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ESTHER

From Commentary on the Old Testament

C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch

adapted for Grace Notes training by Warren Doud

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Web Site: <http://www.gracenotes.info>

E-mail: wdoud@gracenotes.info

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The Authors

Carl Friedrich Keil (26 February 1807 – 5 May 1888) was a conservative German Lutheran Old Testament commentator. He was born at Lauterbach near Oelsnitz, Kingdom of Saxony, and died at Rätz, Saxony.

Franz Delitzsch (Leipzig, February 23, 1813 – Leipzig, March 4, 1890) was a German Lutheran theologian and Hebraist. Born in Leipzig, he held the professorship of theology at the University of Rostock from 1846 to 1850, at the University of Erlangen until 1867, and after that at the University of Leipzig until his death. Delitzsch wrote many commentaries on books of the Bible, Jewish antiquities, biblical psychology, a history of Jewish poetry, and Christian apologetics.

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Warren Doud, Director
1705 Aggie Lane, Austin, Texas 78757

E-Mail: **wdoud@gracenotes.info**

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Esther

Introduction

Name, Contents, Object, and Unity of the Book of Esther

This book bears the name of **אֶסְתֵּר** or **מִגַּלְת**

אֶסְתֵּר, book of Esther, also briefly that of

מִגַּלְת with the Rabbis, from Esther the Jewess, afterwards raised to the rank of queen, to whom the Jews were indebted for their deliverance from the destruction with which they were threatened, as related in this book.

Its contents are as follows:—Ahashverosh, king of Persia, gave, in the third year of his reign, a banquet to the grandees of his kingdom at Susa; and on the seventh day of this feast, when his heart was merry with wine, required the Queen Vashti to appear before his guests and show her beauty. When she refused to come at the king's commandment, she was divorced, at the proposal of his seven counsellors; and this divorce was published by an edict throughout the whole kingdom, lest the example of the queen should have a bad effect upon the obedience of other wives to their husbands (Esther 1). When the king, after his wrath was appeased, began again to feel a tenderness towards his divorced wife, the most beautiful virgins in the whole kingdom were, at the advice of his servants, brought to the house of the women at Susa, that the king might choose a wife at his pleasure. Among these virgins was Esther the Jewess, the foster-daughter and near relative of Mordochai, a Benjamite living in exile, who, when brought before the king, after the customary preparation, so pleased him, that he chose her for his queen. Her intercourse with Mordochai continued after her reception into the royal palace; and during his daily visits in the gate of the palace, he discovered a conspiracy against the life of the king, and thus rendered him an important service (Esther 2). Ahashverosh afterwards made Haman, an

Agagite, his prime minister or grand visier, and commanded all the king's servants to pay him royal honours, i.e., to bow down before him. When this was refused by Mordochai, Haman's indignation was so great, that he resolved to destroy all the Jews in the whole empire. For this purpose he appointed, by means of the lot, both the month and day; and obtained from the king permission to prepare an edict to all the provinces of the kingdom, appointing the thirteenth day of the twelfth month for the extermination of the Jews throughout the whole realm (Esther 3). Mordochai apprised Queen Esther of this cruel command, and so strongly urged her to apply to the king on behalf of her people, that she resolved, at the peril of her life, to appear before him unbidden. When she was so favourably received by him, that he promised beforehand to grant whatever she had to request, even to the half of his kingdom, she first entreated that the king and Haman should eat with her that day. During the repast, the king inquired concerning her request, and she answered that she would declare it on the following day, if the king and Haman would again eat with her (Esther 4:1–8). Haman, greatly elated at this distinction, had the mortification, on his departure from the queen, of beholding Mordochai, who did not rise up before him, in the gate of the palace; and returning to his house, formed, by the advice of his wife and friends, the resolution of hanging Mordochai next day upon a gallows; for which purpose he immediately caused a tree fifty cubits high to be prepared (Esther 5:9–14). Next night, however, the king, being unable to sleep, caused the records of the kingdom to be read to him, and was thereby reminded of the obligation he was under to Mordochai. When, on this occasion, he learnt that Mordochai had as yet received no reward for his service, he sent for Haman, who had resorted thus early to the court of the palace for the purpose of obtaining the royal permission for the execution of Mordochai, and asked him what should be done to the man whom the King desired to honour. Haman, thinking his honour concerned himself, proposed the very highest,

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and was by the king's command obliged, to his extreme mortification, himself to pay this honour to Mordochai, his wife and friends interpreting this occurrence as an omen of his approaching ruin (6). When the king and Haman afterwards dined with Esther, the queen begged for her life and that of her people, and pointed to Haman as the enemy who desired to exterminate the Jews. Full of wrath at this information, the king went into the garden of the palace; while Haman, remaining in the room, fell at the feet of the queen to beg for his life. When the king, returning to the banquet chamber, saw Haman lying on the queen's couch, he thought he was offering violence to the queen, passed sentence of death upon him, caused him to be hanged upon the gallows he had erected for Mordochai (7), and on the same day gave his house to the queen, and made Mordochai his prime minister in the place of Haman (Esther 8:1, 2). Hereupon Esther earnestly entreated the reversal of Haman's edict against the Jews; and since, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, an edict issued by the king and sealed with the seal-royal could not be repealed, the king commanded Mordochai to prepare and publish throughout the whole kingdom another edict, whereby the Jews were permitted, to their great joy and that of many other inhabitants of the realm (Esther 8:3-17), not only to defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies on the appointed day, but also to kill and plunder them. In consequence of this, the Jews assembled on the appointed day to defend their lives against their adversaries; and being supported by the royal officials, through fear of Mordochai, they slew in Susa 500, and in the whole kingdom 75,000 men, besides 300 more in Susa on the day following, but did not touch the goods of the slain. They then celebrated in Susa the fifteenth, and in the rest of the kingdom the fourteenth, day of the month Adar, as a day of feasting and gladness (Esther 9:1-19). Hereupon Mordochai and Queen Esther sent letters to all the Jews in the kingdom, in which they ordered the yearly celebration of this day, by the name of the feast of Purim, i.e.,

lots, because Haman had cast lots concerning the destruction of the Jews (Esther 9:20-32). In conclusion, the documents in which are described the acts of Ahashverosh and the greatness of Mordochai, who had exerted himself for the good of his people, are pointed out (Esther 10).

From this glance at its contents, it is obvious that the *object* of this book is to narrate the events in remembrance of which the feast of Purim was celebrated, and to transmit to posterity an account of its origin. The aim of the entire contents of this book being the institution of this festival, with which it concludes, there can be no reasonable doubt of its *integrity*, which is also generally admitted. Bertheau, however, after the example of J. D. Michaelis, has declared the sections 9:20-28 and 29-32 to be later additions, incapable of inclusion in the closely connected narrative of Esther 1-9:19, and regards Esther 10 as differing from it both in matter and language. The sections in question are said to be obviously distinct from the rest of the book. But all that is adduced in support of this assertion

is, that the words קָיָם, to institute (Esther 9:21, 27, 29, 31), סוּף, to come to an end, to cease

(Esther 9:28), the plural צוֹמוֹת, fasts (Esther 9:31), and an allusion to the decree in a direct manner, occur only in these sections. In such a statement, however, no kind of consideration is given to the circumstance that there was no opportunity for the use of קָיָם and the

plur. צוֹמוֹת in the other chapters. Hence nothing remains but the direct introduction of the decree, which is obviously insufficient to establish a peculiarity of language. Still weaker is the proof offered of diversity of matter between 9:20-32 and Esther 9-9:19; Bertheau being unable to make this appear in any way, but by wrongly attributing to the word קָיָם the meaning: to confirm a long-existing custom.

