

1751

W. H. W. to
Beacon Hill
School.



The orphan presenting herself before the king.—p. 25.

HADASSAH,

THE JEWISH ORPHAN.

ILLUSTRATED WITH FINE CUTS.

WRITTEN FOR THE AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION, AND
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HADASSAH

CHAPTER I.

Account of a great king—Description of his palace, and of the feasts he made—His conduct towards the queen, and her undeserved disgrace—The evil effects of strong drink—Method of choosing a new queen—History of an orphan, and how she came to be thought of for queen—Account of Mordecai, her adopted father—Her temper and behaviour—She pleases the king, and is raised to the throne.

ONE of the most rich and powerful kings that ever lived was Ahasuerus, the king of Persia. To his dominions belonged Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, and many other cities and countries about which

we often read in the Bible and in histories.

There was no part of the earth, perhaps, in which could be found so many beautiful flowers and trees, or so great a variety of useful fruits and vegetables, as were found in Persia. And we are told by a traveller, who passed through the country long since the reign of Ahasuerus, that at a feast to which he was invited, he counted fifty different kinds of fruit upon the table, every one of which grew in the country. They did not have to send thousands of miles, as we do, for figs, and almonds, and pine-apples, &c., for almost every variety of rich fruit grew

at home, as our peaches, and pears, and apples do.

This fertile and extensive country was divided into one hundred and twenty-seven provinces or states, over each of which was a prince or governor. The king's palace was in a city called Shushan; and to show us how great were his riches and power, we are told that in the third year of his reign he invited all the princes or governors of the provinces, and all his nobles and counsellors, to come to Shushan, where he made a feast for them which lasted about six months. The entertainment was given in the area or court of the palace garden.

We know the eastern houses were so built as to enclose a large court or yard, such as we see in the annexed cut.

The court is surrounded by the sides of the house. A fountain of water is opened in the middle of it, which is thrown up through a pipe, and falls into a marble cistern; producing an agreeable sound and a delightful freshness and coolness of the air. And sometimes, where the court was large enough, vines and roses, and other fragrant and beautiful shrubbery, covered the sides of it, and filled the air with the sweetest perfume.

The court of the palace of Aha-

suerus was paved with rich marble of various colours. The couches around the court, on which the guests reclined, were made of gold and silver; and the awning, which was stretched over the whole, was fastened, by rings of silver, to marble pillars; while the cords and hangings were all of the richest and most costly kind, and of every variety of beautiful colours. The vessels of the table, too, were made of pure gold, and each vessel was unlike all the rest.

At the same time the queen made a feast for the princesses and noble women of the kingdom; but this was in the palace, and not in the public court.

On the seventh day after the feast began, the king, being excited by the free use of wine, directed seven of his servants to go to the queen's apartment, and bring her, in her royal dress, into the king's presence, that he and his company of princes and nobles might see her; for she was of a very fair and beautiful countenance.

The king would never have done this, if he had not been under the influence of wine, for it was against the custom of the country for the women to appear in public.

The queen refused to obey the command. She felt the impropriety of the king's request that she should visit such a place for

such a purpose, and chose to suffer his displeasure rather than be guilty of conduct so unbecoming.

Her refusal to obey made the king very angry. Though he was ruler over such a mighty nation, he had no rule over his own spirit; and being influenced with wine, which is a mocker, and with strong drink, which is raging, (Prov. xx. 1,) he ordered her to be driven from the throne; never to come into his presence again, and to share his favour no more forever. Better was it for her, however, to go into disgrace and obscurity with an unspotted character and a good conscience, than to keep her place on

the throne with guilt and self-reproach.

Inquiry was soon made for some suitable person to take the place of the disgraced queen; and it was proposed that a number of the fairest and most beautiful women in the kingdom should assemble at Shushan, and have apartments provided for them in the palace, and whoever among them most pleased the king should be made queen.

Among the persons who were brought to the palace was an orphan child, whose name was HADASSAH, or Esther, as she was more commonly called. It is supposed that her parents died while she was an

infant. They were Jews. In a dreadful war between them and the surrounding nations, the Jews were carried away, as prisoners, from their own country, and were made to live in other places, and some of them were taken to Persia. So that Esther was the child of a captive Jew. She was left a poor, defenceless orphan in a strange land; but still the Lord took her up and provided for her, as he always does for such as trust in him. Ps. xxviii. 10.

She had a kind relation whose name was Mordecai. He received her into his own house, and adopted her for his daughter.

Esther was of a fair countenance

and beautiful figure; and when the servants of the king went out to collect the company of young women from whom their royal master might choose a queen, Mordecai sent Esther with them.

We shall see, very soon, that it was not any proud, or ambitious feeling that caused Mordecai to send his adopted daughter to Shushan; nor was it because she was vain of her form, or features, that Esther consented to go. God had wise purposes to answer, and he puts it into the hearts of his servants to do his will.

Before she went up, we may suppose that Mordecai faithfully in-

structed her, and gave her wise and affectionate counsel as to her conduct in her new station. He charged her to say nothing about her being the daughter of Jewish parents, or about the country from which her ancestors came. She would not, probably, be questioned on this subject, and as the Persians felt a sort of contempt for the Jews, it would be unnecessary and imprudent for her to say any thing about it.

Many young persons would have been very proud of Esther's distinction. The decree of the king was to collect together at Shushan the fairest and most beautiful young women of the country. The object

of collecting them was known to everybody; and when Esther was appointed to go, it was as much as to say that she was one of the fairest and most beautiful young women of all Persia. She probably felt, however, that, with all her beauty, she had no reason to be proud. God had given her a fair countenance and a graceful form, and God could in a moment take them both away, and give her, instead of them, sickness and deformity.

This humble and modest feeling, which was seen in all her conduct and conversation, made her the favourite of the king's officer who had charge of the women's apartment.

For we are told, in the history of those times, that when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan, the palace, that Esther was brought also into the king's house to the custody of Hegai, the keeper of the women. And Esther pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him, and he gave her servants to attend upon her, and appointed her the best place that could be found in the house of the women.

