

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ESTHER.

THE
BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

ESTHER.

London:

JAMES NISBET & CO., BERNERS STREET, W.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE BOOK.—In considering the characteristic features of this work, it is necessary first to decide upon its date, lest we should get this book confused with the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which immediately precede it in our Canon. Their historical range does not reach later than about 420 B.C. Ezra and Nehemiah both lived in the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. Dean Stanley dates Ezra 459 B.C. and Nehemiah 445 B.C. But the story of Esther belongs to an earlier period, and to the reign of Xerxes, who was the king before Longimanus. Dean Stanley dates the story of Esther 485 B.C. It has therefore nothing to do with the restored Jews, who had at the time settled in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, but is wholly concerned with those scattered Jews who remained behind in the various provinces of the Persian Empire.

THE DATE OF THE COMPOSITION OF THIS WORK AND ITS AUTHOR cannot possibly be known. It is but an effort to get out of a difficulty to affirm the authorship of Mordecai. It is quite possible—as we find historical records were preserved at the Persian Court of a previous attempt on the life of the sovereign—that official records were made of the incidents which led to the death of Haman and the preservation of the Jews from the scheme laid for their destruction, and that some Jewish officer, cup-bearer or other, found these records, and transcribed them.

Modern critics think the book was written as early as the third century, 300–200 B.C. In their view it is not an authentic historical writing. It is a question whether it contains a nucleus of facts, or is simply a romantic tale. In any case, its object is simply to commend the observation of the Feast of Purim.

The Book of Esther is distinctly Persian, and it must surely have been written in Persia. Its place is properly outside the characteristic Jewish literature. It classifies rather with the works that now form the Apocrypha. There is no feature more strongly marked in the whole Jewish literature than the association of God with every person and every event, every prophecy and every word. In this Book of Esther the very name of God is wanting, and the relativity of God to events is never indicated or suggested. "It is the one example in the sacred volume of a story of which the whole scenery and imagery breathes the atmosphere of an Oriental Court as completely and almost as exclusively as the 'Arabian Nights.' . . . Even the names which most closely connect the story with the history of Israel are not Hebrew, but Chaldean or Persian. 'Mordecai' is 'the worshipper of Merodach, the war-god of Babylon.' 'Esther' is the 'star of the planet Venus.' The 'Purim,' from which the Festival of Deliverance took its name, is the Persian word for 'lot,' and has even been supposed to be the name for an ancient Persian solemnity."

Ahasuerus has, with some confidence, been identified as Xerxes, whose other name, Achashverosh, sounds very similar to Ahasuerus; and whose character as known in history is in precise keeping with his conduct as described in this work.

In his time Egypt revolted from the Persian rule, and was re-conquered; and some five years later occurred the battles of Thermopylæ, Artemis, and Salamis. It may help to fix the period in our minds if we remember that 477 B.C. is given as the death of Confucius, and 475 as the death of Gautama, the Buddha. At this time Rome was quite a second-rate Italian commonwealth.

VERIFICATION OF THE STORY.—It must be admitted that we have no verification of the story of Esther from any independent sources whatever. Neither such Persian annals as have been found, nor any Jewish memorials, contain any records of such a peril and deliverance of the scattered Jews in the Persian provinces as is narrated in this book.

But the fact remains that the Festival of Purim began to be observed about this time, and that tradition associated some remarkable deliverance with it, of which it was treated as a perpetual memorial. Probably the genesis of this festival needs some further research. It is quite possible that it really bears relation to the deliverances of the Maccabæan period, and the love of making mysterious origins for things led to the invention of a tale associated with earlier times. In the Second Book of Maccabees the festival is spoken of as the "day of Mordecai," and Josephus also refers to it. In favour of its historical genuineness, mention may be made of the appeal of the writer to the "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia" (chap. x. 2), which certainly indicates that the author regarded his work as verifiable.

PURIM.—The Jews appear to have given the name Purim, or Lots, to this festival because Haman had thrown lots to ascertain what day would be auspicious for him to carry into effect the bloody decree which the king had issued at his instance. But the uncertainty of the origin, or even date of beginning, of this festival have led to a variety of conjectures in connection with it. EWALD, in support of his theory that there was, in patriarchal times, a religious festival at every new and full moon, conjectures that Purim was originally the full moon feast of the month Adar. KEPLER identified the "feast of the Jews," in John v. 1, with the Feast of Purim, and in this he is supported by Alford and Ellicott. The festival lasted for two days, and was regularly observed on the 14th and 15th of Adar. It was not a Divine institution, and there was no obligation to keep it at Jerusalem.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF Esther are so familiar to Bible readers that they need not be even outlined. On the whole it may be safe to decide that the main facts of the story are genuinely historical, and that such a peril for the scattered Jews and such a deliverance did actually occur in the reign of Xerxes; but it may also be admitted that some later author, of the period of the Apocryphal books, has worked up the materials at his command into the elaborate and descriptive story which we now have in our hands.

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ESTHER.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-4. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia).—*Artaxerxes*:—By almost universal acknowledgment now, the sovereign here referred to is Artaxerxes, surnamed Longimanus, or the long-handed; the term Ahasuerus being, like that of Pharaoh, expressive of the kingly dignity, and not the name of an individual. In his time the Persian empire was of vast extent, comprehending all the countries from the river Indus on the east to the Mediterranean on the west, and from the Black Sea and the Caspian in the north to the extreme south of Arabia, then called Ethiopia. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *God liberal to sinners*:—What rich gifts hath God often bestowed on men who know Him not! Think not, however, that God is more liberal to His enemies than to His friends. Some of the vilest of men possessed all the great and large dominions of the Persian empire. But if God has bestowed on you the least measure of true faith, of unfeigned love, of unaffected humility, He hath bestowed on you treasures of inestimably greater value than all the possessions of Artaxerxes Longimanus or of Nero. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Prosperity cursed*:—A curse is mingled with all the prosperity of sinners, because they know not how to use or to enjoy, but are disposed, by their corrupt tempers, to abuse everything which they possess. (*Ibid.*) *A great want in the soul of man*:—There is a want in the soul of man which all the wealth of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces cannot supply. There is a want which the best social arrangements cannot supply. There is a craving in the heart of man beyond all creature power to satisfy. Guilty man needs to be placed in a right relation toward God. Money cannot purchase for him peace and pardon. Artaxerxes was as poor as the humblest serf in his dominions in this respect, and far poorer than the poorest of the children of Judah, dispersed through his empire as exiles, but knowing Jehovah. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Character of Ahasuerus*:—First to come before us in the story is the king, Ahasuerus, more familiar to us as Xerxes. Cruel, passionate, capricious, his character as set forth in contemporary history is wholly in keeping with all that we see of him here. This is the man who was hospitably entertained by Pythias of Lydia when on his way to Greece, and helped by an enormous contribution; but when the old man, who had given all his other sons to the service of the king, pleaded that the eldest might stay with him, Herodotus tells us that Xerxes in a fury commanded that the son should be slain, and he made his whole army pass between the severed body. Of him it is told how that when a storm destroyed the bridge by which he would cross into Greece, he commanded the engineers to be slain, and then had the sea beaten with chains to subdue it into better manners. He comes near to us by his association with the famous Greek heroes. Marching in his pride with a host of five millions, with which he would subdue the world, he is stayed by three hundred Spartans, whilst his vast fleet is destroyed by the skill and courage of the Greeks at Salamis, a victory that secured the deliverance of Europe from Oriental despotism, and preserved for us the literature and art which have uplifted and beautified our civilisation. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) Which was in Shushan the palace.—*The palace at*

Shushan is presented before us. *Shushan* was the metropolis of Persia, a magnificent city of about fifteen miles circumference, and the residence of the kings. In winter the climate was very mild, but in summer the heat was so excessive that an old writer says the very lizards and serpents were consumed by it on the streets. It was probably on this account that the seat of government was at Ecbatana in summer, and only in winter at *Shushan*. (*T. McEwan*.)

Vers. 3-9. In the third year of his reign, he made a feast.—*The occasion of the feast*:—It was the third year of the reign of Xerxes. Now we know from the Greek historian Herodotus that in that very year Xerxes “summoned a council of the principal Persians, as well to hear their opinions as to declare his own,” on the matter of the invasion of Greece. At first, on his accession to the throne, we are told that “he showed little disposition to make war against Greece, and turned his thoughts to the reduction of Egypt”; but after he had succeeded in Egypt, he was all the more inclined to listen to the advice of his cousin Mardonius, and seek to punish the Athenians for the defeat of his father at Marathon. Accordingly, at the council assembled in *Shushan*, he declared his purpose “to lay a bridge over the Hellespont, and to transport an army into Greece, that he might punish the Athenians for the injuries they had done to the Persians and to his father.” Nay, not content with that, he added, “I intend, with your concurrence, to march through all the parts of Europe, and to reduce the whole earth into one empire; being well assured that no city or nation of the world will dare to resist my arms after the reduction of those I have mentioned.” He was opposed by his uncle, Artabanus, but ultimately, under the influence of Mardonius and some illusory oracles which fell in with his own ambition, the die was cast, and the decision was made to prepare for and carry out the invasion of Greece with such an army as the world had never before seen. Now it was in connection with this determination, and in order, as I believe, to give the greatest possible impulse to the carrying out of the enterprise so resolved on, that this long-continued fête was held. He wanted to produce the conviction that, with such resources as he had at his command, it was impossible that he should fail. This accounts for the magnificent scale on which everything was done. It looks supremely foolish, but it is a folly that keeps its ground to this day even in western lands, where it is still the fashion for men to banquet themselves into enthusiasm for some great railway enterprise or some party campaign. (*W. H. Taylor*.) *Feasting not favourable to valour*:—There is good reason to suppose that this feast was held on the occasion of his projected invasion of Greece. To fill the minds of his captains with confidence, and to fire his soldiers with military ardour, he makes all this vain display and provides this munificence of self-indulgence. If this be so, with how little favourable result when the brunt of the struggle came! Yet what other result than that which actually came could be reasonably expected? Real courage and endurance are bred of much harder conditions than these. How are real men made? and how are they made ready for any manly thing of more than common difficulty? By feasting on rich viands? By drinking wine and looking on it when it is red in the cup? By nights of revelry? By gazing on the outside shows of life? By sinking into voluptuous ease? Never since the world began have manhood and courage sprung of such things as these, although in a few rare instances they may have passed through them unbroken and not much defiled. The Greeks were comparatively few and comparatively poor; and their country had no vast harvest-bearing plains. They were fighting for rocks and mountains and seas. But those mountains and seas were the symbols and the guardians of their liberty. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Pride spoils hospitality*:—He has ordained a feast for them. But the feast is really to his own power and pride. (*Ibid.*) *The vanity of worldly grandeur*:—1. There is unlimited power. The man presented to our view is “reigning from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces.” 2. His power was supreme. The life of every subject in his kingdom depended on his word. He ruled without resistance and without control. The wealth, the productions, the inhabitants of the greatest empire of the earth, were thus his undisputed right. Here was one great object of human ambition completely gained. What struggles are made on earth for the attainment of office and personal dominion! The lust of power has waged the deadliest wars of earth, excited the cruellest murders of men, and deluged nations with blood. Among ourselves we see this lust of power on a smaller scale, in all the political efforts and contested elections of our own day, and in our own land. 3. There is a

peaceful and secure possession of this unlimited power. The view is given to us "in those days when Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom." Ahasuerus possessed his father's dominions in perfect peace. He had nothing to do but to govern peacefully and to enjoy abundantly. What blessings he might have dispersed abroad! What monuments of usefulness to men he might have established! The peaceful possession of power is a great privilege, as well as a great temptation. It enables man to be a benefactor to his race. He may sit as king among the mourners and make a thousand weary hearts to sing for joy. But it is a great temptation to the sensual cupidity of man. The history of the world is filled with the stories of human power, oppressive and destructive. 4. There is the possession of vast wealth and outward glory. Ahasuerus gathered around him "all his princes, his servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him, when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty." No condition could appear to an earthly mind more desirable or tempting. We know something of the struggle for wealth. It is the great object for contest in the peaceful walks of business and commercial enterprise. To be rich, in modern society, is to be influential and exalted. What a vast privilege is the possession of such wealth! What happiness it may communicate when it is faithfully dispensed and employed as an instrument for human benefit! How great is the honour and the joy of being thus a public benefactor to mankind! But the responsibility is also great. Alas, how opposite to all this is the habitual use of wealth! It leads the selfish mind to a forgetfulness and neglect of the wants of others. It persuades sinful men that they have the right to live for their own indulgence and pleasure, and are not to be held responsible to others for the way in which their own acquisitions and means of influence are employed. 5. There is also splendid display. Wealth is often hoarded with a covetous grasp for mere accumulation. Man wants even the openness of heart for its display. But in the picture by which the Holy Spirit will illustrate for us the emptiness of the world there shall be no such defect. The wealth which has been amassed shall have the opportunity of the utmost manifestation. How we follow after pageants and exhibitions of the lowest kind! The gilded tinsel of such scenes, whether military or dramatic, funereal or joyous, is always exciting and attractive to the giddy, silly minds of the multitude. 6. There is not only all this power, wealth, and display combined; there is also here boundless actual indulgence and hospitality. What could have been more grand or satisfying in earthly things? Doubtless the whole multitude applauded the magnificence and hospitality of the youthful monarch. If the world can give man happiness in sensual indulgence, here was a scene of its perfect joy. No element of delight is wanting in such a picture. All these provisions are unsatisfying still. (1) They are all unsuitable. The soul has other views and needs, which none of these outward provisions of the earth can ever reach. There is still the burden of inward sin. There is still the want of reconciliation to God. (2) They are temporary. They are the things of a day at the best. The whole of a worldly life is but a day's dream of pleasure. To-morrow it will be over. To take you off from this vain pursuit of earth is the purpose of such a scene as the one we have considered. Look at it, not to desire it, but to discern its vanity. Behold how empty, how unsatisfying, how unsuitable, how transitory it is! Cease to look there for your joys. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Ahasuerus*:—I. The king of Persia at this time was *AHASUERUS*. We read in Scripture of four grand earthly empires, of which this was one—and the second in the order of succession. The Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman all passed away as a dream—they crumbled to dust, and their glory is long ago departed! Notwithstanding the strength and celebrity of these ancient kingdoms, they came to nought and "their dominion was taken away." But there is a kingdom which passeth not away. Its King will remain in honour and glory for ever, and its subjects shall be blessed with everlasting happiness. 1. Great as was the extent of these kingdoms, His is inconceivably more extensive. 2. It is also more durable. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion." Let us be anxious to be numbered among the subjects of this kingdom, for they are all "kings and priests" for ever. With Christ on His throne we shall stand before His throne and that of His Father in the celestial city; we shall see His face, and His name shall be in our foreheads; we shall need no candle nor light of the sun, for the Lord God will give us light, and we shall reign for ever and ever! II. This mighty potentate, *Ahasuerus*, WISHED TO MAKE A DISPLAY OF HIS GREATNESS. Seldom, alas! is that expression, "Where much is

given, much will be required," practically in their remembrance! Oh! let us beware of glorying in anything of our own—"sacrificing unto our own net, and burning incense to our own drag." Man at his best state is altogether vanity, and possesses nothing of any value but what God has given him. Where providence has bestowed much of earthly wealth and authority, it requires much grace not to be unduly elevated by them, and to keep ever in mind that they are given for usefulness. The weighty responsibilities which they bring with them are seldom considered. Let us beware of pride. "The proud in heart is abomination to the Lord." Crush the first risings of vanity and self-importance. Dread every high thought of yourselves, every towering imagination, every exalted idea of your own moral excellency, remembering that God knoweth the proud afar off, but giveth grace to the humble. III. At this feast, though a heathen one, THERE WAS ONE THING WHICH CONDEMNED THE PRACTICE OF MANY WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIANS. "And the drinking was according to law; none did compel, for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure." Intemperance is an abomination to God and a degradation to man. Hereby the creature, which is inferior only to the angels, makes himself lower than the beasts of the field! The bounties of providence are continued evidences of God's tender care toward us, His undeserving creatures, and are to be thankfully and humbly received and used piously and in moderation. They are given for the support of our nature, to enable us to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits: let us not, then, render ourselves incapable of doing so by drowning our rational powers in intoxicating liquors, and throwing our bodies out of health and comfort by a worse than beastly abuse of God's mercies. IV. But though the feast of Ahasuerus was free from the disgrace of compelling the guests to proceed to drunkenness, YET DID VERY EVIL CONSEQUENCES RESULT FROM IT; indeed, it is but seldom that such meetings are free from such consequences. We read of Belshazzar's feast, and that it was not without its grievous impieties. We read likewise of Herod's feast, and of the deed of darkness which gave it its notoriety. Our Lord, too (Luke xiv.), teaches us that, though the entertaining of our friends in this way is not entirely prohibited, the money thereby expended would be much better laid out, against the day of reckoning, in consoling the miserable and relieving the distresses of the indigent and needy. V. Let us consider THE EVIL WHICH WAS OCCASIONED BY THE FEAST. 1. It behoveth us to lead exemplary lives, and the higher we are placed in community the more ought this to be the object of our ambition. 2. It behoveth us to regard the duties which appertain to the relations of life in which we are placed. (*J. Hughes.*) *The short-lived treasure*:—The apostle Paul speaks of the world as if it were a pageant which has been exhibited and is over; a procession which is on the march and has passed by; a scene-picture which drops for a moment and then gives way to another which succeeds it. Here there is no continuing city for man. If he would have a kingdom which cannot be removed, he must seek it beyond the limits of the present world, among the things which are unseen and eternal. 1. Our first reflection must be, the world passeth away. It has gone. All its indulgences and all its glories have come to their appointed end. Nothing of them remains. Ahasuerus feasted and Vashti suffered. All is silent and dead. No single voice of the glory or of the sorrow remains. Where is the splendour of Shushan? Not one stone remains upon another of all the palaces of its glory or the portals of its majestic display. How wonderfully contrasted are the works of God and the works of man! The one has perished. The others remain. But is not this equally true of earth in all the relations and displays of its glory? Look where you will, you see the same history continually repeated. The bloom of youth, the gaiety of health, the boast of riches, the clarion sound of triumph and power, all, all pass away. They live a moment; they shine for a day; and they are gone. Man tries in vain to prolong their enjoyment and their being; or even to recover their shape, and perpetuate their memory. He is doomed to disappointment in them all. The retrospect is sadness and self-condemnation. There at least we may say, "My heart and my hope shall not be fixed. Something better than this I must have and will have. The joys that fade so rapidly and so certainly are not for me. This world, and all the things which are in this world, shall never be the treasure of my choice." 2. As our second reflection upon this accomplished scene, the manner of its passing has been most remarkable. In the lesson we have considered, God has been pleased to show us this experiment on the grandest scale. The world began with every possible advantage for its working and its display, and in every succeeding step it went downward

until it came to nothing. Its first scene was its brightest one. The morning rose when the tide was at his full and the surface calm as the molten silver. Every hour marked its rapid ebb, till the evening closed upon a full accumulation of defilement and disgust which the preceding show had vainly covered for a season. It was a sad experiment indeed. In the manner of its passage and trial it was a universal type. In all our possessions of the world, in the whole scheme of mere worldly enjoyment, the first is always the best. The clock of this world still strikes backward. It begins at twelve, runs rapidly round to one, and then stops. Thus its circle is complete, larger or smaller as it may happen to be. How many have I seen, starting in all the pride of inherited wealth, closing their career in neglect and poverty! How many have I beheld the centre of personal admiration in the world of fashion, of earthly pomp and folly, living to be forgotten and abhorred! Thus this present world repays its votaries. And when the result comes in age, or sickness, or poverty, or neglect, and the whole machine has run down and stopped, bitter and disgusting indeed is the remembrance of the world which has gone. But what a contrast there is between this passing worldly portion and the reality of that treasure which stands in opposition to it! The heavenly portion ever grows more and more compensating and satisfactory. The heart never grows old or dull in the faithful pursuit of it. 3. In this passage of the world you may see what are the elements of its short-lived power to please—what are the facts which make up the necessity of this rapid rush of all that sinful man has sought and desired on the earth. Ahasuerus had everything which a mere sensual mind could ask. What formed the necessity of his wretchedness in the midst of it all? We may answer at once, because nothing of all that he had was adapted in itself to give him satisfaction. This is the first difficulty. You have a spiritual nature, a soul within which can never be satisfied with the mere shams of an earthly life. The soul looks out in the midst of all the joys of earth unmet and unhappy, unable to be contented thus, because there is no real proportion between the two. There is here an original and inseparable defect in the things of the world, which no multiplication of them can supply. These joys and treasures are all short-lived and perishing in themselves. They have the sentence of death within themselves; and you cannot prolong the period of their power. They corrupt and decay in your hands while you grasp them. The appetites which desire and seek these joys pass away with them also. There soon comes the time when there is no longer a susceptibility to their power. Their invitations find no longer a response in the heart to which they are offered. The voices of singing men and singing women can be heard no more. And this with no reference to a change of principle or heart. No, it may be we would willingly prolong their power if we could; we would gladly renew our former gratifications in them if it were possible. But all their power to please, and all our facility to be pleased by them, have passed away and cannot be recalled. The whole scene of which these earthly joys make up a part also goes, and cannot be arrested or recalled. Friends are gone; families are broken; homes are lost; companions have departed. We stand here to contemplate this inherent fading character in the world which has passed. What a contrast are all its provisions to the joys and advantages of real religion! 4. We may look at the result of this passage of the fashion of the world. What does it leave behind? Ah, this is the worst of all. We have seen the evidence in the experiment before us. Nothing in memory. There is no remembrance of benefit or pleasure. The past gives no satisfaction. There is no room for delight in retrospection. A wasted life, enfeebled powers, conscious degradation, are all the residuum of a life of sensual enjoyment in the world. Added to this, there is extreme regret, often the bitterness of unappeased remorse. Nothing in actual possession. What of all the array of human pleasures outlasts itself? Youth, gaiety and wealth successively pass by. Man goes out of one vain indulgence into another, but carries nothing away with him. The soul is empty. He presses on in this vain succession to the end. The fact of the result remains the same. He has nothing. Pleasure has gone; time has gone; indulgence has gone; means have gone; appetites have gone; life has gone. And of the whole pageant as it has passed nothing remains. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Self-glorification*:—I. THE MONARCH WAS ABLE TO MAKE A PROUD DISPLAY AND TO GRATIFY THE ORIENTAL TASTE FOR MAGNIFICENCE. II. BUT THIS PROUD DISPLAY WAS A CONTEMPTIBLE EXHIBITION. It showed—1. The materialism of his nature. 2. The narrowness of his view. 3. The childishness of his spirit. III. THIS PROUD DISPLAY HAS A SORROWFUL ASPECT. The display only lasted for "days" after all. Let our wealth—material, intellectual, or moral—speak for itself. Let us see the warning word "days" inscribed

on all our possessions. (*Homiletic Commentary.*) *A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of his wealth:*—The whole struggle of modern life is exactly after the first chapter of Esther and the first chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Every Ahasuerus thinks he could do better than his namesake, and every new Solomon says that he would never play the fool as the old one did. What little toy houses are ours as compared with this palace; and yet we will persist. Why do we not believe history? Why do we not accept the verdict that it is not in time or sense, in gold or precious stones, to make a man great or happy? When we have built up our little toy houses, Ahasuerus looks down upon them, and smiles at the little honeycombs. His "beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble." Yet it was an elaborate tomb, a magnificent sarcophagus! When will men come to learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth; that he is most jewelled who has no jewellery; that he only is great who is great in soul? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The honours of the world should not elate:*—Alcibiades was one day boasting of his wealth and great estate, when Socrates placed a map before him, and asked him to find Attica. It was insignificant on the map; but he found it. "Now," said the philosopher, "point out your own estate." "It is too small to be distinguished in so little a space," was the answer. "See, then," said Socrates, "how much you are affected about an imperceptible point of land." Your bags of gold should be ballast in your vessel to keep her always steady, instead of being topsails to your masts to make your vessel giddy. Give me that distinguished person who is rather pressed down under the weight of all his honours than puffed up with the blast thereof. (*Abp. Secker.*) *Waste of wealth:*—I am no advocate for meanness of private habitation. I would fain introduce into it all magnificence, care, and beauty, when they are possible; but I would not have that useless expense in unnoticed fineries or formalities—cornicing of ceilings, and graining of doors, and fringing of curtains, and thousands of such things—which have become foolishly and apathetically habitual. . . . I speak from experience: I know what it is to live in a cottage with a deal floor and roof, and a hearth of mica slate; I know it to be in many respects healthier and happier than living between a Turkey carpet and a gilded ceiling, beside a steel grate and polished fender. I do not say that such things have not their place and propriety; but I say this emphatically, that a tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic comforts and encumbrances, would, if collectively afforded and wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England. (*J. Ruskin.*) *The royal feast:*—Let us draw a comparison between the great Persian feast and the feast of the gospel. I. THE ONE WAS PROVIDED BY THE KING; THE OTHER BY THE KING OF KINGS. II. THE ONE FEAST IS LIMITED TO NOBLES AND PRINCES; THE OTHER IS MADE FOR ALL NATIONS. III. IN THE ONE WE SEE THE FADING GLORIES OF MAN; IN THE OTHER WE SEE THE UNFADING GLORIES OF GOD. IV. THE ONE FEAST CONTINUED FOR SIX MONTHS; THE OTHER CONTINUES THROUGH ALL TIME. V. IN THE ONE CASE SOME WERE OBLIGED TO FEAST IN THE COURT OF THE GARDEN, AS THERE WAS NOT ROOM FOR THEM IN THE PALACE; THE CHURCH OF GOD IS FOR ALL COMERS. VI. IN THE ONE CASE THERE WAS A SEPARATION OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES; BUT IN THE OTHER BOTH ARE WELCOME TOGETHER. VII. THE ONE FEAST ENDED IN CONSTERNATION AND SORROW; BUT THE OTHER SHALL CONTINUE IN JOY AND HAPPINESS. Learn, in conclusion—1. The insufficiency and instability of all earthly things. 2. The rich grace and goodness of our God. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty.*—*Despotism occasionally generous:*—Despotism, while it has its caprices of cruelty, has also its occasional fits of generosity and kindness. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Extravagance:*—Every one is to live, and to entertain his friends, according to his rank and circumstances; but those who are of a liberal spirit are in danger of indulging in extravagance, to gratify their vanity and passion for show. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Unsatisfying splendour:*—What was there in all that to satisfy the soul's hunger and thirst, its craving and longing? One morsel of the bread of life would be better, one drop of the wine of the kingdom more blessed and exhilarating, than it all. So that when we look abroad upon the scene of Persian magnificence and luxury, the glitter and splendour of it seems to dissolve and fade away when there is brought into prominence our Lord's solemn inquiry, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (*T. McEwan.*) *Temperance best:*—Epicurus himself, who placed happiness in pleasure, enjoined temperance as a necessary means of this pleasure. An author of our own nation justly observes

that when a great multitude of alluring dishes are set upon a table a wise man may see palsies, apoplexies, and other grievous or mortal distempers lurking amongst them. Poor men, who are unable to provide for themselves anything beyond the bare necessities of life, are apt to envy those who have it in their power to fare sumptuously every day. Be persuaded, if you desire to be content with your condition, that happiness does not lie in the abundance of the things which a man possesseth, or in the rich entertainments which he is able to furnish out for himself or his friends. Could not Jesus have furnished out as elegant an entertainment for those whom He fed by miracles as Ahasuerus to his noble guests? And yet He fed them only with barley loaves and fishes. Could not God have brought wine as easily as water out of the rock for the refreshment of His people? (*G. Lawson.*) *The expense of feasting*:—Poor man! Little did he know wherein true riches, and glory, and royalty consisted. It is said of the father of Louis XV., king of France, that when his preceptor one day was speaking of this feast of Ahasuerus, and wondered how the Prince of Persia could find patience for such a long feast, he replied that his wonder was how he could defray the expense of it. He was afraid that the provinces would be compelled to observe a fast for it. *The majesty of the Divine Ruler*:—From the tinselled splendour of the Persian court it may be well for us to turn that we may contemplate the majesty of Him who is the true King of kings and Lord of lords; of Him whom Isaiah represents as "sitting upon the circle of the earth, and all the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them as a tent to dwell in." To acquire adequate conceptions of His majestic greatness is an impossibility. That which surrounded Ahasuerus was no doubt such as to inspire awe. And were it possible that a human potentate should hold sway over the several planets constituting the solar system—ruling subjects innumerable by his uncontrolled will—what majesty in the eyes of millions would centre around his person and government! He, however, into whose majestic presence we shall one day enter, and at whose footstool we ought now to bow in reverence, is the Ruler, not alone of earth, nor simply of the solar system, but He whose government is coextensive with the universe, whose presence fills immensity, whose sceptre when lifted in mercy bestows life, when in anger consigns to wretchedness. The inconceivable majesty of God ought to impress us with a becoming sense of our own insignificance. A proper conception of the majesty of God is fitted to induce the inquiry, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" It should prompt the desire for some humble part in enhancing God's glory, the inclination to do something toward accomplishing the work He is carrying forward in the earth and is willing to effect in our own hearts. He whose ambition it is to conquer the kingdom of evil within himself and who accepts Christ as the Captain of his salvation is destined to no such disappointment as crushed the spirit of Xerxes, forcing him to feed upon the ashes of crushed hopes and to surrender to self-indulgence that he might drown the memory of former anguish. (*J. Van Dyke, D.D.*) **Where were white, green, and blue hangings.**—*The beauty of nature*:—Every day we behold a more glorious scene in the canopy of the heavens spread over our heads. The roses and lilies which adorn our gardens are more beautiful than any of the productions of art which royal wealth can call forth. The earth is full of God's riches. The heavens show forth His glory. Those who delight to have their eyes and their minds at once entertained can be at no loss, though they are far from royal palaces, when the earth displays her beauty and the stars their glory. (*G. Lawson.*) **And gave them drink in vessels of gold.**—*An absurd drinking custom*:—What a miserable thing it is that we hear sometimes that a man cannot do his business without drinking! "Come and have a drink!" is the beginning of business, and "Come and have a drink!" is the completion of it. What a glutton and a beast a man should be if before he could begin or finish any business he must say, "Come and have a meal!" And is he any better who must always drink something? Surely, when competition is so keen, it is needful that he who buys or sells should keep his wits as clear as God made them. To muddle one's own brain with drink is to play the fool; to muddle another's is to play the knave. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Ver. 8. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel.—*Political prudence*:—It is not entirely, however, in moral recoil that sanction is thus given in law to the better practice. There is a touch of political prudence in it. For here at the feast are princes from all parts, with their retainers and tribes. There are men here from the mountains who are famous for their temperance and for the

strictness and simplicity of their manners. Such men would not be won, but disgusted rather and alienated from the royal cause, by anything like Bacchanalian excess. In prudence, therefore, as well as from possibly higher motive, the principle of temperance must have the reinforcement of public law. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *God not to be insulted by the abuse of His creatures*:—Did an absolute prince pay such regard to the laws of his country, and to the liberty of his subjects, and shall not Christians pay an equal regard to the laws of their religion? Are these laws less obligatory upon us at feasts than on other occasions? Shall we requite the liberal Giver of all good things with insults on His authority, at the very time that our table is covered by His bounty? (*G. Lawson.*) *The compulsion of our drinking customs*:—Whether we do not, on a wider scale, as a people in fact, and with the force of law, practise compulsion still, and that on the weakest and most helpless part of our people, is a very serious question, and one which, to say the least, we cannot answer with the same confidence. If places where drink is sold to the common people are multiplied much beyond the reasonable needs of the community; if exceptional privileges are given to the sellers; if their houses, with many exits and entrances, are planted in the most conspicuous spots; if they burn the brightest lights in the streets, and are allowed to keep open long after other trades and industries are closed and silent, does not all this and more of the same kind amount to a sort of compulsion to working-people, and trades-people, and thoughtless young people of both sexes? (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *No compulsion to drink*:—The statement here made reminds us of an incident which is said to have occurred at the table of Queen Victoria in one of the early years of her reign. The temperance movement was just beginning to make its way into the upper classes of English society, and on the occasion to which I refer a British nobleman, well-known for his activity in all good causes, declined to comply with the request of one of his fellow-guests that he should drink wine with him, whereupon the appeal was made to her Majesty that she should exert her authority in the case; but she nobly replied, in the spirit of this Persian law, "There shall be no compulsion at my table"; and that reply did much to discountenance the old custom of badgering, and browbeating and insisting upon guests drinking out of regard for their hosts, until they felt themselves in a position where it was difficult to refuse, and were virtually compelled either to act against their better judgment or to do that which was considered rude and unmannerly. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. When the heart of the king was merry with wine.—Intoxication:—There is a difference between not being intoxicated and being sober. A person may be able to speak and to walk, and yet may be guilty of excess in the use of strong drink. He may not have lost the use of his senses, and yet have lost the sound use of his senses. He may lose his guard, and expose himself defenceless to the attack of temptation. Reason is the glory of a man, and whatever tarnishes or dims the lustre of this crown is criminal. Next to reason, speech is man's glory, and everything which causes it to falter is sinful. Whatever makes a man slow to hear, swift to speak, swift to wrath—whatever makes him rash in counsel, and precipitate in action—whatever makes him say or do what is unbecoming his character, and what he would be ashamed of at another time—cometh of evil, and may be the source of great vexation to himself and injury to others. (*T. McCrie.*) *Drunkenness does not destroy responsibility*:—The worst effect of the vice of drunkenness is its degrading influence on the conduct and character of men. It robs its victims of self-respect and manliness and sends them to wallow in the mire with swinish obscenity. What they would not dream of stooping to in their sober moments they revel in with shameless ostentation when their brains are clouded with intoxicating drink. It is no excuse to plead that a drunkard is a madman unaccountable for his actions; he is accountable for having put himself in his degraded condition. The man who has been foolish enough to launch his boat on the rapids cannot divert its course when he is startled by the thunder of the falls he is approaching; but he should have thought of that before leaving the safety of the shore. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The drunkard's excuses and the drunkard's woe*:—**I. THE DRUNKARD'S EXCUSES.** 1. Good-fellowship. But can friendship be founded on vice; especially on a vice which impairs the memory and the sense of obligation, leads to the betrayal of secrets, and stirs up strife and contention? 2. It drowns care. But the drunkard's care must arise either from the ill state of his health, the unfortunate position of his worldly affairs, or the stings of a guilty conscience; and in either case his temporary oblivion is purchased at the cost of an

aggravation of the evils which cause him to desire it. II. THE DRUNKARD'S WOR. This is made up of the miserable effects. 1. Temporal. (1) Poverty. (2) Contempt. (3) Ill-health. (4) An untimely death. 2. Spiritual. (1) The understanding is depraved and darkened. (2) The will is enfeebled and dethroned. (3) Regard for men, reverence for God, are destroyed. Drunkenness travels with a whole train of other vices, and requires the whole breadth of the broad way to give it room. (*Clapham's Selected Sermons.*) *Afraid of drink*:—Stonewall Jackson, "Jeb" Stuart, and a large number of the most distinguished of the Confederate officers imitated the example of their chief, and were strict temperance men. Upon one occasion Jackson was suffering so much from fatigue and severe exposure that his surgeon prevailed on him to take a little brandy. He made a very wry face as he swallowed it, and the doctor asked, "Why, general, is not the brandy good? It is some that we have recently captured, and I think it very fine." "Oh, yes!" was the reply, "it is very good brandy. I like liquor—its taste and its effects—and that is just the reason why I never drink it." Upon another occasion, after a long ride in a drenching rain, a brother officer insisted upon Jackson's taking a drink with him; but he firmly replied, "No, sir, I cannot do it. I tell you I am more afraid of King Alcohol than of all the bullets of the enemy." *The battle with drink*:—And drink is such a degrading enemy to the intellectual man: the foe is unworthy of his steel. The battle of drink is not like the old contests of chivalry, when knight assailed knight with unblemished shield, and there was such a grace and elegance about the conflict that even defeat was not dishonourable. It is more like a battle with a chimney-sweep falling foul of you, rolling on you his heavy bulk till he has you sprawling in the mud, and so smearing you that you become an object of loathing—to yourself, if you have any sense of shame, and certainly to all who pass by. Could any humiliation be deeper? (*G. W. Blaikie.*) *The safety of temperance*:—Suppose there were two lines of railroad; on one of them was an accident regularly once a week, sometimes on one day, and sometimes on another; and on the other there never had been an accident. Suppose your only son wanted to go the journey traversed by the respective lines, and he were to come to you saying, "Which road shall I take, father?" would you dare to tell him to take that upon which the accidents were so frequent, because it was the most fashionable? You would say at once, "Take the safe road, my boy." And that is just what we temperance folks say. (*John B. Gough.*) *Wise abstinence*:—There was a half-witted boy in one of the southern counties of Scotland who was known as an "innocent" or "natural." Upon one occasion he was enticed into a public-house where a company of young men were drinking. Some of them offered spirits to this supposed simpleton, whereupon he instantly and absolutely refused them, saying, "If the Lord Almighty has given few wits to Daft Davie, He has at least given him sense enough to keep the little that he has!" (*Sunday School.*) All's well that ends well; but wine never ends well. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

Vers. 11, 12. To bring Vashti the queen before the king.—*Vanity*:—Whatever be the ruling passion of a man, whether it be pride, vanity, or anger, or lust, or impiety, or even benevolence, it will display itself when he is inflamed by strong drink. Vanity was the ruling passion in the breast of the Persian monarch. He had feasted his nobles for weeks to "show the riches of his glorious kingdom"; and now he would bring in the queen, to "show the people and the princes her beauty." He was vain of Vashti; and having displayed "the honour of his royal majesty," he would now exhibit the beauty of her royal majesty. We are hurt by the ebullition of pride—but ready to laugh at the display of vanity. It is true that it makes its subject ridiculous, but it is a vice as well as a weakness, and is often productive of great mischief. The female sex is commonly supposed to be most addicted to vanity; but men are not free from it, and, if they have nothing to be vain of themselves, are sometimes fain to shine in borrowed feathers. (*T. McCrie.*) *Vashti's refusal*:—What the reason was that swayed her to this bold step we are not told. Her motives may have been mixed. Perhaps she was tired with her own exertions. Perhaps she felt that for the time she was not beautiful, and would not look queenly. Perhaps she thought the summons too peremptory, and the bearers of it not dignified enough to come to her with such a message. We cannot certainly tell. All human motives are more or less mixed, and so were hers—but one feels bound to say that by far the most probable cause of her refusal was a deep sense of injury done to her womanhood, and of course to her queenliness, in this sudden call to show herself in such a company, at such a time. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The pride of Vashti*:—Bad

as the conduct of the king was in issuing the order, it does not follow that the queen was right in disobeying it. If the action had been in itself positively immoral, then it would have been her duty to have resisted, whatever the consequences might be. No authority can bind, and no danger should constrain, a woman to do anything which is vicious or essentially immodest. Had Vashti of her own accord gone into the company, had she sought the opportunity, or embraced it joyfully, she would have been convicted of immodesty; but had she complied merely out of respect to authority, and to prevent her husband from being dishonoured by her refusal, in the presence of his subjects, her conduct would have appeared in a very different light in the eyes of all reasonable persons. She was a subject, as well as a wife; and if her royal husband had, when heated with wine, issued an order which reflected on her honour, she, being perfectly sober, might have consulted his. But Vashti was as proud as Ahasuerus was vain, and determined that if he was imperious, she would be haughty and unyielding. She was piqued that such a message should be sent to her in the presence of her maids of honour and the great ladies of Persia, and resolved to show her spirit by setting at nought the request of the king her husband. Instead of making a modest excuse, or sending "a soft answer which turneth away wrath," she gave a flat and peremptory refusal. (*T. McCrie.*) *Vashti obeyed the higher law*:—Thus the question was publicly forced on all, Is this man, who rules from India to Ethiopia, really a great man, after all? For Vashti disobeyed him; and Vashti was right. There is a higher law than even the will of a king and a husband—the law that gives a woman right to guard her own modesty when those who should guard it for her do not. Vashti obeyed that higher law written by the Creator in the nature of men and women; and we can think nothing but good of her in the matter. Had force been used, her responsibility would have ceased, but she had no right to yield; and the crown royal was a cheap price to pay for her own self-respect. *Selfishness is unfeeling*:—Did he send a message to Vashti to ask if she would be willing? When was woman ever honoured out of Christ, who redeemed her out of her social estrangement and solitude, and set her forth invested with the queenliness of a God-given beauty and modesty. Hear the king: "Fetch Vashti now, and make a show of her beauty, for she is fair to look upon." All this is in natural order. Selfishness never considers the feelings of others. Selfishness will be gratified at all costs and hazards. When a man's heart is merry with wine all that is most sacred in humanity goes out of him. Who can withhold anything from a ravenous beast? Who should stay his power and say be quiet, be self-controlled, be contented? None. This is human nature when left to itself. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Amestris*:—If Ahasuerus is to be identified with Xerxes, it is probable that Vashti is the same as the Amestris who is spoken of by the Greeks as the wife of Xerxes, and whom he must have wedded before his accession to the throne. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Vashti right*:—But for my part I consider it worthy of all praise, and hold that she was entirely right in what she did. It is true that by the appointment of God the husband is the head of the wife, but the headship is not absolute and autocratic. Here, too, the government must be constitutional and within limits which have been fixed by the Lord Himself. No husband has a right to command a wife to do that which is wrong, and liberty of conscience ought to be as sacred in the home as in the State. (*Ibid.*) *Vashti had good reason to be excused*:—Vashti had good reason to beg to be excused from appearing in a company where too many were merry with wine, and it is probable that if she had sent her humble request to the king to spare her modesty he might have recalled his orders. (*G. Lawson.*) *Disobedience of Vashti*:—She was in no danger of being insulted by indecent words or wanton glances in the presence of her royal husband, whose frown was death to his subjects. She thought she was supporting the honour of her sex. But did not she see that she was affronting her husband and her king not only before his chamberlains but before all his people? If he suffered his own family to trample upon his authority his respectability amongst his other subjects must have been greatly lessened. The queen is the first subject in the kingdom; she ought, therefore, to go before all the other subjects in showing a becoming deference to the king's pleasure. If men expect due obedience from their wives, let them be always reasonable in their commands, otherwise half the guilt of the disobedience of their wives will remain with themselves. Never impose a burden upon your wife which either female delicacy or her particular temper, which you ought to know, will render too heavy for her to bear. Ahasuerus hoped to show to all his princes and people in Shushan how

happy he was, and only showed them his misery. (*Ibid.*) *Worldly indulgence disappointing*.—Was Ahasuerus contented with what he had so richly enjoyed? We stand in this chamber of the world to witness a remarkable scene of its madness and folly. 1. Behold the thorough dissatisfaction which attends its joys. See the conscious wretchedness which limits all its pleasures. Man finds an inherent and inseparable element of dissatisfaction in all the scenes of his earthly joys. They do not, they cannot meet his wants. He awakes always to find that his soul is empty, and sad in the consciousness of the fact. Ahasuerus is just as unsatisfied with all his magnificent display and with his six months' pompous festival as the poorest subject of his realm is with his own hard lot. Unlimited opportunity of indulgence is nothing, while there is a limited capacity to enjoy and an unlimited craving for enjoyment. Such was Ahasuerus. His heart was empty of joy though filled with madness. He imagines a new spectacle which will awaken a new admiration. He commands his seven chamberlains "to bring Vashti the queen before the king, with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look on." But he is not alone. Where is the feast or where the provision of the world for human gratification in which there is nothing left for the heart to desire? Ahasuerus is but a specimen. His folly has been multiplied in myriads of instances, and in every variety in the scale of imitation. It only shows what emptiness there is in the whole of this scheme of sensual gratification. 2. Behold the bitter disappointment. "Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains." Refused to come!—what a disappointment to morbid, vulgar curiosity! What a fall to intoxicated pride! But it was a noble specimen of woman's dignity, modesty, and virtue. All his indulgence is forgotten—the happiness of his palace has passed away. The worldly heart is empty and vexed with itself. His dream of glory has vanished. Its beauty and splendour have withered completely for him. One "dead fly" has destroyed the fragrance of the whole provision. But is this a peculiar case in the disappointment which it describes? Was Ahasuerus the only victim of such conscious mistake in the midst of indulgence? You see the madness, the disappointment in the sensual heart which worldly indulgence everywhere produces. Go where you will, as far as you will, still desire and imagination press further on. Something is yet demanded to complete your attainment. This is the inevitable law of the result in human pleasure. The brightest portion leaves something still to ask. The highest attainment is as unsatisfying as the lowest. 3. Behold the degradation to which this disappointment has brought its victim. The king is wretched in the presence of them all. Ahasuerus is degraded, but he has degraded himself. The man who has sacrificed his virtue, his integrity, his self-respect, may be sure that, sooner or later, his sin will find him out. But this is another lesson in the chamber of worldly indulgence. This is the habitual end of a life of mere sensual gratification. Personal degradation is its habitual result—in some shape or other its final, inevitable result. Moral, outward degradation frequently! Intellectual, conscious degradation, social degradation! what can be more degrading than such a subjection? What can be more degrading than such a slavery to brute appetite and sensual display? It is the defiling and destroying of a mind that might be elevated to God and educated for glory. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Vashti*.—1. In the first place I want you to look upon Vashti the queen. A blue ribbon rayed with white, drawn around her forehead, indicated her queenly position. It was no small honour to be queen in such a realm as that. Hark to the rustle of her robes! See the blaze of her jewels! And yet it is not necessary to have palace and regal robe in order to be queenly. When I see a woman with stout faith in God, putting her foot upon all meanness and selfishness and godless display, going right forward to serve Christ and the race by a grand and glorious service, I say, "That woman is a queen," and whether she comes up from the shanty on the common or the mansion of the fashionable square I greet her with the shout, "All hail, Queen Vashti!" When Scarron, the wit and ecclesiastic, as poor as he was brilliant, was about to marry Madame de Maintenon he was asked by the notary what he proposed to settle upon Mademoiselle. The reply was, "Immortality; the names of the wives of kings die with them; the name of the wife of Scarron will live always." In a higher and better sense upon all women who do their duty God will settle immortality! Not the immortality of earthly fame, but the immortality celestial. And they shall reign for ever and ever! Oh, the opportunity which every woman has of being a queen! The longer I live the more I admire good womanhood. If a man have

a depressed idea of womanly character he is a bad man, and there is no exception to the rule. The writings of Goethe can never have any such attractions for me as Shakespeare, because nearly all the womanly characters of the great German have some kind of turpitude. 2. Again, I want you to consider Vashti the veiled. Had she appeared before Ahasuerus and his court on that day with her face uncovered she would have shocked all the delicacies of Oriental society, and the very men who in their intoxication demanded that she come, in their sober moments would have despised her. As some flowers seem to thrive best in the dark lane and in the shadow, and where the sun does not seem to reach them, so God appoints to most womanly natures a retiring and unobtrusive spirit. God once in a while does call an Isabella to a throne, or a Miriam to strike the timbrel at the front of a host, or a Marie Antoinette to quell a French mob, or a Deborah to stand at the front of an armed battalion crying out, "Up! Up! This is the day in which the Lord will deliver Sisera into thy hands." And when women are called to such outdoor work and to such heroic positions God prepares them for it. When I see a woman going about her daily duty—with cheerful dignity presiding at the table; with kind and gentle but firm discipline presiding in the nursery; going out into the world without any blast of trumpets, following in the footsteps of Him who went about doing good—I say, "This is Vashti with a veil on." But when I see a woman of unblushing boldness, loud-voiced, with a tongue of infinite clitter-clatter, with arrogant look, passing through the streets with a masculine swing, gaily arrayed in a very hurricane of millinery, I cry out, "Vashti has lost her veil." 3. Again, I want you to consider Vashti the sacrifice. Who is this that I see coming out of that palace gate of Shushan? She comes homeless, houseless, friendless, trudging along with a broken heart. Who is she? It is Vashti the sacrifice. Oh, what a change it was from regal position to a wayfarer's crust! Ah! you and I have seen it many a time. Here is a home empalced with beauty. All that refinement and books and wealth can do for that home has been done; but Ahasuerus, the husband and the father, is taking hold on paths of sin. He is gradually going down. Soon the bright apparel of the children will turn to rags; soon the household song will become the sobbing of a broken heart. The old story over again. The house full of outrage and cruelty and abomination, while trudging forth from the palace gate are Vashti and her children. Oh, Ahasuerus, that you should stand in a home by a dissipated life destroying the peace and comfort of that home! 4. Once more, I want you to look at Vashti the silent. You do not hear any outcry from this woman as she goes forth from the palace gate. From the very dignity of her nature you know there will be no vociferation. Sometimes in life it is necessary to make a retort; sometimes in life it is necessary to resist; but there are crises when the most triumphant thing to do is to keep silence. Affliction, enduring without any complaint the sharpness of the pang, and the violence of the storm, and the fetter of the chain, and the darkness of the night—waiting until a Divine hand shall be put forth to soothe the pang and hush the storm and release the captive. An Arctic explorer found a ship floating helplessly about among the icebergs, and going on board he found that the captain was frozen at his log-book, and the helmsman was frozen at the wheel, and the men on the look-out were frozen in their places. That was awful, but magnificent. All the Arctic blasts and all the icebergs could not drive them from their duty. Their silence was louder than thunder. And this old ship of the world has many at their posts in the awful chill of neglect, and frozen of the world's scorn, and their silence shall be the eulogy of the skies, and be rewarded long after this weather-beaten craft of a planet shall have made its last voyage. I thank God that the mightiest influences are the most silent. The fires in a furnace of a factory or of a steamship roar though they only move a few shuttles or a few thousand tons, but the sun that warms the world rises and sets without a crackle or faintest sound. Travellers visiting Mount Etna, having heard of the glories of sunrise on that peak went up to spend the night there and see the sun rise next morning, but when it came up it was so far behind their anticipations that they actually hissed it. The mightiest influences of to-day are like the planetary system—completely silent. Don't hiss the sun! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Therefore was the king very wroth.**—*Self-control the highest attainment*:—"Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him." Literally, he frothed at the mouth and became as a wild boar. The strength of manhood is in self-control. The Oriental king could not brook that his will should be resisted. It is the very highest attainment of Christian education that a man shall accept the resistance of his will as an element in his culture. No man will

seek to force his will; he will reason about it, he will be mighty in argument, tender and gentle in persuasion, and if he cannot win the first day or the second day, he may be successful on the third day. But mere force never won a true victory. Conquer by love and you will reign by consent. Let men feel that your wisdom is greater than theirs, and they will say, "God save the king!" The time is coming when every man will have to prove his kingliness not because of the insignia he keeps in the tower, but because of a wise head, a noble heart, and a hand that never refused its offices to an honest cause. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Anger*:—I. THE DEFORMITY OF ANGER. What an ugly thing is anger. II. THE DISGRACE OF ANGER. III. THE DANGER OF ANGER. (*J. Trapp.*) *The batteries of passion*:—Regular ill-temper is altogether a different thing from passion. The one corrodes incessantly like an acid or metal, the other discharges desperate shocks like the electric shocks of the gymnotus, and spends itself. Do not get in the way of passionate men until their batteries are discharged. The exhaustion of these batteries is only a matter of time and opportunity. And you may watch the process calmly, and be instructed by Humboldt's description of the way in which the gymnotes use their batteries, and see if you discover therein any resemblance to and lesson for passionate persons. He tells us that the gymnotes abound in the vicinity of Calaboza in South America, and the Indians, well aware of the danger of encountering them when their powers are in vigour, collect from twenty to thirty horses, drive them into the pools, and when the gymnotes have exhausted their electric batteries on the poor horses they can be taken without risk. Time and repose are needed before the batteries are ready to act again. The first assault of the gymnotes, says Humboldt, was chiefly to be dreaded. In fact, after a time the eels resembled discharged batteries. Their muscular motion continued active, but they had lost the power of giving energetic shocks. When the combat had endured for a quarter of an hour the horses seemed to be less in fear. They were no longer seen to fall backwards, and the gymnotes, swimming with their bodies half out of the water, were now flying from the horses and making for the shore. The Indians then began to use their harpoons, and by means of long cords attached to them drew the fish out of the water. When the batteries of his passion have been discharged many a passionate man has also afforded a similarly easy conquest to those who have just watched and waited. (*Scientific Illustrations, &c.*) *The passionate character*:—The panther rarely attacks man without being provoked; but it is irritated at the merest trifle, and its anger is manifested by the lightning rapidity of its onset, which invariably results in the speedy death of the imprudent being who has aroused its fury. Avoid passionate people, for they are like the panther. (*Ibid.*) *Beautiful surroundings may be inoperative for good*:—Surely a palace will be a sanctuary. The palace of this man was worse than a stable. Surely in the presence of beauty men must grow beautiful! This man looked on beauty but did not see it, and perpetrated the irony of living amongst beautiful things until he became ghastly and hideous. Never did Pleasure hold such carnival; never were such Saturnalia known in all the earth. Yet the men did not retire from it heroes and chief of virtue and beneficence; they staggered away half beast and half devil. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Character is not in circumstances*:—Sometimes we say, looking upon the abodes of poverty, "What can we expect here of decency, moral education, and progress? See how the poor are huddled and crowded together! What can be looked for here but a hotbed bringing forth a most evil harvest?" All that is right. But if there is any argument in it at all it is an argument that covers a large space. Here is a man who has room enough, he has everything at his command; if he wants gold or silver or precious stones he can have them by a nod of his head, what can we expect here but piety, contentment, thankfulness, moral progress? Family life under such a canopy must be a daily doxology, a sweet, hallowed thing more of heaven than of earth. We must beware of the sophism in both sides of this popular argument. Character is not in circumstances. The poorest people have, in no solitary instances easily numbered, most vividly illustrated the purest and noblest character. There are kings who are paupers, there are paupers who are kings. We owe everything to moral education—we owe nothing to kingly splendour. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 15. *What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law.*—*The great advantage of laws*:—Here let us remark the great advantage of laws. Law is mind without passion; and it is better to have a code of laws, however bad, than to have none but the will of a man. Had the king on this occasion acted according

to his passion, it is more than probable that the scene might have terminated more tragically; but he acted "according to law." Secondly, we see the great advantage of counsel. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," says the wise man. This is more especially the case with those who have the lives, the property, and even the religion of others, to consider and determine upon. What an advantage is it to have for counsellors good men, who hate covetousness, who have the welfare of their country at heart, and especially those who act under the fear of God! (T. McCrie.)

