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*THE CAMBRIDGE BIBLE  
FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES*

GENERAL EDITOR FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT:—

A. F. KIRKPATRICK, D.D.

DEAN OF ELY

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

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# THE BOOK OF ESTHER

With Introduction and Notes

by

THE REV. A. W. STREANE, D.D.

Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

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## PREFACE

BY THE

GENERAL EDITOR FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE present General Editor for the Old Testament in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges desires to say that, in accordance with the policy of his predecessor the Bishop of Worcester, he does not hold himself responsible for the particular interpretations adopted or for the opinions expressed by the editors of the several Books, nor has he endeavoured to bring them into agreement with one another. It is inevitable that there should be differences of opinion in regard to many questions of criticism and interpretation, and it seems best that these differences should find free expression in different volumes. He has endeavoured to secure, as far as possible, that the general scope and character of the series should be observed, and that views which have a reasonable claim to consideration should not be ignored, but he has felt it best that the final responsibility should, in general, rest with the individual contributors.

A. F. KIRKPATRICK.

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# ESTHER.

## INTRODUCTION.

### § 1. *Title and outline of contents.*

THE Book of Esther, while it is among the shorter of those comprised in the historical portion of the Old Testament Canon, has features which claim for it a peculiar interest. Its clear-cut narrative, the skilful development of the plot of the story, the artistic contrasts as presented by the narrator, the frustration of evil designs and the vindication of the innocent, all combine to furnish the Book with an undoubted attractiveness, even apart from the deeper questions as to its character and purpose, with which we shall presently have to deal.

The heroine of the Book rises from a humble station to be a queen, and by the use of the position she has obtained rescues her nation from wholesale destruction devised against them by Haman, the favourite courtier of king Ahasuerus (Xerxes, B.C. 485—465).

The story opens with the description of a banquet given by Ahasuerus, king of Babylon, in the third year of his reign at Shushan (Susa), one of his capitals, first for one hundred and eighty days to the chief personages in his kingdom, and then for seven more days to the people of Shushan. Heated by wine, Ahasuerus summons the queen Vashti to his presence in order to shew the people and the princes her beauty. On her refusal to submit to the insult of being required to appear at this scene of intoxication, the king at the instigation of his counsellors deposes her from the rank of queen, and by way of giving a

lesson to his subjects publishes her disgrace, upon which he founds an edict that every man shall be master in his own house. Elaborate arrangements are made for the assembling of the most beautiful maidens at Susa and the selection of a successor. After an interval of four years, the fairest is finally adjudged to be Esther, cousin and ward of Mordecai, a Jew of the Captivity, a Benjamite. Soon afterwards he saves the king's life by giving, through Esther, information of a conspiracy against him on the part of two of his chamberlains—a good deed which is recorded in the 'chronicles' of the kingdom, but inadvertently left unrewarded by Ahasuerus. Shortly afterwards an influential courtier named Haman is promoted to the office of grand vizier, and his ire is excited by Mordecai's refusal to make obeisance to him in accordance with the king's command, as he passes in and out of the palace gates. Haman's offended pride scorns the idea of a simple vengeance on the particular offender. He will be satisfied with nothing short of an order for the destruction of Mordecai's people, whom Haman describes as disloyal and worthless, and in the twelfth year of the king's reign he obtains from him a decree for that purpose, gaining his consent the more readily by guaranteeing that as the result of his action a huge sum (10,000 talents of silver) would accrue to the royal treasury out of the plunder of the Jews. Haman further takes the utmost care by the casting of lots to find the most suitable date on which to accomplish his scheme of vengeance and confiscation of property. The edict is issued on the thirteenth day of the first month, and on that day eleven months it is to take effect. Mordecai, learning what is about to befall his nation, calls upon Esther to intervene. At first she pleads the risk to her own life if she should presume to approach the king unsummoned; but she is warned by Mordecai that she will not escape in a general massacre of the Jews. Calling upon her countrymen in Susa to join with her in an intercessory fast for the success of her enterprise, she resolves to venture. On being received favourably by Ahasuerus, she invites him to come with Haman to a banquet on the following day, and when the king on that occasion asks the

nature of her request declares that she will present it, if on the morrow they will repeat the visit. Haman, exulting in his honours, and considering his purpose as regards Mordecai to be already as good as achieved, prepares a gallows for his foe. But during the intervening night the king, being sleepless, causes the chronicles of the court to be read to him, and is reminded by them of the service which Mordecai had rendered. On his finding that no reward had been bestowed on him, and Haman at that moment entering the royal presence to demand Mordecai's execution, the minister is unexpectedly compelled to carry out for the hated Jew a programme of exalted dignity such as he had himself dictated for 'the man whom the king delighteth to honour,' in his overweening confidence that he was himself to be the central figure. His wife warns him of coming disaster, a presentiment which is speedily justified by the event. At the ensuing banquet Esther tells her tale and points to him as 'the adversary and enemy' of her people, whereupon the king, angered further by the vehemence of Haman's despairing application for mercy to the queen, orders him to immediate execution on the gallows which, as a courtier opportunely suggests, stands ready for the purpose. Mordecai succeeds to Haman's position. The original edict cannot be altered, but by a second decree, issued on the 23rd day of the third month, and published, like the former one, throughout the empire, the Jews are empowered to defend themselves on the day (13th of Adar) appointed for their destruction, and are everywhere victorious, slaying 75,000 of their enemies, while at Esther's request the permission as regards Shushan is extended to the following day as well, and Haman's sons (slain on the previous day) meet their father's fate of impalement. Mordecai is placed in power, and many become proselytes to Judaism. The festival of Purim (lots) is instituted by Esther and Mordecai to commemorate the deliverance. It is to be an occasion of feasting and gladness, and is to be celebrated on the 14th and 15th of Adar, the former in the country parts, the latter in the cities, as being the respective days when in the country generally and in Susa in particular the Jews celebrated their victory over their foes.

§ 2. *Character and purpose of the Book.*

The first question which naturally arises concerns the character of the narrative which has just been set forth in outline. To what extent is the Book a narrative of actual events? Three forms of answer have been given to this question.

(1) It has been maintained that the Book is, in the fullest sense of the word, historical. In support of this opinion there have been adduced the following arguments. (*a*) The festival of Purim, of which the Book professes to describe the origin, was an established custom as early as Josephus<sup>1</sup>. (*b*) The local colouring throughout the Book is remarkably consistent. Modern research<sup>2</sup> has been able to find few, if any, slips in description such as would mark a work of imagination written when Persian customs had ceased to be matters of contemporary and familiar knowledge. Details like the account of the adornments of the palace, Mordecai's genealogy, the banquets given by Esther to the king and Haman, point in the same direction. The proper names, which are abundant, are of the character which we should expect at the date and place assigned to the story. (*c*) The absence of corroboration from other literature is in no wise hostile to the claims of the Book to historicity. We find e.g. that the Book of Ezra leaves the period B.C. 516—459 all but a blank (Ezra iv. 5, 6 forms the sole exception), while the profane historians, Herodotus and Ctesias, are occupied solely with the relations between the Persian Empire and Greece. (*d*) The character of Xerxes, passionate, capricious, despotic, agrees perfectly with that assigned to him by secular writers<sup>3</sup>. (*e*) Had the account not been recognised by the Jews from the first as an actual record of events, it would not have been admitted to the Canon of Scripture, inasmuch as otherwise they would have hesitated to accept a Book which makes no reference to Jerusalem, the Temple, Palestine,

<sup>1</sup> *Ant.* xi. 6. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*, iv. 269—287.

<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus, *Persae*, 467 ff.; Juvenal, *Sat.* x. 174 ff.; Herodotus, Books vii., ix.

sacrifices or other ordinances (except fasting), and which does not even contain the name of God. (*f*) The 'chronicles' of the Persian kingdom are several times<sup>1</sup> referred to as contemporary evidence for particulars in the narrative. (*g*) The dates assigned in the Book to the great feast at Susa, and later, to the elevation of Esther to be queen, agree with Herodotus's statement (vii. 8) that Xerxes in the 3rd year of his reign held a council of the governors of the provinces in Susa with reference to his projected expedition against Greece, and that he returned, after that expedition, to Susa in his 7th year.

(2) There are those on the other hand who regard the Book as simply a work of imagination. The following reasons are adduced for this opinion. (*a*) There is an obvious tendency throughout unduly to glorify the Jews, and magnify directly and by inference their importance. Of all the selected maidens a Jewess is successful, first in being chosen queen, and then in obtaining her requests from the king. Haman, the Jew's enemy, is overthrown. Mordecai, the Jew, succeeds to his position. Susa warmly sympathises with the Jews both in adversity and in prosperity. (*b*) There is an omission of all reference to the narrative in the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, as well as in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, and in Philo. (*c*) There is an absence of direct quotations from the 'chronicles' of the Persian kingdom (we may contrast in this respect the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah), which therefore may be presumed to exist only in the imagination of the writer, and can thus be compared with the equally unreal ones from which Ctesias professes to draw. (*d*) The accumulation of coincidences and contrasts is characteristic of fiction rather than of real history<sup>2</sup>. (*e*) There are other features in the details of the narrative itself which point in the same direction. Such are the banquet's duration for one hundred and eighty days (i. 4; but see note there), the

<sup>1</sup> ii. 23, vi. 1, x. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, the conflict between Haman the 'Agagite' and Mordecai the Benjamite (see notes on iii. 1), the former's exultation and sudden fall, the two edicts and the circumstances under which they were promulgated, the Jews' peril and their deliverance.

prolonged ignorance of Esther's Jewish parentage on the part of the court, the suspiciously Semitic character (as against one of the arguments on the other side given above) of certain of the Persian proper names, the decree for universal massacre of Jews, as well as the publication of such a decree eleven months beforehand, and the subsequent permission for slaughter. (f) It is impossible satisfactorily to identify either Esther or Vashti with Amestris, whom we gather from Herodotus and Ctesias to have been Xerxes' only wife<sup>1</sup>.

(3) There is, however, a third and intermediate view, which seems on the whole best to fit in with the evidence. The arguments on behalf of the wholly fictitious character of the Book, such as we have just enumerated, no doubt carry considerable weight, but they need not preclude us from holding that there is at bottom a veritable historical basis, though we may admit that the element of romance has its share in the general result. When we place Esther alongside of the apocryphal Books of Tobit and Judith, the comparison from the point of view with which we are now dealing is distinctly in favour of the Canonical Book. While the other two are obviously lacking in historical characteristics, there is no corresponding reason on the other hand why Esther should be regarded as simply 'a novel with a purpose,' such as has become so common a feature of modern literature.

Esther herself has in all probability been idealised. The actual details which we derive from other sources with respect to Xerxes' time make us hesitate to aver that she was more than a favourite member of the royal seraglio. But there is no difficulty in supposing that during the reign of that monarch one who occupied the position of a secondary wife was made the means of averting some calamity which threatened at least a portion of her compatriots, and that upon this foundation was framed the narrative which we possess. If therefore the above account of its origin be correct, it may be compared to the 'semi-

<sup>1</sup> Amestris was daughter of a Persian general, and was married to Xerxes so long before the date with which the Book of Esther deals that two of her sons went with his expedition against Greece.

historical tales, of which the Persian chronicles seem to have been full<sup>1</sup>.

That an historical romance, or even a 'novel with a purpose' (if the Book could be shewn to be such), should be contained in the 'Divine Library' which we call the Old Testament, need not cause difficulty to any thoughtful reader. The various kinds of literature represented respectively by the Books of Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah may well admit beside them one which is not perhaps altogether unlike the last named in the circumstances of its origin. 'No one asks whether our Lord's Parable of the Prodigal Son was a true story of some Galilean family. The *Pilgrim's Progress* has its mission, though it is not to be verified by any authentic Annals of Elstow<sup>2</sup>.'

It must be confessed that a conspicuous characteristic of the Book—not, however, confined to it among Old Testament writings, but yet receiving a special prominence by the whole drift of the story—is the fierceness of revenge, brought into particular relief in Esther's request (ix. 13) directed against the family of Haman. Here, as with such examples as are disclosed by earlier Jewish records, we can but point to the fact that Old Testament times furnished but a *praeparatio evangelica*, and that, in accordance with the law of development acting in the sphere of religion, the world was not yet ready to realise the duty of Christian forgiveness.

A perplexity of another kind connected with this Book arises from the well known peculiarity that the Divine Name is wholly absent from it. Elsewhere we find Biblical writers dwelling explicitly upon the relation between God and His people. His attitude towards men and theirs towards Him is set forth without reserve. Here on the contrary all such treatment of the matters handled is held rigidly in check.

The explanation may probably be traced to one or other of

<sup>1</sup> See Sayce, *The Higher Criticism, and the Verdict of the Monuments etc.*, pp. 469 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Adeney, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (the Expositor's Bible), p. 354.

two causes, if it be not indeed the result of their joint influence.

(1) The Book, as we shall see, was in all probability written at a time intermediate between the fervently religious spirit that found its home among the prophets and psalmists, and the revival of the same enthusiasm under the Maccabean leaders<sup>1</sup>. During this intervening period there had arisen a sort of timidity or reserve in the expression of religious emotion. Language on the subject of the Divine Being was held under strict control by the sentiment, 'God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few<sup>2</sup>.' A veil was drawn between the creatures of earth and the majesty of the Godhead, and there was a reluctance to speak plainly of the mysteries which lay beyond man's ken.

(2) Again, it is probable that the writer had the feast of Purim in his mind as the chief occasion on which the Book would be read. This festival was sometimes attended, we may believe, with excessive conviviality. Moreover, unlike the Passover, it was a purely secular celebration. Accordingly, there may have been a desire to avoid the risk that the name of God should be lightly used amid such surroundings.

But although the Book presents the peculiarity we have just noticed, it would be far from correct to say that it wholly lacks the religious element. God's providential care of His people is in fact one of the most prominent of the lessons taught. 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep<sup>3</sup>' might well be the motto of the narrative, relating, as it does, how a series of apparently providential occurrences combine to evince the constancy of the Divine protection. Moreover, Mordecai's warning to Esther that, if she will not assume the perilous distinction to which the crisis summons her, then shall there

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable, however, that in the history of the Maccabean war, as contained in the First Book of the Maccabees, according to the true text the same reticence is displayed, the name of God not once occurring in that Book. As a substitute we find either the word 'heaven' (e.g. ii. 21, iii. 50, 60), or simply a pronoun (e.g. iii. 22).

<sup>2</sup> Eccles. v. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. cxxi. 4.

relief and deliverance arise to the Jews *from another place* (iv. 14), and his question, 'who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' (iv. 14), indicate, though with a reticence unlike the general tone of prophetic and priestly utterances in the Old Testament, an unflinching trust in the overruling Hand. Whatever be the sense in which we may apply the word *inspired* to the Book of Esther, we can at any rate claim that from this point of view it is undoubtedly *inspiring*. 'The name of God is *not* there, but the work of God is<sup>1</sup>.'

Notwithstanding all this, we must admit the cogency of Ewald's criticism that in this Book 'we fall as if from heaven to earth<sup>2</sup>,' that the exaltation of the Jewish people is a prominent aim in the mind of the writer, while the absence of explicit reference to the Supreme Being tends at least to obscure the relation between Him and His people as set forth generally in the Old Testament. There is here no indication of the sense of national sin or of punishment as its due, no trace of any consciousness of being unworthy of the Divine favour. Even when the deliverance comes, rejoicing, not gratitude, is depicted as at any rate the paramount feeling. Patriotism, rather than religion, is the prevailing sentiment, and this suggests that the Book belongs to a period of decline in religious life, arising from long exposure to the influences of surrounding heathenism.

One main purpose of the Book, as we have already indicated, was to encourage the observance of the feast of Purim, and perhaps to bring about its more intelligent and reverent celebration. We may also safely assume that a foremost object with the author was to enforce upon the Dispersion those lessons as to the Divine providence to which we have referred.

<sup>1</sup> Stanley, *Jewish Church*, iii. 180, where he also remarks, 'It is necessary for us that in the rest of the sacred volume the name of God should constantly be brought before us, to shew that He is all in all to our moral perfection. But it is expedient for us no less that there should be one book which omits it altogether, to prevent us from attaching to the mere name a reverence which belongs only to the reality.'

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. of Israel*, Eng. trans., 4th ed. (Longmans), i. 197.

§ 3. *Date and Authorship.*

Very varying opinions have been held as to the date of this Book. Some, influenced by the life-like and on the whole accurate picture of Persian manners which it presents, have attributed it to an author at least as early as the reign of Xerxes' immediate successor, Artaxerxes Longimanus (B.C. 465—425), while others have gone to the opposite extreme of considering it to be a romance reflecting Egyptian circumstances and opinions belonging to the later Ptolemaic times<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, Grätz and others see in the Book a Maccabean colouring, and hold that under the name of Ahasuerus we have a veiled representation of Antiochus, and that the intention of the author is to warn the Syrian power that Israel will not be forced into idolatry, and that, if driven to extremities, they may once again prove too strong for the heathen oppressor. These theories, however, are exceedingly far-fetched, and it is difficult to believe that a work written later than the third century B.C. could give a picture of the Persian court of Xerxes' time which is on the whole so faithful. In support of a late date indeed there has been adduced the fact that in the list of famous persons in Ecclus. xlv.—xlix. there is no reference to characters in this Book: but the argument from omission is generally a precarious one<sup>2</sup>. Again, it is pointed out that there is found no reference to the feast of Purim as an established custom earlier than 2 Macc. xv. 36, and that there under the name of 'the day of Mordecai' it is spoken of as to be preceded for the future by a celebration (on the 13th of Adar) of the overthrow of Nicanor. It is further remarked that in the corresponding part of 1 Macc. (vii. 43, 49), where the celebration of Nicanor's defeat is instituted, no mention is made of Mordecai,

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in *circa* B.C. 180. This view is thought to receive some support from the wording of the note which forms xi. 1 (LXX., x. 11) in the apocryphal Additions to Esther, and which asserts that 'the Epistle of Phururai' was brought to Egypt 'in the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra.' See below in § 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ezra, e.g., whose existence as an historical character in the 5th century B.C. is undoubted, does not appear in that list.

and the inference is drawn that the feast of Purim did not come into vogue till after the writing of the earlier Book, i.e. little if at all before B.C. 120—110. Here again, however, even if we were to grant that the feast of Purim was not observed in Palestine during the turmoil and oppression of Maccabean times, it seems unsafe, in the face of countervailing evidence, to conclude that the Book, which clearly has for one of its purposes to enjoin the custom, was not yet written. Such countervailing evidence is to be found in the features upon which we have already dwelt. The reign of Abasuerus is indeed spoken of as one which had already passed away (i. 1 f.), but the writer is still close enough to the age he has depicted to preserve a verisimilitude in detail which would certainly have been lacking, if the memory at least of the days preceding the substitution of Greek for Persian supremacy had not been still fresh.

We conclude then, as being on the whole the most satisfactory hypothesis, that the Book was written, very possibly in Persia itself, by a Jew familiar with the character of the time with which he dealt, and scarcely later than B.C. 300.

The idea that Mordecai was the author<sup>1</sup> arose out of a mistaken interpretation of ix. 20, viz. from not perceiving that 'these things' have to do only with the letter of which the substance is there given. The Book has also been ascribed to Ezra<sup>2</sup>, to Joiakim the son of Jeshua the high priest (see Neh. xii. 10, 26), and by a Jewish tradition to 'the men of the Great Synagogue'.<sup>3</sup> These, however, are obviously but guesses, of which in the case of the last the very meaning is obscure.

That it is the work of a single author is generally admitted, with the exception of the two Purim letters (ix. 20—28, 29—32), the style of which has given rise to some doubt as to whether they formed part of the original Book. Some of the reasons for this surmise depend upon a careful comparison of the Hebrew of

<sup>1</sup> Held e.g. by St Clement of Alexandria, and by the Jewish writer Ibn Ezra.

<sup>2</sup> So St Augustine, *De Civit. Dei*, c. 36.

<sup>3</sup> For these see further in § 5 ('Place in the Canon').

these sections with that of the rest, others upon alleged slight inconsistencies. The evidence, however, seems insufficient upon which to base anything like a certain conclusion.

#### § 4. *Value of the Book.*

Attention has been called in the preceding sections to certain features which have caused difficulty to some readers in recognising the Book of Esther as rightly belonging to that portion of the Divine revelation which is preserved for us in the Old Testament. It is equally incumbent upon us to recognise the importance of the place which the Book nevertheless holds in the pre-Christian literature of the Bible, and its value as a contribution to the Jewish life and thought of its day.

1. It presents us, as has been already shewn, with such a vivid picture of life in the Persian court and royal harem at that day as is not to be had in any other source of information. The honours, almost divine, rendered to a king, who might yet be, as was Xerxes, utterly weak and worthless, the court intrigues by which viziers might successfully conspire against a queen, and on the other hand a queen might procure the sudden ruin of a favourite minister, the luxury and prodigality of a palace joined with the most ruthless cruelty and an entire absence of compunction for the wholesale destruction of human life, the ever present danger of assassination dogging the footsteps of the highest—these are set before us with a mixture of skill and simplicity, and give us a picture of a state of society which leaves its lasting impression upon the mind.

2. If, as we have seen occasion to believe, the date of the Book may be placed within the Persian period or shortly after, it furnishes us with a unique picture of the Jews of the Dispersion during that period. 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people' (iii. 8). We see their mysterious isolation from other nations, while they yet dwell in the midst of them, self-centred, but in daily intercourse with the heathen (like Christians

of later days), 'as unknown and yet well known,...as chastened and not killed<sup>1</sup>.' The remarkable absence of all reference to Palestine, or even to the Law<sup>2</sup> or to Jewish worship, serves to bring into fuller relief the strength of the tie of race, as distinguished from that of religion, which bound together these proud aliens scattered throughout the many provinces of the Persian Empire, and which infused into them, even though in an exaggerated form, the subtle influence of kinship.

3. The masterly sketches of character that are presented to us are surely not without 'example of life and instruction of manners.' Ahasuerus e.g. is a mere puppet worked by those who successively gain his ear, while he fancies that his will is law throughout his dominions; helplessly weak, and all the time imagining himself possessed of absolute power; dissolute, vengeful, vain, yet not without a certain sense of justice and generosity.

In Haman we have the combination of overweening vanity and unscrupulous cruelty, the former being the direct cause of the latter. His egotism destroys all sense of proportion. On the other hand beneath all his vigour and energy he is a coward and pleads in abject humiliation for his life. In him 'poetic justice' receives complete satisfaction. He is 'hoist with his own petard.' The 'power that makes for righteousness' does not necessarily confine its operations to the world to come.

Mordecai teaches us one lesson in common with Joseph and Daniel, viz. that devotion to the interests of those with whom one's lot is cast, aliens though they may be, is fully compatible with loyalty to one's faith and nation. He also exemplifies the man who is content to 'do good by stealth,' to carry out obvious duties without aims of an ambitious kind. Fame comes to him, but it comes unsought. We cannot, however, fail to see the imperfection of one part of his character as viewed from a Christian standpoint. We shudder at the vengeful spirit which is united with his fervour of racial sentiment and confidence that his nation is destined to survive all perils.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Unless it be in Haman's words to Ahasuerus just quoted.

Once more, the central figure who gives her name to the Book must be full of significance to every reader. Possessed of independence of character, she yet accepts the task set her by her guardian, while fully conscious of its peril. 'To whom much is given, of him shall much be required.' She rises to the demand, and the deliverance of her people, possible for her alone, is effected by a combination of heroism and tact. But with all that is admirable and noble in the character whose lineaments are so skilfully drawn for our benefit, we are yet startled, perhaps even more in her case than in that of Mordecai, by her thirst for vengeance upon the foes of her nation. After all, 'certain hard lines betray the fact that Esther is not a Madonna, that the heroine of the Jews does not reach the Christian ideal of womanhood<sup>1</sup>.'