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Historical Character of the Book of Esther

The feast of Purim is mentioned, 2 Macc. 15:36, under the name of Μαρδοχαϊκή ἡμέρα, as a festival existing in the time of Nicanor (about 160 B.C.); and Josephus tells us, Ant. xi. 6. 13, that it was kept by the Jews during a whole week. Now the institution of this festival must have been based upon an historical event similar to that related in this book. Hence even this is sufficient to show that the assertion of Semler, Oeder, and others, that this book contains a fictitious parable (*confictam esse universam parabolam*), is a notion opposed to common sense. For if this festival has been from of old celebrated by the Jews all over the world, it must owe its origin to an occurrence which affected the whole Jewish people, and the names Purim and Mordochai's day are a pledge, that the essential contents of this book are based upon an historical foundation. The name Purim (i.e., lots), derived from the Persian, can be suitably explained in no other manner than is done in this book, viz., by the circumstance that lots were cast on the fate of the Jews by a Persian official, who contemplated their extermination, for the purpose of fixing on a favourable day for this act; while the name, Mordochai's day, preserves the memory of the individual to whom the Jews were indebted for their deliverance. Hence all modern critics admit, that at least an historical foundation is thus guaranteed, while a few doubt the strictly historical character of the whole narrative, and assert that while the feat of Purim was indeed celebrated in remembrance of a deliverance of the Jews in the Persian empire, it was the existence of this festival, and the accounts given by those who celebrated it, which gave rise to the written narrative of the history of Esther (thus Bertheau). On the other hand, the historical character of the whole narrative has been defended not only by Hävernicks (*Einl.*), M. Baumgarten (*de fide libri Estherae*, 1839), and others, but also, and upon valid grounds, by Staehelin (*spec. Einl. in die kanon. BB. des A. T.* § 51f.). The objections that have been raised to its credibility have arisen, first from the habit of

making subjective probability the standard of historical truth, and next from an insufficient or imperfect attention to the customs, manners, and state of affairs at the Persian court on the one hand, or an incorrect view of the meaning of the text on the other. When, e.g., Bertheau as well as Bleek (*Einleit.* p. 286) says, "The whole is of such a nature that the unprejudiced observer cannot easily regard it as a purely historical narrative," Cleric. (*dissert. de scriptoribus librr. hist.* § 10) far more impartially and correctly decides: *Mirabilis sane est et παράδοξος (quis enim neget?) historia, sed multa mirabilia et a moribus nostris aliena olim apud orientales ut apud omnes alios populos contigerunt.* The fact that King Ahashverosh should grant his grand vizier Haman permission to publish an edict commanding the extermination of the Jews throughout his empire, is not challenged by either Bleek or Bertheau; and, indeed, we need not go so far as the despotic states of the East to meet with similar occurrences; the Parisian massacre of St. Bartholomew being a sufficient proof that the apparently incredible may be actual reality.¹ And all the other statements of this book, however seemingly unaccountable to us, become conceivable when we consider the character of King Ahashverosh, i.e., as is now generally admitted, of Xerxes, who is described by Greek and Roman historians as a very luxurious, voluptuous, and at the same time an extremely cruel tyrant. A despot who, after his army had been hospitably entertained on its march to Greece, and an enormous sum offered towards defraying the expenses of the war, by Pythius the rich Lydian, could be betrayed into such fury by the request of the latter, that of his five sons who were in the army the eldest might be released, to be the comfort of his declining years, as to command this son to be hewn into two pieces, and to make his army pass between them (Herod. vii. c. 37–39; Seneca, *de ira*, vii. 17); a tyrant who could behead the builders of the bridge over the Hellespont, because a storm had destroyed the bridge, and command the sea to be scourged, and to be chained by sinking a few fetters (Herod. vii. 35); a debauchee who,

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after his return from Greece, sought to drive away his vexation at the shameful defeat he had undergone, by revelling in sensual pleasures (Herod. ix. 108f.); so frantic a tyrant was capable of all that is told us in the book of Esther of Ahashverosh.

Bleek's objections to the credibility of the narrative consist of the following points: *a.* That it is inconceivable that if the Persian despot had formed a resolution to exterminate all the Jews in his kingdom, he would, even though urged by a favourite, have proclaimed this by a royal edict published throughout all the provinces of his kingdom twelve months previously. In advancing this objection, however, Bleek has not considered that Haman cast lots for the appointment of the day on which his project was to be carried into execution; the Persians being, according to Herod. iii. 128, Cyrop. i. 6. 46, frequently accustomed to resort to the lot; while not only in Strabo's time, but to the present day, also, everything is with them decided according to the dicta of soothsayers and astrologers. If, then, the lot had declared the day in question to be a propitious one for the matter contemplated, the haughty Haman would not reflect that the premature publication of the edict would afford a portion of the Jews the opportunity of escaping destruction by flight. Such reflections are inconsistent with absolute confidence in the power of magical decisions; and even if what was possible had ensued, he would still have attained his main object of driving the Jews out of the realm, and appropriating their possessions.—*b.* That at *this* time Judea, which was then almost wholly reinhabited by Jews, was among the provinces of Persia, and that hence the king's edict commanded the extermination of almost all the population of that country. This, he says, it is difficult to believe; and not less so, that when the first edict was not repealed, the second, which granted the Jews permission to defend themselves against their enemies, should have resulted everywhere in such success to the Jews, even though, from fear of Mordochai the new favourite, they were favoured by the royal

officials, that all should in all countries submit to them, and that they should kill 75,000 men, equally with themselves subjects of the king. To this it may be replied: that Judea was, in relation to the whole Persian realm, a very unimportant province, and in the time of Xerxes, as is obvious from the book of Ezra, by no means "almost wholly," but only very partially, inhabited by Jews, who were, moreover, regarded with such hostility by the other races dwelling among them, that the execution of the decree cannot appear impossible even here. With regard to the result of the second edict, the slaughter of 75,000 men, this too is perfectly comprehensible. For since, according to Medo-Persian law, the formal repeal of a royal edict issued according to legal form was impracticable, the royal officials would understand the sense and object of the second, and not trouble themselves much about the execution of the first, but, on the contrary, make the second published by Mordochai, who was at that time the highest dignitary in the realm, their rule of action for the purpose of ensuring his favour. Round numbers, moreover, of the slain are evidently given; i.e., they are given upon only approximate statements, and are not incredibly high, when the size and population of the kingdom are considered. The Persian empire, in its whole extent from India to Ethiopia, must have contained a population of at least 100,000,000, and the number of Jews in the realm must have amounted to from two to three millions. A people of from two to three millions would include, moreover, at least from 500,000 to 700,000 capable of bearing arms, and these might in battle against their enemies slay 75,000 men. Susa, the capital, would not have been less than the Stamboul of the present day, and would probably contain at least half a million of inhabitants; and it by no means surpasses the bounds of probability, that in such a town 500 men should be slain in one day, and 300 more on the following, in a desperate street fight. Nor can the numbers stated by looked upon as too high a computation. The figures are only rendered