Vers. 16-26. **And Memucan answered before the king.**—*Hasty counsellors*.—If they had been wise, as counsellors ought to be, they would have been in no haste to give judgment in a matter so important as that which was submitted to them. They would have delayed till passion had cooled, and right reason had been restored. But, half-intoxicated they proceeded to give judgment at once, falling in with the humours of royalty, and hastening to do what could not afterwards be recalled. (T. McEwan.) *Flatterers*.—It is the punishment of despots to be surrounded by flatterers, and the words of counsellors are but the dicta of their whims and conceits. (Ibid.) *Flatterers*.—There is a general lesson suggested by what passed between the king and his counsellors as to the danger of flattery. It is natural to all men to desire to have their opinions confirmed and approved by others. The feeling of self-approbation, which forms one element of happiness, is gratified and strengthened when several persons give their verdict in favour of a choice which we have made or a course of action which we have judged it right to pursue. But then, when men occupy exalted stations, and have it in their power to reward richly those who are in any way instrumental to the advancement of their comfort and happiness, they are exposed to the very serious calamity of having counsels and opinions poured into their ear for the purpose of pleasing them, and not of presenting truth to them or guiding them rightly through difficulties. There is hardly any one, indeed, who is exempted from the influence of flattery. It is less and less exercised as wealth and power diminish; but when a man is possessed of anything that can afford gratification to others, he will find some to fall in with his wishes and approve of his opinions, until all he has is expended. Perhaps it is in the condition of absolute poverty alone that the voice of flattery is not heard. Whether we have or have not wherewithal to bribe others to our way of thinking and feeling, and to secure their approval of our conduct, certain it is that we have a flatterer in our own hearts whose insidious attempts to mislead us we should guard against most anxiously. In every man there is a conflict between inclination and the power of conscience. This conflict arises and is carried on without reference to a man's religious knowledge or belief. The heathen were as conscious of it as those are who possess the oracles of God. When unlawful desire prompts in one direction, there is another influence, the natural conscience, which points in a different way, and has its strong arguments to repress the cravings of desire. Now all the reasonings against the conviction of what is right are just so many self-flatteries by which we are seduced into sin. And their strength is too great. They put a false colouring upon the objects of human pursuit, they make what is wrong appear right and what is hurtful seem innocent, and thus the maxim is verified, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." We may wonder at the folly of Artaxerxes in allowing himself to be guided by the judgment of men who only spoke what they supposed would please him! But all men have as good reason—yea, Christ's own people have as good reason—to wonder at the strange flatteries by which at one time their progress heavenward is interrupted, and at other times their will is enlisted on the side of what is positively evil. (A. B. Davidson, D.D.) *The result of sensual indulgence*.—1. The flattery and the falsehood of the world. The king is surrounded by admirers and friends. They are "wise men who knew the times." One faithful but persecuted woman is the object of their hostility and the subject of their counsel. But ah, where is the faithful man among them all? Why is there no one to take the side of persecuted innocence and injured virtue? What an aspect this council exhibits of the mind and motives of guilty men! How rarely do the rich and great listen to the voice of truth or find the fidelity of real friendship! To maintain the side of truth and virtue against wealth and pride and power in the world is a signal mark of the great and noble mind. Thus hand joins in hand in the perpetration of human sin. Is this peculiar? Nay, this is the transgression with which the world aboundeth. What swarms of flatterers hang about the path

of self-indulgent youth ! See that daughter of wealth and fashion. How is she led on from step to step in the blandishments of her career. There is none to restrain, none to warn, and she has no real friend to whom she can be induced to listen. Memucan's abound wherever appetite asks an excuse for the gratification it seeks. 2. See the total want of domestic confidence, the violation of that pure and mutual family dependence which follows in the train of earthly selfishness and sensuality. What a reason this prince of the kingdom of Persia gives for his cruel and unjust advice ! "This deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women," &c. Memucan's grand fear alleged is that all the wives in Persia will prove either too virtuous to be degraded or too rebellious to be governed. Nothing marks a debased and consciously criminal mind more clearly and habitually than its suspicion and incredulity of the virtue and integrity of others. This painful and disgraceful fact is brought before us in our present illustration. It is the family relation of which Memucan speaks. What is it that maintains in our households the spirit and dominion of mutual confidence ? I answer, not the world or the pursuit of the world, but the power of true religion. Take this great principle of life and truth from the household, let the world rule there in its pride of covetousness, or in its lust of indulgence, and how soon and how thoroughly are domestic happiness, dignity and peace sacrificed and cast away ! Mutual suspicion, recrimination, alienation, separation, divorce, hatred, persecution, murder, all follow in the legitimate train of succession as natural and too often habitual results. Half the talent and ingenuity of the world is exercised in plans for counterworking and overreaching the schemes of other people, or in self-defence against their violence or fraud. What an exhibition this makes of human sin ! The children of the world expend their life and time and powers in suspecting, watching, guarding, forestalling each other. 3. The actual crime to which this course of indulgence in sensuality must lead. The king assents at once to the cruel and unjust advice which he receives. "The saying pleased the king and princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan." The self-indulgent monarch finds himself involved in the grievous injustice and wrong which has been the result of his own sin. This is the regular process through which the worldly and the ungodly habitually travel. I do not mean to say that they are all allowed to attain this result of open crime. The providence of a gracious God often interposes to keep men back from the results of their own choice. Merciful indeed is this interposition. Who can tell to what an extent of wickedness a rebellious world would run but for the interference of this unseen Divine restraint ? But such a restraint is a special and peculiar interposition in the case of individuals. When intemperance sinks into poverty and rejection—when fraud and robbery bring the victim to a felon's cell—when vanity and indecorous exposure prove the destruction of female virtue—when anger and revenge result in bloodshed and murder—men are not astonished. They recognise in all these the natural issues of the principles we have traced. 4. See how surely the day of regret must come to human guilt. The king has finished his purpose and the advice of his attendants. But he is far from peace. Sin can never satisfy the sinner. "After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her." Human wrath cannot last for ever. The whirl of the excitement passes, and then comes the bitterness of the memory of sin. The soul is filled with remorse—literally, a biting, gnawing of itself. It is the fearful result of human sin. This is the chamber of the world. In all these there comes the question that will be answered, "What fruit had ye then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed ? for the end of these things is death." This is ever the result. What remembered follies crowd upon the mind ! The soul looks inward and holds communion with itself. A thousand Vashtis are remembered, what they have done and what they have suffered. It is a deeply convincing hour. New and wonderful light is poured in upon the conscience. This is the end of the sensual indulgence of the world. (S. H. Tyng, D.D.) *Courtiers forsake a failing cause :—* I. THE COURTLY ORATOR. II. HIS CUNNING FLATTERY. III. HIS VICIOUS REASONING. IV. HIS TIME-SERVING POLICY. V. HIS UNFEELING NATURE. (W. Burrows, B.A.) *The folly of trusting in man :—*Ahasuerus was guilty of it. Remark that this practice—I. IS IDOLATROUS IN ITS PRINCIPLES. II. IT IS GROVELLING IN ITS AIM. III. IT IS UNREASONABLE IN ITS FOUNDATION. IV. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS ISSUE. *Learn—*1. There is no safety in man. 2. To put your trust in the Lord. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Counsel needed :—*Not only kings, but also private persons, often need wise counsels, especially when they are hurried away by their passions. But

our loss is, that at such times we are uncommonly unfit to receive counsel. (*G. Lawson.*) *Fit counsellors few*:—Every man is not fit to be a counsellor. (*Ibid.*) *For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women.*—*Fashions travel downward*:—Fashions and maxims usually go downward from one class of society to another. Customs, adopted by the higher orders as their rule, gradually make their way until at length they pervade all ranks. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Evil actions do not terminate in themselves*:—"What the queen doth will be done by all," was his statement, and we must feel the truthfulness of it. It embodies a maxim peculiarly applicable to the followers of Christ. They are supposed to be separate from the sinful world by the very circumstance of their being Christ's. Then, if they become worldly—if they act inconsistently—their acts do not terminate in and with themselves. What they say and do produces effects far beyond their own calculation and their own sphere. A word spoken for Christ may bear fruit where they would not have been prepared to look for such a result. (*Ibid.*) *Among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered.*—*Unalterable judgments foolish*:—He who prides himself on never reversing his judgments should be extremely cautious about forming them. Obstinacy may refuse to change its opinions; wisdom will be guilty of no such rashness. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *And let the king give her royal estate unto another.*—*The vicissitudes of life*:—Perhaps you look back upon scenes different from those in which now from day to day you mingle. You have exchanged the plenty and luxuriance of your father's house for privation and trials known to God and your own heart. The morning of life was flushed with promise. Troops of calamities since then have made desperate charge upon you. Darkness has come. Sorrows have swooped like carrion birds from the sky, and barked like jackals from the thicket. You stand amid your slain, anguished and woe-struck. Rizpah on the rock. So it has been in all ages. Vashti must doff the spangled robes of the Persian Court, and go forth blasted from the palace gate. Hagar exchanges Oriental comfort for the wilderness of Beersheba. Mary Queen of Scots must pass out from flattery and pomp to suffer ignominious death in the Castle of Fotheringay. The wheel of fortune keeps turning, and mansions and huts exchange, and he who rode in the chariot pushes the barrow, and instead of the glare of festal lights is the simmering of the peat fire, and in place of Saul's palace is the rock, the cold rock, the desolate rock. But that is the place to which God comes. Jacob with his head on a stone saw the shining ladder. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Unjustifiable divorce*:—We cannot but remark upon the facility with which divorce took place in that land of Persia. We cannot be too thankful that we live not where such unjust laws obtain. Nor can we too zealously guard the sacred obligations of wedded life. Perhaps many cases of unhappiness might be traced to a similar cause to that which brought about the separation of Ahasuerus and Vashti. Any mere trifle becomes sufficient as an excuse for separation. We have heard of a quarrel and divorce taking place because one asserted that there were a certain number of windows in a house opposite and the other denied it. Each maintained their point with obstinacy, and neglected to settle their difference by counting them. (*F. Hastings.*) *The Nemesis of absolutism*:—The character of Ahasuerus illustrates the Nemesis of absolutism by showing how unlimited power is crushed and dissolved beneath the weight of its own immensity. The very vastness of his domains overwhelms the despot. He is the slave of his own machinery of government. But this is not all. The man who is exalted to the pedestal of a god is made dizzy by his own altitude. Absolutism drove Caligula mad; it punished Xerxes with childishness. The silly monarch who would decorate a tree with the jewellery of a prince in reward for its fruitfulness, and flog and chain the Hellespont as a punishment for its tempestuousness, is not fit to be let out of the nursery. When the same man appears on the pages of Scripture under the name of Ahasuerus, his weakness is despicable. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Vers. 20. *All the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.*—*Wives to honour their husbands*:—All the wives too are included, for they are all "to give honour to their husbands, both to the great and small." Well, the great, the really great, will get the honour easily, and could do very well probably without the helpful edict. Where there is real greatness, which, in Christian speech, we may translate into real goodness, it is the wife's joy to render what it is the husband's pride to wear. But the honour is to be given "both to the great and small!" "Ay, there's the rub." If this insurrectionary torch should go through

the land, what will become of the small ones?—the selfish, the spiteful, the meddlesome, the rude, the mean, the silly, the helpless, the good-for-nothing? They are all to have honour! As if a decree could really get it, or keep it from them. Wouldn't the better plan be, in that case, and in many a case besides, that the small shall try to grow larger? Let them be ashamed of their littleness, and rise out of it into something like nobleness. Let them love and help their wives, and care for their children, and honour will come as harvest follows sowing. But unless they do something like that, one fears that all the edicts that can be devised and promulgated will leave them as it finds them—"small." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Love is the law:—1. And does not this history teach us that the great law of domestic happiness is love? No Persian decrees are required to execute the mandates of love, nor can any royal commandment make a household happy without it. The true way for all queens to rule is to "stoop to conquer." Let their husbands call themselves as much as they please "the lords of creation," and let them seem to hold the reins, but it is theirs to tell them how to drive. This is the more excellent way. The dispute about the sphere of the sexes is as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural. It is God's will that man should be the head and woman the heart of society. If he is its strength, she is its solace. If he is its wisdom, she is its grace and consolation. Domestic strife is always a great evil, but it becomes doubly so when it occurs before company, as happened with the king of Persia, and when professed friends come in and make bad worse. It is then the wound becomes incurable. 2. Let us learn to guard against all excesses, not only in feasting and in the loss of time, but of feeling and passion. How inconsiderate, how rash, how sinful was Herod's oath and terrible decree against John the Baptist! And scarcely less wicked were the king's unjust and cruel proceedings against his wife. It was a maxim with General Jackson to take much time to deliberate—to think out the right resolution—but when once the resolution was taken, then to think only of executing it. 3. How emphatic a lesson is here of human vanity! The great monarch of such a vast empire is not able to govern himself. And all the grandeur of half a year's feasting is spoiled by the disobedience of his queen. This was the dead fly in his pot of ointment. 4. Alas! that so lovely a place as a garden should have been the scene of such revelry and sinning. A garden is associated with some of our holiest and saddest thoughts. Sin fastened on our race in a garden. It was in a garden the curse was pronounced, and there too the great promise of a Redeemer was given. And it was in a garden the Messiah entered the lists of mortal combat to bruise the old serpent's head. Instead, then, of making our gardens the scenes of sinful mirth and dissipation, as did the Persian king, let us make them oratories for pious breathings to heaven—let them give us thoughts of God and of the love and sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ. It is to Him we owe all our pleasures in the creatures and gifts of providence, as well as the hope of eternal life. And so also let the garden be a preacher to us of our frailty. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

The husband to bear rule in his house:—This is truly a Divine appointment, but it is not made in an arbitrary manner, like, for instance, a positive institution of the Jews, which might be this way or that way with equal propriety—the thing deriving its sacred character chiefly from the fact of the appointment. Even a Divine appointment could not make the wife supreme, human nature continuing what it is. For one thing, woman is weaker than man physically, and supremacy goes with strength. All kinds of force have their ultimate source in God, and when He makes man permanently stronger than woman, no doubt He means some corresponding authority to rest where the permanent strength does. No doubt strength may be abused, is most shamefully abused in some instances, by the husband. But the way to prevent the abuse of strength is not, surely, to attempt to transfer its proper responsibilities to weakness? Weakness may be abused as much as strength, and in some ways even more. Again, there are many things of less or more importance which come to require a single ultimate decision. One must say how this thing is to be. Practical action must be taken one way or other. Who shall decide? Is the husband to submit to the wife? He decides with whom God has lodged the responsibility. But the truth is that in a properly regulated, or rather a properly inspired home, the question of authority in its bald form never arises. The husband's rule and the wife's obedience are alike unconscious, and alike easy. The sweet laws of nature, the good laws of God, make them one. This leads us to say, on the other hand, with equal emphasis, that the authority of the husband is clearly a limited authority. Common sense ought to teach a man that there is a

large sphere of the practical family life where he ought to leave the wife and mother practically supreme. His interference at all (whatever may be the abstract right) will not help the industry, the order, the peace of the household. But, rising higher, look at the grand fact that the authority of the husband over the wife has, and must have, clear and strong, and altogether impassable limits. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) **Bear rule in his own house.**—*Houses should be homes*:—"In his own house"—who has a house of his own? The house is a prison until somebody else shares it. The house belongs to all the people that are in it—part to the husband, part to the wife, part to the children, part to the servants, right through all the household line. Develop the notion of partnery, co-responsibility; let every one feel a living interest in the place: then the house shall be built of living stones, pillared with righteousness, roofed with love. It is here that Christianity shines out with unique lustre. Obedience is right for all parties, but the obedience has to be in the Lord; it is to be the obedience of righteousness, a concession to wisdom, a toll paid to honour, which is to be returned in love and gratitude. Christianity has made our houses homes. We owe everything that is socially beneficent to Christianity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *His own house*:—A man living at a hotel is like a grape-vine in a flower-pot—movable, carried around from place to place, docked at the root and short at the top. Nowhere can a man get real root-room, and spread out his branches till they touch the morning and the evening, but in his own house. *The overruling providence of God*:—The important thing, in order to our understanding the story, is that we should keep these first links in our hand, and should mark the working of "another King." Into the administration of our Lord Jesus Christ no mistake can creep, and so perfect is His grasp that mosaic pavements, golden couches, throngs of noblemen, fawning courtiers, excess of wine, swelling vanity, and a woman's firmness, are all, without the slightest knowledge on the part of any actor in the drama, made to bring about a purpose of His, the execution of which is more than four years distant. Had Ahasuerus not been the proud voluptuary he was; had he not made his great feast; had he not in the last day of it let slip or thrown away the reins of sound reason and run his head against a first law of nature; had his vanity taken any other direction than that of wishing to parade the queen's beauty; had Vashti been less of a true woman; had the courtiers been honest than they were—then there would have been no vacant place for Esther to fill, and the plot of Haman might have thriven. But we have this song, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. *After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti.*—*Acting under the impulse of rage*:—The king had given full sway to his passion and wounded pride, and treated his wife with great severity. In his moments of cool reflection he probably repented of the harshness of his proceedings towards her. Excitement is a bad guide in human affairs. He who acts under the impulse of rage is sure to be driven astray, even as a vessel in a storm is driven to situations of embarrassment and peril. Man in wrath speaks freely and eloquently, but never wisely, and he works with decision and energy, but who is benefited by his operations? He doeth much, but uniformly to a bad purpose. (*J. Hughes.*) *Avenge memories*:—O, memory! thou art a bitter avenger. (*T. McEwan.*) *Bitter memories*:—Ah! these bitter memories of earth will be ingredients in the future cup of the penal suffering of the lost. (*Ibid.*) *Too late*:—Repentance may come too late. Ahasuerus could not retrace his steps. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Vain remembering*:—I. THE REGRET OF THE KING FOR HIS BASH AND UNWARRANTABLE ACT. He was sensible that he had committed injury and that he had not only wronged Vashti, but also made himself a sufferer. 1. He could not devise a remedy. There are wishes that even the most powerful despots cannot get gratified, and limits to their will that even they cannot pass over. 2. The law of the Medes and Persians must stand. II. THE EXPEDIENT WHICH HIS COUNSELLORS SUGGESTED TO FREE HIM FROM HIS DIFFICULTY. Learn—1. When men suffer themselves to be carried away by the impulse of any violent

passions, they may commit acts which cannot afterwards be remedied, and which they themselves may have especially to lament. 2. It forms no excuse for sin committed, that the transgressor had reduced himself to a condition in which he ceased to retain his full consciousness of the distinction between right and wrong. Take an illustration from the history of Saul. He failed to improve his privileges; the Spirit of the Lord departed and the evil spirit took possession of him—slew prophets, &c. He was held responsible because he had laid his heart open for the reception of the evil spirit. 3. Repentance may come too late. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 2-17. **And let the king appoint officers.**—*The weak and lowly* :—Poor, helpless, feeble, may be the earthward aspect of true religion. Beggars shall be taken from the dunghill, to set them among princes. God will be indebted to no outward help or influence. We see how God is pleased to overrule the very sins and passions of guilty men for the accomplishment of His own designs. The banishment of Vashti has left Ahasuerus solitary and self-reproaching. Some scheme must be adopted by those who counselled her overthrow, to supply her place. "Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan, the palace. And let the maiden that pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king, and he did so." How perfectly natural was all this arrangement and plan! And yet it was but one part of God's Divine arrangement to bring about His own plan, a plan of which they knew nothing. Thus He leaves men to act out their own purposes and accomplish their own ends, and yet overrules their whole scheme for the attainment of the results which He has already determined. This is His providence; this is the wise and perfect government of the Most High. 1. We see a youthful female, a poor girl. Her very sex betokens weakness and exposure. But yet woman is called "the weaker vessel," and is so, as the crystal vase is a weaker vessel than the oaken cask, more easily overthrown, more surely injured, more irreparably destroyed, by the power of vicious habit or sinful temptation. To her, exposure to evil is far the heavier, and far more dangerous. Upon her, sorrows press with a far more grievous load. To her, misfortunes come with a far more sharpened power. The wrongs of women have filled every age and every history. But here, when the illustration of rising, conquering piety is brought before us, the subject is a woman; and a woman in her weakest and most forlorn position, a lonely girl. It is enough for us to see and know that God is there, the Father of the fatherless and the God of the widows in His holy habitation. 2. She is an orphan girl. "She has neither father nor mother." What a privilege are parents spared to bless and cheer our maturity! What a joy and cause for thanksgiving is it to be permitted even to shelter and cheer their age in our own home! What solitude, separation, want of confidence, fear, distrust, yea, anguish, often fill up the orphan's heart! Few can sympathise; and even to those few it is impossible to pour out the secret sorrows which are the burden and distress within. But imaginary as the causes may be, the sorrows which they produce are real and abiding. Yet, when we add poverty to the orphan's lot, what increased bitterness do we throw into the cup! An orphan boy may struggle. The very poverty which oppresses him may excite his energies and call out his powers of endurance and of action. His self-dependence is aroused. But an orphan girl in poverty! what human case is habitually harder? Everything in her sex, and everything in her condition, is against her. Her exposure to the wickedness and the arts of the corrupt is the subject of constant observation and of constant dread. (1) That God loves the lowly. Let every imagination which exalteth itself against God be cast down. Be content to allow Him to take you from the dust in all your sinfulness and unworthiness, and to wash and cleanse and save you by His own grace and power alone. (2) Forget not that your honour and happiness will always be promoted by gaining the mind of God in this relation. This surely is the path of happiness for us. The world says, "Happy are the rich, the luxurious, the self-indulgent." God says, "Happy are the poor in spirit, the meek." The weak things of the world, if He choose them, and love them, will confound the things that are mighty. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Esther the queen* :—In this chapter we find illustrated—I. PROVIDENCE. We must not judge the heathen court of Persia by our standard of morality. Rather let us see how God overrules all these arrangements for the accomplishment of His own purposes. II. ADOPTION. In ten thousand things the strongest and wisest of us is but a lonely orphan, needing some strong hand to protect us, the pity of some

loving heart for our comfort. How blest is he who has learned to say, "Our Father." III. RECOMPENSE. Think of the joy of Mordecai as he sees his adopted daughter thus uplifted. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *Esther at court*:—There is, unquestionably, a difficulty connected with this 8th verse. 1. If Mordecai, of his own accord, presented Esther as a candidate for the royal favour, then he acted in opposition to the law of Moses, which forbade that the daughters of Israel should be given to the heathen. It would be no apology for his conduct that he designed by what he did to advance the interests of his nation. What is forbidden by the law must not be done that good may come of it. 2. Many interpreters suppose that those who were commissioned to select the virgins for the king's seraglio executed their office without respect to the feelings of the parties interested. Esther was taken, therefore, without there being any choice left, either to her or Mordecai, in the matter. 3. Others that, as the whole was so manifestly providential, Mordecai may have received special intimation from heaven to bring his orphan cousin under the notice of the king's officers. There is nothing in the history to warrant this opinion; therefore we embrace the first supposition as the most probable account of the affair. 4. But whatever may have been the feelings of Mordecai and Esther, we see the special workings of providence in her behalf. She obtained favour of the chief of the eunuchs above all the other maidens who had been committed to his care, so that, without solicitation on her part, not only was there more than ordinary indulgence toward her, but she was even treated with a degree of respect that seemed, as it were, the prelude to yet higher advancement. The commencement of Esther's life in the palace gave promise of a prosperous issue. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The beginning of true prosperity*:—Our study is in the chamber of true religion. There we see a solitary girl, and she an orphan. She hath "neither father nor mother." On the doctrine of earthly chances, everything is against her. But in the scheme of the Divine government, we shall see that she has an Almighty Friend. Her beginning is small indeed, and disastrous enough; her latter end shall greatly increase. But there are other discouraging circumstances also, which seem completely to forbid the latter end of advancement which is promised. 1. She is a stranger. We find her in a land not her own, though perhaps she was born upon its soil—among a people with whom she has no affinity and no bond of affection. A girl, an orphan, and a stranger. To wander among multitudes with whom we have no connection and no sympathy is often a depression to the brightest spirits. But this poor girl is not a stranger in voluntary journeying—she is a captive. She is a servant of the true God in a land of dark idolatry; a pure, praying girl amidst a people whose licentious profligacy made the most wasting crimes to be no dishonour. But if piety can be made triumphant under circumstances so completely opposed to it, and a child of God can glorify her Father's name, and keep His commandments amidst temptations and difficulties so numerous and pressing, how great will be the responsibility of those who are exposed to no such contests! 2. This orphan stranger, this lonely girl, is also beautiful in person. "The maid was fair and beautiful." This is a gift which all naturally, perhaps not unreasonably, prize. It is God who hath given to the youthful form and face their attractions and their loveliness. One of the marks of His benevolence is here seen. His goodness shines in all these aspects of His power. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Yet the beauty of our daughters is but too frequently a snare. Sin in the heart perverts and corrupts it. It is welcomed as a merchandise for gain. It is nourished as the food for vanity. It is perverted to awaken an earthly taste, and to encourage a carnal mind. It brings an attending exposure to peculiar temptations. Her parents delighted over her childish promise, and called her Hadassah, their myrtle, their joy. They looked forward to great parental delight in her coming bloom, when as a fragrant myrtle they should see her blossoming at their side. But this, alas, they were not to see. She was to bloom for the gaze of other eyes, but not for theirs. Could I lead you off from this outward beauty to think of the fair beauty of the Lord—how much more precious and desirable is that pure and obedient mind which we find united with Hadassah's loveliness of person! Outward beauty we cannot all have. But this higher and more enduring beauty of the Spirit you may all possess. 3. The sole earthly protector of this beautiful orphan was poor and unable to defend her. "In Shushan, the palace, there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai. And he brought up Hadassah," &c. When her father and her mother were obliged to forsake her, the Lord took her up, by providing her a faithful friend in her father's nephew. He took her for his own

daughter. But she was really one of God's hidden ones, chosen in His love, to be protected and loved by Him. Never forget this highest security of His protection and His presence. There you are secure for ever. No one can be poor who is rich in faith toward God. No one can be deserted who has the Divine friendship and fellowship. 4. This lonely orphan girl was grateful and obedient: "Esther did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him." Happy indeed is such a manifestation of grace as this! You may build with confidence any hope of usefulness and any desired attainment of human excellence upon a character so true. A spirit thus pure, subdued, affectionate and sincere, what may it not do that is lovely, honest, and of good report? It spreads happiness for others around its path. It converts the cares and trials of life into pleasures and delights. It crowns the whole personal walk with loveliness and attractions. But Esther's gratitude to her earthly benefactor was founded on her still deeper gratitude to God. This poor and lonely, but faithful and beautiful girl, God means to raise up to be an eminent blessing and restorer to His people. Her latter end is to be in great prosperity. This is our great lesson now. We are witnessing the purpose and the work of God. He is exalting a child of His own, and showing what He can do with His own, and by His own power. No condition is beneath His notice. No child of grace is below His care. None who love Him can be forsaken or destroyed. We see here a low beginning; none could be more so; but it is a very lovely one. And as we study the course through which God is pleased to lead this child of grace, we shall see Him to be justified in His whole course, and to come forth completely victorious in the work which He hath undertaken. How great is the advantage of having God upon your side, and of being under His special protection and care! (S. H. Tyng, D.D.) *The mysterious beginning*:—This is a most important truth for us to study. Man proposes, but God disposes. The eyes of the Lord are in every place. The government of the world is on His shoulder. 1. We may consider the object of this exaltation. This poor Jewish orphan is to be made the Queen of Persia. The change of position is as wide and wonderful as earth can illustrate. Why did God thus select and elevate her? He designed to give to all His people a great illustration of His power and goodness. He would have them see, He would have all to see, how certain and adequate is His protection to those who love and trust Him. But He had further designs in this work. He not only intended to show His goodness to Esther in protecting and rewarding a child whom He loved, He also purposed to make her an eminent blessing to others. She was to be a restorer to her people, a great blessing to her own captive nation. No one is exalted in this world for himself alone. Whatever gifts, or gains, or influence we have, they are for the benefit of others. No man liveth for himself. But how clearly and with what peculiar power does God teach us this truth in the whole plan of Divine redemption. Why has the Lord Jesus lived and died? And why is He still living as a mediator at the right hand of God? "For us," is the only answer to the question. He is exalted on high that He may bestow gifts upon men. This important truth God equally teaches us in our own enjoyment of the blessings which redemption brings to us. He enriches us with all our gifts that we may be made the instruments of enriching others. We should look around and ask, "Whom can I bless? Whom can I serve? To whom can I give even a cup of cold water in my Master's name?" We can never tell how wide may be the appointed influences of such a spirit. We see the end of the Lord, that He is faithful and very gracious, and we may learn from it to understand and to confide in the loving-kindness of the Lord. When the gracious purpose of God comes out in the result of His dispensation, we have no longer any doubt or darkness resting upon His Word. 2. We may consider the circumstances of Esther's exaltation. They were painful and repulsive to her in an extreme degree. Such was the subject of violent compulsion. Such is the true meaning of the term "brought," literally, "brought by force." In this exaltation of the captive orphan, God remarkably overruled and employed the wicked passions of men. The king consulted only his own corrupt desires. His officers combined to minister to his wicked tempers and gratifications. No happiness of others, no peace of violated households, no wretchedness of ruined and discarded youth, was to be considered as an obstacle in the path. The king's commandment and decree must be obeyed. This does not lessen the wickedness of men. However God may restrain and employ them, their purpose is only to sin. And whatsoever results God may bring out of their wickedness, they must bear the guilt of their sin in the same condemnation. God's mercy may compel them to bless His people, and to glorify Himself, while His justice punishes

their transgression, and overthrows their own plans of personal gain and glory. Henry VIII. was a monster of crime. His motives appeared to be his own wicked passions alone. He murdered and he married at his pleasure. Yet God overruled the whole result for the establishment of His truth. This glorious Reformation has been often reproached for Henry's crimes. It would be just as reasonable to reproach the deliverance of the Israelites and their subsequent prosperity with the crimes of Pharaoh. God can make even our own pardoned sins and follies to become a blessing to us, and to bring honour to Him. (*Ibid.*)

The important friendship :—What principle of Divine providence can be more important than this? To have the friendship of God is to have all that men can ask. If He is on our side, it is of little consequence who may be against us. But He is always on the side of those whose ways please Him. Esther's history shows us this. In all its aspects her exaltation was most remarkable. 1. Mark the simple cause of this exaltation. It was the Divine tribute to her character. Because her ways pleased the Lord, He made her enemies to be at peace with her. Do you ask for success, for happiness, for final triumph? Do you desire a result of blessedness for this life and for the life to come? Embrace the hope which the gospel gives. Go to the fountain which the gospel opens. Enter into the Saviour's ranks and belong to Him. He will carry you safely through every trial and every contest. 2. Mark the way in which this exaltation was accomplished. God gave her favour in the sight of others. An unseen influence and power preceded her in the path through which she was led and prepared her way before her. And now we see the beginning of the turning tide. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." The maiden pleased Hegai, the keeper of the women, and she obtained kindness of him. Everything now is to be in her favour. "The best place in the house of the women" is assigned to her. "Seven maidens meet to be given to her out of the king's house" are appointed her attendants. So easily can your gracious heavenly Father change and order the minds of others concerning you. He can make all your enemies at peace with you. Thus He prepared Pharaoh's daughter to be the defender and the royal nurse for the infant Moses. Thus also He dealt with Daniel and his companions. He gives a pleasant and attractive aspect to religious character, adorns it by His Spirit with traits of meekness and spiritual beauty, makes its influence agreeable and pleasant to those who become connected with it, and in this way makes His servants acceptable to others and a real blessing to many. This system of His gracious government lays out the line of personal duty for you. It is your duty to be a blessing to all persons and at all times. 3. Mark the state of mind which true piety will display under the most trying circumstances. This was beautifully exhibited in Esther as she passed through the trying ordeal which was to lead to her exaltation. Esther showed great self-respect. What is so dignified and refining as true piety? It habitually clothes the character with grace and purity, and the manners with delicacy and elegance. We see the poorest daughters of earth exalted by the transforming power of true religion to a hold on the reverence of all, and often to the admiration and delight of many. True piety is patient, quiet and unassuming. Esther showed a quiet submission to the will of God. She asked for nothing. She desired nothing of all that she saw around her. All the state and magnificence of her new condition were nothing to her. Her mind could find repose only in God. How beautiful is such an example! Remember that Divine promise (Isa. xxvi. 3): "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Esther showed entire indifference to worldly display. But "when the turn of Esther was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, appointed." She was contented to leave her whole influence and prospects in her Father's hands, and therefore "she required nothing." This was true modesty, as well as a simple and pious trust in God. Her mind and thoughts were directed to Him, not to herself. What an example was this to youth in the midst of the snares and artificial glare of the world! True adorning is "not the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on apparel, but it is in the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." What attractive beauty there is in a heavenly temper, a lowly spiritual mind! This is a jewel of the Lord's preparation and appointment, and eminently becomes and adorns the children of God. Esther showed a simple and entire trust in God. In the bitter-

ness of her heart's sorrow she had no other protector. (*Ibid.*) *The myrtle that became a star*:—I. Hadassah, **THE ORPHAN**. Mordecai took the little tree, growing without shelter from the storm, and planted it by his own hearth. II. Look next at Hadassah, **THE CAPTIVE**. III. Then at Hadassah, **THE BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN**. Nobody should despise beauty of face; but bad character spoils beauty, whilst beauty of soul may supply the lack of physical beauty. IV. Last of all, at Esther, **THE QUEEN**. V. Let us conclude with a **TWOFOLD WISH**. 1. May you grow like a myrtle, and resemble it in two qualities: in that it is an evergreen, and always fragrant. Be thou lovely in the dark days as well as the bright; and do thou always cheer thy dwelling with the fragrance of godliness. 2. May you glow like a star, which God has clothed with light and placed so high in the heavens. Do thou walk in light—Christ's light—the light of truth, and love, and holiness; and, finally, shine as a star in heaven, your home for evermore. (*J. Edmons, D.D.*) *Beauty*:—Esther, in addition to her outward comeliness, was modest, engaging, contented, and possessed all those amiable qualities which adorn the individual, while they make him useful to society. Beauty is one of the gifts of nature; but if it consist only in symmetry of form and fineness of colouring, it is no more than a beautiful statue; it can only gratify the eye. That which reflects as a mirror the good qualities of the mind can alone form an object of rational attraction. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 5-20. **Whose name was Mordecai**.—*Mordecai*:—Providence opens avenues through which merit may attain elevation. I. MORDECAI WAS KIND TO HIS ORPHAN COUSIN. He brought her up, adopting her as his own daughter. He was intensely solicitous for her welfare. He was her counsellor, guardian, friend. He seems to have possessed respect for womanhood—what Charles Lamb in one of his Essays of Elia designates, “reverence for the sex.” Are we not justified in affirming that this is indicative of nobility? Love of woman, as woman, produces beneficent results, which few can afford to dispense with. It aids in developing perfection of character. II. He possessed **GOOD JUDGMENT**. He advised Esther not to reveal her kindred. He did not enjoin her to deny her nationality, much less to become alienated from her suffering countrymen; but he exhorted her to maintain silence in reference to her descent. He will await deliverance from Israel's God, carefully watching the indications of providence, and endeavouring, meanwhile, to induce Esther to strengthen her influence with the king. “The prudent man looketh well to his going.” III. HE WAS **HUMBLE**. He sat as porter at the royal gate of the palace and was contented. IV. HE WAS **LOYAL TO JUSTICE**. When two of the chamberlains sought to lay hands on the king he disclosed the plot to the queen, who, by reporting it to the monarch, delivered the culprits over to the vengeance of law, and “they were both hanged on a tree.” V. HE WAS **CONSCIENTIOUS**, and to a right-minded person the approval of conscience is the richest reward, one which depends upon himself and of which no other can rob him. Mordecai refused to bow before Haman. “If the monkey reigns, dance before him,” is a proverb which evidently had little force with Mordecai. If Haman does not deserve respect, he shall not receive reverence from him. Kind, prudent, humble, just and conscientious, need we marvel that Mordecai rose from lowly station to become chief minister of State? Though he has saved the life of the king, he is not promoted. He returns to his humble duties. By the simple fact that a record is made of the services of a porter, preparation is made for the stirring events of the future. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *Tried fidelity*:—Here we have the fact demonstrated in a striking illustration that no man can serve God for nought. He will never be a debtor to any of His creatures. The path of truth and goodness, of love to God and love to men, will always advance in light and purity to a perfect day. This is the illustration we have in the character and history of Mordecai. Ahasuerus, Esther, Haman, and Mordecai, in their relations make a perfect dramatic exhibition. Their paths cross each other, and their interests mingle. Their conditions and responsibilities are in constant close connection, and are continually intermingled. Each character is a separate living principle. And in each the operation and result of this peculiar principle is distinctly and very beautifully displayed. 1. In this fidelity in duty we first see this path of duty beginning in the very lowest circumstances of life. Enrich and exalt the indulgence of the world by every imagination of its wealth and pleasure, and yet He shows its end to be vanity and vexation of spirit. He will show the reward of fidelity in duty. He will display the history of its certain triumph, and perfect security and success. Begin as you will in

human condition; make the sphere as limited as you can; multiply difficulties around its strait and narrow path as you choose, and He will show you how easily and how certainly He can exalt and honour it, and that by the very instruments which have been collected to oppose it. Thus Mordecai begins a poor captive Jew, perhaps a beggar, certainly a menial at the king's gate. Men often think it of little consequence what one does who is so concealed and so little known. But, ah, never forget that there is no such distinction before God between duties great and little, or sins venial or mortal. Whatever God requires or forbids is great. Every station which His providence has assigned and ordered is necessary and important. Virtue must always be tried by little things. The beginnings of all temptations are small, and the question of resistance or compliance with them is always settled in very narrow contingencies of trial. It is far easier to perform higher duties, and to resist greater temptations. The real trial of human principles is in unknown and secret dangers. When everybody is watching, it is easy to walk uprightly. The soldier on parade will be sure to keep time and step. But when our walk is unobserved, our conduct unnoticed, our position in life of no consequence in human sight, then are our difficulties and our temptations always the greater and the more dangerous. "No one will know; no one sees; example is nothing; it is of no consequence what I do; it is impossible for me to do much good in any way." Ah, not thus did Mordecai argue, though in these very circumstances of narrow influence Mordecai begins. 2. We see this poor and faithful man perfectly contented with his low estate. He is unmurmuring though poor. If you would have larger and higher responsibility, gain it and be prepared for it, by earnestly and contentedly fulfilling the obligations which are laid upon you now. 3. We see him affectionate and liberal in his social relations. Though poor, yet making others rich. Though poor himself, he cheerfully adopts his orphan cousin, and divides his comforts, whatever they might be, with her. "He brought up Hadassah, his uncle's daughter." The largest generosity is often among the most straitened in earthly condition. But it is an indispensable characteristic of true virtue. Obedience to God is imitation of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. A covetous, harsh, narrow, selfish temper can never have tasted that God is gracious, or have known anything of the Saviour's transforming love. He was delicate and refined in his liberality. There is much in the way in which kindness is bestowed to make it either acceptable or a burden. The little orphan Mordecai "took and brought up for his own daughter." There is nothing in the religion of the New Testament to encourage bluntness, coarseness, or assumption of superiority. But Mordecai's tenderness was watchful as well as delicate. "To know how Esther did, and what should become of her," was the dearest interest he had on earth. And for this "he walked every day before the court of the women's house." 4. We see him faithful in every claim as a subject. In his solitude he overheard the counsel of two conspirators against the life of the king. He sought the opportunity, therefore, to preserve the life of the king, and he succeeded. This also is an eminent example. The virtuous, religious man is always an orderly and peaceful man. 5. We see in Mordecai especial fidelity to God. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) **For she had neither father nor mother.**—*Religion promotes benevolence*:—Now there are some remarks very obviously suggested by this part of the narrative. I should say that here we have a fine example of the practical power of true religion, in leading to a benevolent regard for the comfort and well-being of the unprotected. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Personal benevolence*:—It is an easy matter for the wealthy to be charitable when their gifts, administered by others, involve no sacrifice of time or labour, and no care and anxiety to themselves. But the noblest exercise of charity is exhibited when we take an interest personally in the well-being of the unprotected, and when they can look to us as their friends and counsellors, to whom they can have recourse in their sorrows and troubles and difficulties. (*Ibid.*) *Mordecai's tenderness in adopting Esther*:—We Christians have not always been ready to give the Jew credit for such tenderness, such ready pity, such gentle helpfulness. Let us ask ourselves if we are willing to come up to the standard of this Jew? What is the good of any religion unless it do make us pitiful, loving, eager to help the poor world about us? I heard a very beautiful story some time since. A friend was telling me that one Sunday he was preaching at some little country chapel, and went to dinner at the house of a labourer, where he found eight children. He was struck with the fact that they seemed to run in pairs, as if they were all twins. After dinner the good woman said, "I saw you looking at the children, sir, as if you could not quite

make them out." "Well, yes," said he, "I could not help wondering if they were all twins!" The good wife laughed. "No," said she, "they are not twins. You see they are all ours, so to speak, and yet four of them are not. When we came into this house the man and woman who lived here before us had just died and left four little children just the age of our four. They had to go to the workhouse, and the van was at the door to take them just as we came in. Three of them were in the van; but the fourth little fellow would not go. He had got hold of the door, and was screaming with all his might. The man was trying not to hurt him, and yet of course he wanted to make him let go. I felt very, very sorry for them all, and said, 'You can't take him screaming like that. People will think that you are murdering him. Put the three back again and come again to-morrow. We will look after them for the night.' The man was very glad to do it, so they all came in again. Well, then you see our children began to play with them, and we all sat down together at supper, and managed to get them off to bed. Well, that night I could not sleep for thinking about them. I could not get it out of my mind what I should like anybody to do for mine if they were left like that. As I lay tossing, John said to me, 'I can't help thinking about those children.' 'Well, John,' I said, 'what do you think about them?' 'Well, Mary, do you think if we pinched a bit that we could manage to keep them?' 'I am sure we could,' I said, and then we went to sleep. The guardians gave us six shillings a week towards their keep, and it went on all right until John began to think that we ought to have a Sunday-school for the children about here. 'We have eight to start with,' said John. So the school was started. But there was a gentleman that set himself against the school, and tried to put it down. However, John would not have that; so this gentleman went to the guardians and got them to stop the six shillings a week. We could not let the children go, for to us it was just as if they were our own. But it was hard work, for John fell ill and was in bed for six weeks. And when he got about again he had to try and find a new place, for his had been filled up. At last he got a job at hedging and ditching, and that meant a stout pair of boots and a pair of leggings and a bill-hook. I had saved a few shillings for the children's shoes, but now I had to give all that to John, and away he went to buy what he wanted. But as soon as he came back I said, 'You must go again to get the children's shoes, John,' and I put two sovereigns in his hand. He looked at me wondering. I told him how that the gentleman's daughter had called to say how sorry she was for us, and she gave us this to keep the children. And since then we have managed to get on right well, sir." (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

Worldly exaltation:—Providence and grace have two separate dominions. The providence of God rules over outward things for the welfare of His children. The grace of God redeems, renews, governs and preserves their own inward heart and character. Both are the subjects of covenant and earnest promises to them. One part of this gracious work we have seen in Esther's case. God protected and preserved the captive orphan by His own power. And all the elements of her own character are the evidences of the grace and power of her Lord. There is something extremely beautiful and even grand in this exhibition of youthful piety. Few will be carried through the extremes of Esther's trial. Now we are to look upon Esther, the queen of Persia, and see how God fulfils all His promises, and protects and maintains in usefulness and happiness the souls of His servants. I. In this view we see **TRUE PIETY IN WORLDLY EXALTATION**. This exaltation has been brought about by a remarkable train of circumstances in the good providence of God. Every probability was against it, and nothing could be more unlikely than the result which was thus produced. "The king loved Esther above all the women," &c. Remarkable as this result was in itself, the reason given for it is yet more worthy of our attention. "She obtained grace and favour in his sight." Her exaltation is ascribed to a far higher power than any that outwardly appeared. God was ruling and ordering it in His own way. You may carry out this principle in all your expectations and plans of life. Your youthful hearts desire earthly success. God may surely give it to you. But He would have you realise that it is His gift. The wise and the only sure way to make the earth a blessing to you is to seek His favour with it. But it will also, which is far more, make the earthly substance which you do gain a real and permanent blessing to you. But surely there is a higher exaltation than any which is wholly confined to earth. There is a throne above all earthly thrones for those who conquer in the Saviour's host. This God reserveth for those who love Him. Seek this throne and kingdom, the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This is the more excellent way. Make

your possession of it sure. The king of Persia made a royal feast at Esther's exultation. It was a feast of far different character from that which preceded the downfall of Vashti. "The king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts according to the state of the king." The former feast was distinguished by abounding selfish, sensual indulgence. This was marked by releases, gifts and acts of favour to the destitute and the suffering. The people of God are always made a blessing to men in the influence which they exercise, and in their final exaltation among men, when the kingdoms of the earth shall be given to the saints of the Most High, the most abounding gifts and mercies shall be showered upon the world around. If God shall give you the high places of the earth, so improve and employ your influence here that others may have reason to bless God in your behalf. II. We see here THE EMPTINESS OF EARTHLY CONTRASTS. No earthly contrast could be greater than between a poor Jewish captive orphan, amidst the oppressions of a heathen land, and the queen of all the provinces of the kingdom of Persia. Yet all this is nothing when viewed in relation to the power and greatness of God. Man looks upon the outward appearance. God looketh upon the heart. Let us seek to gain His mind, and learn to value others, and to think of ourselves according to the reality of character, and not according to the mere appendages and aspects of the outward condition. The vain mind of youth delights in worldly elevation and grandeur. But Esther's trials of character will be far greater in her new condition than in her former one. Few can bear great earthly prosperity with advantage. It is here that the principle of our text comes in, "He preserveth the souls of His saints." He delivers them from the destructive influence which surrounds them. He carries them safely through the hour of trial. Prosperity brings in the claims of worldly fashion, the examples of the exalted wicked, the hostility of a world which at the same time tempts to transgression and scoffs at fidelity. It introduces a multitude of new thoughts and new relations which corrupt the character and entangle the soul. The life of piety declines. The spirit of prayer grows dull. The modesty of dress and personal appearance is laid aside. The purity of the outward walk is disregarded. III. We see in Esther's case that under the Divine guidance and grace TRUE PIETY MAY PASS UNINJURED THROUGH EVERY STATE. Esther's sudden exaltation had no effect on her fidelity to God, or on her attachment to His people. We see the same guarded self-respect, and the same love for Mordecai afterwards as before. The proportioned usefulness of individual piety in different stations in human life it would be very difficult to decide. God often selects the feeblest instruments as the most important agencies to promote His glory. We may, therefore, dismiss all anxiety about the influence of our appointed station. He will give the blessing according to His own will. But what can show more beautifully the reality of the work of God in the heart than the constant exercise and display of the same kindness, tenderness, and simplicity in a high estate as in a previous low condition? One of the most striking facts in Esther's character is this repeated assertion of her faithful remembrance of Mordecai and of her permanent regard to his instructions. Ah, what a blessing do we confer when we succeed, under the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit, in laying up in the youthful mind the principles of true religion and real love for God! This is something real; a gift that will abide. IV. WE SEE ESTHER'S EXALTATION MARKED BY SINCERE GRATITUDE AND AFFECTIONATE CARE FOR THE APPOINTED INSTRUMENT OF IT. A low and upstart mind hates to acknowledge obligations; nay, often feels a new hostility towards those from whom benefits have been received. But a truly great and exalted mind forgets no benefits that have been conferred, and esteems it a high privilege to be able to pay them directly back to the person who has bestowed them. Esther acknowledges her twofold obligation, while she gives the information which saves the life of the king, and gives it in the name of Mordecai, that it might in some way be the instrument of promoting his advantage, and of rescuing him from the poverty of his condition. This gratitude for kindness from our fellow-men is always characteristic of true piety. A religious heart is ashamed of no obligations. Shun that sinful pride which hates the feeling and the acknowledgment of dependence. A joyful and pleasant thing it is to be thankful. (S. H. Tyng, D.D.) And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house.—*Mordecai's loving solicitude*:—The histories of Mordecai and Esther run side by side, like the two differently-coloured rivers—the Arve and the Rhone. But the course of the one is from time to time being crossed and coloured by the course of the other. Esther played a leading part in

the deliverance of the Jewish nation, but she owed much to the teaching, influence, and directions of Mordecai. She was the seen and he the unseen worker. These latter often do the most important work. I. MORDECAI'S LOVING SOLICITUDE. II. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE WAS OF DIVINE ORIGIN. God makes use of human passions for the promotion of His merciful purposes. Human reasons may be given to account for Mordecai's love for Esther, but there were also Divine reasons. III. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE QUICKENED MORDECAI'S DISCERNMENT. IV. THIS LOVING SOLICITUDE TAUGHT MORDECAI A TRUE CREED. Love is light. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in a clear apprehension of Divine truth and of Divine methods. "Although he trusted God with his niece, yet he knew that an honest care of her might well stand with faith in God's providence. God must be trusted, but not tempted by the neglect of careful means" (Trapp). V. MORDECAI'S LOVE MADE HIM WATCHFUL. VI. MORDECAI'S LOVE MADE HIM SELF-FORGETFUL. VII. MORDECAI'S LOVE CONCERNED ITSELF ABOUT ESTHER'S HIGHEST WELFARE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) **She required nothing.**—*Simple attire*:—It seems to be implied in the text that while the other maidens endeavoured by dress and ornament to make an impression upon the heart of the king, Esther had recourse to no such artifice. If she was to gain the royal favour, which no doubt she desired to do, she trusted to her native graces and accomplishments as the means of obtaining it rather than to the splendour of her attire. And such will always be the procedure of true beauty and modesty. Excessive attention to the decoration of the person, and the lavish use of gaudy ornament, indicate the consciousness of some personal defect, and are inconsistent alike with good taste, with female delicacy, and with the law of Scripture. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Reality versus superficiality*:—She had grace in her heart, humility in her deportment, and the high attractions of gentleness, meekness, and pity. These would speak to the heart in look and gesture, and obtain favour for her "in the sight of all them that looked upon her." There was realness in contrast with superficiality, true-heartedness in opposition to mere pretension, and the heroic love of the right and the noble over against all that is hollow, hypocritical, and base. Even in a heathen court spiritual excellences such as these, rarely to be found there, were sure to command respect and win the affections. (*T. McEwan.*)

