

QUEEN ESTHER

THE WEB IS WOVEN

"After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the Son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" Esther 3:1-3.

The stage of this passage is filled by three strongly marked and strongly contrasted men: Mordecai, Haman, and Ahasuerus. Mordecai, a sturdy non-conformist; Haman, an arrogant and vindictive minister of state; Ahasuerus, a despotic and careless king. These three are the visible persons, but behind them is an unseen and unnamed "Presence," the God of Israel, who still protects His exiled people.

We will first take a look at this sturdy non-conformist, Mordecai. The "reverence" which the king had commanded his servants to show to Haman was not simply a sign of respect, but an act of worship. Eastern adulation regarded a monarch as in some sense a god, and we know that Divine honors were in later times paid to Roman emperors, and many Christians were martyred for refusing to render them.

The command here indicates that Ahasuerus desired Haman to be regarded as his representative, and possessing at least some reflection of god-head from him. European ambassadors to eastern courts have often refused to prostrate themselves before the monarch on the ground of its being degradation to their dignity, but Mordecai stood erect while the crowd of servants lay flat on their faces, as the great men passed through

the gate, because he would have no share in an act of worship to any but JEHOVAH.

He might have compromised with conscience, and found some plausible excuses if he had wished. He could have put his own private interpretation on the prostration and said to himself, "I have nothing to do with the meaning that others attach to bowing before Haman. I mean by it only due honor to the second man in the kingdom." But the monotheism of his race was too deeply ingrained in him, and so he kept a stiff backbone and "bowed not down," resisted peer pressure, and would not be herd-bound.

That his refusal was based on spiritual scruples and is the natural inference from his having told his fellow-porters that he was a Jew. That fact would explain his attitude, but would also isolate him still more. His obstinacy piqued them, and they reported his contumacy to the great man, thus at once gratifying personal dislike, racial hatred, and religious antagonism. And recommending themselves to him as solicitous for his dignity.

We, too, are often sometimes placed in circumstances where we are tempted to take part in what may be called constructive idolatry. There arise, in our necessary co-operation with those who do not share in our faith, occasions when we are expected to unite in acts which we are thought very strait-laced for refusing to do, but which, conscience tells us cannot be done without practical disloyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whenever that inner voice says, "Don't" we must disregard the persistent solicitations of others, and be ready to be singular, and run any risk rather than comply.

"So did not I, because of the fear of God" has to be our motto, whatever fellow-servants may say. The gate of Ahasuerus's palace

was not a favorable soil for the growth of a devout soul, but flowers can bloom on dung-hills, and there have been "saints in Caesar's household."

Haman is a sharp contrast to Mordecai. He is the type of the unworthy character that climbs or crawls to power in a despotic monarchy, vindictive, arrogant, cunning, totally oblivious of the good of the subjects, using his position for his own advantage, and ferociously cruel. He had naturally not noticed the one erect figure among the crowd of abject ones, but the insignificant Jew became important when pointed out.

IF HE HAD BOWED, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ONE MORE NOBODY. A face in the crowd, one among many. But his not bowing made him somebody who had to be crushed. The childish burst of passion is very characteristic, and not less true to life in the extension of the anger and thirst for vengeance to, "all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus." They were "the people of Mordecai" and that was enough. "He thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone." What a perverted notion of personal dignity which thought the sacrifice of the one offender beneath it, and could only be satisfied by a blood-bath into which a nation should be plunged.

Such an extreme of frantic lust for murder is only possible in such a state as Ahasuerus's Persia, but the prostitution of public position to personal ends, and the adoption of political measures at the bidding of wounded vanity, and to gratify blind hatred of a race, is possible still, and it becomes all Christians to use their influence that the public acts of their nation shall be clear of that taint.

Haman was as superstitious as he was cruel. And so he sought for auguries from Heaven for his hellish purpose and cast lots to find the favorable day for bringing it about. **He is not the only one who has sought Divine approval for wicked public acts. Religion has been used to varnish many a crime,** and "te deums" sung for many a victory which was little better than Haman's plot.

The crafty denunciation of the Jews to the king is a **good specimen of the way in which a despot is hoodwinked by his favorites and made their tool.** It was no doubt, true that they did not "keep the king's laws," except so far as these required worship of other gods.

In all their long dispersion they had been remarkable for two things, their tenacious adherence to the law, so far as possible in exile, and their obedience to the law of the country of their sojourn. No doubt, the exiles in Persian territory presented the same characteristics. But Haman has had many followers in resenting the distinctiveness of the Jew, and charging on them crimes of which they were innocent.