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improbable by the notion, that the Jews themselves suffered no loss at all. Such an assumption, however, is by no means justified by the circumstance, that such losses are unmentioned. It is the general custom of the scriptural historians to give in their narratives of wars and battles only the numbers of the slain among the vanquished foes, and not to mention the losses of the victors. We are justified, however, in supposing that the war was of an aggravated character, from the fact that it bore not only a national, but also a religious character. Haman's wrath against Mordochai was so exasperated by the information that he was a Jew, that he resolved upon the extermination of the people of Mordochai, i.e., of all the Jews in the realm (Esther 3:4–6). To obtain the consent of the king, he accused the Jews as a scattered and separated people, whose laws were different from the laws of all other nations, of not observing the laws of the king. This accusation was, "from the standpoint of Parseeism, the gravest which could have been made against the Jews" (Haev. *Einl.* ii. 1, p. 348). The separation of the Jews from all other people, a consequence of the election of Israel to be the people of God, has at all times inflamed and nourished the hatred of the Gentiles and of the children of this world against them. This hatred, which was revived by the edict of Haman, could not be quenched by the counter-edict of Mordochai. Though this edict so inspired the royal officials with fear of the powerful minister, that they took part with, instead of against the Jews, yet the masses of the people, and especially the populations of towns, would not have paid such respect to it as to restrain their hatred against the Jews. The edict of Mordochai did not forbid the execution of that of Haman, but only allowed the Jews to stand up for their lives, and to slay such enemies as should attack them (Esther 8:11). The heathen were not thereby restrained from undertaking that fight against the Jews, in which they were eventually the losers. When, however, c. Bleek finds it "utterly unnatural" that, after the Jews had slain 500 of

their foes in one day in Susa, the king should, at the request of Esther, whose vengeance and thirst of blood were not yet appeased, have granted an edict that the slaughter should be renewed on the following day, when no attack upon the Jews was permitted, his objection rests upon a sheer misunderstanding of the whole affair. The queen only requested that "it should be granted to the Jews in Susa to do to-morrow also, according to the decree of to-day" (Esther 9:13), i.e., "to stand for their lives, and slay all who should assault them" (Esther 8:11). This petition presupposes that the heathen population of Susa would renew the attack upon the Jews on the next day. Hence it is evident that Bleek's assertion, that the heathen were not allowed on that day to renew their attack upon the Jews, is an erroneous notion, and one at variance with the text. Together with this erroneous assumption, the reproach of vengeance and bloodthirstiness raised against Esther is also obviated. Her foresight in securing the lives of her people against renewed attacks, betrays neither revenge nor cruelty. Unless the heathen population had attacked the Jews on the second day, the latter would have had no opportunity of slaying their foes. How little, too, the Jews in general were influenced by a desire of vengeance, is shown by the fact so repeatedly brought forward, that they laid not their hand on the spoil of the slain (Esther 9:9, 15), though this was granted them by the royal edict (Esther 8:11).—d. Bleek's remaining objections are based partly upon misrepresentations of the state of affairs, and partly upon erroneous notions of Eastern customs.²

If, then, all the objections raised against the credibility of the narrative may by thus disposed of, we are perfectly justified in adhering to a belief in the historical character of the whole book, since even Bleek cannot deny, that some at least of "the customs and arrangements of the Persian court are both vividly and faithfully depicted." To this must be added the statement of the names of the individuals who take part in the narrative, e.g., the courtiers, 1:10; the seven princes of Persia,

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1:14; the keeper of the women's houses, 2:8 and 14; the ten sons of Haman, 9:7-9, and others; and the reference to the book of the chronicles of the Medes and Persians, as the documents in which not only the acts of Ahashverosh, but also the greatness of Mordochai, were written (Esther 10:2). As the numerous and otherwise wholly unknown names could not possibly be invented, so neither can the reference to the book of the chronicles be a mere literary fiction. When, therefore, Bertheau thinks, that the writer of this book, by thus bringing forward so many small details, by stating the names of otherwise unknown individuals, and especially by giving so much accurate information concerning Persian affairs and institutions,—the correctness of which is in all respects confirmed both by the statements of classical authors and our present increased knowledge of Oriental matters,—certainly proves himself acquainted with the scene in which the narrative takes place, with Persian names and affairs, but not possessed also of an historical knowledge of the actual course of events; we can perceive in this last inference only the unsupported decision of a subjectivistic antipathy to the contents of the book.

Authorship and Date of the Book of Esther

No certain information concerning the *author* of this book is obtainable. The talmudic statement in *Baba bathr.* 15. 1, that it was written by the men of the Great Synagogue, is devoid of historical value; and the opinion of Clem. Al., Aben Ezra, and others, that Mordochai was its author, as is also inferred from 9:20 and 23 by de Wette, is decidedly a mistaken one,—the writer plainly distinguishing in this passage between himself and Mordochai, who sent letters concerning the feast of Purim to the Jews in the realm of Persia. Other conjectures are still more unfounded. The date, too, of its composition can be only approximately determined. The opinion that in 9:19 the long existence of the feast of Purim is presupposed, cannot be raised to the rank of a certainty. Nor does the book contain allusions pointing to the

era of the Greek universal monarchy. This is admitted by Stähelin, who remarks, p. 178: "The most seemingly valid argument in support of this view, viz., that Persian customs are explained in this book, 1:1, 13 (for 7:8, usually cited with these passages, is out of the question, and is the king's speech in answer to 8:5), is refuted by the consideration, that the book was written for the information of Palestinian Jews; while Hävernicks, ii. 1, p. 361, refers to a case in Bohaeddin, in which this biographer of Saladin, p. 70, though writing for Arabs, explains an Arabian custom with respect to prisoners of war." On the other hand, both the reference to the chronicles of the Medes and Persians (Esther 10:2), and the intimate acquaintance of the writer with Susa and the affairs of the Persian monarchy, decidedly point to the fact, that the date of its composition preceded the destruction of the Persian empire, and may perhaps have been that of Artaxerxes I or Darius Nothus, about 400 B.C. The omission, moreover, of all reference to Judah and Jerusalem, together with the absence not only of theocratic notions, but of a specially religious view of circumstances, favour the view that the author lived not in Palestine, but in the more northern provinces of the Persian realm, probably in Susa itself. For though his mode of representing events, which does not even once lead him to mention the name of God, is not caused by the irreligiousness of the author, but rather by the circumstance, that he neither wished to depict the persons whose acts he was narrating as more godly than they really were, nor to place the whole occurrence—which manifests, indeed, the dealings of Divine Providence with the Jewish people, but not the dealings of Jahve with the nation of Israel—under a point of view alien to the actors and the event itself, yet a historian acquainted with the theocratic ordinances and relations of Judah would scarcely have been capable of so entirely ignoring them.

The Canonicity of the Book of Esther

The book of Esther has always formed a portion of the Hebrew canon. It is included also among

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the twenty-two books which, according to Josephus, *c. Ap. i. 8*, were acknowledged by the Jews as *δικαίως πεπιστευμένα*. For Josephus, who repeatedly asserts, that the history of the Hebrews from Moses to Artaxerxes was written by the prophets and worthy to be believed, relates also in his *Jewish Antiquities* (l. xi. c. 6) the history of Esther, Mordochai, and Haman. Certain critics have indeed desired to infer, from the statement in the Talmud, *Jerush. Megill. 70. 4*, that “among the eighty elders who contended against the institution of the feast of Purim by Esther and Mordochai as an innovation in the law, there were more than thirty prophets,” that the Jews did not formerly attribute the same authority to the book of Esther as to the other Scriptures (Movers, *loci quidam historiae canonis V. T.* p. 28; Bleek, *Einl.* p. 404); but even Bertheau doubts whether this passage refers to the whole book of Esther. For it treats unambiguously only of the fact Esther 9:29–32, which is very specially stated to have been an institution of Esther and Mordochai, and concerning which differences of opinion might prevail among the Rabbis. The further remark of Movers, *l.c.*, that the oldest patristic testimonies to the inclusion of this book in the canon are of such a nature, *ut ex iis satis verisimiliter effici possit, eum tunc recens canonis adjectum esse*, because it occupies the last place in the series of O.T. writings given by Origen, Epiphanius, and Jerome, according to Jewish authority, and because the canons of the Greek Church, which more accurately enumerate the books received by the synagogue, do not contain the book of Esther, is also incorrect. For (1.) the lists of the canonical books of the O.T. given by Origen (in Euseb. *hist. eccl.* vi. 25) and Epiphanius give these books not according to their order in the Hebrew canon, but to that of the Alexandrian version, while only Jerome places the book of Esther last. (2.) In the lists of the Greek Church this book is omitted only in that given in Euseb. *hist. eccl.* iv. 26, from the *eclogae* of Melito, Bishop of Sardis, and in that of Gregory of Nazianzen, while it is included in those of Origen and Cyril of Jerusalem; a circumstance which leads to the supposition