For twelve months they were making preparation for their appearance before the king, and during all this time Mordecai was faithfully watching over his adopted daughter, and making daily inquiry as to her

health and happiness; and Esther, in return for his care and kindness, conducted herself wisely and modestly, according to his instructions. She did as she supposed he would wish her to do, though she was out of his sight; thus setting before children and youth a bright example of the duty and affection which they should delight to render to such as love and take care of them.

When the time came for the young women to appear in the royal presence, they were permitted to choose any ornaments they pleased, and to adorn themselves as much as they would. They were then to enter the king's apartment, one

by one; and if they were not acceptable to him, they came out, and returned not into his presence.

Esther's turn came. She chose to appear in her usual dress, without ornaments of any kind, and trust to her plain and simple apparel and modest manners to recommend her to the favour of the king. She was presented to him, as he sat upon his throne, with the officers of the kingdom around him. (*See frontispiece.*) Her graceful appearance and artless manners excited his admiration, and he loved her above all the others; so that the royal crown was immediately set upon her head, and that very day she became the queen of

the realm. Thus God putteth down
one and setteth up another :

He raiseth the poor out of the dust,
And lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;
That he may set him with princes,
Even with the princes of his people.

Psalm cxiii. 7, 8.

CHAPTER II.

Conduct of the new queen—A conspiracy to murder the king—Information of their design given by Mordecai—The conspirators seized and executed—Character and station of Haman—Mordecai's treatment of him, and the cause of it—The effect on Haman—The massacre of the whole Jewish people proposed, and the decree of the king obtained for it—Casting lots, how practised and when.

THOUGH raised to the throne of the greatest kingdom of the world, Esther never forgot her obligation to her kind relation, who had become one of her subjects. She still remembered Mordecai's directions, and observed them as she used to do when she was under his care. Nothing is more amiable and praise-

worthy in young persons than this childlike submission to those in whose piety and wisdom they may safely trust; and nothing, on the other hand, shows more folly and ignorance, than a contempt of the advice and guidance of others.

Mordecai was an officer of the king's household; and soon after Esther's advancement, he came to the knowledge of a conspiracy, or plan formed by two of the servants to murder the king. He hastened to inform Esther of it, and she informed the king. The offenders were instantly seized and tried; and being found guilty of a design to destroy the king's life, they were both executed.

A record was made of the whole transaction, and Mordecai was mentioned as the informer. We shall see by-and-by how God's purposes were to be accomplished by this event.

And who shall say how vast the plan
Which this slight incident began ?
Too slight, perhaps, the small occasion
For our dim-sighted observation :
It passed unheeded, like the bird
Which cleaves the silent air unheard ;
And yet may prove, when understood,
The harbinger of boundless good.

We shall see, that though no step has been taken to destroy the Jews, and no one has thought of such a thing, God foresees the danger which awaits them, and has taken three steps for their deliverance,

viz. First, the dismissal of the queen; second, the elevation of Esther to her place; and third, the good office which Mordecai did in making known the conspiracy against the king's life.

Among those who stood highest in the king's favour, at this time, was Haman. He is supposed to have been an Amalekite, and no one can forget the dreadful curse which was pronounced by God on the whole family of Amalek, because of their cruel treatment of the Israelites. (See Exod. xvii. 8. 14. 1 Sam. xv. and xxx. 1, 2.)

Haman, however, had obtained the first place among the officers of

the court, and was a particular favourite of the king. And the king commanded all the inferior officers to bow down to him, and pay him reverence. It is probable that this was something more than the honour which was due to his office, and which, by the rule given us in the Bible, Mordecai ought to render. (Rom. xii. 7.) It was a kind of worship which is due to God only, and not to any created being in heaven or on earth. It is possible, too, that Mordecai knew that Haman was of the accursed race of Amalek; and this, together with the wicked pride which he showed, would be reason enough

why Mordecai should refuse to pay him the homage which he required.

There were many people ready to tell Haman of Mordecai's offence. Some persons seem to have little else to do, than to excite ill-feelings and quarrels in families, and among neighbourhoods, by telling tales; and even little children sometimes seem to delight in getting each other punished; instead of trying, by example and persuasion, to keep each other from doing wrong.

As soon as Haman knew that Mordecai refused to reverence him, his proud heart was filled with anger.

Mordecai was probably a godly man ; and we need not wonder that his fellow-servants were disposed to injure him. It has always been the case, and always will be, that good people are objects of the dislike and ill-will of the wicked, (2 Tim. iii. 12,) and they are glad to see them in difficulty and disgrace.

They said to Mordecai very often, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" but he did not regard what they said to him. He held his peace, and went on quietly in the discharge of his duty. As soon as they found that he was a Jew, they hastened to tell Haman of it, for they knew this circum-

stance would make him still more angry with Mordecai.

If Haman had been a wise man, he would have overlooked the conduct of this humble Jew, and would have been satisfied with the flattery of the millions of people that were ready and willing to bow down to him. But a proud man is almost always a weak man too. And Haman was so full of rage, that he determined, not only to destroy Mordecai, but also to cut off the whole Jewish people—men, women, and children, wheresoever they could be found in the whole country. Yes! all the people must be put to death, because this one



Haman pleading with the king to destroy the Jews.

proud man could not have his will!

To execute his cruel purpose, it was necessary to obtain a decree from the king. Haman took advantage of his high office and influence, and represented to the king that there was a certain people dwelling in his dominions, whose customs and laws were entirely different from those of the Persians, and that they did not respect the king's commandment; that it was unwise to suffer such a people to continue in the land; and he therefore prayed the king to write a decree to destroy them.

See the wicked man pleading for

the ruin of a people that never injured him, and that were entirely innocent of all offence against the king. How mean and hateful is his conduct! What angry and malicious feelings must be in his heart!

Lest the king should object to making the decree, on account of the expense which it would occasion, Haman engaged to see that a large sum of money should be paid into the treasury; for he expected to seize the property of the people whose lives he was determined to destroy.