From Mordecai onwards it has been so, and Europe has been disgraced by a crusade against them less excusable than Haman's. **Hatred still masks itself under the disguise of political expediency,** and says, "It is not for the king's profit to suffer them." But the true half of the charge was a eulogium, for it **implied that the scattered exiles were faithful to God's Word, and were marked off by their lives. That ought to be true of all Christians.** They would obviously be living by other principles than the world adopts.

The enemy's charge, "Shall turn unto you for a testimony," Happy shall we be if observers are prompted to say of us that "our laws are diverse" from those of ungodly men around us.

The great bribe which Haman offered to the king is variously estimated as equal to from three to four millions sterling. He, no doubt, reckoned on making more than that out of the confiscation of Jewish property. That such an offer should have been made by the chief minister to the king, and that for such a purpose, reveals a depth of corruption which would be incredible if similar horrors were not recorded of other eastern despots. But with Germany astonishing the world, no one can call Haman's offer too atrocious to be true.

Ahasuerus is the vain, glorious king known to us as Xerxes. His conduct in the affair corresponds well enough with his known character. The lives of thousands of law abiding subjects are tossed to the favorite without inquiry or hesitation. He does not even ask the name of the "certain people," much less require proof of the charge against them. The insanity of weakening his empire by killing so many of its inhabitants does not strike him, nor does he ever seem to think that he has duties to those under his rule.

Careless of the sanctity of human life, too indolent to take trouble to see things with his own eyes, apparently without the rudiments of the idea of justice, he wallowed in a sty of self-indulgence, and, while greedy of adulation, and the semblance of power, let the reality slip from his hands into those of the favorite, who played on his vices as on an instrument, and pulled the strings that moved the

puppet. We do not produce kings of that sort nowadays, but king "Demos" has his own vices, and is so easily blinded and swayed as Ahasuerus. In every form of government, monarchy or republic, there will be "would be" leaders, who seek to gain influence and carry their objects by tickling vanity, operation on vices, calumniating innocent men, and the other arts of the demagogue. **Where the power is in the hands of the people, the people are very apt to take its responsibilities as lightly as Ahasuerus did his, and to let itself be led blindfold by men with personal ends to serve, and hiding them under the veil of eager desire for the public good.** Christians should "play the citizen as it becomes the Gospel of Christ," and **take care that they are not beguiled into national enmities and public injustice by the spacious talk of modern Hamans.**

So the web is woven and we are now ready for Esther's venture.

ESTHER'S VENTURE

"Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai: All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place: but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

"Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise: and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH," Esther 4:10-16.

Patriotism is more evident than spirituality in the book of Esther. To turn to the book of Esther after the fervors of prophets and the continual recognition of God in history which marks the other historical books, it is like coming down from Heaven to Earth. But that different tone probably accurately represents the difference between the believers and heroes of an earlier age and the Jews in Persia, in whom national feeling was stronger than devotion. **Or nationalism and patriotism was a part of their devotion and spirituality.**

The picture of their characteristics deducible from this book shows many of the traits which have marked them ever since, accommodating flexibility, strangely united with unbending tenacity, a capacity for securing the favor of influential people, and willingness to stretch conscience in securing it, reticence and diplomacy and, beneath all, unquenchable devotion to Israel, which burns alike in the politic Mordecai and the lovely Queen Esther.

In this lesson there is not much audible spirituality, but Mordecai impressively enforces his assurance that Israel cannot perish, and his belief in God's providence getting people in their place for great unselfish ends, and Esther ready to die, if need be, in trying to save her people, and thinks that fasting and prayer will help her in her daring attempt. These two cousins, unlike in so much, were alike in their devotion to Israel, and thought they said little about their Christianity. **They acted it, which is better.**

It is very like Jews that the relationship between Mordecai and Esther should have been kept dark. Nobody but one or two trusted servants knew that the porter was the queen's cousin, and probably her Jewish birth was also unknown. Secrecy is, no doubt, the armour of oppressed nations, but it is peculiarly agreeable to the descendants of Jacob, who was a master of the art. There must have been wonderful self-command on both sides to keep such a secret, and true affection, to preserve intercourse through apparent indifference.

Our passage begins with the middle of Esther's conversation with the confidential go-between, who told her of the insane decree for the destruction of the Jews, and of Mordecai's request that she should appeal to the king. She reminds him of what he knew well enough, the law that unsummoned intruders into the presence are liable to death and adds what, of course, he did not know, that she had not been summoned by the king for a month.

We need not dwell on this ridiculously arrogant law, but may remark that the substan-

tial accuracy of the statement is confirmed by classical and other authors, and may pause for a moment to note the glimpse given here of the delirium of self-importance in which these Persian kings lived, and to see in it no small cause of their vices and disasters. What chance of knowing facts or living a wholesome life had a man shut off thus from all but lickspittles and slaves? No wonder that the victims of such dignity beat the sea with rods, when it was rude enough to wreck their ships. No wonder that they wallowed in sensuality, and lost pith and manhood. No wonder that Greece crushed their unwieldy armies and fleets.

