable extra-Biblical history dovetail into each other is very remarkable. Our examination leaves us not simply with the negative result of not finding any contradictions between the two, but it affords us most striking confirmations of the claim that the author of the former was, in the strictest sense of the term, a writer of history. The perfection in the temporal and local setting of his work will be better appreciated if we compare it with the other piece of Jewish literature most similar to it in plot that has come down to us from pre-Christian times. In the Book of Judith the children of Israel are also represented as in sore distress when a woman brings deliverance. The story has the form of history, but it will fit into no epoch of the past. The events described are alleged to have occurred after the Jews had returned from the captivity (iv. 3, v. 18, 19), while Nebuchadnezzar was reigning as king of the Assyrians in Nineveh, the great city (i. 1, iv. 1)! This alone is sufficient to exclude the work from the class of truthful narratives. Many other illustrations of its unreliable character might be given, for it is replete with chronological and geographical errors. Here is a specimen of an ancient Jewish romance: who will place Esther by the side of Judith and say that it also came from the pen of a romancer?

The entire correctness of the statements, direct and indirect, of our author, where it is possible to compare them with other authorities—and such points we have found not few—compels us to receive as true his assertions that we cannot otherwise verify. Included in the latter is what he tells us of the secret history of the court and the harem of Xerxes. This is an integral part of the narrative and cannot be separated from the rest; but how did the recorder obtain such facts? I think that it may safely be said that the evidence at hand conclusively demonstrates that he was not only a contemporary of the scenes he describes, but also a principal actor in them. What was his name? In Esth. ix. 20 we read that "Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus,

both nigh and far, to enjoin them that they should keep" the days of Purim. There is here a reference to a preliminary account of the recent deliverance that was transmitted to the Israelites in the provinces when the adoption of the celebration was urged upon them. In consequence of what was written they bound themselves and their children to observe the anniversary forever. As the festival of Purim was to be remembered "throughout every generation" wherever a Jew might be found (ix. 28), it was imperative that an authoritative statement of the facts connected with its origin should be prepared. From what source could such a written memorial best and most naturally come? "Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim" (ix. 29). "This *second* letter of Purim" was our present Book of Esther from the beginning of the first chapter to the end of the ninth. It was the formal narrative intended for permanent preservation and general instruction. There is definite historical proof that before the beginning of the Christian era the whole Book of Esther was known as a "letter of Purim." It is afforded by the subscription found in the Septuagint at the end of its tenth chapter: "In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemeus and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemeus his son, brought [to Egypt] this epistle (*ἐπιστολήν*) of Purim, which they said was the same, and that Lysimachus the son of Ptolemeus, that was in Jerusalem, had interpreted it." When sent out, the record before us was accompanied by more personal letters addressed to Jews in different sections of the country and written to confirm it (ix. 29, 30). It went forth in the name and with the authority of the queen and the grand vizier, but of course the actual work of composition fell to the lot of the latter, Mordecai.

The tenth chapter is very short, consisting of only three sentences. It seems to come in abruptly after what was originally intended to be the close of i-ix. It has the appearance of being a later addition; the reign of Ahasuerus is apparently presupposed to be finished. It may be considered as analogous to the closing portion of Deuteronomy, added to the Pentateuch to record the death of Moses and to round out the preceding narrative. It was probably added soon after the death of Xerxes and perhaps by Mordecai himself.