The story which Haman told was undoubtedly false. There is

no account of a single person, except Mordecai, who refused to obey the king's commandment. But a proud and ambitious man can easily persuade himself, that any means of accomplishing his purposes are proper and lawful.

Without consulting any of his friends or counsellors, the king, in a thoughtless manner, and perhaps under the influence of wine, took his ring from his hand and gave it to Haman. This was a sign that his request was granted; for the ring gave him authority to do as he pleased. So he made the decree just according to his own wishes, and sealed it with the king's ring.

which was given him for that purpose. To determine what day should be fixed upon for the massacre, Haman cast lots. Perhaps he put into some person's lap, or into a box or other vessel, three hundred and sixty-five marks, representing the days of the year; and after shaking them together, he put his hand in and drew out one of the marks, and whatever day of the year that mark represented, should be the day of slaughter for the Jews.

So the lot is cast into the lap, (Prov. xvi. 33,) but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. If the lot had fallen on a day of the next week, or the next month,

there would have been no time to save the poor Jews from the destruction which threatened them. But the Lord so disposed the lot, that the day appointed was nearly a year distant, and thus the Jews had abundant time to prepare for their defence.

There was nothing wicked in casting lots, when it was done sacredly, with a sincere and devout reference of the whole matter to God. It is, however, very wicked to practise it unnecessarily, and perhaps no case can occur, in these days of gospel light, when a resort to this method of deciding a question would be proper.

As soon as the day was fixed, Haman hastened messengers all over the land with the news. Notice was given to the governors and rulers of the several provinces or states, and the decree was published in the various languages of the country. And letters were sent by post everywhere, requiring that upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which answers to the first of March, as we reckon time, they should destroy, kill, and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, and seize all their property.

Their purpose being formed, the

king and Haman sat down to drink; but the people of the city of Shushan were surprised and shocked when they heard what had happened.

CHAPTER III.

Mordecai's conduct when he heard of the decree—The queen attempts in vain to comfort him—He admonishes her of her duty to interfere for the safety of her people—Her objections to this course—Mordecai's answer, and its effect on the mind of the queen—Her noble resolution—Story of the four leprous men.

As soon as Mordecai heard of the decree, he was filled with sorrow, and clothed himself in coarse, dark cloth, and covered his body with ashes. This was customary among the Jews, as were also tearing the hair, beating the breast, &c., as signs of deep mourning and humiliation. (Jonah iii. 6.) He then went out into the city, and cried with a loud



The mourning of Mordecai

and bitter cry, and showed every mark of the deepest distress.

It was very natural that in this season of perplexity and danger, Mordecai should wish to consult with Esther, and learn from her the true cause of the king's displeasure towards the Jews. But he could not be admitted to the palace in the garments of sorrow. They that dwell in king's houses wear soft raiment, (Matt. xi. 8,) and are offended by the coarse, rough sackcloth which the mourner puts on; but can they keep sadness and sorrow out of their houses, as well as sackcloth and ashes? Do fevers, and cancers, and dropsies pass by

the abodes of power and wealth, and go only into the houses of the poor and humble? Why then should the signs of mourning be kept out of sight, while sickness and death, which occasion it, happen alike to all? (Eccl. ix. 2.)

Esther, however, was not ignorant of what the king and Haman had done; and she had heard, also, of the deep sorrow which filled Mordecai's heart, and caused him to utter his bitter cry, even in the street. Perhaps she did not know, as well as he did, the extent of the threatened destruction, nor the means which had been used to make it certain. But wherever the king's

decree was published, in all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Such general grief and sorrow could not pass unobserved; and the servants of Esther told her of it. Perhaps they mentioned Mordecai by name, either because they suspected, from his inquiries about her, that he was a relation, or because his grief was so great and public as to attract particular notice.

The queen was greatly troubled when she heard of the deep affliction of her adopted father, and immediately sent him a change of

raiment, desiring that he would cast off his garments of sackcloth, and put on a cheerful dress. But he declined to do so. He refused to be comforted; and continued to mourn and weep over the desolation with which he and his countrymen were threatened.

Then the queen called for Hatach, one of her chief officers, and directed him to go to Mordecai, and inquire particularly into the cause of his grief, and the extent of the evil which he feared.

So Hatach went forth, and met Mordecai as he was walking back and forth in the street of the city, which was before the king's gate,

and told him for what purpose the queen had sent him.

Then Mordecai told him all that had happened, and gave him a copy of the king's decree, that the queen might see for herself what a dreadful destruction was about to come upon her brethren and kinsmen, the Jews. He also sent a particular message to Esther, charging her to go in unto the king, and make her petition unto him in behalf of her people, and see if she could not persuade him to change his purpose, or in some way save them from the ruin that was before them.

Esther directed Hatach to return to Mordecai, and remind him of the

law of the king's house, that if any person, man or woman, who is not called, comes into the court where the king is, such person shall surely be put to death, unless the king shall hold out to him or her the golden sceptre, as a token of pardon and favour. She also directed him to say to Mordecai, that she had not been called into the king's presence for thirty days; and, of course, she had reason to fear that the king was displeased with her, though she did not know for what cause. At any rate, she could not hope, under such circumstances, to be received with favour, if she should go into his presence uncalled.

But Mordecai was not satisfied with this answer. He felt that Esther was placed where she could do more than any one else to turn the king's mind. He was convinced that it was her duty to go to him without any fear of the consequences; tell him to what danger her countrymen were exposed through the malice of wicked Haman, and persuade him, if possible, to protect and save them.

He therefore sent the messenger back with a faithful warning to the queen, that she must not think, because she was in the king's house, that she would escape, if there should be a general slaughter of

the Jews. He assured her of his confidence that God would deliver his people, by some means or other, such as his infinite wisdom should choose. And he told her, that if from selfishness, or an improper fear of the consequences, she should hold her peace when it was her duty to speak out, she might depend upon it, that the deliverance of the Jews would be accomplished, while she and her family would be destroyed.