And what a glimpse into their hearts' emptiness and degradation of sacred ties is given in the fact that Esther the queen had not seen Ahasuerus for a month, though living in the same palace, and his favorite wife. No doubt, the experiences of exile had something to do in later ages with the decided preference of the Jew for monogamy.

But we can see how clearly Esther sees and how clearly she tells Mordecai the tremendous risk which following the counsel he gave her would bring. **NOTE THAT SHE DOES NOT REFUSE. SHE SIMPLY PUTS THE CASE PLAINLY, AS IF SHE INVITED FURTHER COMMUNICATION.** "This is how things stand. Do you still wish me to run the risk?" That is poor courage which has to shut its eyes in order to keep itself up to the mark. Unfortunately, the temperament which clearly sees dangers and that which dares them are not often found together in due proportion, and so men are over-rash and over cautious.

This young queen, with her clear eyes saw, and with her brave heart was ready to face, peril to her life. Unless we fully realize difficulties and dangers beforehand, our enthusiasms for great causes will ooze out at our fingers' ends at the first rude assault of these. **So let us count the cost before we take up arms, and let us take up arms, after we have counted the cost. Cautious courage, courageous caution, are good guides. Either alone is a bad one.**

Mordecai's great message is a condensed statement of the great reasons which always exist for self-sacrificing efforts for others' good. His words are none the less saturated with devout thought because they do not name God. This porter at the palace gate had not the tongue of the psalmist or of a prophet. He was a plain man, not uninfluenced by his pagan surroundings, and perhaps he was careful to adapt his message to the lips of the Gentile messenger, and therefore did not more definitely use the sacred name.

It is very interesting that Mordecai makes no attempt to minimize Esther's peril in doing as he wished. He knew that she would take her life in her hand, and he expects her to be willing to do it, as he would have been willing. IT IS GRAND WHEN LOVE EXHORTS LOVED ONES TO A COURSE WHICH MAY BRING DEATH TO THEM, AND LIFELONG LONELINESS AND QUENCHED HOPES TO IT. Think of Mordecai's years of care over and pride in his fair young cousin and how many joys and soaring visions would perish with her. And then estimate the heroic self-sacrifice he exercised in urging her to her course.

His first appeal is on the lowest ground. Pure selfishness should send her to the king, for, if she did not go, she would not escape the common ruin. So, on one hand, she would have to face certain destruction, and on the other, there were possible success and escape.

It may seem unlikely that the general massacre should include the favorite queen, and especially as her nationality was apparently a secret. But when a mob has once tasted blood, its appetite is great and its scent keen, and there are always informers at hand to point to hidden victims. The argument holds in reference to many forms of conflict with national and social evils. If Christians allow vice and godlessness to riot unchecked, they will not escape the contagion, in some form or other.

How many good men's sons have been swept away by the immoralities of great cit-

ies? How few families there are in which there is not "one dead," the victim of drink and drugs and dissipation? How the godliness of the Church is cooled down by the low temperature around!

At the very lowest, self-preservation should enlist all good men in a sacred war against sins which are slaying their country men. If small pox breaks out in the slums, it will come up uptown into the grand houses, and the outcasts will prove that they are the rich man's brothers by infecting him, and perhaps even killing him. The epidemic of AIDS, for example, makes us all brothers.

Mordecai goes back to the same argument in the later part of his answer, when he foretells the destruction of Esther and her father's house. There it puts it, however, in a rather different light. The destruction is not now, as before, her participation in the common tragedy, but her exceptional ruin while Israel is preserved.

The unfaithful one, who could have intervened to save, and did not, will have a special infliction of punishment. That is true in many applications. Certainly, neglect to do what we can do for others does always bring some penalty on the slothful coward, and there is no more short-sighted policy than that which shirks plain duties of beneficence from regard to self. But higher considerations than selfish ones are appealed to.

Mordecai is sure that deliverance will come. He does not know whence, but come it will. How did he arrive at that serene confidence? Certainly because he trusted God's ancient promises and believed in the indestructibility of the nation which a Divine hand protects. "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

How does such a confidence agree with fear of destruction? The two parts of Mordecai's message sound contradictory, but he might well dread the threatened catastrophe, and yet be sure that through any disaster, Israel as a nation would pass, cast down, no doubt, but not destroyed... May fall many times, but not be cast away.