that it might have been omitted by an oversight in transcription in those of Origen and Epiphanius. Only Athanasius (in his *epist. fest.*), Amphilochius (in the *Jambi ad Seleuc.*), and the author of the *Synopsis Athanasius*, who is supposed not to have lived till the tenth century, reckon it among the apocryphal books; while Junilius (of the sixth century) remarks that there were many in his days who doubted the canonicity of the book of Esther. From this it is sufficiently obvious, that these doubts were not founded upon historical tradition, but proceeded only from subjective reasons, and were entertained because offence was taken, first at the non-mention of the name of God in this book, and then at the confessedly apocryphal additions mingled with this book in the Alexandrian translation. The author of the *Synopsis Ath.*, moreover, expressly says that the Hebrews regarded this book as canonical. The well-known harsh judgments of Luther in his work *de servo arbitrio: liber Esther, quamvis hunc habent in canone, dignior omnibus, me iudice, qui extra canonem haberetur*, and in his *Table Talk*, are purely subjective.³ Luther could never reconcile himself to this book, because he felt that the saving truths of Scripture were absent from it. The later Jews, on the contrary, exalted it even far above the Torah and the prophets.⁴

Later Protestant theologians, too, have, in their efforts to justify the canonicity of this book, over-estimated its canonical value, and attributed to the history therein related, Messianic references which are foreign to its meaning (comp. the verdict given upon it in Carpzov's *Introd. in V. T.* p. 369f.). The moderate opinion of Brentius is: *hic liber utilis est ad docendam fidem et timorem Dei, ut pii non frangantur adversis, sed invocantes nomen Domini ex fide, accipiant spem salutis; impii vero alieno supplicio terreantur et ad pietatem convertantur*. This opinion is one far better founded than the depreciatory decision of modern critics, that this book breathes a spirit of revenge and pride (de Wette-Schrader); or of Bertheau, that “Esther and Mordochai are full of a spirit of revenge and hostility not to Gentile

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ways, but to the Gentiles themselves, of cruelty, and of ungodly confidence in a victory over the world, by worldly power and the employment of worldly means,” and that this book “belongs to the historical records of the revelation made to Israel, only in so far as it helps to fill up the chasm between the times of the prophets and the days of our Lord.” “The book itself and its position in the canon plainly testify, that the people to whom the victory over the world was promised, separated themselves farther and farther from communion with the holy God, trusted to their own arm and to worldly power, and could not, therefore, but be worsted in their contest with the empire of the times.” Such a verdict is justified neither by the circumstance, that the Jews, who reject Christ’s redemption, understand and over-estimate this book in a carnal manner, nor by the fact, that the name of God does not once occur therein. With respect to the first point, the book itself is not to blame for being misused by Jews who have not accepted the redemption which is by Christ, to nourish a fanatical hatred of all Gentiles. Even if Esther and Mordochai were filled with a spirit of revenge toward the Gentiles, no reproach could in consequence be cast on the book of Esther, which neither praises nor recommends their actions or behaviour, but simply relates what took place without blame or approval. But neither are the accusations raised against Esther and Mordochai founded in truth. The means they took for the deliverance and preservation of their people were in accordance with the circumstances stated. For if the edict promulgated by Haman, and commanding the extermination of the Jews, could not, according to the prevailing law of the Medo-Persians, be repealed, there was no other means left to Mordochai for the preservation of his countrymen from the destruction that threatened them, than the issue of a counter-edict permitting the Jews to fight for their lives against all enemies who should attack them, and conceding to them the same rights against their foes as had been granted to the latter against the Jews by the edict of Haman. The

bloodshed which might and must ensue would be the fault neither of Mordochai nor Esther, but of Haman alone. And though Mordochai had irritated the haughty Haman by refusing him adoration, yet no Jew who was faithful to the commands of his God could render to a man that honour and adoration which are due to the Lord only. Besides, even if the offence of which he was thereby guilty against Haman might have incited the latter to punish him individually, it could offer no excuse for the massacre of the entire Jewish nation. As for the second point, viz., the non-mention of the name of God in this book, we have already remarked, § 3, that this omission is not caused by a lack of devoutness of reverence, the narrative itself presenting features which lead to an opposite conclusion. In the answer which Mordochai sends to Esther’s objection to appear before the king unbidden, “If thou holdest thy peace, there shall arise help and deliverance for the Jews from another place,” is expressed the assured belief that God would not leave the Jews to perish. To this must be added, both that the Jews express their deep sorrow at the edict of Haman by fasting and lamentation (Esther 4:1–3), and that Queen Esther not only prepares for her difficult task of appearing before the king by fasting herself, but also begs to be assisted by the fasting of all the Jews in Susa (Esther 4:16). Now fasting was a penitential exercise, and the only form of common worship practised by Jews dwelling among Gentiles; and this penitential exercise was always combined with prayer even among the heathen (comp. Jon 3:5f.), though prayer and calling upon God might not be expressly mentioned. Finally, the occasion of this conflict between Jews and Gentiles was a religious one, viz., the refusal of adoration to a man, from fear of transgressing the first commandment. All these things considered, we may with Stähelin appropriate what Lutz in his *bibl. Hermeneutik*, p. 386, says concerning this book: “A careful survey will suffice to show, that the religious principle predominates in the book of Esther, and that there is a religious foundation to the view taken of the occurrence. For it is represented as

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providential, as an occurrence in which, although the name of God is unmentioned, a higher Power, a Power on the side of Israel, prevails. Even in single features a closer inspection will plainly recognise a religious tone of feeling, while the whole book is pervaded by religious moral earnestness." It is this religious foundation which has obtained and secured its position in the canon of the inspired books of the O.T. The book is a memorial of the preservation of the Jewish people, during their subjection to a universal empire, by means of a special and providential disposition of secular events, and forms in this respect a supplement to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which relate the restoration of the Jewish community to the land of their fathers. On the additions to the book of Esther in the Alexandrian version, which Luther, after the example of Jerome, excluded from the book and relegated to the Apocrypha under the title of *Stücke in Esther*, comp. my *Lehrb. der Einleitung*, § 237, and O. F. Fritzsche's *kurzgef. exeget. Hdb. zu den Apokryphen des N. T.* p. 68f. For the exegetic literature, see *Lehrb. der Einl.* v. § 150. Comp. also E. Ph. L. Calmberg, *liber Esteræ interpretatione latina brevique commentario illustr.*, Hamb. 1837, 4, and Bertheau's Commentary, quoted p. 12.

Esther 1

The Banquet of King Ahashverosh and the Divorce of Queen Vashti.

Ahashverosh, king of Persia, gave, in the third year of his reign, a banquet to the grandees of his kingdom then assembled in Susa, for the purpose of showing them the greatness and glory of his kingdom; while the queen at the same time made a feast for the women in the royal palace (vv. 1–9). On the seventh day of the feast, the king, "when his heart was merry with wine," sent a message by his chief courtiers to the queen, commanding her to appear before him, to show the people and the princes her beauty, and on her refusal to come, was greatly incensed against her (vv. 10–12). Upon

inquiring of his astrologers and princes what ought in justice to be done to the queen on account of this disobedience, they advised him to divorce Vashti by an irrevocable decree, and to give her dignity to another and better; also to publish this decree throughout the whole kingdom (vv. 13–20). This advice pleasing the king, it was acted upon accordingly (vv. 21 and 22).