He also suggested to her, that perhaps God, in his wise and holy providence, had brought her, an obscure, captive orphan, to the throne of Persia, for the very purpose of delivering the Jews through her means.

We see that Mordecai had no fears. He felt perfect confidence in the power of God to take care of him and of his people. It is true he mourned and wept, for it was a time of danger and calamity to his countrymen, and weeping is not inconsistent with entire confidence in God, and cheerful submission to his will. But he had no doubt that Haman's scheme would be defeated, and the Jews be delivered from the hands of their enemies, whatever course Esther might take. But for her own sake, he begged her to study the will of God, and to determine whether it was not required of her to take advantage

of her exalted station, and to use her influence with the king in behalf of her captive countrymen, who were threatened with such a bloody persecution.

This course of Mordecai is worthy of imitation. For example: it seems a thing incredible, that this world, filled as it now is with darkness and sin, should ever be universally blessed with the light, and purity, and peace of the gospel. But God says it shall be so. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. (Isa. xi. 9.) He will give his son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. (Ps

ii. 8.) Now this will certainly come to pass. Though missionaries should die as fast as they land on pagan shores; though types and printing-presses should all be broken up, and none should know how to make them again; and though Bibles and tracts should all be destroyed; still God's counsel shall stand. His will shall be accomplished. He teaches us, by the Bible and by his providence, what his will is. We have abundant evidence, that he blesses the efforts of his church to spread the gospel by means of missionaries, schools, tracts, &c.; and we are to do all this with as much zeal and industry,

as if the purpose of a gracious Redeemer could be accomplished in no other way. Esther may be silent, but the Jews will be saved. Means may fail, but the promise of God is sure.

Mordecai's solemn message greatly moved the queen's mind. We may suppose that she was much perplexed with the difficulties of her situation. If she should incur the king's anger by any improper approach to him, she would lose her place, as the former queen had lost her's. There would then be no one near the throne to defend the Jews, and they would be left to perish before the fury of their

enemies. And yet, on the other hand, if some one did not go forward boldly, and make known the whole matter to the king, it would probably be too late, in a little while, to get the decree changed.

In this difficulty, she took the only safe course. As an humble, dutiful child seeks the advice and direction of a wise and faithful parent, so she went to her heavenly Father, and besought him to direct her steps in the right way, and give her grace to glorify him. She asked not in vain. The path of duty was made plain before her face; and she had strength and resolution given to her to make a

decision, and to meet all the consequences of it.

“Go,” said she to the messenger,—“go, return to Mordecai, and tell him to gather together all the Jews in the city, and fast, neither eating nor drinking for three days, night or day. I, also, and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, though it is against the law: **AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH.**”

It was a noble resolution. She reasoned as the four leprous men reasoned, who were sitting at the gate of the city of Samaria, while its inhabitants were suffering a dreadful famine. Perhaps you may remember the story.

The Syrian army had besieged Samaria ; that is, they had shut up the city, and surrounded it with soldiers, so that no one could go in or come out, night or day. This siege had lasted so long, that the people were starving. So dreadful was the famine that nearly fifty dollars were paid for the head of an ass to eat ; and the people had even begun to feed upon each other !

The four leprous men were sitting just outside the gate ; for those who had this dreadful disease were not permitted to come near other people. And they said one to another, " Why sit we here until we die ? If we say we will enter

into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we shall die also. Now, therefore, come let us fall unto or join the host of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die."

And they rose up to go to the Syrian camp. And God prepared the way before them, by causing the Syrians to flee at what they thought to be the sound of horses and chariots, and a great army coming upon them. So that when the four lepers came upon the campground, behold there was no man there, neither voice of man; but

horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were.

It was night; but they hastened to the city, and called to the porter who kept the gates, and told him what had happened. The king was informed of it; but he suspected it to be a trick of the enemy, by which they meant to deceive and draw them out of the city, and then fall upon them by surprise, and cut them off. Messengers were sent out to ascertain the truth; and they followed the flying army of the Syrians even to the river Jordan, and found the whole way was strewed with the garments and vessels which the Syrians had cast

away in their flight. So the famished people went out of the city, and supplied themselves with meat and drink, and silver and gold, from the tents which their enemies had left.

This beautiful history, as well as the incident in Esther's life, may instruct us in a matter of personal duty. Our situation is not unlike that of the leprous men, except that it is perhaps a great deal worse. We are all in danger of eternal death. We are condemned already, and the wrath of God abides upon us. (John iii. 18. 36.) If we do not repent of our sins and forsake them, and turn to God, we

shall surely die. (Ezek. xviii. 20.)
If we call upon God and cry for
mercy, and he will not hear us, but
sends us away in all our guilt and
wretchedness, without peace or par-
don, we can but die. A struggle
for salvation will not make our case
any worse. And there is at least
some good reason to hope, that if
we ask, we shall receive; if we
seek, we shall find; if we knock, it
shall be opened unto us. (Matt
vii. 7—11.)

Just make the trial, seek his face;
Yes, seek him ~~near~~ and now;
Repent, believe, and trust his grace,
And make your solemn vow.

CHAPTER IV.

A solemn fast for three days—Character of Esther's resolution — The prodigal son's resolution — The wanderer from God—The generous and noble conduct of the queen contrasted with the benevolence and sacrifices of the divine Redeemer.

WE may suppose that in the midst of all the vain pleasures and honours of the king's palace, and while the streets of the city of Shushan were thronged with the busy children of the world, Esther, with a few of her servants, who feared God, retired to the most secret apartment they could find. And sometimes alone and sometimes together, bowed themselves down,

and for three days earnestly besought the divine direction and blessing. The queen was about to expose her crown, and perhaps her life, in behalf of her countrymen; and she needed great grace to do her duty wisely, faithfully, and fearlessly. The Jews felt that if she did not succeed, their hope of deliverance would be nearly, if not quite destroyed; and they fasted, and prayed, and pleaded with God, that he would remember them in mercy, and give Esther favour in the sight of the king, that so they might be delivered from the hands of their enemies, who stood ready to destroy them.