How did it agree with his earnestness in trying to secure Esther's help? If he was certain of the issue, why should he have troubled her or himself? Just for the same reason that the discernment of God's purposes and absolute reliance on these stimulate, and do not paralyze, devout activity in helping to carry them out. If we are sure that a given course, however full of peril and inconvenience, is in the line of God's purposes, that is a reason for strenuous effort to carry it out.

Since some men are to be honored to be His instruments, shall not we be willing to offer ourselves? There is a holy and noble ambition which covets the dignity of being used of the Lord. They who believe that their work helps forward what is dear to the Lord's heart may well do with their might what they find to do, and not be too careful to keep on the safe side in doing it. THE HONOR IS MORE THAN THE DANGER. "Here am I, take me," should be the Christian feeling about all such work.

The last argument in this noble summary of motives for self-sacrifice for others' good is the thought of God's purpose in giving Esther her position. It carries large truths applicable to us all.

THE SOURCE OF ALL ENDOWMENTS OF POSITION, POSSESSIONS, OR CAPACITIES, IS GOD. His purpose in them all goes far beyond the happiness of the receiver. **Dignities and gifts of every sort are ours for use in carrying out His great designs of good to other fellows.**

ESTHER WAS MADE QUEEN, NOT THAT SHE MIGHT LIVE IN LUXURY AND BE THE PLAYTHING OF A KING, BUT THAT SHE MIGHT SERVE ISRAEL. **Power is duty. Responsibility is measured by capacity. Obligations attend advantages. Gifts are burdens. All men are stewards,** and GOD GIVES HIS SERVANTS THEIR "TALENTS" NOT FOR SELFISH SQUANDERING OR HOARDING, BUT TO TRADE WITH AND TO PAY THE PROFITS TO HIM.

This penetrating insight into the source and intention of all which we have, carries a

solemn lesson for us all. THE FAIR YOUNG HEROINE'S SOUL ROSE TO THE OCCASION, AND RESPONDED WITH A SWIFT DETERMINATION TO HER OLDER COUSIN'S LOFTY WORDS. Her request for the prayers of the people for which sake she was facing death was surely more than superstition. Little as she says about her faith in God, it obviously underlays her courage. A SOUL THAT DARES DEATH IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD'S WILL AND IN DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD'S AID, DEMONSTRATES ITS GODLINESS MORE FORCIBLY IN SILENCE THAN BY MANY PROFESSIONS. "If I perish, I perish."

Think of the fair, soft lips set to utter this grand surrender, and of all the flowery and silken cords which bound the young heart to life, so bright and desirable as was assured to her. Note her resolute calmness, the spartan brevity, the clear sight of the possible fatal issue, the absolute submission. No higher strain has ever come from human lips like these of this *Woman in My Life*, Esther.

The womanly soul was of the same stock as a Deborah, a Jephthah's daughter, and the same fire burned in her, utter devotion to the Lord on behalf of Israel because of her entire consecration to Israel's God.

What was her individual life compared with her people's life, and her Lord's will? She was ready without a murmur to lay her young radiant life down. **Such ecstasy of willing self-sacrifice raises its subject above all fears and dissolves hindrances.** It may be wrought out in uneventful details of our small lives, and may illuminate these as truly as it sheds imperishable lustre over the lovely figure standing at the palace court, and waiting for life or death at the will of the sensual tyrant.

The scene need not detain us. We can fancy Esther's beating heart putting fire in her cheek and her subdued excitement making her beauty more splendid as she stood. What a contrast between her and the arrogant king on his throne. He was a voluptuary, ruined morally by unchecked license, a monster, as

he could hardly help being, of lust, self-will and caprice.

She was at that moment an incarnation of self-sacrifice and pure enthusiasm. **The blind world thought that he was the greater**, but how ludicrous his condescension, how vulgar his pomp, how coarse his kindness, how gross his prodigal promises by the side of the heroine of faith, Esther, whose life is held in his capricious hand.

How amazed the king would have been if he had been told that one of his chief titles to be remembered would be that moment's in-

terview. Ahasuerus is the type of swollen self-indulgence, which always degrades and coarsens. Esther is the type of self-sacrifice which uniformly refines, elevates, and arrays with new beauty and power. If we would reach the highest nobleness possible to us, we must stand with Esther at the gate, and not envy or imitate Ahasuerus on his gaudy throne.

"He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall find it."

MORDECAI AND ESTHER

"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Esther 4:14.

All Christians are agreed in holding principles which underlie evangelism. They all believe that the world is a fallen world, that without Christ the fallen world is a lost world, that the preaching of the Gospel is the way to bring Christ to those who need Him, that to the Church is committed the ministry of reconciliation.

There are the grand truths from which the grand work of evangelism has sprung. It is not my intention to enlarge on them now. But in this and in all cases, there are secondary motives besides, and inferior to those which are derived from the real fundamental principles. We are stimulated to action not only because we hold certain great principles, but because they are reinforced by certain subordinate considerations.