Esther 1:1–8. The banquet. Vv. 1–3 mark a period. **עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה**, which belongs to **יְהוָה**, does not follow till v. 3, and even then the statement concerning the feast is again interrupted by a long parenthesis, and not taken up again and completed till v. 5. On the use of **יְהוָה** in historical narratives at the beginning of relations having, as in the present instance and Ruth 1:1, no reference to a preceding narrative, see the remark on Josh. 1:1. Even when no express reference to any preceding occurrence takes place, the historian still puts what he has to relate in connection with other historical occurrences by an "and it came to pass." Ahashverosh is, as has already been remarked on Ezra 4 (p. 46), Xerxes, the son of Darius Hystaspis. Not only does the name **אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ** point to the Old-Persian name

Ks'ayars'a (with **א** prosthetic), but the statements also concerning the extent of the kingdom (Esther 1:1, 10:1), the manners and customs of the country and court, the capricious and tyrannical character of Ahashverosh, and the historical allusions are suitable only and completely to Xerxes, so that, after the discussions of Justi in Eichhorn's *Repert.* xv. pp. 3–38, and Baumgarten, *de fide*, etc., pp. 122–151, no further doubt on the subject can exist. As an historical background to the occurrences to be delineated, the wide extent of the kingdom ruled by the monarch just named is next described: "He is that Ahashverosh who reigned from India to

Ethiopia over 127 provinces." **מְדִינָה ... שְׁבַע**

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is not an accusative dependent on מֶלֶךְ, he ruled 127 provinces, for מֶלֶךְ, to reign, is construed with עַל or בְּ, but is annexed in the form of a free apposition to the statement:

“from India to Cush;” as also in Esther 8:9. הִדְּיוּ

is in the Old-Persian cuneiform inscriptions, Hidhu; in Zend, Hendu; in Sanscrit, Sindhu, i.e., dwellers on the Indus, for Sindhu means in Sanscrit the river Indus; comp. Roediger in Gesenius, *Thes. Append.* p. 83, and Lassen,

Indische Alterthumsk. i. p. 2. כּוּשׁ is Ethiopia.

This was the extent of the Persian empire under Xerxes. Mardonius in Herod. 7:9 names not only the Sakers and Assyrians, but also the Indians and Ethiopians as nations subject to Xerxes. Comp. also Herod. 7:97, 98, and 8:65, 69, where the Ethiopians and Indians are reckoned among the races who paid tribute to the Persian king and fought in the army of Xerxes. The 127

מְדִינֹת, provinces, are governmental districts, presided over, according to Esther 8:9, by satraps, pechahs, and rulers. This statement recalls that made in Dan 6:2, that Darius the Mede set over his kingdom 120 satraps. We have already shown in our remarks on Dan. 6:2 that this form of administration is not in opposition to the statement of Herod. iii. 89f., that Darius Hystaspis divided the kingdom for the purpose of taxation into twenty ἀρχαί which were called σατραπείαι. The satrapies into which Darius divided the kingdom generally comprised several provinces. The first satrapy, e.g., included Mysia and Lydia, together with the southern part of Phrygia; the fourth, Syria and Phoenicia, with the island of Cyprus. The Jewish historians, on the other hand, designate a small portion of this fourth satrapy, viz., the region occupied by the Jewish community (Judah and Benjamin, with their chief city Jerusalem), as מְדִינָה, Ezra 2:1, Neh. 1:3, 7:6, 11:3. Consequently the satrapies of Darius

mentioned in Herodotus differ from the *medinoth* of Dan. 6:2, and Esther 1:1, 8:9. The 127 medinoth are a division of the kingdom into geographical regions, according to the races inhabiting the different provinces; the list of satrapies in Herodotus, on the contrary, is a classification of the nations and provinces subject to the empire, determined by the tribute imposed on them.

Esther 1:2. The words: in those days, take up the chronological statement of v. 1, and add thereto the new particular: when King Ahashverosh sat on the throne of his kingdom

in the citadel of Susa. שָׁבַת does not involve the notion of quiet and peaceable possession after the termination of wars (Clericus, Rambach), but that of being seated on the throne with royal authority. Thus the Persian kings are always represented upon a raised seat or throne, even on journeys and in battle. According to Herod. vii. 102, Xerxes watched the battle of Thermopylae sitting upon his throne. And Plutarch (*Themistocl.* c. 13) says the same of the battle of Salamis. Further examples are given by Baumg. *l.c.* p. 85f. On the citadel of Susa, see Neh. 1:1, and remarks on Dan. 8:2.

Esther 1:3. “In the third year of his reign he made a feast to all his princes and his servants, when the forces of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, were before him.”

עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֶּה, to make, to prepare, i.e., to give, a feast; comp. Gen. 21:8. The princes and the servants are, all who were assembled about him in Susa. These are specified in the words which follow as חֵיל פ'. We might supply לְ

before חֵיל from the preceding words, (viz.) the forces, etc.; but this would not suit the לְפָנָיו at the end of the verse. For this word shows that an independent circumstantial clause begins with חֵיל, which is added to call attention to the great number of princes and servants

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assembled at Susa (Bertheau): the forces of Persia ... were before him: when they were before him. By חֵיל, the host, the forces, Bertheau thinks the body-guard of the king, which, according to Herod. vii. 40, consisted of 2000 selected horsemen, 2000 lancers, and 10,000 infantry, is intended. There is, however, no adequate reason for limiting חֵיל to the body-guard. It cannot, indeed, be supposed that the whole military power of Persia and Media was with the king at Susa; but כָּל חֵיל without כל can only signify an *élite* of the army, perhaps the captains and leaders as representing it, just as “the people” is frequently used for “the representatives of the people.” The Persians and Medes are always named together as the two kindred races of the ruling nation. See Dan. 6:9, who, however, as writing in the reign of Darius the Mede, places the Medes first and the Persians second, while the contrary order is observed here when the supremacy had been transferred to the Persians by Cyrus. On the form פָּרֶס, see rem. on Ezra 1:1. After the mention of the forces, the *Partemim*, i.e., nobles, magnates (see on Dan. 1:3), and the princes of the provinces are named as the chief personages of the civil government.

Esther 1:4. “When he showed the glorious riches of his kingdom and the excellent honour of his greatness many days, one hundred and eighty days.” This verse has been understood by most expositors as stating that the king magnificently and splendidly entertained all the grandees mentioned in v. 3 for a full half-year, and gave them a banquet which lasted 180 days. Clericus supposes proceedings to have been so arranged, that the *proceres omnium provinciarum* were not entertained at one and the same time, but *alii post alios*, because all could not be absent together *per sex menses a suis provinciis*. Bertheau, however, thinks that the historian did not purpose to give an exact and graphic description of the proceeding, but only to excite astonishment, and that they who

are astonished will not inquire as to the manner in which all took place. The text, however, does not say, that the feast lasted 180 days, and hence offers no occasion for such a view, which is founded on a mistaken comprehension of v.