Vers. 17-20. **So that he set the royal crown upon her head.**—*The elevation of woman*:—Gloss it as you may, this is not pleasant reading, and yet not unprofitable, having much to say to us, and especially to women, of what we owe to Christianity for the elevation of woman. Telling of a despot and sensualist, and how he claimed his country's fairest beauty for his insatiate pleasure. But it is purely told us. It can be read without dulling the conscience or staining the imagination. What nation of antiquity looked not upon woman as a decorated toy or an abject drudge? There was one exception. Among the Jews her position was relatively high as compared with that assigned to her in adjacent nations. She had larger liberty than even now is allowed her in Oriental countries, with greater variety and importance of employments. She headed, like Miriam, the bands of women who celebrated, with triumphant song, the overthrow of enemies. She led armies, like Deborah, and was, like her, a prophetess and a judge. In the free grace of an unconfined maidenhood she went out to meet her father with timbrels and dances. Her hymns were included in sacred records, as was the song of Samuel's mother. She was consulted, like Huldah, by high-priest and king. And while the effect of polygamy was disastrous, so far as that obtained before the captivity, and while it was obvious that the husband, not the wife, was the acknowledged head of the household, in independence of whom the wife could enter on no engagements, the dowry was given for the wife, not with her. The modern harem was unknown, the matron walked abroad unveiled, her husband's house was esteemed her "rest," she had a large authority in the family, and the grace and force of her character and mind were honoured, cultured, and allowed opportunity. (*R. S. Storrs.*) *Esther's advancement* from low estate to share the throne of Persia reminds us of what God does for His people in raising them from the miry clay to sit with Christ upon His throne. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. **For Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.**—*Repaying parental kindness*:—Then I would say that there is a lesson here for the young. How can they repay in any measure—for fully

they can never repay—the tenderness of their godly parents to them in their youth, and the anxiety which has been felt on their account as they advanced toward maturity? In one way only—by endeavouring to pursue the path which leads to present respectability and usefulness, and which Christ in His Word has marked out as that which His disciples must tread. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 21. **Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh . . . sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.**—*Traitors*:—Besides flatterers, despots are apt to have traitors and assassins about them, such as Bigthan and Teresh. Mordecai detected their villainy, and no doubt ran considerable risk in exposing it. But he was not one of those who are honest only when honesty appears to them to be the best policy; he did the right because it was the right, faithfully and fearlessly. (*A. M. Symington.*) *Crafty foes*:—There are crafty spiritual foes who wait for the opportunity to kill the soul. (*T. McEwan.*) *Danger of great men*:—I. THE DANGER OF GREAT MEN. II. THE FIDELITY OF THE GODLY MAN. III. THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT. (*J. Hughes.*) *Danger and service*:—History is full of examples of plots and assassinations in the palaces of Eastern princes. Favouritism, founded usually upon mere caprice, is one of the characteristics of a despotic government. Then envy and hatred are naturally excited in consequence of this, among such as think themselves as well entitled to preferment as those on whom it has been bestowed. We have no means of knowing what led the two chamberlains to conspire against the king. An angry word, or some apparent slight or insult, may have provoked them to revenge, or they may have been bribed by other parties whom the king had injured. The narrative in the text is given so briefly that we are not told how Mordecai came to discover the plot. He may have been requested to become an accomplice, in order that by his assistance the actual perpetrators of the bloody deed might the more easily effect their escape. But whether in this way, or by overhearing the conspirators as they were speaking together of the time and manner of carrying out their purpose, he became aware of it—he immediately took measures to counteract the dark design. There are three topics suggested by them, to which we may briefly advert. 1. In the first place, we cannot read this narrative without drawing from it a lesson as to the uncertainty of life. The destroying sword may be hanging as by a single hair over the head of the ruler of a vast empire, making his life as contingent as that of the mariner when the storm suddenly bursts forth upon him, or of the soldier when he is under the thick fire of the enemy. Humanly speaking, those who occupy the middle class of society, whose wants are supplied without any danger or painful toil, and who have nothing to dread from the envy and enmity of others, live in greatest security, and have least occasion to fear what is usually called accident, as affecting their life. And the practical use which we should make of the uncertainty of the present life is to have a sure interest in Christ, which will render the life to come all certainty and blessedness to us. 2. In the second place, the narrative before us teaches us that whatever station in providence men are called to fill, they may be instrumental in conferring important benefits on others. Mordecai, a man of humble rank, saved the life of the king. But the remark which we have just made may be transposed to services more important than those which have reference to the present life and its concerns. What an immense power, for instance, is possessed by the nurse to whose care the children of a family are committed, and who, by the faithful execution of her trust, may implant the seeds of truth in the youthful heart so deeply that no worldly influence will afterwards efface them. There is something higher here than the mere saving of life. Every follower of Christ, in whatever sphere he moves, may do incalculable good to those around him, even to those who are placed high above him. If you cannot do so much as you would, a consistent and faithful life, spent in all the unobtrusiveness of true humility, will be a lesson to some that may be productive of vast benefit. 3. In the third place, from the narrative under review we are led to think of a record of unrequited deeds. Mordecai's information saved the life of the king, and was duly noticed in the annals of the kingdom; but it lay there for a considerable time, apparently as a dead letter. There is evidently a twofold application that may be made of this particular. The acts of wicked men are all recorded, and will be brought into judgment. The hand of justice does not always follow the perpetration of the evil act. Yet the retribution, if it be slow, is certain. But it is not so much this aspect of the question that is presented to us in the text as the more pleasing one, that the services of God's people are recorded, and are not suffered

to pass unrewarded in the end. The reward, indeed, may not come in the present life. The faithful disciples of Christ have often been left to contend with the world's opposition, and to fall victims to the world's enmity, just on account of their steadfast attachment to the truth. But they are all recorded, and the record will be produced hereafter. The Scripture teaches us this very plainly. "God is not unrighteous," says the apostle, writing to the Hebrews, "to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister." (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1-6. After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman.—*The prosperous wicked man*.—Matthew Henry says: "I wonder what the king saw in Haman that was commendable or meritorious? It is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud and passionate and revengeful; yet he was promoted and caressed, and there was none as great as he. Princes' darlings are not always worthies." I. THE WICKED MAN IN PROSPERITY. Haman is typical. He is the progenitor of a long line that by skilful plotting rise above the heads of superior men. In this world rewards are not rightly administered. Push and tact get the prize. II. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN IS SURROUNDED BY FAWNING SYCOPHANTS. "The king had so commanded." A king's commandment is not required to secure outward homage towards those in high places. Clothe a man with the outward marks of royal favour, and many are at once prepared to become his blind adulators. Imperialism is glorified in political, literary, and ecclesiastical spheres. Power in arms, push in business, skill in politics, success in literature, and parade in religion are the articles of the creed in which modern society believes. III. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN IS SURROUNDED BY MEDDLING SYCOPHANTS. Even admirers may be too officious. If Haman had known and seen all, he might have prayed, "Save me from my friends." The king's servants, in their selfish zeal, frustrated their own purposes of aggrandisement. How often in trying to grasp too much we lose all. IV. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN FINDS THAT FALSE GREATNESS BRINGS TROUBLE. That greatness is false which is not the outcome of goodness. The course of wicked prosperity cannot run smooth. Haman meets with the checking and detecting Mordecai. V. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN MAY LEARN THAT AN UNRESTRAINED NATURE BRINGS TROUBLE. Haman was intoxicated with his greatness. He was full of wrath. Wrath is cruel both to the subject and the object. VI. THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN UNWITTINGLY PLOTS HIS OWN DOWNFALL. Haman's wrath led him to dangerous extremes. Poor Haman! Already we see thee treading on a volcano. Thy hands are digging the pit into which thou shalt fall. Thy minions are preparing the gallows on which thou thyself shalt be hung. Learn—1. Prosperity has its drawbacks. 2. "Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud." 3. That our greatest troubles often spring from our own depraved natures. (*W. Burrows, B.D.*) *Mordecai and Haman*.—I. THE INSECURITY OF EARTHLY GREATNESS. The king in this story was exposed to the plot of Bigthan and Teresh. From it he was saved by the intervention of Mordecai, though by and by to fall beneath the assassin's blow. Great are the perils of the great. Their lives often, behind all the splendour that takes the public eye, a sad story. II. THE DIVINE FORESIGHT OF AND PREPARATION FOR COMING EVIL. The plotters, Bigthan and Teresh, paid the penalty with their lives. But what had that plot to do with the great story of this book—Israel's deliverance from Haman? Much, for mark, the plot was detected by Mordecai. The news was conveyed to Esther, and by her to the king. Thus God's design for Israel's deliverance precedes Haman's design for Israel's destruction. Oh! the Divine preparations! How God goes before us! Does Jacob look round upon famished Canaan? Lo! by the hand of long-lost Joseph, God has prepared for him a house in Egypt. Do we come into peril? Before we reach it God has been preparing for us a way of escape. His love is older than our sin—than all sin. III. THE DIGNITY OF CONSCIENTIOUSNESS IN LITTLE THINGS. Mordecai would not bow to Haman. Not from disloyalty. He had stood by the king and saved him from the plotted death. Because—this is the reason he gave—because he was a Jew;

and Haman, he knew, was the Jews' enemy. Others bowed—he could not. A little thing, do you say, to bow to Haman? but a little thing may have much effect on others, as this had on Haman—on ourselves; and, often repeated, is not little in its influence. He had conscience in this matter, and to defile it had not been a little harm. Conscience can appear in little things, but it deems nothing little that affects it, that expresses it. The early Christians would rather die than cast a few idolatrous grains of incense into the fire. Many an English martyr went to the prison and the stake rather than bow down to the wafer-god of Romanism. In little things, as some would deem them, we can take a stand for Christ. IV. **THE WICKEDNESS OF REVENGE.** Had Haman a just grudge against Mordecai? Let him have the matter out with Mordecai alone? No; that will not suit him. He would punish a whole nation. The proud became the revengeful. If a man is humble and has a lowly estimate of himself, he will bear in silence the contempt and unkindness of men. But pride is easily wounded—sees slights often where none were intended. On a great platform we see, in the case of Haman, to what sin wounded pride will hurry a man. And to what a doom! We need to beware. Are none of us ever tempted harshly to judge a whole family because of the conduct of one of its members? to say, in the spirit of Haman, he is bad—the whole lot is bad? “Hath any wronged thee?” says Quarles, “be bravely revenged; slight it, and the work is begun; forgive it, and the work is finished.” V. **THE PATIENCE OF FAITH.** The king's life had been saved by Mordecai. But no honour had come to him for the service—no reward. And now an edict is out against him and his nation, dooming them all to death. And does he regret the stand that he has taken? Does he loudly complain of the king's ingratitude? He keeps silence. God will think on him for good. Oh, troubled one! oh, darkened life! oh, soul tempest-tossed, “only believe.” The clouds will pass—will melt into the eternal blue! (*G. T. Coster.*) *Haman and Mordecai*:—1. It shows in a lurid but striking manner the diabolical character of revenge. Pride is pride, and revenge is revenge in quality, although they only show themselves in words with little stings in them, and by insinuations that have no known ground of verity. If we do not make it our business to chastise our spirits and purify them from the seeds and shadows of these vices, in the forms in which they can assail us, can we be quite sure that if we were on the wider stage, and had the ampler opportunity, we should not be as this devilish Amalekite? 2. A lesson of personal independence. What meanness there is in this country in bowing down to rank! in letting some lordly title stand in the place of an argument! in seeking high patronage for good schemes, as men seek the shadow of broad trees on hot days! in running after royal carriages! in subservience to power, and adulation of wealth! Rise up, Mordecai, in thy Jewish grandeur, and shame us into manliness, and help us to stand a little more erect! 3. Finally, a lesson of patience and quietness to all the faithful. Obey conscience, honour the right, and then fear no evil. Is the storm brewing? It may break and carry much away, but it will not hurt you. A little reputation is not you. A little property is not you. Health even is not you, nor is life itself. The wildest storm that could blow would only cast you on the shores of eternal peace and safety. But more probably the storm may melt all away in a while and leave you in wonder at your own fears. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. But Mordecai bowed not.—*Decision for God*:—But why did Mordecai not obey the commandment of the king? It may have been because he had a personal dislike to Haman, but that would not have justified him in contradicting the will of the sovereign. Or it may have been that, being a Jew, he regarded himself as exempted from doing honour to one of a race which God had cursed. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua, for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” But so long as Mordecai was a captive in Persia he could hardly be excused, on this account, from resisting the law of the land. The ground of this righteous Jew's refusal must be sought for deeper than either of these things. There can be little doubt, we think, that the homage commanded to be paid to Haman amounted, in this Jew's estimate, to that which should be rendered to God only. The stand which he took had its foundation in religion—a foundation which the men of the world have ever failed to comprehend. (*T. McEwan.*) *Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman*:—But on what ground did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman and do him reverence? The only answer which comes clearly out of the chapter to that question is, that the position which he took was

one that was common to him with all his people, so that it was sufficiently accounted for to others when he said, "I am a Jew." It was a matter of religion with him. But, that being admitted, the question still arises, What was there in such a command as this of Xerxes to offend the conscience of a pious Jew? Some have answered that, as the Persian monarch was regarded as an incarnation of Ahura-Mazda, and therefore entitled to Divine honours, the act of prostration before him was understood to imply worship; and so homage paid to Haman as the king's representative would be a virtual giving of Divine honour to a human creature. This is confirmed even by heathen writers—for Herodotus tells us that certain Greeks, on being pressed to prostrate themselves before the king, when they were introduced into his presence at Susa, declared "that it was not their custom to worship a man, nor had they come for that purpose"; and Curtius has said, "The Persians, indeed, not only from motives of piety, but also from prudence, worship their kings among the gods." Now, if that explanation be adopted, the act of Mordecai takes its place beside the refusal of the early Christians to sacrifice to the Roman emperor, and puts him on the honour roll among those whose rule of life in all such cases was, "We ought to obey God rather than men." But while it would fully justify Mordecai, this explanation is in itself not without difficulty. For did not Joseph's brethren make similar obeisance to him? Would not Mordecai after his own elevation to Haman's place be required to bow before the king? and must we condemn Nehemiah for rendering to Artaxerxes the homage which Mordecai here refused to Haman, though Xerxes himself had commanded that it should be rendered? It is possible, of course, that Mordecai was right, and that all the rest were wrong; but it is not absolutely incontrovertible that the reverence here required was of the nature of religious worship. Others, therefore, have sought for the reason of Mordecai's disobedience to the royal mandate in the nationality of Haman. Taking Agagite as equivalent to Amalekite, they remind us that the Amalekites were the first to attack the Israelites after their escape from Egypt, and that after his victory over them on that occasion Moses said, "The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." They recall to our remembrance, also, the fact that it was for sparing some of the Amalekites that Saul was first rejected by God from being king over Israel, and that the only time that Samuel wielded a sword was when he "hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord." Now if Haman was indeed an Amalekite, it would be easy to find in that a reason for Mordecai's conduct as well as for Haman's purpose of revenge; for these descending feuds between races in the East are both undying and envenomed, especially when they are rooted in religious differences. But then we have no other case in Scripture where a royal title like Agag becomes a public patronymic, so as to be the name of a tribe; and it is hard to account for the appearance of one of the hated race of Amalek here, at this late date, in Susa. So there are difficulties connected with both solutions, and it is not easy to choose between them. Perhaps the first, all things considered, is the more satisfactory. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Strong conviction*:—The commandment of the king was very express, and Mordecai manifestly exposed himself to imminent danger by disregarding it. If, indeed, his objection to pay homage to Haman was founded upon a conviction that such homage amounted to something like idolatry, then we might regard his refusal as ranking him with the three illustrious youths who braved the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar rather than they would submit to worship the image which he had set up. But we can scarcely take this view of the matter, as it is not likely that Mordecai would have withheld from the king himself the outward reverence which the law and usage of the country required. But if it was because Haman was of the seed of Amalek, that the Jew would not bow to him nor do him reverence, then intense must have been the detestation of that race, when he would rather run the risk of incurring the displeasure of the king than pay respect to one of them who stood so high in the royal favour. Yet we conceive that he might feel himself fully vindicated in his own conscience for acting as he did. It was, after all, a high religious scruple by which he was influenced. By the law of Moses the Amalekites were condemned to perpetual infamy. No earthly rank or station could blot out or modify that sentence. In this view of the subject, Mordecai would have supposed himself an apostate from his religion had he done reverence to Haman, and therefore he refused to do it, whatever might be the consequence to himself. We cannot but respect such a feeling as this, generated as it was by regard for the Divine law. It could not be appreciated by the other servants of the king, who may have attributed Mordecai's

conduct to a sullen and haughty temper; but, although the matter in itself was apparently unimportant, it was an evidence of real heroism of character in this man to obey the dictate of conscience at the hazard of personal suffering. True religion does not interfere with the discharge of the ordinary courtesies of life, nor does it forbid our rendering that honour to rank and station which is their due. But when vice and real infamy are shrouded under high rank, the Christian must beware of acting so as to make it supposed that the rank forms an apology for the vice and infamy, or renders them less hateful than they really are. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *A little matter*:—All was going well with this man. His rivals had been crushed, his seat had been set above the seats of all the noblemen at court, the king had made him his boon companion, and had issued orders that the palace servants should bow before him and do him reverence. He was as nearly happy as a man can be whose ruling passion is vanity; but such men hold their happiness by a very frail tenure. It does not look altogether well that Ahasuerus should have needed to give special orders about his servants bowing to Haman. Darius had not needed to do this in the case of Daniel. Had the favourite been respected and liked, men would have given him all seemingly honour unbidden. "But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." It does seem a very small matter; but when such a man as Mordecai attached importance to it we must pause and consider whether the matter was really so small as it seemed. For it is an unsafe way of reasoning to say about anything, "It is only one little act; why scruple over it? If it does no good it can do no harm"; and so forth. By such reasoning habits of untruth and intemperance have many a time been formed, and what was perhaps little in itself, if it had been possible to separate it from all else, has been found to be anything but little in its results. The truth is, we cannot separate any single action from the rest of our lives; so that the importance of an action depends not on its greatness or its littleness, but on many other circumstances, such as how often we do it, the effect it has on others, particularly its influence on our own consciences. In this case it so happened that what Mordecai did—rather what he determined not to do—proved to be of very great importance to the whole Jewish people and the whole Persian empire; but he could not know that. What he did know was that, if he had once bowed to Haman, his conscience would have been defiled, as surely as Daniel's would have been if he had eaten the king's meat; and a polluted conscience is no trifle. A man has to carry it about with him all day, to go to sleep with it if he can, to encounter it again when he awakes, until God purges out the stain. But why should Mordecai have feared that, by bowing to Haman as the rest did, he would bring on himself this worst evil, a bad conscience? We do not need to suppose that the homage enjoined was idolatrous; it may have been nearly so; but Mordecai knew the character of the prime minister, and he knew the fifteenth Psalm: in his eyes "a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." In addition to the knowledge Mordecai could not but have of Haman's character, he knew him to be of the seed-royal of Amalek; and a man with the spirit of Moses and Samuel in him would not recognise the advancement of "the Jews' enemy." The point might be small in itself, but the principle involved in it was to Mordecai more important than life. The day was not far off when Ahasuerus and all Persia agreed with Mordecai in his estimate of Haman. But persons who act on high principle must be content to find that few on earth understand them at the time. Angels understand and smile on them, but the smiles of angels are not seen. Possibly some of Mordecai's Jewish brethren might hint to him that his conduct was rather extreme (that terrible word!)—savouring more of bigotry than of pious charity. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *The difference between right and wrong shown in little things*:—The difference between right and wrong may be shown in a little matter, but it is not therefore a little difference; and they who are determined to be thorough in their allegiance to God will make no distinction in their conduct between small things and great. Very noble, too, was Mordecai's firmness in resisting the entreaties of his fellow-servants, for he shut up the whole controversy with the simple confession, "I am a Jew." He will not needlessly publish his religion on the house-top, but neither will he be ashamed of it in the "king's gate." It might cost him much to make the confession, but he knew that sin would be still more costly, and so he did not shrink from saying, "I am a Jew." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Limits to the claims of official civility*:—In Mordecai's adherence to his religious principles we see that there are limits to the claims of social and official civility—bounds that duty does not allow us to pass in

our respect for our superiors. The Word of God is the standard of respectability and manners as well as of faith, and it forbids all lying and deceit, all flattery and all mean compliances with the wishes of others, however exalted. It does not allow us to do anything that is contrary to good breeding and the chivalry of right. It does not allow us to neglect our duties, waste our time or injure our health, merely to please a friend or a potentate. Let it be remembered, to the honour of one of the Presidents of the United States, General Jackson, that he never allowed any visitors to keep him from the house of God on the Lord's day. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, **Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?**—*Mordecai's companions*:—But yonder come his fellow-servants of the palace; what have they to say? Why they say to him, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" And verily, aged man, why? Is it that all eyes may be turned upon you? It is true, indeed, that he is the observed of all observers who does not go with the multitude, even though they go to do evil. Any one that dares to think and speak for himself is sure to be condemned by the many that he differs from; for his position and principles are a running commentary of condemnation upon them. It has ever been so, and perhaps it will always continue to be so, for it is not for the man that lives in the cellar to say what he sees who dwells on the house-top. Some men are before their times, and some men never catch up with the age in which they live; and some men have not moral courage enough to hear themselves breathe honestly and freely. We see this daily as to the press and the pulpit. Is not the daily bread of the printer put in jeopardy if his journal does not meet the popular taste? And have we not seen large bodies of business men combine to starve newspapers to death by withholding their patronage unless the said papers would defend their conduct? And is it not true that if one pulpit has the courage to utter an honest opinion, that does not happen to coincide with the rest of the pulpits, that then all the pulpits and papers that have neither capacity to understand nor the moral honesty to comprehend the poor dissenter open their batteries upon him? (*Ibid.*) *Principle seems impolitic*:—And again his fellow-servants say, "Friend Mordecai, consider well what you are going to do. Remember, it is not Haman merely, but his master also, that you offend. Is it wise, then, for you to peril the forfeiture of your place and your life upon a question of mere etiquette or courtesy? It is extremely impolitic and dangerous for you not to do homage to so great a prince. And besides, if you will not bow with us, then you will have to suffer alone." "Yes, friends," says he, "I have considered all this; and I am content to meet the consequences. It is not a mere question of courtesy. I am a Jew. My religion is with me a glorious reality." (*Ibid.*) *Cowardice cannot understand courage*:—Mordecai's fellow-servants were not capable of understanding his principles. Cowards never apprehend the true character of a brave man. Little minds cannot see up into the magnanimity of a great and noble soul. (*Ibid.*) **For he told them that he was a Jew.**—*Fidelity to principle*:—We have in the case of Mordecai an example of fidelity to principle which is worthy of all study and imitation. He felt that it was wrong to do homage to Haman. In resisting the entreaties of his fellow-servants, he shut up the whole controversy with the simple confession, "I am a Jew." Herein he gave an example which Christians might follow with advantage. Have the courage, young men, when you are asked to do what you know to be wrong, to reply simply, "I am a Christian." Add to your faith courage—the heroism not of the warrior but of the man who has learned to run the gauntlet of ridicule and scorn, and to follow the dictates of duty "uncaring consequences." To quote the words of the greatest wit of his age—"Learn to inure your principles against ridicule. You can no more exercise your reason if you live in the constant dread of laughter than you can enjoy your life if you are in the constant terror of death. If you think it right to differ from the times, and to make a point of morals, do it, however rustic, however antiquated, however pedantic it may appear; do it as a man who wore a soul of his own and did not wait till it was breathed into him by the breath of fashion." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not . . . then was Haman full of wrath.**—*Vanity and cruelty*:—Haman manifests by his behaviour the intimate connection there is between vanity and cruelty. 1. Vanity is a form of magnified egotism. When a vain man looks out on the world it is always through the medium of his own vastly magnified shadow. Like the Bröcken

Ghost, this shadow becomes a haunting presence standing out before him in huge proportions. He has no other standard of measurement. The good is what gives him pleasure; evil is what is noxious to him. (1) Egoism utilises the sufferings of others for its own ends. No doubt cruelty is often the result of sheer callousness. It is not so in Haman's case; he is irritated, and vents his annoyance in a vast explosion of malignity that must take account of the agony it produces, for in that agony its own thirst for vengeance is to be slaked. (2) Egoism promotes cruelty by destroying the sense of proportion. Self is not only regarded as the centre of the universe; like the sun surrounded by the planets, it is taken to be the greatest object, and everything else is insignificant when compared to it. What is the slaughter of a few thousand Jews to so great a man as Haman? It is no more than the destruction of as many flies in a forest fire that the settler has kindled to clear his ground. The same self-magnification is visibly presented by the Egyptian bas-reliefs, on which the victorious Pharaohs appear as tremendous giants driving back hordes of enemies or dragging pigmy kings by their heads. It is but a step from this condition to insanity, which is the apotheosis of vanity. The chief characteristic of insanity is a diseased enlargement of self. 2. Vanity leads to cruelty through the entire dependence of the vain person on the good opinion of others. In this vanity differs from pride. A proud man is satisfied with himself, but the vain man is always looking outside himself with feverish eagerness to secure all the honours that the world can bestow upon him. While a proud man in an exalted position scarcely deigns to notice the "dim, common people," the vain man betrays his vulgarity by caring supremely for popular adulation. Therefore, while the haughty person can afford to pass over a slight with contempt, the vain creature who lives on the breath of applause is mortally offended by it and roused to avenge the insult with corresponding rage. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The misery of pride*:—A man of principle would have respected the conscientiousness of the act, even though he might have laughed at what he regarded the smallness of the scruple. A man of ordinary common sense would have treated the whole affair with indifference; but Haman valued his office just because it carried with it the right to such homage, and therefore what would have been a mole-hill, or hardly so much, to others, was a mountain to him. The proud man thus increases his own misery; and little slights, which other people would not so much as notice, are felt by him with great keenness. He whose arm has been recently vaccinated is very sensitive where the pustule is, so that a push which you would think nothing of is agony to him. Now, in precisely the same way the proud man is "touchy," as we say; the slightest infringement on his dignity wounds him to the quick, and when other people are laughing he is vowing revenge; for, as this story illustrates, the passions are all near of kin, and one prepares the way for another. Brooding over the refusal of Mordecai to do him reverence, it became so magnified in his estimation that he determined to punish it; there was revenge. That he might gratify that revenge, it became necessary to bring the peculiarities of the Jewish nation before the king, and he requested their destruction on the ground that they were not profitable to the monarch, whereas the sole reason why he suggested their extirpation was that Mordecai had slighted him; there was falsehood. Then, in planning their massacre, there was murder. Here, therefore, were four sins all in a line, each rising above the other in enormity—pride, revenge, falsehood, murder. People think, sometimes, that pride is no great sin; some almost speak of it as if it were half a virtue; but, as this and other histories make plain, it is the germ of other evils that are worse than itself, and therefore we ought to be on our guard against allowing ourselves to become its victims. And how shall we best counteract it? I reply, by cultivating a sense of responsibility. That which we have, whether it be ability, or wealth, or exalted position, we have received as a trust, and we are to use it, as stewards for God, in the service of our fellow-men. Let us keep pressing the questions, Who hath made me to differ from others? What have I that I have not received? For what purpose have I been entrusted with these things? And the more we ponder these, the less we shall be inclined to plume ourselves on our possessions, and the more we shall be stirred up to the service of our generation by the will of God. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Injured vanity*:—"A man will forgive you anything," Professor Huxley said, "if you do not injure his vanity. Once do that, and he will never forgive you." *Evil passion its own penalty*:—Now, it may be thought by some that the case of Haman allowing himself to be so chafed and perturbed by a trifle as to be made miserable in the midst of so many advantages, is to be regarded as altogether extreme and

without parallel; but we believe that on examination it will be found that the wicked always receive part of their punishment in the violence of some unhallowed passion which blinds them to all the real benefits of their lot. Is there not a gnawing disease in the heart of the covetous man, for example, which prevents him from enjoying the good things which are placed within his reach, just because he has not yet acquired all that he wishes to possess? And still, as he gets more and more, is he not as far as ever from being satisfied, since he has not yet reached the point at which he aims? Or again, look to the man who is the slave of envy, and mark how miserable this base passion makes him. He has ample means of enjoyment, which he can call his own; but his neighbour has something which pleases him better, and just because that one thing is wanting to himself, he can find no satisfaction in the varied blessings which a kind providence has showered upon him. His neighbour's good is to him what Mordecai at the king's gate was to Haman. In like manner, I might advert to the working of the more violent passions of anger and revenge as a cause of intense torment to those who cherish them, and as altogether preventing them from taking advantage of many sources of happiness which lie open to them on every side. I might also allude to the misery which wounded vanity and affronted pride often bring to those who have high notions of their own importance, as when a trifling word or action will discompose them for many days together, and deprive them of their relish for the things that formerly pleased them, and made them happy. But enough has been said to show how by a just retribution the ungodly, following their natural tendencies and passions, work out their own passion. How different is the picture presented to us, where grace reigns in the heart. Although corruption is not altogether eradicated from the spiritual man, yet its power is subdued; the fierce passions are tamed, love takes the place of envy, malignity, and wrath; and the believer, seeking and finding his chief enjoyment in God, remains comparatively unruffled by those incidents which breed so much vexation and disquietude in the breast of the ungodly. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Wounded pride*:—Wounded pride excites revenge, and this always burns hottest in the weakest minds. How insatiable is revenge, especially when it is associated with national and religious rancour! Haman learned that Mordecai was a Jew, a name that called up the bitterest recollections in the breast of an Amalekite, and he resolves at once on the total extermination of that people. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *A favourite lust*:—And it has always been one of the devices of the enemy to drive men into criminal excesses to their own ruin, through the instrumentality of some favourite lust or appetite. It was the covetous spirit of Judas that opened a way to the tempter to hurry him on to betray the Saviour. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Then was Haman full of wrath*.—*The penalty of an evil passion*:—How dreadfully this wrath flamed in his bosom we learn from the method which he took to express it. We may observe, at present, what misery pride, by its own nature and inseparable consequences, brings upon men. No proud man ever received all that respect, or was treated with all that delicacy of regard, which he thought his due. Now pride mortified by neglect or contempt, kindles a fire in the soul which burns, and torments, and destroys. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 6. **Wherefore Haman thought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom.**—*Plotting in vain*:—We proceed to consider the scheme of destruction which Haman arranged with the utmost craft. It seemed in its arrangement perfectly secure. Its accomplishment appeared certain and beyond resistance. 1. Haman's malice was extreme, equal to any result to which it might lead. There was no reluctance, no holding back in the carrying out his purposes of wickedness to the utmost. 2. Haman's plan was extremely crafty and determined. It involved many successive steps, and he faithfully persevered through them all. But what avails all this plotting against God? How mad and silly seem all the well-arranged plans of this scheme of wickedness when the providence and power of God are brought into the account! The secrecy of the plan is nothing. He that is higher than the highest regardeth it. An infinite power unseen is contending against him. Remember the story of Elisha, and his servant on the hill of Samaria (2 Kings vi. 15). 3. We see the people whom Haman desired to destroy given entirely into his hands. The king makes him an unlimited grant. "The king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee." "Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry," &c. Alas, what extended

sorrow among men the arbitrary wickedness of man is able to produce! Ambition deluges the earth with blood. The wicked covetousness of a few may doom myriads to misery, with no relief. The pride of this world will not stop to hear; the business of this world will not stop to consider; the prosperity and self-indulgence of this world will not be troubled with the griefs of the absent suffering; the indifference of this world cannot take the trouble to read, or think, or act, concerning them. 4. We see on the side of the Jews no power to resist. The highest human power was irrevocably pledged to their oppressor. Every advantage is on the side of the oppressor. But God has His own plans already laid and fixed. 5. We are ready to ask, in reference to the case before us, How could any one ever present greater difficulties? But God delights in overcoming difficulties, and in causing the faith of His people to endure in the midst of all discouragements. He allows the obstacles in their path to accumulate to the utmost. And God graciously honoured the faith which He imparted by fulfilling all its expectations in a manner the most complete. If you come to serve the Lord, you must endure your part of the trials which His people meet. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Revenge*:—Justice is said to blindfold herself that she may hold the scales evenly, not knowing what has been put into each; but revenge shuts both eyes that it may see no scales at all. What monstrous disproportion between the offence and the penalty, to avenge a small personal affront received from one Jew by "causing to perish in one day all Jews, old and young"! To say nothing of Nero or Domitian, nor of Radama in Madagascar—for these, being heathen, had to that extent the same excuse as Haman—let me recall in a few words a well-known story. There were many Protestants in France after the Reformation, some of them nobles, all of them peaceful citizens. Their numbers and their growth vexed the Pope, and especially vexed the Pope's "niece," Catherine de Medici, queen of France, and mother of three of its kings. Suddenly, while one of her sons, Charles IX., was young, Catherine made peace with the Huguenots, and displayed great zeal in enforcing new laws in favour of her Protestant subjects. After two years, without any warning, on the eve of St. Bartholomew's Day, there began a massacre in which six thousand persons perished in Paris alone, and fifty thousand in the provinces of France, within three days. When the joyful tidings reached Rome, public thanks were given in the churches. Haman would have rejoiced in the bloodshed; but he must have owned himself outdone in cunning and blasphemy. Catherine succeeded where Haman failed; her victims were effectually blindfolded, and she took the name of a holy God and a merciful Saviour to justify an act which even those of her own creed now blush to acknowledge. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Enmity to God's people*:—We see how enmity to God's truth and His people displays itself with restless activity for the accomplishment of its ends. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. In the first month . . . they cast Pur, that is, the lot.—*The time of the lot*:—The drawing of the lot took place in the month Nisan, or about March of our year, and the day fixed by it was the thirteenth day of Adar, or February—a period of nearly twelve months intervening. The patience of Haman would be sadly tried by this result, but his superstitious fears would prevent him from acting contrary to the decision of "Pur." In tracing the deep lines of providence in the whole narrative, however, we cannot help seeing a higher and more beneficent wisdom than that of chance. Had an earlier day been decided upon, sufficient time might not have been given to Mordecai to use the means which he did to frustrate the conspiracy. If the suspense of the Jews was a trial of their faith, and an incentive to prayer, the interval was also a boon in so far as it gave Mordecai leisure for deliberate action in view of the king's subsequent decree. No doubt, in this instance, the disposing of the lot was of the Lord—a disposing of it very different from the intention of those who used it. So may the lot become in the hands of those who believe in its decisions the means for the accomplishment of the retributive purposes of God. (*T. McEwan.*) *The blind method of revenge*:—Revenge, when it becomes a master passion, is the worst madness. I. **REVENGE IS BLIND IN ITS METHOD.** This is illustrated in the conduct of Haman. He caused the lot to be cast to find out the favourable day for the accomplishment of his purpose. 1. He was blind to the fact that there is no chance. 2. He was blind to the fact that so-called chance might as easily be against him as for him. 3. He was blind to the fact that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." II. **HAMAN PERSISTED IN HIS REVENGEFUL PURPOSE.** What a

glorious revolution would soon take place, if the good were as persistent in the pursuit of merciful purposes as the bad are in revengeful projects. Every bad passion is injurious in its permanence. III. REVENGE IS DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS PATIENCE. Haman was willing to wait twelve months in order that his revenge might be the more signally marked. But his very patience worked his ruin. Time is not on the side of revengeful waiters. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus.—*Listening to scandal*:—If we blame Ahasuerus for too readily listening to the invective of Haman, and condemning the Jews untried and unheard, we should be on our guard against committing the same sin, by giving heed to scandal in regard to others, without careful personal inquiry and observation, lest we should be only crediting the creations of the worst passions and distempers of our fallen nature. (*T. McEwan.*) *Half the truth dangerous*:—There is no notice taken of Mordecai. Not a syllable about his own injured pride. No reference made to the enmity of the Amalekites to the Jews. The real merits of the proposal are all kept back, and only those things are mentioned which were fitted to arouse the indignation of the king against the Jewish people. They were “a certain people”—a nondescript race, scattered abroad, like so many rebels against the government, and yet preserving their own unity; having their own laws, and despising constituted authority; contemning the king’s laws, and setting the example of insubordination; and sowing dissension and strife throughout all the provinces of the empire. For these reasons it was clearly not expedient that they should be tolerated any longer. How skilfully does the crafty conspirator conceal his malice and revenge under cover of the king’s profit. He did not ask for the destruction of this disaffected people as a favour to himself, but in making the proposal he artfully insinuated that he was doing the king a service. (*Ibid.*)

There is a certain people scattered abroad.—*The destruction of the Jews*:—He stood high in the favour of his prince, but did he not risk the total loss of that favour by a proposal so evidently unjust and inhumane? Why did he not dread the wrath of the king, which is as messengers of death? Might he not have heard such words as these in answer to his proposal: “Audacious wretch! what hast thou seen in me that thou shouldst hope to make me the murderer of my people? Man of blood! thou scruplest not to seek the destruction, at one blow, of thousands of my subjects, upon a vague, unsupported charge which thou bringest against them! Wilt thou not another day follow the example of Bigthan and Teresh? Wilt thou be more afraid to lay thy hand upon one man, though a king, than upon many thousands of my subjects who have done thee no wrong?” (*G. Lawson.*) *Haman’s proposition* contained truth enough to make it plausible, and error enough to make it cruel, and enough personally agreeable to the king to make it popular with him. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Cunning malice*:—But observe the cunning malice of his address to the king. He does not say, “There is an old Jew that has offended me, and, through me, offered an affront to your sacred majesty; therefore let me execute vengeance upon him.” No, not a word of this sort. He feared to show his real character for rancour to the king, or courtiers. He professes to have no personal motives, but to be moved altogether by a desire for the public good. (*Ibid.*)

True and false accusations:—Having formed so thorough-going a purpose, Haman took steps to execute it. We need not wonder at his lying about the character of the Jews; for it is often possible to use nothing but the language of truth, and yet to utter only the greater falsehood. It was quite true of God’s people, that their laws were “diverse from all people”: it is true of them to-day, and was equally true then, that, being bought with a price, they cannot be slaves of men; that, if any human law interferes with the will of their Saviour, they can give only the one answer, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But it was false to say, “Neither keep they the king’s laws”; for, in respect of everything that man has a right to command, God’s people are the best subjects. To the fathers of these exiles the God of Israel had given this commandment: “Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace”; and Haman could scarcely be ignorant that both the former empire and this one had profited by the private virtue and public faithfulness of pious Jews. God will answer Haman in His own way. But we ought to be fully prepared for the calumny, seeing it arises from two causes which remain always in force. The world cannot understand what it is that we owe to the love of God and to the blood of Christ, and how He must, therefore, reign supreme in the believing heart; and the world extremely

dislikes to hear a claim advanced for liberty of conscience which reminds it of a power higher than its own. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.—*Profit*:—Worldly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit and loss; neither have they grace to know that nothing is profitable but what is honest; they must needs offend by rule, that measure all things by profit and measure profit by their imagination. How easy it is to suggest strange untruths when there is nobody to make answer! False Haman, how is it not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews? If thou construe this profit for honour, the king's honour is in the multitude of his subjects; and what people more numerous than they? If for gain, the king's profit is in the largeness of his tributes; and what people are more deep in their payments? If for service, what people are more officious? No name under heaven hath made so many fools, so many villains, as this of profit. (*Bp. Hall.*) *No true profit in sin*:—It is, then, a question of profit or loss, not of right and justice. Never was there a scheme of villainy that was not gilded over with the plausible pretence of public utility. Nothing under heaven has made so many fools and so many heartless villains as supposed profit. The greatest good to the greatest number is indeed desirable, but such an object was never yet reached by a disregard of justice and right. Expediency is a fallacy. It is never allowed us to try the experiment of doing evil that good may come. How did it turn out in the case before us? The king is to get ten thousand talents for this execution. But instead of that his only profit was the blood and mangled bodies of thousands of his faithful subjects. Ah, cruel Haman! Are these the tender mercies of the wicked? Are these the profits of sin? What "if thou couldst have swum in a whole sea of Jewish blood, if thou couldst have raised mountains of their carcases? What if thou couldst have made all Persia thy shambles, who would have given thee one farthing for all those piles of flesh, for all those streams of blood?"—*Hall.* (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Haman's murderous proposal*:—I. THE COMMONNESS OF IT. In every age God's people have been hated for the very reasons that are here assigned. They worship the one true and living God. David tells of confederacies formed to "cut off the Jews from being a nation." The ten persecutions in the early ages of Christianity. At the present day private animosity is indulged as far as the laws of the land will allow. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." II. THE IMPIETY OF IT. III. THE FOLLY OF IT. Haman with all his power could not prevail against the Jews, who yet in appearance were altogether in his hands. (*C. Simeon.*)

Ver. 9. I will pay ten thousand talents of silver.—*Haman's wealth: ancient millionaires*:—Crassus owned a landed estate valued at more than one million and a half pounds sterling, and Ridorus, after having lost a good deal in the civil war, left an estate worth one million forty-seven hundred pounds. And Lentulus, the augur, died worth three millions, three hundred and thirty-three thousand, three hundred and thirty-three pounds sterling. Apicius was possessed of above nine hundred and sixteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-one pounds. His wealth, however, was by no means satisfactory or sufficient for him. For after having spent vast sums in his kitchen, he was so miserable that he put an end to his own life by poison. These rich old Romans were not bankers or mere merchants and traders. These amounts did not merely pass through their hands in the way of trade. They were worth so much in hard money. Nor were all the millionaires of ancient times Romans. Herodotus says that Xerxes, in going to Greece, the father of Ahasuerus—or as some say, Ahasuerus himself—found Pythius, the Lydian, possessed of two thousand talents of silver and four millions of gold darics; that is, about twenty-seven and a half millions of dollars (*Lib. vii.*). And Plutarch informs us, that after Crassus, the Roman general, had given the tenth of all he had to Hercules, he entertained ten thousand people at his tables, and gave to every citizen as much corn as would support him three months; and then had seven thousand one hundred Roman talents remaining; that is, about twenty-eight millions of dollars. Surely, then, there is nothing incredible in our history because it speaks of ten thousand talents of silver. The wealth and luxury of the old world, in many particulars, surpassed our own times. The enormous debts contracted in the days of Alexander and of the Cæsars prove that the wealth of those times was great, although this is a way to prove one's wealth by that is not at all to my mind, especially for a Church. Anthony owed, we are told, at the ides of March, £333,333 13s. 4d., which, however, it is said he paid before the calends of April, every

penny of it. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Costly revenge*:—His revenge was so dear to him, that he would not only hazard the king's favour by the horrid proposal of murdering a whole nation, but expose himself to a severe loss in his fortune, rather than suffer the hated race to live. What liberal sacrifices will men make to their passions! They will give a great part of the substance of their house to the gratification of their hatred or their lust. Why then should we think it a hard matter to give a part of our substance to God? If our desires are as eager for the advancement of virtue and purity, if we are as earnest in our wishes to have the wants of the poor supplied, and the afflictions of the unfortunate relieved, as revengeful men, like Haman, are to gratify their ill-nature, it will give us pleasure to honour the Lord with our substance, and to minister to the needs of our fellow-men. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 11. *To do with them as it seemeth good to thee.*—*The danger of an easy temper*:—Ahasuerus appears to have been a man of an easy temper, and ready to confer the greatest obligations, without deliberation, on those whom he loved. But there is no true wisdom without judgment and steadiness. A thoughtless man, of an easy temper, is more likely to turn out a vicious than a virtuous character, because in a world where so many more bad than good men are to be met with, he is likely to give up himself to the guidance of those who will lead him out of the way of understanding; or if he should be led in the right path by some of his friends, there are others that will lead him out of it. Ahasuerus would have heaped favours upon the Jews, if Mordecai had been to him at this time what Haman was.

I. MANY HAVE NOT DULY DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN AN EASY AND A GOOD TEMPER. An easy temper is a very dangerous one, when it is not under the powerful restraints of wisdom. It is vain to boast of a ready compliance with every good motion suggested to us if we are equally ready to comply with bad motions. If we surrender ourselves to the direction of our friends, we may soon find that we have given up ourselves to our enemies. He is not our friend who desires to be our lord. II. PLEASE MEN FOR THEIR GOOD TO EDIFICATION. Be always ready to grant reasonable requests, and to follow good counsels. But you must judge for yourselves, by the light which God has given you, what requests are lawful to be granted, and what counsels are worthy to be followed. (*Ibid.*) *The terrors of despotism*:—

I. This history is an illustration of the danger of a one-man power—OF AN ABSOLUTE DESPOTISM. The liberty that rests on the selfishness, or the inclination of one man, or of a hundred men, is suspended despotism, and if we must choose between the rule of one man, or of thirty, without a written constitution and laws, we should greatly prefer the one. In either case, our property and personal liberty are at the will of human caprice or passion. II. We see how GREATLY WE ARE BLESSED, IN HAVING A GOVERNMENT, NOT OF MEN, BUT OF JUST, MILD, ENLIGHTENED AND EQUITABLE WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED LAWS, guaranteeing to us liberty in the worship of God, and in the pursuits of life and the enjoyment of our institutions. The King of Persia, in some instances, seems to have been surrounded by the restraints of precedents, yet, in other cases, he could do what he pleased with the lives and property of his subjects. There was no written constitution. III. WE ARE NEVER TO DESPAIR OF THE ARK, EVEN WHEN IT FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE PHILISTINES. God will never forsake His people. It is no new thing for the godly to have to suffer persecution. The Jews were misrepresented. Even what Haman said of them that was true was so said as to give a fresh colouring to the whole picture. There is no proof that the Jews were factious under the Persian rule. On the contrary, from the lives of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah we should infer just the opposite. It is an old aspersion of God's people, to charge them with singularity. Would to God there was more cause for the imputation than there is! The very thing, therefore, that constituted their glory was made their offence. But it is better always to fall into the hands of God than of men. This was David's choice, and observation approves of it. The very reasons Haman gave for destroying the Hebrews are among the very reasons why God will not let them perish out of the earth. That which whets the sword of men moves the pity of the Almighty. God sometimes leaves His people to come into the greatest peril, that His power may be the more easily seen in their deliverance. Pharaoh was raised up to show His power, and so was Haman. "God taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and ensnares the wicked in the works of their own hands." In the darkest hour it is our duty and our highest happiness still to trust in God. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

Vers. 12-15. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day.—*Fruit-*

less preparations :—I. HERE IS UNSEEMLY HASTE. II. HERE ARE INCONSISTENT PRECURSORY MEASURES. Wickedness renders a man inconsistent. Revenge impelled to action, but conscience still spoke in reproving tones. All must be done according to law. Obedience to the eternal law of right is the only method by which human lives can be rendered consistent and harmonious. III. HERE IS A LOW ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE, shown—1. In the unmethodical nature of the slaughter designed. 2. In the indiscriminate nature of the slaughter designed. 3. In the rapacity after property. Life *versus* property. This decree is one of the unwritten decrees of modern civilisation. IV. HERE IS WICKEDNESS BOLSTERED UP BY HUMAN AUTHORITY. Learn—1. Great men should try to get a true idea of the importance of human life. 2. Statesmen should remember that the true wealth of a community is its men. 3. All ought to remember that life is ignoble when passion is allowed to rule. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Persian postal facilities* :—The postal service for that age was exceedingly good, but only the king could take advantage of it. Indeed, it was one of the means used by him for the government of the empire, and was very largely, according to Herodotus, the device of this same Xerxes. Along the chief lines of travel he established, at intervals of fourteen miles, post-houses, at each of which relays of horses and couriers were always in readiness. One of these messengers, receiving an official document, rode with it at his utmost speed to the next post-house, where it was taken onward by another courier with another horse, and in this way a proclamation like that here described would reach the farthest limits of the empire in five or six weeks. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. To kill, and to cause to perish.—*A wicked massacre* :—The wickedness of the intended massacre does not rest with Ahasuerus and Haman. Great multitudes of the king's subjects must participate in the guilt. The governors and rulers of every province, and the people under their command, have letters written to them, sealed with the king's seal, to contribute their part to the massacre. Let the great consider what they do. If they are wicked, they are not wicked alone. We ought to bless God that no man hath power to require us to do anything but according to the known laws of the land. And yet men of true virtue will not comply with the will of the most absolute monarchs when it is not consistent with the laws of justice and of mercy. At the famous Bartholomew massacre, when the King of France sent his orders to the commanders in the different provinces to massacre the Huguenots, one of them returned him this answer: "In my district your Majesty has many brave soldiers, but no butchers." That virtuous governor never felt any effects of the royal resentment. It is to be feared that few of the Persian governors would have given such proofs of virtuous courage if the king's edict had not been reversed. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 15. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.—*Society broken into sections* :—Alas! how society is broken up into sections—one part caring little for another that is closest to it, and at the very moment pressing upon it for sympathy and succour. Stone walls were all that separated these two men from an agonising population, and yet they were as insensible to the sufferings which were without as though they had been hundreds of miles removed from that scene of perplexity and dismay. How many are in suffering in every great city! How many tears are being shed, groans of distress uttered, pangs of anguish and remorse endured! But the world takes no notice of them—enjoys its ease, and dulls all sensibility to the pain of others by sensual delights. "What is that to us? see thou to that," is still the reply of the world to those who have been its slaves. Happy shall be the time when the gospel shall have rectified this state of things; when each shall regard himself, like the Saviour, as a minister to others; when the wide breaches of fashion and caste shall be bridged over and healed; when priest and Levite shall disappear in the compassionate Samaritan; when every man shall look not upon his own things, but also on the things of others, and when society, from the highest to the lowest, shall be a holy, sympathising, loving brotherhood, possessed of the spirit and imitating the example of our Lord Jesus Christ! It was not the Jews only who were distressed and alarmed, but the whole community—some, because in the destruction of the Jews they would themselves suffer in friendship or outward estate—others from feelings of humanity at the prospective slaughter of good citizens and unoffending women and children—some through fear that a deed so cruel and horrible might lead to an insurrection in the provinces, and an indiscriminate plundering and murdering among the inhabitants

—and others lest such an unrighteous decree might provoke the judgment of the Almighty. The city was panic-stricken. If the king was to act thus arbitrarily and unreasonably in one instance, might he not do so in many ways? (*T. McEwan.*) *Self-indulgence*:—How self-indulgence renders men callous to the distresses and sufferings of their fellow-men. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The irregularities of human conditions*:—I. THE INEQUALITIES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. 1. The most striking instance of inequality is that which is illustrated between the condition of the oppressor and the oppressed. 2. This is further illustrated by the contrast between the jollity of the palace and the perplexity of the city. 3. The indifference of one class of the community towards another and seemingly less favoured class is brought to view in this passage. 4. This indifference has its root in and is the outcome of selfishness. II. THE MYSTERIES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. Haman feasting with the king, Mordecai mourning at the king's gate. III. THE COMPENSATING FORCES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS. The pleasure of Ahasuerus was not a permanent stream. The glory of Haman was soon tarnished. The sorrow of Mordecai was turned into laughter. IV. THE SYMPATHETIC ELEMENT IN HUMAN CONDITIONS. Sorrow draws men and women more closely together than joy. When one part of a city suffers, the whole of the city should be perplexed. V. THE HARMONISING PRINCIPLE FOR HUMAN CONDITIONS. What principle is there that is to adjust in fit proportions the various parts and members of human society? The gospel rightly understood, broadly interpreted, and fully received. The gospel dethrones selfishness, and teaches the true brotherhood of humanity. VI. THE TRUE SUSTAINING POWER FOR ALL HUMAN CONDITIONS: "Even our faith." The true help in life's difficulties is to go into the sanctuary of God. By faith and prayer the world's true heroes have ever conquered. Here learn—1. To keep away from sensuality, which hardens the nature. 2. To cultivate sympathy, which ennobles the nature. 3. To foster firm faith in an overruling power, which brightens life. 4. To have respect unto the harmonies of heaven amid the discords of earth. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes.—*Mordecai's grief*:—In the case of Mordecai, the first effect of the proclamation was bitter anguish, for his conduct had been the flint out of which the spark leaped to kindle this portentous conflagration. But Mordecai's grief did not upset his judgment. The genuine sorrow of an honest soul very seldom has that effect; and this man's greatness comes out in his deliberateness. Faith, too, as well as sound judgment, may be discerned under this good man's grief. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Mordecai in sackcloth*:—I. MORDECAI WAS EXCEEDINGLY AFFECTED AT WHAT THE KING HAD COMMANDED (ver. 1). See the stirring benevolence of this man, the sweet philanthropy which dwelt in his soul, and how deeply he felt the common calamity, which resulted from his own conscientious doings. There is nothing new in the Lord's people meeting with adversities and troubles in this life. "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." II. IN THE DEPTH OF HIS GRIEF, MORDECAI "CAME EVEN BEFORE THE KING'S GATE, CLOTHED WITH SACKCLOTH: FOR NONE MIGHT ENTER INTO THE KING'S GATE CLOTHED WITH SACKCLOTH (ver. 2). Amusements or diversions are one class of spiritual idols to which many of the sons of men render homage. The wise man informs us that a scene of unbroken enjoyment is not the best for the interest of the soul. "It is better to go to the house of mourning," &c., "for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart." Do as the saints of old did; we never hear them saying, "I will rejoice in the world"; but "I will rejoice in the Lord," "I will rejoice in Thy salvation." "In the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice." "My soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." III. Mordecai, though he could not enter within the king's gate with his signals of distress, WENT AS NEAR IT AS HE DARED TO GO, WITH THE VIEW OF ACQUAINTING ESTHER, BY MEANS OF HER ATTENDANTS, WITH THE IMPENDING DANGER. As soon as she heard of his mournful habit, she sympathised with him, and sent

him raiment instead of his sackcloth, that he might resume his place. We cannot but admire two things which the grace of God had wrought in this woman—her condescension and gratitude. She was now a queen. Providence had placed her on the summit of worldly greatness, yet did she not disregard one of her subjects in distress. She kindly inquired into the cause of his sorrow. Her gratitude also was lovely. Mordecai had acted the part of a tender father towards her, when she was cast a parentless child on the wide world. She does not now forget that tenderness.