4. An important lesson which the Book teaches us may be stated thus: 'May it not be taken as a great example to Christians whose lot has fallen among those who are not Christians? For, though there is no naming of the name of God, yet there is a deep sense of personal vocation to do His work; there is a faith in self-sacrificing intercession; and a type of courage, loyalty, and patriotism such as is scarcely found elsewhere in the Bible<sup>2</sup>.'

5. Finally, the Book is of value as shewing us the Jewish people in a state of preparation, albeit unconscious preparation, for the 'central event' in the world's history, the Incarnation of the Son of God. It depicts for us the links which bound together the widely scattered nation, settled throughout the known world. 'Of this vast race, for whom so great a destiny was reserved when the nation should fail, the Book of Esther recognised, as by a prophetic instinct, the future importance<sup>3</sup>.'

<sup>1</sup> See Adeney, *Ezra etc.*, p. 391, in a chapter to which are due some of the thoughts embodied in this section.

<sup>2</sup> Note by Lock in Sanday's *Inspiration*, pp. 222 f.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley, *Jewish Church*, iii. 176.

§ 5. *Place in the Canon.*

Among Old Testament Books, as arranged in the Hebrew Bible, Esther is placed as the last of the five Megilloth (Rolls)<sup>1</sup>, and thus is included in the Hagiographa or last of the three sections into which the Jews divide their Scriptures, the former two being the Law and the Prophets. The position, however, which the Book thus occupies in the Jewish Canon was not always an assured one. In fact there was for a while a more or less distinct line of separation between Canonical Books and those as to the inclusion of which there was felt some degree of hesitation. Thus we cannot be at all certain that Esther was one of 'the other Books of our fathers' which are referred to (B.C. 132) by the Greek translator of the Prologue to the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, as being well known to his grandfather, the writer of that book (*circa*. B.C. 180). The earliest reference to the Book as included in the Jewish Scriptures occurs in Josephus<sup>2</sup>, who by placing the limit of the records 'justly held sacred' in the reign of 'Artaxerxes, king of the Persians<sup>3</sup>,' seems to imply such inclusion. The Jewish councils of Jerusalem and Jamnia (1st century A.D.), which virtually closed the Canon of the Old Testament, accepted the Book as canonical. Its claim also seems to be acknowledged in the apocryphal 2nd Book of Esdras (end of 1st century A.D.) from

<sup>1</sup> Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther. Even at the present day the books read aloud in the worship of the synagogue are written in columns in the form of Rolls. There is a wooden roller at the beginning and end, and the successive columns, as they are read, are rolled round the first of these. The Megilloth, as their name indicates, formed separate volumes, and were severally read on five anniversaries in the Jewish year, viz. Song of Songs on the Feast of the Passover, Ruth on the Feast of Weeks, Lamentations on the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, Ecclesiastes on the Feast of Tabernacles, and Esther on the Feast of Purim.

<sup>2</sup> *contra Apionem*, i. 8.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Josephus, in common with the LXX., erroneously makes the Persian monarch not to be Xerxes but his immediate successor (Artaxerxes Longimanus, B.C. 465—425).

the number which it assigns<sup>1</sup> to the sacred Books. The Mishnah, which is the basis of the subsequently formed Talmud, a heterogeneous embodiment of Jewish tradition, was committed to writing by R. Jehudah *circa* A.D. 200, and includes Esther in its list of the Books of Holy Scriptures. The Talmud (*Baba Bathra*, 14) ascribes the Book (meaning apparently its editing or acceptance as of canonical authority), together with the Book of Ezra, the twelve Minor Prophets, and Daniel, to 'the men of the Great Synagogue<sup>2</sup>.' The hesitation felt on the subject is apparent, however, in more than one Talmudic statement. In the Talmud of Babylon (*Megilloth*, 7a) we detect the existence of an element of uncertainty among Jewish teachers of that day as to the full inspiration of the Book. In *Sanhedrin* (100a), a Talmudic treatise, a certain Levi bar Samuel and R. Huna bar Chija even call the contents 'Epicureanism,' i.e. heathenish. In the Jerusalem Talmud (*Megillah*, 7'ב) we read that eighty-five elders, including more than thirty prophets, disputed as to the ordinance of Esther and Mordecai with respect to the Purim festival until God opened their eyes and they found divine sanction for it in Exod. xvii. 14. It should nevertheless be said that the original wording of this last Talmudic passage leaves it at any rate possible that the reference is not to the Book as a whole, but only to the directions about fasting in ix. 29—32.

We may add that the discursive character of the Talmud, uncertainties as to the chronology of the various elements of which it is composed, and the unsatisfactory condition of its text detract considerably from its value as evidence, where accuracy in dates is needed<sup>3</sup>.

Whatever was the case in the first few centuries A.D., later Jewish opinion presents a complete change. So far from a disposition to undervalue the Book, it came to be held of more

<sup>1</sup> xiv. 44, a passage, however, by no means free from difficulty, owing to varieties of reading.

<sup>2</sup> That is, a succession of learned Jews, whose existence, however, has been shewn by modern research to be somewhat problematical. See Ryle, *Canon of the O.T.*, Excursus A.

<sup>3</sup> See further in Ryle, ch. x.

importance than the rest of the Hagiographa, the Prophets, and even than the Law itself. The intensity of its patriotic spirit laid fast hold on the sentiment of the nation. At various epochs of persecution, the perusal of its pages has given the Jews courage, and has strengthened their confidence in themselves as reserved through all trials and troubles for a lofty destiny. The Book was entitled *the Megillah* (or Roll) *par excellence*, and the copies of it were specially adorned and beautified. Maimonides<sup>1</sup>, the most celebrated Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages, declared that in the days of the Messiah the only Scriptures left would be the Law and the Roll<sup>2</sup>. It was specially directed that women and children should hear it read on the occasion of the Purim festival. Gathered annually in their synagogue at the close of the 13th day of the month of Adar, as the minister unfolded the Roll and read the story, the congregation repeated after him in loud and triumphant tones the passages relating to the victory of the Jews over their enemies, while at the mention of Haman's name the assembly, and specially the younger portion, hissed, stamped, shook the clenched fist, and pounded noisily on the benches, saying, 'Let his name be blotted out,' 'Let the name of the wicked perish.' Moreover, it was customary for the reader to utter the names of Haman's ten sons in one breath, in allusion, it was said, to their all dying at the same moment. In the Jewish rolls the names of the sons were written in three vertical and parallel lines of 3, 3, and 4 words, to indicate that the ten were hanged on three parallel cords. At the conclusion of the reading the whole congregation exclaimed: 'Cursed be Haman, blessed be Mordecai; cursed be Zeresh, blessed be Esther; cursed be all idolaters, blessed be all Israelites; and blessed be Harbonah, who hanged Haman<sup>3</sup>.'

In the earliest days of the Christian Church as well there was a certain amount of hesitation as to the acceptance of the Book.

<sup>1</sup> d. A.D. 1204.

<sup>2</sup> See Carpzov, *Introd.* xx. § 6.

<sup>3</sup> See Stanley, *Jewish Church*, iii. 178. Further particulars will be found in Additional Note I.

Melito, Bishop of Sardis<sup>1</sup>, who made careful enquiry from the Syrian Jews as to the limits of the Old Testament Canon, omits Esther from the list which he compiled<sup>2</sup>. St Athanasius and St Gregory of Nazianzus omit the Book from their lists of canonical writings. The former, however, placed Esther (with the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Judith and Tobit) in an intermediate class between canonical books on the one hand, and such apocryphal writings as were to be excluded from use in public worship on the other. This intermediate class was permitted for use in Churches, and was hence entitled (books) publicly read (*ἀναγιγνωσκόμενα*). St Augustine, and St Cyril of Jerusalem accept the Book as canonical, as do Origen and St Jerome, although these two place it last on their lists<sup>3</sup>.

We should remember, however, that as many of the Fathers were ignorant of Hebrew, they were dependent upon the form in which the Book appeared to the Greek-speaking world in the LXX., thus including the apocryphal Additions (see next section); and difficulties naturally felt about receiving these Additions may have brought suspicion upon the whole. Further, there may have been occasional confusion even in those days between the Books of Esther and Ezra, or even those of Esdras, as we know to have been the case in at least one instance at a much later date. The book which Martin Luther has been charged with contemptuously tossing into the Elbe was not Esther but Esdras<sup>4</sup>. It is, however, quite true that the former Book was far from being a favourite with that Reformer, who says<sup>5</sup> that he wishes that 'it did not exist, for it hath too much of Judaism, and a great deal of heathenish naughtiness.' This, however, is not the only one of Luther's utterances as to parts of the Bible, which may well be thought to savour of impetuosity rather than sober judgment. We have already sought to indicate the point

<sup>1</sup> Latter half of 2nd century A.D.

<sup>2</sup> See Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* iv. 26. Some writers on the Canon, however, consider that this omission is accidental.

<sup>3</sup> See further in Ryle, ch. xi.

<sup>4</sup> See Stanley, *Jewish Church*, iii. 178 for authorities.

<sup>5</sup> *Table Talk*, clix. 6; *Bondage of the Will*, in *Works*, iii. 182.

of view whence profitably to regard a Book which, differing though it does in more than one striking respect from what we might *a priori* expect to find as a constituent part of Holy Writ, is yet, upon thoughtful and sympathetic consideration of its Jewish authorship, far from deserving to be excluded from the Books which are 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness'.<sup>1</sup>

§ 6. *Relation of the Original Hebrew to the Septuagint Version.*

On turning to the Greek form of the Book of Esther, we are confronted with the fact that it contains a considerable amount of additional matter. These Additions consist of seven sections, the first placed as an introduction to the Book, and the others at various points in the story. These sections appear together in an English form in that book of the Apocrypha which bears for its full title, 'The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther, which are found neither in the Hebrew, nor in the Chaldee.' In the English Version they present a confused and unintelligible appearance, if we attempt to read them as continuous, inasmuch as they are there severed from their proper contexts in which they form parts of a consecutive history; and the section which stands first (x. 4—xi. 1) ought properly to be placed last. The severance came about thus. When St Jerome, in the course of his labours in producing the Latin Version of the Scriptures, arrived at the Book of Esther, his acquaintance with Hebrew at once made apparent to him the discrepancy between the existing Hebrew and Greek forms of the Book. Accordingly, he proceeded first to render the Hebrew into Latin, but, not wishing to ignore the shape in which the Book was accepted by Greek-speaking Christians, he appended the several sections, commencing with that which in the LXX. followed immediately upon the close of the Hebrew part of the Book, viz. x. 4—xi. 1 (the last verse forming an explanatory note as to the date of the Greek translation), and adding the remaining sections peculiar to

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16.

the LXX. in the order in which they lay imbedded in the rest of the narrative, with a note in each case stating at what point in the Hebrew it was to be inserted. In the course of time, however, the notes disappeared, and so arose the confused result above mentioned.

The original position of the Additions is as follows<sup>1</sup>:

Chapter x. 4—13 and xi. 1, Interpretation of the Dream, etc., was the 7th Addition, forming the conclusion of the Book.

Chapter xi. 2—12 and Chapter xii., the Dream and the Conspiracy of the two Eunuchs, was the 1st Addition, forming the Introduction to the Book.

Chapter xiii. 1—7, the Royal Decree against the Jews, was the 2nd Addition, and was placed after chap. iii. 13.

Chapter xiii. 8—18, the Prayer of Mordecai, was the 3rd Addition, and was placed after chap. iv. 17.

Chapter xiv., the Prayer of Esther, was the 4th Addition, and was placed after the Prayer of Mordecai.

Chapter xv., Esther's Interview with the King, was the 5th Addition, and was placed before chap. v. 3.

Chapter xvi., the Royal Decree in favour of the Jews, was the 6th Addition, and was placed after chap. viii. 12.

Even irrespective of the fact that this additional matter has no counterpart in the Hebrew, there are certain inconsistencies and discrepancies contained in these sections rendering it clear that they are rightly called 'Additions.' The date which they assign to Mordecai's discovery of the conspiracy against the king is in the second instead of the seventh year of his reign. Moreover, a reward is *at once* bestowed for the service thus rendered. Again, the language of Ahasuerus's edict in favour of the Jews (xvi.) is inconsistent with the unalterable character ascribed in the Book to the law of the Medes and Persians<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the Table in Churton's *Uncanonical and Apocryphal Scriptures*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Inconsistencies are also noticeable in xi. 2 ff., cpd. with ii. 21; xii. 5, cpd. with vi. 3; xii. 6, cpd. with iii. 1, 4 f.; xv. 18, cpd. with ix. 12; while

A main object of these insertions in the original story was evidently to remove the uneasiness arising from the secular tone of the latter. There is no longer any scruple in introducing the name of God. Prayer assumes a prominent place, and throughout we see the effort to give a strongly religious character to the Book. The royal edicts, moreover, inserted doubtless in imitation of the genuine extracts contained in Ezra and Nehemiah, bear internal evidence that they are invented for the occasion, and, moreover, are probably not the work of the writer mainly responsible for the other additional matter.

The question may be asked, What was the primary language in which the Additions were written? Have they a Hebraic (Hebrew or Aramaic) origin behind the Greek form in which we know them? It has been held by some that the LXX. text is a translation from an original, of which the existing Hebrew text is an abbreviated form. The latter, it has been suggested, was made for use in the synagogues to supersede the older, inasmuch as the other, with its more directly religious tone and its frequent use of the name of God, was held to be unsuitable for reading in connexion with the scenes of conviviality into which the celebration of the feast of Purim had degenerated. None of the arguments, however, which are adduced for this view are satisfactory<sup>1</sup>, and it is opposed to both external and internal evidence. Josephus<sup>2</sup>, while elsewhere in his narrative following with tolerable fidelity the LXX. Version as based on the Hebrew, shews in the part of his account corresponding to these Additions a marked independence, thereby apparently indicating that he held them in less esteem than the rest. Moreover, the character of the Greek itself lends little or no support to the view that it represents a Hebraic original. This is especially true of the diffuse and bombastic

we may perceive such expressions as 'Hades' (xiii. 7), 'drink-offerings' (xiv. 17), 'chosen people' (xvi. 21) to be unsuitable in the mouth of a Persian king.

<sup>1</sup> They may be seen fully set forth and criticised in the *Speaker's Commentary on the Apocrypha*, i. 362 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquities of the Jews*, xi. 6.

style of a part of it, viz. chs. xiii. and xvi.<sup>1</sup> To perceive the difference the English reader may compare with those royal letters the extracts from the Aramaic commentary (Targum Shēnī) which are given in Additional Note III. It is true that a few expressions in the Additions have been adduced<sup>2</sup> as Hebraisms in support of the above mentioned theory, but in fact they shew nothing more than that the author was a Jew.

In connexion with the Additions there may be asked another question, to which it is not so easy to return a satisfactory answer. Did there first exist a Greek Version (now lost) of the Hebrew as it stands, and were the Additions subsequently inserted, or were they introduced at once by the Greek translator, either composed by himself, or taken from some other source? It may be suggested in reply that the inconsistencies between them and the portion of the story which exists in Hebrew as well can be more easily accounted for, if we suppose that the translator of the latter was not himself responsible for their composition, inasmuch as his work must have made him too familiar with the Hebrew form of the narrative to have been himself guilty of deviating from it even in the details here referred to. But, after all, this argument is precarious, and a comparison between the Greek rendering of the Hebrew and the Greek of the Additions does not seem to justify us in differentiating with any degree of confidence the authorship of the two parts, or in assuming the existence of an otherwise unknown Greek Version corresponding to the Hebrew form of the Book.

The Greek Version of the Book is on the whole a tolerably good rendering but decidedly paraphrastic and exhibiting certain omissions. Such omissions are (*a*) the somewhat obscure clause in the Hebrew of i. 22 (see note there), (*b*) Esther's name, Hadassah (ii. 7), (*c*) Mordecai's refusal to acknowledge Haman (v. 9), (*d*) the clause concerning the 'crown royal' (vi. 8), (*e*) difficulties in viii. 10, 14, (*f*) the whole of ix. 30.

<sup>1</sup> See examples in the *Speaker's Comm.* as above referred to.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. by Kaulen, *Einleitung*, § 271. Such are τῆ μιᾶ τοῦ Νεωᾶ (xi. 2), κινδυνὸς μου ἐν χειρὶ μου (xiv. 5).

Besides omissions of this sort, there is also a certain amount of freedom observable in the Greek translation. Thus 'Artaxerxes' (*Ἀρταξέρξης*) and 'the king' (*ὁ βασιλεύς*) are used interchangeably, and the Hebrew for 'princes' is rendered sometimes by one word (*φίλοι*, i. 3, ii. 18, iii. 1), sometimes by another (*ἄρχοντες*, i. 14, 16, 21). In the Hebrew of Esther there is considerable room for this variation in rendering, as it abounds in particular turns of expression and repetitions<sup>1</sup>.

Thus freedom of translation and a certain lack of accuracy detract somewhat from the value of the LXX. in this Book as a witness to the original. But specially in proper names the Greek is often startlingly different.

In i. 2 the LXX. adds the words, 'when Artaxerxes the king was enthroned' (*ὅτε ἐθρονίσθη Ἀρταξέρξης ὁ βασιλεύς*). Now the substantive (*ἐνθρονισμός*) corresponding to this verb is a peculiarly Egyptian term for the enthronement or coronation festival of the Ptolemaic dynasty. This insertion therefore seems to point to Egypt as the place where the Book was translated.

The Greek form of the Book appears in two recensions<sup>2</sup>, which differ considerably from one another, both in the portion representing the original and in the Additions. That which is the later of the two recensions (called G\* in the notes) probably is not earlier than the 3rd century A.D. The date of the former, as we shall now see, precedes this by several hundred years.

<sup>1</sup> The translator occasionally shews lack of acquaintance with words belonging to the later Hebrew, e.g. *v'illu*, *וַיְלִי*, in vii. 4. In i. 6 on the contrary he read *v'dar*, *וַדַּר*, as though it were a word of the new or later Hebrew, and equivalent to the Greek *ῥόδον*. Also in the same place he connected *v'sūchareth* (*וְסוּחָרֶת*) with the Aramaic *s'chōr* (*סְחֹר* = Heb. *sābhīb*, *סָבִיב*).

<sup>2</sup> Both to be found in Lagarde (*libr. canon. Vet. Test.* i. pp. 504 ff.) and in Fritzsche's *Lib. apocr. Vet. Test.*, pp. 30 ff. G\* gives us the text known as 'Lucianic.' Lucian (martyred at Nicomedia, *circa* A.D. 311) acquired a great reputation for Biblical learning as the author of a 3rd century revision of the Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments as used in Syria. For the evidence that certain extant 'cursive' Greek MSS. preserve for us the text as revised by him see Swete, *Introd. to the O.T. in Greek*, pp. 82 f.

A kind of note or subscription to that which in the LXX. forms the last of the 'Additions,' and which now appears in the apocryphal portion of the English Book as xi. 1, runs as follows :

'In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and a Levite, and Ptolemy his son, brought the epistle of Phrurai here set forth, which they said was the same, and that Lysimachus the son of Ptolemy, that was in Jerusalem, had interpreted it.'

The indication of date contained in this apparently explicit statement is much less satisfactory than it may at first sound. Among Egyptian royal personages both Ptolemy and Cleopatra were names far from uncommon, and there were no fewer than four Ptolemies (Epiphanes, Philometor, Physcon, and Lathyrus) who each married a Cleopatra. The most natural hypothesis is, however, to make the above reference to apply to Philometor, whose fourth year was B.C. 179—8. The 'epistle of Phrurai' probably refers not, as some have thought, merely to the section ix. 20 ff., but to the whole of Esther, and 'may have been written with the purpose of giving Palestinian sanction to the Greek Version of that book, but it vouches for the fact that the version was in circulation before the end of the second century B.C.<sup>1</sup>

### § 7. *Relation of the Book of Esther to other literature.*

Josephus in telling this story<sup>2</sup> frequently differs in details. He seems to have had few if any other materials<sup>3</sup> for the story than those we now possess in the shape of the Hebrew text and the Greek Additions; but he handled those materials in some cases with considerable freedom. He gives nothing corresponding to the note or subscription which we have considered at the end of the last section. His method in dealing with the materials now extant is exemplified in his treatment of the prayers of

<sup>1</sup> Swete, *Introduction to the O.T. in Greek*, p. 25; but cp. pp. 257 f., where he questions the historical value of the note.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiquities of the Jews*, xi. § 6. His book was completed A.D. 93—4.

<sup>3</sup> Such may possibly be the additional passages (xi. § 6. 10) which he speaks of as read to Ahasuerus from the chronicles of the kingdom.

Mordecai and Esther (xiii. 8—18, xiv.). In the former Mordecai is made by him to ask that his refusal to bow down before Haman may not bring misfortune upon the innocent nation. In the latter Esther prays for personal beauty, that she may thereby move the heart of the king.

Two principal Targums, or Aramaic paraphrases, upon Esther exist<sup>1</sup>. The latter is the more interesting of the two, and exhibits in a marked degree the characteristic features of Jewish commentaries in the shape of fantastic legends<sup>2</sup>. Both probably owe their origin to the desire to provide literature suitable for the convivialities of Purim. A third Targum<sup>3</sup> gives the Aramaic rendering without additional matter. They are all assigned to the authorship of a society or College of learned Jews, named Geonim, who flourished A.D. 600—1000<sup>4</sup>. In this connexion may be mentioned the still later work said to be by Josippon ben Gorion, which contains clear traces of the Greek Additions, and, lastly, the Midrash, or Hebrew Commentary named Megillath Esther<sup>5</sup>.

### § 8. *Character of the Hebrew.*

The Book is written in an easy and simple style, and the sentences for the most part are straightforward and free from ambiguity. It contains, however, a certain number of words characteristic of later Biblical Hebrew; also Persian words, to which attention is drawn from time to time in the notes. It might have been thought that this admixture of later forms and

<sup>1</sup> The earlier is to be found in Walton's Polyglott, vol. ii., the second (*Targum Shēni*) in Bomberg's Hebrew Bible, Venice, 1517, and appears in English as Appendix I to P. Cassel's *Comm. on Esther* (T. and T. Clark). Both are given in Lagarde, *Hagiographa Chaldaica*.

<sup>2</sup> See Additional Note II (*Haggādā*).

<sup>3</sup> See Antwerp Polyglott, vol. iii.

<sup>4</sup> The word Geonim denotes in Hebrew *excellent*. The title therefore properly denotes eminent or illustrious teachers of the various seats of Jewish learning in those days. In actual use, however, it often bore a narrower import as a title belonging to the heads of the renowned Academy of Sura, on the Euphrates. See further in Abraham's *Short History of Jewish Literature*, pp. 37 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Wünsche, *Biblioth. Rabb.*, Part ix., Leipzig.

constructions would be likely to afford us considerable help in the direction of determining the date of the Book of Esther. We do not however in point of fact derive much assistance from this source. For even after the later Hebrew, such as we find e.g. in the Mishnah, had come into use, we must allow for the tendency to write books in a style imitative of classical Hebrew models.

### CHRONOLOGY.

B.C.

- 538. Capture of Babylon by Cyrus and Foundation of the Persian Empire.
- 529. Cambyses.
- 522. Pseudo-Smerdis and Darius I (Hystaspes).
- 485. Xerxes.
- 480. Battles of Thermopylae and Salamis.
- 465. Artaxerxes I (Longimanus).
- 424. Darius II (Nothus).
- 405. Artaxerxes II (Mnemon).
- 359?. Artaxerxes III (Ochus).
- 336. Darius III (Codomannus).
- 333. Alexander the Great overthrows the Persian Empire.
- 223. Antiochus III (the Great).
- 198. He obtains possession of Palestine.
- 182. Ptolemy Philometor.
- 175. Antiochus IV (Epiphanes).
- 168. He seizes Jerusalem and desecrates the Temple.
- 167—165. Rise and Victories of the Maccabees.

# ESTHER.

NOW it came to pass in the days of <sup>1</sup>Ahasuerus, (this is 1 Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto

<sup>1</sup> Or, *Xerxes*. Heb. *Ahashverosh*.