4, which combines עָשָׂה בְּהֵרָאֲתוֹ וגו' with

מִשְׁתֶּה of v. 3, while the whole of v. 4 is but a further amplification of the circumstantial clause: when the forces, etc., were before him; the description of the banquet not following till v. 5, where, however, it is joined to the concluding words of v. 4: “when these (180) days were full, the king made a feast to all the people that were found in the citadel of Susa, from great to small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king’s house.” This verse is thus explained by Bertheau: after the soldiers, nobles, and princes of the district had been entertained for six months, all the male inhabitants of Susa were also entertained in a precinct of the palace garden, the women being feasted by Vashti the queen in the palace (v. 9). It is, however, obvious, even from v. 11, which says that on the seventh day of this banquet the king commanded the queen to appear “to show the people and the princes her beauty,” that such a view of the occurrence is inadmissible. For this command presupposes, that the people and princes were assembled at the king’s banquet; while, according to the view of Bertheau and older expositors, who insist on two banquets, one lasting 180 days, the other seven, the latter was given to the male inhabitants of Susa only. The princes and people of the whole kingdom did not, however, dwell in Susa. These princes and people, to whom the queen was to show her beauty, are undoubtedly the princes and servants of the king, the forces of Persia and Media, and the nobles and princes of the provinces enumerated in v. 3. With this agrees also the description of the guests invited to the seven

days feast. כָּל-הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן does not signify “all the inhabitants of Susa,” but all then present, i.e., then assembled in the citadel

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of Susa. **הַנְּמָצְאִים** used of persons means, those who for some purpose are found or present in any place, in distinction from its usual inhabitants; comp. 1 Chron. 29:17, 2 Chron. 34:32, Ezra 8:25; and **הָעָם** does not here signify people in the sense of population, but people who are met in a certain place, and is used both here and Neh. 12:38 of an assembly of nobles and princes. **לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד** **קָטָן**, moreover, does not mean old and young, but high and low, the greater and lesser servants (**עֲבָדִים**) of the king, and informs us that of those assembled at Susa, both princes and servants participated without exception in the banquet.

This view of 3–5 is confirmed by the consideration, that if the seven days banquet were a different one from that mentioned in v. 3, there could be no reason for naming the latter, which would then be not only entirely unconnected with the narrative, but for which no object at all would be stated; for **בְּהִרְאֲתוֹ** cannot be translated, as in the Vulgate, by *ut ostenderet*, because, as Bertheau justly remarks, **ב** cannot indicate a purpose. From all these reasons it is obvious, that the feast of which further particulars are given in 5–8 is the same **מִשְׁתֵּה** which the king, according to v. 3, gave to his **שָׂרִים** and **עֲבָדִים**, and that the text, rightly understood, says nothing of two consecutive banquets. The sense of vv. 3–5 is accordingly as follows: King Ahasuerus gave to his nobles and princes, when he had assembled them before him, and showed them the glorious riches of his kingdom and the magnificence of his greatness for 180 days, after these 180 days, to all assembled before him in the fortress of Susa, a banquet which lasted seven days. The connection of the more particular description

of this banquet, by means of the words: when these (the previously named 180) days were over, following upon the accessory clause, v. 4, is anacoluthistic, and the anacoluthon has given rise to the misconception, by which v. 5 is understood to speak of a second banquet

differing from the **מִשְׁתֵּה** of v. 3. The purpose for which the king assembled the grandees of his kingdom around him in Susa fore a whole half-year is not stated, because this has no connection with the special design of the present book. If, however, we compare the statement of Herod. vii. 8, that Xerxes, after the re-subjection of Egypt, summoned the chief men of his kingdom to Susa to take counsel with them concerning the campaign against Greece, it is obvious, that the assembly for 180 days in Susa, of the princes and nobles mentioned in the book of Esther, took place for the purpose of such consultation. When, too, we compare the statement of Herod. vii. 20, that Xerxes was four years preparing for this war, we receive also a corroboration of the particular mentioned in v. 3, that he assembled his princes and nobles in the third year of his reign. In this view “the riches of his kingdom,” etc., mentioned in v. 4, must not be understood of the splendour and magnificence displayed in the entertainment of his guests, but referred to the greatness and resources of the realm, which Xerxes descanted on to his assembled magnates for the purpose of showing them the possibility of carrying into execution his contemplated campaign against Greece. The banquet given them after the 180 days of consultation, was held in the court of the garden of the royal palace. **בֵּיתָן** is a later form of **בֵּית**, which

occurs only here and 7:7, 8. **חֲצִיר**, court, is the space in the park of the royal castle which was prepared for the banquet. The fittings and furniture of this place are described in v. 6. “White stuff, variegated and purple hangings, fastened with cords of byssus and purple to silver rings and marble pillars; couches of gold and silver upon a pavement of malachite and

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marble, mother-of-pearl and tortoise-shell.” The description consists of mere allusions to, or exclamations at, the splendour of the preparations. In the first half of the verse the hangings of the room, in the second, the couches for the guests, are noticed. חור from

חור means a white tissue of either linen or cotton. Bertheau supposes that the somewhat larger form of ח is intended to denote, even by the size of letter employed, the commencement of the description. כרפס, occurring in Sanscrit, Persian, Armenian, and Arabic, in Greek κάρπασος, means originally cotton, in Greek, according to later authorities, a kind of fine flax, here undoubtedly a cotton texture of various

colours. תכלת, deep blue, purple. The hangings of the space set apart were of these materials. Blue and white were, according to Curtius 6:6, 4, the royal colours of the Persians; comp. M. Duncker, *Gesch. des Alterthums*, ii. pp. 891 and 951 of the third edition, in which is described also the royal table, p. 952. The

hangings were fastened (אחוז) with cords of white byssus and purple to rings and pillars of white marble. מטות, couches (divans) of gold and silver, i.e., covered with cloth woven of gold and silver thread, were prepared for the guests at the feast. These couches were placed upon a tessellated, mosaic-like floor; the tessellation being composed of stones of various colours.

בהט, in Arabic a mock stone, in LXX σμαραγδίτης, a spurious emerald, i.e., a green-coloured stone resembling the emerald, probably malachite or serpentine. שש is white marble; דר, Arabic darrun, darratun, pearl, LXX πίννινος λίθος, a pearl-like stone, perhaps mother-of-pearl. סהרת, a kind of dark-

coloured stone (from שחר = סחר, to be dark), black, black marble with shield-like spots (all three words occur only here).

Esther 1:7. The entertainment: “And drinks poured into vessels of gold! and vessels differing from vessels, and royal wine in abundance, according to the hand of a king. (V. 8) And the drinking was according to law; nine did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house to do according to

every one’s pleasure.” השקות, inf. Hiph., to give to drink, to hand drinks, is used substantively. The golden drinking vessels were of various kinds, and each differing in form from another. Great variety in drinking vessels pertained to the luxury of Persians; comp.

Xenoph. *Cyrop.* viii. 8, 18. מלכות is wine from the royal cellar, therefore costly wine. Many interpreters understand it of the Chalybonian wine, which the Persian kings used to drink. See rem. on Ezek. 27:18. ביד

המלך, according to the hand of the king, i.e., according to royal bounty; comp. 1 Kings 10:13. The words: “the drinking was according to law, none did compel,” are generally understood to say, that the king abolished for this banquet, the prevailing custom of pledging his guests.

According to Grecian information (see Baumgarten, p. 12f.), an exceedingly large quantity of wine was drunk at Persian banquets. This sense of the words is not, however, quite certain. The argument of Baumgarten, *Si hic mos vulgaris fuisset in epulis regiis, sine dubio haec omnia non commemorata essent*, no more holds good than his further

remark: *formulam illam בדת אין אינס non puto adhibitam fuisse, nisi jam altera contraria*

בדת אין אינס *solemnis esset facta*. The historian can have noticed this only because it was different from the Jewish custom. Bertheau also justly remarks: “We are not told in the present

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passage, that the king, on this occasion, exceptionally permitted moderation, especially to such of his guests as were, according to their ancestral customs, addicted to moderation, and who would else have been compelled to drink immoderately. For the words with which this verse concludes, which they imply also a permission to each to drink as little as he chose, are specially intended to allow every one to take much. יָסַד עַל, to appoint concerning, i.e.,

to enjoin, comp. 1 Chron. 9:22. רַב בֵּית, those over the house, i.e., the court officials.