It is the duty of all Christians to promote the evangelistic cause on the lofty grounds of the Gospel of Christ. Besides that, it may be in a special way our duty for some additional

reasons drawn from peculiarities in our condition.

Circumstances do not make duties, but they may bring a special weight of obligation on us to do them. Times again do not make duties, but they too make a thing a special duty now. The consideration of consequences may not decide us in matters of conscience, but it may allowably come in to deter us from what is on higher grounds a sin to be avoided, or a good deed to be done. **Success or failure is an alternative that must not be thought of when we are asking ourselves, "Ought I to do this?"** But when we have answered that question, we may go to work with a lighter heart and a firmer hand if we are sure that we are not going to fail. All these are inferior considerations which do not avail to determine duty and do not go deep enough to constitute the real foundation of our obligation. **They are considerations which can scarcely be shut out, and should be taken in in determining the weight of our obligation, in shaping the selection of our duties, in stimulating the zeal and sedulousness with which we do what we know to be right.**

To a consideration of some of these secondary reasons for energy in the world of

evangelism I now want you to focus your attention. The verse we have before us is spoken by Mordecai to Esther, when urging her to her perilous patriotism.

IT SINGULARLY BLENDS THE STATESMAN AND THE BELIEVER. He sees that if she selfishly refuses to identify herself with her people in their calamity, the wave that sweeps them away will not be stayed outside royal dwelling. He knows too much of courts to think that she can stand against that burst of popular fury should it break out. But he looks on as a devout man believing in God's promises, and seeing past all instruments. He warns her that "DELIVERANCE AND ENLARGEMENT SHALL ARISE." He is no fatalist. He believes in man's work, THEREFORE HE URGES HER TO LET HERSELF BE THE INSTRUMENT BY WHICH GOD'S WORK SHALL BE DONE.

He is no atheist. He believes in God's sovereign power and unchangeable faithfulness, therefore he looks without dismay to the possibility of her failure. He knows that if she is idle, all the evil will come on her head, who has been unfaithful, and that in spite of that, God's faithfulness shall not be made of none effect. HE BELIEVES THAT SHE HAS BEEN RAISED TO HER POSITION FOR GOD'S SAKE, FOR HER BRETHREN'S SAKE, AND NOT HER OWN. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

THERE SPEAKS THE DEVOUT STATESMAN, THE COURT-EXPERIENCED BELIEVER. He has seen favorites tended and tossed aside. Vashti, viziers powerful and beheaded, kings half-defied and deserted in their utmost need. Sitting at the gate there, he has seen generations of Hamans go out and in. He has seen the craft, the cruelty, the lusts which have been the apparent causes of the puppets rise and fall and he has looked beyond it all and believed in a "Hand" that pulled the strings, in a King of kings, who "Raiseth up one and putteth down another." So he believes that Esther has come to the kingdom of God by God's appointment, to do God's work at

God's time. And these convictions keep him calm and stir her.

We can find here a series of considerations having a special bearing on this work of evangelism.

- GOD GIVES US OUR POSITION THAT WE MAY USE IT FOR HIS CAUSE, FOR THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL. NO MAN HAS ANYTHING FOR OWN SAKE. No man liveth to himself. We come to the kingdom for others. Here we touch the foundation of all authority. We learn the awful burden of all talents, the dreadful weight of every gift.
- NO MAN RECEIVES THE GOSPEL FOR HIS OWN SAKE. We are non-conductors but stand all linked hand in hand. We are members of the body that the blood may flow freely through us. For no loftier reason did God light the candle than that it might give light. We are beacons kindled to transmit, till every sister height flashes back the ray.
- WE ESPECIALLY HAVE RECEIVED A POSITION IN THE WORLD FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD. Our national character and position unite that of the Jew in his two stages. We are sent to be the "Light of the world," and we are "tribes wandering on foot." Our history all has tended to this function, our local position, our laws, our commerce. We are citizens of a nation which as a nest has found the riches of His peoples. In every land our people dwell.

Think of our colonies. Think that we are brought into contact with heathen, whether we will or not, we cannot help influencing them. "Through you the Name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles." Think of sailors. Why this position? What is plainer than that all this is in order that the Gospel might be spread?

God has ever let the Gospel follow in the tracks made for it by commercial law. This object does not exclude others. Our lan-

guage, our literature, our other rich spiritual treasures, we hold them all that we may impart. But remember that all these other good things America has will spread themselves with little effort. People will be glad to get them. But the Gospel will not be spread so. **It must be taken to those who do not know it. It must be held forth, with outstretched hands to a "disobedient and gainsaying people."** It is found of them that seek it not. Like the Lord we must go to the wanderers, we must find them as they lie panting and thirsty in the wild wilderness.