## CHAP. I. 1—9. THE GREAT FEAST GIVEN BY AHASUERUS AT SUSIA.

1. *Now it came to pass*] Heb. *And it came to pass*. 'And' is a strange word with which to begin a book. In the case of similar openings to other historical Books (Joshua, Judges, etc.) it implies the continuation of a former narrative. Here, on the other hand, as probably at the commencement of Ezekiel and Jonah, it only denotes a connexion in the writer's own mind with preceding history in general or with the period of Ahasuerus in particular. It may even have become established as an opening formula, irrespective of its strict applicability.

*Ahasuerus*] The Heb. *Ahashvērōsh* represents the Persian *Khshayarsha* (*mighty eye*, or, *mighty man*), whence was derived the Greek *Xerxes*, who is no doubt the monarch intended. The Ahasuerus of this Book has indeed been identified with (a) Cambyses (B.C. 529), father of Darius Hystaspes, on the strength of Daniel ix. 1, a passage, however, which in reality lends no aid to this hypothesis (see Driver in *Camb. Bible*, *ad loc.*), or (b) Artaxerxes Longimanus, the son and successor of Xerxes (B.C. 465—425), with whom the LXX., followed by Josephus, identifies him, or (c) Cyaxares, a Median ruler, or (d) 'Darius the Mede' of Dan. v. 31 (where see note in *Camb. Bible*).

The last two identifications may be at once dismissed. Ahasuerus was evidently a king of *Persia*, as is shewn by the extent of his dominions as well as from other considerations, such as the whole atmosphere of the Book. Moreover (b) is precluded by the Hebrew, which uses the form *Artahshashtha* for Artaxerxes (Ezra iv. 7). Accordingly there can be little or no doubt that Xerxes (B.C. 485—465), conspicuous in history for the defeat of his gigantic armaments at Salamis (B.C. 480) and Plataea (479), is the king of whom we here read. Further, (i) the capricious and sensual character of Ahasuerus corresponds with the notices of Xerxes in Herodotus (ix. 108 ff.), (ii) the extent of his empire agrees with the account here, (iii) the gathering at

Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces :)  
 2 that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the <sup>1</sup>palace,

<sup>1</sup> Or, *castle*.

Susa in the third year of his reign (*v.* 3) harmonises with the statement of Herodotus (*vii.* 8) that after Xerxes' subjugation of Egypt there was a great assembly of satraps at Susa to make arrangements for the attack on Greece about two years later, while the interval of four years between Vashti's disgrace and Esther's promotion (*ii.* 16) leaves time for the king's return from that ill-fated expedition to comfort himself for its ignominious ending with sensual gratifications.

[*from India even unto Ethiopia*] The word in the original for India (*Hōddu*) appears to represent the Persian *Hidush*. Both have lost the *n* which has been retained by the Greek (*LXX.* Ἰνδουκῆς), and so (through the Latin) by ourselves. The name was originally confined to the land watered by the seven streams of the Indus, and was later extended eastward and southward. Ethiopia, here and elsewhere, is the Heb. Cush.

[*an hundred and seven and twenty provinces*] The satrapies into which the Persian Empire was divided were, according to Herodotus (*iii.* 89), at first but twenty. The Heb. word here, however, (*mēdīnah*) denotes a subdivision of the satrapy, so that the large number given in the text may be quite accurate. The later Aramaic paraphrase (*Targum Shēnī*, or second Targum; see *Introd.* p. xxxiii) fancifully connects the number of the provinces over which Ahasuerus was permitted by God to rule with the fact that he was destined to take for his queen a descendant of Sarah who lived a hundred and twenty-seven years (see *Gen.* xxiii. 1).

2. *Shushan the palace*] i.e. Susa. Ecbatana, Babylon, Persepolis, and Susa were all places of sojourn for the Persian court for longer or shorter periods.

'Shushan the palace,' which is to be distinguished from 'Shushan the city' (*ix.* 13—15) was built by Darius, father of Xerxes, on the same plan as the palace at Persepolis. The city of Susa was cut in two by a wide river, anciently called the Choaspes, and now known under the name of *Ab-Kharkha*. The populous quarters on the right bank are now marked by hardly perceptible undulations of the plain; on the left, the royal city, the citadel, and the palace. "Three huge mounds, forming a rhomboidal mass, 4500 feet long from N. to S., and 3000 feet broad from E. to W., are a standing witness to the size and magnificence of the buildings which formed the ancient citadel or acropolis," Driver in *Camb. Bible* on *Dan.* viii. 27.

M. Dieulafoy, a French architect and engineer, in 1884—6 carried out important excavations at Susa, and brought to light many interesting features, recovering the plan of the citadel, and extensive remains of the buildings of which it consisted. "Artaxerxes, in an inscription found on one of the columns, says: 'My ancestor Darius built this *Apaddna* in ancient times. In the reign of Artaxerxes, my grandfather, it was

in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his <sup>3</sup> princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media,

consumed by fire. By the grace of Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras, I have restored this *Apadāna*.<sup>1</sup> An *Apadāna* was a large hall or throne-room. The *Apadāna* of Susa stood on the N. of the Acropolis: it formed a square of about 250 feet each way. The roof (which consisted of rafters and beams of cedar, brought from Lebanon) was supported by 36 columns in rows of six; the sides and back were composed of walls of brick, each pierced by four doors; the front of the hall was open. The columns were slender shafts of limestone, delicately fluted, and topped by magnificently carved capitals. In front of the hall, on each side, was a pylon or colonnade, with a frieze at the top 12 feet high, formed of beautifully enamelled bricks, the one decorated by a procession of lions, the other by a procession of 'Immortals,' the armed life-guards of the Persian kings. A garden surrounded the *Apadāna*, and in front of it on the south, was a large square for military manoeuvres, etc. Adjoining it, on the east, was a large block of buildings forming the royal harem (the 'house of the women' of Est. ii. 3, etc.): south of this was the royal palace, with a court in the centre (Est. iv. 11, v. 1). The entire acropolis covered an area of 300 acres<sup>2</sup>.

The word *bīrah* translated 'palace' (marg. *castle*) probably includes the idea of a stronghold as well as a royal residence, and in fact seems to have a still wider application in ix. 6, where see note. The king's place of residence is indicated by a different expression in v. 5, ii. 8, iv. 13, vii. 7, 8. Benjamin of Tudela, a Spanish-Hebrew traveller in the East in the 12th century (ed. Asher, London and Berlin, 1840, i. 117), mentions visiting the ruins of Xerxes' palace, adding that even at that time 7000 Jews lived at Susa.

3. *in the third year of his reign*] probably B.C. 483.

*unto all his princes and his servants*] The ruins at Persepolis and at Susa shew that there was abundant accommodation for the exercise of royal hospitality. Besides the palace built by Darius, Persepolis also contains one erected by Xerxes himself. Herodotus (i. 126) mentions the feasts given by the Persian kings. But the amplitude of the entertainments provided was doubtless much exaggerated in the statement of the Greek historian, Ctesias<sup>2</sup> (a contemporary of Herodotus, but an untrustworthy historian), to the effect that no less than fifteen thousand persons were ordinarily feasted at the table of Persian monarchs, and that 400 talents were spent upon a feast.

*the power of Persia and Media*] The Medes were governed by a

<sup>1</sup> Driver, *ibid.* who also points out that in one of the galleries of the Louvre, Paris, several rooms are devoted to sculptures, etc., brought from Susa, and to a restoration of parts of the *Apadāna*. He refers, among other works, to Dieulafoy, *L'Acropole de Suse*, Mme Dieulafoy, *À Suse, Journal des Fouilles*, and *La Perse, la Chaldée, et la Susiane*, Chap. xxxix., all with illustrations and maps.

<sup>2</sup> Fragment xxxvii. ed. A. Lion, Göttingen, 1823. Ctesias was physician to Artaxerxes Mnemon, who reigned B.C. 405-359.

the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him :  
 4 when he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the  
 honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred  
 5 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  
 6 the court of the garden of the king's palace ; *there were  
 hangings of*<sup>1</sup> *white cloth, of*<sup>2</sup> *green, and of blue, fastened with  
 cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of  
 marble : the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pave-*

<sup>1</sup> Or, *fine cloth, white and blue.*

<sup>2</sup> Or, *cotton.*

number of independent chiefs (the 'kings of the Medes' referred to in Jer. li. 11, 28). They were united with the Persians under the sway of Cyrus, and he, as well as subsequent kings of Persia, treated them as the most favoured nation of those under their rule. This was especially the case in respect to the exercise of the Persian king's patronage as to important governorships.

*the nobles*] lit. *the first men.* The Heb. is a modification of the old Persian word *fratama*.

*princes of the provinces*] i.e. satraps, each having (see above) a plurality of provinces under his rule, and being in the position of a tributary king.

4. *the riches etc.*] Herod. (vii. 27) tells of the golden plane tree and the golden vine given by Pythius, a rich man of Celaenae, to Darius. Aeschylus (*Persae*, 161) mentions the walls hung with gold<sup>1</sup>. The text may refer among other things to the ingots of gold which Darius had stored in the treasury (Herod. iii. 96).

*an hundred and fourscore days*] This may mean a series of entertainments to successive relays of guests. The 'princes' could scarcely be all spared from their satrapies at once.

5. *in the court of the garden*] See notes on v. 2.

6. *there were hangings of white cloth, of green, and of blue*] marg. *fine cloth, white (or cotton) and blue.* The word translated 'green' in the text is best rendered *cotton*, and is of Persian origin<sup>2</sup>. The cords, which by means of silver rings attached the hangings to the pillars, furnished a contrast of colour, viz. fine, white linen, mixed with a reddish purple.

*pillars of marble*] The remains of the pillars found at Susa are of a dark blue limestone, which the Heb. word may very well denote.

*the couches were of gold and silver*] i.e. with coverlets of gold and silver work, or possibly with a framework of these materials (so the Targum explains), like those which Herod. (ix. 82) tells us that Xerxes brought with him on his expedition against Greece.

<sup>1</sup> χρυσεστόλους δάμους.

<sup>2</sup> Καρπας borrowed by the Greek in the form κάρασος (Lat. *carbassus*).

ment <sup>1</sup>of red, and white, and yellow, and black marble. And 7 they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the <sup>2</sup>bounty of the king. And the drinking was 8 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 9 the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house.

<sup>1</sup> Or, of porphyry, and white marble, and alabaster, and stone of blue colour.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. hand.

[of red, and white, and yellow, and black marble] marg. or, of porphyry, and white marble, and alabaster, and stone of blue colour. For the 'white and yellow' of R.V. A.V. had 'blue and white.' A mosaic pavement of various costly materials is apparently meant, but the precise meaning of the terms used is uncertain. Perhaps we may take it that each is the name of a material, not a colour, and render *porphyry* (or *alabaster*), *marble*, *pearl-stone*, and *dark paving-stone*. We should observe, however, that the second of these is the same word as that used in the description of the pillars (see note), and that the last may mean marble with dark spots or streaks. The LXX. adds that there were crystal couches scattered over with roses.

7. *vessels of gold*] Many such were captured by the Greeks in the Persian camp near Plataea.

[*the vessels being diverse one from another*] This seems to be noted as an unusual circumstance. In the representation of Sargon's banquet depicted upon the walls of his palace at Khorsabad, the goblets held by the banqueters are uniform in shape (see Rawlinson, *Ancient Monarchies*, 2nd ed. i. 580).

*bounty*] Heb. *hand*, i.e. as was to be expected in the case of so great a sovereign, in a right royal fashion.

8. *according to the law*] rather, according to the direction given by the king for the occasion. The words which follow suggest that ordinarily hard drinking was enforced. Drunkenness was common among the Persians<sup>1</sup>.

9. *Vashti the queen*] If we identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes, the queen here mentioned must have been Amestris, his only wife known to secular history. She was daughter of Otanes (Herod. vii. 61), one of the seven who conspired against Pseudo-Smerdis (B.C. 522). The name Vashti has been explained as another form of Amestris, the letters *m* and *v* readily interchanging as labials. It may, however, be a modification of the Old Persian *vahista*, *excellent*.

[*made a feast for the women*] The sexes were separated in the case of

<sup>1</sup> See the description of a drunken company put by Xenophon (*Cyropaedia*, i. 3. 12) into the mouth of Cyrus, who describes the spectacle presented by Astyages himself and his friends on the occasion of the king's birthday feast. See also Additional Note III, in the first extract from the Jewish commentary called *Targum Shēni*.

- 10 which belonged to king Ahasuerus. 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 <sup>1</sup>chamberlains that  
 11 ministered in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the peoples and the princes her beauty: for she was  
 12 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.  
 13 Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times,

<sup>1</sup> Or, *eunuchs* (and so in ver. 12, etc.).

all public meals, although the Persian custom seems to have been that the queen was as a rule admitted to the king's table<sup>1</sup>.

*in the royal house*] The harem was probably on the south side of the above-mentioned hall of pillars.

#### 10—22. VASHTI'S DISGRACE.

10. *he commanded Mehuman etc.*] The names of the seven chamberlains, or rather, eunuchs, who were sent to fetch Vashti, vary much in their form in the LXX. and other versions. Their derivation is, like their nationality, quite uncertain, inasmuch as the Persian market was largely supplied with men of other races for this purpose.

11. *with the crown royal*] a species of peaked turban, perhaps set off with jewels.

*the peoples*] A.V. *the people*. The R.V., by using the plural, brings out more clearly the sense of the original that the company included persons of different races.

*to shew...her beauty*] Similar stories are told of other Eastern kings, but none involving so public an exposure.

12. *refused to come*] as being aware of the insults likely to be put upon her in a scene of drunken revelry, and by a king so capricious and uncontrolled in temper.

13. *the wise men, which knew the times*] The expression includes two classes of functionaries, (a) the astronomers and astrologers, who based their advice upon observation of the heavens, and (b) students of the laws and customs which had come into existence in the past, and so formed a guide for the direction of present conduct.

*for so was the king's manner etc.*] This does not indicate a custom of Ahasuerus in particular, but is a general remark to the effect that the kings of Persia were in the habit of taking counsel in this way before

<sup>1</sup> See Herod. ix. 110, who tells us that at the annual banquet in celebration of the king's birthday Amestris the queen 'made request of Xerxes that he would please to give her as her present the wife of Masistes' (the king's brother) as it was her cruel desire to torture her.

(for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgement; and the next unto him was Carshena, 14 Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom :) What shall we do unto 15 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 16

coming to any important resolution, and nothing that in any way concerned the king's dignity could be considered insignificant. By conforming to this national use Ahasuerus shewed that even on such an occasion, and while moved by passionate indignation, he was able to put some restraint upon himself. Another example of this usage in the Persian monarchy is that given by Herodotus (iii. 31), where Cambyses asks the opinion of the learned men who were about him before taking his sister in marriage.

14. The names of the seven princes have evidently suffered much in transmission. According to Herodotus (vii. 5—17) Mardonius (Xerxes' cousin) and Artabanus (his uncle) were the king's chief advisers in the early part of his reign. These names may be represented in the text by 'Marsena' and 'Admatha.' The LXX, gives but three names. This may be owing to a scribe (or the original translators) having a partially illegible manuscript to work upon.

*the seven princes of Persia and Media*] who took rank as members of the king's council above the other great men of the kingdom. So in Ezra (vii. 14) we find that Artaxerxes had seven special advisers. There were, according to Herodotus (iii. 84), seven great families in Persia, the heads of which had peculiar rights. One of these rights was that of access to the king at all times, unless when he was in the women's apartments.

*which saw the king's face*] i.e. who had the right of access to his presence. Some connect this privilege with the story of the assassination of the Pseudo-Smerdis (B.C. 522) by Darius and six other conspirators. The latter, we are told, made a bargain with their colleague, whose claims to the throne they were championing, to the effect that they should at all times have the right of approach just mentioned (Herod. iii. 84).

15. *What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law*] Heb. *According to law what is there to do unto the queen Vashti?* thus giving the question a slightly more judicial air, as though the king were considering the matter quite dispassionately, and simply in the interests of his kingdom.

*done the bidding*] a little less heavy form of expression than A.V. 'performed the commandment.'

16. *And Memucan answered*] From the terms of his answer it is evident that there was no existing law in Persia which would meet

princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the peoples that  
 17 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.  
 18 And this day shall the princesses of Persia and Media which have heard of the deed of the queen <sup>1</sup>say *the like* unto all the king's princes. So *shall there arise* <sup>2</sup>much contempt and  
 19 wrath. If it please the king, let there go forth a royal

<sup>1</sup> Or, *tell it*.

<sup>2</sup> Or, *enough*.

the case. Therefore, if it was to be dealt with, one must be enacted. In favour of passing such a law Memucan adduces two considerations; (a) that Vashti's perversity constituted an offence against the whole of the king's dominions, and (b) that it was inexpedient that such an offence should go unpunished, inasmuch as the natural consequence would be that this domestic insubordination would be widely imitated. Memucan thus shews the worst side of an Oriental courtier by the servility with which he overlooks the fact that it was the outrageous conduct of the king which brought about the difficulty, as well as by the somewhat Macchiavellian attempt to cloak the jealousy which he and his companions felt at the queen's influence under the pretext of regard for social welfare throughout the Empire.

*peoples*] See note on v. 11.

17. *to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes*] As compared with A.V. ('so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes') R.V. both improves the English, and furnishes a closer rendering of the Hebrew.

*when it shall be reported*] rather, *while they say*. The Vulgate accordingly has *ut contemnant et dicant*.

18. Memucan points out that, inasmuch as the disobedience was public and notorious—for the princesses who were feasting with Vashti heard her answer—they will 'say the like,' i.e. will meet their husbands' commands with equally insolent replies; or, better, as marg. of R.V., will 'tell it,' viz. spread the story far and wide.

*much*] lit., as in marg., *enough*, meaning, of course, more than enough; an example of the figure of speech called *Litotes*.

*contempt and wrath*] on the part of wives and husbands respectively.

19. *If it please the king*] a standing formula in proposing royal decrees. So often in this book; cp. Neh. ii. 5.

*a royal commandment*] lit. *a commandment of the kingdom*, i.e. an edict which, though directed against an individual, should be registered as a public ordinance, in order that it might come under the class of laws which could not be altered. Memucan had reason to insist upon

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 king give her royal estate <sup>1</sup>unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make <sup>20</sup> shall be published throughout all his kingdom, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. And the saying pleased the king <sup>21</sup> and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, <sup>22</sup> into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *unto her companion*.

this course, as he and those sympathising with him in the advice tendered to the king, would have good cause to dread the vengeance of Vashti, if she should regain her position as queen. Another case of making into an unalterable edict what from its nature was but a temporary measure is to be seen in Dan. vi. 8 f. As regards the whole question, how far the king was bound by any laws, there existed evidently a certain elasticity. Cambyses, desiring to marry his sister (see on v. 13), was told by his advisers that, although there was no law permitting such an act, yet there was one to the effect that the king might do as he pleased.

**20. decree]** Heb. *pithgam*, a loan-word from Old Persian *patigama* (*patigam*, to come to, arrive). It occurs in its Aramaic form (*pithgama*) in Ezra iv. 17, v. 7, 11.

*kingdom]* The usual translation of the Heb. word. By rendering 'empire' (here only in O. T.) the A. V. introduces a distinction which does not exist in the original.

*for it is great]* In point of fact the Persian rule at this time extended over more than half of the known world. The LXX., however, do not appear to have found the words in their text.

**22. he sent letters into all the king's provinces]** There was an excellent system of posts in Persia, which, according to Herodotus, was in full working order in the time of Xerxes. See further on iii. 13.

*to every people after their language]* It would be interesting to know in detail the languages in which these letters may be supposed to have been written. We cannot, however, hope to attain completeness in our list, although there are a considerable number which we may confidently include, as spoken by the subjects of an Empire reaching 'from India even unto Ethiopia' (see i. 1 with note). They may be classed as follows:

(1) *Semitic*. In Babylonia Assyrian or the cognate Babylonian was the language of the government, while probably Aramaic, which is closely akin to these, was commonly spoken. This last, it would

bear rule in his own house, and should publish it according to the language of his people.

appear, was used throughout a large portion of the Persian Empire, and Aramaic inscriptions—one of them bearing date in the fourth year of Xerxes<sup>1</sup>—have been found in a country as distant from the centre of Persian rule as Egypt. The great Semitic family of languages, of which Aramaic is a member, prevailed in more or less varying forms (in addition to the above-named Assyrian and Babylonian) in a large part of the Persian king's dominions, viz. Phœnician, Arabic, Hebrew, and Western or Biblical Aramaic.

(2) *Turanian*. In parts of Assyria and Babylonia there may also have been surviving dialects which belong to a wholly different group of languages, and formed the speech of the old Accadian and Sumerian population. These were branches of the *Turanian* or *Agglutinative* family of which Turkish is one of the representatives at the present day. To this class also belonged Georgian, the most important of the languages spoken on the southern side of the principal Caucasus range.

(3) *Aryan*. This great family, to which can be traced most of the languages of modern Europe, would include Sanscrit and Prakrit, the latter of which is the mother of a large number of the Indian dialects, Zend, the old language of Bactria, and, lastly, the language of Greece, which doubtless at the time of Xerxes was making its way steadily eastward from the country of its birth.

*and should publish it according to the language of his people*] The literal rendering of the Hebrew is *that every man should be ruling in his own house and speaking according to the language of his own people*. This has been explained to refer to cases where men had taken wives from other nations. The wife then must conform to her husband as regards the matter in question, and the language used in the family must be the mother tongue of the latter (so the Targum). The clause will thus be a particular application of the general ordinance that 'every man should bear rule in his own house.' Nehemiah (Neh. xiii. 23 f.) points out as one of the evils of marriages between Jews and non-Jews confusion of language on the part of the children of such unions.

It is, however, doubtful if the text is sound, and a conjecture has been widely adopted, which involves the change of not more than one Heb. consonant<sup>2</sup>. The meaning then will be, *and shall speak whatsoever seems good to him*, i.e. shall give whatever orders he chooses. In favour of this emendation it is pointed out that the new verb introduced by it into the Heb. text is one which, though not very frequent elsewhere, occurs in three other passages in this Book (iii. 8, v. 13, vii. 4). On the other hand it is dubious whether the

<sup>1</sup> See the Palaeographical Society's Oriental Series, plate lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> בְּלִשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ instead of בְּלִשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ.

After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus 2 was pacified, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. Then said the king's 2 servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: and let the king appoint officers 3 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 <sup>1</sup>Hegai the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: and let the maiden 4

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *Hege*.

construction which it involves is permissible Hebrew. The LXX. omits the words, and translates the preceding clause, *so that they might have fear in their houses*, meaning apparently, *so that the husbands might be respected at home*<sup>1</sup>.

#### CHAP. II. 1-18. ESTHER'S ELEVATION TO BE QUEEN.

1. *After these things*] Two years elapsed between the council of leading men held at Susa (see on i. 1) and Xerxes' actual departure on his expedition against Greece (B.C. 481). If we were to accept the historical character of the story, we should have to suppose that the search for an eligible consort would go on during his absence. But the writer in all probability does not contemplate any such interval, or recognise in his own mind the war of that date.

*he remembered Vashti*] This and the words which follow suggest that the king was inclined to relent if the decree had not been irrevocable. The LXX., *he no longer remembered Vashti*, has no claim to be regarded as the right reading.

2. *Then said the king's servants*] naturally alarmed at their sovereign's incipient change of disposition, which might bring disaster upon themselves.

3. *to the house of the women*] the harem, which must have been of large dimensions, and was made up, as we see from v. 14, of more than one building. It most likely consisted of three portions, viz. the house of the queen, such as Solomon built for Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings vii. 8), the house of the virgins (v. 9), and that of the concubines (v. 14).

*Hegai*] It is best, for the sake of uniformity, to spell thus throughout (cp. vv. 8, 15). The A.V. follows the Heb., which is inconsistent, giving in this verse *Hege*, and elsewhere *Hegai*.

*their things for purification*] See v. 12. The Heb. word for 'purification' means properly *scraping* or *rubbing*, for the purpose of cleansing or polishing.