Esther 1:9–12. Vashti the queen also gave a banquet to the women in the royal house (palace) which belonged to King Ahashverosh, probably in the royal apartments of the palace, which were placed at her disposal for this great feast to be given to the women. The name Vashti may be compared with the Old-Persian *vahista*, i.e., *optimus*. In Persian *šty*, means a beautiful woman. This statement serves as an introduction to the scene which follows. Vv. 10 and 11. On the seventh, i.e., the last day of the banquet, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he commanded his seven chamberlains to bring Vashti the queen before him, with the royal crown, to show here beauty to the people and princes. כָּטוֹב לֵב וְגו', when the heart of the king was merry through wine, i.e., when the wine had made him merry, comp. 2 Sam. 13:28, Jud. 16:25. It was the office of the seven

eunuchs who served before the king (מְשֵׁרֵת)

אֶת־פָּנָי like 1 Sam. 2:18) to be the means of communication between him and the women, and to deliver to them messages on the part of the monarch. Their number, seven, was connected with that of the Amshaspands; see rem. on v. 14. The attempts made to explain their several names are without adequate foundation; nor would much be gained thereby, the names being of no significance with respect to the matter in question. In the LXX the names vary to some extent. The queen was to appear

with the crown on her head (כִּתְרָה, κίθαρις or κίταρις, a high turban terminating in a point), and, as is self-evident, otherwise royally apparelled. The queen was accustomed on ordinary occasions to take her meals at the king's table; comp. Herod. ix. 110. There is, however, an absence of historical proof, that she was present at great banquets. The notice quoted from Lucian in Brissonius, *de regio Pers. princ.* i. c. 103, is not sufficient for the purpose.

Esther 1:12. The queen refused to appear at the king's command as delivered by the eunuchs, because she did not choose to stake her dignity as a queen and a wife before his inebriated guests. The audacity of Persians in such a condition is evident from the history related Herod. v. 18.

Esther 1:13–15. The king, greatly incensed at this disobedience to his behest, inquired of his wise men what was to be done to Queen Vashti according to law. These wise men are v. 13 designated as those "who knew the times," i.e., astrologers and magi, who give counsel according to celestial phenomena; comp. the wise men of Babylon, Dan. 2:27, 5:15; Isa. 44:25, 47:13; Jer. 50:35. Of these he inquires, "for thus was the business of the king conducted before all that knew law and

judgment." דְּבַר here does not signify word or speech, but matter, business; and the meaning of this parenthetical sentence is, that in every matter, the king, before deciding, applied to those who were skilled in law and judgment to hear their opinions concerning it. With this is joined a second explanatory parenthetical sentence, v. 14: "And those next him were Carshena, etc., the seven princes of the Persians and Medes, who behold the king's countenance, who hold the first seat in his kingdom." הַקָּרִב

אֵלָיו is indefinite, and may be understood as expressing the plural. It is perhaps questionable how this clause should be combined with what precedes, whether with בְּלִי־יָדַי דָּת וְדִין,

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before all that knew law and judgment and those next him, or with **לְחַכְמִים**, v. 13: he spoke to the wise men ... and those next him. In any case the sense is, that the seven princes of the Persians and Medes were also numbered either among the wise men who knew the times, or those who were skilled in the law. These seven princes are the seven king's counsellors of Ezra 7:14, and by their number of seven form a counterpart to the seven Amshaspands. They who see the face of the king, i.e., are allowed direct intercourse with him. Herod. iii. 84 relates of the seven princes who conspired the overthrow of the pretended Smerdis, that they resolved, that it should be permitted them to present themselves unannounced before the future king. Hence many expositors identify these seven princes with the authorities called the seven counsellors, but without sufficient grounds. The number seven frequently recurs,—comp. the seven eunuchs, v. 5, the seven maidens who waited on Esther, 2:9, —and refers in the present case to the seven Amshaspands, in others to the days of the week, or the seven planets. **הַיִּשְׁבִּים רִאשֹׁנָה**, who sit first, i.e., in the highest place, i.e., constitute the highest authority in the realm. What the king said (v. 13) does not follow till v. 15: "According to law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not done the word of the king," i.e., not obeyed his command by the eunuchs? **בְּדָת**, according to law, legally, is placed first because it is intended emphatically to assert that the proceeding is to be in conformity with the law. **עָשָׂה** with **בְּ**, to inflict something on any one.

Esther 1:16–20. The counsel of the wise men. V. 16. Memucan, who was the last mentioned in v. 14, comes forward as spokesman for the rest, and declares before the king and the princes, i.e., in a solemn assembly, and evidently as the result of a previous joint consultation: Vashti the queen has not done wrong to the king alone, but also to all the princes and all the people,

because the example of the queen will lead all the Median and Persian wives to despise their husbands. Therefore an irrevocable edict is to be published decreeing the divorce of Queen Vashti, and this law published throughout the whole realm, that all wives may show honour to their husbands. Vashti has not transgressed against the king alone (v. 16), but against all the princes and people in all the provinces of King Ahashverosh (v. 16). In what respect, then, is the latter assertion true? We are told vv. 17 and 18. "For the deed of the queen will come abroad to **(אֵל for עַל)** all women, to bring their husbands into contempt in their eyes (the *infin.* **לְהַבְזוֹת** stating the result), while they will

say," etc. (the suffix of **בְּאַמְרָם** relates to the women, who will appeal to the disobedience of the queen). V. 18. "And this day (i.e., already) the princesses of the Persians and Medians, who hear of the act of the queen (**דְּבָרָה**, not the word, but the thing, i.e., her rejection of her husband's command), will tell it to all the princes of the king, and (there will be) enough contempt and provocation. **קֶצֶף** is an outburst of anger; here, therefore, a provocation to wrath. Bertheau makes the words **וּכְדִי בֹז'** **וּכְדִי** the object of **תֹּאמְרֶנָּה**, which, after the

long parenthesis, is united to the copula by **ו**, and for, "to speak contempt and wrath," reads: to speak contemptuously in wrath. But this change cannot be substantiated. The expression, to speak wrath, is indeed unexampled, but that is no reason for making

קֶצֶף stand for **בְּקֶצֶף**, the very adoption of such an ellipsis showing, that this explanation is inadmissible. The words must be taken alone, as an independent clause, which may be readily completed by **יְהִי**: and contempt and wrath

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will be according to abundance. כְּדִי is a litotes for: more than enough. The object of תִּאמְרָנָה must be supplied from the context: it—that is, what the queen said to her husband. In the former verse Memucan was speaking of all women; here (v. 18) he speaks only of the princesses of the Persians and Medes, because these are staying in the neighbourhood of the court, and will immediately hear of the matter, and “after the manner of the court ladies and associates of a queen will quickly follow, and appeal to her example” (Berth.).