Therefore, Christians must make special earnest efforts or the work will not be done. They must be as the "dew that tarrieth not for man nor waiteth for the sons of men." And again, such action does not involve approval of the means by which such a position has become ours.

Mordecai knew what vile passions had been at work to put Esther there, and did not forget poor Vashti. And we have no need to hide conviction that our position in this country has sometimes been won by wrong, been kept by fraud. And many innocent have been thrown down.

But still God maketh the wrath of man to praise Him. Still we are debtors to the Greek and Barbarian. And all the more debtors because of the ills inflicted. God has laid on us a solemn responsibility.

Over all the dust of base intrigues, and the smoke of bloody battles, and the hubbub of busy commerce, God's hand has been working. And though we have been sinful, He has given us a place and a power, which is mighty and awful. We have received these not for our own glory, not that we should boast of our dominion, not that we should gather tribute or gain and glory from subject peoples, not even that we should carry to them the great lesser blessings of language, united order, peaceful commerce, away over brute nature, BUT THAT WE SHOULD GIVE THEM WHAT WILL MAKE THEM MEN, i.e., CHRIST.

We have a work to do, an awful work. To us all as Christians, to us especially as citizens of this land and members of this race, to us and to our brethren the message comes, by our history, our manners, etc., as plainly as if it were written in every wave that beats around our coast. "Ye are My witnesses saith the Lord." God lays upon us special evangelistic work by the special characteristics of the times.

"Such a times as this," said Mordecai to Esther. Was there ever such a time? Look at the conditions of heathenism. It is everywhere tottering. "The idols are on the beast, but bel boweth down." **The grim gods sit half famished already. There is a crack in every temple wall.** Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Brahminism, they are none of them progressive. They are none of them vital. **Think how only the Gospel outleaps space and times. How all these systems are of time and devoured by it, as Satan eats his own children. They are of the things that can be shaken, and their being shaken makes more certain the remaining of the things that cannot be shaken.**

Look at the fields open. India, China, Japan, Africa, in a word, "The field is the world" to a degree in which it never was before. "Such a time," a time of seething and we can determine the cosmos, a plastic time, and we can mould it, it is a deluge. Push the ark boldly out and ransom some.

If we neglect the voice of God's providence, harm comes on us. The gifts unimproved are apt to be lost. One knows not all the conditions on America holding her away, nor do we fathom the strange way in which spiritual characteristics are inwrought with material interests. But we believe in a providential government of the world, and of this we may be very sure, **that all advantages not used for God are held by a very precarious tenure.**

The first is that selfishness is the ruin of any people. When you have a "Christian" nation and they are not using their position for God's glory, they are using it for their own sakes, and that indicates a

state of mind which will lend to numberless other evils in their relation to men, many of which have a direct tendency to rob them of their advantages.

For instance, a selfish nation will never hold conquest with a firm grasp. If we do not bind subject peoples to us as benefits, we shall repel them by hatreds. Think of India and its lessons, or of South Africa and its. We have seen the tide of material prosperity ebb away from many a nation and land, and I for my part believe in the hand of God in history, and believe that the tide follows the motions of the heavens.

The history of the Jewish people is not an exception to the laws of God's government of the world, but a specimen of it. They who were made a hearth in which the embers of Divine Truth were kept in a dark world, when they began to think that they had the Truth in order that they might be different from other peoples, and forgot that they were different from others in order that they might first preserve and then impart the Truth to all, lost the light and heat of it, stiffened into formal hypocrisy and malice and all uncharitableness, and then the Roman sword smote their national life in twain.

Whatever is not used for God becomes a snare first, then injures the possessor, and tends to destroy the possessors.

The march of providence goes on. Its purpose will be effected. Whatever stands in the way will be mowed remorselessly down, if need be. Helps that have become hindrances will go. **The kingdoms of this world will have to fall, and if we are not helping and hastening the coming of the Lord, we shall be destroyed by the brightness of His coming.**

The chariot rolls on for men and for nations. There is only the choice of yoking themselves to the car, and finding themselves borne along rather than bearing it and partaking the triumph or of being crushed beneath its awful wheels as they bound along their certain road, bearing him who rides

"forth prosperously because of Truth and meekness and righteousness."

Though we be unfaithful, God's purpose of mercy to the world shall be accomplished, "Deliverance and enlargement shall arise from another place."