IV. MORDECAI SENT BACK TO ESTHER TIDINGS OF THE SITUATION IN WHICH HE, AND SHE, AND THEIR PEOPLE WERE PLACED (vers. 7, 8). Esther was now in a station, high and influential, and she is here charged to use her influence on the side of right and justice, and against oppression and tyranny. It is delightful to behold power thus employed! Power is a mighty weapon, and effects great things either to the injury or benefit of the community.

V. ESTHER SENT AGAIN TO MORDECAI, TO TELL HIM THAT SHE HAD NOT FOR A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD BEEN INVITED TO THE ROYAL PRESENCE, AND THAT TO GO UNINVITED WAS CERTAIN DEATH. VI. NOTWITHSTANDING WHAT ESTHER SAID, MORDECAI WOULD BY NO MEANS HAVE HER NEGLECT THE WORK WHICH HE HAD ASSIGNED HER (vers. 13, 14). We learn a few particulars from these words. 1. That Mordecai had a strong belief that God would interfere for His people in this case.

2. That we are not to flinch from our duty by reason of the danger which we incur by its performance. It is easy to walk in the way while it is smooth and easy, but it must be walked in also when it is rough and thorny. 3. That the work of the Lord shall prosper, whether we endeavour to promote it or otherwise. "Deliverance shall arise to the Jews from another place: but thou," &c. God is never at a loss for instruments to accomplish His will. If we neglect the honour, He will make others willing to spend and to be spent in His service.

VII. WE COME NOW TO ESTHER'S ANSWER (vers. 15, 16). Fasting and prayer were resorted to on this occasion. Spiritually performed, they never fail of success. United prayer, as in these cases, and in that of Peter, who was about to be killed by Herod, is omnipotent. Like Esther, let us work and pray. These duties must ever be associated. To work without praying is Pharisaism and presumption. To pray without working is insincerity and hypocrisy. Like Mordecai, let us counsel others to do their duty, heedless of all temporal consequences, and pray that they may have power from on high for its due accomplishment. (*J. Hughes.*)

Anguish keenly felt:—At first it would appear that he was so stunned, and almost stupefied, by the news, that he knew not what to do. He was cast into the uttermost distress. He was like a vessel struck by a cyclone. He would get to the use of efforts to meet the crisis by and by; but, for the moment, when the hurricane first burst upon him, he could do nothing but give way to the violence of the storm. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Great sorrow:*—I. SORROW CANNOT BE PREVENTED. Sibbes says, "None ever hath been so good or so great as could raise themselves so high as to be above the reach of troubles." Thomas Watson observes, "The present state of life is subject to afflictions, as a seaman's life is subject to storms. Man is born to trouble; he is heir-apparent to it; he comes into the world with a cry and goes out with a groan."

II. SORROW CANNOT BE EXPLAINED. In its general aspect sin is the cause of sorrow. When we come to particularise we find ourselves at fault. Eternity is the only true and complete interpreter of time. Heavenly joys only can make plain the meaning of earthly sorrows.

III. SORROW CANNOT BE HIDDEN. Emotion is as much part of our God-given nature as intellect. The man who does not feel is a man with the better part of manhood destroyed. Feeling must sooner or later find an expression. It is better not to hide our sorrows. Trouble concealed is trouble increased.

IV. SORROW CANNOT BE CONFINED. It passes from nature to nature; from home to home. This community of feeling, this susceptibility to sorrow, speaks to us of our brotherhood. We are members one of another. V. BUT SORROW CAN BE MITIGATED.

1. By believing that the threatened trouble may never come. 2. By believing that God knows how to effect a deliverance. 3. By believing that sorrow may be made productive. As the waters of the Nile overflow the surrounding country, and open up the soil, and prepare it for the reception of the rice seed, so the waters of sorrow should overflow and open up the otherwise barren soil of our nature, and prepare it for the reception of the seed of all truth in its manifold bearings. "Tribulation worketh patience," &c. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Mordecai's grief:—There is perhaps but little doubt that Mordecai passed hours—they come to nearly all—when gloom lay heavy upon the soul, when the shock he had felt seemed to render existence a blank, leaving little of hope before him save that which glittered around the gateway of death and seemed to whisper, "Abandon effort; accept the inevitable"—

seasons when the fruitlessness of labour, the unreasonableness of man, the malignancy of human enmity, the worthlessness of human sacrifice, the emptiness of the most ardent aspirations, and the inefficiency of goodness, leave the soul drifting upon the open sea of despondency with a torturing sense of loneliness—moments when faith in man, even faith in the Church, is shaken, inducing the spirit to cast itself upon the Fatherhood of God, as the storm drives the wearied bird to its home in the rocks. But since faith still lives, and can only live, in the performance of present duty—which alone has the power of maintaining piety in the soul—he soon discovers that continued reliance upon God is urging him to labour for the realisation of the results he covets. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Clothed with sackcloth.—*The transfigured sackcloth*:—The sign of affliction was thus excluded from the Persian court that royalty might not be discomposed. This disposition to place an interdict on disagreeable and painful things still survives. Men of all ranks and conditions hide from themselves the dark facts of life. Revelation, however, lends no sanction to this habit. We wish to show the entire reasonableness of revelation in its frank recognition of the dark facts of existence. I. WE CONSIDER FIRST THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF SIN. Sackcloth is the outward and visible sign of sin, guilt, and misery. What is popularly called sin, certain philosophers call error, accident, inexperience, imperfection, disharmony, but they will not allow the presence in the human heart of a malign force which asserts itself against God and against the order of His universe. Intellectual masters like Emerson and Renan ignore conscience; they refuse to acknowledge the selfishness, baseness, and cruelty of society. Men generally are willing to dupe themselves touching the fact and power of sin. We do not unshrinkingly acquaint ourselves with the malady of the spirit as we should with any malady hinting itself in the flesh. The sackcloth must not mar our shallow happiness. In the vision of beautiful things we forget the troubles of conscience as the first sinners hid themselves amid the leaves and flowers of paradise; in fashion and splendour we forget our guilty sorrow, as mediæval mourners sometimes concealed the cerements with raiment of purple and gold; in the noises of the world we become oblivious of the interior discords, as soldiers forget their wounds amid the stir and trumpets of the battle. Nevertheless sin thrusts itself upon our attention. The creeds of all nations declare the fact that men everywhere feel the bitter working and intolerable burden of conscience. The sense of sin has persisted through changing generations. The sackcloth is ours, and it eats our spirits like fire. More than any other teacher, Christ emphasised the actuality and awfulness of sin; more than any other He has intensified the world's consciousness of sin. He never sought to relieve us of the sackcloth by asserting our comparative innocence; He never attempted to work into that melancholy robe one thread of colour, to relieve it with one solitary spangle of rhetoric. He laid bare its principle and essence. The South Sea Islanders have a singular tradition to account for the existence of the dew. The legend states that in the beginning the earth touched the sky, that being the golden age when all was beautiful and glad; then some dreadful tragedy occurred, the primal unity was broken up, the earth and sky were torn asunder as we see them now, and the dew-drops of the morning are the tears that nature sheds over the sad divorce. This wild fable is a metaphor of the truth, the beginning of all evil lies in the alienation of the spirit of man from God, in the divorce of earth from heaven; here is the final reason why the face of humanity is wet with tears. Instead of shutting out the signs of woe, Christ arrayed Himself in the sackcloth, becoming sin for us who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins; He establishes us in a true relation to the holy God; He restores in us the image of God; He fills us with the peace of God. Not in the spirit of barren cynicism does Christ lay bare the ghastly wound of our nature, but as a noble physician who can purge the mortal virus that destroys us. We go to Him in sackcloth, but we leave His presence in purity's robe of snow, in the heavenly blue of the holiness of truth. II. WE CONSIDER THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF SORROW. Sackcloth is the raiment of sorrow, and as such it was interdicted by the Persian monarch. We still follow the same insane course, minimising, denying suffering. Society sometimes attempts this. Literature sometimes follows the same cue. Goethe made it one of the rules of his life to avoid everything that could suggest painful ideas. Art has yielded to the same temptation. Most of us are inclined to the sorry trick of gliding over painful things. When the physician prescribed blisters to Marie Bashkirtseff to check her consump-

tive tendency, the vain, cynical girl wrote : " I will put on as many blisters as they like. I shall be able to hide the mark by bodices trimmed with flowers and lace and tulle, and a thousand other things that are worn, without being required ; it may even look pretty. Ah ! I am comforted." The real secret of the power of many of the fashions and diversions of the world is found in the fact that they hide disagreeable things, and render men oblivious for awhile of the mystery and weight of an unintelligible world. There is no screen to shut off permanently the spectacle of suffering. When Marie Antoinette passed to her bridal in Paris, the halt, the lame, and the blind were sedulously kept out of her way, lest their appearance should mar the joyousness of her reception ; but ere long the poor queen had a very close view of misery's children, and she drank to the dregs the cup of life's bitterness. Reason as we may, suffering will find us out, and pierce us to the heart. We will not have the philosophy that ignores suffering ; witness the popularity of Schopenhaur. We resent the art that ignores sorrow. The most popular picture in the world to-day is the " Angelus " of Millet. We will not have the literature that ignores suffering. Classic religions had little or nothing to do with the sorrows of the million ; the gods reigned on Mount Olympus, taking little note of the grief of mortals. Christianity boldly recognises the sad element in human nature. Christ makes clear to us the origin of suffering. He shows that its genesis is in the error of the human will ; but if suffering originate in the error of the human will, it ceases at once if the erring will be brought into correspondence with the primitive order of the universe. Christ has power to establish this harmony. Dealing with sin, He dries up the stream of sorrow at its fountain. By the authority of that word that speaks the forgiveness of our sin, He wipes away all tears from the face of such as obey Him. Christ gives us the noblest example of suffering. So far from shutting His gate on the sackcloth, once more He adopted it, and showed how it might become a robe of glory. Poison is said to be extracted from the rattlesnake for medicinal purposes ; but infinitely more wonderful is the fact that the suffering which comes out of sin counterworks sin, and brings to pass the transfiguration of the sufferer. It is a clumsy mistake to call Christianity a religion of sorrow—it is a religion for sorrow.

III. WE CONSIDER THE RECOGNITION BY REVELATION OF DEATH. We have, again, adroit ways of shutting the gate upon that sackcloth which is the sign of death. Some would have us believe that through the scientific and philosophic developments of later centuries the sombre way of viewing death has become obsolete. The fact, however, still remains, that death is the crowning evil, the absolute bankruptcy, the final defeat, the endless exile. If we are foolish enough to shut the gate on the thought of death, by no stratagem can we shut the gate upon death itself. Christ displays the fact, the power, the terror of death without reserve or softening. He shows that death is unnatural, that it is the fruit of disobedience, and by giving us purity and peace He gives us eternal life. He demonstrates immortality by raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Here is the supreme proof of immortality : " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father." The moral works are the greater works. If Christ has raised us from the death of sin, why should we think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead ? If He has wrought the greater, He will not fail with the less. Christ bringing life and immortality to light has brought about the great change in the point of view from which we regard death, the point of view which is full of consolation and hope. Once more, by boldly adopting the sackcloth Christ has changed it into a robe of light. We cannot escape the evils of life. Wearing wreaths of roses, our heads will still ache. " The king sighs as often as the peasant " ; this proverb anticipates the fact that those who participate in the richest civilisation that will ever flower will sigh as men sigh now. Esther " sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take his sackcloth from him, but he received it not." In vain men offer us robes of beauty, chiding us for wearing the robes of night ; we must give place to all the sad thoughts of our mortality until we find a salvation that goes to the root of our suffering, that dries up the fount of our tears. Christianity gives such large recognition to the pathetic element of life, because it divines the secret of our mighty misfortune, and brings with it the sovereign antidote. The critics declare Rubens had an absolute delight in representing pain, and they refer us to his picture of the " Brazen Serpent." The writhing, gasping crowd is everything, and the supreme instrument of cure, the brazen serpent itself, is small and obscure, no conspicuous feature whatever of the picture. Revelation brings out broadly and impressively the darkness of the world, the malady of life, the terror of death, only

that it may evermore make conspicuous the uplifted Cross, which, once seen, is death to every vice, a consolation in every sorrow, a victory over every fear. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Sorrow may be transfigured*:—Science tells how the bird-music has arisen out of the bird's cry of distress in the morning of time; how originally the music of field and forest was nothing more than an exclamation caused by the bird's bodily pain and fear, and how through the ages the primal note of anguish has been evolved and differentiated until it has risen into the ecstasy of the lark, melted into the silver note of the dove, swelled into the rapture of the nightingale, unfolded into the vast and varied music of the sky and the summer. So Christ shows that out of the personal sorrow which now rends the believer's heart, he shall arise in moral and infinite perfection; that out of the cry of anguish wrung from us by the present distress shall spring the supreme music of the future. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 2. For none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.—Death must be encountered:—Since the last enemy must be encountered by the greatest as well as the least of our race, is it not far better to be prepared for meeting him, than to banish him from our thoughts? (*G. Lawson.*) *Death a visitor that cannot be stopped at the gate*:—And is Death included in this prohibition? Have you given orders to your porters and guards to stop this visitor at the gate, and to say to him, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further"? Or will they be able to persuade him, and his train of ghastly attendants, gout, fever, consumption, and other diseases, to lay aside their sable dress, together with their darts and spears and scorpions? (*T. McCrie.*) *We cannot keep trouble from our hearts by banishing the signs of mourning from our dwellings*:—It is the height of folly, therefore, for us to try to surround ourselves with the appearance of security, and make believe that no change can come upon us. That is to do like the ostrich, which buries its head in the sand, and thinks itself safe from its pursuers because it can no longer see them. Trouble, sorrow, trial, death are inevitable, and the wise course is to prepare to meet them. We cannot shut our homes against these things; but we can open them to Christ, and when He enters He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. And in every province . . . there was great mourning among the Jews.—A sentence of death:—If a sentence of death pronounced by an earthly sovereign produced such grief, such anxiety, such cries of deliverance, what impression ought to be made on the minds of sinners by that sentence which is passed against them in the court of heaven?—"Judgment is come upon all men to condemnation." We are still under that sentence of condemnation if we are not in Christ Jesus. Surely we believe neither law nor gospel, if we can enjoy peace in our own minds, without the humble hope of mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 4. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment.—*Sorrow not superficially removed*:—Esther, in her elevation, and in her separation from her friends, was far from forgetting them. She was deeply afflicted when she heard of the mourning habit and sore affliction of Mordecai. She was vexed that he should appear at the king's gate in a dress in which he could not enter it, and therefore sent to him change of raiment. But she knew not the sources of his distress. Grief so firmly rooted, and so well founded, could not be removed without a removal of its cause. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 5. Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains.—*Hatach*, the chamberlain, gives us a good subject for reflection; and not a hackneyed one. Pause we a moment then on this undistinguished name. Let the greater actors stand aside—king and queen—Haman and Mordecai—mourning Jews and raging Amalekites—and let a servant (in high office no doubt, but still a servant), rendering true fealty in the spirit of reverence and faithfulness, stand before us in his undistinguished honesty and simplicity. The queen begins to be in sore trouble. The darkness is deepening. Some unknown but dire calamity is near—"Send me Hatach—I need my truest and my best—that I may know what it is, and why it is, and what may be done to prepare for, or avert the evil day." Imagine, if you can, what this world would be if all the Hatachs were taken out of it, or taken out of its offices. Let Abraham have no Eliezer; Sarah no Deborah; Naaman's wife

no little maid of Israel; Saul no armour-bearer; Esther no Hatach. Let that process go on through a particular section of society, and what helpless creatures kings and queens would be, and all the men of great name, and all who live in state, and luxury, and grandeur! It would be like a landslip in society. The upper stratum would come sliding down, in some cases perhaps toppling down in many things to a level with the lowest. There are men in government offices never heard of in public life, who have more merit in particular measures which pass than some of those whose names are connected with them. There are managers and confidential clerks who mainly conduct great businesses in the city, and in whom their masters proudly and safely trust. Or, to enter the private scene, many a house is kept quiet, and orderly, and sweet, and homelike, mainly by the assiduities of one confidential servant. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. And to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him.—*A resolute will*:—In the meantime, this lesson may be drawn from his conduct—that a resolute will, when it is exerted for the accomplishment of any purpose, is usually successful in the end. The triumphs of the Reformation, for example, in our own country and in other lands, where it did triumph, while they are really to be ascribed to the overruling providence of God, are instrumentally to be attributed to this, that God raised up and qualified for the work certain men of determined will and unflagging energy, who kept before them the great purpose which they sought to effect, and would be turned aside by no danger or difficulty from working it out. And I would remark, that in things spiritual—in things affecting the eternal salvation of man—resoluteness of will and indomitable energy are as indispensable as in the pursuit of temporal good. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Human sympathy*:—How ardently Mordecai is coveting the sympathy of one whom his self-sacrifice elevated to a position above his own! Human sympathy, exhibited in practical ways, proves wondrous in power, multiplying joys and dividing sorrows. It is like sunshine upon rosebuds, unfolding hidden beauty and evoking new fragrance. Like May breezes upon consumptive cheeks, it brings back the glow of health where pallor of death has been, and paints cheerfulness where despondency has been brooding too long already. It is a contribution of the heart more priceless than the wealth of the Indies. It may be incapable of explaining the mysteries of providence; it may be disqualified for recommending resignation to the Divine will; it may be powerless in effecting deliverance; but when genuine it possesses inestimable value, though it may not open avenues from Marah to the land of Beulah. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. But I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.—*Providence tries faith*:—Thus it is that Providence sometimes frowns on the cause of His Church and people, by not only exposing them to imminent danger, but by shutting up all the ordinary avenues of escape, so that there appears no evasion for them. This proves a severe trial to their faith, but affords an opportunity for displaying His own wisdom and mercy in their ultimate deliverance. (*T. McCrie.*) *The darker aspect of providence*:—We have here an illustration of what is not unfrequently observable in the arrangements of the Divine providence—that the affairs of God's people assume a darker and darker aspect, just before a favourable interposition comes—in order, no doubt, to make the truth more palpable, that it is by His hand that their deliverance is wrought out, and that therefore they should never distrust Him, nor think that He has forgotten to be gracious. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Access to God without fear*:—It is indeed with the Great King you have to deal, and life and death are at His disposal; but you may go to Him without fear, if you go with a true heart. There was all the formality of priestly services under the law, between the worshippers and Jehovah, to make them feel that they could not come nigh personally; just as there were functionaries to prevent Esther from coming into the presence of the king, when she merely felt the wish to do so. Now, however, God invites us to come to Him at all times, and what prevents us from having full communion with Him is not our personal unworthiness, but our unbelief. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 13. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther.—*Repeated admonition necessary*:—It is necessary for those who desire to be useful to the souls of their neighbours not only to tell them, as occasion requires, what it is their duty to do, but to repeat their admonitions, to enforce them by reasons, and to obviate those

objections which rise up in their minds against the performance of it. (*G. Lawson.*) *High motives necessary*:—Mordecai's answer is tragical and grand. Esther's womanly caution brought out his courage and his faith. In his consuming zeal for God and God's people, he left the domestic affections far below him. Though loving Esther more than he loved any one else on earth, he never scrupled about risking her life. For the same reason he made no allusion to the obligations under which she lay to his kindness. He had nursed her on his knees, he had taught her to walk and speak, he had fed and clothed her, he had surrounded the perilous steps of her maidenhood with the shield of his watchful and wise affection; but he neither remembered these things now nor wished her to remember them. As none of them moved him to spare her the risk, so neither will he urge them as reasons why she should undertake it. This great thing must be gone through under the influence of higher motives than these, and in obedience to a higher will than his. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) **Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.**—*False hopes of safety are one fruitful source of delusion*, by making persons careless or averse to use means for their own escape, or the deliverance of others, from danger, temporal or eternal. They must, therefore, be disabused and undeceived; the veil of covering which is spread over their minds must be torn off, and they must be shown their real state, and their impending danger in all its nakedness and nearness. We never will persuade sinners to flee to the refuge opened for them if we do not convince them that wrath is coming upon them. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Think not with yourselves that you shall escape their doom, however sober, and decent, and moral you may be, compared with some of them. While profligacy destroys its thousands, false peace and lying confidences destroy their ten thousands. (*T. McCrie.*) *Reluctant self-denial*:—Alas! how often it happens that the Christian needs to be plied with arguments rooted in selfishness ere he can be induced to perform an unpleasant duty, especially if it involves the possibility of self-sacrifice! John Sterling well said, "The worst education which teaches self-denial is better than the best which teaches everything else but that." Strange that, although we announce ourselves followers of the Saviour, we should be so reluctant to endure hardship as good soldiers, while yet fulsome in the declaration, "No sweat, no sweet; no cross, no crown; no pains, no gains." (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *No refuge in the king's house*:—In many ways do men cherish false hopes, from the simple circumstance of dwelling in what may be called "the king's house." For example: The Word of God includes all under condemnation who have not a personal faith in the Divine Redeemer; but in the neglect of that urgent duty there are some who hope for salvation simply because descended of pious parentage, or possessed of an outwardly good moral character, or connected with the Christian Church. When they are charged with their duty in relation to the gospel these are the king's houses in which they vainly flee for refuge. (*T. McEwan.*)

Vers. 14. Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.—*Female deliverers in Israel*:—In former ages women, as Deborah and Jael, had been made the instruments of saving Israel. Esther might have a place among those whose memories, after so many generations, were still fragrant among their countrymen. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Enlargement and deliverance*:—Enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews, to the Israel of God, under the gospel as well as under the law. Amidst all the distresses of the Church, we may rest assured that she cannot perish. All, therefore, who perform eminent services to the Church ought humbly to thank the Lord for choosing to employ them rather than others; for He is never at a loss for servants to do His work. (*G. Lawson.*) **And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**—*The use of talents to be accounted for*:—A man who knows a particular remedy for a certain disease, of which others are ignorant, would be chargeable with the fatal consequences that may arise from the general ignorance if he locks up his knowledge within his own breast. If Providence furnish us with talents which are not granted to others, we must account for our use of them. If we have opportunities of doing much good which others have not, and make no use of them, we make ourselves guilty of a crime which can be charged upon none but ourselves. (*Ibid.*) *Services suitable to our situation required by God*:—If God has done remarkable things for us, we have reason to believe that He expects some services from us suited to the situation in which He has placed us, and to the means of service with which He has

furnished us. We ought, therefore, when we consider what God hath done for us, to consider at the same time what He requires from us. If our circumstances are peculiar it is likely that some peculiar services are required. (*Ibid.*) *The time for usefulness* :—Our times are in the Lord's hands. He fixes the bounds of our habitations and arranges our conditions according to His own will. His servants have a special earthly calling wherein they are called, the duties of which they are individually to fulfil. He has particular relative objects to secure in the exaltation of those whom He loves. And when any of His servants are raised to influence, or wealth, or power, it is that He may make them effective instruments of His power for blessing to others. There is, therefore, a special propriety of time at which His gifts of power and influence are bestowed upon particular men. If one is made rich, it is because there are many poor waiting to be enriched by him, and he is to have the greater blessing of imparting, giving to his fellow-men. There is a particular reason, could we know it, for which we are "come to the kingdom for such a time." We should study our duty in the circumstances of its time. Every virtue and trait of holiness in her character shines with increasing brightness and beauty as Esther goes forward in her appointed dispensation. Let us consider the circumstances of the time. 1. It was a time of great trial for the people of Israel. 2. The time tested the sincerity of Esther's affection for Mordecai, and brought that into immediate demonstration. 3. The time also tried the sincerity of Esther's affection for her nation. The truly pious heart will cherish an universal love. The wants and sorrows of all mankind are the subjects of its sympathy and its concern. But true religion especially exalts and enlarges domestic love, and love for our country and nation. The more truly the heart is engaged for God the more earnestly will it feel the sorrows and needs of those who are near to us. Have we wealth? We have those connected with us who are poor and suffering. Have we station or knowledge? It is no Christian heart which has no fellowship in suffering and no tenderness for woe. Yet we sadly see a hardness of heart often attendant on exalted conditions. Men seem to feel that they have been elevated by their own efforts, and that inability to do the same in others is in some degree a crime which ought to be punished by suffering. They invent every possible excuse for withholding their demanded aid. 4. The time displayed her entire disinterestedness of spirit, and her trust in God. She resolved to put the request of Mordecai into immediate operation. Mere self-indulgence would have delighted in her own state of luxury and enjoyment, and have shut her ears and her heart against the cries and woes of her people. To preserve this people she must hazard her own life. Beautiful is this illustration of a disinterested and devoted spirit. I am content to perish to gain the great end of blessing to others which I have before me. Such was the love of our Divine Redeemer for us. "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross and despised the shame." (*S. H. Tynge, D.D.*) *A human voice speaks Divine lessons for human lives* :—What are the Divine lessons which this human voice speaks, not only to Esther, but to every true soul. I. THAT GREAT ADVANTAGES ARE CONFERRED FOR A DIVINE PURPOSE. Talents, position, influence, wealth. II. THAT GOD REQUIRES THAT SUCH ADVANTAGES SHOULD BE FAITHFULLY USED FOR THE PROMOTION OF HIS PURPOSES. III. THAT SUCH DIVINE PURPOSES CANNOT BE FRUSTRATED. IV. THOSE WHO FRUSTRATE DIVINE PURPOSES SHALL BE INJURED. V. LEARN THAT A FAITHFUL DISCHARGE OF DUTY MUST BRING RICH RESULTS. (*W. Burroues, B.A.*) *Esther's exaltation; or who knoweth* :—I shall lay out my sermon under four words. I. HEARKEN! 1. To a question. Brother, will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God? Do you mean to say, "I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you will be lost, but I say you are lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice. 2. To a second question: If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them? 3. Remember, for your humiliation, that God can do without you. 4. As God can do without us, it may be He will do without us. 5. How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it come upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be despised? II. CONSIDER—1. To what some of you have been advanced. 2. Why the Lord has brought you where you are. 3. At what a time it is that you have been thus advanced. 4. Under what special circumstances you have come where you are. 5. With what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you. III. ASPIRE. "Who knoweth," &c. When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and

everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, &c., of earth, but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honour God and bless men. IV. CONFIDE. 1. If thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this, be confident that thou art safe. 2. If God has a purpose to serve by a man, that man will live out his day and accomplish the Divine design. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The duty of the hour* (to an agricultural college):—This exemplifies a truth of universal application and of particular pertinency. The idea is that the general welfare is best promoted by the advancement of the individual, while the advancement of the individual can be maintained only by his loyal devotion to the public weal. We have discovered in these latter days that relations are of more moment than things. Charcoal, sulphur, nitre are things of some potency, in themselves considered; but they must be brought into the proper relations, the one to the other, before the might of gunpowder shakes the earth. I observe—1. That the college graduate of to-day, who has completed a four years' course of liberal training in a well-equipped and thoroughly-manned institution of learning comes into a kingdom. 2. The college graduate of to-day comes into his kingdom at a time of marvellous and portentous significance. 3. Our time, with its sudden transitions, is fraught with danger to all classes of society, but to none more than to those who till the soil. (*C. S. Walker, Ph.D.*) *The principles of Divine providence*:—I. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE HIGHEST GOOD OF MAN. This is shown—1. In the advent of Christ for the world's salvation. 2. The spread of the gospel and the conversion of the Gentiles. 3. The restoration of peace between nations and the final destruction of slavery. II. THE HIGHEST GOOD OF MAN IS SECURED INDEPENDENTLY OF MAN'S INDIVIDUAL CONDUCT. The stream of human agency is like a river, ever flowing and ever changing. One drop in the stream cannot say, "When I am gone the channel will be dry." No sooner is room made than another follows, and the channel is ever full. So it is in the history of man. God's providence will secure workers. III. THAT MEN ARE PLACED BY GOD IN SUCH POSITIONS THAT THEY MAY SECURE FOR THEMSELVES THE HONOUR OF HELPING GOD IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL WORK. IV. IN NOT MAKING USE OF OUR PROVIDENTIAL POSITION WE EXPOSE OURSELVES TO FEARFUL EVILS. V. THAT IN MAKING USE OF OUR PROVIDENTIAL POSITIONS, WE SHALL REQUIRE SPECIAL QUALIFICATIONS, AND SHALL HAVE THE SYMPATHY AND CO-OPERATION OF A HOLY UNIVERSE, AS WELL AS THE COMMENDATION AND BLESSING OF GOD. Notice—1. That in doing our duty we show the possession of the highest and noblest moral qualities. (1) Duty done under the pressure of difficulty is done by faith in God, and is therefore a proof of piety. (2) Duty done in difficulty requires a self-sacrificing disposition. (3) Duty done amid difficulties requires consummate skill. (4) In doing duty no time should be lost. 2. That in doing our duty we have the help of a holy universe (chap. vi. 1). (*Evan Lewis.*) *The preservation of the Jews an illustration of the Divine government*:—The text presents for our consideration—I. A FIRM CONVICTION OF AN OVERRULING PROVIDENCE. II. THE RECOGNITION OF HUMAN INSTRUMENTALITIES IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. III. THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-SACRIFICE WHICH ENABLES MEN TO BE ACCEPTABLE INSTRUMENTS IN THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. (*Prof. E. J. Wolf, D.D.*) *Position and responsibility*:—Our Lord's great principle, "Unto whom much is given of him shall much be required," is clear as a mathematical axiom when we look at it in the abstract; but nothing is harder than for people to apply it to their own cases. If it were freely admitted, the ambition that grasps at the first places would be shamed into silence. If it were generally acted on, the wide social cleft between the fortunate and the miserable would be speedily bridged over. The total ignoring of this tremendous principle by the great majority of those who enjoy the privileged positions in society is doubtless one of the chief causes of the ominous unrest that is growing more and more disturbing in the less favoured ranks of life. If this supercilious contempt for an imperative duty continues, what can be the end but an awful retribution? Was it not the wilful blindness of the dancers in the Tuileries to the misery of the serfs in the fields that caused revolutionary France to run red with blood? (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *God's purpose and man's opportunity*:—I draw from the text the following general truths: I. THAT RUNNING THROUGH THE PROVIDENCE OF THIS WORLD THERE IS A GRACIOUS DIVINE PURPOSE FOR ITS ULTIMATE SALVATION. 1. Mordecai believed in the indestructibility of the Jews. This was with him evidently a religious faith. This faith must have been founded

on one or more of the promises of God. 2. This purpose of the preservation of the Jews is but a branch and a sign of another and grander purpose—a purpose to gather and save the whole world. This types itself in the kingly history; gleams in the prophet's vision; breathes in the holy psalm; speaks out in the Acts of the Apostles; runs through all the epistles, and sighs up to heaven in that last apocalyptic cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." II. THAT RICH AND RARE OPPORTUNITIES OCCUR IN THE PROGRESS OF THINGS, BY WHICH BELIEVING MEN ARE ALLOWED TO COME EFFECTUALLY "TO THE HELP OF THE LORD AGAINST THE MIGHTY." We must spread the gospel or lose it. Our moral opportunities, our seasonable times for action, are very precious, are very brief, and when they are gone they cannot be renewed. So it is at times with Churches, with societies, and with nations. III. THAT THE NEGLECT OF SUCH PROVIDENTIAL CALLS HAS A TENDENCY TO BRING DESTRUCTION. Mordecai probably had in view a general principle of retribution, acting at all times, but sure to act swiftly and terribly in a case like this. This principle has its fullest application to the ungodly. The way, the hope, the expectation, the works, the memory, and saddest of all, the soul of the wicked shall perish. Let a Christian man neglect opportunities and hold truth in unrighteousness, and what will happen to him? He perishes as to the real power of his life. It is the same with Churches, &c. No Church, &c., can live except as they continue to be in harmony with the purpose and the providence of God. Where are the seven Churches in Asia? IV. THAT OBEDIENCE WILL BRING ELEVATION AND BLESSING. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Inactivity in the cause of Christ condemned*:—Reflect—I. THAT THE MAN WHO USED THESE WORDS WAS EVIDENTLY WELL AWARE THAT THE CAUSE OF GOD WAS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE AIDS OF MEN. This is evident if we consider—1. The meanness of the instruments and the greatness of the work to be done. 2. How absolute are the promises of God, which show His determination to bless His people. 3. The power of God. These considerations ought to teach the instruments to be humble, and they ought also to confirm the faith of the people of God. II. THAT HIS PROVIDENCE DOES RAISE UP SUITABLE INSTRUMENTS TO CARRY FORWARD HIS WORK. III. THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF THOSE INSTRUMENTS TO GIVE THEMSELVES UP TO THE WORK. We are not only to study the book of God to know what is our duty in general, but also the book of providence to know what is the particular duty He designs us to do. We ought to study—1. Our particular talent. 2. Our sphere. 3. Our circumstances. 4. The times. IV. THAT AN AWFUL DOOM RESTS ON THOSE WHO LISTEN NOT TO THE CALL OF PROVIDENCE. 1. We shall lose the satisfaction of doing good. 2. We shall not prosper. (1) Temporally. (2) Spiritually. Those who are not actively employed in the service of Christ feel most of the bitterness arising from doubts as to their actual condition and fears as to their spiritual state. Listlessness in the cause of Christ will be a cause of gloom on a dying bed. 3. There is an intimate connection between the degrees of glory in heaven and the exercises of activity here. (*W. H. Cooper.*) *Providence and opportunity*:—God's providential purpose; man's present opportunity; that is how I read the lesson of this marvellous history. A purpose clearly written on the face of events and to be readily deciphered from their grouping. Moses at the Red Sea heard a voice telling him to stretch his rod over the sea, that a way might be made for the ransomed to pass over. Now we have no voice; but circumstances gather about us, the rod is thrust into our hand, and we miss our deliverance if we do not see that we must wave the rod. We are not in intellectual and religious infancy. We ought to be able to discover without any warning voice what God's purpose is, and what our opportunity is worth. I. AS TO LIFE ITSELF, HUMAN EXISTENCE; ENTRY UPON IT IS A COMING TO A KINGDOM. Living now, we are conditioned by the time and circumstances of to-day. Our days have fallen on a time different from all that have gone before, unique in this particular, if in nothing else—the power of public opinion. In former days but one man here and there seemed to have a kingdom to enter upon, a few men swayed the nations, a few men seemed to be inspired to deeds which raised them into leaders of the people. But now the rulers in name are the ruled in fact. The government is governed and the people control everything. It is a great thing to live now. Literature and science pour their wealth out before us. By these things we have the chance of being better men in some directions of thought and of exerting a mightier influence in the world than our fathers could exert. Some men might just as well have lived hundreds of years ago, for any appreciation they seem to have of the privileges and demands of the time. No time is like another in all its details. We have to make it what it shall be. By the impulse of an earnest life,

by the influence of holy character, by brief words spoken and little deeds done according to our opportunity, must we do something to mould that public opinion which is omnipotent. II. As CHRISTIANS WE HAVE COME TO A KINGDOM. Christianity has always presented two aspects, the offensive and the defensive. In the old days of national warfare, when ships were made of wood, rough-wrought cannon and shot were sufficient means of attack. But with the iron-plating has necessarily come improvement in the means of destruction. As the ship becomes more exposed to the danger of improved appliances she must be more scientifically defended. We sometimes smile as we see the way in which truth used to be asserted and defended. We now see that truth is its own best defence. (*J. Jones.*) *The day we live in* :—Esther had her God-appointed work. You and I have ours. I. IN ORDER TO MEET THE SPECIAL DEMAND OF THIS AGE YOU NEED TO BE AN UNMISTAKABLE, AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN. Of half-and-half Christians we do not want any more. A great deal of the piety of the day is too exclusive. It hides itself. It needs more fresh air, more outdoor exercise. There are many Christians who are giving their entire life to self-examination. They are feeling their pulses to see what is the condition of their spiritual health. How long would a man have robust physical health if he kept all the day feeling his pulse instead of going out into active, earnest, every-day work? I was once amid the wonderful, bewitching cactus growths of North Carolina. I never was more bewildered with the beauty of flowers, and yet when I would take up one of these cactuses and pull the leaves apart the beauty was all gone. You could hardly tell that it had ever been a flower. And there are a great many Christian people in this day just pulling apart their Christian experiences to see what there is in them, and there is nothing left in them. This style of self-examination is a damage instead of an advantage to their Christian character. I remember when I was a boy I used to have a small piece in the garden that I called my own, and I planted corn there, and every few days I would pull it up to see how fast it was growing. Now, there are a great many Christian people in this day whose self-examination merely amounts to the pulling up of that which they only yesterday or the day before planted. If you want to have a stalwart Christian character, plant it right out of doors in the great field of Christian usefulness. The century plant is wonderfully suggestive and wonderfully beautiful, but I never look at it without thinking of its parsimony. It lets whole generations go by before it puts forth one blossom; so I have really more admiration when I see the dewy tears in the blue eyes of the violets, for they come every spring. Time is going by so rapidly that we cannot afford to be idle. A recent statistician says that human life now has an average of only thirty-two years. From these thirty-two years you must subtract all the time you take for sleep, and the taking of food, and recreation; that will leave you about sixteen years. From those sixteen years you must subtract all the time that you are necessarily engaged in the earning of a livelihood; that will leave you about eight years. From those eight years you must take all the days, and weeks, and months—all the length of time that is passed in sickness; leaving you about one year in which to work for God. II. To meet the duties this age demands of you, you must, ON THE ONE HAND, AVOID RECKLESS ICONOCLASM, AND ON THE OTHER HAND, NOT STICK TOO MUCH TO THINGS BECAUSE THEY ARE OLD. Do not take hold of a thing merely because it is new. Do not adhere to anything merely because it is old. There is not a single enterprise of the Church or the world but has sometime been scoffed at. There was a time when men derided even Bible societies, and when a few young men met in Massachusetts and organised the first missionary society ever organised in this country there went laughter and ridicule all around the Christian Church. They said the undertaking was preposterous. And so also the work of Jesus Christ was assailed. People cried out, "Who ever heard of such theories of ethics and government? Who ever noticed such a style of preaching as Jesus had?" Many have thought that the chariot of God's truth would fall to pieces if it once got out of the old rut. And so there are those who have no patience with anything like improvement in church architecture, or with anything like good, hearty, earnest church singing, and they deride any form of religious discussion which goes down walking among every-day men rather than that which makes an excursion on rhetorical stilts. Oh, that the Church of God would wake up to an adaptability of work! There is work for you to do, and for me to do, in order to this grand accomplishment. Here is my pulpit, and I preach in it. Your pulpit is the bank. Your pulpit is the store. Your pulpit is the editorial chair. Your pulpit is the anvil. Your pulpit is the house scaffolding. Your pulpit

is the mechanic's shop. III. In order to be qualified to meet your duty in this particular age, YOU WANT UNBOUNDED FAITH IN THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRUTH AND THE OVERTHROW OF WICKEDNESS. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Women's duty to the age* (a woman's sermon to women):—What is women's duty? It is to be gentle, true, devoted. It is to be as strong as it is in her to be and as beautiful as possible. It is to be a discreet keeper at home, a willing performer of out-of-sight duties, a helpmeet to man, a mother in Israel, a handmaid of the Lord. It is a fact past denial that women do exert an immense influence in the world. An English bishop has said, "A nation is what its women make it." No man is so strong, or so wise, or so good, that he can afford to do without the gentle remonstrance, the inspiring plaudits, the pure and bright life-example of the women of his family. There is great need now for "women who understand the times and know what the people ought to do." Reforms are necessary, and in making them we shall certainly have to begin with ourselves. Better women will make better homes, better homes will make better society, better society will raise the tone of public opinion, and influence those who frame and execute our laws. Let us learn from the example of Queen Esther how to become better. I. LET US RECOGNISE THE FACT THAT AS SHE HAD HER OPPORTUNITY, SO HAVE WE OURS. If we look around us we must see how God brings certain persons into certain circumstances because they are most fit to be there. One in a family converted. One in a family to whom has been given the seeing eyes and the understanding heart. One in a family more clever, more strong, more amiable than the rest. Why? That that one may fulfil the duties, and meet, not shirk, the responsibilities of that position. II. LET US LEARN THAT THE FACT OF A DUTY BEING DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS IS NO EXCUSE FOR OUR FAILING TO PERFORM IT HONESTLY. III. WE MAY LEARN THE SOURCE OF TRUE STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE. IV. WE MAY LEARN THAT HAVING SEEN OUR DUTY, AND ASKED GOD'S GUIDANCE AND BLESSING, WE SHOULD FEARLESSLY GO THROUGH WITH OUR TASK. Fearlessly, but wisely, according to the light that is given to us. Esther fortified her soul with trust in God, and then used her own common sense. Esther's judgment was equal to her courage. She knew how to "bide her time." (*Marianne Farningham.*) *Public duty*:—This message sets before us three weighty principles. I. THAT GOD'S CAUSE IS INDEPENDENT OF OUR EFFORTS. Mordecai believed that the record of God's faithfulness in the past gave the assurance that in some way of His own He would prevent the extinction of His people. This is an attitude of mind we should seek to cultivate in reference to the cause of Christ. This cause has the omnipotence of God behind it. He has promised Christ the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, and, whoever helps and whoever hinders, His word shall not be broken. One man with truth and the promise of God at his back is stronger than an opposing world. The cause of Christ has come through crises when persecution has tried to exterminate it. It has passed through periods of scepticism when learning and cleverness have fancied that they have blown it away as an exploded superstition. Men have had to stand up for it single-handed against principalities and powers, but with it at their backs they have been stronger than all that were against them. II. THAT WE ARE NOT INDEPENDENT OF IT. We cannot hold back from Christ's cause with impunity. It can do without us, but we cannot do without it. If religion is a reality, to live without it is to suppress and ultimately destroy the most noble part of our being. To live without God is to renounce the profoundest and most influential experience which life contains. If Christ is the central figure in history, and if the movement He has set agoing is the central current of history, then to be dissociated with His aims is to be a cipher or perhaps even a minus quantity in the sum of good. III. CHRIST'S CAUSE OFFERS THE NOBLEST EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR GIFTS. It is a transfiguring moment when the thought first penetrates a man that the purpose for which he has received his gifts is to help humanity and the cause of Christ in the world. A man enters upon his spiritual majority when he ceases to be the most important object in the world to himself, and sees outside an object which makes him forget himself and irresistibly draws him on. The problem of the degraded and disinherited is pressing on the attention of intelligent minds with an urgency which cannot be disregarded. The heathen world is opening everywhere to the influences of the gospel. If you would run in response to this call, do not neglect the preparation. Knowledge is the armour of light in which the battles of progress have to be fought. Life for God in public must be balanced by life with God in secret. (*James Stalker, D.D.*) *Woman's opportunities*:—It has been observed that with every great emergency

God has raised up a man equal to the emergency. As God called Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, David, and Daniel for a special work, so He called Alfred the Great, William the Conqueror, Washington and Lincoln. As God inspired Bezaleel to invent cunning works, so to-day He raises up such men as an Edison to solve and use mysterious forces of nature. Every age and every emergency has had the men needed for the age and the emergency. The apostles met the demand of their age. The Church Fathers did a peculiar work for which they were fitted. Luther came upon the scene just when needed. This is also true of all great men who have become the world's leaders and saviours. I have spoken of man, but what has been said of him is equally as true of woman. She may not have been so conspicuous a figure, but she was none the less important. When Samuel's mother consecrated her boy to the service of Jehovah, had she no part in determining the destiny of Israel? When the mother and grandmother instructed young Timothy in the Scriptures, did they have no part in the establishment of the Apostolic Church? When Martha and Mary made a home for the Saviour, a place where He could lay His head, did they not perform an important part? When the mother of Augustine taught and conversed with him about Scriptures, did she not do much toward making Augustinian confessions possible? The mother of Alfred the Great was his first teacher and always his most trusted counsellor. The mother of Henry VII. of England did more than her royal son for the dissemination of learning and the establishment of colleges. The rise of Methodism goes back beyond John or Charles Wesley to their noble mother. Who familiar with the life of Herschel and his sister can doubt that much of his greatness rests upon her co-operation and untiring labour? The name of Joan of Arc suggests what woman can do on the field of war. Of every woman mentioned it might be said, "Thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." The breadth of woman's influence is widening. She is the strongest social force of to-day. Life is her key-board which she may sweep with a master's touch if she will. To woman all doors are open. She may enter and win her bread without being touched by snobbishness and caste. The entrance of woman into the various occupations has had the tendency to stop the growing boorishness which was manifesting itself in business circles. It is slowly but surely leading men to recognise the one great work of life not to be money getting, but character building. She is giving a shading to the values of life; hence we are beginning to place things more nearly where they belong. In temperance reform woman has been, and is still, the leader. Time and again she has undergone the scoffs of rowdies and the ridicule of pot-house politicians, but feeling that God called her to the kingdom for such an hour as this, she has risked popularity and society influence in defence of home and children. The most important work in all this widening field of woman's activity is the evangelisation of the world. It is of God. It touches man's deepest need. It brings him the blessings of a Christian civilisation and the assurance of life eternal. It is therefore the highest service woman can enter into. There is nothing that will yield greater joy or larger returns. (*W. C. Burns, D.D.*) *The Church and the present crisis*:—I ask you to observe—