<sup>1</sup> ὥστε εἶναι φόβον αὐτοῖς ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις αὐτῶν.

which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

- 5 There was a certain Jew in Shushan the palace, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the  
6 son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives which had been carried away

5. *There was a certain Jew*] The grammatical form in the original may be intended to emphasize the abruptness with which Mordecai is brought upon the scene. The influence which he, a Jew, is to have upon the history is thus placed in significant contrast with the brilliancy of the court of Susa.

*Mordecai*] It may surprise us that a name which properly means a votary of the Babylonian god Marduk, another form of Merodach (Jupiter), should be borne by a Jew<sup>1</sup>. It has been suggested that it may have been given to the son in compliment to a Babylonian friend or master, and without any reference to its derivation, just as, in later days, the name Martin, e.g. St Martin of Tours, is completely devoid of associations with its etymological source. Mordecai, the cousin and adoptive father of Esther, is to be distinguished from the Mordecai who was a companion of Zerubbabel (Ezra ii. 2; Neh. vii. 7). He has, without justification, been identified with Matacas, described by Ctesias<sup>2</sup> as a powerful favourite of Xerxes.

*the son of Jair etc.*] These names may denote respectively Mordecai's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. It is better, however, to consider Shimei and Kish to be the well-known members of the tribe of Benjamin, the former appearing in the history of David (2 Sam. xvi. 5 ff.; 1 Kings ii. 8, 36-46), and the latter as father of Saul (1 Sam. ix. 1, xiv. 51; 1 Chron. viii. 33). Thus only these *prominent* links are mentioned in tracing the descent, it being a frequent practice among the Jews to omit less important members of a genealogy. Jewish tradition, accordingly, as expressed in the Targum on this passage, identifies Shimei with the enemy of David. Josephus takes the same view, as is shewn by his statement that Esther, Mordecai's cousin, was of royal descent, thus referring to Kish in his relationship to Saul. See further in note on iii. 1.

6. *who had been carried away*] According to Heb. grammar, the relative pronoun should refer to Mordecai. If, however, he was even as a boy one of the captives in the time of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, 2 Kings xxiv. 6), B.C. 598, and if, as we have seen, Ahasuerus is to be

<sup>1</sup> But see Sayce (*The Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 470), who points out that "in the contract tablets which have been discovered under the soil of Babylonia we occasionally find the names of Jews, and in some instances these Jews are associated with persons evidently of the same nationality, but who have adopted, if not the beliefs, at all events the divine names of the Babylonian religion." He adds instances.

<sup>2</sup> *Persica*, xvii.

with <sup>1</sup>Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he <sup>2</sup>brought up <sup>7</sup>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 <sup>8</sup>pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was

<sup>1</sup> In 2 Kings 24. 6, *Jehoiachin*.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *nourished*.

identified with Xerxes, Mordecai's age would be something like 120 years, while his cousin Esther must also have been much too old. To get rid of this difficulty (which would only be diminished, not removed, if we were to adopt the otherwise very improbable view that an earlier ruler than Xerxes is intended), it has been sought, in contravention of the grammatical usage of the original, to make the antecedent to be not Mordecai but Kish, taken as the name of the great-grandfather of the former, and as otherwise unknown. But the true explanation doubtless is that the chronological difficulty never occurred to the framer of the story, nor, probably, to his earliest readers, and that he simply meant to represent Mordecai as one of the Jews in exile.

*whom Nebuchadnezzar etc.]* See 2 Kings xxiv. 10 ff.

*7. brought up]* Heb. *was foster-father to* Hadassah. The word is rendered 'nursing-father' in Num. xi. 12; Is. xlix. 23.

*Hadassah, that is, Esther]* Hadassah, from the Heb. *hādas*, 'myrtle'.<sup>1</sup> For this was substituted, either on her becoming queen or earlier, the name Esther, from the Persian *sitāreh*, a star, or from Istar, the Assyrio-Babylonian equivalent of Ashtoreth. For the attempt to identify her with Amestris, the wife of Xerxes, see Introduction, p. xiv. The fact that Mordecai took Esther to be as his own daughter is given as accounting for the familiarity between them.

The *Targum Shēnī* expounds, from the Jewish point of view, the significance of the name Hadassah. She was so called "because as the myrtle spreads fragrance in the world, so did she spread good works. And for this cause she was called in the Hebrew language Hadassah, because the righteous are likened to myrtle." The same commentary adds, "She was also called Hadassah because, as the myrtle does not dry up either in summer or in winter, so the righteous have a share in this world and in the world to come." (Cassel, *Comm.* pp. 299 f.)

*his uncle's daughter]* The Heb. which properly means *uncle*, viz. a father's brother, has also sometimes a wider sense, *beloved one*, friend. We gather from the story that the writer considered Esther to be much younger than her cousin Mordecai.

*8. the king's commandment and his decree]* the former substantive

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the Greek names *Mupria*, *Muppiŋn*, *Muprus*.

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

referring to his orally expressed order, the latter being the same word as that used for 'the laws of the Persians and the Medes' (i. 19).

*Hegai*] See v. 3.

*was taken*] The *Targum Shēnī* says that Esther was hidden by Mordecai, before being removed from his custody by the exercise of the king's authority.

*she obtained kindness of him*] This or a synonymous expression is a favourite one with the author (vv. 15, 17, v. 2).

*speedily*] In order that the prescribed period of twelve months' preparation (see v. 12) might be accomplished as soon as possible in Esther's case, Hegai gave her precedence over others in its commencement.

*her things for purification*] See on v. 3.

*with her portions*] A.V. has more vaguely, *with such things as belonged to her*. The reference is not to unguents of any kind, but to special food given as part of the preparation of those who were to be admitted to the king. So Nebuchadnezzar appointed for the youths who were to 'stand before the king' (Dan. i. 5) a daily portion of the king's dainties and of the wine which he drank.

*and the seven maidens*] The article (wrongly omitted in the A.V.) indicates that it was the custom to assign seven attendants or maids of honour to persons in Esther's position as candidates for the king's favour.

*which were meet to be given her*] suitable to her exceptional claims on the ground of her beauty.

*and he removed etc.*] A.V. has *and he preferred etc.* In this sense, viz. to advance, promote, the verb (occurring also in A.V. of Dan. vi. 3; John i. 15, 27) is now but little used, although the substantive *preferment* has held its ground in common parlance. The Heb. verb simply denotes change, and it is the remainder of the clause which expresses the fact that the change was for the better.

*and her maidens*] The word in the LXX. (*ἄβρα*) is employed to denote female attendants of the choicer kind, like the French *filles d'honneur*. If it be an actual Greek word, it properly means *graceful, delicate*, but in the sense in which it is here used, it may be of foreign origin. Elsewhere it is used of the attendants upon Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. ii. 5), also of Judith's maid (Jud. viii. 33), and again in this Book (iv. 4, 16) and so in the apocryphal Additions (xv. 2, 7).

place of the house of the women. Esther had not shewed 10  
 her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her  
 that she should not shew it. And Mordecai walked every 11  
 day before the court of the women's house, to know how  
 Esther did, and what should become of her. Now when 12  
 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 13  
 wise came the maiden unto the king, whatsoever she desired

10. *Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred*] We must suppose that it would easily be discovered that she, like many of her companions (see v. 3), was not Persian by nation. Thus what she desired to conceal was not simply that she was a foreigner, but that she was a Jewess. Nevertheless we have no knowledge from any other source that there was a special antipathy to her people on the part of the Persians. The concealment of her nationality must, one would think, have involved her in various acts both connected with food (cp. Dan. i. 8 etc.) and otherwise, which were inconsistent with Judaism. According to the *Targum Shēnī* the king on one occasion said to her, "Pray, tell me, who are thy people, and what is thy family?" She replied, "I am ignorant both concerning my people and concerning my family, because, when I was quite a child, my father and mother died and left me." (Cassel, *Comm.* p. 302.)

11. *walked every day before the court of the women's house*] In later times it would have been impossible for one in Mordecai's position, even though holding some post of humble character about the palace, to approach the harem. We cannot, however, say with certainty that the rule was equally stringent in the days of Xerxes. Mordecai was clearly allowed at this time personal intercourse with his adopted daughter, whether in the presence of a third person or otherwise; not so at a later stage of the narrative (iv. 2).

12. *after that it had been done to her according to the law for the women, twelve months*] More accurate than A.V. *after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women.*

*sweet odours*] *spices* or *balsam*. The Hebrew and English words for myrrh (*mōr*) and balsam (*bāsem*) are etymologically identical. These spices came to us from the East, and retained their Eastern names in European languages.

*the things for the purifying*] a general designation including the two items just mentioned. The A.V. less accurately has *other things for the purifying*.

13. *then in this wise*] better than *then thus* of A.V., as marking

was given her to go with her out of the house of the women  
 14 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, which  
 kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more,  
 except the king delighted in her, and that she were called  
 15 by name. Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of  
Abihail the uncle of Mōrdecai, 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  
 16 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  
 17 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  
 18 head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the

more forcibly the commencement of the apodosis, answering to the somewhat distant 'Now when' at the beginning of *v.* 12.

15. *Abihail*] Esther's father is mentioned again in ix. 29. In both places the LXX. reads *Aminadab*, which is its equivalent for *Abinadab*. The object of introducing again at this point the description of Esther's connexion with Mordecai seems to be to call attention to the contrast between the modesty of her requirements and those of her companions on an occasion on which so much depended, and which would in all likelihood prove unique for each one. Her 'requiring nothing' served to emphasize the attractions of her person, and thus was intended to be reckoned to the credit of the Jewish nation.

16. *the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth*] In the time of the Babylonish exile the months ceased to be called by the old Canaanitish names which the Jews had previously given them, e.g. Abib (Exod. xiii. 4), Ziv (1 Kings vi. 1), and were denoted by numbers only. After the exile the new Babylonish names, of which Tebeth is one, began to come into use. The name does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. It corresponded to the latter part of December and earlier part of January, and is derived from a Babylonian root *tebu*, which appears also in Hebrew, and means *to sink* or *dip*, referring to the rainfall by which it is characterised.

*in the seventh year of his reign*] probably in January, B.C. 479. Xerxes had at that time lately returned from his ill-starred expedition against Greece.

17. *the royal crown*] See on i. 11.

king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a <sup>1</sup>release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the <sup>2</sup>bounty of the king. And <sup>19</sup>when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. Esther had not yet <sup>20</sup>shewed her kindred nor her 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, <sup>21</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *rest*.<sup>2</sup> Heb. *hand*.

18. *a release*] Heb. *a rest*, an exemption for a certain time from taxation and from military service. Such e.g. had been granted by the Pseudo-Smerdis on his usurpation (Herod. iii. 67).

*gifts*] The Heb. word was used in older times for a portion of food sent from the table (Gen. xliii. 34; 2 Sam. xi. 8), and afterwards for a contribution or tax imposed for sacred purposes (2 Chron. xxiv. 6), or a present such as largess from a superior (Jer. xl. 5 and here).

*according to the bounty of the king*] See on i. 7.

#### 19—23. MORDECAI'S DISCOVERY OF THE PLOT AGAINST THE KING'S LIFE.

19. *And when the virgins were gathered together the second time*] Render, *Now when maidens were being gathered together a second time*. There is no article attached to the word 'virgins' in the original, and we have no means of knowing what kind of occasion is referred to here. It is merely a conjecture that the reference is to an effort made by the officials to supplant Esther in the king's affections by introducing to his notice such as would better support their influence. The clause is omitted in the LXX.

*then Mordecai sat etc.*] better, perhaps, *and when Mordecai was sitting etc.* In this way we have another circumstantial clause, which is added to the first, and resumed in v. 21. Mordecai occupied a place at the gate of the palace properly so called, or of that division of the women's apartments which was assigned to the queen herself (see on v. 3), that he might utilise any opportunity which presented itself of communicating with his ward. His occupation of this subordinate position is accounted for in v. 20, which is of the nature of a parenthesis.

20. *Esther had not yet shewed etc.*] In the East, when persons rise in rank, it is expected that their relatives will rise with them. But the connexion between Esther and Mordecai had not been disclosed, the queen having been faithful in carrying out the direction of her foster-father to that effect. There is no great improbability of a secret of this sort having been kept under the circumstances of the story.

21. *In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate*] The main course of the story is thus resumed from v. 19.

while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the<sup>1</sup> door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king  
 22 Ahasuerus. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who shewed it unto Esther the queen; and Esther told the king  
 23 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.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *threshold*.

*chamberlains*] eunuchs.

*Bigthan and Teresh*] The former is possibly the Bigtha of i. 10. In vi. 2 he is called Bigthana.

*of those which kept the door*] who guarded the entrance to the room where the king slept. It was a position in which the strictest fidelity was obviously needed, and which gave a conspirator who could attain it a great prospect of success. In point of fact Xerxes himself in the end fell a victim to a murderous attack by an officer of this kind (Diodor. xi. 69. 1), and such too was the fate of one of his successors, Artaxerxes III (Ochus), in B.C. 338.

22. *And the thing was known to Mordecai*] The Targum states that Mordecai was indebted for his discovery to extraordinary linguistic powers, as understanding no fewer than seventy languages! Josephus (*Ant.* xi. 6. 4) less extravagantly attributes it to information obtained from a Jewish slave of the conspirators named Barnabazus.

*told*] simpler than 'certified' of A.V. and more in consonance with the original.

*in Mordecai's name*] but without mentioning his relationship.

23. *And when inquisition...on a tree*] The LXX. have more briefly, 'And the king examined the two eunuchs and hung them.' The word 'examined' probably means by torture.

*hanged on a tree*] crucified or impaled. Such was the form of capital punishment inflicted upon political offenders in Persia (Herod. iii. 159, iv. 43).

*the book of the chronicles*] Herodotus (viii. 90) tells us that historians were attached to Xerxes' court, and moved with it from place to place. Thus these chronicles recorded facts and events of State importance. Doubtless they were written on materials more perishable than the burnt clay tablets, which have been found in the vicinity of Babylon and elsewhere, and which have fortunately transmitted to us public occurrences of their time. Ctesias (see on i. 2) pretended that records set down by Persian chroniclers were the sources from which he drew his information. We may compare the *acta diurna* of the Roman Empire, referred to in Tacitus (*Ann.* xiii. 31). The 'chronicles' mentioned in the text here are referred to again in vi. 1, x. 2. Cp. Ezra iv. 15.

*before the king*] under his supervision, if not actually in his presence.

After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman 3 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, 2

CHAP. III. 1—6. HAMAN OFFENDED BY MORDECAI'S REFUSAL TO MAKE OBEISANCE.

1. *After these things*] i.e. between the seventh (ii. 16) and the twelfth (v. 7) years of Xerxes' reign.

*Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite*] Haman's name has been held to be another form of *Humman* or *Humban*, an Elamite deity, and that of his father to be connected with the Persian *mâh* and *dala*, thus signifying *given by the moon*. The description of Haman as an 'Agagite' is perplexing. The following views have been held.

(a) Josephus (*Ant.* xi. 6. 5) and the Targum understand the statement literally to mean that Haman was descended from Agag, king of Amalek, the latter availing itself of the opportunity of giving a complete genealogy through Amalek to Esau (see Gen. xxxvi. 12). If we accept this explanation of the word, we can see the significance which it bears for the narrator. He desires to place Mordecai and Haman before the reader in the guise of hereditary enemies, the one the descendant of Kish, and thus connected with the first king of Israel, the other the descendant of Agag, Saul's conquered foe. As then, so now, it is a case of a contest between the Jew and his adversary.

(b) The title 'Agagite' may be an allegorical nickname, and intended to indicate a spiritual rather than a natural descent, one whose attitude to the chosen nation was that of the Amalekite king of earlier days.

(c) It may, however, denote a place or family otherwise unknown.

For 'Agagite' the LXX. here and in (ix. 10 and) xii. 6 have *Βυργαean* (*Βουργαίος*), and in ix. 24 and xvi. 10 *the Macedonian* (*ὁ Μακεδών*). The former has been explained as originating in a mistake in reading the first letter in the Heb., or as arising from confusion with Bagoas, a favourite of Alexander the Great (*Curtius* vi. 5. 23). Either of two other explanations, however, is decidedly to be preferred, viz. (a) that it means *bully*, *braggart*, as it occurs twice in this sense in Homer (*Il.* xiii. 824, *Od.* xviii. 79), many of whose words were revived by writers of Alexandrian Greek, or (b) that it is a word denoting eunuch, and afterwards any court official. See Schleusner, *Lexicon Vet. Test.* s.v. The latter title 'Macedonian' either (a) points to the time when the Greek power, rendered dominant in the East by Alexander of Macedon (died B.C. 323), had become through Antiochus Epiphanes (died B.C. 164), who inherited Alexander's conquests in Syria, the type of hostility to the nation of the Jews, or (b) is meant to indicate Haman as a traitor to the Persian power.

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

<sup>1</sup> Or, *words*.

2. *bowed down*] The Heb. expresses a more profound salutation, after the Oriental fashion, than the A.V. 'bow.'

*the king had so commanded*] Bowing down before a superior was such an established custom that one would have thought the king's command needless. It may have been that Haman's elevation was so strongly contrasted with his origin that there was occasion for the order to be issued.

*But Mordecai bowed not down*] What was his reason? Although we have Greeks (Spartan ambassadors) refusing to bow down to the Persian monarch (Herod. vii. 136) on the ground that it was not their custom to worship men, yet the Jews had no objection to the act in itself (2 Sam. xiv. 4, xviii. 28; 1 Kings i. 16), and disobedience to the king's direction in such a matter was fraught with danger.

Two possible answers suggest themselves. (1) He considered Haman as the king's representative, and, as the Persian obeisance to the sovereign involved a belief that he was in some sort an incarnation of the Deity, Mordecai, as a Jew, refused to perform an act of idolatry. If so, however, we do not see how he could avoid bowing down, whenever he happened to be in the presence of the king himself, as in viii. 1. (2) Mordecai, as a Jew, refused to bow down to the hereditary enemy of Israel. See last note and cp. Numb. xxiv. 7. A characteristic piece of Targum says that the king's servants pointed out to Mordecai that a conspicuous ancestor of his, Jacob, had bowed down before one of Haman's forefathers, Esau (Gen. xxxiii. 3). Mordecai, however, replied that he himself was not involved in this act, as being descended from Benjamin who at the time referred to was not yet born.

4. *whether Mordecai's matters would stand*] The Heb. expression signifies either matters or words. They desired to know whether his refusal would pass with impunity. In their eyes it was not only a breach of custom but a piece of unwarrantable presumption.

*for he had told them that he was a Jew*] The point of this clause is not clear. It may mean that they desired to see whether his nationality would exempt him from prostration, or, on the other hand, that they expected him, as belonging to a captive race, to be treated with special severity.

wrath. But he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai. In the first month, which is the month 7 Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur,

6. *But he thought scorn etc.*] Haman's wrath was so excessive that to punish the man who excited it seemed to him as nothing. The whole nation to which his enemy belonged must perish. A little more than forty years previously, at the accession of Darius Hystaspes, there had been a general massacre of the Magi, when the people "slew every Magus who came in their way" (Herod. iii. 79). This and other instances<sup>1</sup> which might be adduced illustrate the tendency towards passionate and excessive vengeance on the part of the Oriental disposition, which holds human life cheap. Some, however, have seen in Haman's conduct the operation of a wider principle in the shape of race-hatred, paralleled in later days by anti-semitic outbursts upon the continent, or the persecution of Eastern Christians by the Turks.

#### 7—15. HAMAN'S SCHEME FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS.

7. *In the first month, which is the month Nisan*] the Hebraised form of the Babylonian *Nisannu*. It is the later substitute for the older Israelite name for the first month of the year, viz. Abib (see on ii. 16), and corresponds to the latter part of March and beginning of April. The meaning of the word Nisan is uncertain. Some make it denote fruitfulness, others, beginning or origin.

Attention has been drawn to the tragic significance of thus plotting the destruction of the Jews in the month of their memorable deliverance from Egypt (Exod. xiii. 4).

*they cast Pur, that is, the lot*] Pur is a word perhaps borrowed from the Persian *pâre*, a piece, fragment, and may be connected with the Latin *pars*, *partis*, or with Assyrian *puru*, or *buru*, a stone. But see further in Additional Note I, p. 67.

The custom of deciding by lot, by means of dice, or pieces of wood, or strips of paper or parchment, prevailed widely in the East, and was considered as a lawful means of committing the decision to Divine agency. Soothsayers and astrologers, who employed this among their methods of determining difficult questions, played an important part in Oriental society. The use of the lot among the Persians is mentioned by Herodotus (iii. 128) and by Xenophon (*Cyrop.* i. 6. 44, iv. 5. 55). For a parallel among the Jews see 1 Sam. xiv. 41 f. (cp. Prov. xvi. 33). We may compare Acts i. 26.

<sup>1</sup> For example, when Cyaxares and the Medes invite to a banquet a large number of Scythians, whose depredations had proved troublesome, and massacre them when drunk (Herod. i. 106).

that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month 8 Adar. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and <sup>1</sup>dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from *those of every people*; neither keep they

<sup>1</sup> Or, *separated*.

*from day to day, and from month to month*] In order to ensure the success of the scheme Haman seems to have gone through the process of testing each day of the successive months until the twelfth month and its thirteenth day (see v. 13) were reached, and declared favourable.

*to the twelfth month*] It would appear that by an error not uncommon among the copyists of manuscripts, the writer's eye, owing to the repetition of the Hebrew for 'month,' passed over a clause, and that the original reading stood thus, and the lot fell upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. This correction is supported by the LXX., though it reads 'fourteenth' for *thirteenth*.

According to Jewish tradition (*Megillah*, 13 b) Haman tried month after month till he reached Adar. Moses died in that month. Hence Haman chose it, forgetting that in the same month Moses had also been born, and therefore from his (or rather, the Jewish) point of view it was likely to be as unfavourable to his purposes as any of the preceding. It should be added that the identity of the day of the month on which Moses was born with that on which he died is inferred by the Jewish commentator Rashi (Rabbi Solomon, son of Isaac, A.D. 1040—1105) from the words 'I am an hundred and twenty years old this day,' Deut. xxxi. 2, all that follows to the end of Deut. xxxiv. 5 being assumed as included in the same day.

*Adar*] the Babylonian *ad(d)āru*, the meaning, however, being doubtful. As the last month of the year, it was followed by Nisan, the first of the next.

8. *scattered abroad*] better, as marg., *separated*.

*peoples*] See on i. 11.

*in all the provinces of thy kingdom*] The Jews who availed themselves of Cyrus's decree permitting their return to Jerusalem (B.C. 538) may have formed only that portion which had no very close ties, commercial or otherwise, with the locality in which they had grown up. Many had acted to the full upon the advice given them by Jeremiah (Jer. xxix. 5 ff.) to make homes for themselves in exile. This passage in Esther points out that they were widely scattered through the Persian dominions, and therefore although, as the tone of Haman's speech intends to convey, despicable in themselves, nevertheless capable of much mischief. The Book of Tobit (the date of which, though it cannot be fixed with certainty, may at any rate be taken as pre-Maccabean) speaks of settlements of Jews at Rages (in Media) and at Ecbatana (i. 14, vii. 1).

*their laws are diverse from those of every people*] The author of the

the king's laws: therefore it is not <sup>1</sup>for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that <sup>9</sup>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 <sup>10</sup>the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto

<sup>1</sup> Or, *meet for the king.*

Book may have had in mind Deut. iv. 6—8, where this diversity is claimed as a witness to the wisdom of the people<sup>1</sup>. With Haman's charge here, implying, as it does, an almost necessary disloyalty on the part of the Jews towards the king, we may compare that addressed to the Persian court by Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra iv. 12—16) against the Jews of the Return. In neither case was there any substantial basis for the charge. If we were to accept the historical character of the narrative, we might say that dissatisfaction arising from the Persian reverses in the late war smoothed the way for a popular agitation, though altogether unreasonable, of the kind which Haman desired.