So it is certain that God from eternity has willed that all flesh should see His salvation. He loves the heathen better than we do. **Christ has died and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.** God hath made of one blood all nations of men. The race is one in its need. The race is one in its goal. The Gospel is fit for all men. The Gospel is preached to all men. The Gospel shall yet be received by a world, and from every corner of a believing Earth will rise one roll of praise to one Father and the race shall be one in its hopes, one in its Lord, one in faith, one in baptism, one in one God and Father of us all.

That grand unity shall certainly come. That true unity and fraternity shall be realized. The blissful wave of the knowledge of the Lord shall cover and hide and flow rejoicingly over all national distinctions. "In that day Israel shall be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the Earth."

This is as certain as the efficacy of a Saviour's blood can make it, as certain as the universal adaptation and design of a preached Gospel can make it, as certain as the power of a Comforter who shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment can make it, as certain as the misery of man can make it, as certain as the promises of God who cannot lie can make it, as certain as His faithfulness who hands the rainbow in the heavens and enters into an everlasting covenant with all the Earth can make it.

This accumulation of certainties does not depend on the faithfulness of men. In the midst of that mighty result the failure of some single agent may be eliminated. No more, though all men failed, God hath instruments, and will use them Himself, if need were.

Only we share the triumph and partake of the blessed result. Decide for yourself what share you will have in that marvelous day. Let your work be such as that it shall abide. Stonehenge, cathedrals, temples stand when all else has passed away. **Work for God abides and outlasts everything beside,** and the smallest service for the Lord, is only made to flash forth light by the glorifying and revealing fires of that awful day

which will burn up the wood, the hay and the stubble, and glow with beautifying brightness and be flashed back with double splendor from "the gold, the silver, and the precious stones," the abiding workmanship of devout hearts in that everlasting tabernacle which shall not be taken down, the ransomed souls builded together, ransomed by our preaching, and "builded up together for a temple of God by the Spirit."

THE WEB IS BROKEN

"And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. Then the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king. And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

"Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther, the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews," Esther 8:3-7.

Of what webs we often weave when at first we deceive.

The spirit of this passage may perhaps be best caught by taking the three persons appearing in it, and the "One" who does not appear, but acts unseen through them all. The heroine of the whole book and of this chapter is Esther, one of the sweetest and noblest of the women of all Scripture. The orphan girl who had grown up into beauty un-

der the care of her uncle Mordecai, and was lifted suddenly from sheltered obscurity into the "fierce light that beats upon a throne," like some flower culled in a shady nook and set in a king's bosom, was true to her childhood's protector and to her people, and kept her sweet, brave gentleness unspoiled by the rapid elevation which ruins so many characters.

Her Jewish name, Hadassah, Myrtle, well befits her, for she is clothed with unostentatious beauty, pure and fragrant as the blossoms that brides twine in their hair. But, withal, she has a true woman's courage which is always ready to endure any evil and dare any danger as the bidding of her heart. She took her life in her hand when she sought to have an audience with Ahasuerus uninvited. And she knew that she did. Nothing in literature is nobler than her quiet words, which measure her danger without shrinking, and front it without heroics, "If I perish, I perish."

The danger was not past, though she was queen and beloved, for a despot's love is a shifting sand-bank, which may yield anchorage today, and tomorrow may be washed away. **SO SHE COUNTED NOT HER LIFE DEAR UNTO HERSELF,** when, for the second time, as in our passage, she ventured uninvited, into the king's presence. **The womanly courage that risks life for love's sake is nobler than the soldier's**

that feels the lust of battle maddening him.

Esther's words to the king are full of tact. She begins with what seems to have been the form of address prescribed by custom, for it is used by her in her former request. But she adds a variation of the formula, tinged with more personal reference to the king's feelings toward her, as well as breathing entire submission to his estimate of what was fitting.

"If the thing seem right before the king," appeals to the sense of justice that lay dormant beneath the monarch's arbitrary will. And "I be pleasing in his eyes," drew him by the charm of her beauty.

She avoided making the king responsible for the plot, and laid it at the door of the dead and discredited Haman. It was his device, and since he had fallen, his policy could be reversed without hurting the king's dignity.

And then with fine tact, as well as with a burst of genuine feeling, she flings all her personal influence into the scale, and seeks to move the king, not by appeals to his justice or royal duty, but to his love for her, which surely could not bear to see her suffer.

One may say that it was a low motive to appeal to, to ask the despot to save a people in order to keep one woman from sorrow, and so it was. It was Ahasuerus's fault that such a reason had more weight with him than nobler ones. It was not Esther's, that she used her power over him to carry her point. She used the weapons that she had, and that she knew would be efficacious. The purpose for which she used them is her justification.