I. THAT A CRISIS HAS COME OF OVERWHELMING IMPORTANCE IN THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE WORLD. It is a crisis of magnificent opportunity and also of infinite responsibility. It is a crisis in which unparalleled success may be achieved for the glory of God, or where Churches may be utterly broken and destroyed by their unfaithfulness and disobedience. It is, indeed, the crisis of history; for never have such opportunities for the evangelisation of our own country, or of the heathen abroad, been presented; never have difficulties been so remarkably removed, and never were calls for help so loud and piercing as just now. That I may help you to realise this truth, let me recall a few facts to your remembrance. Within the lifetime of some now here the world was practically closed against the extension of Protestant Christianity. Mohammedanism sealed itself against the truth of Jesus; and the heathen nations of the earth were walled around by prejudice or by prohibitory laws. China and Japan were hermetically sealed against the entrance of Christianity. And now, with our scientific discoveries, our mechanical inventions, our great social movements and combinations, we are sweeping along with a rapidity which it is almost bewildering to contemplate. All this is wonderful beyond realisation. Never did the human race move so quickly. Time after time have the maps of the world been altered and reformed in our day. Now with a startling swiftness the moral map of the world is changing, and no one can presage what will be the next great movement that will

command the wonder of mankind. In all these revolutions and developments of the hour, what institution ought to be more concerned than the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? The Church of to-day is the arbiter of the world's future. It is called on to save idolatrous nations awakening from the sleep of ages from relapsing into the abyss of scepticism. It is summoned to sanctify and beautify the growing intelligence and wealth of barbarous peoples, by suffusing them with the glory of Christian holiness and truth. It is destined to become the harbinger and bestower of liberty, of enfranchisement, of spiritual expansion to classes and masses of the race who have hitherto groaned in bondage and shame. II. WHAT IS REQUIRED FROM THE CHURCH TO MEET THE PRESSING CRISIS. We have a Church of the times; we need a Church for the times. The Church of the times is far too much formal, aiming at gentility and fashion; the Church for the times must be spiritual and powerful, aiming at evangelistic aggression and the conversion of the world. If the Church will seek a new baptism and enter on a new career of aggressiveness, how soon the most glorious prophecies of time shall be fulfilled it is impossible to realise. "A short work will God make upon the earth." A very brief period sufficed for the destruction of Sennacherib's host and for the downfall of Babylon. It was a short time only that was required for the humbling of Napoleon's pride. And if the Church of God, with her splendour of learning, her ripeness of intellect, her boundless wealth, and her unparalleled vantage-ground, be only faithful and obedient, and ready for the avalanche of opportunities which now present themselves, the progress of the gospel must be far more rapid and glorious than ever before. (*W. J. Townsend.*) *Man born for an end.*—While we continue on earth we are obliged to a sort of spiritual speculation; to judge as well as we can, but to remain uncertain; to take the most important steps in the dark; to pursue our course like vessels in a mist, cautiously and fearfully, having no clear view of the coast by which we sail, but only catching here and there a dubious sign of where we are, and whither we are tending. This acting on venture is emphatically taught in the text. Observe—I. THAT ALL GENERATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE CREATED FOR THEIR OWN END. We cannot doubt that it was with a definite design that God set up the pillars of the universe. And so with its continued existence. The mighty river of human life which gushed forth in Adam, flows, we are sure, to some goal and makes to some issue. God beholds the vast tide of being sweeping on to a glorious consummation, which He perceives now, and we shall see hereafter, to have been the point to which the current tended from the beginning. This will appear from the continual changes which take place. Why do not men's habits remain always the same? Why does one generation abandon the principles and tastes of its predecessor? How is it that the nineteenth century is not like the sixteenth? Continual change intimates that we are travelling on to an appointed destination. To suppose otherwise would be to suppose God to be a God, not of order, but of confusion. We see traces of this in the several dispensations of religion which God has revealed. The law prepared the way for the gospel; all the wars and conquests of Rome brought the human family into a condition the most favourable for the preaching of the apostles. The Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian dispensations, appear to follow in manifest order, each working up and fading into that which came next. What the world is now is a necessary step to what the world is to be. And what is true of periods of a thousand years is true also of each period of fourscore years. Every generation of human kind is born for an end. We are apt to consider overmuch individual life, not the life of the universe. We see unnumbered ripples on the stream of time, coming and going apparently without cause or effect: God beholds in each ripple an onward flow; that not one could be withdrawn without injury to the symmetry of the great whole. There arises out of all this a very solemn character attaching to our tenure of life. We have our part in a stupendous work, whose limits we cannot discern. We have been launched into being just at the moment when we were wanted. Not to do our own pleasure, but to fulfil a part in working out God's counsels. This is the solemn vocation of each generation. II. VERY COMMONLY A MAN'S LIFE WORKS UP TO, OR HANGS UPON A CERTAIN CRITICAL MOMENT. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Oh! they are words which may well sound in the ears of the soul, at many a sick-bed, at many an event of inferior importance in our earthly career. How did Abraham live seventy years in his father's house an ordinary man, till the mysterious moment when the voice said to him, "Come out from thy kindred"? and on what he did at that strange bidding hung not only his, but the

world's history! How did all David's life turn upon the incident, that at the moment when he chanced to visit his brethren in the camp, at that moment Goliath came out with his defiance of the living God! And so with ourselves: there are in almost every man's life turning-points upon which all hangs. Who cannot look back and discern times and seasons when, if he had acted otherwise, his whole after-life would have been altered? And thus in religion—whether a man be lost or saved will frequently depend upon a step taken at a particular crisis; all subsequent steps grow out of that step. True that every hour of our lives is an hour when good and evil are set before us. There are strong temptations occurring at intervals, which, well got over, leave a man's heart for a long time at liberty; which, if not resisted, lead from deceit to deceit—from sin to sin—until there is no getting the feet out of the net. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Sometimes a man's whole life may be traced afterwards to have led up to one such moment. His education, his tastes, his companionships may all be discerned to have been the instrumentality of drawing him into the wilderness for his one great conflict with the adversary. (*J. B. Woodford, M.A.*) *Every one has his peculiar work*:—The thought to a devout man is always supreme—thou art come here for such a time—for such a purpose. Thy steps are ordered of the Lord. Thy talents, thy character, thy place in society have all been shaped and settled, with a special adaptation to the Divine purpose. "Nothing walks with aimless feet." As in the human body every function, so in the Divine government every Christian is placed to do a work which none else can do, and his Lord's eye is ever on him. While this is his victory over every base fear, and discouraging thought, his faith, his confidence that God has called him to his proper work, will sustain him in it. (*Homilist.*) *Emergency*:—Let us learn from the appeal of Mordecai to Esther that opportunity is the test of character. "Who knoweth," he said, "whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" It was the tidal time of her life, the great opportunity of her existence, and the question was whether she would rise to the occasion and make it subservient to her greatness or whether it would sweep her away with it as weak, irresolute, and unequal to the emergency. Happily she stood the test, and by her courageous self-devotion proved that she was worthy of the affection with which her foster-father regarded her. Character is revealed only by being tested, and that test often comes in the shape of sudden elevation. The common idea, I know, is that character is tested only by affliction; but I am not sure if prosperity be not a more searching acid than adversity. Now, this is a truth which ought never to be lost sight of by any one among us. What we shall do in a crisis depends upon what we have been doing all along in the ordinary routine of our lives, when no such emergency was on us. We cannot cut ourselves off from the past. There is a continuity in our lives, such that the habits which we have formed in the days that are gone do largely condition for us our resources in the present. Every day we live we are either adding to that constant element in us which constitutes our truest selves, and so increasing that reserve force on which in times of emergency we can draw with advantage, or we are expending with imprudent prodigality our spiritual capital, and living morally beyond our means, so that when a crisis comes we cannot stand it, and must inevitably go down. The careful man who husbands his earnings and stores them in some safe bank is able, when a time of adversity comes upon him, to tide over the difficulty by breaking in upon the surplus which he has accumulated. We all see and admit that in the case of deposits that are made outside of ourselves, and which are not us so much as they are ours. But we too frequently fail to take note of it in respect to the character deposits or drafts which we are constantly making on or from ourselves—meaning, thereby, our souls. If, as each morning dawns, we meet every duty as it calls us, or face every temptation as it attacks us, as a duty to be performed, or a temptation to be resisted out of regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall thereby add to our store of strength for the confronting of what may yet be before us; but if we go through our lives seeking only our own ease or the gratification of our appetites, or the indulgence of some evil ambition, we are, in all that, only weakening ourselves, and making ourselves so much the less to be relied upon when we come into our kingdom, and have to face a time like that which Esther was here required to meet. Travellers tell us of a tree in tropical countries, the inner parts of which are sometimes eaten out by ants, while the bark and leaves remain apparently as fresh as ever, and it is not till the tornado comes and sweeps it down that its weakness is discovered. But the storm did not make

the tree weak : it only revealed how weak it really was ; and its feebleness was the result of the gnawings of innumerable insects through a long course of years. In like manner, if we let our characters be honeycombed by neglect of common duty, or by daily indulgence in secret sin, or by habitual yielding to some temptation, we cannot expect anything else than failure when the testing hour shall come. What an importance thus attaches to what I may call the commonplace of life ! We are apt, when we read such a history as that before us, to exclaim, "How tremendously important these grand outstanding opportunities of doing some great service are !" And no doubt they are all that we can say they are. But then we forget that the bearing in these of the individuals to whom they have been given will depend on the characters which they have been forming and strengthening in the ordinary routine life of every day before they came into their kingdom. It is out of the commonplace, well and faithfully done, that the heroic is born ; and the splendid devotion of Esther to the welfare of her people would never have been heard of had she not meekly learned and diligently practised the lessons of her girlhood which Mordecai taught her in his pious home. The prize-taker at the end of the year is the daily plodder all through it. The gaining of his diploma by a student depends, no doubt, on the manner in which he passes his final examination. That is for him the equivalent of this occasion in the life of Esther ; but then the proficiency which at that time he manifests does itself depend on the steady, constant perseverance which he has maintained in his class work from hour to hour throughout his course. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Junctures.—Nor does this prophetic utterance of Mordecai apply simply to our position and responsibility as a nation, but also to our circumstances and obligations as individuals. When a ship is moving in a certain course, and there is descried a wrecked crew and passengers tossed in their little boat, or imprisoned on some lonely island, the captain might well consider whether he has not been brought into the course which he has taken for "such a time"—such an occasion of humanity and benevolent action as that—and would be censured if he did not avail himself of it for the rescue of the perishing. In every life there are junctures when the same reflection should have a place in our minds. It may be an orphan family cast in the way of a wealthy relative whom he has the opportunity of taking under his protection and guardianship, or an infidel assault on the vital doctrines of Christianity, when just such talents and faith as we may possess may be what is needful to repel it, or an injury being done to a neighbour when, from our position and influence, interference on our part may be all that is called for to prevent it. In a thousand different ways may we have to consider whether God has not so placed us in providence as to be specially qualified and circumstanced for the accomplishment of particular works of faith and labours of love. (*T. McEwan.*)

Our opportunity.—As I read Captain Mahan's masterly and noble "Life of Nelson" the other day with Esther in my mind, I could not but mark with my pencil such things as these in that great sea-captain who had such a hand in setting England up on her high opportunity. "Opportunity," says the excellent biographer, "flitted by, but Nelson was always ready and grasped it." Again, and again, and again the same thing is said of Nelson, till it shines out above all his other great gifts, and becomes the best description of his great genius. But we are not great queens like Esther, with the deliverance of Israel in our hands ; nor are we great sea-captains like Lord Nelson, with the making of modern England in our hands. No. But we are what we are, and what God has made us to be and to do. We all have our own circle set round us of God, and out of our own circle our own opportunities continually arise. Our opportunities may not be so far-reaching or so high-sounding as some other men's are ; but they are our opportunities, and they are far-reaching enough for us. Our opportunities are life or death to us and to others ; they are salvation or condemnation to our immortal souls ; and is that not circle and opportunity enough ? We are all tempted every day to say, "If I only were Esther ! If I only had a great opportunity, would I not rise to it ! Would I not speak out at any risk ! Would I not do a work, and win a name, and deliver Israel, and glorify God !" Did you ever read of Clemens, and Fervidus, and Eugenia, and their imaginary piety ? Clemens had his head full of all manner of hypothetical liberalities. He kept proposing to himself continually what he would do if he only had a great estate. Come to thy senses, Clemens. Do not talk what thou wouldst be sure to do if thou wast an angel, but think what thou canst do as a man. Remember what the poor widow did with her one mite, and go and do likewise. Fervidus, again, is only sorry he is not a minister. What a reformation

he would have worked in his own life by this time, and in his whole parish, if only God had made him a minister! He would have saved his own soul, and the souls of his people, in season and out of season. Do you believe yourself, Fervidus? You are deceiving yourself. You hire a cabman to drive you to church, and he sits in the wet street waiting for you, and you never ask him how he manages to live with no Sabbath. It is not asked of you, Fervidus, to live and die a martyr; but just to visit your cabman's wife and children, and have family worship with them on a Sabbath night like you would have done if you had been a minister. Eugenia, again, is a young lady full of the most devout dispositions. If she ever has a family she will let you see family religion. She is more scandalised than she can tell you at the way that some of her schoolfellows have married heathens, and at the life they lead without God's worship in their newly-married houses. But, Eugenia, you may never be married so as to show married people how to live. At the same time, you have a maid already, all to yourself. She dresses you for church, and then you leave her to have as little religion as a Hottentot. You turn her away when she displeases you, and you hire another, and so on, till you will die unmarried, and without a godly household, and your circle will be dissolved and your opportunity for ever lost. Your maid, and her sister, and her widowed mother, and her ill-doing brother, and her sweetheart, they all are your circle at present, and your opportunity is fast flitting by; and, because it is so near you every day, you do not discover it. Oh, Eugenia, full to the eyes of so many vain imaginations! You never heard of Eugenia, and Fervidus, and Clemens before, and do not know where to find them. But no matter. You and I are Fervidus and Eugenia ourselves. You and I are Mordecai and Esther ourselves. We are in that circle, and amid those opportunities, the very best that all the power, and all the wisdom, and all the love of God can provide for us. (*A. Whyte, D.D.*)

Vers. 15-17. **Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan.**—*The crisis in the life of Esther*:—The spectacle presented reminds us—I. THAT IN NEITHER PLACE NOR FORTUNE HAS ANY ONE SECURITY AGAINST TRIAL AND DANGER. The palace may be a prison to its inmate, the hut cannot exclude the approaches of a grief. II. THAT ONE REASON NOT ONLY FOR GIFTS OF PLACE AND FORTUNE, BUT FOR EXPERIENCES OF TROUBLE ALSO, MUST BE THAT WE MAY HELP OTHERS IN THEIR PERILS. Power and opportunity measure obligation. Even sorrow and peril as they enrich and mellow the nature, enhance the power to help and bless. III. THAT RISK AND DIFFICULTY DO NOT EXEMPT FROM DUTY OR RELEASE FROM OBLIGATION. It is told of the Duke of Wellington that, in one of his campaigns, an officer awoke him to say to him that a certain enterprise to be carried into effect that night was impossible. As the officer was going on to give reasons for this opinion, the Duke replied, "Bring me my order-book." Turning over its leaves, he said, "It is not at all impossible; see, it is down in the order-book." Whereupon he lay down to sleep again. Risks are not to be unprovided for. Difficulties are not to be despised; but had there been none to run great risks, to undertake in the face of great hardships, prophets and apostles had been few. There had been no Elijah or Daniel, no John the Baptist or Paul the apostle, no Luther or Knox. IV. THAT HELPING TO SAVE OTHERS IS OFTEN THE BEST WAY TO INSURE OUR OWN SALVATION. The teaching of experience and history is that mere self-seeking is self-ruin. There is such a thing as the solidarity of human interests. The capitalist thrives best when he promotes the weal of the labourer, the labourer when he regards the interests of his employer. To save my children I must help to save my neighbour's. To one who inquired if the heathen can be saved if we do not give them the gospel, the apt reply was, "A much more practical question for us is whether we can be saved if we do not help to give it them." An eminent statesman early professed his Christian faith, and for some years maintained a godly walk. After a time he ceased to be religiously active, and allowed his light to be hid. While not renouncing his faith, yet his Christian character did neither himself nor Christ any honour. One evening he dropped into a little school-house gathering, and at the close he introduced himself to the preacher, and after an earnest conversation with him, he said, "Sir, I would give all the fame I now have, or expect to have, for the assurance of that hope of which you have spoken to-night." To be ourselves saved we must help to save others. V. OF THE TRUE SOURCE OF COURAGE AND HELP IN PERPLEXITY AND ILL. Although no distinct mention of prayer is made, yet it is evidently implied. It is an instinct of the human heart to resort to the Hearer of Prayer. In its distress the soul cries unto God. When a great steamship was

hourly expected to sink in mid-ocean we are told that all on board gave themselves to prayer. VI. THAT GOD'S PROVIDENCE IS ALWAYS OVER HIS PEOPLE FOR GOOD. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *Difficulties cleared up:*—1. Esther's heart was moved not to shrink from manifest duty. "Add to your faith, virtue," courage, a manly and determined purpose to carry out its calls to their utmost extent. Stop not to ask leave of circumstances, of personal convenience or indolent self-indulgence, but go forward in your appointed work. How prone we are to shrink from disagreeable or dangerous duty. How many excuses we are able to frame for our neglect. How easy it becomes to satisfy our sinful hearts that God will not require that which it is so difficult or so dangerous to perform. Fly from no duty when the word and providence of God call you forward. Go on, and trust yourself to God. 2. Esther's heart was moved to sincere dependence on God. Prayer seems the natural voice of danger and sorrow. The ancient philosopher said, "If a man would learn to pray, let him go to sea." The hour of the tempest will be to multitudes a new lesson in their relations to God. When men are in affliction and trouble they are easily led to cry unto God. Esther and her maidens prayed. What if the husband does not or will not bless his household? Cannot the mother and the wife collect her children and her maidens for prayer? 3. The king's heart was moved to listen and to accept her. The clouds have passed, and the Lord whom she loved has given her a token for good. This is the power of prayer, the work of providence, the influence of grace. The king's heart is in the hands of the Lord, and as the rivers of water, He has turned it according to His will. What a lesson in providence is this! The same power which leads to prayer, and supports us in prayer, at the same time works over other minds and other things to make an answer completely ready for our enjoyment. How easily can God remove all the stumbling-blocks out of the way of His children! "What art thou, O, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Anticipated difficulties suddenly vanish; enemies whom we had expected are not found; the things which apparently threatened our hurt turn out to our advantage; and blessings which we had not dared to hope for crowd around our path. Thus Paul found it at Rome. 4. God moved Esther's heart to great wisdom and prudence in her management of the undertaking she had assumed. Peculiar wisdom and skill often are imparted to us in answer to prayers for the accomplishment of the work of the Lord. Our dependence and prayer have no tendency to make us headlong or rash. We are still to employ all the proper means and agencies which our utmost wisdom will suggest to attain the end we have in view. True piety in the exercise of its faith and love and hope towards God, is the highest wisdom. It unites all the wisest calculation and effort of man with all the goodness and power of God. It is a fellowship, a partnership with God in which He furnishes all the capital, and employs our sanctified labours alone; in which we strive to be faithful, and He promises to bless. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Esther's petition:*—I. WE NOTE THE FACT THAT EVERY ONE HAS SOME SPECIAL MISSION. Esther's special mission was to avert the destruction which threatened her people. Is it true that all have some such peculiar charge? We read of the decisive battles of the world and their commanders; of the dominating philosophies and their masters; of the ruling arts and their teachers; of the controlling religions and their high-priests; of the great reforms and their leaders. Yet these elect ones are but as a handful of sands to the grains which make the shore. For the rest, mere existence seems to be its own end and object. But it is not so. A persistent pressure is in and on every heart to enter into secret communication with God, and linking its weakness with His strength, exerts a blessed influence which, like the sound-waves, goes on endlessly. That hour of audience with its Maker is its greatest possibility. For that, at least, it has a special mission. From Him it receives what almost might be called "sealed orders." Saul of Tarsus was given his at Damascus, and so he went to Jerusalem, not knowing how they would read as he opened them there. So every Christian goes his way, till we find Henry Martyn preaching Christ to the Hindus, Isaac Newton solving the problem of the apple's fall, Leigh Richmond writing "The Dairyman's Daughter," George Müller erecting his orphanage, Mary Lyon opening collegiate doors to her sisters, and Abraham Lincoln issuing the emancipation proclamation. And though not yet widely observed, the prayers, counsels, and inspirations by which gifted souls have roused, led, and saved society originated in the closet, and kitchen, and field, where the godly parent or teacher has fulfilled a holy and particular mission. The successful general is fêted and praised. Every soldier in the ranks is just as essential to the victory. Every individual, however

insignificant, has his momentous obligation. The child's hand in the lighthouse tower may turn the helm of a whole navy, that it is not strewn along the reefs.

II. **NOTE THE FACT THAT LOVE FOR OTHERS IS WORTHY LOVE OF SELF.** To lose one's love of life, comfort, and honour in the greater love of the life, comfort, and honour of his kin is counted the highest of human virtues. Mettus Curtius, in spurring his horse into the yawning chasm to save Rome, was not the first nor the last to hold the welfare of the many above that of the individual. "We have no religion to export," meanly argued a legislator against the Act of incorporation of the American Board. "Religion," was the profound reply, "is a commodity which the more we export the more we have." III. **NOTE THE NEED OF TIMELY PREPARATION FOR OUR WORK.** Then—always—the idea has prevailed that united petitions, like the volume of the sea, would be mighty, while the solitary plea, like the single drop, would be null. Jesus promised answer when two or three were agreed in their request. Spiritual momentum, like physical, seems to be proportioned to the quantity of soul multiplied by its eagerness. The Church has upborne its ministers, and made them speak with authority when it has been praying with them. Individual preparation must also be made. Esther must fast no less than her people. She does all she can to pave the way for a favourable reception of her cause. Jacob's present of flocks and herds, sent forward to placate Esau, with the greeting "and behold he is behind us," fitly represents the forethought and tact which oftenest gains its end. We may call it "policy"; but what harm, if it be not bribery? IV. **NOTE THE REWARD OF VENTURING IN A GOOD CAUSE.** The supreme hazard gains the supreme desire. The fearless champion of a full and free religious life oftenest triumphs. St. Patrick before the Druid chieftain; Wickliffe before the angry bishops, and Luther before the Diet, succeed, when others of as noble wish, but of less courage, must have failed. Into the densest heathenism the soldier of the Cross penetrates, and a redeemed people build their monument of thanksgiving, not for his piety simply, but for his bravery. Holy causes seem often to clothe their advocates in such shining dress, that assailing powers are abashed at the sight. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

A suggestion and its operation:—We have here illustrated—I. **HUMAN OBLIGATION TO SUGGESTION.** By far the majority of the imports into the soul and life of the world are marked "*viâ suggestion.*" As the present holds in it the past, so suggestion is the essential of progress, the root of accomplishment, the spur of duty. Compute, if you can, the poet's debt to suggestion; Burns and the mouse, &c. The prime factor of invention is suggestion. Men see something, hear something, touch something, and in a flash an idea springs full-armed and captures the mind. The eye suggests the telescope, the heart the engine. Is naval architecture to be completely revolutionised? Is the new leviathan to be the future type of ocean steamers? Subtract the suggestion of a whale's back, and what then? Human experience is largely the outcome of suggestion. Mordecai could not command Queen Esther, but he could pace in sackcloth before the palace gate. He could send a message to the queen making an entreating, pitiful suggestion. II. **THE STRUGGLE WHICH ENSUES IN CARRYING A SUGGESTION OVER INTO PRACTICE.** Carlyle has said, "Transitions are ever full of pain." Thus the eagle when it moults is sickly, and to attain his new beak must harshly dash off the old one upon the rocks. There is no more critical experience for a human soul than when a suggestion lodges in it; especially when it means the readjustment of all our spiritual furniture, burying of cherished plans, crucifying selfish ambition, stripping off desire, defying danger, releasing power, and making us risk the sarcasm, the scorn which are ever the pall-bearers of failure. This gives scope for the true heroism of life, a heroism which finds its choicest exhibit, not in those who have the leverage of a great enthusiasm and who are consciously beneath the eyes of a great multitude, but in those duels between souls and suggestions fought out in the solitude of the human breast. Thus John Knox, when summoned in public assembly to the ministry, rushes from the congregation in tears to enter, in his solitary chamber, upon a struggle which should last for days, but the outcome of which should be a face set like a flint. Thus Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel shrink and wrestle but obey. Thus Esther hesitates and excuses herself on the ground of personal danger, till at last the suggestion rides over her soul roughshod, and in the heroism of a great surrender she declares, "So will I go in unto the king . . . and if I perish, I perish."

III. **THE AVAILING OF ONE'S SELF OF ALLIES IN THE EXECUTION OF A DETERMINED PURPOSE.** Esther made three allies. 1. With herself. She knew her royal spouse was impulsive; she knew he was susceptible. And so, bent on subduing him, she

bedecks herself with jewels, and right royally attired stands in the court. Impulse leaps, susceptibility flames: "She obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre." 2. With her husband. In the execution of a worthy purpose one may find and may avail himself of the ally which resides in that which is to be overcome. It makes a deal of difference how you take hold of a thing. The handle of a pail is the water-carrier's ally; he may despise it and fare worse! Said one of the keenest logicians in this country, "In entering upon a debate, find, to begin with, common ground with your antagonist, something you can both accept—a definition, a proposition, or if nothing else, the state of the weather." Here is a deep truth. There are natural allies in the enemy's country; it is strategy, it is generalship, to get into communication with them. Esther recognised her ally, and so she approached her husband, not with entreaty or rebuke, but with invitation. The suggestion of a feast prepared under her direction in honour of his majesty was the warder within the castle of the fickle king's soul, who would not fail to raise the portcullis of his will to admit the entrance of a queen's desire. 3. With time. There is a ministry in wise delay; haste is not of necessity success. Is procrastination the thief of time? Then precipitation is the assassin of it. To work and wait—to wait for the order, the chance, the moment to strike, was a lesson Esther had learned by heart, and so she refused to unbosom her petition till the hour struck. When Leyden was besieged by the Spaniards the inhabitants sent word to the enemy that they would eat their left arms and fight with their right before they would surrender. At last, in their extremity, they told the governor they must surrender. "Eat me, but don't surrender," was the heroic reply. Then some one thought of cutting the dykes and flooding the enemy's camp; they did it, rushed upon the enemy in the confusion, and out of apparent disaster snatched a glorious victory. (*Nehemiah Boynton.*)

Esther's petition.—**LEARN**—I. THAT IN THE EXIGENCIES OF RELIGION AND OF GOD'S KINGDOM, THE CHURCH MAY DEMAND OF US THE DISREGARD OF PERSONAL SAFETY. II. THAT WHEN GOD GIVES US A MISSION WHICH WE ARE WISE ENOUGH TO SEE AND TO FULFIL, THEN WE MAY HUMBLY EXPECT THAT HE WILL ACCOMPLISH BLESSED RESULTS BY THE FEIBLEST INSTRUMENTS. (*W. E. Boggs, D.D.*) **I also and my maidens will fast likewise.**—*Mistress and maid*:—Some, it is probable, of Esther's maids were heathens when they came into her service. Yet we find her promising that they would fast. She can answer for them, as Joshua for his household, that they would serve the Lord. If mistresses were as zealous as Queen Esther for the honour of God and the conversion of sinners, they would bestow pains upon the instruction and religious improvement of their female servants. If women may gain to Christ their own husbands by their good conversation, may they not also gain the souls of their servants? and if they are gained to Christ, they are gained to themselves also. (*G. Lawson.*) *Fasting is in itself a prayer*:—It is remarkable that nothing is here said about prayer, but fasting was in itself a prayer; for it was not a form put on from without, but the natural expression of the inner emotion, and as an application to God, it is to be explained much as we do the touching of the Saviour by the woman, who in that way sought her cure. Words are signs, just as fasting is a sign. That which is essential in either is genuineness. God does not look to the words themselves, any more than He does to the fasting in itself. He has regard only to that which the soul expresses, either by the one or through the other. The touch of the soul of the woman went to the Master's heart through her touching of His garment with her fingers; and the yearning of the soul of Esther, through her fasting, made its appeal to Jehovah, even though she did not breathe His name. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) **And so will I go in unto the king.**—*Prayer accompanied by appropriate use of means*:—She will not think that her duty is done when she has prayed and fasted. She will seek, by the use of proper means, to obtain that blessing which she has been asking. The insincerity of our prayers is too often discovered by our sloth and cowardice. We ask blessings from God, and, as if He were bound to confer them, not according to His own will, but according to ours, we take no care to use those means which He hath appointed for obtaining them, or we do not use them with requisite diligence. (*G. Lawson.*) *Courage to face difficulties*:—There are two kinds of courage—the mere animal courage, which results from well-strung nerves, and is exerted by impulse rather than by reflection; and the moral courage, which, on a calm calculation of difficulties, and of the path of duty, will face the difficulties and prosecute the path of duty at any hazard, even at the risk of life itself. It will often be found that men are deficient in the latter of these

qualities, while they are remarkable for the former. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Esther's resolve*.—I. THE PREPARATION: fasting and prayer. 1. Fasting is abused by the Church of Rome, therefore disused by many who belong to the Church of Christ. Deep feeling will make fasting natural. Moses (Exod. xxxiv. 28), Elijah (1 Kings xix. 7, 8), Christ (Matt. iv. 2), fasted forty days each. See *Ezra's fast* (Ezra viii. 21, 23). Directions how to fast (Matt. vi. 16-18). Paul was given to fasting (2 Cor. vi. 4, 5; xi. 27). Fasting is useless without faith. The Pharisee (Luke xviii. 12). 2. Prayer. 'Three days' special prayer. The Jews in their synagogues. Esther in the palace. With what humility, sorrowful confession, and earnestness did they pray! II. THE RESOLUTION: "So will I go in unto the king," &c. There are some points of resemblance and of contrast between the case of Esther and that of the poor sinner. 1. Points of resemblance. (1) She was in extreme danger (ver. 13). So with the sinner (Psa. vii. 11-13). (2) There was no other way for her escape. "By no means" (Psa. xlix. 7). (3) This way seemed full of difficulty and danger. Haman's influence. The king's temper. The royal guards. 2. Points of contrast. (1) She went into the presence of an earthly monarch who was partial, changeable, irritable, weak. God is always the same. (2) She was uninvited. The sinner pressed to come. (3) The law forbade her to come. (4) The king has apparently forgotten her for thirty days. (5) She might have been stopped by the guards. (6) She might have been misunderstood. (7) She might have failed by going the wrong time. Lessons.—1. Warning. Danger threatens. 2. Instruction. Prepare. 3. Encouragement. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *And if I perish, I perish.*—*Love to God stronger than death*:—"If I perish, I perish." Our lives are not our own; they cannot be long preserved by us. They will be of little value to us without a good conscience. The life which is purchased by neglect of duty is shameful, bitter, worse than death. Whoever shall save his life in this manner shall lose it in this world as well as in the next. But to lose life for the sake of Christ and a good conscience is truly to live. A day of life employed in the most hazardous duties, by which we show that our love to God is stronger than death, excels a thousand days of a life spent in the service and enjoyment of the world. (*G. Lawson.*) *Esther's resolve*.—I. THE IMPENDING DANGER. 1. A wicked, crafty, designing foe. 2. An irrevocable decree of destruction. 3. No visible way of escape. II. THE BOLD RESOLUTION. III. THE SOLEMN PRELIMINARY: fasting and prayer. IV. THE SUCCESSFUL ISSUE. 1. Life spared. 2. Enemy is destroyed. 3. Honour is given. (*The Study and the Pulpit.*) *The crisis met*.—I. OBSERVE THE QUEEN'S MODESTY—her extraordinary prudence at the very moment that she is most successful. Her request was a simple invitation to have the king come to a banquet of wine the next day, and as a mark of regard for his preferences, she wishes him to bring Haman. II. In Esther's fasting and prayer and pious courage we see THAT FAITH AND PIETY ARE NOT ALWAYS SHORN OF THEIR FRUITS UNDER UNFAVOURABLE INFLUENCES; they may flourish in a palace. In a chaotic state of society a pious man may have greater difficulties to overcome in maintaining a godly walk, but then, in overcoming these difficulties, he will gain a greater degree of spiritual strength. III. QUEEN ESTHER WAS A TRUE REPRESENTATIVE WOMAN. Every one is raised up as she was, not to be a Sultana, and do just the work she did, but to do his or her own work. Every one has a duty to perform—a post to maintain—a lot to fulfil. IV. It may sometimes be our duty to ourselves, our country, our fellow-men and our God to put our LIVES IN JEOPARDY FOR THE TRUTH, OR FOR THE CHURCH, AND FOR THE SAKE OF JESUS. True piety ought to make men brave. V. WE SHOULD NEVER FEAR TO DO OUR DUTY. The God whom we serve is able either to sustain us under our trials or to deliver us out of them. Why should we yield to the fear of man that bringeth a snare, seeing that we are in the hands of Him who holdeth the hearts of all men and of devils in His hand? VI. THE PRIVILEGE AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER. 1. As Henry remarks, here is an example of a mistress praying with her maids that is worthy of being followed by all housekeepers and heads of families. 2. And we are here encouraged to ask the sympathy and prayers of others when we undertake any great or perilous enterprise. The king's favourite was her greatest enemy. But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, even His own Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. VII. ONE OF THE GRACIOUS DESIGNS OF AFFLICTION IS TO MAKE US FEEL OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. A gracious result of trials to the people of God is that it drives them to prayer. But the court of heaven is not like that of Persia, into which there was no entrance for those that were in mourning or clothed with sackcloth. Such could not come

near the palace of Ahasuerus. But it is the weary, the heavy-laden, and the sorrowing that are especially invited to the throne of grace, and invited to come boldly. "Is any among you afflicted," saith the apostle James, "let him pray." (W. A. Scott, D.D.) *Courage ought to be cultivated*:—The exigencies of human existence call loudly for the cultivation of courage. Victory is frequently suspended upon boldness. Cromwell's Ironsides were accustomed to enter the battle shouting, "The Lord is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." They were always victorious. The Christian's heroism should be like that of the Prince of Condé, who, when offered by his monarch the choice between three things—"To go to Mass, to die, or to be imprisoned"—heroically replied, "I am perfectly resolved never to go to Mass, so between the other two I leave the choice to your majesty." If Luther dared to enter the Diet of Worms relying on the justice of his cause and the protection of God, assuredly the Christian in this age may confidently face the dangers which confront him. Genuine piety has a powerful tendency to develop heroism. Moses, Elijah, Nathan, Daniel, John the Baptist, &c. (J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.) *Moral heroism*:—1. The Christian should make no concealment of his piety. If Esther dared to reveal her religion, asking her maidens to unite in imploring the interposition of Jehovah, surely the Christian ought not to cloak his. 2. Sympathy shown to the suffering is advantageous to the giver as well as to the receiver. 3. Those who resist the evidence that the Church is not infrequently in a condition calling for immediate deliverance are enemies of true religion, not friends. 4. Christians should possess moral heroism. 5. If desirous of securing deliverance for the Church, we should endeavour to impress upon each a keen sense of personal responsibility. 6. We should endeavour to sustain those who are passing through trials for us. Mordecai and the Jewish people engaged in prayer while Esther exposed herself to death on their behalf. 7. Assurance of deliverance should impel to the performance of present duty. (J. S. Van Dyke.) *Esther's peril and its attendant success*:—Notice—I. THE SITUATION IN WHICH ESTHER WAS PLACED. II. HER CONDUCT IN THE EMERGENCY. III. THE SUCCESS WHICH ATTENDED HER APPLICATION. (R. P. Buddicom.) *Esther's resolve*:—This was not—I. THE RESOLUTION OF A FATALIST WHO ACTS UPON THE PRINCIPLE THAT WHAT IS DESTINED TO BE MUST BE. II. THE RESOLUTION OF DESPERATION, WHICH FEELS "MATTERS CANNOT BE WORSE, and to have done the utmost may bring relief, while it cannot possibly aggravate the evil." III. THE RESOLUTION OF A PERSON PROSTRATED UNDER DIFFICULTIES, AND YET, WITH A VAGUE HOPE OF DELIVERANCE, saying, "I will make one effort more, and if that fail, and all is lost, I can but die." Esther's purpose was framed in a spirit altogether different. It was the heroism of true piety, which in providence shut up to one course, and that, full of danger, counts the cost, seeks help of God, and calmly braves the danger, saying, "He will deliver me if He have pleasure in me; if not, I perish in the path of duty." (A. B. Davidson, D.D.) *Access to the throne*:—I remember at the time of that marvellous "blizzard," as it was called, in America, there was an astounding instance of roundabout communication. There were parties in Philadelphia who wanted to communicate with Boston, but all the telegraph lines were down, and they actually cabled the message across the sea to London, and from London by cable to Boston, in order to get the message through which it was desired to communicate to parties in that city. This may illustrate what I mean, that sometimes, when interruption of communication exists on earth, or there are closed doors or insurmountable obstacles which hinder our effective labour, and when in vain we knock and ring at the closed doors, or attempt to overcome the hindrances that exist between us and the ends that we desire to attain—if we can get access to the King of kings, and if we can send our message up to the throne, from the throne the answer will come. We shall find that the surest way to get to the upper storey of the house, or to reach across the intervening obstacles that have accumulated in our path, is to approach the desired end by way of God's throne. (A. T. Pierson.) *Gospel-consecration* does not go farther than this. Everything dear and valued was left behind in order that she might serve God. "All things were counted but loss" that she might maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." Ah! how this believer, in old times, when as yet the Saviour was only had in promise, puts to shame many in these latter days who are in possession of the finished salvation! Even the pleasures of sense, and the wealth and rewards of the world, keep them in a state of indecision and vacillation, if not of absolute indifference, to the call and claims of the gospel. (T. McEwan.)

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1-14. Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel.—*There is nothing stationary* :—"Now it came to pass." These words call for special notice in a book which strikingly illustrates the providence of God both in regard to nations and individuals. They remind us that there is nothing stationary—that what comes is moving on. Seasons of trial and perplexity would be overwhelming if they had the character of fixedness. It is happily not so. As you have stood gazing on a mountain, bathed in sunlight, you may sometimes have observed a dark shadow creeping along the side of it, as though hastening to accomplish its mission, and quickly gliding away out of sight, leaving the landscape all the more beautiful because of your remembrance of it. So is it with what is painful and sad in providence. Events of this kind have come at intervals, but it was only to pass—not to abide—like the floating of little clouds between us and the sun, and when past, giving to human life, as to nature, a greater richness and variety. Biographies are but commentaries on these familiar words. Indeed, men themselves but come to pass. (*Ibid.*) *Performance must follow resolve* :—Esther was not one of those who resolve and promise well, but do not perform. (*G. Lawson.*) *Crisis help* :—I. We have here an illustration of the fact THAT WHEN THE CRISIS COMES GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE GRACE TO MEET IT. Doubtless Esther looked forward with much trepidation to the moment of her entering in before the king. When the time came she found that the way was clear. This is far from being an uncommon experience with the children of God. That which in the prospect is most formidable turns out to be in the reality most simple. The women at the sepulchre. When God asks us to perform some dangerous duty, we may rely that the way up to the duty will be made open to us, and that strength will be given to us for its discharge. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." "As thy days so shall thy strength be." "My grace is sufficient for thee." How often have these promises been made good to Christians in these days. It is a time of extremity; the enemies of truth are bitterly assailing the very citadel of the faith, and now a stand has to be made which shall determine the issue for years. The eyes of all humble Christians are turned to one singularly gifted man; all are saying that, like Esther, he has come to the kingdom for such a time as this. But he is full of anxiety and trepidation. At length he consents to lift the standard and enter on the conflict, and when the time comes he is carried away out of himself, and so sensibly helped by the Spirit of God that he sweeps everything before him on the resistless torrent of his eloquence. Or there is a terrible disease invading the frame; it cannot be cured, and if let alone it will issue in a lingering illness and painful death. There is nothing for it but a critical surgical operation, and yet from that the patient shrinks. At length, however, the consent is given. It is to be performed on a certain day and at a certain hour. The meanwhile is given to prayer, and all the friends and relatives are requested, each in his own closet, to join in the supplication. Then when the hour strikes the diseased one walks with a strength that is not her own into the room, and gives herself into the hands of the surgeons, saying, "Living or dying, I am the Lord's." The shrinking is gone, the fear is subdued, and there is nothing but a calm heroism, which is the gift of God for the occasion. Or, yet again, a difficult duty is to be performed—a brother to be expostulated with for some serious sin, or to be warned of some insidious danger. But we do not know how he will take it, and the question comes to be whether our effort to save him may not aggravate the danger to which he is exposed. Who will undertake the task? There is one who, of all others, seems to be the fittest; but the very idea of it fills him with anxiety. How shall he proceed? There is nothing for it but prayer; and in the faith that God will answer he goes forward. He finds the way marvellously opened. He has a most satisfactory interview. All his fears are dispelled—he has saved his brother. II. WHEN THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT WITH GOD A LITTLE MATTER WILL MAKE A GREAT MISERY. Happiness does not consist in the bearing of others towards us, but in the relation of our own souls to God. A self-centred heart cannot avoid misery. The one thing needful to happiness is a new heart. III. WHEN A LITTLE MATTER MAKES A GREAT MISERY, THAT IS AN EVIDENCE THAT THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT WITH GOD. IV. IT IS A GREAT MISFORTUNE WHEN A MAN'S WORST COUNSELLORS ARE IN HIS OWN HOUSE. A good wife would have turned his thoughts in another direction. Here, then, is a beacon of warning for all wedded wives. Let them beware of adding fuel to a fire

already burning far too strongly in their husbands' hearts, as Zeresh did here. When they see those whom they love best going in the way of envy or passion or revenge, let them exert themselves wisely, yet firmly, to alter their determination. And let those husbands who have wives that are wise enough to see when they are going astray, and brave enough to endeavour to keep them from doing that which is wrong, thank God for them as for the richest blessings of their lives. A wife who is merely the echo of her husband, or who, as in the instance before us, only seconds and supports that which she sees he is determined upon, is no helpmeet for any man. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *The glory of intercession*.—I. THE BOWED FORM OF THE SUPPLIANT QUEEN. To bend the knees for others is the noblest attitude possible for the children of men. What shall be said of the selfish pietist who prays, "Forgive us our trespasses," and gives no heed to the multitudes who lie in darkness and the shadow of death? What shall be said of those Christians who "don't believe in missions"? When the ship *Algona* went down and the captain made off with one of the boats, leaving forty-eight passengers to drown, the whole world stood in horror of him. It is far better to sing "Rescue the perishing" than to make too much of "When I can read my title clear." A glorious award awaits those who in self-forgetfulness have adventured all in behalf of their fellow-men. II. THE OUTSTRETCHED SCEPTRE. It means to us that the great King is ever ready to hear intercessory prayer. In the rabbinical legend of Sandalphon an angel is represented as standing at the uttermost gates of heaven, one foot on a ladder of light. He is listening for a mother's appeal, the sob of a burdened heart, the cry "God be merciful to him!" On hearing these voices of intercession he bears them aloft, and they turn to garlands as he lays them before the feet of God. It stands in the nature of the case that God should be most willing to hear unselfish prayers. III. THE SEQUEL. The Jews were saved and the Feast of Purim instituted in recognition of this deliverance. The world waits to be won by Christian intercession. When General Grant was languishing on his bed of pain, no message of sympathy touched him more than that from an aged quaker: "Friend Grant, I am a stranger to thee. I would not intrude upon thy suffering, but I am anxious for thy soul. Trust in Jesus; He will not fail thee." The abundant entrance into heaven is for those who by prayer and its supplementary effort have wrought deliverance for others. At the close of the American Civil War, when Lincoln went down to Richmond, the freedmen loosed the horses from his carriage and dragged it through the streets, shouting, "God bless Massa Lincoln!" He had broken their chains, and this was a slight expression of their gratitude. In the apportionment of the honours of heaven there is nothing comparable with this, "He hath saved a soul from death!" (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The royalty of faith*.—I. ROYAL APPAREL MAY COVER A SAD HEART. II. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH SUSTAINS IN SADNESS. Faith possesses the true alchemy which can transmute the base metal of sadness into the celestial gold of abiding gladness. The sick saint; the imprisoned martyr; the lonely missionary bereft of wife and child on a foreign shore; the pastor labouring amongst an unresponsive people—all acknowledge the sustaining power of faith. III. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH LEADS TO DARING VENTURES. Abraham was ready to offer up his only-begotten son; Esther was ready to offer up herself. Hers was a Divinely inspired faith, worthy of a place among those celebrated in Hebrews. IV. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH IS GREATER THAN THE ROYALTY OF MERE CIRCUMSTANTIALS. The Cæsars and the Neros do not now rule—the Pauls and the Peters do. Faith is better and mightier than weapons of war, words of wisdom, or the gilded trappings of earthly royalty. V. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH COMMANDS SUCCESS. VI. THE ROYALTY OF FAITH SWAYS THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *A conquest by feminine beauty*.—One of the most stirring passages in history with which I am acquainted tells us how Cleopatra, the exiled Queen of Egypt, won the sympathy of Julius Cæsar, the conqueror, until he became the bridegroom and she the bride. Driven from her throne, she sailed away on the Mediterranean Sea in a storm, and when the large ship anchored she put out with one womanly friend in a small boat until she arrived at Alexandria, where was Cæsar, the great general. Knowing that she would not be permitted to land or pass the guards on the way to Cæsar's palace, she laid upon the bottom of the boat some shawls and scarfs and richly dyed upholstery, and then lay down upon them, and her friend wrapped her in them and she was admitted ashore in this wrapping of goods, which was announced as a present for Cæsar. This bundle was permitted to pass the guards of the gates of the palace, and was put down at the feet of the Roman general. When the bundle was unrolled there rose before Cæsar one whose

courage and beauty and brilliancy are the astonishment of the ages. This exiled Queen of Egypt told the story of her sorrows, and he promised her that she should get back her throne in Egypt and take the throne of wisely dominion in his own heart. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *A queen on the vanity of jewellery*:—Among the treasures most coveted are jewels, but in the "Diary" of Madame D'Arblay, whose maiden name was Burney, and who was lady-in-waiting on Queen Charlotte, consort of George III., we read: "The queen told me how well at first she had liked her jewels and ornaments. 'But how soon,' cried she, 'was that over! Believe me, Miss Burney, it is a pleasure of a week—a fortnight at most. The trouble of putting them on, the care they require, and the fear of losing them, made me in a fortnight's time long for my own earlier dress, and wish never to see them more.'" *Esther's nobleness*:—The splendour of Esther's career is seen in the fact that she does not succumb to the luxury of her surroundings. The royal harem among the lily-beds of Shushan is like a palace in the land of the lotus-eaters "where it is always afternoon," and its inmates in the dreamy indolence are tempted to forget all the obligations and interests beyond the obligations to please the king and their own interests in securing every comfort wealth can lavish upon them. We do not look for a Boadicea in such a hot-house of narcotics. And when we find there a strong, unselfish woman such as Esther conquering almost insuperable temptations to a life of ease, and choosing a course of terrible danger to herself for the sake of her oppressed people, we can echo the admiration of the Jews for their national heroine. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The sight of a face*:—It is a constant fact in nature that the sight of a face will do what nothing else can do in the way of awakening love, touching sympathy, securing trust, evoking help, or, it may be, in the way of provoking and stimulating feelings of a very opposite description. If a purpose be very important and very good, generally it will be better promoted by a personal appearance than by any kind of representation. If I am seeking a good thing, my face ought to be better than the face of another for the getting of it; better, too, than my own letter asking it. If the poor widow had sent letters to the unjust judge, he probably would not have been much discomposed, but by her continual coming she wearied him, and won her quest. When the king saw Esther she obtained favour. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand*:—*God grants requests*:—Did this haughty monarch hold out the sceptre, and say, "What wilt thou, and what is thy request?" and shall not God hear His own elect—His chosen spouse—crying to Him day and night? Esther had to go into the presence of a proud imperious man, we to go into the presence of a God of love and condescension. She was not called; we are invited. She went in against the law; we have both precept and promise in our favour—yea, precept upon precept, and promise upon promise. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." She had no friend at court on whom she could rely, and the great favourite was the accuser of her brethren, the mortal foe of her name and race; we, even when we have sinned, and sinned after light and pardon, have an Advocate with the Father, His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, who also is the propitiation for our sins. Esther was encouraged to ask to the extent of the half of the kingdom of Persia; we are encouraged to ask to the whole of the kingdom of heaven, with a life-rent on earth of all that is needful for us. Ought we not then to "come boldly to the throne of grace"? (*T. McCrie.*) *The gifts of the heavenly King*:—1. Ahasuerus held out the sceptre to his queen, who had never offended him, nor been unfaithful to him; but Jehovah holds out His sceptre to the unfaithful. 2. But the king not only bade the queen to his presence, but made her a bountiful offer. "What is thy request? It shall be given thee to the half of my kingdom." This offer he makes three times over. Surely the Lord wrought marvellously herein, and in His goodness to His people, exceeded their largest expectations. God grants a kingdom to His people, and that an everlasting kingdom—their crowns fade not away, their purses wax not old. Their riches cannot be corrupted by moth and rust, and thieves cannot deprive them of their treasures. Their joy no one taketh from them, and their pleasures are those which are at God's right hand for evermore. Oh! let us approach the heavenly King in the all-powerful name of the one Mediator, and fervently pray for these imperishable blessings. (*J. Hughes.*) *Confidence in prayer*:—The Church is "the Lamb's wife." She has free access to the throne of the King of kings. Oh! how timidly and doubtfully do believers sometimes draw near to Him! It is as though they feared His royal sceptre, forgetting that it is the sceptre of

mercy; as though they were apprehensive that He had taken away His love from them, forgetting that "having loved His own who were in the world, He loves them unto the end." He has no half-measures—no half-kingdoms to offer. He promises you the kingdom—wholly, willing, unreservedly—and even chides you for having hitherto asked nothing in His name, and encourages you to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." King Ahasuerus could not anticipate the request of Esther; after his own carnal heart he thought that it must be some additional temporal good. But our King knows all beforehand, and has provided for, and is ready to bestow upon us all that we can need upon the earth, and all that we can desire to prepare us for heaven. And surely, if we require to be stirred to earnestness and importunity by the presence of a great cause, we all have it in the condition of our own hearts, the souls of others, and the salvation of the world.