Mordecai, too, the orphan's father and friend, by whose advice and persuasion she had been so greatly influenced—how fervently was he imploring the protection and blessing of God, to attend the queen in her most hazardous and doubtful enterprise, and with what deep and solemn interest was he looking forward to the issue of it!

Esther's resolution was made without any condition or qualification. She looked at the critical circumstances in which she and her countrymen were placed by the malice of Haman and the rashness of the king. She felt that her duty was plain, and though attend-

ed with many dangers, must be performed. She knew her weakness too, and how easily the wicked and deceitful heart of man is turned aside by the temptations of the devil. It was wise in her to cast herself on God, and trust in Him for the supply of all needed grace and strength.

Nothing is more common among men than to make resolutions; and they are broken or forgotten as easily as they are made. The most common reasons are, either that they are made without reference to our dependence on God for grace to keep them, or they are made with the fear and expectation that they

will not be kept, or (and this is the most common reason) they are not made with a view to *present action*. We are much more willing to resolve for to-morrow than for to-day. The son that left his father's house, with all its comfort and safety, and roamed abroad in folly and sin, till he was reduced to beggary, was at last compelled, by his forlorn condition, to think of home, of his father, of the peace and plenty he might have enjoyed there, and of the base ingratitude and sinfulness of his conduct. His reason was restored; conscience spoke; I will arise, not next week, not to-morrow, but NOW. He could do it

better then than at any future time. I will arise and go to my father; and he arose and went. What he resolved to do he did; and did it at once. This was the only wise and safe course. And so the wanderer from God, of whatever age or character, as soon as he is made to feel his miserable and hopeless situation, needs only to form such a resolution as Esther formed, and seek the same grace to keep it.

I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Doth like a mountain rise;
I know his courts; I'll enter in;
Perhaps he'll hear my cries,
Perhaps he will admit my plea,
Perhaps regard my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

It was a generous spirit in Esther that led her to expose her own interest and life for the sake of her brethren, and kindred, and friends. The most worldly and selfish cannot but admire her for it. But this, and all similar acts of generosity and noble daring which history records, are not worthy to be compared with the benevolence of our Divine Redeemer, who left the glory which he had with the father before the world was, (John xvii. 5;) came to this guilty earth of ours in the form of a servant; made himself of no reputation, (Phil. ii. 7,) and suffered the punishment of our sins in our stead. He knew

that a life of suffering and disgrace was before him, (Isa. liii. 3, &c. ;) that death in its most cruel and terrible form would meet him ; and, more than all this, that he must be forsaken of God, (Matt. xxvii. 46,) his holy Father, while he took the place and bore the sins of man in his own body on the tree. (1 Pet. ii. 24.) And yet he came, not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (Matt. ix. 13.) He died, —not for the righteous,—not for his friends,—but for sinners,—for his enemies. He was shamefully treated, basely betrayed, and cruelly murdered by those whom he came to pardon, bless, and save.

O, for such love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break ;
While, all harmonious, human tongues
The Saviour's praises speak !

CHAPTER V.

Esther ventures all, and goes into the king's presence—
Her reception—The king's offer—The king and Ha-
man invited to a banquet—The queen's second re-
quest—Haman's anger excited anew—He discloses
his feelings to his family and friends—They propose
the murder of Mordecai—A gallows prepared for the
purpose.

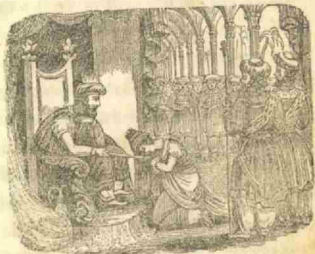
I WILL GO IN UNTO THE KING,
AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH.

This was the noble resolution of
Esther when she considered her ob-
ligations to the king, to herself, to
God, and to her own people.

On the last of the three days
which had been spent in fasting
and prayer, and while Mordecai
and the other Jews of the city were

yet engaged in the solemn service, the queen put on the royal robes, and with her heart fixed, trusting in God, (Ps. cxii. 7,) she went fearlessly into the inner court of the king's palace, and stood where none were permitted to enter, unless they were called by the king.

The king is upon his throne, and sees her approach. The officers of the court are standing in the royal presence. This is the time of danger; but in answer to the prayers of Esther and her companions, God gives her favour in the king's sight. She bows herself at the footstool, and the golden sceptre is held out to her as a token of acceptance.



Esther before the throne.

“Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be given thee to the half of my kingdom.”

What a relief to her anxious and burdened heart! and what emotions of gratitude must have been excited in her bosom, when she found that God had turned the king's heart favourably towards her!

In answer to his gracious inquiry, Esther merely requested that the king and Haman would come together, that day, to a feast which she had prepared for them.

“And the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may

do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared."

While sitting at the table, the king repeated his offer to Esther, and asked her to make known her request. She declined doing so at that time, but invited the king and Haman to come to another feast the next day.

This distinguished honour was very flattering to the pride of Haman. To be invited to the queen's feast, with no company but the king, was a distinction which few courtiers attained, and to an ambitious, worldly man, like Haman, a very desirable one. So that he

went forth from the palace into the street, with a joyful and glad heart. But at the gate sat Mordecai. He passed by, but the humble Jew stood not up nor moved for him. Mordecai had by this time become more fully acquainted with his mean and malicious character, and with his cruel designs towards himself and his countrymen; and he felt unwilling to pay to such a man the least token of respect. This filled Haman's proud heart with anger and indignation, and of course took away all the enjoyment which his late honours had occasioned.

He, however, restrained himself

as well as he was able, until he got home; and here, where the real character is usually seen best, Haman exposed the bad feelings of his heart.

He even calls his friends and associates together, and in the presence of his wife and family, exposes his weakness and sin. He tells them of the glory of his riches, of his children, who were at that moment, perhaps, playing about the room, unconscious of the disgrace and ruin which their father was bringing upon himself. He tells them of his honours and distinctions in the king's service; and especially does he call to mind the



Haman consulting his friends.

flattering token of the queen's regard which he had just received, in being invited to the banquet, with no one but the king, on two successive days. "Yet all this," cries the unhappy, wretched man, "all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate." No matter what favour, distinction, or prosperity I may enjoy, I shall never be happy till that man, Mordecai, is made to bow down to me. I will never be contented, so long as he keeps his seat while I am passing by.