Esther may well teach her sisters today to be brave and gentle, to use their influence over men for high purposes of public good, to be the inspirers of their husband, lovers, brothers, for all noble thinking and doing, to make the cause of the oppressed their own, to be the apostles of mercy and the hinderers of wrong, to keep true to their early associations if prosperity comes to them, and to cherish

sympathy with their nation so deep that they cannot "endure to see the evil that shall come unto them," without using all their womanly influence to avert it. "The one who has the king's ear, has the kingdom."

Now Ahasuerus plays a sorry part beside Esther. He knows no law but his own will, and that is moved, not by conscience or reason, but by ignoble passions and sensual desires. He tosses his subjects lives as trivial gifts to any who ask for them. Haman's wife knew that he had only to "speak to the king and Mordecai would be hanged." Haman had no difficulty in securing the royal mandate for the murder of all the Jews. Stated with indulgence of low desires, he let all power slip from his idle hands, and his manhood was rotted away by wallowing in the pigsty of voluptuousness. But he was tenacious of the semblance of authority, and demanded the appearance of abject submission from the "servants" who were his masters.

He yielded to Esther's prayer as lightly as to Haman's plot. Whether the Jews were wiped out or not mattered nothing to him, so long as he had no trouble in the affair to shift all responsibility off his own shoulders on to somebody else was his one aim. He was untrue to his duty when he gave his signet to Mordecai and bade him and Esther do as they liked, as when he had given it to Haman.

And with all this slothful indifference to his duty, he was sensitive to etiquette, and its cobwebs held him whom the cords of his royal obligations could not hold. It mattered not to him that the edict which he allowed Mordecai to promulgate practically lit the flames of civil war. He has washed his hands of the whole business.

It is a hideous picture of an eastern despot, and has been said to be unhistorical and unbelievable. But the world has seen many examples of rulers whom the possession of unlimited and irresponsible power has corrupted in like fashion. **And others than rulers may take the warning that to live to self is the mother of all sins and crimes,**

and that no man can safely make his own will and his own passions his guides, THAT THERE IS NO SLAVERY SO ABJECT AS THAT OF THE MAN WHO IS TYRANIZED BY HIS LOWER NATURE, THAT THERE IS A TEMPTATION BESETTING US ALL TO TAKE THE ADVANTAGES AND NEGLECT THE DUTIES OF OUR POSITION.

And that to yield to it is sure to end in moral ruin. We are all kings. Even if our kingdom be only our own selves, and we shall **RULE WISELY ONLY IF WE RULE AS GOD'S VICEROYS, AND THINK MORE OF DUTY THAN OF DELIGHT.**

Now Mordecai is a kind of a duplicate of Joseph and embodies valuable lessons contented with acceptance of obscurity and neglect of his services, faithfulness to his people and his God in the foul atmosphere of such a court, wise reticence, patient discharge of small duties, undoubting hope when things looked blackest, fed by steadfast faith in God, unchangedness of character and purpose when lifted to supreme dignity, then use of influence and place, not for himself, but for his people.

All of these are traits which may be imitated in any life. We should be the same men, whether we sit unnoticed among the lackeys at the gate, or are bearing the brunt of the hatred of powerful foes, or are clothed "in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold." These gauds were nothing to Mordecai. Earthly honors should never turn our heads. **HE VALUED POWER BECAUSE IT ENABLED HIM TO SAVE HIS BRETHREN, AND WE SHOULD CULTIVATE THE SAME SPIRIT.**

The political world, with its fierce struggles for personal ends, its often disregard of public good, and its use of place and power for "making a pile," or helping relations up,

would be much the better for some infusion of the spirit of Mordecai.

But we must conclude, where everything concludes, in any study of the "*Women in My Life*" with not the forces and the visible persons, because this book of Esther does not say much about the Lord, but His presence broods over it all, **AND IS THE REAL SPRING THAT MOVES THE MOVERS THAT ARE SEEN.**

It is all a lesson of how God works out His purposes through men and women that seem to be working out their's. The king's criminal abandonment to lust and luxury, Haman's measly personal pique, Esther's beauty, the fall of the favorite, the long past services of Mordecai, even the king's sleepless night, are all threads in the web, and God is the ultimate Weaver.

The story raises the whole question of the standing miracle of the co-existence and co-operation of the Divine and the human. Man is free and responsible. God is sovereign and all pervading. God makes "the wrath of man to praise him, and with the remainder thereof He girdeth Himself."

Today, as then, God is working out His deep designs through men whom He has raised up, though they have not known Him. Amid the clash of contending interest and worldly passions, God's solemn purpose steadily advances to its end, like the irresistible ocean current, which persists through all the storms that agitate the surface, and draws them into the drift of its silent trend.

Ahasuerus, Haman, Mordecai, Esther, are the Lord's instruments, and yet each of them is doer of his or her deed, and has to answer to Him for it.

Do you know Esther? A hostage in Persia?