(*T. McEwan.*) *The golden sceptre*:—In reverence, in submission, and for safety, she touched the top of the sceptre, and then all the power of the empire was between her and harm. We cannot assert that this was meant to be a symbolical act; but certainly it does express in a striking way the method and the result of our coming as sinners to God. The golden sceptre of grace is ever in the King's hand. Never does He cast one wrathful glance upon any who approach unto Him; He is on the throne of grace, that He may be gracious. When we touch the sceptre we yield submission; we are reconciled, accepted, and protected by all the forces of the universe, and by all the perfections of God. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Touching the sceptre*:—I. THE SCEPTRE IN THE HANDS OF CHRIST. We read that He is "head over all things," and more than this, "head over all things to the Church." He holds that sceptre for them—for their protection—for their highest and best interests. Christ is on the throne! The steps which lead to that throne ought to assure us what He is, now that He is there. The Cross best explains Christ. His character in all its transparency and purity, its glory and beauty, fitted Him to reign over all. But we want more than a righteous King; more than a true King! Love must be on the throne which is to sway the hearts of men, and "herein is love." II. IN ALL APPEALS TO HIM WE TOUCH THAT SCEPTRE. 1. When we touch that sceptre, we prove that we believe His Word. It is certain that actions bespeak faith more than words. Do we believe in Christ's purposes of mercy? Do we believe that all the vice, misery, wrong, around us, Christ desires to do away with? that it grieves His heart more than it ever can ours? We must believe this in the light of His Incarnation, coming into this world as He did to seek and to save that which was lost. When we touch His sceptre, we proclaim our belief in His mercy, we come to the King as those who know that He is the same Saviour that walked this world, and went about doing good, and preached deliverance to the captives everywhere. 2. When we touch that sceptre, we bespeak its aid; we imply confidence in its power. We manifest our consciousness that there is a greater power than that of evil: that Jesus must and will reign. It were sad to live were it otherwise. We who know Christ for ourselves, have confidence in His ability to realise the ideal of the Inspired Word, "Godliness is profitable for all things: having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 3. When we touch that sceptre, we imply our oneness of spirit with Him. Many would like to touch other sceptres, and turn their purposes of success into golden achievements. See how men wait on others. But Christ's purposes are moral and spiritual purposes. His kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and we say by our touch of His sceptre, "Master, we do desire this end; deliver our people from slavery, from the plots of our Hamans, from the desires which would destroy their peace of mind, hinder their happiness, and harm their souls hereafter. Oh! King Jesus, we are one with Thee!" 4. When we touch that sceptre, we imply that Christ loves us. We love Him, and He loves us. We know that the fact of His love to us will make our petitions powerful before Him. III. THE SCEPTRE MAY BE TOUCHED BY THE HUMBLEST HAND. Yes; and it often is. Poor and humble saints, weak and afflicted saints, that can do little else, can pray. Not through door-keepers, and past stately sentinels, do we reach the Royal Pavilion! No! Esther goes straight in to the king. So may we! The privilege of prayer itself is not more wonderful than the freeness of it. The Heavenly Royalty needs no poor pageantry of outward state. You can touch that sceptre. You can come in, and be face to face with the King. IV. THIS SCEPTRE IS NOT SWAYED BY US, BUT TOUCHED BY US. Esther touched it! And then the king said unto her, "What wilt thou, Esther?" And thus it is with us. It pleased the king to grant her widest request. But still it

was the king's will. And so it is with us. I would ask this question: Who would dare to touch the sceptre, if the touch was to turn to swaying it? Not I! Not you! No; you know enough of life to wish at all events its government taken out of your hands. We touch the sceptre, but we do not take it. No. That moment an awful consciousness would come over us, and we should flee from mountain to city, to be absolved from the responsibility. We might seem to benefit ourselves, but whom might we not harm? We might seem to gain a transitory good, but what beneficent laws of the universe, working for the common good, might we not endanger? It is a comfortable thing to be able to cast all our care upon Christ. V. IN SWAYING THAT SCEPTRE CHRIST CAN OVERCOME ALL THE DESIGNS OF OUR ENEMIES. The danger seemed great to the company of Jews in the Persian empire, but in one brief hour the darkening cloud had disappeared, and Esther had "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." (*W. M. Statham.*) **What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request?**—*Prayer should be definite*:—To make prayer of any value, there must be definite objects for which to plead. We often ramble in our prayers after this, that, and the other, and we get nothing, because in each we do not really desire anything. We chatter about many subjects, but the soul does not concentrate itself upon any object. Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? You do, as a matter of habit, without any motion of your heart. You are like a man who would go to a shop and not know what articles he would procure. He may, perhaps, make a happy purchase when he is there, but certainly it is not a wise plan to adopt. And so the Christian in prayer may afterwards attain to a real desire, and get his end; but how much better would he speed if, having prepared his soul by consideration and self-examination, he came to God for an object at which he was about to arrive, with a real request. Did we ask an audience at her Majesty's court, we should not be expected to go into the presence of royalty and then to think of some petition after we came there. Even so with the child of God. He should be able to answer the great question, "What is thy petition? and what is thy request? and it shall be done unto thee." Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is! Would he be likely to have success? Conceive a ship, on a voyage of discovery, putting to sea without the captain having any idea of what he was looking for! Would you expect that he would come back heavily laden either with the discoveries of science or with treasures of gold? In everything else you have a plan. You do not go to work without knowing that there is something that you designed to make; how is it that you go to God without knowing what blessing you design to have? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Large offers*:—1. With respect to the largeness of the offer. "Even to the half of my kingdom," the king said, "will thy request be granted." "All things are yours," it is said to believers; and it may well be said, since Jehovah gives Himself to them as their God, and Christ is theirs, and the Spirit dwells in them. 2. But then as Esther was afraid all at once to ask what she most desired, so God's people are often slow or afraid to avail themselves to the full of their privilege of asking. Many are contented to live from year to year with little more to uphold them than an indistinct hope that they shall reach heaven at last, when, if they would but take home God's promises in all their freeness and richness, they might be able to rejoice in Him as their portion. But perhaps it may be that as Esther did not feel herself in a condition all at once to close with the king's most liberal offer, so some among us, for other reasons than the feeling that it would be presumptuous, may be exercised in the same way with respect to spiritual privileges. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Directions for prayer*:—I. There must be METHOD in prayer. "What is thy petition?" Self-examination is especially beneficial as we are about to approach God. Prayer with too many is too much like the hurried salute given to a passing friend; or it is like the quick march of an army past the royal standard. It is often little better than counting beads strung on a cord; or as one turning a praying wheel. More strength in prayer would be obtained by more method in prayer. II. There must be ASSURANCE in prayer. Not merely the assurance that God is ready to hear prayer, but the assurance that we "have found favour in the sight of the King." Esther desired to feel her ground sure here. How shall we know if our heavenly King is favourable to us? By looking to the unspeakable gift. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." The gift of Christ implies the gift of all things needful. III. There may be HESITANCY in prayer. Not the hesitancy of doubt, but of deliberation. That is sometimes the truest prayer, when the heart is too

full for utterance. IV. There must be SUBMISSION to the Divine will in prayer. "I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. **Let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.**—*Do not hasten providence*:—The very persons are here before whom it will be told to-morrow—the king, the queen, Haman! Then why delay? Nine people out of ten would have said, if consulted beforehand, "Ah, she is losing her case, through fear or through finesse, or by some evil counsel. She is losing the ripe and favourable hour, which will never return. To-morrow! O Queen, why not to-night?" And so, oftentimes, we would hasten providence in our own affairs, fretting against His wise delays, and laying our poor shoulders to the great wheels of God, as though He were not moving them fast enough, when, in fact, they are going as evenly as the sun, as sublimely as time itself. "The king is here; why not speak?" Yes, he is here, and he is not here. He is not here as he will be to-morrow night. To-night he will be sleepless. To-night he will be reminded, through his sleeplessness, of an act of loyal faithfulness on the part of Mordecai, which has been hitherto unrewarded. To-night the order will be given for the preparation of a gallows. In a word, when the same three meet at to-morrow's banquet, they will be the same, and yet not the same. They will be really in different relations to each other, and to many beyond. So the banquet is ended, as if by the utterance of the word "wait." "He that believeth shall not make haste." (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Wisdom to act in critical situations*:—When persons are placed in critical situations, and endeavour to act singly and honestly, wisdom is granted to them to direct their course. Though she had met with a reception equal to her most sanguine expectations, Esther did not immediately present the request which was nearest her heart, but contented herself with begging that the king, accompanied with Haman, would "come to the banquet of wine which she had prepared." By this she testified her disinterestedness. She was afraid of precipitating the decision, and sought to avail herself of every prudent method for ensuring success. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 9. **Then went Haman forth that day joyful.**—*The superficial man*:—I. HAMAN'S GLADNESS. It arose—1. From a false estimation of himself. 2. From a false estimate of his position. II. HAMAN'S USE OF HIS EYES. He saw, but not correctly. Pride casts a film over the mental vision. Prejudice lessens the power of vision. Green-eyed jealousy cannot see correctly. He could not see that stubbornness rightly read meant integrity of purpose. III. HAMAN'S CONSEQUENT CHANGE OF STATE. A false use of the eyes has its penalties. No faculty can be perverted without bringing retribution. IV. HAMAN'S POWER OF SELF-CONTROL. The power of self-control is not to be despised, but the power of self-conquest is a nobler achievement. V. HAMAN'S RESOURCE IN TROUBLE. It is observable how many bad men have attached themselves to wives who have stuck to them in all circumstances. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Joy from meagre sources*:—There is much joy among the children of men which arises from very meagre sources, much joy the loss of which would be better than its possession. (*J. Hughes.*) *Short-lived gladness*:—That day was the last of his gladness; next morning's sun should not set before all his glory was laid in the dust. Nay, that very day, and that very moment when it was most buoyant, his joy was destined to suffer a dash from which it would never completely recover. (*T. McCrie.*) *The last to-morrow*:—Be not so cruel as speak to him of to-morrow! Let the wicked enjoy their bright to-day—it is the only bright to-day which they will ever have. Yes, to-morrow! Let worldly men fear and prepare for their last to-morrow! "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy." (*T. McEwan.*)

Ver. 10. **Nevertheless Haman refrained himself.**—*Self-restraint possible*:—Haman refrained himself. It is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that even those persons who are habitually self-willed, and destitute of the power of self-government, can nevertheless, when occasion requires it, exercise a wonderful control over both their speech and their passions. Thus, for example, a man who is addicted to the sin of profane swearing will be found to put such guard upon his words in the presence of a superior who detests that sin, that not one oath will escape from his lips. A man who has no command of his temper at ordinary times will appear smooth and unruffled in his intercourse with those on whom he is

dependent, or whose good opinion he desires to gain. A man given to excess in the indulgence of his appetites will be careful not to transgress in company where it would be accounted shameful. Now there is an important principle involved in all this, deeply affecting the moral responsibility of such men for all their conduct. For if they can lay themselves under such restraint—when it serves their purpose—that long-formed habits can be checked and mastered, then we think that even they themselves must admit that they are deprived of all excuse when they suffer themselves to be usually governed by these habits. And if regard for the opinions and feelings of their fellow-men exerts a power over them which the law of God does not possess, then manifestly they are chargeable with the guilt of standing more in awe of men than of God. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) **And when he came home.**—*Home with a bad man*:—It is not pleasant to go home with Haman; but God thinks it good for us to see the inside of a bad man's heart. We shall understand the irony of His providence the better. (*T. McCrie.*)

Vers. 11-13. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children.—*The discontented man as a reckoner*:—The discontented man is—I. A GOOD RECKONER, UP TO A CERTAIN POINT. Look at Haman's statement: Riches—children—position—honour. These represent the ideal of happiness to a large majority of men. The whole is stated correctly, but the result is false. II. A BAD RECKONER, because—1. He places too high an estimate on the mere material. 2. He does not take into account the unknown quantity. 3. He over-estimates his own deserts. 4. He is bad at subtraction. He enumerates his blessings as four, and his drawback as one. He subtracts one from four, and makes nothing the strange result. 5. He is defective in multiplication. Haman made more of Mordecai's refusal to render him homage than it deserved. Discontent is always an unreliable multiplication. It makes evils where there are none, and more of existing evils than it ought to do. III. THE DISCONTENTED MAN UNKNOWNLY MAKES A GOOD COMPUTATION. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit" is the statement of those who have taken their fill of this world's good things, and have forgotten God their maker. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 13. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.—*Outward prosperity and an evil heart*:—Haman's misery sprung from his most prominent vice. The avenger did not so much track his path, like an independent retributive messenger, as that it was secreted in his very sin. It is often so in providence. God does not need to stretch forth His hand against the sinner. It is enough that He allows the working of his sin to overtake him. Had there been no pride in Haman's heart he could never have been subjected to this soul-torture because of a harmless affront by an inferior in rank; but forasmuch as he had nursed and cherished his pride to an ungovernable extent, the pain and anguish which he had to endure when it was thwarted and injured was crucifying to all his prosperity and joy. He became his own tormentor. The law is universal, giving to all sin its entail of evil. The sinner may suppose that his sin is not known, and, because not known, that it will escape punishment; but the sin will itself find out the man, and the punishment will grow out of it as a poisonous plant from a hidden seed. Sceptics may theoretically deny the Divine government, but practically it is beyond dispute. By an inexorable law "evil pursueth sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid." Intimately connected with this thought there is another of equal importance—that we are not in a position to judge of the relative amount of happiness or unhappiness in the lot of man upon the earth. Surveyed from without there might not appear to be a more enviable man than Haman. If earthly good could make happiness there was no element wanting in his case. There was ostensibly no comparison between his lot and that of some contented poor man, who, besides meanness and obscurity, has to bear the burden of bodily suffering. Nevertheless you might never get from the poor sufferer under the influence of religion the same confession of wasted happiness and blighted peace that we have from this lordly great man in the high day of his abounding prosperity. Let the outward condition be what it may, his spirit—the real man—rises superior to it, and is not touched by it. But in the other case it was the spirit which was diseased, and which, like the scorpion when surrounded by fire, turned its sting in upon itself. So that, before we could estimate relative individual happiness or unhappiness, we would require to go below the surface of things and look upon the heart. Moreover, we cannot fail to notice that outward prosperity in an unsanctified

heart renders the man more susceptible to trifling annoyances. He becomes so accustomed to what is highly pleasing that a very small thing occasions great uneasiness. While he looks at his good things through the large end of the telescope, he beholds what is troublesome and vexatious through the small. The world's broad way is crowded with eager seekers after happiness. "It is here," cries one, and there is a rush in that direction, only to be followed by disappointed looks and longing hearts. "It is there," cries another, and there is anxious toiling and plodding for its attainment; but the cisterns are found at last to be broken and empty. In the midst of this thirsting, moiling, weary world, Jesus has caused His voice to be heard, pleading and saying: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." (T. McEwan.)

Vain prosperity:—The servants of God may be sometimes so foolish as to envy the prosperity of the wicked. But a sure result is before the wicked, and in due time their sin finds them out. They are set in slippery places. We see here the most crafty and accomplished wickedness caught in its own snare, and made the instrument of its own punishment. All its schemes of evil are overruled; all its revengeful and hostile purposes are made to bless those against whom they have been prepared. 1. We see every possible advantage of condition and power conceded to him. God allows the cause opposed to Him to have all the means of apparent triumph and success, so that if such opposition may ever prevail, it shall have the fullest opportunity. When He would show us the vanity of the world He allows it to heap up every possible means of gratification and pleasure. When He would show us the security of piety He permits every possible difficulty and objection to be in its way. Haman shall complain of no want on his side of any instrument which might render his triumph certain. And then, in defiance of all his power and his craft, God will overturn all his schemes. Could the wickedness of man ever succeed, it must in circumstances like his. He was rich; unlimited wealth seemed to be in his control. For a single grant of power he offered the king ten thousand talents of silver, nearly twenty millions of dollars. Not only rich, he was highly exalted in station. No subject of the monarch equalled him in rank or in the influence which his station gave. Rich and exalted, he was powerful also. The king had given him his own ring. All the powers of government in the kingdom were thus placed in the hands of Haman. In this high condition he was flattered and honoured by universal homage. "All the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed," &c. And as we survey his condition we exclaim, "What gratitude such a man must owe to God! What blessings he might bestow upon his fellow-men." But Haman had no heart for gratitude, no love for mankind. He was an enemy to God, to His people, and to His truth. The controlling spirit of his wicked heart was selfishness. "Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished." 2. We see the small amount of Haman's alleged deficiencies. "Mordecai bowed not nor did him reverence." What an illustration of the prosperity of this world. It is impossible that any earthly portion should be free from every cause of complaint. The decay and sorrow which human sin produces must everywhere in some shape be found. It is left as a token of God's authority, as a test of man's submission, as a teacher of contentment and humility in the midst of occasions for pride and self-indulgence. There is to every man a Mordecai in the gate, an unbending and unsubmitive difficulty of some kind in human life, to guard the children of God from the ruin which prosperity would bring, and to awaken the sinful to a consciousness of the insufficiency of an earthly portion, and the importance of something higher and something better than earth can give. Less than Haman's sorrow no living man can have. But this fact of trial in human condition is always a constantly recurring one. It was so here. Day by day Haman must pass the gate, and Mordecai could not be avoided. The sorrow is small, but it is ever present, like a broken tooth, or a missing step in the stairs on which we must habitually pass. It can never be forgotten. A submissive mind receives it as a call for acknowledgment and humility. A rebellious mind makes it an occasion of complaint, and the same annoyance hardens the heart in rebellion and impiety. Let us make a friend and teacher of every Mordecai in our way. We shall never be without him. 3. This leads us to mark the effect of this one exception upon Haman's feelings and mind. This single deficiency completely destroyed all his enjoyment and peace. To make a man happy whose heart is astray from God is impossible. Whatever of earthly bounties may be given, there is the secret feeling of remorse and consciousness of guilt which nothing can silence or dismiss.

The mind is in rebellion against the only power which can give it peace. 4. All these circumstances in Haman's condition showed how small was his temptation to crime. Haman had no reasonable excuse, no motive but in his own wicked heart, for the course of crime on which he was to enter. It was simply the working of malicious wickedness, his own fretful, hateful temper. Mordecai did him no injury, diminished none of his real advantages or possessions. Such is the process of yielding to the suggestions and claims of a sinful temper. It leads us from one step to another in the course of sin, until the sinner is ensnared in unexpected guilt, and entangled in crimes hideous in their aspect and beyond his power to escape. It may be the appetite for gain, the haste to be rich, which pushes him on to every sacrifice of duty, and through every species of fraud and every scheme of attempted concealment, till God suddenly reveals the whole plot and the man is ruined beyond recovery. Let no young man feel that he is safe from temptation to the worst of crimes in allowing the power for a moment of such a spirit. Watch against its first encroachment. Cultivate, as the rule of life, high and pure motives, habits of self-control, refusal to receive affronts or to take offence at the errors or neglect of others. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Poisoned pleasures.—Give a whole world of pleasure to a man who loves the world and the things of it, he will soon find that something is wanted, though perhaps he does not know, so well as Haman thought he did, what it is. He finds some gall and wormwood that spread poison over his pleasures. All his abundance cannot compensate for the loss of some one thing or other that he deems essential to his happiness. The fact is that the world cannot give a right constitution to his disordered soul, or be a substitute for that Divine favour in which lies the life of our souls. (*G. Lawson.*)

On the disorders of the passions.—These are the words of one who, though high in station and power, confessed himself to be miserable. His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public; but as soon as he came to his own house he was forced to disclose the agony of his mind. I. How MISERABLE IS VICE WHEN ONE GUILTY PASSION IS CAPABLE OF CREATING SO MUCH TORMENT! We might reason from the constitution of the rational frame, where the understanding is appointed to be supreme and the passions to be subordinate, and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery as necessarily ensues as pain is consequent in the animal frame upon the distortion of its members. Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery. But when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows he can with freedom pour out to a confidant. When he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his suffering arises from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity in particular must he be reduced before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery! In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge, then, of the degree of torment which Haman endured by its breaking through all these restraints and forcing him to publish his shame before those from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict. Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less pungent than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world the mind can exert its powers and suggest relief. And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer and his sufferings can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its stronghold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation, and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture. 1. Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God, and admire His justice in thus making the sinner's own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him. Sceptics reason in

vain against the reality of Divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly pursuing the sinner with evil. 2. Let us remark also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge, from external appearances, concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not, within its bounds, one more thoroughly wretched. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion you must follow the great man in the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise; you must not only be able to penetrate into the interior of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. 3. Unjust are our complaints of the promiscuous distribution made by providence of its favours among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men: but the allotment of real happiness is never so. For to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travail with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrors make them afraid on every side. II. How UNAVAILING WORLDLY PROSPERITY IS, SINCE, IN THE MIDST OF IT, A SINGLE DISAPPOINTMENT IS SUFFICIENT TO EMBITTER ALL ITS PLEASURES. We might at first imagine that the natural effect of prosperity would be to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect that as one in the full glow of health despises the inclemency of the weather, so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station should disregard slight injuries, and, at perfect ease with himself, should view in the most favourable light the behaviour of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow if worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is to create an extreme sensibility to the slightest wound. It foment impatience, and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing, and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence the gale, which another would scarcely feel, is to the prosperous a rude tempest. Hence the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as it is told of the effeminate Sybarite, breaks their rest. Hence the disrespect shown by Mordecai preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident occasioned to him. The cause lay not in the external incident—it lays within himself; it arose from a mind dis-tempered by prosperity. Let this example correct that blind eagerness with which we rush to the chase of worldly greatness and honours. Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also how often, besides corrupting the mind and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him with the most serene and settled aspect she was digging in secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the queen; and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai. An extensive contemplation of human affairs will lead us to this conclusion, that among the different conditions and ranks of men the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universally take place. Providence never intended that any state here should be either completely happy or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous and more lively in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters our vanity, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions which, after all the refinements of art, are found to be the most genuine and true. III. HOW WEAK HUMAN NATURE

IS WHICH, IN THE ABSENCE OF REAL, IS THUS PRONE TO CREATE TO ITSELF IMAGINARY WOES. Let it not be thought that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they, perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them, yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows, preys upon the citizen no less than upon the courtier, and often nourishes passions equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it everywhere searches out materials for itself, and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity than in creating divisions amongst mankind and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause but real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils not inferior, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose. Hence discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among nations. Hence Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence multitudes in the most obscure stations for whom providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended. From this train of observation which the text has suggested, can we avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardour of enterprise, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendour appears amidst its ruins. In this view let us with reverence look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world on purpose to be the light and the life of men; who came in the fulness of grace and truth to repair the desolation of many generations, to restore order among the works of God, and to raise up a new earth and new heavens, wherein righteousness shall dwell for ever. Under His tuition let us put ourselves; and amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a heavenly Conductor vouchsafes His aid, let us earnestly pray that from Him may descend Divine light to guide our steps, and Divine strength to fortify our minds. Fix, then, this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue is the destruction of your peace. At your first setting out in life, especially when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty, beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions and violent desires were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth, and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *The mission and the curse of jealousy*:—In the formation of character, as in the make-up of the world, nothing is ever lost or misplaced. The heat of the tropics in the belt of the equator makes trade-wind currents, and trade-wind currents make northerly gales, and northerly gales bring hail and snow, and the rivers swollen from the mountain streams flow again into the ocean. There are scavengers on land and sea which consume the world's refuse; there are processes at work in the economy of nature by which the refuse of the barn-yard and the dry bones of the slaughter-house become restorers of the soil and fertilisers of Mother Earth robbed yearly of her life-giving qualities. And in the economy of character we see this same endless chain of results. God does not work at right angles to His guiding principles. When a great law or tendency is boldly thrown out in the material world, we shall be sure, if we look closely enough, to find a corresponding principle in the mental and moral world. Just as there are sharks in the ocean and crocodiles in the jungle, and lizards and snakes and a world of crawling

things about us; just as there are fevers and poisons and dreadful illnesses stored up in certain lovely-looking regions, so there are dreadful passions and instincts, revenges and jealousies, stored away in nature, which look as charming but are as deceitful as Brazilian wild meadow land. All these things have their use. Consider the mission and curse of jealousy. I. ITS MISSION. Have you ever felt in a yacht that the masts and the sails could not stand the strain of wind much longer? But the skipper at the helm laughs down your fears, for he knows how much lead is on the keel, or how much centre-board is down. Bulk is planted in that boat somewhere on purpose to steady it when the wind draws on for a blow. In some such way has jealousy been planted in human nature to steady the character when flaws of temptation or gusty currents of animalism strike us. In its existence we find the reason for monogamy and marriage faithfulness and domestic happiness and concord. Why should we be jealous if the Christian view of marriage is false? God has placed this Cerberus-like attribute, this watch-dog instinct, chained but barking, at the door of domestic happiness on purpose to guard the honour and sanctity of those within. II. ITS CURSE. Any force perverted becomes an evil, and when jealousy steps an inch beyond its lawful limits, then it becomes the direst curse. It is just like the mission or the curse of any strong drug or medicine. Any instinct or attribute which becomes inflamed or enlarged and assumes an undue prominence, causes trouble in the character, in the same way in which any enlarged or congested organ asserts itself with pain and irritation in the physical system. And when jealousy passes beyond its proper sphere and rankles in the nature like some smouldering back-log, it lights up every new object which is thrown upon it. It is like a secret fever, which burns and keeps one hot amid all sorts of cool surroundings, as when Haman said, "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." It assumes many varying forms. It appears as tribe jealousy with its clannish smallness; it appears in the countless bickerings of society, in the pride of caste, and in that vulgar pride which rejoices in trampling upon caste; it is the great motive power of ambitious and scheming women; it gives the cud of reflection to innumerable artists, painters, musicians, and business men. It is with the physician in consultation with his fellow physician as they finger the pulse of their dying patient. It is with the warring lawyers, in strife over the sentence upon the accused murderer; it defiles the sacred chancel, it defiles the pulpit steps; it makes us think hard things of our brethren. In all these instances it is a moral malaria within the soul. It is the sight of the hated Mordecai sitting at the gate. The old Goth Alaric was called the scourge of God, as he came thundering down the plains of Lombardy. But jealousy is a greater scourge than the old Goth. It is the root of all our domestic troubles. Jealousy means pride; it means selfishness; it means inordinate self-conceit; it means being first all the time; it means a blighted life and a miserable old age. If you want to please yourself you can count up what you save and all you have got, as Haman did, and yet all this will avail you nothing every time you see the one you are jealous of sitting where you want to be. But if you cast these demons out—jealousy, selfishness, self-conceit—if you sink yourself and throw overboard for ever this thought of always being first, a whole new world of life and honour will be before you. (*W. Wilberforce Newton.*)

The festering thorn that poisons the body:—It does not take much to spoil a man's life. One little thing may mar his usefulness and the veriest trifle may destroy his peace. The record of lost men will be a record of apparent trifles. "One thing lacking" will be the keynote of the wail of hell, as it is the cry of those who have slipped down when they have reached the topmost rung but one of the ladder of life's ambition. This man would have been the greatest of senators but for one infirmity. He has brilliance, power, eloquence, wisdom, but he has no stability. That man would have been the greatest soldier. He has courage, knowledge, skill, self-denial, but he has an unbridled temper. And so it is in every grade of life. In Haman we have a notable example of a worldly life, and a potent instance of the working of sin, sending its poisonous influence through a man's character until it works out its own deadly end. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." We have the history of sin in the world exemplified in this individual man. I. THE POISON LATENT. There is not a thing on earth but is poisoned. We attain learning, and while attaining it we swallow the poison with which it is infected. We derive honour, but at the same time we lay hold of the seeds of misery which accompany it. Heavy is the head that wears a crown. The baton

of power is a symbol of weariness. The seat of honour is a seat of persecution. There is a great system of compensation in life which makes men much more nearly equal than they appear to be. II. Notice THE SORE FESTERING. This festering grievance was nothing but a sentimental fancy. And such are most of our festering sores. Mental, moral, or bodily maladies are soon got rid of, but visionary troubles—never. A man will recover after small-pox or fever; he will revive after bereavement or sorrow; he will be cheerful after the loss of a leg or the ruin of his pecuniary affairs. But once let him get a sentimental grievance, and he is never the same again. III. Notice THE SORE WORKING. Death. (*J. J. S. Bird.*) *The ruinous nature of discontent*:—In treating upon these words I shall endeavour to show—I. THAT THE DISCONTENT THEY EXPRESS IS COMMON WITH PERSONS IN EVERY POSSIBLE CONDITION OF LIFE. II. ITS EVIL AND RUINOUS NATURE. III. ITS CONTRARIETY TO THE CHRISTIAN TEMPER. (*W. Richardson.*) *Human limitations*:—Is there not a gnawing worm in the heart of every joy? Is there not a Mordecai in the way of every ambitious man? We cannot have all things exactly our own way; there is one nail we cannot extract, one lock we cannot undo, one gate we cannot open, one claim we cannot pacify. In every path there would seem to be a deep, gaping grave which even mountains cannot fill up. How near are some men to perfect bliss! If but one thorn could be extracted, then the men themselves would be safe in heaven; but that one thorn abides to remind them of their limitations, and to sting them with a useful sense of disappointment. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Haman's confession*:—This confession is calculated to impress two things upon us. I. THAT MATERIAL THINGS CANNOT MAKE US HAPPY. II. THAT HUMAN HAPPINESS IS ALL TOO EASILY DESTROYED. The work of destruction is, in general, easy. What is a flower worth after you roughly plant your foot upon it? What damage is done to a fair picture by throwing a bottle of ink against it! A servant can by mistake burn in a few minutes a MS. on which years of study were expended by her master. A succession of strokes with a hammer soon disfigure the most skilful and costly piece of furniture that ever was made; and it cannot have escaped the notice of any thoughtful man that human happiness is a flower of amazing delicacy. It takes but little to lay it low. A headache or the scratch of a pin unfits us for enjoying ourselves. An unkind remark renders us miserable for days. A disappointment does the same; and so with scores of other things. Mordecai's want of respect was in itself a small matter; but it sadly interfered with Haman's enjoyment. It had the effect of neutralising, and more than neutralising, all the felicities of his office and condition. He may be compared to the owner of a mansion sitting at a blind window seeing nothing, and all the while there are windows in every room from which excellent views of the surrounding scenery can be obtained if he would only place himself at them and look through them. Haman made the mistake—1. Of thinking too much about Mordecai's refusal to pay him the honour to which he considered he was entitled. 2. Of setting too high a value on the respect of Mordecai. (*Homilist.*) *Things that ought to be unnecessary for happiness*:—A forcible writer of our day has some remarks to the point which will well bear quotation—a few words only being altered. He is speaking of the great Lord Bacon. After describing the chancellor's strenuous efforts within his library, where his rare powers were guided by an enlarged philanthropy and a sincere love of truth, this writer observes: "Far different was the situation of the great philosopher when he came forth from his study and laboratory to mingle with the crowd which filled the galleries of Whitehall. In all that crowd there was no man equally qualified to render great and lasting services to mankind. But in all that crowd there was not a heart more set on things which no man ought to suffer to be necessary to his happiness—on things which can often be obtained only by the sacrifice of integrity and honour. To be the leader of the human race in the career of improvement . . . to be revered by the latest generations as the most illustrious among the benefactors of mankind—all this was within his reach. But all this availed him nothing, while some quibbling special pleader was promoted before him to the bench, while some obscure commoner took precedence of him by virtue of a purchased coronet . . . while some buffoon, versed in all the latest scandal of the court, could draw a louder laugh from the king." This illustration shows how the profoundest intellect may be enslaved by a puerile self-conceit. It shows that refined mental power, together with exalted rank, immense reputation, European greatness (in fact or in tendency), may yet be coupled with a wretched, drivelling idolatry of toys and follies. And the difference is soon reached; we see that the

soul of man is too capacious to be filled by the largest gifts of earth, and that time will not satisfy the cravings of a spirit made for eternity. *Wealth not happiness*:—Haman's wealth, honour, power, palace, friends, &c., failed to satisfy and make him happy. "There be as many miseries beyond riches, as on this side of them." "Pleasure is like lightning, a flash and away. The world is like an artichoke—nine parts of it are unprofitable leaves; about it there is a little picking meat, and, in the midst, there is a core enough to choke them that devour it." It may be said of the world, as of Athens, "It is a fine place to pass through, for there is much to be learned there; but it is a bad place to live at, there are so many dangers in it." The pleasures of sin are momentary and unsatisfying; its punishment is eternal and terrible. Adrian, a pope of Rome, said, "I had great hardships and troubles in early life, but none gave me such misery as the papal crown." Diocletian, a Roman emperor, gave up his sovereignty, and retired to private life for comfort and happiness. It would be very foolish to pay genuine golden sovereigns for base counterfeit farthings. It is incredible that an angel should come from heaven to seek enjoyment with a baby's toys. And the soul should seek satisfaction and blessing from God. (*H. Burton.*) *Unsatisfied*:—In the deserts of Central Australia there grows a plant called the Nardoo plant, which although it satisfies hunger, is said to be destitute of nutritious elements, and a party of English explorers once perished of starvation while feeding daily upon it. It is so in the experience of those who find their portion in earthly things. Their desires are crowned, but they are actually perishing of want. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*) *The black ewe*:—Some time ago, as a gentleman was passing over one of the extensive downs in the West of England, about mid-day, where a large flock of sheep was feeding, and observing the shepherd sitting by the roadside preparing to eat his dinner, he stopped his horse, and entered into conversation with him to this effect: "Well, shepherd, you look cheerful and contented, and I daresay you have few cares to vex you. I, who am a man of pretty large property, cannot but look at such men as you with a kind of envy." "Why, sir," replied the shepherd, "'tis true I have no troubles like yours; and I could do well enough was it not for that black ewe that you see yonder amongst my flock. I have often begged my master to kill or sell her; but he won't, though she is the plague of my life, for no sooner do I sit down to look at my book, or take up my wallet to get my dinner, but away she sets off over the down, and the rest follow her, so that I have many a weary step after them. There, you see, she's off, and they are all after her." "Ah, friend," said the gentleman, "I see every man has a black ewe in his flock to plague him as well as I." *Small things annoy the greatest*:—How small things may annoy the greatest! Even a mouse troubles an elephant, a gnat a lion, a very flea may disquiet a giant. What weapon can be nearer to nothing than the sting of this wasp? Yet what a painful wound hath it given me! That scarce visible point, how it envenoms, and rankles, and swells up the flesh. The tenderness of the part adds much to the grief. If I be thus vexed with the touch of an angry fly, how shall I be able to endure the sting of a tormenting conscience. (*Bp. Hall.*) *Worldly possessions cannot give full satisfaction*:—Who that looked upon Haman as he rode forth in all the glory of purple and gold, or as he lounged on his divan in the midst of his friends, would have supposed that he had anything to cause him so much annoyance? And yet is it not always so? There is a skeleton in every house, the worm in every rose, sorrow in every heart. Look into that stately mansion. See how richly it is furnished with finely carved chairs, luxurious lounges, marble-topped tables, and bookcases with rows of costly books. Pictures of the choicest character deck the walls. Busts and antiques are here and there. The velvety carpets feel like a mossy bank beneath the feet. Ask the occupants of the mansion if they are content, and perhaps the owner will tell you, "All this availeth me nothing" so long as my neighbour on the hill has a house larger and better furnished. The wife will perhaps tell you that "all availeth nothing" so long as a certain family is accounted as higher in the social scale than hers; or because at a dinner-party she noticed with annoyance that some one had taken precedence of herself; or because she had not been invited to some great gathering where certain of the *Elite* were expected. The absurdities and vexations of the weak-minded and exclusive are more than equal to those of the excluded. The petty social fanciful annoyances oft make all comforts and possessions to "avail nothing" in the production of real happiness. Enter the shop of that tradesman. What a large business he carries on! Yet he in his soul is not happy. He is envious. He will confess to himself, if not to you, "All this availeth me nothing"

so long as a certain competitor in the same business can buy cheaper or make money more rapidly than myself. Go along a country road, and note some pretty homestead nestling among the trees; surely that must be the abode of content and peace! You approach it, and meeting the occupant thereof, you congratulate him on the beauty of his dwelling-place and charm of the surrounding hills; he, haggard and worn, only replies, "All this availeth me nothing." Look at my neighbour's barn, how much larger, and his crops how much finer than mine! So the warrior or statesman, the preacher and the potentate, are alike discontented. Dissatisfied, successful men! The blessings and privileges they possess are nothing; the trifling lack or annoyance is everything. Their state is as sinful as it is miserable. They are lineal descendants of Haman the Agagite. It is not in the nature of worldly possessions or position to give full satisfaction. If they could, the results would have been injurious to man's moral nature. No thoughts of higher things entering man's mind, he would soon have been degraded to the level of the brute creation. (*F. Hastings.*)

Vers. 14. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends.—*Bad advice*:—If a proud man make his complaint to you of his unhappiness, you but make him more unhappy if you advise him to gratify his pride by unreasonable and sinful means. You might as well advise a man dying of a dropsy to pour into his throat large quantities of water. Advise him to mortify his pride, and to learn of Him who was meek, and lowly of heart; to deny himself, to prepare himself for bearing the cross, to take upon himself the yoke of Christ, which is easy. The humble man is always happy. The proud man can never be happy till he is effectually humbled. It is not consistent with the nature of things, nor with the will of the High and Lofty One, who abhors the proud, that the gratifications which pride requires should ever give pure or lasting pleasure to the soul. (*G. Lawson.*) *Women best and worst*:—The truth is women are the best and the worst. Because they can be the best, they can be the worst. Because they can rise to the highest in moral grandeur, in self-sacrificing love, in the things which bring human nature nearest to the angelic mood, therefore they can sink to the lowest, and when "past feeling" can be most like the angels fallen. Thank God that your best friends would renounce your society rather than stand by you in anything revengeful or mean. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VER. 1. On that night could not the king sleep.—*The power of a sleepless night*:—A trifling circumstance to record. Ah! how important are little things: the unnoticed things are the life-blood of the world. In a great palace we think of the marble and the stone, the cedar and the iron, but who thinks of the mortar and the nails? And yet, in the architecture, mortar and nails are as important as pillars and columns and beams. Thus in the architecture of the world, and in the conduct of its moral affairs, trifles are the mortar and the nails. I. The first thing I see here is a WONDERFUL LESSON IN THE ILLIMITABLE PLAN OF PROVIDENCE. How events ripen to the close! How crime matures itself to its doom! Amazing is the work of providence. You see two distinct sets of actions progressing at the same moment. The election of Esther, the choice of a merely capricious king; the elevation to dignity: the integrity of Mordecai; the ambition of Haman: the desire to crush the Jews; the yearning desire to save them. All these things are working together. You remember "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And "all things work together for good to them that love God." Calmly and surely proceeds the Divine plan, and, unaware of the Divine idea, proceeds the infernal plan. See how triumphantly Haman looks at the letters of persecution signed with the signet of the king: and see how he gloats as the morning sun shines over the black gallows-tree, and never for a moment suspects it to be his own. The poor blind fool checkmated by himself! ingeniously rearing his own scaffold, and twisting the rope for his own neck. You will perhaps say to me, "Why did God allow all this to go on so far? Why did He not check Haman in the first moment of his invidious attempting? Why is the crime matured?"

And the answer perhaps only pushes the inquiry farther back. "Why did He allow Haman to be near the court at all?" The answer must be, that God and providence are not the capricious and intermeddling agencies you have sometimes supposed: they prosecute their own path, and Satan and sin prosecute their path too. On they hasten, every step hastens to judgment; every movement winds the entangling coil of circumstances more irretrievably around them. II. How, FROM THE WIDE SWEEP OF IMMENSE PROVIDENCES WE DESCEND TO TRIFLES! How the scheme of providence includes and encloses the small details of human affairs! I will extract three other lessons.—1. How remote, and yet how distinct and minute, are the operations of God's providence! Here was a circumstance connected with the history of the Church, with the preservation of God's people, and with the conservation of Divine truth, and the advent of the Messiah. How small a place is Shushan and the whole of Media and Ahasuerus! 2. See the perfect compatibility, nay, unity, of prayer with the plans of providence. The prayers of Mordecai, the mournings of the Jews, they are the operating causes round the sleepless couch. The prayer so troubled the couch, that the king could not sleep. 3. May I not apply it yet once more, and ask you the meaning of some sleepless nights, some troubled days? (*E. P. Hood.*) *Ahasuerus' sleepless night—the Divine government*:—1. Who is the sleepless monarch on this night? 2. What was the book he read that night? 3. What was the discovery he made that night? 4. What was the result of the discovery that night? Two things, at least, came out from the king's sleeplessness this night. (1) The preservation and exaltation of Mordecai. (2) The frustration of enormous wickedness, and the salvation of the whole Jewish people. Truly, this was a memorable night. From this subject we may learn a few lessons in connection with God's government of the world. I. HE OFTEN WORKS OUT HIS PURPOSE THROUGH THE FREE WORKINGS OF DEPRAVED MINDS, UNCONSCIOUS OF HIS INFLUENCE. The brethren of Joseph, prompted by evil passions, sell him to the Ishmaelites, and he is borne a slave into Egypt. They are free in their wicked counsels and deed; but, unconsciously to themselves, all the while they are carrying out the purposes of Heaven. The same with Vespasian and Titus in their destruction of Jerusalem. Though a spirit most fiendish moved and directed these bloodthirsty and ambitious pagans, yet they wrought out almost with letter minuteness the long-threatened judgment of Heaven. As nature moves on to the magnificence of summer, as well through cloudy skies and thunderstorms as sunshine and serenity, so providence advances its purposes, as well through such a mind as that of Ahasuerus as that of Peter, or of Paul. II. HE ALWAYS OVERRULES THE CONDUCT OF SINNERS FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THEIR OWN PLANS. The very destruction which Haman and his accomplices plotted for Mordecai and the whole Jewish people came upon themselves. On the lofty gallows that Haman had raised for another, he was hanged himself. Thus it ever is. The men of Babel build a tower in order to be kept in close social combination; but that structure leads to their confusion and separation. The Egyptians rush into the Red Sea in order to wreak vengeance on the fleeing Israelites; but the channel in which they sought to bury their enemies became their own grave. It is the very nature of sin to confound itself. Its struggles for pleasure will lead to misery; for honour, will lead to degradation. Sin always conducts the sinner to a result never sought, never intended. What sinner aims, as an intelligent purpose, at the blasting of all his hopes, the loss of all his friendships, the everlasting ruin of his soul? Yet to these every sin he commits is conducting him. Like Haman, every sinner is building his own gallows. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. III. HE SOMETIMES WORKS OUT HIS PURPOSES BY MEANS APPARENTLY MOST INSIGNIFICANT. (*Homilist.*) *The sleepless night*:—I. HOW GOD OPERATES TO MIGHTY ENDS THROUGH INCONSIDERABLE AGENCIES. We are apt to measure God by standards established between man and man. The Divine greatness is regarded as that of some very eminent king: what would be inconsistent with the dignity of the potentate is regarded as inconsistent with the dignity of God; and what seems to us to contribute to that dignity is carried up to the heavenly courts, or supposed to exist there in the highest perfection. But we should gain a grander and juster idea of our Maker by considering in what He differs from men, than by ascribing to Him, only in an infinite degree, what is found amongst ourselves. It is not by putting unbounded resources at the disposal of God and representing Him as working through stupendous instrumentality that we frame the highest notions of Him as a sovereign and ruler. There is something sublimer and more over-

whelming in those sayings of Scripture, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength," "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty," than in the most magnificent and gorgeous descriptions of dominion and strength. Christianity, for example, diffused through the instrumentality of twelve legions of angels would have been immeasurably inferior, as a trophy of Omnipotence, to Christianity diffused through the instrumentality of twelve fishermen. When I survey the heavens, with their glorious troop of stars, and am told that the Almighty employs them to His own majestic ends, I seem to feel as though they were worthy of being employed by the Creator. But show me a tiny insect, just floating in the breeze, and tell me that, by and through that insect, God will carry forward the largest and most stupendous of His purposes, and I am indeed filled with amazement. And is there anything strained or incorrect in associating with an insect the redemption of the world? Nay, not so. In saving the race whence Messiah was to spring, God worked through the disturbed sleep of the Persian monarch, and the buzz of an inconsiderable insect might have sufficed to break that monarch's repose. When God interfered on behalf of His people groaning under the bondage of Pharaoh, it was with miracle and prodigy, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm; but I fall before Him as yet more amazing in wisdom and power, when I find the bloody purpose of Haman defeated through such instrumentality as this: "The king could not sleep," &c. II. THE SETTING UNDER A RIGHT POINT OF VIEW OF THE UTILITY OF PRAYER. It is often objected against prayer that it seeks for miracles and expects God to interrupt at our call the established course of things. It may be that when the Jews betook themselves to prayer, that they looked for visible and miraculous interference, as in other emergencies when God bared His arm in defence of His people. Although I thoroughly believe that were a case to arise in which nothing short of a miracle would meet the circumstances of a servant of God, the miracle would not be withheld; yet I am satisfied that it is not required that there should be miracles in order to our prayers being granted, neither does the granting them suppose that God is variable or changes in His purposes. There was no miracle in His causing Ahasuerus to pass a sleepless night: a little heat in the atmosphere, or the buzzing of an insect, might have produced the result; and philosophy, with all its sagacity, could not have detected any interruption of the known laws of nature. Neither were God's purposes variable, though it may have actually depended on the importunity of prayer, whether or not the people should be delivered. God's purpose may have been that He would break the king's sleep if prayer reached a certain intenseness; that He would not break it if it came below that intenseness; and surely this would accord equally with two propositions—1. That the Divine purposes are fixed and immutable. 2. That notwithstanding this fixedness and immutability, they may be affected by human petitions, and therefore leave room for importunate prayer. Comparatively I should not be encouraged, were I told that what disquieted the monarch was the standing of a spectre by his bedside in an unearthly form, which in unearthly accents upbraided him for leaving Mordecai unrequited. But when I observe that the king's rest was disturbed without anything supernatural; that all which God had to do in order to arrange a great deliverance for His people was to cause a sleepless night, but so to cause it, that no one could discern His interference, then indeed I learn that I may not be asking what the world counts miracle, though I ask what transcends all power but Divine. There is something encouraging in this to all who feel their insignificance. If the registered deliverances, vouchsafed to the Church, were all deliverances which had been effected through miracles, we might question whether they formed any precedent on which creatures like ourselves could justly rest hope. We dare not think that for us armed squadrons will be seen in the heavens, or the earth be convulsed, or the waters turned into blood. But look from Israel delivered from Pharaoh to Israel delivered from Haman, and we are encouraged to believe that God will not fail even us in our extremity, seeing that He could save the people through such a simple and unsuspected process as this: "On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The sleepless night*:—There may have been three or four reasons for this restlessness. 1. The care of his kingdom. 2. The revolving of ambitious schemes. 3. His raging passions. His passions often showed themselves in a ridiculous way. When he came back from his Grecian expedition he was so mad at the river Hellespont for breaking up his bridge of

boats, that he ordered his servants to whip that river with three hundred lashes.

4. A troubled conscience. There is nothing like an aroused conscience to keep a man awake when he wants to sleep. There was a ruler who one morning was found with his sword cutting a nest of swallows to pieces. Somebody came up and said, "Why do you cut that nest of swallows to pieces?" "Why," he replied, "those swallows keep saying that I murdered my father." The fact was, that the man had committed the crime, and his conscience, by Divine ventriloquism, was speaking out of that birds' nest. No, Ahasuerus could not sleep. The more he tried to sleep, the wider he got awake. All around about his pillow the past came. There, in the darkness, stood Vashti, wan and wasted in banishment. There stood the princes whom he had despoiled by his evil example. There were the representatives of the homes he had blasted by his infamous demand that the brightest be sent to his palace; broken-hearted parents crying, "Give me back my child, thou vulturous soul!" The outrages of the past fitting along the wall, swinging from the tassels, crouching in the corner, groaning under the pillow, setting their heels on his consuming brain, and crying, "Get up! This is the verge of hell! No sleep! No sleep!" (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

The sleepless night:—How many different causes or occasions there may be of the sleepless night! Some cannot sleep in the remembrance of recent sin. Some are kept waking by great sorrow. Some by brain excitement. Some in very weariness of overwork. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Sleep a necessity:—Without it human life would soon come to an end. It would burn rapidly away. (*Ibid.*)

Men sleep or wake as God wills:—Kings have no specific to secure healthful rest; rather they are apt to miss the best specific, hard work and a good conscience. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

Resource in sleeplessness:—A good book is a better resource in sleeplessness than drugs. (*Ibid.*)

Divine providence:—I. Note THE MINUTE UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S SUPERVISION AND CONTROL. The notion of many is that providence is concerned only with great matters. But those who so believe forget that perfection in anything cannot be secured without attention to details, and that great issues often hinge on apparently very trifling affairs. A sleepless night is in itself no very important thing. Again, it is a matter of little moment what a man shall do to fill in the hours of sleeplessness and keep himself from *ennui*; but if Xerxes had adopted any other plan than that which he followed, or if the attendant had chosen to read from any other section of the chronicles of the kingdom than that which he selected, there would have been nothing to recall Mordecai's services to the king's remembrance. Once more: if Haman had not come to the court at the time he did, and been introduced into the presence at the precise moment when the mind of the king was pondering the question what honour should be conferred on Mordecai, then the first word might have been his, and so the fiat might have gone out for the consigning of Mordecai to the gallows, even at the moment when the monarch was thinking about doing him honour. Now, this history is not exceptional in any respect. It certainly is not exceptional in this particular. You see the same supervision of the most apparently trifling things by God in the biography of Joseph, and there are many striking illustrations of it in secular history. A change of wind from west to east is not a great matter, and yet on such a change as that, at a particular hour of a particular day, the history of Great Britain turned; for thereby the fleet of William of Orange was waited to Torbay, while that of James II. was by the same means prevented from putting out to sea to intercept its progress. II. But note THAT WE HAVE HERE NO INTERFERENCE WITH THE OPERATION OF THE LAWS OF NATURE, AND NO INFRINGEMENT OF THE LIBERTY OF MORAL AGENTS. We have no record of any miracle in this case. There is nothing supernatural in a man's having a sleepless night, or in his fixing on a certain part of his chronicles to read, or in the coming in of another person upon him at a particular juncture; and no single one of the actors in the case was working under compulsion—each one knew at the moment that he was following his own bent. But it was not less the work of God, or less glorifying to God. Now this non-miraculous providence, if I may so call it, is a greater and grander and more glorious achievement of God's than it would have been if the same results had been accomplished through the direct forth-putting of His own omnipotence. Now, if what I have advanced on this important matter be true, it may cast some light on the way in which God answers His people's prayers. There are those who affirm that to ask God to confer on us a physical blessing is to ask Him to work a miracle in our behalf. Even if I believed that, I would still ask Him for what I need, because

He has commanded me to do so, and I would trustfully leave the method of His answer in His own hands. But I do not believe that to ask a physical blessing from God is to ask Him to work a miracle in our behalf, and such a history as this of Esther confirms me in that non-belief. Then, finally, here, if what I have advanced in this connection be correct, it may tend to reconcile us to the minor inconveniences that come upon us in life. What an amount of fretting we do over little things! We go off our sleep, or we miss a train, or we have to wait for some tedious hours at a railroad station, or we approach the harbour in a fog and have to lie outside for a long while, so near our homes and yet so far from them, or a friend disappoints us and our plans are deranged. Yet why should we be impatient if it be true that even these little things are taken cognisance of by God, and woven by Him for His glory and our good into the fabric of our lives? If we could but pause a moment and say within ourselves, "This is all in the plan of God concerning us," we should at once have self-control. Lessons—1. Think how valuable God's commonest gifts are. Keep your conscience clean, that nothing of guilt may put thorns into your pillow. Take no ambitious schemes with you to your couch, lest you should be constrained to lie awake in the attempt to work them out. Finish each day's business in its own day, that there may be no nervous anxiety in your mind about the morrow. Watch over your table, and take nothing there that will make you restless. Think more of this common blessing of sleep, and see in that one of the richest tokens of the Divine goodness which is not to be trifled with, but to be valued and enjoyed. 2. And this leads me, by a very natural transition, to ask whether you have ever reviewed your obligations to God for all that He has done for you? Xerxes utilised his sleepless hours in discovering wherein he had failed to meet his obligations to his benefactors. But what a benefactor you have had in God! He gave His only Son for your salvation. Xerxes' indebtedness to Mordecai was nothing in comparison to your obligation to Jehovah. Now let me ask, What have you done to Him for that? (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Sleeplessness providentially used* :—There is no reason assigned for this. The king was not afflicted with illness, he was not suddenly seized with any disease to cause this wakefulness, nor was it occasioned by any intelligence of a distressing character, such as that formidable enemies had made their appearance before Shushan, or that grievous misfortunes had happened to any one dear to him. No; but the matter was entirely of the Lord. God has employed sleep for weighty purposes, in various ages of the world. It was while Adam was in "deep sleep" that "one of his ribs was taken," and made a living being and an help meet for him. It was while Jacob was asleep that he was favoured with that wonderful vision, in which he beheld a ladder set upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven—a striking representation of God's providential care for His people, and likewise of that Redeemer who is the way to the Father—a way in which whosoever walketh the angels of glory continually afford him their friendly ministrations. It was when Joseph was asleep that he was directed from heaven to take Mary for his wife, because that which had been conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. But here God carries His purposes into execution by means of the absence of sleep. He is never at a loss to bring His designs to pass. (*J. Hughes.*) *Watches of the night* :—Had Ahasuerus been a pious man, and acquainted with the Word of God, he would have filled up the watches of the night with religious meditations, or called for the book of the law of the Lord, in which he would have found both instruction and entertainment. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Historical records* :—Nor was the custom wholly confined to the East. The "Chronicles of the Cid," William of Malmesbury's "Chronicles of the Kings of England," the six old English Chronicles, viz., Asser's Life of Alfred, and Chronicles of Eldred, Ethelred, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and of Richard, and "The Chronicles of the Crusaders," of Robert of Gloucester, and Ossian, and the famous Spanish and English ballads, are a part and parcel of the history and literature of our own day. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *A sleepless king* :—In one of the dungeons of the fortress of Glatz lay a Prussian nobleman. King Frederick William III. had confined him there for treason. He had been long a prisoner, and there was no hope that he would ever be released. His only company was a Bible—the book he hated, and never read. But suffering and solitude wore upon his spirit, and he did read at last—till there rose in his soul some sense of a just God, who punishes those that forsake Him. He had forsaken Him—and now he repented of it. One night, by the dim light of his dungeon lamp, he was turning the leaves of the Bible for consolation, when his eyes fell on Psal. i. 15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt

glorify Me." Then, for the first time since childhood, the proud man knelt and prayed, and the peace of God came into his heart and dwelt there. That same night King Frederick in his palace, like King Ahasuerus, could not sleep. Worn out, he begged the Lord to give him one hour of rest from pain; and his prayer was granted. He awoke refreshed and grateful, and said to his wife, "Who in all my kingdom has wronged me most? I will forgive him." Said Queen Louise, "It is the Count M—— in the prison of Glatz." "Send orders to release him at once," commanded the king. And in a few days the prisoner was a free man, glorifying God for both spiritual and temporal deliverance. *All records before God's eye continually* :—When Ahasuerus read in the book of the records of the chronicles, and there found how Mordecai had discovered a plot of treason against his person, he did not lay the book aside, and slightly pass by such a piece of service, but inquires what honour and what dignity had been done to Mordecai. It seems if the king had thought on, or read of him sooner, he had rewarded him sooner: but God hath ever in His eye all the records and chronicles of His people's actions; He reads their journals every day. (J. Spencer.)