*for the king's profit*] rather, as marg., *meet for the king.*  
*to suffer them*] to let them alone.

9. *that they be destroyed*] lit. *to destroy them.* Let an edict be issued for their destruction.

*I will pay ten thousand talents of silver*] about £3,750,000 sterling. Xerxes, unscrupulous though we know him to have been, might well be staggered by the request that he should direct this wholesale massacre on such slender grounds as had hitherto been adduced. Hence Haman at once supports his petition by the offer of enormous pecuniary gains to follow, meaning apparently that he will pay the amount, if he has leave to plunder the Jews. The king at an earlier period of his reign had declined a gift from a subject, the value of which was much beyond four and a half million pounds of our money<sup>2</sup> (Herod. vii. 28). His resources, however, had not then been exhausted by the war with Greece. The condition of the imperial treasury was doubtless now very different, and if any such offer as Haman's was now made, so tempting a measure for replenishing it, and thus supplying Xerxes with the means of gratifying his love of ostentation and excess, might well prove irresistible.

*those that have the charge of the king's business*] i.e. the royal treasurers. The A.V. 'those that have the charge of the business' would rather suggest the business of the massacre. But the word 'king's,' though it is not indeed expressed, is implied in the Hebrew.

10. *his ring*] The possession of the king's signet ring gave the

<sup>1</sup> For the expansion of this verse in the hands of a Jewish commentator, see Additional Note III, p. 72, *Targum Sheni* (and extract).

<sup>2</sup> The offer was made by Pythius of Caelaenae (see note on i. 4) to Xerxes when visiting that town in connexion with his expedition against Greece. Rawlinson (*Herod.* vol. iv. 30) calculates the amount to have been "little short of five millions of our money (£4,827,144)." Grote, however (*Hist. of Greece*, v. 36 note), considers the sum an incredible one.

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 <sup>1</sup>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,

<sup>1</sup> Or, *secretaries*.

holder full power to issue edicts in his name, since the sealing of them with his signet gave them validity. Alexander the Great is said to have intimated in this way that he desired his general Perdicas to succeed him. Cp. for the use of a signet ring in this connexion viii. 2; Gen. xli. 42; 1 Macc. vi. 15; see also Josephus, *Ant.* xx. 2. 2.

*Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy*] This full description lays stress upon the terrible plight in which the Jews were placed by the delegation of unlimited powers for their destruction into the hands of their hereditary foe.

11. In the East, confiscation of goods is the invariable accompaniment of capital punishment, and they are forfeited to the crown. At first sight the words seem to mean that the king declines Haman's offer, and gives him free leave to massacre the Jews, and plunder them for his own benefit. But probably it is implied that the promised payment to the king was to be made out of the spoils. It is clear that the information which Mordecai obtained assured him that the king's treasuries were to receive the booty (iv. 7).

12. *scribes*] *secretaries*, such as attended Xerxes in his expedition against Greece<sup>1</sup>.

*in the first month, on the thirteenth day thereof*] The thirteenth having been found to be a lucky day for the massacre itself, Haman may have thought it advisable to choose the same day of the first month for entering upon the preparation for it.

*satraps*] A.V. *lieutenants*. The original word is *ahashdarpan*, a Hebraised form of the word *khshatrapava*, which occurs in Persian inscriptions in the sense of governor. Our word *satrap* comes through the Græcised form (*σατραπης*) of the Persian word.

*governors*] Heb. *pakhoth*, plural of *pekhah*. The satrap held sway over a province, the *pekhah* over a smaller district or petty kingdom. The latter is a loan-word from the Assyrian *pakhditi*, lord of a district. Nehemiah was a *pekhah* (Neh. v. 14).

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus says that "seated beneath a golden awning [in a Sidonian galley] he sailed along the prows of all his vessels...while he made enquiries again, as he had done when he reviewed the land-force, and caused the answers to be recorded by his scribes" (Herod. vii. 100). Again, "During the whole time of the battle [of Salamis] Xerxes sat at the base of the hill called Aegaleos, over against Salamis, and whenever he saw any of his own captains perform any worthy exploit, he enquired concerning him, and the man's name was taken down by his scribes, together with the names of his father and his city" (viii. 90).

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 <sup>13</sup> 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 <sup>14</sup>

*the princes*] A.V. *the rulers*. These were the chiefs of the conquered peoples. The Persians in this respect followed the same course which we have adopted in India, and placed a good deal of power in the hands of the existing native rulers.

*in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written*] See on v. 10.

13. *And letters were sent by posts*] Xenophon tells us (*Cyr.* viii. 6. 17) that these were carefully organised by Cyrus in the Persian Empire, and continued after his time. Stations were established at convenient distances apart, and supplied relays of horses and men, that the transmission of letters might be as rapid as possible, the forwarding of correspondence being often continued by night<sup>1</sup>. The Heb. for 'posts' here is literally *the runners*. The Greek word is *angaros* (*ἀγγαρος*), which, as denoting compulsory service, supplies a verb used three times in the N.T. (Matt. v. 41, xxvii. 32; Mark xv. 21) in the sense 'to compel.'

*both young and old, little children and women*] It was customary among the Persians (see Herod. iii. 119), and even among the Jews in early times (Josh. vii. 24 f.; 2 Kings ix. 26), to put to death the families of criminals. So too Appian (xii. 22) tells us that Mithridates, king of Pontus, sent out orders for the indiscriminate slaughter of Romans and all others of Italian birth. In European history the massacre of St Bartholomew is a conspicuous example of similar cruelty.

*upon the thirteenth day*] The LXX. has simply *upon one day*, and in that which purports to be the letter itself, as given in the apocryphal Additions to the Book of Esther (xiii. 6), the date is given as 'the fourteenth,' as given also by the LXX. in v. 7 (see note there). In Esther ix. 1, however, the Greek supports the Hebrew date here given.

14. *A copy*] The word in the original is of Persian origin, and occurs again in iv. 8, viii. 13.

<sup>1</sup> "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 a horse to each day; and these men will not be hindered either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night from accomplishing at their best speed the distance which they have to go. The first man 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" (Herod. viii. 98).

the writing, <sup>1</sup>that the decree should be given out in every province, was published unto all the peoples, that they  
 15 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 perplexed.

4 Now when Mordecai knew all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went

<sup>1</sup> Or, *to be given out for a decree.*

*that the decree should be given out*] The marg. *to be given out for a decree*, is probably better, the writing and the decree being one and the same.

*unto all the peoples*] See on i. 11.

*that they should be ready against that day*] A few weeks would suffice for the edict to reach even remote provinces of the Empire. Thus the Jews' enemies would have ample time to make preparations for the carrying out of its purpose. It is of course obvious that the intended victims would also hereby be given an opportunity of defending themselves; and this must be acknowledged to be a difficulty, if we assume the accuracy of the dates given for the successive parts of the transaction. Clearly, however, we are not in a position to impugn their accuracy by conjecturing a shorter interval between the inception of the scheme and the date appointed for its execution, inasmuch as a considerable time is demanded by the exigencies of the narrative for circumstances attending the overthrow of Haman, the change in the king's sentiments, and the transmission of letters permitting the Jews to defend themselves.

15. *went forth in haste*] Haman fearing lest the king should change his mind and forbid the decree to be published.

*the king and Haman sat down to drink*] We are reminded of Gloucester's words to Buckingham (*Richard III.* Act III. Sc. 1, end),

"Come, let us sup betimes, that afterwards

We may digest our complots in some form."

The writer of the Book of Esther has an eye for the literary effect of contrasts. The callousness of the Jew's enemy is contrasted with the dismay which even the Gentile city of Susa felt at the prospect of bloodshed.

#### CHAP. IV. 1—3. DISMAY OF MORDECAI AND THE JEWS.

Mordecai not only shares with the other dwellers in Susa the knowledge of the impending calamity, but also has obtained (*v.* 7) information as to the nature of the transactions between the king and Haman. He exhibits the usual Oriental tokens of grief and horror.

1. *rent his clothes*] So e.g. Reuben, when his brother Joseph was sold

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 commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and <sup>1</sup>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 off 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

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *sackcloth and ashes were spread under many.*

to the Midianites (Gen. xxxvii. 29), and Jacob, when he thought that his son had perished (Gen. xxxvii. 34). Cp. 2 Kings xviii. 37; Matt. xxvi. 65.

*put on sackcloth with ashes*] the two things together constituting an expression of the deepest grief. So Daniel (Dan. ix. 3) and the king of Nineveh (Jon. iii. 6).

*went out into the midst of the city*] Utterances and other signs of mourning not being permitted within the royal precincts, he went where it was possible to exhibit his grief more unrestrainedly.

2. *and he came even before the king's gate*] either as being his usual place of resort, or with the hope that in this time of distress he might have some chance of communication with Esther, even though his garb precluded him from nearer approach.

3. *many lay in sackcloth and ashes*] lit. *sackcloth and ashes were spread under many.*

#### 4—17. ESTHER'S GRIEF AND THE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN HER AND MORDECAI.

4. *came and told it her*] Although unaware, according to the story, of the queen's relationship to Mordecai, her attendants knew (see ii. 11) the importance which he attached to her welfare, and therefore they presumed that his mourning garb would bespeak her interest.

*she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai*] so that he might come within the gate and tell her the cause of his distress.

*but he received it not*] by this refusal indicating the dire nature of the calamity of which it was the symbol.

5. *Hathach*] The LXX. call him Achraethæus (Ἀχραθαῖος), while the Targum makes him to be Daniel!

6 Mordecai, to know what this was, and why it was. So Hathach went forth to Mordecai unto the broad place of  
 7 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  
 8 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 shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her; and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto  
 9 him, and to make request before him, for her people. And  
 10 Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Then Esther spake unto Hathach, and gave him a message unto  
 11 Mordecai, *saying*: All the king's servants, and the people

*to know what this was, and why it was*] to know what his mourning attire meant.

6. *the broad place*] the open space in front of the entrance to the palace, where Mordecai still lingered.

7. *the exact sum*] The A.V. less closely *the sum*. The Heb. word is derived from a root meaning to *distinguish, explain*. It occurs again in x. 2 ('*the full account of the greatness of Mordecai*').

*that Haman had promised to pay*] See on iii. 11.

*for the Jews*] as the price of the destruction of the Jews.

8. *to make request before him, for her people*] See ii. 10. It was now necessary for Esther to declare her nationality. It was only by identifying herself with the imperilled nation that their deliverance could be hoped for.

10. *gave him a message*] A.V. *gave him commandment*; but, although the word in the original often bears this sense, yet here the point of the expression is not the order to convey her communication but that that communication was to the effect that follows.

11. Esther points out that it is a matter of common notoriety, not only among the courtiers but throughout the Empire, that death would be the penalty for entering the king's presence unsummoned, unless he should hold out the golden sceptre. Herodotus puts the rule in a modified form, saying that those who sought the interview had to be announced (Herod. iii. 118, and cp. 140). But Esther might very well have hesitated to make application in this way, from the likelihood to her mind that she was no longer in favour with the king, and that therefore a request for an audience would certainly prove futile, whereas in the method which she actually adopted there was at least a chance of success. Josephus makes the law to have been that none of the king's own people (that is, members of the royal family) should approach him unsummoned, when he sat on his throne (*Ant.* xi. 6. 3).

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 <sup>12</sup> they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai <sup>13</sup> 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 holdest thy peace at <sup>14</sup> this time, then 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

*there is one law for him*] i.e. the law is without exception, the pronoun referring to the law-breaker. The A.V. ('there is one law of his') wrongly makes it refer to the king.

13. *Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house*] Rank and position will avail nothing against so absolute an edict.

14. *relief*] A.V. *enlargement*, a word now obsolete in the sense of relief or deliverance. It does not occur elsewhere in the A.V., but we find the corresponding verb, meaning *to set at large, to give freedom to move without obstruction*, in 2 Sam. xxii. 37 (=Ps. xviii. 36) ('Thou hast enlarged my steps under me'); Ps. iv. 1 ('Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress'). For the same use of the verb in Old English compare

"Thrice hath this Hotspur.....

Discomfited great Douglas, ta'en him once,  
*Enlarged him...."*

*I Henry IV. III. 2. 115.*

"*Enlarge the man committed yesterday.*"

*Henry V. II. 2. 40.*

*from another place*] not meaning simply from some human source, as when Judas Maccabaeus sent an embassy to Rome to ask aid against Greek oppression (1 Macc. viii. 17), or later, when his brother Jonathan applied in the same quarter and for the same object (1 Macc. xii. 1). The reference here, though veiled after the reticent fashion of this Book, is to the Divine agency, whether working through earthly means or not. Israel cannot perish.

*but thou and thy father's house shall perish*] Her inactivity would involve not only herself but her family in ruin. Thus she has nothing to hope from that alternative. It ensures her death; the other course but risks it.

*who knoweth whether*] = perhaps. Cp. the same expression in Joel ii. 14; Jon. iii. 9.

*whether thou art not come*] A.V. *whether thou art come*. It is true

- 15 kingdom for such a time as this? Then Esther bade them  
 16 return answer unto Mordecai, Go, gather together all the  
Jews that are present 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  
 17 I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did  
 according to all that Esther had commanded him.

that the 'not' has no literal equivalent in the original Hebrew, but still the R.V. is a more accurate translation of the exact sense. Mordecai means, We cannot say that Providence has not shaped thy fortunes to this very end, and given thee a position enabling thee to deliver thy whole nation in the impending crisis.

16. *all the Jews that are present in Shushan*] We are to suppose them to be a considerable number, if they were subsequently able to dispose of three hundred of their foes (ix. 15).

*fast ye for me*] in connexion with intercession on my behalf. Prayer and fasting went together in time of sorrow or anxiety or penitence. So David (2 Sam. xii. 16), Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 27), Daniel (Dan. ix. 3).

*neither eat nor drink three days, night or day*] This sounds a very explicit direction to abstain from all food for seventy-two hours. It is, however, possible that for the general body of the Jews here referred to it may not have really meant more than two nights and the intervening day, a part of the twenty-four hour day being for certain purposes reckoned as a whole one. Cp. Matt. xii. 40 with xxviii. 1. Nevertheless to fast for the longer period is not beyond the limits of Oriental abstemiousness.

*I also and my maidens will fast in like manner*] Esther herself cannot have carried out this abstinence in its most rigid form. The appearance which she must in that case have presented before the king would have militated strongly against her chances of success, slender as those chances were in any case.

*if I perish, I perish*] She accepts the risk, acknowledging the necessity. For form of expression cp. Jacob's words in Gen. xliii. 14.

17. *went his way*] The Targum takes advantage of the frequent though by no means exclusive use of the original verb in the sense *to pass beyond, transgress*, to interpret it as indicating that Mordecai transgressed the rule of Passover, which prohibited fasting at that season. It is true that the Passover feast commenced on the evening which, with the following morning, constituted the fifteenth day of the month Nisan<sup>1</sup>, but from the date at which the king's scribes were convened, as given in iii. 12, we need by no means conclude that the arrangement made between Mordecai and Esther followed so closely as this interpretation would imply.

<sup>1</sup> The Passover lamb was eaten on the fourteenth day (Exod. xii. 6), just before the sunset which introduced the fifteenth.

Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put <sup>5</sup> on her 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 <sup>2</sup> 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 <sup>3</sup> 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

CHAP. V. 1—8. ESTHER'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

Esther is received graciously. The king, however, obviously guesses that she has an important object to gain in thus presenting herself, and so enquires the nature of her request. She is careful not to add to the difficulties of her position by anything like precipitancy in revealing her desire. She will shape her plans so as to secure the most favourable moment for preferring her petition.

1. *on the third day*] reckoning as the first day that on which (iv. 16) she gave her promise to Mordecai.

*her royal apparel*] in contrast with the mourning garb which she had worn while fasting.

*in the inner court*] Here the risk commenced: see iv. 11.

*in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house*] Part of the king's house consisted of a pillared hall, having the throne in the middle of the side opposite to that which had an entrance admitting from the inner court. Thus the king, sitting on his throne and looking down the vista of pillars, would be able to see those standing without. 'Entrance' is more accurate than the A.V.'s 'door,' as the Heb. word simply denotes *entrance, doorway*.

2. *held out to Esther the golden sceptre*] See iv. 11.

*touched*]. So among the Greeks the suppliant laid hold of the person or the garments of the person to whom the appeal was directed. The Vulgate makes Esther kiss the sceptre ('*osculata est summitatem virgae eius*'). For the Greek apocryphal Additions, presenting a detailed account of Esther's preparations for the interview and of the interview itself, see chaps. xiv, xv.

3. *it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom*] The order of the words in the Heb. indicates the eagerness belonging to a rapid and authoritative declaration: *to the half of the kingdom, yea, it shall be given thee*. Cp. Herod's promise to the daughter of Herodias (Mark vi. 23). In Herod. ix. 109 we find Xerxes undertaking beforehand to grant whatever should be asked by his consort Amestris in return for a beautifully worked mantle which she had presented to him. He

4 kingdom. And Esther said, If it seem good unto the king,  
 let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet  
 5 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  
 6 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  
 7 the kingdom it shall be performed. Then answered Esther,  
 8 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  
 9 them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said. Then  
 went Haman forth that day joyful and glad of heart: but

further tells us (Herod. ix. 110, 111) that on a certain day in the year a guest at the king's table might make any request and that the king was bound to grant it.

4. That a subject like Haman should be admitted to make a third at the banquet to which the king was invited by his consort, seemed a specially marked instance of favour, arising from the position which the minister held in the estimation of his royal master. The higher the honour paid, the more startling and effective is the favourite's ruin.

6. *What is thy petition?* Esther having hazarded her life, the king recognises that she has some weighty reason for such an act, and in the cheerfulness induced by the banquet—a frame of mind upon which Esther had doubtless calculated—he repeats his question towards the end of the feast (see Herod. i. 133).

7, 8. Esther's form of reply suggests that for the moment she meant to declare her grief, but suddenly breaks off for some reason which remains hidden from the reader. She virtually acknowledges, however, that she has a weighty petition to present, and promises that, if her two guests will repeat their visit under similar circumstances next day, she will postpone no longer.

#### 9-14. HAMAN'S PROPOSED VENGEANCE UPON MORDECAI.

The greater Haman's excitement and exultation at having reached the highest pinnacle of dignity attainable by a subject, the more did Mordecai's conduct rankle within him and move his rage; so pointed was the contrast with the extreme adulation naturally exhibited by all others connected with the palace towards the king's favourite.

when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up nor <sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>11</sup> 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 <sup>12</sup> let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow also am I invited by her together with the king. Yet all this availeth <sup>13</sup> me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his <sup>14</sup> friends unto him, Let a <sup>2</sup> gallows be made of fifty cubits high,

<sup>1</sup> Or, *trembled before him.*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. *tree.*

9. *in the king's gate*] Mordecai's resumption of his old position indicates that he had put off his mourning apparel (see iv. 2) now that hope had dawned through Esther's undertaking to plead with the king.

*moved for him*] better, as marg., *trembled before him.*

10. Haman also on his side uses circumspection in carrying out his vengeful design. Instead of ordering immediate punishment to be inflicted upon his enemy, an act which we may safely assume would in virtue of his position be easy of accomplishment, he consults his wife and his friends.

*Zeresh*] The name is probably the Hebraised form of the Persian *saris*, *gilt* or *golden*. Cp. the Greek Chryses, Chryseis.

11. *recounted unto them*] A. V. less accurately, *told them of.*

*and the multitude of his children*] lit. *and the multitude of his sons.* Of these there were ten (ix. 7 ff.). Clearly his wife and intimates would be familiar with the size of his family. The point of his remark, however, lies in the circumstance that among the Persians, as also with the Jews (see Ps. cxvii. 4 f.), to have many sons was considered to redound to a man's credit (Herod. i. 136).

A characteristic comment in the Targum tells us that Haman had, besides these, 208 other sons. This it deduces from the combined numerical values of the three letters of the (one) Hebrew word rendered 'and the multitude<sup>1</sup>.'

14. *Let a gallows be made*] Heb. *tree.* See ii. 23. 'Fifty cubits' is a hyperbolic expression meaning exceedingly high. The cubit at this time was probably equal to six handbreadths, and thus approximately 1½ feet in English measure. Zeresh and the rest considered it a

<sup>1</sup> חָרָב. ח=6, ר=200, ב=2.

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.

6 On that night <sup>1</sup>could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles, and

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *the king's sleep fled* from him.

safe assumption that one who had such influence with the king as to be permitted to condemn a whole nation to be exterminated within a few months, might reckon absolutely on obtaining authority to put an individual of that nation to death at once. Hence the order for the erection of the 'gallows' might be made beforehand, although according to Persian law the power of life and death resided in the king alone.

#### CHAP. VI. 1—11. MORDECAI'S ELEVATION.

In this section we are shewn the strange concatenation of apparently trivial circumstances which collectively have the effect of bestowing the highest reward and most signal disgrace upon the humble and virtuous Israelite and the highly placed enemy of that people. It seems but a series of chances that the king was sleepless, that he adopted a particular method of alleviating his discomfort, that a certain section of the chronicles of the kingdom was read to him, that Haman was an early arrival at the palace on this occasion, and thus, through his haste to bring about Mordecai's destruction, was himself of all persons the one chosen to do him honour. Nevertheless it was from the combination of all these occurrences that there arose the most mighty issues, and this fact plainly looms large in the mind of the narrator, though he does not in so many words attribute the ordering of the events to the hand of God. Here then we have the turning point of the narrative. Pride begins to approach its fall, and the humble to be exalted.

1. *could not the king sleep*] better literally, as marg., *the king's sleep fled* from him. The LXX. paraphrases, 'The Lord withheld sleep from the king'; and so the Targums. But in the present Heb. text the name of God never occurs; see *Introd.* p. xv.

Suetonius (*cap.* 50) says that the Roman emperor Caligula so suffered from sleeplessness that he used to rise and stand or roam about the palace. Procopius (*Hist. Arcana*, ed. Bonn, pp. 81 f.) relates the same of the emperor Justinian. The Turkish sultan, Selim I (died 1520), is said to have passed most nights in reading books; while sometimes he would have others read to him, or talk to him about State matters (Diez, *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien*, i. 266).

*the book of records of the chronicles*] lit. *the book of memorials, even the chronicles*. Cp. Mal. iii. 16, 'book of remembrance.' In ii. 23

they were read before the king. And it was found written, <sup>2</sup> that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of those that kept the <sup>1</sup>door, who had sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the king <sup>3</sup> 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. And the king said, <sup>4</sup> 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 <sup>5</sup> standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What <sup>6</sup> 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 <sup>7</sup> Haman said unto the king, For the man whom the king

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *threshold*.

(where see note) we have the shorter expression 'the book of the chronicles.'

*and they were read before the king*] The original resembles in its sense a Greek imperfect, implying that the reading lasted for a considerable time. The object doubtless was that the continuous sound of another's voice might induce slumber. There is no suggestion in the passage that the king could not himself read, although such may very well have been the case. See Rawlinson, *Ancient Monarchies* (2nd ed.), iv. 228 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Bigthana*] in ii. 21 Bigthan, while the same name in i. 10 loses yet another letter. The Targum says that the plan was to put a poisonous snake in the cup from which the king drank.

<sup>3</sup> *What honour and dignity etc.?*] We are not obliged to suppose that Xerxes had forgotten the fact of his deliverance or the person who had saved his life; but only that he had no recollection what recompense, if any, had been made. In Persia there was a list kept of those who did the king service (Herod. viii. 85, 90), and thus special stress was laid upon the duty of acknowledging their devotion.

<sup>4</sup> *Who is in the court?*] that instructions might be at once given to rectify the omission, and so relieve the king from the stigma of ingratitude. Probably there were always one or two persons in attendance outside the king's chamber. The answer would naturally name the most important person in waiting.

<sup>6</sup> *said in his heart*] i.e. thought.

<sup>7</sup> *For the man etc.*] lit. *The man etc.*, the broken character of the sentence shewing Haman's eagerness and excitement.