We may readily suppose that such a man would not have the wisest and best people for his friends

and counsellors. And we find, from the advice they gave him, that Haman took counsel of those who were ready to feed his pride, and to assist him in the execution of his wicked designs.

His wife and friends advised him to have a gallows erected, seventy-five feet high; and that when he should go with the king to Esther's banquet the next day, he should obtain from him an order to hang Mordecai. The gallows being prepared beforehand, there would be no delay, and the hated Mordecai could be put out of the way before his friends would have an opportunity to intercede for him.

The plan pleased Haman. His anger was so fierce that he could not wait for the general massacre. The gallows was erected; but Mordecai, of course, had no knowledge of the mischief that was intended towards him. He went on in the discharge of his duty; while God took care that the evil design of Haman should not prosper. The righteous man is always safe.

He shall call upon me,
And I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honour him;
With long life will I satisfy him,
And shew him my salvation.

Psalms xci. 15, 16.

CHAPTER VI.

The king finds that Mordecai has not been rewarded—Haman is suddenly called on to propose honours for the king's favourite—He mistakes the king's purpose—Picture of a selfish man—Haman is compelled to do honour to Mordecai—Public display—Effects of this honour upon Mordecai—Effects upon Haman—Their respective conduct.

It so happened that the king on that night could not sleep. It might have been because of the improper indulgences of the day; or the cares of his vast kingdom might press upon him; or it is still more probable, that the stings of a guilty conscience, and the possession of a heart at enmity with God, occasioned his wakefulness. He might

have fancied that conspiracies were formed against him, and that his crown, or perhaps his life, was to be taken from him, for the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) To employ the restless hours, he called for the books in which the history of his kingdom was written. During the examination of these books, his attention was drawn to a particular passage, from which it appeared that Mordecai had made known the plan for his assassination, which was laid by the two servants; and

it did not appear that he had ever been rewarded for this service.

The king determined at once to reward Mordecai for his faithfulness, and immediately inquired of his servants what officer was in the outer court. Haman was so impatient for the destruction of the humble Jew, that he could not wait for the banquet to get an order for his execution. He was coming in at this early hour of the morning to accomplish his purpose. The servant said, "Behold, Haman standeth in the court." The king directed him to be called. So Haman came in.

Before he had an opportunity to

propose his own business, however, he was asked, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" Now mark the workings of his proud and selfish heart. He said within himself, "Who is there in all Persia, whom the king would honour rather than me? I am invited with him to the queen's banquets; I am first in office, and first in favour. I have the king's seal in my possession, and what mark of his confidence could he give me, that I have not got? And yet it must be that he designs some new distinction for me."

As soon as he had time to think

of a plan for the most public display of the royal favourite, and not doubting at all that it would be all for himself, he replied :

“For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought, and the crown* which the king wears, and the horse that he rides upon. And let one of the noblest princes of the country be called, and let the apparel, and the crown, and the horse be given into his hands: and let him array in this apparel, and with this crown, the man whom the

* There is some doubt whether this crown was the king's, or whether it was an ornament placed upon the head of the horse, to denote that he belonged to the king.

king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and let a herald go before him, proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.' "

In all this, the vain and wicked Haman supposed that he was procuring distinction for himself, and imagined, perhaps, that he already heard the shouts of the multitude, as he rode through the streets of Shushan, in royal state, bearing upon his person such proud tokens of the king's favour. Mordecai, he supposed, would before that time have ended his life on the gallows,

and would no more vex his haughty spirit; so that he should be had in reverence by the whole people.

What then must have been his surprise and mortification, when the king commanded him to make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, just as he had proposed, and do even so to Mordecai!—yes, to Mordecai, the Jew that was sitting at the king's gate. The last words of the king's command were, "Let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." What a dagger to the heart of Haman! Must all this be done for that Jew, the destroyer of all my peace; and must I do it?

Yes, it was the king's command,



The proud Haman humbled, and the humble Mordecai exalted

and he could not refuse, but at the peril of his life. And with a heavy and angry heart, he took the apparel and the horse; called for Mordecai, arrayed him in the royal robes, and put upon him the royal crown.

Attended by a military guard and by a crowd of citizens, all waiting to do homage to the king's favourite, Mordecai passed through the streets of the city, upon the king's horse, led by the proud Haman, who had intended all this honour for himself. And the proclamation was made by a herald, at every corner, and at the places of public resort: **THUS SHALL IT BE**

DONE UNTO THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR.

Mordecai enjoyed not this distinction. He would rather have chosen to remain at the king's gate, unnoticed and unknown. But he knew that much was depending upon the humour of the king, and although he desired none of this vain and idle parade, he was willing to submit to the king's pleasure, for the sake of securing the safety of his people. It is not the receiving praise from men, but it is the improper desire of praise, and the neglect to seek the honour which cometh from God only, which is so sinful. A man of piety,

whose life is governed by the principles of the gospel, will generally be honoured by his fellow men. But he receives this honour with meekness, giving God the glory and he uses his influence to increase the happiness of his fellow men.

The difference is clearly seen in the conduct of the two men before us. Mordecai, when the parade was over, cheerfully left his horse; threw off his crown and royal apparel; withdrew himself from the multitude, and from the honours they were ready to heap upon him; and took his place again at the king's gate. While Haman, possessed of wealth and honour,

and holding the highest place in the king's favour, hastened to his house, mortified, vexed, and with his head covered, as a token of mourning, because another man had been honoured rather than himself. All his care and thought were about his own happiness and glory.

CHAPTER VII.

Haman's friends predict his downfall—He is hastily called to the queen's banquet—She then discloses to the king the wicked conspiracy against the Jews.