Ver. 3. **There is nothing done for him.**—*Merit overlooked* :—Modest merit is overlooked, while the aspiring, the ambitious, and the time-serving rise to honour and riches. Nor is ingratitude confined to courts. (T. McCrie, D.D.) *Ingratitude to God* :—But if gratitude to man for his comparatively little kindness (for man cannot do much for his fellow) animate the believer's bosom, it glows with still more fervent gratitude to God, for the invaluable and merited blessing of salvation. (T. Hughes.) *A resurrection of good works* :—Things are done and forgotten, and men never suppose that they will come up again; yet after many days they are revived, and history begins to take up the thread where it was dropped. (J. Parker, D.D.) *God's time best* :—But God is never surprised, and the end of all is to make us think of Him. Nothing entered in His "book of remembrance" is ever forgotten. His time for bringing the good deeds of His people to light may seldom be the time we would judge best, but it is always the most fit. Look to this case. Had it been a day, an hour, half an hour sooner, would the effect have been as good for Mordecai or for his people? Would humility, prayer, patience, have been called into strengthening exercise? (A. M. Symington, B.A.) *Unearthed* :—The loyalty and faithfulness of Mordecai had not been rewarded at the time. On the human side that might have been regarded as a piece of ingratitude, if not a reprehensible oversight; but on the Divine side it was a prepared cause, secreted and hidden for a long period, and yet waiting, and ready for the accomplishment, at the right time of a beneficent result. It was destined to come to the light. It was a seed-corn buried in the earth, which should bear fruit in due season. In an opposite direction there is the same particular providence often manifested in the unveiling of crime, and the bringing home of guilt to the hearts of those who have contracted it, as in the envy and malice of Joseph's brethren and the avaricious covetousness of Achan. As shells, deep in the sea, grope their way to the shore, or as hidden springs burst their way through to the surface, and form little rivulets, so is there in providence a great law, constantly in operation, for the disclosure of all that is either good or bad in human character or conduct. If bad, it is as though the avenger was tracking the steps of the transgressor, and at some turning in his path, and by some trivial accident, the evil is unearthed, and the doer of it brought to judgment. Or if good, it is as though the rewarder was following in the way of the righteous, and at the best time, and apparently by the most fortuitous combination of circumstances, the well-doing is made known, and meets with its recompense. Even now it is so. But the lines are drawn out far beyond the present, and converge in the transactions of a distant day. (T. McEwan.) *Reward and retribution* :—I. IT TEACHES US HOW WELL A GOOD MAN CAN AFFORD TO WAIT FOR THE DUE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS UPRIGHTNESS, AND FOR ANY REWARD HE MAY NEED FOR THE GOOD HE HAS DONE. The conjecture is that six long years had gone by since Mordecai revealed the plot of the chamberlains and saved the king's life, and not even a word of acknowledgment had come to him during all that time. But what we most admire is his behaviour meantime. If he had been a self-seeking man, he could easily have found means to refresh the king's memory as to his services; but he kept silence. If he had been a malignant man, he might have sought what he would, in that case, have called a just revenge for the ungrateful neglect with which he had been treated, by hatching or falling in with some other plot. And then, how well all turns out in the end! How much

better than if the reward had been given at the time! "He that believeth shall not make haste"; God's time is always the best. Righteousness is its own reward, and we are never righteous as God would have us be until we feel this deeply and act accordingly. He who, in God's strength, looks every day on the face of duty, and walks with her along whatever paths her sacred feet may tread, has in his own spirit, in his own character, what soon or late will blossom out into all beauty and grandeur; what will in the end become "glory, honour, and immortality." II. The next lesson is just the opposite of this, viz., "HOW CERTAINLY A BAD MAN MUST BE OVERTAKEN AND PUNISHED!" We say "how certainly" because there is in his badness the root and element of the retribution, and often, without knowing it, he carefully develops and ripens by his own action the retribution that falls on his head. III. FOR THERE IS AN INCRESCENT POWER IN EVIL (as indeed there is also in good), IN VIEW OF WHICH WE CANNOT BE TOO WATCHFUL AND ANXIOUS, LEST BY ANY MEANS WE SHOULD FALL UNDER THE POWER OF IT. The power of it, remember, is very silent and gentle, generally, in its operations. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *Pacification of conscience*.—The king was determined to rectify this matter, for he thought that by the pacification of conscience sleep might return. Many men are willing to purchase sleep on high terms. Could the murder but be undone; could the evil deed be but blotted out; could the stolen money be but safely returned; could the cruel word but be recalled; in short, could anything be done that sleep might once more come to the house, and fold all memories and anxieties within its healing robes! (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-11. *What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?*—*Pride associated with folly*.—1. In Haman honouring Mordecai we have a remarkable verification of the fable of the dog and the shadow. He gaped after the shadow and lost the substance. Folly generally rides after pride. Haman grew more and more insolent and arrogant as he advanced in wealth and power, until he reached the highest point allowed to him by providence. He did not consider that he who does not climb gets no fall, and that he that climbs too high is sure, at last, to come down with a terrible crash. His temerity is remarkable. Thinking, however, that he was ordered to cut out his own honour, it is natural he should have made the measure large. 2. How completely wretched are the envious and the proud. Pride is the canker-worm of the soul. It always renders us unhappy. It is ever so with those who have not a new heart. The most wealthy and highly honoured are not content. There is something still wanting. There is something they still complain about. They make themselves miserable when they ought to be happy. Oh, how little a thing is earthly grandeur! How little a thing may embitter all human honour and affluence! There can be no happiness on earth till there is self-denial and trust. There is no happiness till we begin to crucify selfishness, and to trust in God as the portion of our souls. 3. We see here how great a misfortune it is to have friends and counsellors who are ignorant, wicked, or evil-disposed. There is a great deal of truth in the proverb, "Save me from my friends, and I will take care of my enemies." It is sad when a man's bosom counsellor is not true and faithful. And there is always danger to be apprehended when the advice of a professed friend is pleasing to our own angry or revengeful feelings. If Haman's wife had been a meek, quiet, prudent, intelligent, God-fearing woman, her advice, at first, had been altogether of a different sort, and her bearing toward her husband, when he hastened home from court, almost heartbroken with disappointment and rage, would have been altogether different from what it was. Instead of adding fuel to his malignant passions, she should have endeavoured to moderate and restrain them. And instead of bruising a heart already broken, by adding taunt and reproach to grief, she should have sought to calm him and make him feel that, with her, in his own home, he was still with friends, respected and beloved, however much he had suffered at court. The husband's fortune is more fully in the hands of his wife than anywhere else. It is hers to make his home happy, and to gird him with strength by sympathy and counsel. When his spirits are almost overwhelmed, she alone, of all human beings, is the one to minister to him. Her nursing is as sovereign to his sick soul as it is for his ailing body. It is her gentle tones only that can steal over his morbid senses with more power than David's harp. And when his courage is almost gone, her patience and fortitude will rekindle his heart again to dare and do, and meet anew the toils and troubles of life. What a misfortune it was that Haman had not a sweet Christian home to retire to after the terrible disappointments and bitter

experiences of that day! Yes, a sweet, quiet home. But you tell me I forget that he was a man of large estates, great honours, and the owner of a princely palace. True, but a palace is not always a home. What is a home? It is something for which many of earth's babbling tongues have no term. A home is not a mere residence for the body, but a place where the heart rests and the affections nestle and dwell and multiply. Just in the proportion that a good woman is a blessing, in the same proportion is a bad woman a curse. Woman's mission is a high and grand one. She is connected with everything that belongs to our race that is noble, refining, and hopeful. Great is the calamity, then, for a community to be under the influence of such opinions or sentiments as are degrading to its women. One bad woman can do more harm in society than a dozen bad men. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *The Nemesis of providence*:—Had he been planning for Mordecai all the time he had been thinking of himself? Yea, verily, that was the Nemesis of providence; and yet, bad as it was, that was only one-half of the matter, for before long he would find that he had also been planning for himself when he had been thinking of Mordecai. The honour which he had designed for himself went to Mordecai, and the destruction which he had devised for Mordecai fell upon himself. The royal apparel was worn by the Jew, and the Agagite was hanged upon the gallows. His head had not been turned by the brief honour, nor his heart uplifted by the short-lived glory, for he was well ballasted, and his people were not yet delivered. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Great changes*:—What a marvellous change! what an unlooked-for revolution! The side of the wheel that was lately the lowest is now the highest. That which was a short time ago shrouded in darkness is now radiant with light! "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." (*J. Hughes.*) *The vain man*:—We see here the working and the punishment of vanity and pride. "Whom can the king think worthy of special honour but myself?" thought Haman. The vain man is always occupied about himself. He thinks about himself; he speaks about himself; he is all in all to himself. The idea never crossed Haman's mind that there could possibly be anyone besides himself whom the king could desire to distinguish by any particular mark of favour. But then how crushing was the order: "Go and do as thou hast said to Mordecai the Jew." (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *The Church honoured by her enemies*:—In this manner does God sometimes make the enemies of His Church and servants to honour them. He not only makes the sinners' hands to forge the snares in which they themselves are caught, but He compels them to weave the crown and impose it on the head of the righteous. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *Insatiable vanity*:—Haman's answer reveals the insatiableness of vanity. No sooner was honour mentioned than his heart cried, "Let me have it! Make me a king, though it be only for an hour; if without the power, yet with all the pomp and trappings." Will this man never have enough? Never; the food is so light and the appetite so strong that there must be a constant supply. Give him this, and to-morrow he will seek something more. The craving is a disease, an atrophy, a cancer. To enjoy honour and to be satisfied with it, a man must be healthy—that is, humble. Mark the strong delusion: "Now Haman thought in his heart." A man cannot have a worse guide than the thought of his heart, unless God has broken and new-made it. Twice within this single minute Haman was cheated by the thought of his heart. He thought others must esteem him as highly as he esteemed himself; but it is never the case that when a man has a lofty opinion of himself other men have an opinion equally flattering. And he thought that all was going well with him, that this sudden honour would only postpone his revenge for an hour, that by the time he returned from the queen's banquet he would be the happiest man in Persia; but he was just on the brink of perdition. The water is always smooth above a cataract. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Self-flattery leading to self-humiliation*:—I. AN ARTLESS QUESTION ADDRESSED TO CONCEIT. II. THE REASONING OF CONCEIT. III. THE ANSWER OF CONCEIT. IV. THE FEARFUL BLOW TO CONCEIT. V. THE HUMILIATING CONDITION OF CONCEIT. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 12. *And Mordecai came again to the king's gate.*—*Humility*:—A proud, ambitious man would have said to himself, "No more of the king's gate for me! I shall direct my steps now to the king's palace, and hold myself ready for honour, office, emolument, which surely must now be at hand." Mordecai seems to have said within himself, "If these things are designed for me in God's good providence, they will find me. But they must seek me, for I shall not seek them. Those who confer them know my address. 'Mordecai, at the king's gate,' will still find me."

(A. Raleigh, D.D.) *Honours modestly borne*:—Few can bear honours and dignities with equanimity, even when they come upon them gradually; but such sudden and high advancement was enough to make any ordinary person giddy, to cause him to forget himself, and behave unseemly. What fatal effects upon the head and heart do we often witness in persons who have all at once been raised from poverty to riches and rank. Even good men are not always proof against the intoxicating influence of such transitions. But Mordecai kept his place; like a gallant ship, firmly moored in a bay, which during a flood-tide heaves and seems for a time borne along with the lighter craft, but, obeying its anchor, comes round and resumes its former position. The pageantry of an hour could not unsettle his mind; he regarded it in its true light—a vain show. (T. McCrie, D.D.)

Ver. 13. *Before whom thou hast begun to fall*.—*Descent easy*:—The ascent to honour and greatness is steep, and those who aspire after them must climb it slowly, and with difficulty; but the descent is easy, and so precipitous, that when they lose their footing they fall in minutes what they rose in years. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VERS. 1-6. *What is thy petition, Queen Esther?*—*Esther's petition*:—1. When called to speak for God and His people, we must summon up our courage, and act with becoming confidence and decision. Had Esther held her peace, under the influence of timidity or false prudence, or spoken with reserve as to the designs against the Jews and their author, she would have been rejected as an instrument of Jacob's deliverance, and her name would not have stood at the head of one of the inspired books. 2. When persons resolve singly and conscientiously to discharge their duty in critical circumstances, they are often wonderfully helped. The manner in which Esther managed her cause was admirable, and showed that her heart and tongue were under a superior influence and management. How becoming her manner and the spirit with which she spoke! 3. It is possible to plead the most interesting of all causes, that of innocence and truth, with moderation and all due respect. The address of Esther was respectful to Ahasuerus as a king and a husband: "If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king." Esther was calm as well as courageous, respectful as well as resolute. 4. It argues no want of respect to those in authority to describe evil counsellors in their true colours in bringing an accusation against them, or in petitioning against their unjust and destructive measures. "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." 5. It is horrible to think and hard to believe that there is such wickedness as is perpetrated in the world. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" We might well ask, Who was he that betrayed his master, and where did they live who crucified the Lord of glory? Who or where is he that dares presume to say, even in his heart, "There is no God"—that denies a providence, profanes the name and day of God, turns the Bible into a jest-book, mocks at prayer and fasting, and scoffs at judgment to come? And yet such persons are to be found in our own time. 6. We sometimes startle at the mention of vices to which we ourselves have been accessory. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" He is not unknown to thee, neither is he far from thee, O king. "Thou art the man!" And how seldom do we reflect on the degree in which we have been accessory to and participant in the sins of others by our bad example, our criminal silence, and the neglect of those means which were in our power, and which we had a right to employ for checking them. 7. Persecution is not more unjust than it is impolitic. (*Ibid.*) *The prudent management of things*:—I. We see THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF CAPABLE AND PRUDENT MANAGEMENT OF THINGS. Esther's management of these great affairs is evidently consummate. There is an overruling providence, but there is also a teaching wisdom of God, and if we wish to be fully under the protection of the one, we must open all our faculties to receive the other. -II. We have in Esther's behaviour A VERY NOTABLE AND NOBLE INSTANCE OF CALM AND COURAGEOUS ACTION IN STRICT CONFORMITY WITH THE PREDETERMINED PLAN. How few women are born into the world who could go through these scenes as

Esther does! How many would faint through fear! How many would be carried by excitement into a premature disclosure of the secret! How many would be under continual temptation to change the plan! Only a select few can be calm and strong in critical circumstances, patient and yet intense, prudent and yet resolved. III. HER BOLDNESS TAKES HERE A FORM WHICH IT HAS NOT BEFORE ASSUMED: IT IS SHOWN IN THE DENUNCIATION OF A PARTICULAR PERSON: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Strong language; but, at any rate, it is open and honest and above-board—no whispering into the king's private ear; no secret plotting to supplant the Prime Minister. Every word is uttered in the man's hearing, and to his face. Let him deny, if he can; let him explain, if he can. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Let my life be given me at my petition.—*A plea for life*:—We have the very same cause for urgency of suit as she had. It behoveth us to say in the presence of another King, "Oh, let my life be given me at my petition." There is a royal law, and under that law our lives are forfeited. Life, in the narrative before us, was about to be taken away unjustly—by force of a most cruel mandate; but it is a holy law that dooms us to death. (*J. Hughes.*) **For we are sold.**—*A plea for liberty*:—We also ought to sue both for our lives and our liberties. By nature we are the bondmen and bondwomen of sin and Satan. (*Ibid.*)

Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?—*The doings of a wicked heart*:—I. A wicked heart INDUCES FOOLHARDINESS. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Haman's daring presumption. A wicked heart is both deceitful and deceiving. II. A wicked heart sooner or later MEETS WITH OPEN CONDEMNATION. III. A wicked heart LEADS TO FEARFULNESS. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *Moral indignation*, being commonly sudden and intense in uttering itself, furnishes strong testimony in favour of the universal principles of God's moral law; but we have need to be careful how we indulge in expression of virtuous wrath. It is safe and wholesome for us to pause and ask whether there is no risk that in judging others we may be condemning ourselves. Ahasuerus will feel ere long that he has uttered his own condemnation. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*)

The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.—*The index finger*:—"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." This is the best way of dealing with every enemy. Definite statements are manageable, but vague charges are never to be entertained. No man makes progress who deals in generalities. The sermon is in the application. The prayer is in the amen. Let us apply this teaching. I. IN THE MATTER OF OUR OWN PERSONAL CHARACTER.

1. Put your finger upon the weak point of your character, and say, "Thy name is Self-indulgence." Tell yourself that you are allowing your life to ooze away through self-gratification. You never say no to an appetite, you never smite a desire in the face. 2. Take it another direction. "The adversary and enemy is this infernal jealousy." Your disease, say to yourself, is jealousy. Speak in this fashion when you have entered your closet and shut your door; say, "I am a jealous man, and therefore I am an unjust man; I cannot bear that that man should be advancing; I hate him; the recollection of his name interferes with my prayers; would God I could lay hold of something I could publish against him, I would run him to death." Yes, this is the reality of the case, God never casts out this devil, this all-devil; only thou canst exorcise this legion. 3. Or take it in some other aspect and say, "The adversary and enemy is this eternal worldliness, that will not let me get near my God." II. WITH REGARD TO PUBLIC ACCUSATIONS. 1. Take it in the matter of public decay. (1) Who in looking abroad upon the country will say, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked liquor traffic"? (2) Or, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked official self-seeking"? 2. Apply the same law to the decline of spiritual power. It is an easy thing to read a paper on this subject, but who names the Haman? What keeps us back? (1) Fear of offending the world. The world ought to be offended. No worldling should ever have one moment's comfort in the house of God. He should feel that unless he is prepared to change his disposition, he is altogether in the wrong place. (2) Sometimes the enemy is doubt in the heart of the preacher himself. The man is divided. His axe is split across the very edge. There is no power in his right arm. When he speaks he keeps back the emphasis. III. WE MIGHT APPLY THE SAME DOCTRINE TO HINDRANCES IN THE CHURCH. The adversary and enemy is this wicked, cold-hearted man. Whenever he comes into the church the preacher cannot preach; he cannot do many mighty works because that man is there, cold, icy, critical. We are afraid to name the adversary in church; we confine ourselves to "proper" words, to "decent" expressions, to euphemisms that have neither beginning nor ending as

to practical vitality and force. We are the victims of circumlocution, we go round and round the object of our attack, and never strike it in the face. What we want is a definite, tremendous, final stroke. Esther succeeded. Her spirit can never fail. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.**—*Guilt cowardly* :—Haman was now left alone with his righteous accuser. Innocence is courageous, but guilt is cowardly. Men, with the consciousness of having truth and justice on their side, have risen superior to the fear of death, and stood undaunted before wrathful kings. But this man, haughty and hardened in view of the sufferings of others, no sooner sees that evil is determined against himself than he becomes a poor, unnerved trembling suppliant at the feet of her whom he had most grievously wronged. (*T. McEwan.*) *Cruel people often cowardly* :—Very cruel people are sometimes very cowardly. Judge Jeffreys could go through his black assize in the West of England, the terror of the land, manifesting the fury of a wild beast; but when the tide turned, and he saw nothing before him but ignominy and disgrace, he sank into a state of abject fear which was pitiable to see. “Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.” As he well may be. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*)

Vers. 7-10. And the king, arising from the banquet.—*Unexpected results* :—Man's calculation is always upon the result of his own forethought and skill. There is to be a sure success from the wisdom of his plans. The race is for the swift and the battle is for the strong. Napoleon said, “Heaven is always on the side of the heaviest artillery.” The history of human contests would give innumerable illustrations of the contrary. God vindicates His own right to rule by employing the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and taking the wise in their own craftiness. Haman has illustrated this in a very clear and remarkable manner. But Haman's course is not yet complete. “The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.” Now Haman sees and feels the folly of his malice, however well contrived. He illustrates the ever-remarkable fact, that the boldest oppressor of others is the most cowardly suppliant in a returning danger upon himself. Then said the king, “Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.” This closed his career of wickedness. Thus its folly and madness, as well as its guilt and certain ruin, were displayed. “Who hath hardened himself against the Lord, and hath prospered?” “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not. Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.” The prosperity of the wicked is short; the triumph of the ungodly is but for a moment. We see it thus displayed. Why shall we ever be tempted to test it for ourselves? Survey the whole course of this providence as it has passed. 1. It was a train of very trifling circumstances in each particular. There has been no event in the whole succession in itself of a remarkable or unusual character. 2. It was a very circuitous and remote process. The first step we have seen was very far off from the final result, and could not have been imagined to have any connection with it. Every succeeding step seemed equally independent and unlikely to produce the end designed. A wonderful plan was lately proposed for connecting New York and Brooklyn by a bridge, the foundation of which should be in the park. Who that saw men digging and laying stone in the middle of the park, with no knowledge of the plan proposed, could have imagined that it was the starting of a bridge over water so far distant, and to a shore so entirely out of sight? Yet such has been the course of this providence which we have considered. Stop at any point, and the connection is just as hidden, and the calculation of the future remains just as difficult. “Known only unto God are all His works from the beginning.” We may stand and ask, Why should the king have selected Esther at the very time of Haman's elevation? Yet every step is sure and leading forward to the result designed. Nothing is lost, and no error is committed upon the road. This is the wonderful skill of Divine providence. The wheels are full of eyes on every side. 3. It was a perfectly unexpected result. Haman had gone through his whole preliminary course with entire success. But how suddenly and wonderfully was he disappointed. 4. God overturns this whole scheme of wickedness without appearing directly to interfere with it in any step of the proceeding. The whole plan wrought out its own result as naturally as the seed of spring brings forth the summer's plant and the autumn's fruit. The sinner was entrapped in his own devices. The sinner was deluded, by his prosperity, to suppose the race was for the swift and the battle to the strong. And yet the whole scheme was overturned in a moment, without one

violent interruption occurring in its process. This is a most important lesson to us. It must teach us never to doubt the constant presence of God in all our concerns, and His directing power over all events involved in them. A change of wind may turn the dreaded flame from our habitation, a sudden lull may break the force of the tempest, the very means of apparent death may be made the real instrument of security and protection. And all this may be with no remarkable interference of special Divine power. Thus remarkable in the simplicity of its arrangement, as well as in the perfection of its result, was this whole process of the Divine overthrow of the crafty wickedness of Haman. He was caught in the very pride of his power. Haman was made the instrument of exalting the very adversary he so much hated. The very sorrow which he had prepared for his victim he was himself required to endure. Dr. Mason of New York, describes a remarkable scene of which he was an unexpected witness. A butcher in this city, in his rage with his aged father who had offended him, knocked him down upon the floor, and was dragging him by his hair to throw him into the street. He had pulled him to the outer door, when the old man cried out, "There, stop now, I did not drag him any further," and then confessed that he had abused his own father in the same manner, and dragged him to that very spot, with the same design. Such instances, in some shape, are constantly occurring, so that it is a familiar expectation that the wicked shall fall into the pit they have digged for others, and they who take the sword perish by the sword. The result of this whole providence was complete deliverance and exaltation to the oppressed, and complete destruction to the oppressor. This was the final result, and an illustration of that which will always be, and at last surely be, the final result. God will exalt those whom man oppresses. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Retributive justice :—An indestructible connection exists between the violation of Divine law and consequent suffering. A disregard to the conditions of health entails sickness. Poison destroys human life. He who thrusts his hand into the flame invites suffering. A like measure of changelessness marks the operations of moral law. Transgression is followed by suffering. Remorse is entailed by doing what one knows to be wrong. A sense of humiliation succeeds an unreasonable outbreak of anger. Loss of happiness and of self-restraint, and of the esteem of friends, is a portion of the legacy of self-indulgence. A knowledge of this law of retribution is not dependent on revelation. The conviction of its existence is inwoven with human nature. Graven on the conscience, it cannot be effaced. Of the examples of retribution few are more worthy of consideration than that of Haman. This illustrates—I. THE CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH RETRIBUTION COMES. The harvest is garnered: how shall the grain reach the seaboard? Along iron rails laid down by man. The rice-fields are gleaned: how shall the product be conveyed to its destination? Through canals cut by man's agency. The fruits of malice, of cruelty, of ambition, and of tyranny are perfected: how shall they be delivered to him for whom they are designed? Through agencies he himself has prepared—by some human hand to which a higher power has consigned them. Retribution though prepared in heaven, in coming to earth traverses the road which man has made ready for it. The lightning-bolt, though forged in the clouds, may make as it comes to earth a pathway of the tree planted by human hands. Haman's wickedness is so conspicuous that the shafts of retributive justice are certain to strike him, miss whom else they may. Oppression and heartlessness, cherished hatred and the spirit of revenge, are towering upward to such heights that their summits are hidden in clouds already black with fury. The particular person commissioned of Heaven to mete out retributive justice to Haman was Ahasuerus. This is in accordance with God's usual method of dealing. Though bearing the seal of the invisible kingdom, retribution comes through some agency with which we are familiar. The king showed good judgment in the earlier stages of his anger. "In his wrath he went into the palace garden." Anger which speedily vents itself in harsh words is less harmful to its object than that which is repressed till a settled purpose is formed. Fear the man who can so far control his resentment as to be able to exercise good judgment in deciding upon measures which noiselessly bring the results of deeds home to their author. The steam which is generated so speedily as to cause a violent explosion might have proved sufficient, if properly controlled, to convey a long train, freighted with the enginery of death, to some advantageous position whence every missile would have told with deadly effect upon the enemy. II. A FRUITLESS PLEA FOR DELIVERANCE. Haman stood up to make request for his life. Verily no man can tell what awaits him! A few days, a few hours, may suffice to cloud the most brilliant prospects. The question, What new requisition is possible?

may be suddenly converted into the anxious inquiry, Can I save anything from the common wreck, even life itself? Haman's prayer, though importunate, was fruitless. The arrival of retribution chronicles the departure of mercy. In the presence of the king even the queen is powerless to rescue the culprit. He is now before the judge whose will is Esther's law. At the day of final adjudication it will no doubt be evident that mercy is powerless to rescue those who have incurred "the wrath of the Lamb." When mercy is driven to assume an attitude of vengeance, hope is for ever extinguished. III. *THE SIGNS OF COMING DOOM.* Haman's sinful career must be checked, or the queen must perish. Wickedness unchecked would ultimately extinguish goodness. Thistles and grass cannot continuously occupy the same soil, nor is it doubtful which would gain the mastery. "As the word went out of the king's mouth they covered Haman's face." Guilt is left to bear the penalty alone. Alas, the heartlessness of those who are comrades in iniquity! No ingratitude surpasses that of those who have been associated in wickedness. To be deserted in the critical hour is the fate of those who have violated Divine commands. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai." He is snared in his own devices. The arrow he directed at another has rebounded, causing his own death. The cannon which, loaded to the muzzle, was to annihilate his enemy, has recoiled, crushing him beneath its ponderous wheels. "As Haman brewed, so he drank." "He made his bed, and he lay in it." Cruelty displayed can have but one issue—cruelty endured. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *The fear, the folly, and the doom of the evil-doer:*—

I. *THE EVIL-DOER RECEIVES WARNING.* "Haman saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." He clearly heard the sound of the avenging deity though his feet might be shod with wool. Evil-doers receive warning. Nature gives warning. Revelation gives warning. History gives warning. II. *THE FOOLISH EVIL-DOER WORKS HIS OWN DESTRUCTION.* The very means Haman took to save his life was the means of bringing about his speedy execution. III. *THE EVIL-DOER RAISES STRIKING EVIDENCE OF HIS OWN GUILT.* "Behold the gallows fifty feet high," &c. IV. *THE EVIL-DOER IS PRACTICALLY HIS OWN EXECUTIONER.* "So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai." (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The wicked overthrown:*—This great fact of Divine government we constantly forget. The person of the Deity is invisible. His ways and plans are not governed by the principles or the expectations of men. But the government is still on His shoulders, and He upholdeth all things by the word of His power. The history of Haman shows us how completely God controls the wicked and makes their crafty and malicious plans result in their own overthrow and ruin. But we come now to consider the peculiar method which God adopted for his overthrow. It is a wonderful illustration of the Divine providence in its minuteness of application. The successive steps in this scheme of counteraction are very minute. It is a regular arrangement of mining and countermining, as in military assaults and sieges. Each successive step is taken in direct reference to the previous motion of the antagonist, and as secretly as possible from him. 1. God lays up in store for His future use Esther's unexpected relation to the king. It was a fearful trial of Mordecai's faith and Esther's piety. It seemed an unaccountable and dark proceeding. Their broken hearts both grieved in bitterness over the dispensation. But God was mercifully preparing for the evil to come. The hold which was allowed upon the affections, and the influence which was thus exercised upon the character of Ahasuerus, were very important in the train of results which was to be brought out. 2. God prepared a special obligation from the king to Mordecai. "Two of the king's chamberlains, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus," &c. 3. God interposed in the settling of Haman's lot. "They cast the lot from day to day, and from month to month to the twelfth month." This was a very peculiar interposition. It gave nearly a year's delay to the executing of the plan. 4. God gave great ease and apparent prosperity to Haman's plan. The king granted his request at once, and gave him unlimited power to fulfil his purpose. Thus Haman was enticed forward to perfect security. His success was so flattering to his own power that it led him to an immediate publication of his whole scheme. "There was written according to all that Haman commanded, to the governors that were over every province," &c. 5. God endowed Esther with singular wisdom in arranging her scheme of argument and defence. 6. God awakens the slumbers of the king. "On that night the king could not sleep." What trifling incidents does God employ to accomplish His great results! You will sometimes hear of His providence as if it were only concerned in

what men call great events; but there are no distinctions of great and little in human events before God. Never be deluded by any false schemes of men. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the notice of your heavenly Father, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 7. God remarkably employs the waking king. "The king could not sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." This was a singular step. He might as readily have called for any other book. 8. God furnished the very agent desired for the accomplishment of His plan. "And the king's servants said unto him, Behold Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in." Every step appears to be propitious to Haman. He enters instantly, perfectly secure of the triumphant attainment of his purpose. But God had now perfectly prepared the way for Mordecai's exaltation, and Haman, who had planned his death, must be the instrument of his honour. "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." There is providence, and this was its course thus far. Every step is natural, voluntary, trifling in itself. No single step had any apparent earthly connection with the others, in the mind of the one who took it. The threads all seemed perfectly separate and unconnected. But it was a single hand which wove them all. How perfect is the scheme! How indispensable is every part! How clear the wisdom which has ordered the whole! With what confidence we may rely on such a Protector. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *The precarious position of princes' favourites*:—Thus empty vessels swim aloft; rotten posts are gilt with adulterate gold; the worst weeds spring up bravest; and when the twins strive in Rebekah's womb Esau comes forth first, and hath the primogeniture. But while they seek the greatest dignities they most meet with the greatest shame; like apes, while they be climbing they the more show their deformities. They are lifted up also that they may come down again with the greater poise. It was, therefore, well and wisely spoken by Alvarer de Luna, when he told them that admired his fortune and favour with the King of Castile, "You do wrong to commend the building before it is finished, and until you see how it will stand." Princes' favourites should consider with themselves that honour is but a blast, a glorious fancy, a rattle to still men's ambition; and that as the passenger looketh no longer upon the dial than the sun shineth upon it, so it is here. (*J. Trapp.*) *For he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.*—*Esteem changed to hatred*:—How easily does he appear to have taken off his regards from his favourite! There was nothing lasting in the bond which united them. The esteem of yesterday was changed into hatred to-day. All their convivial meetings and merrymaking, when the city of Shushan was perplexed, were forgotten, and the man's destruction was determined upon with as much zest and zeal as his elevation had been promoted. Such is largely the characteristic of the friendship of worldly men. Close and ardent for a time, but liable at any moment to be turned into enmity. How different from the tie which ought to bind together Christian hearts in the common love of the same Saviour. (*T. McEwan.*) *Unexpected peril*:—The wicked know not the moment that the mine is to be sprung under their feet. (*Ibid.*) *Will he force the queen also before me in the house.*—*Suspensions*:—It is the misery of those who have been detected in the commission of great crimes, and it is a just part of their punishment, to be suspected or accused of that of which they were guiltless. But yesterday, all that Haman said or did was viewed with a favourable eye; now, the most innocent actions are construed to his disadvantage. (*T. McCrie, D.D.*) *And Harbonah, one of the king's chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high.*—*The falling man*:—When a great man is going down, the meanest will give him a push. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Fickle courtiers*:—Courtiers are very clever persons, and turn with wonderful agility. (*A. M. Symington, B.A.*) *Reverses*:—But how terrible are the reverses of princes, and how sudden the fall of statesmen. Wolsey, Raleigh, Essex and Louis Phillippe, are only a few out of many that illustrate how slippery are the steps of thrones and the standings around them. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.*—*Moral retribution*:—We all remember the ballad of Southey which tells how Sir Ralph the Rover, who cut away Inch Cape Bell, perished with all his crew upon the Inch Cape Rock; and even secular historians have been constrained to remark on illustrations of the fulfilment of this law of providence. Thus Macaulay reminds us that no man ever made a more unscrupulous use of the

legislative power for the destruction of his enemies than Thomas Cromwell, and that it was by the unscrupulous use of the legislative power that he was himself destroyed. And Alison recognises in the death of Murat a memorable instance of the "moral retribution which often attends upon great deeds of iniquity, and by the instrumentality of the very acts that appeared to place them beyond its reach." He underwent, in 1815, the very fate to which, seven years before, he had consigned a hundred Spaniards of Madrid, guilty of no other crime than of defending their country, and this, as the historian adds, "by the application of a law to his own case which he himself had introduced to check the attempts of the Bourbons to regain a throne which he had usurped." Thus, often, in the words of the great dramatist, the engineer is "hoist with his own petard"; and we see that even in this life there is retribution. But it may be said that, though this is observable in great matters and with great people, it is not found in small. And to that I reply that there is nothing small in the providence of God. But others may say that this law is not absolutely universal, and that there have been cases in which it has not been fulfilled. To that I reply that there are such anomalies in God's providence on earth, but the existence of these is only a reason for our believing that the retribution which has not overtaken the sinner here will surely come upon him hereafter; for then God "shall render to every man according to his works." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Haman confounded:—1. Oh, how great are the vicissitudes of life! When Haman thought himself secure, then he was nearest to his ruin. 2. How sudden and astonishing the change that takes place in the feelings of those about the court. Yesterday, everybody envied Haman for his prosperity, but hated him for his insolence. Yesterday, they bowed the knee, and did him homage, but now that they see he has fallen, they are just as hearty in their rejoicings at his downfall. If Haman be going down, they all cry, "Down with him!" And as Mordecai is now the favourite, all are ready to exalt him. The old Louis, dead in Versailles, may rot or bury himself, while the courtiers and countesses are making fair weather with the rising sun. 3. Haman pleading at Esther's feet is a proof that "the heathen are sent down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken." The Jews' enemy, and the adversary of the Hebrew orphan, a suppliant at the queen's feet, illustrates how God regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, and scattered the proud in their imagination. 4. Another lesson learned from Haman's gallows, perhaps, better than from any other standpoint of this history, is to beware of the first risings of evil passions. 5. We see again that human prosperity is wholly unavailing in the hour of calamity. The glory of Haman yesterday only enhances his disgrace to-day. 6. It is then an unfair, limited, and partial view of providence to say that God's favours are not wisely and equitably distributed among men. The purposes of God are not to be judged of by the events of a moment, nor by the occurrences that are near together. The chain of providence has many links; some are so high, and some are so far away, that at present we cannot see them, nor can we judge correctly of it till we see the whole chain together. 7. You must learn to discriminate between real and apparent happiness. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*)

A warning to ambitious men:—Let all ambitious men read the story of Haman and take warning. His story may not be repeated in all its Oriental details; yet there remains enough in the tale to remind us that we too are ambitious, that we too may have ignoble thoughts towards our fellow-men, and that even we are not above resorting to the foulest practices to get rid of the Mordecai who stands in our way as a stumbling-block. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The law of retribution:—A proverb says, "Harm watch, harm catch," and it is a true saying. *Haman*:—In the character of Haman there is a singular exhibition of ambition and envy. He was a man without benevolence, justice, or mercy. From the one external act in respect to Mordecai, we infer the fearful depth of depravity within. It does not appear but that his character might have been without reproach previous to his promotion. Exemplary conduct, however, previous to an open act of sin, must not be taken as a proof of purity of character at any time, for the external acts of sin may be compared to the eruptions of a volcano, which sometimes occur only after intervals embracing centuries, while the internal depravity is like those pent fires which lie couched beneath the base of the mountain, where in secret the lava wave is in perpetual motion. From the life and death of Haman learn—

1. That the wicked man cannot go unpunished.
2. That the wicked man will be punished when he least expects it.
3. That the wicked man will be punished by means of his own devising.

(*O. T. Lanphear, D.D.*) *Gallows for Haman*:—

Here is an Oriental courtier, about the most offensive man in Hebrew history. I. THAT WHEN THE HEART IS WRONG THINGS VERY INSIGNIFICANT WILL DESTROY OUR COMFORT. Who would have thought that a great prime minister, admired and applauded by millions of Persians, would have been so nettled and harassed by anything trivial? The silence of Mordecai at the gate was louder than the braying of trumpets in the palace. Thus shall it always be if the heart is not right. Circumstances the most trivial will disturb the spirit. It is not the great calamities of life that create the most worriment. I have seen men, felled by repeated blows of misfortune, arising from the dust, never desponding. But the most of the disquiet which men suffer is from insignificant causes; as a lion attacked by some beast of prey turns easily around and slays him, yet runs roaring through the forests at the alighting on his brawny neck of a few insects. You meet some great loss in business with comparative composure; but you can think of petty trickeries inflicted upon you, which arouse all your capacity for wrath, and remain in your heart an unbearable annoyance. If you look back upon your life you will find that the most of the vexations and disturbances of spirit which you felt were produced by circumstances that were not worthy of notice. If you want to be happy you must not care for trifles. Do not be too minute in your inspection of the treatment you receive from others. Who cares whether Mordecai bows when you pass or stands erect and stiff as a cedar? That woodman would not make much clearing in the forest who should stop to bind up every little bruise and scratch he received in the thicket; nor will that man accomplish much for the world or the Church who is too watchful and appreciative of petty annoyances. II. Again, I learn from the life of this man THAT WORLDLY VANITY AND SIN ARE VERY ANXIOUS TO HAVE PIETY BOW BEFORE THEM. Haman was a fair emblem of entire worldliness, and Mordecai the representative of unflinching godliness. When, therefore, proud Haman attempted to compel a homage which was not felt, he only did what the world ever since has tried to do, when it would force our holy religion in any way to yield to its dictates. Paul might have retained the favour of his rulers and escaped martyrdom if he had only been willing to mix up his Christian faith with a few errors. His unbending Christian character was taken as an insult. Faggot and rack and halter in all ages have been only the different ways in which the world has demanded obeisance. Why was it that the Platonic philosophers of early times, as well as Toland, Spinoza, and Bolingbroke of later days, were so madly opposed to Christianity? Certainly not because it favoured immoralities, or arrested civilisation, or dwarfed the intellect. The genuine reason, whether admitted or not, was because the religion of Christ paid no respect to their intellectual vanities. Blount, and Boyle, and the host of infidels hatched out during the reign of Charles II., could not keep their patience, because, as they passed along, there were sitting in the gate of the church Christian men who would not bend an inch in respect to their philosophies. Reason, scornful of God's Word, may foam and strut with the proud wrath of a Haman, and attempt to compel the homage of the good, but in the presence of men and angels it shall be confounded. When science began to make its brilliant discoveries there were great facts brought to light that seemed to overthrow the truth of the Bible. The archaeologist with his crowbar, and the geologist with his hammer, and the chemist with his batteries, charged upon the Bible. Thus it was that the discoveries of science seemed to give temporary victory against God and the Bible, and for awhile the Church acted as if she were on a retreat; but when all the opposers of God and truth had joined in the pursuit, and were sure of the field, Christ gave the signal to His Church, and, turning, they drove back their foes in shame. There was found to be no antagonism between nature and revelation. The universe and the Bible were found to be the work of the same hand, strokes of the same pen, their authorship the same God. III. Again, learn THAT PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL. Was any man ever so far up as Haman, who tumbled so far down? Yes, on a smaller scale every day the world sees the same thing. Against their very advantages men trip into destruction. When God humbles proud men, it is usually at the moment of their greatest arrogance. If there be a man in your community greatly puffed up with worldly success, you have but to stand a little while and you will see him come down. You say, "I wonder that God allows that man to go on riding over others' heads and making great assumptions of power." There is no wonder about it. Haman has not yet got to the top. The arrows from the Almighty's quiver are apt to strike a man when on the wing. IV. Again, this Oriental tale reminds us THAT WRONGS WE PREPARE FOR OTHERS RETURN UPON OURSELVES. The gallows that Haman built for Mordecai

became the prime minister's strangulation. Robespierre, who sent so many to the guillotine, had his own head chopped off by the horrid instrument. The evil you practise on others will recoil upon your own pate. Slanders come home. Oppressions and cruelties come home. When Charles I., who had destroyed Strafford, was about to be beheaded, he said, "I basely ratified an unjust sentence, and the similar injustice I am now to undergo is a sensible retribution for the punishment I inflicted on an innocent man." Haman's gallows came a little late, but it came. Opportunities fly in a straight line, and just touch us as they pass from eternity to eternity; but the wrongs we do others fly in a circle, and however the circle may widen out, they are sure to come back to the point from which they started. They are guns that kick! Furthermore, let the story of Haman teach us how quickly turns the wheel of fortune. So we go up, and so we come down. You seldom find any man twenty years in the same circumstances. Of those who, in political life, twenty years ago were the most prominent, how few remain in conspicuity! Of those who were long ago successful in the accumulation of property, how few have not met with reverses! While many of those who then were straitened in circumstances now hold the bonds and the bank-keys of the nation. Of all fickle things in the world, Fortune is the most fickle. Every day she changes her mind, and woe to the man who puts any confidence in what she promises or proposes! She cheers when you go up, and she laughs when you come down. V. Again, this Haman's history shows us THAT OUTWARD POSSESSIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES CANNOT MAKE A MAN HAPPY. There are to-day more aching sorrows under crowns of royalty than under the ragged caps of the houseless. Much of the world's affluence and gaiety is only misery in colours. Many a woman seated in the street at her apple-stand is happier than the great bankers. The mountains of worldly honour are covered with perpetual snow. Tamerlane conquered half the world, but could not subdue his own fears. Ahab goes to bed sick because Naboth will not sell him his vineyard. The soul's happiness is too large a craft to sail up the stream of worldly pleasure. As ship-carpenters say, it draws too much water. This earth is a bubble, and it will burst. This life is a vision, and it will soon pass away. Time! It is only a ripple, and it breaketh against the throne of judgment. Mordecai will only have to wait for his day of triumph. It took all the preceding trials to make a proper background for his after-successes. The scaffold built for him makes all the more imposing and picturesque the horse into whose long white mane he twisted his fingers at the mounting. You want at least two misfortunes, hard as flint, to strike fire. Heavy and long-continued snows in winter are signs of good crops next summer. So many have yielded wonderful harvests of benevolence and energy because they were for a long while snowed under. We must have a good many hard falls before we learn to walk straight. It is on the black anvil of trouble that men hammer out their fortunes. Sorrows take up men on their shoulders and enthrone them. Tonics are nearly always bitter. Men, like fruit-trees, are barren unless trimmed with sharp knives. They are like wheat—all the better for the flailing. It required the prison darkness and chill to make John Bunyan dream. Mordecai despised at the gate is only predecessor of Mordecai exalted. (*T. De Witt Talmage*.) *Retribution*:—A bishop said to Louis XI. of France, "Make an iron cage for all those who do not think as we do—an iron cage in which the captive can neither lie down nor stand straight up." It was fashioned—the awful instrument of punishment. After a while the bishop offended Louis XI., and for fourteen years he was in that same cage, and could neither lie down nor stand up. It is a poor rule that will not work both ways. "With that measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." (*Ibid.*) *The purpose of God*:—The wheels in a watch or a clock move contrary one to another, some one way, some another, yet all serve the intent of the workman, to show the time, or to make the clock to strike. So in the world the providence of God may seem to run cross to His promises. One man takes this way, another runs that way. Good men go one way, wicked men another. Yet all in conclusion accomplish the will, and centre in the purpose of God, the great creator of all things. (*R. Sibbes*.)

CHAPTER VIII.

VERS. 1, 2. On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen.—Right use of wealth.—I. We see how, IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, THE WEALTH WHICH WORLDLY MEN WOULD USE IN OPPOSITION TO THE INTERESTS OF GOD'S CAUSE AND PEOPLE MAY BE WRESTED FROM THEM, AND MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THESE INTERESTS. The conclusion which we draw from all this is, that the best and happiest arrangement which a man can make with respect to the good things which have been bestowed upon him is that in his lifetime he seek to be personally the dispenser of good to others. If he lives and acts in this spirit, then he will have the less anxiety as to the disposal of what he may be able to leave behind him. II. The peculiar providence which we see exercised in the case of Mordecai teaches us THAT MEN MAY BE WELL CONTENT TO WAIT, WHILE THEY ARE IN THE WAY OF WELL-DOING, UNTIL THEY RECEIVE THEIR RECOMPENSE. Worth and faithfulness and humility, after they have been long neglected, are brought into the light, and are honoured in proportion to the neglect which they formerly experienced. III. FROM ESTHER'S LOVE FOR HER PEOPLE WE TAKE A LESSON. Then should not this be an example to those among us, who themselves have had their souls gladdened by the grace of God, to be mindful of others who have not been visited so graciously? IV. THE LESSON WHICH IS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE CONDUCT OF THE KING AS IT IS HERE EXHIBITED. If one man, for example, has injured another, and knows it, but is too proud to acknowledge it, then he is destitute of the true spirit of Christianity. If a man is engaged in a wrong course of action, and is sensible of it, but will put his soul in peril rather than yield to the remonstrances of his friends, then his pride will certainly prove the ruin of his soul. There is, perhaps, more real heroism in confessing and correcting errors and weaknesses than there is in boldly contending for truth, when we are conscious that we have it on our side. Many voices will cheer us onward in the defence of principles which we defend at some risk. The courage that suffers in a good cause will always get applause. But when I have done wrong, and make confession of the wrong, the men of the world do not sympathise. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) **And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai.—The end in peace.**—But success to faithfulness, even in the narrowest sphere and with the feeblest powers, is uniform and certain, and, as an example, blessed and wholesome. This is the great principle which Mordecai illustrates. 1. In his case we first see this fidelity for a period exceedingly tried and hopeless. 2. We see this faithfulness in duty brought to extreme danger. Not only was Mordecai unrewarded, but he was condemned to an appointed destruction. 3. We see this fidelity in duty completely rescued and delivered. 4. We see this fidelity in duty proportionably exalted. 5. We see this fidelity in duty abundantly rewarded in outward, earthly things. 6. We see this fidelity in duty not only rewarded in itself, and in the person and condition of the man who is distinguished by it, but crowned with eminent usefulness to others. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Vers. 3, 4. Besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman.—Counteracting evil.—It requires earnest and vigorous efforts on the part of the pious to undo the evil wrought by the wicked, and left by them as a legacy to the world. How much thought and research have been expended in this way in answering the works of such men as Voltaire and Paine! The evil cannot be sufficiently deplored, but may it not, in the providence of God, be overruled and sanctified for good? In nature we have opposing forces at work, which issue in greater stability and permanence; and somewhat the same result is secured by the opposition and conflict of minds. By the strain to which the truth is subjected it is put to the test, and whilst what cannot be maintained falls away, all that is founded on reliable evidence is retained, and made on every side more perspicuous, as the pressure of a great need has stimulated the inventive genius of a people to provide appliances to meet it. So has one infidel book or wicked action occasioned the writing of treatises in defence of Divine revelation, or the performance of holy and generous deeds, and the evil of the former has been more than counteracted, and the result proved an absolute boon. In this direction also we may see the hand of God, and praise Him for His goodness. (*T. McEwan.*) **Sin survives the sinner.**—I. EVIL OUTLIVES ITS FIRST CONTRIVERS. 1. Haman is dead, but the mischief he devised still hangs over the Jews. A passing stranger may loosen a stone in an embankment, and go

on his way; but a whole province will bewail his folly. An infidel father trains most carefully an infidel son; the son becomes an eminent writer and spreads through a whole generation the poison he imbibed on his father's knee. An English colonist, filled with pity for the Caribbeans, introduces negro slavery into the West Indies—doing evil that good may come—and for centuries those fair islands are cursed by his device. 2. Evil tends to permanency. (1) Because of the natural corruption of the heart. (2) This principle is assisted by the solidarity of our race. What affects one affects all. II. EVIL YIELDS BEFORE HOLY SELF-SACRIFICE. Esther was—1. Intensely solicitous. 2. Persistent. 3. Boldly self-sacrificing. 4. Successful. III. EVIL CRUSHED BUT NOT KILLED. IV. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. The folly of infallibility. 2. The power of intercession. 3. The awful nature of sin. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people.**—*Great changes*:—The world is full of changes. There are no elements of stability belonging to it. When all appears fair and promising, some unlooked-for event takes place, to darken the prospect, and to render it cheerless and gloomy. And, on the other hand, when the atmosphere forbodes great storms, a gale arises unexpectedly, to chase away the clouds, and to pour liveliness on all around us. We find these statements strikingly verified in this chapter. 1. Haman's prosperity vanished away suddenly, and the objects of his deadly enmity rose to power and happiness. "On that day" (in which Haman was executed) "did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen." Here she, who had been doomed to an untimely death by a wicked man, is enriched with his estates. How true the declaration of the psalmist, "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them"! 2. Esther was not the only one that profited by Haman's doom. Mordecai also was advanced by it. How could he advance a more deserving character, one who had been more faithful in every duty? Were things properly conducted, such would always be the case. Worthlessness of character would ever act as an hindrance to power, and a life conducted on the principles of integrity and faithfulness would lead to preferment and honour. Such will be the case on a future day. The good and faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord. Esther likewise behaved well on this occasion. She did not forget Mordecai's kindness to her when she was destitute and in trying circumstances. There is a perpetuity in holy affection and friendship which you look for in vain in the children of this world. These may for a season be loud in their professions of attachment; but when it suits their purpose they find it convenient to forget those professions, and allow their attachments to degenerate into neglect and oblivion. But Christian friendship, based on permanent principles, is permanent in duration. The sweet friendship between Jonathan and David nothing could extinguish, no reverse of fortune could even cool. But there is no friend equal to Jesus! the acts of His friendship are unceasing. He is, what every friend ought to be, "a friend that loveth at all times." 3. The Jews also derived great advantage from the death of Haman, for his edict contemplated their destruction. Esther interceded for them, and as far as circumstances permitted, prevailed. She approaches the king again, uncalled, in the humblest manner, and with abundant tears in his eyes. It is a good sign when we feel an interest in the welfare of those related to us, and when we can with importunity invoke the blessings of God upon them. Thus did Esther. She was not more earnest for herself than for her people. Thus felt Jesus. "When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it." Thus felt St. Paul. He poured out his very soul for his people, the Jews, though they persecuted him, and tried to effect his destruction. He tells us that he "had great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart" at their folly and wickedness in rejecting Christ, and that his "heart's desire and prayer unto God for them was, that they might be saved." Are we thus minded? Esther fell down at the king's feet for her people. Have you done so for your relatives and friends? "Oh that" my children "might live before Thee!" 4. Esther interceded not in vain: for the king took immediate steps to avert, at least in some degree, the storm which had long been gathering over their heads. The unchangeableness of the Persian laws was deeply to be regretted, and caused much injustice and cruelty. The law of God is indeed unchangeable, and properly—necessarily so. His commands are based on immutable foundations, and therefore they must be eternally the same. How strangely was this kingdom managed! Here are two different and

contrary laws—authorising civil war from the one end of the realm to the other—one decree authorising the Persians to attack the Jews, the other authorising the Jews to defend themselves, and to slay the Persians. Let us bless God for more rational and equitable enactments in our kingdom. We owe this altogether to His goodness in giving us the Scriptures; for our civil as well as religious light are derived from their sacred page. 5. If such anxiety was manifested for this newly-enacted law to be known throughout the empire, how much more anxious should we be to circulate the Word of God throughout the world! And if it was deemed of such moment that the decree should be “written unto every people, after their language,” how should we rejoice that the great charter of salvation has been translated into so many of the languages of the earth, and that a copy of the Scriptures goeth forth into distant parts of the world for every moment that passeth away! The speed with which the decree in favour of the Jews was to be made known to them deserves our attention. “The posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment—that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.” Was preservation from temporal death of such consequence to the Jews that all this expedition was enjoined that they might obtain it? Of how much greater consequence is preservation from everlasting death. 6. Mordecai, being now chief minister of state, went forth arrayed, according to the dignity of his office, and the people rejoiced at beholding power conferred on one who would use it beneficially. “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Their weeping endured for a night, and there was joy in the morning. “A good day!” yes! a day of everlasting sunshine, awaits holy mourners, in a future world. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (*J. Hughes.*)