8 delighteth to honour, let royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon,  
 9 <sup>1</sup>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 noble 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  
 10 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  
 11 hast spoken. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse,

<sup>1</sup> Or, *and the crown royal which is set upon his head.*

8. *royal apparel*] The extent of the honour which Haman sought is illustrated by the story in Plutarch's Lives (*Artaxerxes*, 5), where we are told that Tiribazus made a similar request; but in that case, though the king granted him a royal robe, he forbade him to wear it. Other instances of the bestowal of garments upon another in token of favour or amity are to be found in Gen. xli. 42; 1 Sam. xviii. 4; and so with regard to armour in Homer (*Il.* vi. 230, of Glaucus and Diomedes).

*the horse that the king rideth upon*] Cp. David's direction as to Solomon in 1 Kings i. 33.

*and on the head of which a crown royal is set*] Assyrian monuments represent the king's horse as wearing a kind of head ornament resembling a crown. We can easily understand therefore that the same custom may have existed at the Persian court. Josephus (*Ant.* xi. 6. 10) adds—the thought being perhaps suggested by the story of Joseph (see above)—that a chain was to be placed about the favoured person's neck.

The rendering of the A.V. 'and the crown royal which is set upon his head,' though retained in the marg. of the R.V., is impossible.

9. *most noble*] the same word as that used in i. 3, where see note.

*through the street of the city*] rather, as in iv. 6, *the broad place of the city*, the open space in front of the palace, the most public place in the city. Conversely, in a story of the *Thousand and one Nights* (ed. König, xi. 19) a local dignitary is led through the city, seated upon a camel backwards, while a crier proclaims in front, 'Thus are those punished who mix themselves up in affairs without being called to do so.'

10. *Mordecai the Jew*] We may assume that his nationality was stated in the chronicles which had been read to the king. The latter seems to have forgotten that he had delivered over the Jews into Haman's hands without reserve.

11. *Then took Haman etc.*] Haman, as the most prominent man in

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. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman <sup>12</sup> hastened to his house, mourning and having his head covered. And Haman recounted unto Zeresh his wife and all his <sup>13</sup> friends every thing 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 <sup>14</sup> king's chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

So the king and Haman came <sup>1</sup> to banquet with Esther <sup>7</sup> the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the <sup>2</sup> second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition,

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *to drink*.

the king's court, was compelled, through the irony of fate, to carry out to the letter in his enemy's case the proposals which he had made on his own behalf.

#### CHAPS. VI. 12—VIII. 2. HAMAN'S OVERTHROW.

<sup>12</sup>. *having his head covered*] in token of grief. Cp. vii. 8; 2 Sam. xv. 30, xix. 4; Jer. xiv. 4; Ezek. xxiv. 17.

<sup>13</sup>. *recounted*] The Heb. word indicates a more detailed account than the 'told' of the A.V.

*his wise men*] See on i. 13. By these are probably meant the same as those who cast lots in iii. 7.

*Mordecai, before whom*] the relative pronoun refers to the individual foe, and not, as in the A.V., to the Jewish nation generally.

*thou shalt not prevail against him*] If we are to consider Haman as a descendant of Agag (see on iii. 1), the writer is probably referring to the passages which indicate that Amalek's fate is, when confronted with Israel, to be worsted in the conflict. See Exod. xvii. 16; Numb. xxiv. 20; Deut. xxv. 17—19; 1 Sam. xv. 5; 2 Sam. i. 8 ff.

<sup>14</sup>. The dramatic instinct of the writer presents us with a sudden change of scene, and contrasts Haman's exultant anticipations (v. 12) of splendour attaching to the royal banquet with the dark forebodings which now oppressed the apparently so highly honoured guest.

*hastened to bring Haman*] We need not suppose that the coming of the attendants implies fear on the part of Esther that through a presentiment of his approaching fall he might fail to arrive. The Eastern custom of fetching guests is well known. Cp. Luke xiv. 17.

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: 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, <sup>1</sup>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? And Esther

<sup>1</sup> Or, *for our affliction is not to be compared with the king's damage.*

vii. 3. Haman's humiliation of the morning doubtless encourages Esther to prefer her petition without further delay. The abruptness perceptible in her speech is itself indicative of the emotion with which its utterance was accompanied.

4. *we are sold*] She refers to the bribe which Haman had offered the king for permission to destroy her people, and of which Mordecai had told her (iii. 9, iv. 7).

*although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's damage*] The original text is obscure. The R.V. makes good sense, as meaning that Haman, by enslaving the Jews, would do the king an injury (by depriving him of the persons of so many of his subjects and of the revenues derived from them) for which it would be out of his power to make compensation. The fatal objection to this rendering is that it is impossible as a translation of the Heb. as it stands, inasmuch as the word rendered 'although' cannot have that sense, but must be rendered *for*, or *because*.

The margin of the R.V., retaining the Heb. consonants as they stand while slightly changing a vowel<sup>1</sup> (*for our affliction is not to be compared with the king's damage*), means, 'the suffering which would be inflicted on us is a trivial matter compared with the loss to the king.'

Other translations are (a) (keeping the same change of vowel in the Heb.) 'for such oppression would not be worth troubling the king about,' or (b) (without the change of vowel) 'for the adversary (Haman) is not worth troubling the king about.' But we are not justified in forcing the word properly translated 'damage' to mean 'annoyance'.<sup>2</sup> The LXX. have 'for the adversary is not worthy of the court of the king'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reading  $\text{רצח}$  for  $\text{רצח}$ .

<sup>2</sup> It may be noted that the word is a 'loan-word' from Aramaic, and occurs in this passage only of the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἀξίος ὁ διάβολος τῆς αὐλῆς (apparently reading  $\text{רצח}$  over again as  $\text{רצח}$ ) τοῦ βασιλέως.

said, An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine **7** *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 **8** 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 chamber- **9** lains that were before the king, Behold also, the <sup>1</sup>gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman hath made for Mordecai, who spake good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. And the king said, Hang him thereon. So they **10** hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of **8** Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *tree*.

**7.** *arose in his wrath*] with the restlessness which accompanies strong passion, and brings him back again apparently at once to confront the object of his indignation.

**8.** *the word*] This seems to refer to the speech just preceding. It was clear to the attendants, without any more specific utterance on the king's part, that Haman was doomed to death.

*they covered Haman's face*] Curtius in his history of Alexander the Great (vi. 8) speaks of this as done to Philotas, who had served with distinction under that monarch, when, on a confession of treason having been wrung from him by torture, he was about to be stoned to death. Livy also (i. 26) mentions it as a Roman custom. We have no authority beyond this passage for its practice among the Persians, and it is possible that, with a slight change in the Heb. word rendered 'they covered,' we should translate, *his face became flushed* (with dismay and shame). Cp. LXX. 'he was utterly perturbed (confounded) in countenance<sup>1</sup>.'

**9.** *Harbonah*] mentioned in the list of i. 10.

*Behold also*] by a fortunate coincidence. Harbonah's words indicate a malicious joy at the downfall of the favourite.

viii. 1. *the house of Haman*] his goods. See on' iii. 11. For the confiscation of the property of a condemned criminal in Persia see

<sup>1</sup> διετράπη τῷ προσώπῳ.

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 spake 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 in his sight, 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

Herod. iii. 129, where, after a description of the death sentence carried out in the case of Oroetes, a Persian, for murder and other misdeeds, the historian mentions as a matter of course that 'the treasures of Oroetes' were conveyed to Sardis.

*Esther had told what he was unto her*] There was no longer any motive for concealing the relationship, Mordecai being now secure in the king's favour. Her own Jewish origin she had been obliged to disclose already (vii. 4).

2. *gave it unto Mordecai*] See on iii. 10.

*set Mordecai over*] entrusted him with the administration of Haman's property. Haman is represented as possessed of great wealth (v. 11).

#### CHAP. VIII. 3—17. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELIVERANCE OF THE JEWS.

3. *spake yet again before the king*] thus apparently taking the risk of again entering his presence unsummoned, but, under the new circumstances, free from such forebodings of evil as those which had attended her previous essay.

*to put away the mischief etc.*] This first form of request (cp. v. 5) was vague. Her anxiety is still for her people, Haman's fall not of itself securing their deliverance from danger. Mordecai, even in his access to fortune and royal favour, seems to think it safest that Esther, and not he, should make the needful appeal.

4. *held out to Esther the golden sceptre*] Cp. iv. 11, v. 2. On this occasion, however, the king's action was not in order to permit approach with a petition, but in token of the favourable hearing granted to a request already made.

5. *If it please etc.*] The long preface to the definite request shews some doubt on Esther's part whether it will be granted.

*to reverse the letters devised by Haman...which he wrote*] She is

Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: for how can I endure to see the 6 evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? Then the king 7 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 laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also <sup>1</sup>to the Jews, as it liketh 8 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 9 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 princes of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto

<sup>1</sup> Or, *concerning*.

careful to represent it as the work of Haman and not of the king. The latter however points out in reply that what has received the authority of the king's seal 'may no man reverse.' The most that can now be done is to address to all concerned (intended victims and governors alike) letters equally authoritative, which shall have the effect of neutralising, so far as may be possible, those which have already gone forth. That the king's sympathies are now wholly on the side of the Jews he emphasizes in *v.* 7.

7, 8. Ahasuerus says in effect, 'I cannot reverse the decree. It is not, as you suggest, merely Haman's. It has been promulgated with my authority, and hence immutability attaches to it. But think of some means by which it may be neutralised.'

9. In the Hebrew this is the longest verse in the Hagiographa, consisting of 43 words and 192 letters. It may be added that the longest in the Prophets is Jer. xxi. 7, consisting of 42 words and 160 letters. (See the critical notes on these passages in Baer's *Massoretic Text of the O. T.*)

*in the third month, which is the month Sivan*] the Babylonian *siman(n)*. The derivation is uncertain. It corresponded to the last half of May and the first half of June.

*on the three and twentieth day thereof*] Haman's letters had been sent out on the thirteenth day of the first month (iii. 12 f.), and thus had had two months and ten days start.

*the satraps, and the governors and princes*] See on iii. 12.

*an hundred twenty and seven provinces etc.*] See on i. 1.

every people after their language, and to the Jews according  
 10 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 posts on horseback, riding  
 on <sup>1</sup>swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of  
 11 the stud: wherein the king granted the Jews which 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  
 12 for a prey, upon one day in all the provinces of king  
 Ahasuerus, *namely*, upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth  
 13 month, which is the month Adar. A copy of the writing,  
<sup>2</sup>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  
 14 enemies. So the posts 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

<sup>1</sup> Or, *swift steeds, mules, and young dromedaries.*

<sup>2</sup> Or, *to be given out for a decree.*

10. *riding on swift steeds*] As time was an object, it was important that the messengers should be well mounted. Both Herodotus (viii. 98) and Xenophon (*Cyrop.* viii. 6. 17) speak of *horses only* as being used in Persia to carry despatches.

*that were used in the king's service*] This corresponds to but one word in the original, which occurs only in this passage, and is a Hebraised form adapted from the Persian *khshatra*, *lordship, realm*, or *khshatram*, *a crown*, which is also the source of *kether*, *a crown* (i. 11, ii. 17, vi. 8), and of the Greek *kidaris*.

*bred of the stud*] perhaps literally, *sons of the (royal) mares*. The word rendered 'stud' occurs here only in the Bible. In later Hebrew it means a mule born of a mare and he-ass. The LXX. and Vulgate, probably having no clue to the meaning of the words, much abbreviate the latter part of this verse, having merely, *they sent the letters* (Vulg. *the letters were sent*) by couriers.

11. The LXX. express the permission in much gentler form, viz. 'to defend themselves and to treat their adversaries and foes as they please.' But the author of the Book evidently means to bring out forcibly the fact that the parts which by the first decree had been assigned respectively to the Jews and their foes are now reversed.

14. *swift steeds that were used in the king's service*] See on v. 10.

*being hastened and pressed on*] The increased need for promptitude is

was given out in Shushan the palace. And Mordecai went 15  
 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 16  
 and honour. And in every province, and in every city, 17  
 whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree  
 came, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good  
 day. And many from among the peoples of the land be-  
 came Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them.

indicated by the two synonymous participles, of which only the latter is used at the sending out of the first edict.

15. *in royal apparel of blue and white*] by way of indicating externally the revulsion of feeling. The Persian king's own robe was purple, or purple embroidered with gold over another garment of purple striped or mixed with white. See Rawlinson's *Anc. Mon.* (2nd ed.), iii. 203.

*crown*] not *kether*, that of the monarch, but *'atârâh*, which may have been a less rich one.

*a robe of fine linen and purple*] The LXX. erroneously translate 'a diadem' etc. The king wore a diadem consisting of a blue and white band or fillet, encircling the lower part of the crown.

The description as regards the sentiments both of Mordecai and the city is worded so as to present a sharp contrast with that of the earlier condition of affairs (iii. 15, iv. 1).

*shouted*] The Heb. verb denotes joy audibly expressed. Thus the A.V.'s 'rejoiced' is inadequate.

16. *The Jews had light etc.*] The expression reminds us of the Prayer Book Version of Ps. xcvi. 11, 'There is sprung up a light for the righteous.' Cp. also Ps. xxvii. 1, xxxvi. 9, for 'light' used, as here, metaphorically as equivalent to prosperity and joy.

17. *a good day*] The expression, occurring also in ix. 19, 22, is found elsewhere only in 1 Sam. xxv. 8.

*became Jews*] The LXX. have, 'were circumcised and became Jews.' They became proselytes in order to secure themselves, in the face of the increased importance and position which the Jews were attaining through Mordecai. Owing, however, to the apparent improbability of a large number of actual proselytes to Judaism among the Persians—an occurrence of which there is no record outside this passage—it has been suggested that by a very slight change in one Heb. letter we should obtain the meaning, *united themselves* (to the Jews), i.e. took their side in the conflict. Cp. 'joined themselves unto them' (ix. 27). It is however possible that the verb in the Hebrew<sup>1</sup> might mean, *pretended* to become Jews.

<sup>1</sup> Being in the Hithpa'el voice.

- 9 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, 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, 2 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 3 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. 4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces: for the man 5 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 6 them that hated them. And in Shushan the palace the Jews 7 slew and destroyed five hundred men. And Parshandatha,

CHAP. IX. 1—10. OVERTHROW OF THE JEWS' ENEMIES.

The story, omitting the intermediate months of preparation, now passes to the date fixed by the decree for the Jews' overthrow.

1. *when the king's commandment*] Beginning with these words, and extending to the end of this long verse, is a series of clauses, thus postponing the actual narrative. The writer's motive for this lengthened protasis may well be the literary effect of suggesting thereby the suspense which prevailed during the intervening period.

2. *to lay hand on such as sought their hurt*] Thus it was open to the Jews to assume the offensive, and not necessarily await an attack. They would no doubt be guided by their familiarity with the circumstances of each locality and consequently with the most advisable tactics to adopt.

*the fear of them was fallen upon all the peoples*] Hence the resistance was half-hearted.

3. *they that did the king's business*] See on iii. 9.

6. *in Shushan the palace*] The word seems to have a somewhat wider sense here than earlier in the Book (see note on i. 2), meaning perhaps *royal city*. Bloodshed within the palace proper would not have been permitted, and even in the fortress connected with it this number would scarcely have been reached.

and Dalphon, and Aspatha, and Poratha, and Adalia, and 8  
 Aridatha, and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and 9  
 Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, 10  
 the Jews' enemy, slew they; but on the spoil they laid not  
 their hand. On that day the number of those that were 11  
 slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.  
 And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have 12  
 slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the  
 palace, 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, 13  
 If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are

7—9. Most if not all of these names are apparently of Persian origin, and this circumstance is against the supposition that this was not Haman's nationality as well. The Heb. text exhibits peculiarities in arrangement and orthography. The ten names are placed vertically. According to Jewish tradition this is to indicate that they were hung one above another on an exceedingly lofty gallows. Moreover, the first letter of the last name is written large, and one of those composing the second, seventh, and tenth names is made smaller than its neighbours. The reason for these peculiarities remains obscure. Evidently at an early date the words became subject to extensive corruption. The LXX. text differs widely.

10. *on the spoil they laid not their hand*] although according to the terms of the edict (viii. 11) they had a legal right to do this. Their desire was deliverance and also vengeance, but not material gain. Cp. the case of Abraham, when he refused to make himself liable to the imputation that he had been enriched by his overthrow of the king of Sodom's enemies (Gen. xiv. 23).

#### 11—19. INSTITUTION OF MEMORIAL CELEBRATIONS.

12. *what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces?*] It is best to take this, not, with A.V., as an actual question, but as meaning, It is superfluous to enquire how extensive the slaughter must be throughout the Empire as a whole, when Shushan alone has yielded so many victims.

*Now what is thy petition?*] The question implies that the king perceives that Esther is not yet satisfied.

13. There may have been special reasons why the extension of time was needed in Susa in order to ensure the Jews' complete success in exterminating their foes there. The attitude of Esther and Mordecai towards the whole question of the permissibility of revenge was naturally

in Shushan to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the  
 14 gallows. And the king commanded it so to be done: and a decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged  
 15 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  
 16 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  
 17 not their hand. *This was done* on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.  
 18 But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth *day* thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth *day* of the same they rested, and made  
 19 it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore do the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwalled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar *a day of gladness* and

that of their contemporaries, and so it is not to be judged by us on Christian principles.

*be hanged upon the gallows*] She asks that the bodies may be impaled or hung on a gibbet, so as to crown their disgrace, and serve as a terrible example.

18. The inability of the Jews dwelling in Shushan to make their festival synchronize with that of their countrymen elsewhere brought about the custom that both the fourteenth and the fifteenth days should be kept. Such is the habit of the Jews to this day, except that the former day is held to be the chief one in the observance (see note on iii. 13). In 2 Macc. xv. 36 the 14th of Adar is called 'the day of Mordecai.'

19. *the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwalled towns, make etc.*] not 'dwelt' and 'made' as in the A.V. The writer is describing the custom of his own day as arising out of the circumstances here recounted. He implies that in his time the Jews who did not come under the above description followed the date at which those in Shushan celebrated their deliverance. The LXX., however, inserts a clause to this effect, viz. 'But those who dwell in the chief cities keep the fifteenth day of Adar as a day of glad feasting, and of sending portions likewise to their neighbours.'

feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all <sup>20</sup> the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to enjoin them that they should keep the <sup>21</sup> fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews had rest <sup>22</sup> 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 <sup>23</sup> begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because <sup>24</sup> Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them,

*and of sending portions one to another*] i.e. that the poor might share in the happiness of the occasion. The same procedure was enjoined by Nehemiah (Neh. viii. 10, 12) at the proclamation of the Law in his time. It was in accordance with the ordinance (Deut. xvi. 11, 14) that the enjoyment of the Feast of Weeks should be extended to 'the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.' The custom of sending gifts (usually sweetmeats) is still preserved at Purim.

20—28. MORDECAI'S INJUNCTIONS FOR THE KEEPING OF PURIM.

20. *And Mordecai wrote these things*] Mordecai's position as a Jew, who had attained to the office of grand vizier, seems to have been regarded as giving him, under the circumstances, a right to impose upon the Jews within the king of Persia's dominions a new annual celebration. It is best to take 'these things' to mean so much of the story as appeared needful by way of explanation of the circumstances of the deliverance, as calling for a commemorative festival. We may notice that in *this* letter, unlike the second (*vv.* 29—32), there is no reference to any but the joyous side of the commemoration.

22. *as the days... a good day*] This has the character of a parenthesis, the preceding clause being taken up again in the words 'that they should make them' etc.

23. *undertook*] assumed the obligation.

*to do as they had begun*] to continue to keep the celebration on the fourteenth day of Adar.

*and as Mordecai had written unto them*] i.e. to keep the celebration on the following day as well.

and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them; and to  
 25 destroy them; but when *the matter* came before the king,  
 he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he  
 had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own  
 head; and that he and his sons should be hanged on the  
 26 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  
 27 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 as  
 it should not fail, that they would keep these two days  
 according to the writing thereof, and according to the  
 28 appointed time thereof, every year; and that these days  
 should be remembered and kept throughout every genera-  
 tion, every family, every province, and every city; and that  
 these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews,  
 29 nor the memorial of them <sup>1</sup>perish from their seed. Then

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *be ended*.

24. *Pur, that is, the lot*] See on iii. 7.

25. *the matter*] A.V. inserts Esther as the subject of the verb. In the original it is simply the feminine pronoun, which however in Heb. may also stand for the neuter.

26. The Feast of Purim comes in early spring, a month before Passover. The previous day is kept as a fast in memory of the Shushan Jews' fast (iv. 16).

*Purim, after the name of Pur*] i.e. they gave the Persian word a Hebrew plural.

*letter*] The original (*'iggereth*) is a late Heb. word, probably of Assyrian origin, cognate to the Greek *angareuein* (*ἀγγαρεύειν*). See note on iii. 13.

27. *upon all such as joined themselves unto them*] i.e. proselytes.

#### 29—32. FURTHER INJUNCTIONS ON THE PART OF ESTHER AND MORDECAI.

The Jews having readily agreed to the directions which Mordecai had given in the first letter, and expressed their readiness (*v.* 28) to accept the obligation of keeping the annual festival as a perpetual one, a second communication is sent out to them, viz. a joint letter of Esther and Mordecai. An increased weight is given to it, as compared with the former, by the addition of the name of the queen who is also the heroine of the story. Moreover, in it the Jews are bidden to remember

Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all <sup>1</sup>authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent letters unto all the Jews, to 30 the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, *with* words of peace and truth, to confirm these 31 days of Purim in their appointed times, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had ordained for themselves and for their seed, in the matter of the fastings and their cry. And the 32 commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim ; and it was written in the book.

And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, 10

<sup>1</sup> Heb. *strength*.

as well the duty of the preceding fast, even as Mordecai and Esther themselves fasted in the time of peril. But see note on v. 31.

29. *the daughter of Abihail*] She was probably thus designated in the letter itself.

*letter*] See on v. 26.

31. *to confirm*] It has been suggested that the former communications from Mordecai were only a recommendation, while this joint letter from him and Esther was intended to render the matter obligatory. Against such a view, however, is the fact that the word in the original here rendered 'to confirm' is the same as that translated 'to enjoin' in v. 21.

*in the matter of the fastings and their cry*] The words may be a gloss. They are not found in the LXX., and the Heb. word translated 'fastings' does not occur in this exact form elsewhere.

32. *in the book*] not meaning the Book of Esther, but most likely the book from which the compiler drew this part of his materials.

#### CHAP. X. 1—3. MORDECAI'S GREATNESS.

The connexion of this short chapter with the rest of the Book is obscure. It may be a fragment of some other work, which, owing to its subject-matter, came to be attached to the preceding narrative. On the other hand it may be nothing more than the closing paragraph or postscript of the Book, having for its object to emphasize the power of Ahasuerus, and so to reflect glory on Mordecai. In that case the thought which inspires the chapter is that Ahasuerus, whose prime minister Mordecai was, could command the service of the continent of Asia, and the coast of the Mediterranean.

1. *laid a tribute*] The word rendered 'tribute' means everywhere else in Biblical Hebrew a body of forced labourers, or serfdom. We

2 and upon 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 3 the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was next unto 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.

should therefore render here, *imposed forced labour*. The thought in the author's mind was that now, Haman having fallen, and Mordecai ruling as vizier in his stead, the favour shewn to the latter, and through him and Esther to the Jewish nation as the people of God, had the result of augmenting the king's power over the other nations included in his dominions.

The Targum characteristically adds that when Ahasuerus knew who the people and family of Esther were, he declared them free.

*the isles of the sea*] an expression denoting the coast lands, especially of Phoenicia and the neighbouring country, with adjacent islands.

2. *in the book of the chronicles*] the official records. See on ii. 23. The formula may be imitated from the phraseology in 1 Kings xiv. 19, 29 etc.

3. *was next unto king Ahasuerus*] i.e. was second only to him in point of rank. The same expression is used of a certain Elkanah's position with respect to Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 7), and of priests who were second in rank to the high priest, 'of the second order,' in 2 Kings xxiii. 4.