WE must remember how unexpectedly and rapidly the scenes recorded in the last chapter took place. Haman expected to have accomplished the destruction of Mordecai, before he attended the king to the queen's banquet. Instead of this, the plan proposed for showing honour to the king's favourite had been matured. And in the short space of a single morning, Mordecai had been called from his post of duty to attend on the

king's pleasure; the news of the intended display had been spread through the city; the military, and the crowd of citizens, had been collected and dispersed; he, whose honour and distinction had been proclaimed by the public herald in the ears of thousands, had already taken his humble seat in the king's gate; and Haman had returned home to tell his wife and friends of all that had befallen him. Who can tell what a day may bring forth!

It was evident to Haman's friends, that the honour showed to Mordecai was not a sign of any good to Haman. And they told him plainly, that they thought his fall

was at hand, and that his plan for Mordecai's destruction would not succeed. While they were yet talking with him, however, a servant came from the king, and interrupting the conversation, reminded him of his engagement to attend Esther's banquet. Although he had been so much flattered by her invitation, yet he was, at the same time, so full of disappointment and mortification at the events of the morning, and so perplexed as to the course he should now pursue to bring about the destruction of Mordecai, and secure his own safety, that he had forgotten his appointment, until the messen-

ger came to his house to hasten him to the queen's apartments.

The conduct of Esther must have surprised both the king and Haman. We are to remember, that she had ventured, at the hazard of her life, into the king's presence. She had been received with favour. The king had offered her whatever she desired, even if it should be the half of his kingdom. She only asked his presence with Haman at her banquet.

When seated at the banquet, the king repeated his offer to give her whatever she desired, though it should be half his kingdom. They probably thought that her object

was to secure an opportunity for a private interview with them, that she might make some important petition, and have time to urge it with all proper importunity. But instead of this, to the repeated offer of the king, she only answered, by inviting them to come the next day to another banquet which she would provide. And now they were again in her presence, and the king once more said to her, "What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom."

Then 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."

She then disclosed to the king the whole plot. She stated to him, that she and her people, the Jews, were sold to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. She said that if it had been intended merely to sell them into bondage, she should have said nothing; though even in that case, the country would lose many of its best citizens, and the king many of his best subjects; and this was an injury which those who sought to destroy them would be

unable to repair. But it was the universal massacre of Jewish men, women, and children, without distinction, that was designed; and her petition was, that the king would interfere for their deliverance.

Filled with astonishment at this disclosure, the king quickly inquired, Who is he and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? Who is there, among all my people, so malicious as to think of such a cruel purpose? He had probably forgotten the act of which he had been guilty in a moment of excitement, and by which he had exposed many thousands of innocent people to an untimely and violent death.

Esther replied, IT IS THIS WICKED HAMAN!

No wonder the proud man starts back with terror, when his foul and murderous purposes are thus exposed. No wonder the vessel from which he was drinking falls from his trembling hand, when he finds himself in the king's presence a guilty, self-condemned, ruined man. But, O! how faint an emblem is this, of the terror and dismay which will fill the soul of every impenitent sinner, when he stands in the presence of the Judge of all the earth, with no interest in Christ, and of course no defence against the dreadful curse of that holy, just



Haman's iniquity exposed.

and good law, which he has broken,
trampled upon, and despised. **THE
SOUL THAT SINNETH, IT SHALL
DIE.**

CHAPTER VIII.

The king's indignation—Haman exposed and ruined—His sudden and disgraceful death—His estate given to the queen—Plan to save the Jews—Mordecai's exaltation, and conduct under it.

THE king was so angry that he arose from the banquet, and went into an adjoining garden, to compose his mind, and determine what should be done with Haman. It was evident from his countenance and manner that his displeasure was excited in the highest degree; and Haman, seeing the evil that was coming upon him, rose up before the queen, and begged her to save him from the king's wrath.

In the earnestness of his entreaties, he had fallen upon his knees on the couch where Esther was sitting. The king, coming in at that instant, supposed his object was to insult and dishonour the queen, for he began to think that no crime was too base and daring for him to attempt. He indignantly exclaimed at this new outrage; and no sooner had the words passed his lips, than the servants who had entered the apartment, and who supposed the king meant that he should be put to death, seized him immediately and covered his face. This was once the custom among the Persians, as we are told by many heathen wri-

ters. A strong expression of the royal displeasure towards an individual was received as a sufficient warrant to treat him as if he was already condemned, and his face was covered as a token of his approaching doom.

One of the servants who saw this transaction, and knew that the execution of Haman would follow, immediately said before the king, that the gallows which had been prepared for Mordecai was standing in the court of Haman's house. And the king ordered Haman himself to be hung thereon without delay.

What a change! The proud Haman has been brought low.

The humble Mordecai has been exalted. Esther's attempt to save herself and her countrymen, at the hazard of her own life, promises to be successful. The king is undeceived; and the mourning and despair of the Jews is changed into the joyful hope of deliverance. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man. (Job xxxiii. 29.)

Immediately after the death of Haman, Esther made known to the king her relation to Mordecai, and that he had been to her a friend and a father. And on that very day there were given to her all the riches in which Haman vainly

boasted himself. And the ring which the king had given Haman, and which Haman had used to seal the bloody decree against the Jews, was taken back by the king himself, and given to Mordecai; who was also appointed by the queen to superintend and manage the property which had belonged to Haman.

Some persons never think of others, if their own wishes are gratified. Indeed, they seem to enjoy their own pleasure more, when they know that others are disappointed.

But in the midst of all these agreeable changes for herself and

her dearest earthly friend, neither Esther nor Mordecai forgot the unhappy condition of their countrymen. The decree for their destruction was still in force, though the wicked author of it had been cut off. And some measures must soon be taken to save them, or the appointed day would come, and there would be none to deliver them from their enemies.