Esther’s patriotism and piety.—Patriotism among the Jews was not a mere beautiful sunflower that flourished and expanded in days of prosperity, but a strong and powerful principle that displayed itself as much, if not more, in days of adversity. Our text breathes the spirit of the truest patriotism. I. THE SCENE THAT PRESENTED ITSELF TO ESTHER’S FEELING HEART. What patriotic Christian can contemplate the condition of large masses of our people without being moved to sympathy and confession? 1. Their poverty and privations. 2. Their want of moral and religious influence. 3. Their spiritual wants. II. THE EFFORT SHE USED UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SHE WAS PLACED. 1. She addressed herself in earnest prayer to the king in behalf of her countrymen. Let us arise and plead their cause with the King of kings who are the willing captives of sin and Satan. 2. She was active in the use of proper and legitimate means to accomplish her heart’s desire. “Prayer without works is enthusiasm, and works without prayer presumption.” 3. She did all in deep humility (ver. 5). III. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO CHRISTIAN EXERTION. 1. The times are favourable. 2. The gospel is admirably adapted to meet the wants of people everywhere. 3. The example of pious characters in all ages from the time of Christ down to our own time, who have felt it their duty and privilege to propagate the gospel. 4. “The value of the soul.” (*C. Hyatt.*)

Esther, an example of intercession.—I. ESTHER’S DEEP AFFECTION FOR HER KINDRED. II. THE CHARACTER OF HER INTERCESSION ON THEIR BEHALF. She had singular advantages and great opportunities, and she turned them to the best purpose. III. SHE USED HER ADVANTAGES WITH EARNEST AND PERSEVERING IMPORTUNITY. Conclusion: There are two points of difference between Esther’s intercession with Ahasuerus and ours with the Lord Jesus. 1. She went into the king’s presence uncalled and unbidden; we are urgently invited and commanded to make our requests known unto God. 2. Esther had reason to fear a repulse; we are positively assured of a welcome. (*R. Glover, D.D.*) *Concern for unsaved relatives*.—It is one of the results of sin that it deadens the spiritual side of our nature so that, while in theory we admit the danger of the unsaved, in fact we fail to realise it. How anxious parents are about the health of their children! If they have any fatal disease, what care and pains they will take until they feel that they are out of danger. Or if on a steamer that was reported in the city to be in danger, how distressed they would feel until they learned of their safety. When the ocean steamer *Atlantic* was wrecked some years ago on the Banks of Nova Scotia, a gentleman from Chicago was reported among the lost. Then came the telegram “Saved,” and his name under it. His business partner had it framed and hung up in the store. If the members of a family really felt the true condition of every one in it who is not a Christian, they would never rest until all were safe. But the true condition is not realised. A mother will say, “My boy

is steady, industrious, no bad habits, stays at home, is kind and good." All well. Many a son is the opposite, disgraces his family and breaks his parents' hearts. But is your son a Christian? Is he saved? It would be a pity that a good boy should be lost. When one of the family is lying on the brink, what a concentration of effort is put forth to rescue him from the grave. The ventilation, temperature, quiet of the house; the exclusion of all excitement, consultation of physicians, all the ordering of household affairs to one end. Then in convalescence moving from one place to another. Oh, if the same care and skill and devotion were employed to save the soul as is put forth to save the body, how many holy, happy Christian homes there would be—father and mother, son and daughter, all one in Christ! (G. H. Smyth, D.D.) *Neglecting the spiritual safety of others*:—Some of you perhaps remember when you were awakened to your danger and saw your condition before God. Does not the recollection move you for the safety of others? "How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" If the awful fate must be theirs, we would shrink from it. Hagar in the wilderness—"Let me not see my child die." David—"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he wept, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son! my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Sam. xviii. 33). A boy was once lost in a storm at sea. His mother went to learn the sad story from the captain of the vessel, who barely escaped with his life. Among other inquiries she asked, "Did you see my boy at the time he met his sad fate?" The captain replied, "Yes, he was clinging to a piece of broken spar that hung over the side of the ship a short time before she sank." "Did he speak to you or say anything about his father or me?" The captain said yes, and then a long pause was broken by the weeping mother impatiently saying, "Oh, tell me what he said, one word of my dear boy will bring me comfort." The captain still tried to avoid telling her, but she insisted. "Well, then," replied the weather-beaten seaman, "your boy looked despairingly at me and said, 'My parents never prepared me for a moment like this!' Then a huge wave washed him from my sight." (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 7-14. **Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen.**—*A monarch's imbecility*:—Always distrust the man who is the victim of circumstances. Great men make their circumstances and little men are made by them. Ahasuerus here pleads his circumstances, and rather than acknowledge an error, plunges the whole empire in danger of civil war. He throws upon Mordecai the duty of contriving a remedy against his own mistakes. I. **A WEAK MAN'S SELF-DEFENCE.** "I have given Esther the house of Haman," &c. He had given what cost him nothing. With a maudlin tenderness, like that of a drunken man, while Esther is inspired with an almost Divine passion of patriotism, he pleads his affection for her person. A small propitiation for a great wickedness. As if the hero of one hundred swindles flung a copper to a beggar; as if a cowardly murderer gave a crust to his victim's orphan; as if a life-long sinner offered to God the compensation of a Sunday prayer; so Ahasuerus hopes that Haman's death will make Esther unmindful of the wickedness devised against her kindred. II. **A WEAK MAN'S "NON-POSSEMUS."** III. **A WEAK MAN'S REFUSAL OF RESPONSIBILITY.** (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) **May no man reverse.**—*The repealable and unrepeatable in human conduct*:—1. There is something in all human action unrepeatable. But the only way of making quite sure that we shall obviate or nullify the consequences of an evil action or an evil course of conduct (if one may express the thing in a strong solecism) is—not to do the action; not to follow the course of conduct. Few things are more melancholy and affecting than the deep concern and trouble of aroused consciences in view of things deeply regretted, but seen to be beyond recall, and, in a large degree, intractable to modification and management. It is easy to touch a spring in a piece of complex machinery where there is force of water or steam pent up and ready to play; but if you don't know all the consequences, you had better not touch the spring. We must not take a morbid view, and afflict ourselves with imaginary fears, and think of this great machine we call providence as if it were full of lurking mischiefs ready to break out at the slightest touch. We are responsible chiefly, almost exclusively, for this—the action in itself, the course of conduct in itself. We cannot control the consequences, and we shall not be accountable for them except in so far as they are the direct and proper fruit of the action. If we do what is right, and wise, and for good reasons, we have nothing to fear. If we do wilfully or carelessly what we know to be wrong, we have every reason to look for

the evil consequences, and every reason to judge that we are responsible for them as far as personal responsibility goes in such a case. 2. This narrative may teach us farther that in the darkest and most unpromising circumstances there is nearly always some way of relief and improvement. How seldom are things so in human life that literally nothing can be done! There is something unrepeatable in all important human action. But there is also much that may be practically repealed. I think we may say that never, at any one time, in the history of a nation, never in the life of an individual, are things so dark and bad that nothing can be done to amend and lighten them. If this were not so, the world would soon be full of the most pitiable spectacles that could be conceived; communities and individuals sitting hopelessly amid the gloom of their own failures. But who knows not, also, that calamities and misfortunes are retrieved, that injuries are redressed, that mistakes are rectified? As Esther set her single will against the deadly edict, and drew from it, as far as her people were concerned, its deadliness, so a single will is often set against a whole system of evil, and by vigorous and persevering assaults it is brought to an end. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *The irreversible in human life:—*The word once spoken cannot be recalled. The deed once done cannot be undone. The book once issued begins to exercise an influence which cannot be bottled up again, but which must go on operative for evermore. The man who in youth sowed "wild oats" cannot stop the production of the harvest which has sprung from his folly. The hasty-tempered one, whose words sank into the heart of a friend and stabbed him with something keener than a poniard, cannot undo the mischief he has wrought. The author of a vile book may see his folly and lament it, but he cannot catch and confine the influence it exerted, even supposing every copy were to be recalled. You cannot stop the ball after it has left the gun. If you shake the dewdrop from a flower you cannot put it back again. "Don't write there, sir," said a newsboy to a young dandy in the waiting-room of an English railway station, when he saw him take off his ring and begin with the diamond in it to scratch some words upon the surface of the mirror. "Don't write there, sir." "Why not?" "Because you can't rub it out." (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *And to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay.—War against evil:—*There is not an evil passion or lust against which we are not called upon to do battle, not a temptation which we are not commanded to resist, not a spiritual adversary which we are not required to put forth all our energies to overcome. In our "evil day" we are summoned by our King to "stand for our lives," and be prepared to war against our enemies as though the victory lay with ourselves. God helping us, we will do it. (*T. McEwan.*)

*Vers. 15-17. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.—Proper use of power:—*Now let us pause for a little, and take from this passage one or two of the important lessons which it suggests. 1. In the first place, the conduct of Mordecai under the strange revolution which had been wrought in his condition and prospects is full of practical instruction to us. The lesson is this, that advancement in worldly honour and prosperity should be turned to account, by being made conducive to the promotion of the interests of the Church of Christ and to the good of His people. It reflects high honour upon Mordecai, that the first act of authority which he performed in the exalted position to which he had been raised was one which secured the enlargement of the Church and the safety of his brethren. In other hands the king's signet had been more frequently employed to give effect to decrees of violence and cruelty; but no sooner does it pass into his hands than it is used in behalf of the oppressed. Worldly honour and dignity in his case were invested with a value which does not intrinsically belong to them, and which never can belong to them, except when they are made subservient to such ends as he sought to promote by means of them. Now we say that all who have been blessed with wealth and influence may well look to this example and learn from it. The natural selfishness of the human heart prompts men to overlook the miseries of others, when they have gathered about them all that is needful for their own comfort. If they can but obtain the luxuries which gratify the senses, they care not what amount of woe and wretchedness may be experienced by those who live almost at their door. They waste not a thought upon the sad condition of the victims of spiritual darkness. We would remind them, therefore, that there is a luxury, the sweetest and best which wealth can purchase, and which lies fully within their reach—the luxury of doing good. 2. In the second place, the account given in the text of the feelings of the Jews when the edict was issued for their

deliverance, suggests some profitable reflections to us. It caused them light, and gladness, and joy; and the day of its publication was a day of feasting to them, and a good day. But our thoughts are directed by the description to a still higher theme. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth." All mere temporal deliverances sink into insignificance when contrasted with this which the prophet celebrates. The sentence of doom under which we all naturally lie, as transgressors of God's covenant, has been followed by a message of pardon and life through Jesus Christ to all who will accept God's gracious offer. Surely, then, we are warranted to ask, What has been the effect of this message upon you who have so often heard it? Now, according to the views of some, where spiritual joy and gladness are wanting, spiritual life must be wanting also. But to this opinion we cannot give our assent. Various causes there may be for the obscuration of the light of Divine joy in the soul, while there is no good reason for supposing that the soul is still dead in sin. No one who has had experience of the conflicts of the life of faith, and of the power of temptation, will require any formal reasoning in proof of the fact that there may be spiritual life without joy, or at least with not a little darkness and disquietude. Yet, it is unquestionably the duty of all Christ's followers to rejoice in His salvation. 3. In the third place, we may take a lesson from what is said in the text respecting the readiness which was shown by multitudes to join themselves to the Jews, when the king's edict in their favour was published. It may be believed that in some instances those of the people of the land who professed the Jewish religion were influenced by right motives, and forsook their heathenism because they felt that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, was the true God. Zechariah had foretold such event (Zech. viii. 23). It is very manifest, from the language used in the text, that such was not the generally prevalent feeling. "Many became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." The sunshine of the royal favour was now resting upon the seed of Abraham. They were a numerous body of themselves; and now, when they had liberty of action, by their wealth they could bring over to their side those who would protect them. It was good policy, therefore, to profess to be friendly toward them. And so not the fear of God, but the fear of the Jews, moved many to renounce heathenism, and acknowledge submission to the law of Moses. The Church was in one of her prosperous periods, and hence there were strong inducements to the worldly-minded to enrol themselves among her members. Now this is no isolated case. Such things have often occurred, although by no means tending to the advancement of vital religion. For example, it must have often struck the reflective readers of history, as a subject rather of painful than of pleasant contemplation, that the progress of the Reformation in many countries should have been so intimately connected with and dependent upon the belief and practice of the ruling powers. The flowing and ebbing of the tide of religious profession might be calculated too surely from the prevailing sentiments of the court. Thus, for instance, how sudden were the changes which the aspect of the Church in England presented during the reigns of three successive sovereigns. In the brief time of the Sixth Edward, when his counsellors were Protestant, and Popery was disallowed, how fast did the principles of Protestantism spread through the kingdom! Then Popery became rampant again, and the majority were glad to seem to be upon its side. And no less remarkable was the revival of Protestantism during the reign of Mary's successor, Elizabeth. The nation appeared to be born in a day; and again multitudes who had joined in the celebration of the Mass cried, "Away with it!" and became the friends and promoters of the purer faith. And thus, from regard to character, and with a view to maintain respectability and to forward worldly interests, very many join themselves to the Church of Christ without being influenced at all by the love of Christ. Now, if we examine all the circumstances carefully, we shall perceive that we have as little reason to take comfort to ourselves from the external state of religion among us as the Jews had from the apparent respect which was shown for their religion in the days of Mordecai, or as the conflicting parties had which alternately sunk or prevailed in many countries at the period of the Reformation. The worldly and selfish element—the fear of man, and not the fear of God—has ever been too prevalent in moulding religious profession; the fires of persecution being sometimes employed to compel, and the attractions of self-interest at other times to draw men to confess with the mouth what they did not believe in their heart. And thus it is that the numerical force

of Christianity, if I may so speak, is so different a thing from the vital power of it. A profession of Christianity, with some show of reverence for its ordinances, will not carry you to heaven. It will not even abide the trouble of a sitting-time on earth, if such time should overtake you. It will not give you solid comfort when you come, as soon you must come, to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Nothing will avail but the faith which rests on Christ, and which, being the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, makes the possession of heaven sure, by the present foretaste of it with which it feasts the soul. (*A. B. Davidson, D.D.*) *Light and gladness*.—I. THE FOLLY OF CLAIMING HUMAN INFALLIBILITY. Think of what the king had here to do. His law "might no man reverse." To save the doomed Jews the king was reduced to the absurd necessity, as Matthew Henry pithily puts it, "of enacting a civil war in his own dominions between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms by his authority and yet against his authority." What is not claimed by our sovereigns or legislators is claimed, in matters of religion, by the Roman Pontiff. As a general belief it may be held by Roman Catholics. But in what one law has this personal infallibility been exercised? In the end it must be a manifest failure in religion, as it has been in politics. II. INTO ALL THE LANGUAGES OF PERSIA WAS THE NEW DECREE TRANSLATED. Thus with man's law. Thus too it should be with God's law. Happy day for any nation when in its own language it comes into possession of the Bible, the good news from God. III. THE PROMPTITUDE IN THE COMMUNICATION OF GOOD NEWS. Wonderful the promptitude that marks the postal service of to-day! It may bring its burden to some, but it is a ministry of consolation to the many. It brings the distant nigh. It revives with oil of love the lamp of life. IV. THE TEMPORAL SALVATION OF THE JEWS WAS BUT A FAINT SHADOW OF THE GOOD THINGS TO COME IN THE GREAT SPIRITUAL SALVATION WROUGHT BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (*G. F. Coster.*) *The story of a great deliverance*.—Some of the most striking illustrations of Divine truth are afforded to us in the incidents of history. It might be too much to say that the Book of Esther is an allegory, but I believe that its spiritual purpose is, that it should furnish us with a most striking illustration of that greater deliverance which God hath wrought for the sons of men through Jesus Christ. I. Now the first thing to be noticed in this story is, THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S DANGER. It arose from the fact that Israel had an enemy at court—"that wicked Haman," who was, in the first place, moved by bitter hatred against the person of Mordecai, but who extended his antipathy to the whole nation to which the object of his hatred belonged. Observe, however, that the strength of the enemy's position rested upon a more valid basis than his own personal hatred. In urging this case against them, he was able to appeal to the laws of the king's realm, and that "it was not for the king's profit to suffer them." We need to point out where the analogy fails, as well as where it becomes instructive. There is no kind of moral resemblance between the Christian's God, and this half-barbarous monarch, Ahasuerus. This man was a capricious and licentious Oriental tyrant, utterly selfish; while righteousness and mercy are blended in wondrous harmony with the attributes of Him whom we acknowledge as King of kings, and who holds our lives and our destinies in His hands. Once again, these Jews were harmless folk, and the charge brought against them, though plausible, was destitute of any such foundation in fact as could have justified severe measures against them. We may despise the moral character of this Oriental despot, and yet the attitude which he, as a king, assumed towards the Jews may well serve to illustrate the attitude which the King of kings is constrained to assume towards those who disobey His laws. Further, though the Jewish people were innocent of any moral or serious political offence, yet at the same time, the fact that they had laws and institutions of their own and that these laws and institutions were diverse from those of other nations, and in particular did not wholly accord with the laws of the Medes and the Persians, placed them in a position of apparent sedition against the ruling power. Here, then, first we have a striking illustration of the relations between the King of kings and Lord of lords, and His rebel creature man. In virtue of the sovereign position which He occupies in His universe, He cannot tolerate anything like deviation from those eternal statutes of righteousness which He Himself has laid down for His creatures; and, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the sinner does break the King's laws, and set His authority at defiance. We also have a determined and malignant foe, "the accuser of the brethren," who first lays himself out to induce us to sin against these eternal edicts, and to form habits of life which are altogether at variance with

the Divine mind, and who then turns round upon his victims and next accuses us to the Divine Being as persons whose very existence in the universe is a source of danger, moral disorder, and general peril to the stability of the kingdom over which the King of kings holds sway. He presses upon the notice of the Supreme Ruler the fact that it is not for His profit to allow us to go on as we are doing. Between the case of Haman against the Jews, however, and Satan's case against us, there is this wide difference—that the charge brought by the enemy of the Jews was morally a plausible pretext, a trumped-up accusation; whereas in the case of the sinner the charge is only too true. If there is one single person whose heart has not been surrendered to God, and whose will is not yet wholly yielded to Him, then of such an one the accusation is true, terribly true, "It is not for the King's profit to suffer him." Let me ask you, then, Have you yielded yourself to God? For observe that if God were to allow men to go on from age to age, defying and disregarding His Divine will and law, He would be permitting His own rule to be overthrown, and would be virtually abdicating the throne of the universe, and giving all over to general anarchy and disorder. Nay, God can never lay aside His claims, and therefore it is not for the King's profit to suffer those who reject or ignore Him. "Has it been for the King's profit that thou hast lived?" If you were eliminated from human society to-day, would it be a gain instead of a loss to the world in which you have lived? You may reply, "I have affections as well as other people. There are many whom I love, and who love me, and whose hearts would bleed if I were taken away; how, then, could the world be anything but a loser by my removal?" Stay, let me ask you, What is the character of your influence and the effect of your example upon those very persons whose affections you have won? Are you doing them harm or good? What fruit does your life bear from day to day? Father, might it not be better for your sons' spiritual and eternal well-being if you were taken away from them? Mother, might it not be better for your daughters, better for your household, if your baneful influence were removed? And you, young man! who are the ringleader of a little band of friends, let me ask, Whither are you leading those young companions of yours? Is your fatal influence dragging them down to ever-deepening depths of moral degradation and sin? Ah! if that be thy case, if thy very friendship is a source of danger to those who are its objects, surely it is not for the King's profit to suffer you. Well, you say, or some one says, "Why does He suffer me, then?" Ah, here is a point to which we can find nothing to answer in the analogy. Let St. Paul explain why God suffers you, "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Such is the secret of our danger; and now, turning again to our illustration, let us observe the sequel. There goes forth as the result of all this, a terrible edict against these unfortunate Jews, no less than an edict of utter destruction. Just let us picture to ourselves what effects must have been produced wherever the proclamation came. Yonder comes the royal herald into a large provincial town; he blows his trumpet and proceeds at once to nail up his proclamation at the gate of the city, or in the crowded market-place. The news spreads like wildfire, and soon it reaches the Jewish quarter of the city. See the terrified inhabitants rushing about from house to house, and at last collecting in a crowd around the fatal parchment, eager to know the worst. One in a clear voice begins to read the dreadful paragraphs amidst a silence still as death. As he proceeds, strong men begin to weep like children, mothers clasp their children to their hearts in an agony of despair, till by and by, as with one voice, all break forth into a cry of lamentation; they rend their garments and grovel in the dust, utterly overwhelmed by a misfortune so unlooked-for and so inevitable. It is easy to account for their consternation, but it is much more difficult to explain the stolid equanimity with which sinners listen to the terrible threats against them of a proclamation more appalling than that which caused such terror to Israel of old. The dread and righteous decree which must expel the sinner from the Divine presence, and consign him to the darkness of death, may not be carried into effect at once; no more was the decree of Ahasuerus; but, remember, the command has gone forth, the sword of judgment is drawn, and under that most dread edict the sinner is condemned already. "The wages of sin is death." Oh, if there was weeping and wailing throughout the provinces of Persia when that ancient proclamation was read, no less is there horror and fear in the heart of the sinner when, his conscience being roused, he at last becomes aware of his actual state, and of his terrible danger. Too many, indeed, are so absorbed with the passing nothings of this world, that they endeavour to evade all serious thought, and to

forget the real perils of their present condition. But, thank God, it is not so with all. See that terrified jailer of Philippi. Why does he exclaim with such undisguised trepidation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Surely it was because in his own conscience he had discovered the proclamation. Remember that nothing is gained by shutting our eyes to facts. II. THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S SAFETY; for saved, eventually, they were in spite of the foe and the terrible edict of the king. How were they saved? As their danger was due to the presence of an enemy at court, so their safety was due to the fact that they also had a faithful friend at court. 1. Let us consider their deliverer; and the first thing that strikes us about her is the fact that she was connected by a double relationship with each of the parties concerned. On the one hand she was related to the doomed race; she was one of them—a Jewess, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; while, on the other hand, she was also closely related to the monarch. She was his wife. Thus she stands, then, between the two—the monarch and the condemned race—and so in her own person effects a reconciliation. 2. Notice, again, that the motive which inspired her to risk her life was love for her people. One angry word, one look, and she and her people were alike lost; but for love of them she was content to risk her all! 3. She stood before King Ahasuerus, not for herself, but as the representative of her people. She approaches him, not in her royal dignity as queen, but as identified with her kindred. For us, too, there is a secret of safety, and blessed are they who are acquainted with it. Let us proceed to consider how this safety has been secured. We, too, have a Friend at Court, and, like Esther, He is possessed of a certain double relationship. On the one hand, He is bound to humanity, for He Himself is man. Voluntarily He took our nature upon Him, "He was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us." He has identified Himself for ever with mankind; but, on the other hand, He is no less closely bound to the everlasting Father than to us. He is one with the Father from all eternity, the Son of His love, the express image of His Person. Further, observe that it was as the representative of His people that the Lord Jesus Christ undertook to perform the work that had to be done before man could be saved. Queen Esther took her life in her hand and presented herself before the king, in order to save; but our Deliverer has done much more than that—He has not risked, but given His life for the doomed race. Now observe, further, when Queen Esther entered into the presence of King Ahasuerus, we read that she found favour, or grace in his sight; but this favour was shown her on her own account, and not because she was a Jewess. Ahasuerus would scarcely, under the circumstances, have been disposed to listen to such a plea, even when advanced by his wife. What does she do? First she wins the king's favour for herself, and then she is in a position, so to speak, to transfer that favour to those whom she represents. Even so was it with our Great Deliverer when He entered within the veil, with His own blood having perfected the work of filial obedience which He had undertaken on our behalf. He was then most of all the Beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased, but the special favour with which He was then rewarded by the Divine Father was won on our behalf that it might be transferred to us. When the grace of Ahasuerus reached Esther, it reached through her the Jew; and even so when the grace of the Father reaches the Beloved Son as Representative of the human family, it reaches us also through Him. Thus indeed "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." You will notice that this grace thus assumes a definite form in a second proclamation made this time in favour of the Jews, whom the former proclamation had given over to death. This second proclamation, observe, does not override or conflict with the first. The law could not be abrogated, and yet its fatal operation had to be prevented, its condemning force was to be rendered nugatory. Here again we need to call attention to points of difference as well as points of agreement. The Gospel dispensation was not designed to abrogate but to fulfil the law. The law of God must remain unalterable, not in virtue of an arbitrary decree of Omnipotence, but because it is founded on moral principles of eternal obligation; it is only because Christ is "the end of the law to every one that believeth," that is to say, produces consequences greater and better even than the law was designed to effect, that the dread penalties of the law can be escaped under the new dispensation. Now let us observe more closely the nature of this second proclamation, for we shall find the illustration very suggestive. The first proclamation puts the whole of the Jews into the hands of their enemies, and arrays against them all representatives of the king's authority and of legal justice throughout the land. The second proclamation, on the other hand, has the opposite effect, for it puts the law on the

side of the Israelites; it gives them the right to defend themselves. Thus it is that the story of this marvellous deliverance shadows forth ours with strange fidelity. For us, too, there has been issued from the throne of the Eternal Being a second proclamation. It has been nailed to the Cross of Calvary, it has been revealed in the broken body of the Son of God. First, it puts the sinner who avails himself of it right with his God; it arrays all the forces of justice on his side, and enables him to find his surest protection in that which but for the work of Christ must have condemned him; and further, it puts him in a position to rise up against the tyrant sins by which he was previously enslaved, and to lead his captivity captive. From the condemnation of the law and from the cruel dominion of sin the believing sinner is equally delivered by the proclamation made from Calvary. The eternal justice of God, which apart from the Cross of Christ must have righteously demanded our punishment, now secures our safety; and we find now that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Many see that God is merciful to forgive us our sin; but how much stronger is our confidence when we see even His eternal justice, that attribute of His from which we needs must have most to fear, arrayed on our side! And here again I think we may notice, without pressing the illustration unduly, that this second proclamation demanded a certain believing response from the Jews before it could be of any practical utility to them. The favour of the king towards the race was conveyed by the proclamation; but unless the Jews had sufficient faith in the king's word to act upon it, and to arm themselves and issue forth against their enemies, they might still have fallen an easy prey. The proclamation from Calvary is described by St. Paul as "the grace of God which bringeth salvation to every man," but it is not every one that ventures forth upon it, claims justification, and, as it were, takes his spiritual enemies by the throat because that proclamation has delivered them into his hands. Alas! how many are there still who receive the grace of God in vain! But to return to our story, let us follow the second proclamation in its journey forth from the court of King Ahasuerus. In hot haste the heralds speed on their way, for the business is urgent, and the tidings spread from city to city, until they reach the uttermost parts of the great king's dominions. Let us watch this royal messenger as he enters that same provincial town that we were visiting in our thoughts when I was describing the promulgation of that first terrible edict. See, he rides up the street in great haste, he blows his trumpet, and the people begin to gather in a crowd. What is going to happen now? Another proclamation! What is it all about? Some poor trembling Jews venture into the throng in deadly terror, lest it should prove but some fresh aggravation of their woes. "Oh, it's about these Jews again! What more about them? Are they to be given up to us at once instead of our having to wait three or four days longer?" It is in three or four different languages, amongst others in Hebrew, and signed with the king's seal. See, there is one of the doomed race. His eyes fall upon the Hebrew; eagerly he begins to read, the colour comes and goes. "God of my fathers!" I fancy I hear him exclaim, "what is this?" Another glance to make sure that his eyes don't deceive him, and then away he hies to the Jewish quarter of the town. "Deliverance!" he cries, "we are delivered, we are saved, God has saved us!" The Jews rush out of their houses, the whole multitude throng to the market-place. Eagerly they listen as one reads aloud; and as sentence after sentence falls from the lips of the reader, sobs of joy and gladness are heard. Ah, that was a day long to be remembered by all. What tears of joy were shed, what songs of rejoicing were raised, what feasts they held! But what shall we say of the joy of the ransomed sinner when the proclamation of life reaches his liberated heart? He has heard the sentence of doom from Sinai, he has felt his impotence to resist his terrible foes, and has wrung his hands in despair as the iron has entered into his soul. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It may be that his misery is so great that he can scarcely attend to his ordinary business, or even find an appetite for his necessary food; and if so, why should we wonder at it? Are you surprised, then, at his joy when first he reads the second proclamation, and discovers that it is really intended for him? Do you blame him for being excited? I'll answer for it, these Jews were excited enough. How could they help it? And how can he? The Jews, we read, had light and gladness, and joy and honour; and such are the blessed privileges still of him who hears the gospel "report," and believes it. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon him with healing in His wings—joy within, and gladness without; and honour, for are we not children of the Most High, "heirs of

God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together"? Honour! Yes, for all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Well, now, that second proclamation has been made to us; the voice from Calvary has been spoken. On the Cross, favour has been secured for a guilty world. Have you received the report? But do you say, "I don't realise it; I am afraid it can't be for me, because I don't feel happy; I don't feel as if I were free from condemnation; I don't feel that I am saved"? Did these Jews of old know that they were delivered because they felt happy? Or did they feel happy because they knew that they were delivered? Which? Thy happiness is the effect, not the cause of thy safety. If thou wouldst be happy read the proclamation. Answer all thy inward misgivings by telling thy troubled heart that the good news is for thee. When we really believe a thing, we cease to look for evidence of our believing it in the effect produced in our own experience. Let me put it thus: Suppose we were to visit that Persian city shortly after the proclamation, and find there an aged Israelite of a sorrowful countenance. "Well, sir," we remark, "this is a day of good tidings: it occurs to us that a more cheerful look might be more in keeping with the occasion." "Ah, sirs," he replies, "this is a sad, sad time with me. I can get no comfort." "Why not, my good friend? Haven't you heard all about the king's decree, and how you Jews are to stand up against your enemies; and don't you know that the king's officers are all going to defend you, and that you are safe?" "Ah!" he replies, with a mournful shake of his head, "that may be all very true, but—but—I don't realise it!" "But what has your realising got to do with it: do tell us, is it true or false? If it is true, your realisations won't make it any truer; and if it be false, your realisations won't make it true; which is it?" "Oh, no doubt it's perfectly true; but still, how can you expect me to be happy when I don't realise it?" Really, if we could have found such a man, don't you think we should have felt something like irrepressible impatience with him? (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*) **Many became Jews, for the fear of the Jews were upon them.**—*Reasons for uniting with a Church*:—The true reasons why one should unite himself with a particular Church are because, first of all, he is already united to Christ; because, next, the organisation and activities of that special Church commend themselves to him as most in harmony with the principles of the New Testament; and because, finally, he is most edified and sustained by its ordinances and ministry. But to allow fashionable or worldly motives to intervene and become the determining elements is to secularise the Church by making it an anteroom of the world and so subordinating it to the world. One should be in that Church where he sees most of Christ; where he gets most from Christ; and where he can do most for Christ. The Church that is composed of such members will be blessed, and will be made a blessing, not to its own adherents only, but to all around. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VER. 1. Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar.—*Hope and foreboding*:—I. **HOPE BLIGHTED.** In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them. The human reasonableness of this hope may be shown—1. From their own numbers. 2. From the insignificance of the Jews. 3. From the known unchangeableness of Persian law. II. **FOREBODING REPROVED.** How often we look forward to a month Adar, and see it shrouded with ominous darkness. But the month Adar may, after all, be the month of rejoicing. III. **TRUE HOPE REWARDED.** (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The method of providence*:—1. Although, then, as has been already said, the grand design of this whole Book of Esther is an illustration of a retributive providence in working out the deliverance of the chosen people, still it is better for us to note the proofs of such a providence, as they occur, in detail. 2. We see here, as well, indeed, as also in other portions of sacred history, and as the lessons of all history and of every-day life also demonstrate, that God, in the exercise of His sovereignty, uses men of very different characters as instruments for fulfilling His supreme purpose. Both Esther and Ahasuerus, both Mordecai and Haman, were Divine agents for bringing about the Hebrew deliverance. 3. These pictures show us that we are to construct men's

reputation for character out of their whole life and principles, and not from any one moment, nor from any word or act. 4. We are here taught to feel the deepest interest in the welfare of our fellow-men, especially of those who may be associated with us, or be bound to us by social ties, or by blood and nationality. 5. I am perfectly sure that in the lives of the men and women as illustrated in the sacred writings we are taught the mind of God Himself, as to the precepts and principles which are agreeable to Him; and that it is in the teachings of the Word of God, and in it alone, that we can find the true principles of all proper reforms. It is in the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we have the principles of happiness—the only true principles of reformation. 6. We see here how great a blessing we enjoy in having mild, equitable, salutary laws, and in having a written constitution, that provides for its amendment, and points out the way for the repeal or alteration of any laws that may be made in haste, or in ignorance, or through party zeal, that are found to be unconstitutional and not for the good of the people. 7. The difficulties of the Persian monarch, growing out of his rash decree, even after the author of it has been punished, are a warning to us to beware of the consequences of our words and actions. 8. This history teaches us to trust in God for the vindication of His own ways and the justification of His judgments against the wicked, as well as in His faithfulness to His people, in remembering to keep and fulfil, at the right time, all His promises to them. 9. The delay of judgment against evil-doers, instead, therefore, of encouraging them to boldness in sin, should melt them to penitential sorrow. (1) For the delay of providence to punish the wicked does not change the nature of sin. It remains intrinsically the abominable thing that God hates. It is impossible, in the nature of things, that sin should ever meet with His approbation. The patience of God, therefore, produces no mitigation of the enormity of wrong-doing. It is no proof of Divine indifference to sin, or of its being a trifling offence in the sight of God, that He does not instantly express His abhorrence of it, and pour out His wrath upon the guilty. Men kindle immediately into a transport of passion when provoked. But God is not a man. He punishes sin not from passion, but from principle—not to revenge Himself for any injury He sustains from sin, but in order to maintain a righteous government for the happiness of His creatures. And the punishment of sin will only be the more severe because of the aggravations of abused mercy. (2) But an evil work is itself a judgment. It was so with Haman. His whole history shows that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall—that God can easily so direct human affairs as to thwart the best laid schemes of wicked men. (*W. A. Scott, D.D.*) *Providence—as seen in the Book of Esther*:—From the narrative of the preceding chapters we learn—I. THAT GOD PLACES HIS AGENTS IN FITTING PLACES FOR DOING HIS WORK. II. THAT THE LORD NOT ONLY ARRANGES HIS SERVANTS, BUT HE RESTRAINS HIS ENEMIES. III. THAT GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE TRIES HIS PEOPLE. IV. THAT THE LORD'S WISDOM IS SEEN IN ARRANGING THE SMALLEST EVENTS SO AS TO PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS. V. THAT THE LORD IN HIS PROVIDENCE CALLS HIS OWN SERVANTS TO BE ACTIVE. VI. THAT IN THE END THE LORD ACHIEVES THE TOTAL DEFEAT OF HIS FOES AND THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE. Lessons—1. It is clear that the Divine will is accomplished, and yet men are perfectly free agents. 2. What wonders can be wrought without miracles! In the miracles of Pharaoh we see the finger of God, but in the wonders of providence, without miracle, we see the hand of God. 3. How safe the Church of God is! 4. The wicked will surely come to an ill end. 5. Let each child of God rejoice that we have a Guardian so near the throne. Every Jew in Shushan must have felt hope when he remembered that the queen was a Jewess. To-day, let us be glad that Jesus is exalted. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 2, 3. *The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities.—The wise conduct of the Jews*:—The Jews acted—1. Wisely. They acted in unison. "They gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives." Union is power: concentration of strength is mighty for good and for evil. How awful the extent of the mischief perpetrated by the evil spirits, because they act in concert—unitedly: whereas disunion would cause even their kingdom to fall. Union and co-operation are likewise powerful for the production of good. Hence copies of the Divine writings are flying to all parts of the world, and missionaries to unfold their precious contents to those who are perishing for lack of knowledge. What would individual efforts do in cases like these? 2. Manfully. "They laid hands on all such as sought their hurt, and no man could withstand them." They were

acting legally: for the royal law permitted them to defend themselves. Trust in God, in His power and faithfulness, is the only source of true magnanimity. It is this alone that makes man undaunted on rational grounds. St. Paul tells us of the ancient believers, that "out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." And this, he tells us, was the effect of relying on God. 3. Moreover, they acted forbearingly, or self-denyingly. They merely defended themselves, and seized not upon the spoils of their enemies: "On the spoil they lay not their hand." They wanted only their lives and their own possessions, and not the riches of their neighbours. We find that great believer, Abraham, acting thus self-denyingly in Gen. xiv. The victory which the Jews obtained on this occasion was a very signal one. "The Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them." "In Shushan, the palace, the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men." At the request of the queen, three hundred more were slain in the royal city. And in the different provinces of the empire they slew of their foes seventy and five thousand. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Behold the fruits of the wickedness of one individual! (*J. Hughes.*) *Self-help brings help*:—I. DIVINE HELP. In this narrative we see all along that the Jews were helped of God. II. DIVINE HELP FOSTERS AND SUCCEEDS SELF-HELP. Divine help must first work, and then there can be successful self-help. These Jews helped themselves—1. By co-operation. 2. By active agency. 3. By a name of power. 4. By aggressive measures. III. SELF-HELP SECURES THE HELP OF OTHERS. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*)

Ver. 10. *But on the spoil laid they not their hand.*—*Leaving the spoils*:—It is not always good to seize all the money to which one has a legal right. There are many cases in which a regard to one's own credit, and there are others in which a sense of duty, should bind up our hands from receiving what we might otherwise take without injustice. The king's edict gave the Jews the right to take the spoil of their enemies. If they had done so, the tongue of slanderers might have alleged that they had slain innocent persons to enrich themselves. (*G. Lawson.*)

Vers. 17-28. *On the thirteenth day of the month Adar.*—*A national memorial*:—This national memorial—I. WAS ESTABLISHED BY SUPREME AUTHORITY. II. WAS APPROVED BY A GRATEFUL PEOPLE. III. WAS SANCTIONED BY THE MARVELLOUS NATURE OF THE EVENTS CELEBRATED. IV. WAS HALLOWED BY THE MANNER OF ITS CELEBRATION. V. WAS PRESERVED BY A WISE METHOD. VI. IS PERPETUATED WITH A GOOD RESULT. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The memorial*:—It would—1. Keep in remembrance an interposition of the Almighty, without which the Jewish nation and religion had been in a great measure, if not wholly, extinct in the world. 2. Mark a striking fulfilment of prophecy in the destruction of the Amalekites, who were the hereditary enemies of the Jews. 3. Stimulate confidence in God in the most critical circumstances, and refusal to pay such homage to the creature as is due to God only. 4. Foster that recognition of God in history and providence which men are ever liable to overlook and forget. In these respects it was an institution which should prove as advantageous to after-generations, and even more so, than to the people of God who were then living. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (*T. McEwan.*) *Memorial days, their obligation and manner of observance*:—I. TAKE A VIEW OF THE REASONS HERE ASSIGNED FOR THE ESTABLISHING THE OBSERVATION OF THE DAYS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT. 1. They were delivered from the entire extirpation of themselves and their religion out of the dominions of the Persian king. 2. The destruction with which they were threatened was in all human appearance inevitable. 3. The Jews might plainly discern a special hand of God in the deliverance which was granted them. 4. As this was a signal instance of God's special favour towards them, so it was but one instance among many others which they continually had from one generation to another. II. CONSIDER THE MANNER IN WHICH THE JEWS ARE HERE COMMANDED TO OBSERVE THEIR FESTIVAL. It includes three parts. 1. The natural. Feasting, rejoicing, &c. 2. The religious. Thanksgiving and praise. 3. The charitable. Sending portions one to another. If our gratitude to God on memorial days be sincere, we shall go on to express our sense of great deliverances. 1. By living as becomes those who have received such great favours from the hands of God. 2. We shall be zealous to maintain and secure the inestimable blessings hitherto continued to us. (*Samuel Bradford.*) *A national memorial*:—The feast instituted by Mordecai was designed to be—1. A

memorial of REST. II. A memorial of JOY. III. A memorial of TRIUMPH. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *The Feast of Purim*:—Looking at the establishment of Purim, we are struck—I. WITH THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF A FEAST OF THIS SORT. II. THERE IS ALSO AN EDUCATIONAL VALUE IN SUCH A FEAST. All the education of a child is not comprised in what he receives at school. He learns much in the home. He is greatly affected by what he sees on the streets. Dr. Andrew Reid tells us how profoundly he was moved by the sight of the statue of John Howard in St. Paul's Cathedral, and traces to that the benevolent purpose of his life, which ended in the establishment of so many asylums for orphans and imbeciles. So we ought to be careful what sort of men those are whom we allow to be honoured in that way. For every one who looks upon a statue is moved to ask, "Whose is it? what was his character? what was his history? and why has he been honoured thus?" And the answers will be a part of the education of those who put the questions, stirring their ambition or firing their enthusiasm. It is the same with national holidays. The Passover, &c. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Different means of commemorating great events*:—Different means have been employed by different nations and in different ages to perpetuate the memory of great events. We are told (Gen. xxxi. 45): "Jacob took a stone and set it up for a pillar." Again (Gen. v. 51). Achan and his family. The king of Ai. Absalom. Alexander the Great caused a tumulus to be erected over the grave of his friend Hephæstion, costing a million and a half of dollars. Virgil makes mention of memorial stones, as does also Homer. Standing-stones, or "menhirs," were also erected in memorial of particular events; and stone circles, constructed with the same design most probably, were so numerous that they may be found even yet in almost every country—in the Orkneys, in Russia, in Hindustan, in Africa, in Greenland, in America, in all parts of Europe. The most remarkable are Stonehenge and Abury, in England. As a means of transmitting events to succeeding generations, a simple ceremony committed to those who sympathise with the cause in which the observance originated is far more effective than even the most imposing monumental structure which art has devised, strength erected, or wealth adorned. The latter is dumb; the former has loving hearts and living tongues to perpetuate the memory of deeds that once stirred human souls and distilled blessings upon the world. The celebration of the 4th of July is likely to prove more satisfactory, as a memorial of a national birthday, than any other monument which the energy and liberality of the American people could have reared. In the rites connected with the Feast of Purim, Mordecai and Esther have a more enduring monument than the Egyptian monarch who erected the pyramid of Gizeh, or the Pharaoh who constructed the marvellous labyrinth. In confirmation of the theory that a ceremony is more effective as a memorial than dolmens, cromlechs, &c., I have only to remind you that the touching incidents connected with the life and death of Christ have been conveyed to the human family in a most remarkable way by the Eucharist. (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *And that these days should be remembered.—Days to be remembered*:—I. Our BIRTHDAYS. II. Days of AWAKENING AND CONVERSION. III. Days of DARKNESS. 1. Days of bereavement. 2. Days of mental depression. 3. Days of perplexity. IV. Days of DELIVERANCE. V. Times of REFRESHING AND SEASONS OF COMMUNION WITH GOD. VI. The day of DEATH AND THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. (*J. Bolton, B.A.*) *A memorial day*:—In these words we have an account of the founding of the Jewish national memorial day. It was not so much a religious as a national memorial day. It celebrated a day of victory and triumph; and they made it memorable by annual observance. I. LET US THINK OF IT AS A MEMORY DAY. There are those who think it unkind to recall the memory of the dead, or even to speak to the bereaved of their losses. There are some who think that the only way to console is by diverting the thoughts from all memory of that which occasioned pain. There is no more mistaken treatment for the human heart than to prescribe oblivion for its cure. The very memory of the loved one blesses us and makes us more gentle and tender toward the living. It is neither manly nor womanly nor human to be either hard-hearted or forgetful. Then, do you think that the heart of our nation is softened, and that sympathy, sensibility, and true greatness are promoted by our observance of a national memorial day? II. THAT OUR MEMORIAL DAY IS A DAY WITH VERY IMPORTANT LESSONS. 1. It teaches Christian patriotism. Love of country is not only a natural sentiment in every true heart, but it is right in the sight of God. No man can ignore his relation to his country and not sin against God. 2. Again, our memorial day teaches the value of peace. Memorial day is a constant reminder of the terrible price paid.

3. The day also brings lessons of gratitude and hope. Memory is the mother of gratitude. So when we recall our national blessings how much cause we have for gratitude to God! "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad." (*Southern Pulpit.*)

CHAPTER X.

VERS. 1-3. And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land.—A good government :—A good government—I. HAS A WISE SYSTEM OF TAXATION. II. MAKES ITS POWER FELT. III. PLACES GOOD MEN IN OFFICE. IV. PROMOTES THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE. V. STRIVES TO PRESERVE PEACE. VI. IS ACCEPTABLE TO A VIRTUOUS AND ENLIGHTENED PEOPLE. (*W. Burrows, B.A.*) *The greatness of Ahasuerus and of Mordecai :—*I. THE GREATNESS OF THE MONARCH IS SEEN—1. In the character of his government. "He laid a tribute on the land," &c. Possibly this was a judicious system of taxation, designed to displace some obnoxious method of raising money for the public treasury. 2. In the acquiescence of his subjects. II. THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI IS SEEN—1. In the contrast existing between his present and his former position. 2. In the fact that his severest trials became the avenue through which he ascended to fame. 3. In his reaching the pinnacle of greatness by simple fidelity to principle and unwearied diligence. 4. In his employing the influence he acquired, not for selfish ends, but to promote the welfare of his people. **Lessons—**1. He who fills well the position he occupies thereby effectually recommends himself to a higher. 2. Nothing is lost by maintaining integrity. 3. Worldly prosperity is often the result of religious faith. 4. It is unwise to be disheartened in the hour of adversity (*J. S. Van Dyke, D.D.*) *Mordecai's exaltation : a summary of providential interpositions :—*To extirpate the Jewish nation would have been to destroy the Church of God, to make void His everlasting covenant, and to bring to nought His merciful and gracious counsels in behalf of a sinful and unhappy world. 1. It was not, therefore, for his own sake only that Mordecai was exalted. 2. Before Mordecai was exalted it was the will of God to try the faith of the Jews. 3. One great purpose of the trial was to recall them to a recollection of their true office and position in the world as witnesses of God and pilgrims to the heavenly city. 4. God prepared an advocate and protector for His people years before Haman had power to do them harm. 5. To prepare the way for this advocate and protector, the divorce and dethronement of Vashti was overruled by God for the advancement of Esther to the crown of Persia. 6. The foundation of Mordecai's greatness was actually laid by his bitterest and most implacable enemy. 7. To pave the way for Mordecai's future advancement, a claim had to be established on the gratitude and confidence of the king, long before the rise of Haman. 8. The time pointed out by the lot for the slaughter of the Jews providentially fell so close to the end of the year as to give almost as much time as possible to Esther and Mordecai to consider what steps could be taken to avert the destruction of their nation. 9. Esther's concealing her Jewish origin, both before and after coming to the throne, was overruled to the confusion and destruction of Haman. He would never have issued the decree against the Jews had he known that the queen was a Jewess. 10. Haman's concealing from the king that it was the Jewish nation he wished to destroy was overruled so as to become the means of his own downfall. 11. The insolence and impatience of Haman getting the better of his prudence was the means of defeating and disappointing his malicious schemes. 12. That Esther should have been received with favour by the king, after she had apparently been slighted by him for thirty days, was clearly an instance of the hand of God. 13. That Esther, through some impression on her mind, should have deferred her petition till the following day, was one of the most remarkable providential interferences in the whole history. The delay led to the erection of the gibbet on which Haman afterwards suffered and also to his humiliation in being compelled to do public honours to Mordecai. 14. The king's sleepless night had momentous results. 15. How providential that Haman should have been at hand at the very moment the king was desirous for some one to propose a suitable reward for Mordecai! 16. Haman's humiliation at being compelled to do honour to Mordecai so dispirited him that when Esther's terrible charge was made against him he was not able to make even a plausible defence, such as his ignorance that the queen was

a Jewess and his ignorance of any conscious intention to injure her. 17. Even the trivial circumstances that the chamberlains sent to summon Haman to the banquet arrived before he had time to have the gibbet taken down and removed, and that thus they came to be informed that it was prepared for Mordecai, were as plainly the work of providence as any other event in the whole narrative. 18. To all these extraordinary accidents and coincidences we must add that the issue of the whole matter placed the Jews in a much more prosperous condition than they were in before, and confirmed their faith in the Divine promises and protection. (*W. Crosthwaite.*) *The Book of Esther*:—I. WE HAVE HERE A GOLDEN LEAF IN THE CHAIN OF PROVIDENCE teaching us that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men." II. WE LEARN HERE THE PECULIAR CARE WITH WHICH GOD WATCHES OVER HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE. III. WE SEE THE WONDERFUL MANNER IN WHICH GOD RAISES UP INSTRUMENTS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE. IV. WE NOTICE THE SURPRISING MANNER IN WHICH PROVIDENCE OPENS UP THE WAY IN WHICH THESE INSTRUMENTS ARE DESTINED TO ACT. V. WE ARE TAUGHT THE DUTY OF PLACING OUR SOLE TRUST AND DEPENDENCE ON GOD. VI. WE LEARN FROM THIS BOOK THE HIGH UTILITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES, AND THEIR STANDING AUTHORITY AS A RULE BOTH TO INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES. (*Thomas McCrie, D.D.*) *A well-governed empire*:—The Chinese have a political saying which is worthy the reading even of English statesmen. It is as follows: When is the empire well governed, and affairs go as they should go? When swords are rusty, and spades are bright; when prisons are empty, and grain-bins filled; when the law courts are lonely and o'ergrown with grass; when doctors walk and bakers ride: it is then that things go as they ought, and the State is well ruled. *The highest government*:—Above all, it is ever to be kept in mind that not by material but by moral power are men and their actions governed. How noiseless is thought! No rolling of drums, no tramp of squadrons, or immeasurable tumult of baggage-waggons, attend its movements. In what obscure and sequestered places may the head be meditating which is one day to be crowned with more than imperial authority! for kings and emperors will be among its ministering servants; it will rule, not over, but in, all heads, and with these its solitary combinations of ideas, as with magic formulas, bend the world to its will. The time may come when Napoleon himself will be better known for his laws than for his battles; and the victory of Waterloo prove less momentous than the opening of the first Mechanics' Institute. (*Thomas Carlyle.*) *Seeking the wealth of his people*.—Mordecai was a true patriot, and therefore being exalted to the highest position under Ahasuerus, he used his eminence to promote the prosperity of Israel. In this he was a type of Jesus, who, upon His throne of glory, seeks not His own, but spends His power for His people. Every Christian should be a Mordecai to the Church, striving according to his ability for its prosperity. Some are placed in stations of affluence and influence; let them testify for Jesus before great men. Others have what is far better, namely, close fellowship with the King of kings; let them be sure to plead daily for the weak of the Lord's people, the doubting, the tempted, and the comfortless. Instructed believers may serve their Master greatly if they lay out their talents for the general good, and impart their wealth of heavenly learning to others, by teaching them the things of God. The very least in our Israel may at least seek the welfare of his people; and his desire, if he can give no more, shall be acceptable. It is at once the most Christlike and the most happy course for a believer to cease from living to himself. He who blesses others cannot fail to be blessed himself. On the other hand, to seek our own personal greatness is a wicked and unhappy plan of life, its way will be grievous and its end will be fatal. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)