## APPENDIX.

For a general account of these Additions to the Canonical Book of Esther, their origin, date, and purpose, together with the forms in which they appear in the Greek, and on the relation of the original Hebrew to the Septuagint Version, see the Introduction § 6.

They are appended here as of some interest in themselves and as representing the form in which the Book was read in the Christian Church while it was dependent on the LXX. and Versions derived from it.

It has been thought convenient to arrange the Additions in their proper order as they stand in the LXX. rather than in that which has been adopted (from the Vulgate) by the English Versions. Consequently the section (x. 4—13) which stands first in the English Versions is here placed at the end (p. 64). For the explanation of the transposition in the Vulg. see *Introd.* § 6.

The Additions must of course be read in their proper contexts, and not continuously as they stand here.

### THE REST OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER, WHICH ARE FOUND NEITHER IN THE HEBREW, NOR IN THE CHALDEE.

11

In the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes the great, <sup>2</sup> in the first day of the month Nisan, Mardocheus the son of

#### CHAP. XI. 2—11. MORDECAI'S DREAM.

This and the following section form the introduction to the Book in the LXX. The interpretation comes in the chapter numbered x. 4—13 (see p. 64), forming the last of the Additions found in that version.

2. *In the second year*] the year preceding that with which the Canonical Book opens (see i. 3).

*Nisan*] See on iii. 7. G\* calls the month 'Adar-Nisan, which is Dystrus-Xanthicus.' The latter names are the Macedonian equivalents for Adar and Nisan.

*Mardocheus etc.*] See on ii. 5. The difference in the forms of the proper names is due to the fact that in the Canonical part of the Book they are drawn from the original Hebrew, whereas in the Additions they come to us through a Greek medium (*Mardochéus* = *Μαρδοχαῖος*).

Jairus, the son of Semeias, the son of Kiseus, of the tribe of Benjamin, had a dream; who was a Jew, and dwelt in the city of Susa, a great man, being a servitor in the king's court; and he was of the captivity, which Nabuchodonosor the king of Babylon carried from Jerusalem with Jechonias king of Judæa; and this was his dream: Behold, <sup>1</sup>noise and tumult, thunderings and earthquake, and uproar upon the earth: and, behold, two great dragons came forth, both of them ready to fight, and their cry was great. And at their cry all nations were ready to battle, that they might fight against the righteous nation. And, lo, a day of darkness and gloominess, tribulation and anguish, affliction and great uproar upon the earth. And the whole righteous nation was troubled, fearing <sup>2</sup>the evils that should befall them, and were ready to perish. Then they cried unto God, and upon their cry, as it were from a little fountain, there came a great river, *even* much water. The light and the sun rose up, and the lowly were exalted, and devoured the glorious. Now when Mardocheus, who had seen this dream, and what God had

<sup>1</sup> Another reading is, *a noise of a tumult.*    <sup>2</sup> Gk. *their own evils.*

3. *Susa*] See on i. 2.

*servitor*] elsewhere in the A.V. only in 2 Kings iv. 43, where R.V. has 'servant,' marg. 'minister.'

4. *he was of the captivity*] See on ii. 6.

7. The conflict between the two dragons (representing Mordecai and Haman) was the signal for all nations to join in an attack upon the Jews. A similar assemblage is depicted in Joel iii. 2; Zech. xiv. 2.

8. Cp. Joel ii. 2; Zeph. i. 15; Matt. xxiv. 29.

10. *cried unto God*] Direct mention of the name of God is a prominent characteristic of the Additional Chapters as contrasted with its absence from the Canonical Book<sup>1</sup>. See *Intro.* p. xv.

*a little fountain*] Esther.

*a great river, even much water*] an emblem of irresistible power. Cp. Astyages' dream as given in Herod. i. 107.

11. *The light and the sun rose up*] The rival powers of good and evil strove for the mastery, the former prevailing.

*the lowly were exalted*] G\* (reading *ποταμοί* for *ταπεινοί*), has 'the rivers were swollen and swallowed up those of high repute.'

*devoured the glorious*] The adjective is plural, but the allusion is to Haman.

<sup>1</sup> The words God and Lord occur 42 times in these chapters.

determined to do, was awake, he bare it in mind, and until night by all means was desirous to know it. And Mardo-<sup>12</sup>cheus took his rest in the court with Gabatha and Tharra, the two eunuchs of the king, that were keepers of the court. And he heard their communings, and searched out <sup>2</sup> their purposes, and learned that they were about to lay hands upon Artaxerxes the king; and he certified the king of them. Then the king examined the two eunuchs, and after <sup>3</sup> that they had confessed it, they were led to execution. And <sup>4</sup> the king wrote these things for a memorial; Mardocheus also wrote concerning these things. So the king commanded <sup>5</sup> Mardocheus to serve in the court, and for this he gave him gifts. Howbeit Aman the son of Amadathus, a Bugean, who <sup>6</sup> was in great honour with the king, sought to molest Mardocheus and his people because of the two eunuchs of the king.

Now this is the copy of the letter: The great king <sup>13</sup>

CHAPS. XI. 12—XII. 6. MORDECAI'S GOOD FORTUNE.

12. *until night*] The natural sense of this verse, combined with the following, is that the conspiracy of the two eunuchs against Ahasuerus belonged to the same (second) year as the dream just related. But ii. 21 (cp. v. 16) seems to place the former five years later, and G\* accordingly adapts its wording here so as to harmonize with the date given in the Canonical part of the Book<sup>1</sup>.

xii. 1. *Gabatha and Tharra*] corresponding to Bigthan and Teresh, as given in ii. 21. Gabatha may be a transposition of Bagatha (Vulg.).

2. *purposes*] lit. *anxieties*, misgivings as to the success of their plot.

3. *examined*] doubtless by torture.

*they were led to execution*] A.V., following an erroneous reading of the Greek (*ἀπὸ τῆς θανάτου*), which differs by but one letter from the best text (*ἀπὸ τῆς θανάτου*), has 'they were strangled.'

4. *wrote these things for a memorial*] See on ii. 23.

6. *a Bugean*] See note on iii. 1.

*because of the two eunuchs of the king*] implying that Haman was, if not a joint conspirator, at any rate on friendly terms with them.

CHAP. XIII. 1—7. ARTAXERXES' LETTER.

In the Greek text this section follows chap. iii. 13.

<sup>1</sup> 'And Mardocheus, arising from his sleep, hid his vision in his heart, and at every opportunity was studying it out, until the day on which Mardocheus slept in the court of the king etc.'

Artaxerxes writeth these things to the princes of a hundred and seven and twenty provinces from India unto Ethiopia, and to the governors that are set under them. After that I became lord over many nations, and had dominion over the whole world, not lifted up with presumption of my authority, but carrying myself alway with equity and mildness, I purposed to settle my subjects continually in a quiet life, and making my kingdom peaceable, and open for passage to the utmost coasts, to renew peace, which is desired of all men. Now when I asked my counsellors how this might be brought to pass, Aman, that excelled in wisdom among us, and was approved for his constant good will and stedfast fidelity, and had the honour of the second place in the kingdom, declared unto us, that in all nations throughout the world there was scattered a certain malignant people, that had laws contrary to all nations, and continually set aside the commandments of kings, so as the uniting of our kingdoms, honourably intended by us, cannot go forward. Seeing then we understand that this nation is alone continually in opposition unto all men, following perversely a life which is strange to *our* laws, and evil affected to our state, working all the mischief they can, that our kingdom may not be firmly stablished: therefore have we commanded, that they that are signified in writing unto you by Aman, who is ordained over the affairs, and is a second father unto us, shall all, with their wives and children, be utterly destroyed

The letter betrays its Greek origin by its style, a fact which is yet more forcibly brought out in the florid and diffuse wording of the king's decree, ch. xvi. We may contrast it with other Persian decrees or letters found in the Bible (Ezra i. 2-4, iv. 17-22, vi. 3-12, vii. 11-26) both in its general style and particularly in its moral disquisitions.

1. *The great king*] This is one of the titles of Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, in the Behistun inscription (see on xvi. 7), where he is also called 'the king of kings.' Cp. 2 Kings xviii. 19.

*governors*] satraps. See on i. 3.

3. *my counsellors*] See on i. 14.

6. *and is a second father unto us*] lit. *our second father*. The Vulgate paraphrases, 'whom we honour as a father.' The title 'father' is again applied to Haman in xvi. 11.

*be utterly destroyed*] lit. *be destroyed root and branch* (ὀλοποιήσῃ).

by the sword of their enemies, without all mercy and pity, the fourteenth day of the twelfth month Adar of this present year: that they, who of old and now also are malicious, 7 may in one day with violence go down to <sup>1</sup>the grave, and so ever hereafter cause our affairs to be well settled, and without trouble.

Then *Mardocheus* made his prayer unto the Lord, calling 8 to remembrance all the works of the Lord, and said, O Lord, 9 Lord, thou King Almighty: for the whole world is in thy power, and if it be thy will to save Israel, there is no man that can gainsay thee: for thou hast made heaven and earth, 10 and all the wondrous things that are beneath the heaven; and thou art Lord of all, and there is no man that can resist 11 thee, which art the Lord. Thou knowest all things, and 12 thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Aman. For I could have been content with good 13 will for the salvation of Israel to kiss the soles of his feet. But I did this, that I might not prefer the glory of man 14 above the glory of God: neither will I bow down unto any but to thee, which art my Lord, neither will I do it in pride. And now, O Lord, thou God *and* King, the God of Abraham, 15

<sup>1</sup> Gk. *Hades*.

*the fourteenth day*] This is evidently a slip on the part of the composer of the letter. The confusion between this day and the thirteenth (see iii. 13, viii. 12, ix. 1, also xvi. 20) doubtless arose through the connexion in thought between the commemoration festival, celebrated on the fourteenth, and the previous day's slaughter which was averted.

*Adar*] G\* has *Dystrus*. See on xi. 2.

7. *malicious*] rather, as in *v.* 4, *malignant*.

#### CHAP. XIII. 8—18. MORDECAI'S PRAYER.

In the Greek text Mordecai's prayer follows upon iv. 17.

12. See on iii. 2.

13. *to kiss the soles of his feet*] a form of homage which seems in Persia to have been confined to kings.

15—17. *heritage—portion—inheritorship*] three words emphasizing God's ownership of His people. Cp. xiv. 9.

spare thy people: for their eyes are upon us to bring us to nought, and they desire to destroy the heritage, that hath  
 16 been thine from the beginning. Despise not thy portion, which thou didst redeem out of the land of Egypt for thine  
 17 own self. Hear my prayer, and be merciful unto thine inheritance: and turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live, O Lord, and sing praises to thy name: and destroy not the mouths of them that praise thee, O Lord.

18 And all Israel cried out mightily, because their death  
 14 was before their eyes. Queen Esther also, being seized *as it were* with the agony of death, resorted unto the Lord: 2 and laid away her glorious apparel, and put on the garments of anguish and mourning: and instead of the most excellent ointments, she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she humbled her body greatly, and all the places of the ornaments of her joy she covered with her tangled hair.

3 And she prayed unto the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, O my Lord, thou only art our King: help me that am  
 4 desolate and have no other helper but thee: for my danger  
 5 is in mine hand. From my youth up I have heard in the tribe of my family, that thou, O Lord, tookest Israel from among all the nations, and our fathers from all their progenitors, for a perpetual inheritance, and didst perform for

17. *feasting*] not simply 'joy,' as A.V.

*destroy not the mouths*] to be taken literally. It is the living who praise God (cp. Is. xxxviii. 19). If Israel be destroyed, His praises will cease.

#### CHAP. XIV. 1—19. ESTHER'S PRAYER.

In the Greek Bible, as here, Esther's prayer immediately follows upon that of Mordecai. See the introductory note to the preceding paragraph.

3. *thou only art our King*] The keynote of the prayer is God's absolute rule, thus controlling, if He wills it, even the 'fleshy king' (v. 10) who assumes the title 'king of kings.' See on xiii. 1. The Greek is 'Thou alone...help me that am alone.'

4. *in mine hand*] close upon me. The reading of G\*, 'My life is etc.,' is smoother.

5. *progenitors*] a closer rendering than that of the A.V., 'predecessors.'

them whatsoever thou didst promise. And now we have 6  
 sinned before thee, and thou hast given us into the hands  
 of our enemies, because we glorified their gods: O Lord, 7  
 thou art righteous. Nevertheless it satisfieth them not, that 8  
 we are in bitter captivity: but they have stricken hands with  
 their idols, that they will abolish the thing that thou with 9  
 thy mouth hast ordained, and destroy thine inheritance, and  
 stop the mouth of them that praise thee, and quench the  
 glory of thy house, and thine altar, and open the mouths 10  
 of the heathen to set forth the virtues of <sup>1</sup>idols, and that a  
 fleshly king shall be magnified for ever. O Lord, give not 11  
 thy sceptre unto them that be nothing, and let them not  
 laugh at our fall; but turn their device upon themselves,  
 and make him an example, that hath begun this against us.  
 Remember, O Lord, make thyself known in the time of our 12  
 affliction, and give me boldness, O King of the gods, and  
 holder of all dominion. Give me eloquent speech in my 13  
 mouth before the lion: and turn his heart to hate him that

<sup>1</sup> Gk. *vain things*.

7. *we glorified their gods*] meaning that Israel's exile was due to its idolatry.

8. *they have stricken hands with their idols*] They have made an agreement or bargain with them. For the expression in this sense cp. 2 Kings x. 15; 2 Chron. xxx. 8 (marg.); Ezra x. 19; Lam. v. 6; 1 Macc. vi. 58, xi. 50, 66.

9. This verse may well preserve for us a reminiscence of the state of things which ensued in Jerusalem, as related in Ezra iv. 6, when the activity in the restoration of the city and Temple which prevailed in the days of Darius was succeeded, on the accession of Xerxes, by the 'accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem,' that brought about 'great affliction and reproach' (Neh. i. 3). The present passage in that case points to the support which the 'accusation' received in Persia.

11. *give not thy sceptre*] Transfer not the authority, symbolized in the case of an earthly king by a sceptre, to what has no real existence. For this mode of designating idols cp. 1 Cor. viii. 4, x. 19.

12. This verse forms the transition from intercession on behalf of the nation to supplication for personal safety.

*the gods*] A.V. wrongly 'the nations,' possibly through an accidental reminiscence of Jer. x. 7.

13. *before the lion*] the king. Cp. Prov. xix. 12, xx. 2; 2 Tim. iv. 17.

fighteth against us, that there may be an end of him, and of  
 14 them that are likeminded with him: but deliver us with  
 thine hand, and help me that am desolate and have no  
 15 other *helper* but thee, O Lord. Thou hast knowledge of all  
 things; and thou knowest that I hate the glory of the  
 wicked, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised, and of  
 16 every alien. Thou knowest my necessity: that I abhor the  
 sign of my high estate, which is upon mine head in the days  
 wherein I shew myself. I abhor it as a menstruous rag, and  
 17 I wear it not when I am private by myself. And thine  
 handmaid hath not eaten at Aman's table, neither have I  
 honoured the king's feast, nor drunk the wine of the drink  
 18 offerings. Neither had thine handmaid any joy since the  
 day that I was brought hither to this present, but in thee,  
 19 O Lord, thou God of Abraham. O God, that art mighty  
 above all, hear the voice of the forlorn, and deliver us out of  
 the hands of the mischievous, and deliver me out of my fear.

15 And upon the third day, when she had ended her

14. *O Lord*] a better division than that of the A.V., where these words come in the next verse.

15—18. She deprecates punishment for her union with the king, as being unavoidable. Such passages as Ezra x. 2, Neh. xiii. 23 ff. shew us in what abhorrence marriages with Gentiles were held. In private she does her utmost to counterbalance and atone for what she is compelled to do in public, including her presence at feasts.

16. *the sign of my high estate*] the crown royal, which she is obliged to wear when she appears before the king.

17. *the wine of the drink offerings*] For this expression in its application to heathen gods cp. Deut. xxxii. 38. See Sayce, *Ancient Empires of the East*, p. 269, for the nature of the offerings made by the worshipper of Ormazd.

19. *hear the voice of the forlorn*] Cp. Judith ix. 11 for an amplification of this thought.

#### CHAP. XV. 1—16. ESTHER'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

In the LXX. this narrative follows upon the prayer just recorded. In the Vulgate it is preceded by three verses, relating how Mordecai urged Esther to appeal to God for protection, and to face the king with the petition on behalf of her people (cp. iv. 13 f.). The narrative itself is an expansion of v. 1, 2.

1. *And upon the third day*] See iv. 16, v. 1. The Midrash (see

prayer, she laid away her garments of service, and put on her glorious apparel. And being majestically adorned, after 2 she had called upon the all-seeing God and saviour, she took her two maids with her: and upon the one she leaned, 3 as carrying herself delicately; and the other followed, 4 bearing up her train. And she was ruddy through the per- 5 fection of her beauty, and her countenance was cheerful and right amiable: but her heart was in anguish for fear. Then having passed through all the doors, she stood before 6 the king, who sat upon his royal throne, and was clothed with all his robes of majesty, all *glittering* with gold and precious stones; and he was very dreadful. Then lifting up 7 his countenance that was flushed with glory, he looked upon her in fierce anger: and the queen fell down, and turned pale, and fainted, and she bowed herself upon the head of the maid that went before. Then God changed the 8 spirit of the king into mildness, who in an agony leaped from his throne, and took her in his arms, till she came to herself again, and comforted her with soothing words, and said unto her, Esther, what is the matter? I am thy 9 brother, be of good cheer: thou shalt not die, for <sup>1</sup>our 10

<sup>1</sup> Or, *the commandment is as well mine as thine. Gk. our commandment is common.*

Wünsche, *Midrash on Esther*, German trans., p. 67) says, "Never did the Israelites find themselves in trouble longer than three days." In illustration are quoted this case and those of Abraham (Gen. xxii. 4), of the patriarchs (Gen. xlii. 17), of Jonah (Jon. i. 17). We may compare Hos. vi. 2.

*her garments of service*] The A.V. has erroneously, 'her garments of mourning,' referring to those which are actually so called in xiv. 1. The word rendered 'service' (*deparela*) is that translated 'purifications' in ii. 12, and in all likelihood refers to worship which she had just been offering to God.

7. *fierce anger*] lit. *the perfection of his anger*, the expression forming a counterpart to 'the perfection of her beauty' in v. 5. The king's wrath seems to have been caused by her neglect of the rule of etiquette which forbade the approach of anyone without being summoned to the king's presence. See on iv. 11.

10. *our commandment is for our subjects*] less well marg. *the commandment is as well mine as thine. LXX. 'our commandment is common.'* The sense seems to be that Esther, as queen, is above any such regulation.

11 commandment is for our subjects: come near. So he held  
 12 up his golden sceptre, and laid it upon her neck, and  
 13 embraced her, and said, Speak unto me. Then said she  
 unto him, I saw thee, my lord, as an angel of God, and my  
 14 heart was troubled for fear of thy glory. For wonderful art  
 15 thou, my lord, and thy countenance is full of grace. And  
 16 as she was speaking, she fell down for faintness. Then the  
 king was troubled, and all his servants comforted her.

16 The great king Artaxerxes unto the governors of countries  
 in a hundred and seven and twenty provinces from India  
 unto Ethiopia, and unto them that are well affected to our  
 2 state, greeting. Many, the more often they are honoured  
 with the great bounty of their benefactors, the more proud  
 3 they are waxen, and endeavour to hurt not our subjects  
 only, but not being able to bear abundance, do take in  
 4 hand to practise also against those that do them good: and  
 take not only thankfulness away from among men, but also  
 lifted up with the boastful words of them that were never

13. *as an angel of God*] a remarkable title to be put in the mouth  
 of one of Jewish birth when addressing a heathen. Hence it is omitted  
 in the Midrash and other later versions of the story. The title is given  
 to king David on three occasions (1 Sam. xxix. 9; 2 Sam. xiv. 17,  
 20, xix. 27).

#### CHAP. XVI. 1—24. THE KING'S DECREE CONCERNING THE JEWS.

In the Greek this chapter follows viii. 12. It has been already  
 remarked (ch. xiii; introductory note) that there is an obvious contrast  
 between both the phraseology and moral reflections of this decree and  
 the contents of actual State documents of Persian kings which have come  
 down to us.

2. The reference is to Haman, as is more plainly set forth later  
 (v. 12). For the title 'benefactor' as applied to those in authority, we  
 may compare Luke xxii. 25. It may be noted that Ptolemy III of  
 Egypt (B.C. 247—242) obtained the actual cognomen of *Éuergetes*  
 (benefactor) through his restoration of the images of Egyptian gods,  
 carried off by Cambyses to Persia.

3. *abundance*] lit. *satiety*. Persons like Haman, the king would  
 say, surfeited with the prosperity that they have attained, actually turn  
 upon the bestowers of it.

4. *the boastful words of them that were never good*] A.V. 'the  
 glorious words of lewd (marg. needy) persons that were never good

good, they think to escape the evil-hating justice of God, who alway seeth all things. Oftentimes also fair speech of 5 those that are put in trust to manage their friends' affairs, hath caused many that are in authority to be partakers of innocent blood, and hath enwrapped them in remediless calamities: beguiling with the false deceit of their lewd 6 disposition the innocent good will of princes. Now ye 7 may see this, as we have declared, not so much by more ancient histories, as ye may, if ye search what hath been wickedly done of late through the pestilent behaviour of them that are unworthily placed in authority. And we must 8 take care for the time to come, to render our kingdom quiet and peaceable for all men, both by changing our 9 purposes, and always judging things that come before our

( *marg. that never tasted prosperity*)<sup>1</sup>. 'Glorious,' unlike the same word in the English of xi. 11, is here equivalent to *vain-glorious*. Cp. for this use, now obsolete, 'He preferreth the penitent Publican before the proud, holy, and *glorious* Pharisee,' in Part I of the Sermon (Homily) on the Misery of Mankind. G\* by a change of two letters in the original (*ἀρείωνιστοι* for *ἀρείονιστοι*) has 'unused to suffering,' i.e. suffering forms a preventive against boastfulness.

5. The king seeks to justify himself for his share in the murderous edict, using, however, somewhat vague and allusive language.

*fair speech*] persuasiveness.

*hath enwrapped them*] as though in a garment.

7. *ancient histories*] such as are referred to in ii. 23, vi. 1.

*what hath been wickedly done of late*] The famous inscription on the rock of Behistun, recording events in the reign of Xerxes' father and predecessor, Darius Hystaspes (B.C. 522—485), tells of the rebellions of Smerdis and of Gomatas. The reference in this verse, however, is doubtless meant to include Haman's action. The LXX. says, 'at our feet.' Cp. the English phrase 'at our doors.'

9. *by changing our purposes*] This seems in conflict with the character of 'the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not' (Dan. vi. 8). But see on i. 19. A conjectural emendation of the Greek text, however, has some support from Josephus (*Ant.* xi. 6. 12), and would give us the sense *not giving heed to* (lit. *using*) *calumnies*.

For Xerxes' vacillation of purpose in connexion with his expedition against Greece see Herod. vii. 8 ff.

*judging things that come before our eyes with more equal proceeding*]

<sup>1</sup> Thus giving a double translation ('lewd persons' and 'that were never good') to the same expression in the original Greek. This may have arisen from the accidental retention of *both* of two renderings which lay before the A.V. translators as alternatives.

10 eyes with more equal proceeding. For Aman, a Macedonian, the son of Amadathus, an alien in truth from the Persian blood, and far distant from our goodness, being as  
 11 a guest received of us, had so far forth obtained the favour that we shew toward every nation, as that he was called our father, and was continually honoured of all men, as the next  
 12 person unto the royal throne. But he, not bearing his high estate, went about to deprive us of our kingdom and our  
 13 life; having by manifold and cunning deceits sought *of us* the destruction, as well of Mardocheus, who saved our life, and continually procured our good, as also of Esther the blameless partaker of our kingdom, together with their  
 14 whole nation. For by these means he thought, finding us destitute *of friends*, to have translated the kingdom of the  
 15 Persians to the Macedonians. But we find that the Jews, whom this most ungracious wretch hath delivered to utter destruction, are no evil-doers, but live by most just laws:  
 16 and that they be children of the most high and most mighty living God, who hath ordered the kingdom both discriminating as to matters brought before us in a more equitable way. Cp. xiii. 2, where the same adjective is rendered 'with equity.'