Esther went before the king, fell at his feet, and besought him with tears, that he would in some way prevent the evil which had been designed by Haman against the nation of the Jews. The golden sceptre was again held out to her as

a token of the royal acceptance ; and she arose, and stood up before him, and said : “ If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seems right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters which Haman wrote, to destroy the Jews which are in all the king’s provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people ? and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred ? ”

Four months had passed away since the decree was obtained, and eight months remained before the time of its execution ; but the

country was so extensive, and the Jews so much scattered, that not a moment could safely be lost, in providing for their defence.

The king was pleased to meet their wishes in the fullest manner. As to reversing the decree, however, it was entirely out of the question, for there was this remarkable and very unwise provision in the constitution of the Persian government, viz. that a law once made could never be changed. But he told them to propose whatever decree they pleased for their own protection, and gave them authority to use his seal, and thus to give it all necessary force.

Accordingly scribes were called together, and a decree was prepared, signed with the king's name, and sealed with his seal. Riders were then employed to go abroad upon the swiftest beasts, throughout the whole kingdom, into every one of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to the Jews and all other people, and make known the new decree. By this decree, permission was given to the Jews to gather themselves together, not only to adopt measures to protect themselves, but also to slay and destroy any one that should attack them in any manner.

If something like this had not

been done, the Jews would have been punished for making any preparation or attempt to defend themselves; but from the decree, everybody would understand that they were in the king's favour, and had the same rights with the rest of the people, and might have a full opportunity to unite together and lay plans for their defence. Such was the effect of this decree, that the Jews, who a little while since were trembling through fear of what might befall them, had now become the strongest party, and many of the people actually turned Jews, in order to be on their side.

Mordecai, too, was raised to the

chief place among the king's officers. He was clothed in royal apparel of blue and white; and he had a crown of gold upon his head, and a rich robe of fine linen and purple. And so great was the regard of the people for him, that, humble as he was, they were all glad, even the whole city of Shushan, when he was thus honoured and elevated.

And yet how strangely it must have appeared to them, that the man who but yesterday was sitting at the king's gate, should now be borne upon the shoulders of the multitude, while the flowers are scattered upon him from the roofs



Mordecai receiving honour from the people.

of the houses, and strewed before him as he passes along the streets. The voice of singing, too, and the sound of the soft harp and the shrill trumpet, and the shouts of the people, on every side, fill the city with joy and gladness.

But Mordecai knew well the vanity of all this, and the little dependence that could be placed upon the honour which cometh from men. It is true he maintained his place in the king's house, and, for all that we know, continued in favour with the people; but no one, who has read the history of our blessed Redeemer, can forget that the same multitudes

that attended him when he rode into the city of Jerusalem, and cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" were soon after heard crying in the same streets, and concerning this same meek and holy Jesus, "Away with him; away with him; crucify him."

Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Happy is he whose hope is in the Lord his God. Ps. cxlvi. 3. 5.

CHAPTER IX.

The fatal day—Review of the changes—The Jews are prospered—Feast-days—Purim—Complete triumph of the Jews—Dreadful end of Haman's sons—Important principles.

BY-AND-BY the time came which was fixed upon by Haman for the massacre of the Jews. And what wonderful events have come to pass, since the lot was drawn which marked that as the dreadful day! Haman has gone down to the grave in wretchedness and disgrace, and with a load of guilt upon his soul. Mordecai, whom he despised, is now higher in the king's favour than Haman himself ever was.

The Jews, who trembled in view of the destruction which hung over them, are now feared by the people; for those who saw Mordecai's advancement, and desired to obtain his favour, did all they could to please him, by defending and assisting his countrymen.

All these changes, great and marvellous as they are, were easily brought about by the wisdom and power of God. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the wicked is carried headlong. Job v. 13. The wicked shall fall himself into his own pit. Prov. xxviii. 10.

In many parts of the country the

Jews were attacked, and they slew a great many of their enemies in their struggle to protect themselves. They were universally victorious, for the fear of them fell on all people. But while they smote their enemies on every side, they did it only in self-defence, and in no instance did they take an article of their property.

This scene of war and bloodshed lasted only one day, and the next two days they observed as days of joy and thanksgiving. They sent good things to each other, as friends in our days send Christmas and New-year presents. They also sent gifts to the poor; and so showed,

by doing good to others, that they were not unmindful of God's great goodness and mercy to themselves.

They also made a law that these two days, which they called days of Purim,* should always be observed throughout every generation, every family, every possession, and every city; so that the remembrance of God's interposition in their behalf should never, never cease. Thus we leave Esther and Mordecai and the Jews in the full enjoyment of God's favour and blessing, at peace with their ene-

* They were called days of Purim, because they had reference to the day which had been fixed upon for the massacre, and which Haman determined by *peh* or lot, as before mentioned.

mies, and with the voice of joy and gladness in all their houses.

And what became of the family of wicked Haman?

We are not told what number of children he had, nor what was the end of his wife; but we know he left ten sons, every one of whom followed his father to the gallows. Yes, the ten sons of Haman were hanged; probably, as the counselors and abettors of their father in his wicked conspiracy. How true is that which was said by the wisest of men! "The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it; but the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the

transgressors shall be rooted out of it. The Lord will destroy the house (or family) of the proud." Prov. ii. 21, 22.

This interesting story illustrates and establishes at least three truths :

1. That pride and ambition are destructive of happiness. Though he may have whatever his heart can desire, a proud and ambitious man still finds some Mordecai or other, the sight of whom fills his heart with vexation and discontent. Perhaps his neighbour has a better house, or a higher office, or is more distinguished than himself ; and he is so weak and foolish as to let this take away his peace and happiness.

2. That pride, like every other bad passion, leads a man from one degree of wickedness to another, until he is overtaken with disgrace and ruin. To know that "*God resisteth the proud,*" is enough to make us tremble at the thought of indulging that vile passion.

3. THAT THE RIGHTEOUS ARE SAFE. The Lord knoweth them that are his. No matter how much every thing and every body may seem to be against us, God will make all things work together for our good if we love Him. Our great anxiety, then, should be to have our peace made with God, through Jesus Christ his Son, who

can defend us, provide for us and support us here, and give us everlasting peace and joy beyond the grave.

THE END.