10. *a Macedonian*] See on iii. 1.

11. *our father*] used as a title of respect. Cp. 2 Kings v. 13.

12. *went about*] a somewhat archaic expression for *sought, endeavoured*. Cp. Ps. xxxviii. 12 (Prayer Book Version), 'They that went about to do me evil' (R.V. 'they that seek my hurt'). So Rom. x. 3 (A.V.).

14. *he thought...to have translated the kingdom of the Persians to the Macedonians*] See on iii. 1. It seems, however, as though the position which Haman held already at the Persian court left him little, if anything, to gain from such a risky proceeding. The motives attributed to him in the Canonical Book are much more natural, viz. hostility to Mordecai (iii. 5 f.), and desire of pecuniary gain (iii. 11, vii. 4).

15. *most ungracious wretch*] lit. *thrice wicked one*. The same epithet is given to Nicanor, one of the generals under Lysias in the war made upon the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes (2 Macc. viii. 34, xv. 3).

16. *God, who hath ordered etc.*] "Darius Hystaspes, the father of Xerxes, was wont to attribute—judging from the inscription over his tomb at Naksh-i-Rastám—all that he had done to the favour of Ormazd" (*Speaker's Comm. ad loc.*). This language (cp. Jer. xxvii. 6), owing to its monotheistic tone, was easily adapted to Jewish belief. Cp. Dan. iv. 34 ff.

unto us and to our progenitors in the most excellent manner. Wherefore ye shall do well not to put in execution the letters 17 sent unto you by Aman the son of Amadathus. For he, 18 that was the worker of these things, is hanged at the gates of Susa with all his family: God, who ruleth all things, speedily rendering vengeance to him according to his deserts. Therefore ye shall publish openly the copy of 19 this letter in all places, and let the Jews live after their own laws, and ye shall aid them, that even the same day, 20 being the thirteenth day of the twelfth month Adar, they may defend themselves against those who set upon them in the time of their affliction. For Almighty God hath made 21 this day to be a joy unto them, instead of the destruction of the chosen people. And ye shall therefore among your 22 commemorative feasts keep it a high day with all feasting: that both now and hereafter there may be safety to us, and 23 the well affected Persians; but to those which do conspire against us a memorial of destruction. Therefore every city 24 or country whatsoever, which shall not do according to these things, shall be utterly destroyed without mercy with <sup>1</sup>fire and sword; it shall be made not only unpassable for men, but also most hateful to wild beasts and fowls for ever.

<sup>1</sup> Gk. *spear and fire*.

18. *hanged*] impaled.

*with all his family*] According to the Canonical Book the ten sons were not impaled at the time that this decree was published, but on the fourteenth day of Adar (ix. 13 f.), which was the day after they had been slain (v. 12).

19. *live after their own laws*] Cp. the permission given to Ezra by Xerxes' son (Ezra vii. 25 f.).

21. *the chosen people*] an improbable expression for a Persian king, however natural in the mouth of a Jew (1 Kings iii. 8; 1 Chron. xvi. 13; Ps. cv. 6; Is. xliii. 20).

22. *high*] lit. notable.

24. *with fire and sword*] lit. as marg. of R.V. *with spear and fire. most hateful to wild beasts and fowls for ever*] Cp. the language used in Ezek. xxxii. 13.

The LXX. proceeds, 'And let these copies be set forth visibly to men's eyes in all the kingdom, and that all the Jews should be ready etc.,' continuing as in viii. 13.

## 10 PART OF THE TENTH CHAPTER AFTER THE GREEK.

4 Then Mardocheus said, These things are of God.  
 5 For I remember the dream which I saw concerning these  
 6 matters, and nothing thereof hath failed. As for the little  
 fountain that became a river, and there was light, and the  
 sun, and much water, the river is Esther, whom the king  
 7 married, and made queen: and the two dragons are I and  
 8 Aman: and the nations *are those* that were assembled to  
 9 destroy the name of the Jews: and my nation, this is Israel,  
 which cried to God, and were saved: for the Lord hath saved  
 his people, and the Lord hath delivered us from all these  
 evils, and God hath wrought signs and great wonders, which  
 10 have not been done among the nations. Therefore hath  
 he made two lots, one for the people of God, and another

## CHAP. X. 4—13. THE FULFILMENT OF MORDECAI'S DREAM.

The A.V. follows the Vulgate in placing this section first of the Additions. See Introd. p. xxvii.

4. *These things*] the history contained in the preceding chapters.

5. *the dream*] viz. that which is given in chapter xi. (vv. 5—11), the interpretation thus, according to the arrangement of the English (following the Latin Vulgate), preceding that which is interpreted.

River and sun are alike typical of Esther, as being the source of deliverance and life to her people, bringing them 'light and gladness, and joy and honour' (viii. 16).

7. *the two dragons*] See xi. 6.

8. *and the nations*] See xi. 7.

The less well attested of the two Greek recensions (G\*)<sup>1</sup> interprets the individual features of the dream somewhat differently: 'The little fountain is Esther; and the two dragons are I and Aman. The river is the nations that were assembled to destroy the Jews. The sun and light which appeared to the Jews are a manifestation of God. This was the judgment.' For the expression 'manifestation of God,' as indicating a visible revelation of the Divine presence, see 2 Macc. iii. 24, and cp. 2 Macc. xiv. 15, xv. 27.

10. *two lots*] See on iii. 7. There, however, the reference is to the lots cast by Haman, so as to secure, if possible, a lucky day for the execution of his design. Hence, according to ix. 24, the name of the commemorative Feast (Purim). Here the word means the committal

<sup>1</sup> For the explanation of this symbol see Introduction, p. xxxi.

for all the nations. And these two lots came at the hour, 11 and time, and day of judgement, before God among all the nations. So God remembered his people, and justified his 12 inheritance. Therefore these days shall be unto them in the 13 month Adar, the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the month, with an assembly, and joy, and with gladness before God, throughout the generations for ever among his people Israel.

In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and 11 Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemy his son, brought the epistle of Phrurai *here* set forth, which they said was the same, and that Lysimachus the son of Ptolemy, that was in Jerusalem, had interpreted it.

to Divine arbitrament of the decision between the people of God and their foes.

11. G\*, for 'day of judgment (*κρίσις*) before God,' has 'the day of the rule (*κυριεύσις*) of the Eternal.

12. *justified*] i.e. declared as Judge that their cause was just. The same use of the word is found in Deut. xxv. 1; Eccus. xiii. 22.

13. *the fourteenth and fifteenth day*] See ix. 17, 18.

CHAP. XI. 1. On the historical value of this Appendix and its bearing upon the date of Esther see Introduction § 6.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES.

### I.

#### THE FEAST OF PURIM.

##### (1) *Its observance.*

The observance of Purim seems at first to have been of a purely social and convivial character. Gradually the religious side of the festival was introduced, and the reading of Esther in the synagogue prescribed. This regulation is attributed to 'the Men of the Great Synagogue<sup>1</sup>.' In some places it is not chanted in the regular manner of the synagogue, but read like a letter ('*iggereth*', see notes on ix. 26, 29). It is also customary to open *all* the roll before reading, so as to give it the appearance of an epistle.

Purim included at least one festive meal, and for it cakes were made of a certain shape, symbolizing the history. In Germany they were called *Hamantaschen* (Haman-pockets) and *Hamanohren* (Haman-ears), in Italy *orecchi d'Aman*. The orthodox Jews of eastern Europe include masquerading among the observances of the season. Boys and girls walk from house to house wearing masks and singing doggerel rhymes.

For further particulars see the Article 'Purim' in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, and I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*.

##### (2) *Origin of the name.*

In chap. iii. 7 ('they cast Pur, that is, the lot') the writer explains the word *Pur* (which does not occur outside Esther) as equivalent to the Heb. word *gōrāl* (גורל), *lot*, meaning ordinarily either (a) the means used for the decision of questions, or for the marking out of persons or things, etc. (e.g. Jos. xviii. 6; Prov. xvi. 33), or (b) that which is so assigned, such as a portion of land (e.g. Num. xxxvi. 3). From the

<sup>1</sup> See p. xxiv.

nature of the case *pur* is presumably a Persian word, and in ix. 24—26 the title of the feast is definitely stated to be drawn from Haman's casting of '*Pur*, that is, the lot,' to destroy the Jews.

Apart from the apparent unsuitability of giving the festival a name suggested by a mere detail in the story, a difficulty in accepting this meaning of the word *Pur* (plural *Purim*) arises from the fact that we know of no word in this or an approximate form in the Persian language which bears the meaning required. It seems, however, as though some such word must have been known to the author of this Book.

Under these circumstances many attempts have been made to solve the problem thus presented. These attempts may be classed under the two following heads.

A. It has been sought to give at least a partial support to the Biblical explanation of the word (*a*) by connecting it with the Persian *pâre*, a piece or fragment (perhaps etymologically related to the Latin *pars*, *portio*), or (*b*) by taking it to be a lost Aramaic word *pûrah*, פִּיּוּרָה, *lot*, from פָּרַר, *to break in pieces*. The latter view is defended by Halévy (*Revue des Études Juives*, Tom. xv. 1887, *Notes et Mélanges*, p. 289) on the ground that the idea of 'lot' in Semitic languages is closely connected with that of fraction or partition, and hence may here be applied to the partition or distribution of gifts at this feast (ix. 19). (*c*) Dieulafoy (see on i. 2) adduces as a specimen of the method used in casting lots, an object found by him in excavating the Memnonium at Susa, viz. a quadrangular prism bearing different numbers on its four faces. Holding that this may have been used for the purpose of casting lots, he considers the *solidity* of its form to have given rise to the name through the significance of the Persian *pur*, *full*. (*d*) The word has been connected with the Assyrian *puru* or *buru*, a stone, and held to have been used (like the Greek ψήφος) in the secondary sense of *lot* (so Jensen, quoted with approval by Wildeboer, in '*Esther*,' *Marti's Kurzer Hand-Commentar*, p. 173).

B. On the other hand many commentators have sought to discover an origin for the Purim festival wholly independent of that assigned to it by Jewish tradition, and therefore also of any word bearing the sense of partition or lot. It will be seen that a feature common to all this class of explanations is that they break completely with the traditional sense.

(*a*) J. Fürst (*Kanon A.T.*) and others connect the word Purim with the Persian *bahar*, 'spring,' and so consider it to denote a spring festival existing among the Babylonians and adopted by the Jews at Susa. So also Zunz, who thinks that afterwards, when it had acquired too firm a hold to be abolished, it was given a religious character by means of this Book.

(*b*) Hitzig (*Gesch. Isr.*) connects the word with *Phur*, which means in modern Arabic *the New Year*. He accordingly makes it a New Year festival, and ascribes to it a Parthian origin, the Book being designed to commend the festival to the Jewish people.

(*c*) According to von Hammer, whose theory is developed by Lagarde ('*Purim*,' *Ein Beitrag zur Gesch. der Religion*, 1887), the feast

of Purim is a Jewish modification of the old Zoroastrian *Farwardigân*, or Festival of the Dead, observed at the end of the year. He seeks to connect this Persian name with the various forms under which the name appears in the LXX. texts (*φρουραι*, *φρουραια*, *φρουριμ*). He proceeds to connect with the Heb. word פִּרְיָה by very precarious etymological arguments. Renan (*Hist. du peuple Isr.*) takes a similar view, the objections to which are stated by Halévy (*op. cit.*).

(d) Grätz (*Monatsschrift*, xxxv. 10—12) traces the name to the Heb. פִּרְיָה (Is. lxiii. 3), *wine-press*, and considers that it answers to the Greek festival named *Ἰθούρια*, *jar-opening*, characterised by riotous mirth and the giving of presents. He supposes that it was adopted by the Palestinian Jews in the time of Ptolemy IV (B.C. 222—205) through the Hellenizing influence of Joseph (died B.C. 208), nephew of the high-priest Onias II. Apart, however, from the improbability that a Greek institution adopted by the Jews of that period would survive the anti-hellenic spirit so strong a generation or two later under the Maccabees, we may notice that the word 'wine-press' suggests an *autumn* rather than a spring celebration, whereas the Greek feast was held early in the year.

(e) Zimmern (*Zeitschrift für die Alttest. Wissenschaft*, 1891) derives it from an ancient New Year festival, having for one of its names *Zagmuku*, which was celebrated with much pomp and mirth at Babylon in the earlier part of Nisan (cp. Est. iii. 7). It included a function entitled 'assembly (Assyr. *puhru*) of the gods,' under the presidency of Marduk, the chief Babylonian deity, to settle the *fates* (*lot*) of the nation for the coming year. Jensen (see above) supports this view, and identifies the chief characters in the story of Esther with Babylonian or Elamite deities, considering that the Jewish fancy, working amid Persian surroundings, combined elements relating to the conquest of the latter by the former.

(f) Wildeboer (Marti's *Kurzer Hand-Commentar*, p. 173) unites with this theory the idea (cp. Lagarde above) of a Festival of the Dead (All Souls' Day), thus explaining the fastings, as well as feasting and sending of gifts (originating in repasts and offerings for the dead), customary on such occasions in Persia and elsewhere. In this way also he accounts for the omission of the name of God, inasmuch as its introduction in connexion with a semi-heathenish celebration would have excluded the Book from synagogue use.

(g) Lastly, in the *Expositor*, Aug. 1896, Mr C. H. W. Johns (referring to Peiser, *Keilinschriftliche Biblioth.* iv. 107) holds the name to be derived from the Assyrian *puru*, *turn of office*, *turn*. He points out that we thus avoid the difficulty of connecting the Heb. name (which is without a guttural) with *puhru* (see Zimmern above), where the guttural (strong *h*) is ineffaceable. He makes the word then to be the common designation of the New Year feast on its secular side, in connexion with the annual accessions to offices<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The above particulars are abridged from the Article 'Purim' in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

In conclusion, we must remember that, although the question as to the source of the name Purim is of archaeological interest, yet so far as we can trace back the actual observance of the feast on the part of the Jews, it relates simply to the story as it stands in our Canonical Book. Thus the speculations mentioned above do not touch the meaning of the feast as it has been traditionally celebrated by the Jews for very many centuries.

## II.

HAGGĀDĀ<sup>1</sup>.

The element of romance, to which we have referred as in all probability having a share in the production of the Book of Esther, is prominent under the name of Haggādā in later Jewish works. The word is applied to those parts of the Rabbinic writings which do not concern themselves with legal enactments and the enumeration and solution of the numerous cases arising out of these<sup>2</sup>, but deal largely with 'the realms of fancy, imagination, feeling, humour<sup>3</sup>.' The Rabbinic schools of learning, which produced an abundant literature of this sort, extended over many centuries, commencing in pre-Christian times. That literature is of interest, as illustrating speculations which formed the subjects of Jewish thought in the days when Haggādā was in course of formation. It often amplified a text or piece of historical tradition, remodelling it in accordance with what were conceived to be the needs of later times. In doing this the writer doubtless felt that he was utilising, not falsifying, history.

Among subjects with which Haggādā dealt the glories of the Jewish nation naturally were a congenial theme. Details were elaborated, and copious additions made, and in these compositions the Jews doubtless often found real relief from the sufferings belonging to their actual surroundings<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> From the root *nāgad* (נָגַד) NGD), to extend, flow, and thence (in Hiph'il), to declare.

<sup>2</sup> This is the province of *Halāchā* (הֲלָכָה), from *kālach* (הָלַךְ, he walked), meaning the laws according to which a person's conduct, his walk in life, is to be ruled.

<sup>3</sup> Deutsch, *Literary Remains*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> See Schürer, *The Jewish People in the time of Christ*, Eng. trans. II. i. 339 ff.

## III.

## SPECIMEN OF THE FIRST TARGUM ON ESTHER

(on chap. ii. 1 ff.).

[The following extracts may be of interest, as serving to exhibit the character of the paraphrastic translations of Old Testament Books into Aramaic. These Versions seem to have had their origin in a religious necessity, when the use of the Hebrew language was dying out as the speech of ordinary life. But the Targums on Esther and the other Megilloth (Rolls) are thought, unlike earlier ones, not to have been intended for public use. They were composed after the need for Aramaic translations had passed away, but, inasmuch as these came to be permanently cherished, the later ones were modelled upon them, and thus present us in the main with the same features<sup>1</sup>.]

After these things, when he had recovered and calmed down from his excessive potations, and when the violence of king Ahasuerus's rage had abated, he began to remember Vashti. His great men answered him and spake thus, Art thou not he that passed sentence upon her, that she should die for what she did? The king said to them, I did not command that she should be put to death, but that she should present herself before me, and when she did not present herself, I commanded that she should be deprived of her queenly rank. They said to him, It is not so, but thou didst pronounce sentence of death upon her at the instance of the seven princes. Forthwith he was violently enraged, and ordered that the seven princes should be hung upon the gibbet. And the king's young men who ministered to him said, Let there be sought out for the king's needs young virgins, fair to look upon, and let the king appoint officers in every province of his kingdom, and let them assemble all young virgins that are fair to look upon unto Shushan the palace to the house of the women where there are baths and washing places, and where Hegai, the king's chief eunuch, custodian of the women, holds office, and let it be decreed that unguents for their anointing be furnished to them, and let the young woman who finds favour in the eyes of the king be raised to the rank of queen in the place of Vashti. And the thing was pleasing in the king's sight, and he did thus.

<sup>1</sup> See further in Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, Art. *Targum*.

FIRST SPECIMEN OF THE SECOND TARGUM  
(TARGUM SHENI) ON ESTHER

(on chap. i. 3 ff.).

In the third year of Ahasuerus's reign he made a feast for all his great men and ministers who were set over the peoples of Persia and Media, the governors and great men, who were in charge of districts, arrayed in woollen robes, clothed in purple, eating and drinking and making merry before him.

The Scripture does not say that he displayed his riches, but it says, 'when he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom' (i. 2), and that means that what he displayed to them was taken from the Holy House; for mortals [lit. flesh and blood] have no riches. All riches come from the Holy One, blessed be He, according as it is written, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts' (Hag. ii. 8). Six treasuries did he shew them daily for one hundred and eighty days, as it is written, 'the riches of the glory of his kingdom and the honour of the excellence of his majesty' (i. 4): here we have six descriptive words. But when Israel saw there the vessels of the Holy House, they refused to take their seats at the feast [lit. in his presence]. And it was told the king that the Jews refused to take their seats, because they saw the vessels of the Holy House. And the king said, Then prepare another place for them to sit by themselves. And when these days were ended the king said, Now I will make a feast for the people of my city, and I will bring them to the court of the garden, which is planted with trees bearing fruit and spices. How did he prepare for them? He bent one tree towards another and made arches, and broke away spice-trees and made them into seats, and they strewed in front of them goodly stones and pearls, and placed shady trees. And they drank of vessels of gold and cups of gold, and when one had drunk of a cup, he did not drink of the same a second time, but they took the cup away from him and brought another; and there were wine-coolers there, and the cups did not match one another, since it is written, 'the vessels being diverse one from another' (i. 7). But when they brought out the vessels of the Holy House, and the heathen poured wine into them, their lustre was changed, and therefore it is thus written, 'the vessels being diverse one from another.' 'And royal wine old' (i. 7), i.e. older than the person who drank it<sup>1</sup>. And why (do we say) than the person who drank it? Because, suppose the man was asked, How old art thou? and answered, I am forty years old, then he was given wine to drink forty years old. And in like manner they did for every one. And for this reason it is written, 'royal wine old' according to the bounty of the king. 'And

<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is deduced by the Targum from the double sense of the Heb. word **בָּרַךְ** which means either great in quantity, abundant (its real sense here), or great in age, old.

the drinking was according to the law'; no one was injured by it. And why did it injure no one? Because a drinking custom prevailed among the Persians that when they brought them a large cup which held four or five Hemins<sup>1</sup>—the measure was called a Pithka<sup>2</sup>—every one was made to drink it at one draught, and they did not leave him alone till he had drunk it at one draught. And the butler [lit. mixer] who mixed wine for the Persians used to acquire great wealth. And how used he to acquire it? He used to mix wine for the guest, and when he could not drink it, he used to beckon to the butler, saying, Take it away, and thou shalt have some money; because he was not able to drink it. But king Ahasuerus said, These cups shall not be brought for drinking; according as each man desires, he shall drink. Accordingly it is written, 'And the drinking was according to the law' (i. 8).

Vashti the queen prepared a feast apart for the women, and mixed for them dark-coloured wine, and she seated them in the palace in order to shew them the king's riches. And they asked her, Where does the king sleep? And she explained to all the women who requested her to do so, that they might know all particulars; and she told them the king's arrangements, that he ate here and drank there and slept there; and because of this it is written, 'in the royal house' (i. 9).

## SECOND SPECIMEN OF THE SECOND TARGUM (TARGUM SHENI) ON ESTHER

(on chap. iii. 8).

[The passage is of interest, as no doubt representing the charges brought against Jews by their Gentile neighbours at the time when the Targum was written.]

And Haman said to king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people of the Jews scattered and dispersed among the peoples of every province of the kingdom; proud and haughty in spirit, collecting melting snows in winter<sup>3</sup>, and putting them in summer pitchers<sup>4</sup>, and their customs are different from those of every people and their laws from those of every province, and they do not adapt themselves to our laws, and they are not minded to conform to our customs, and they refuse to do service to the king; and when they see us, they spit upon the ground and look

<sup>1</sup> *ḥéma*, liquid measure.

<sup>2</sup> Probably the Persian *βαρακή*, a kind of cup, mentioned by Diphilus, a comic poet, who flourished in the latter part of the 4th cent. B.C. See Meinecke's *Comic Fragments*, iv. 414.

<sup>3</sup> lit. of Tebeth, corresponding to the latter part of December and the first part of January. See note on ii. 16.

<sup>4</sup> lit. 'pitchers of Tammuz,' corresponding to the latter part of June and the first part of July. The above is Jastrow's rendering (*Dict. of the Targumim etc.* s.v. *חַמְצָא*), but it seems incompatible with *וַיִּתְבִּין*. If we do not amend this to *וַיִּהְיֶינָה*, we must explain it as, *sitting in bathing vessels*.

upon us as something unclean; and when we go to speak to them and demand of them some service to the king, they climb over walls and break through fences, and disappear into rooms, and make their escape through gaps; and when we run to lay hold of them, they turn round and stand with flashing eyes and gnash with their teeth and stamp with their feet, and they frighten us and we cannot lay hold of them. We do not take wives of their daughters, and they do not take to them wives of our daughters, and any of them who is brought to do work for the king excuses himself on that day, spending it in staring and sauntering about. And on a day when they wish to buy from us they tell us it is a lawful day, but on a day when we wish to buy from them, they close the market against us and tell us that it is an unlawful day. At the first hour of the day they say, We are reciting the *Shēma*<sup>1</sup>; at the second hour they say, We are occupied by our prayers; at the third they say, We are engaged with our meal; at the fourth they say, We are blessing the God of heaven for having given us food and drink; at the fifth they are going out to walk; and at the sixth they are returning; and at the seventh their wives go to meet them and say, Bring some soup of bruised beans, for ye are wearied by your service of the tyrannical king. One day in the week they keep as a day of rest. They go up to their synagogue and read in their books and expound their prophets and curse our king and utter imprecations against our rulers and say, This is the seventh day on which our great God rested.

<sup>1</sup> The title of the passage Deut. vi. 4—9, as commencing with the word שְׁמָע, *Shēma*, hear. It was recited twice a day by every adult male Israelite (see Schürer, *The Jewish People in the time of Jesus Christ*, Eng. trans. II. ii. 84).

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