Esther 1:19. After this argument on the queen’s conduct, follows the proposal: “If it please the king (טוֹב עַל like Neh. 2:5), let there go from him a word of the kingdom (i.e., a royal edict), and let it be written (entered) in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, and not pass away, that Vashti come no more before King Ahashverosh; and let the king give her queenship (her royal rank) to another who is better than she.” An edict issued by the king, entered among the laws of the Persians and Medes, and sealed with the royal signet (Esther 8:8), does not pass away, i.e., remains in force, is irrevocable (comp. Dan. 6:9). The counsellors press for the issue of such an edict, for the purpose of making it impossible to the king to take Vashti again into favour, lest they should experience her vengeance on the restoration of her influence. רְעוּתָהּ, her companion, is any other woman, Vashti being here regarded merely as a woman. הַטּוֹבָה includes both beauty and good behaviour (Berth.). By this means, add the counsellors in v. 20, all the ill effects of Vashti’s contumacy will be obviated. “And when the king’s decree, which he shall make, is heard in his whole kingdom, for it is great, all wives shall give honour to their husbands, from great to small.” פְּתִיגִם is according to the *Keri* to be pointed as the

constructive state, פְּתִיגִם. The expression

פְּתִיגִם עֲשֵׂה is explained by the circumstance, that פְּתִיגִם signifies not only edict, decree, but also thing (see on Dan. 3:16): to do a thing. In the present verse also it might be so understood: when the thing is heard which the king will do in his whole kingdom. The parenthetical clause, for it is great, is intended to flatter the king’s vanity, and induce an inclination to agree to the proposal. “From great to small” signifies high and low, old and young.

Esther 1:21, 22. The saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king carried it into execution. He sent letters into all his provinces to make known his commands, and to let all husbands know, that they were to bear rule in their own houses. “In every province according to its writing, and to every people according to their speech” (comp. 8:9), that his will might be clearly understood by all the subjects of his wide domain, who spoke different languages and used different alphabetical characters. The contents of these letters follow in לְהִיזַת וּגְוֹ, that every man should be master in his own house. These words state only the chief matter and object of the edict; but they presuppose that the fact which gave rise to the decree, viz., the refusal of Vashti, and her consequent deposition, were also mentioned. The last words: “and that he shall speak according to the language of his people,” are obscure. Older expositors understand them to mean, that every man was to speak only his native language in his house, so that in case he had a foreign wife, or several who spoke other languages, they might be obliged to learn his language, and to use that alone. Bertheau, on the other hand, objects that such a sense is but imported into the words, and in no wise harmonizes with the context. Both these assertions are, however, unfounded. In the words, the man shall speak according to the language of his people, i.e., he shall speak his

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native tongue in his house, it is implied that no other language was to be used in the house, and the application of this law to foreign wives is obvious from the context. The rule of the husband in the house was to be shown by the fact, that only the native tongue of the head of the house was to be used in the family. Thus in a Jewish family the Ashdodite or any other language of the wife's native land could not have been used, as we find to have been the case in Judaea (Neh. 13:23). All other explanations are untenable, as has been already shown by Baumgarten, p. 20; and the conjecture set up after Hitzig by Bertheau, that instead of בְּלִשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ we should read

בְּלִשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ, every one shall speak what becomes him, gives not only a trivial, and not at all an appropriate thought, but is refuted even by the fact that not שְׂוֵה עַם, but only שְׂוֵה לְ (comp. 3:8) could bear the meaning: to be becoming to any one. Such a command may, indeed, appear strange to us; but the additional particular, that every man was to speak his native tongue, and to have it alone spoken, in his own house, is not so strange as the fact itself that an edict should be issued commanding that the husband should be master in the house, especially in the East, where the wife is so accustomed to regard the husband as lord and master. Xerxes was, however, the author of many strange facts besides this.

Esther 2

Elevation of Esther to the Throne. Service Rendered by Mordochai to the King.

Esther 2. When the wrath of King Ahashverosh was appeased, and he remembered his harsh treatment of Vashti, his courtiers proposed that he should send to fetch fair young virgins from all parts of his realm to the house of the women in Susa, that he might choose a new queen from among them. This proposal pleasing the king, was acted upon (vv. 1–4). In the fortress of Susa, however, there dwelt one of the Jews who

had been carried into captivity from Jerusalem, and whose name was Mordochai. This man had brought up Esther, his uncle's daughter, as his own child (vv. 5–7). When, then, in pursuance with the king's commands, many maidens were gathered together in Susa, Esther also was brought into the king's house, and found favour with the keeper of the women while, according to order, she was going through a course of purification and anointing (vv. 8–14). Then her turn came to be brought before the king, she found favour in his sight above all the other maidens, and was chosen by him to be queen in the place of Vashti. By Mordochai's command, however, she disclosed her race and lineage to no one (vv. 15–20). At the same time two courtiers conspired against the life of the sovereign. Their conspiracy being discovered by Mordochai, was by him revealed to Esther, who gave information of it to the king, whereupon the matter was investigated, and found to have been correctly stated. The offenders were punished, and the event duly registered in the chronicles of the kingdom.

Esther 2:1–4. When, after these things, the wrath of King Ahashverosh was laid (שָׂדַךְ, from שָׂכַךְ, to be sunk, spoken of wrath to be laid), he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what was decreed against her (גִּזְרָה, to

determine, to decree irrevocably; comp. גִּזְרָה, Dan. 4:14); a desire for reunion with her evidently making itself felt, accompanied perhaps by the thought that she might have been too harshly treated. To prevent, then, a return of affection for his rejected wife ensuing,—a circumstance which might greatly endanger all who had concurred in effecting her repudiation,—the servants of the king, i.e., the court officials who were about him, said: "Let there be young maidens, virgins fair to look on, sought for the king." בְּתוּלוֹת, virgins, is added to נְעָרוֹת, the latter word signifying merely

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young women of marriageable age. V. 3. "And let the king appoint (וַיִּפְקֹד) is the continuation of (וַיִּבְקֶשׁ) officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together every virgin who is fair to look on to the citadel of Susa, to the house of the women, unto the hand of Hega the king's eunuch, the keeper of the women, and let them appoint their things for purification; and let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti." To the hand of Hega, i.e., to his care and superintendence, under which, as appears from v. 12, every maiden received into the house of the women had to pass a year before she was brought before the king. Hega (called Hegai, v. 8 and 15) was an eunuch, the keeper of the women, i.e., superintendent of the royal harem.

וְנָתַן is the *infin. abs.*, used instead of the *verb. fin.* to give prominence to the matter: let them appoint. תְּמַרְקִים, from מָרַק, to rub, to polish, signifies purification and adornment with all kind of precious ointments; comp. v. 12. This speech pleased the king, and he acted accordingly.

Esther 2:5-7. Before relating how this matter was carried into execution, the historian introduces us to the two persons who play the chief parts in the following narrative. V. 5. There was (dwelt) in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the name of Mordochai (מֹרְדֳּכַי, in more correct editions מֹרְדֳּכַי), the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite (אִישׁ יְמִינִי like 1 Sam. 9:1). Jair, Shimei, and Kish can hardly mean the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of Mordochai. On the contrary, if Jair were perhaps his father, Shimei and Kish may have been the names of renowned ancestors. Shimei was probably the son of Gera, well known to us from the history of David, 2 Sam. 16:5f. and 1 Kings 2:8, 36f., and Kish the father of Saul, 1 Chron. 8:33, 1 Sam.

9:1; for in genealogical series only a few noted names are generally given; comp., e.g., 1 Chron. 9:19, 6:24f. Upon the ground of this explanation, Josephus (Ant. xi. 6) makes Esther of royal descent, viz., of the line of Saul, king of Israel; and the Targum regards Shimei as the Benjamite who cursed David. The name Mordochai occurs in Ezra 2:2 and Neh. 7:7 as that of some other individual among those who returned from captivity with Zerubbabel, but can hardly be connected with the Persian *mrdky*, little man. Aben Ezra, Lightfoot, and others, indeed, are of opinion that the Mordochai of the present book really came up with Zerubbabel, but subsequently returned to Babylon. Identity of name is not, however, a sufficient proof of identity of person. The chronological statement, v. 6: who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, etc., offers some difficulty. For from the captivity of Jeconiah in the year 599 to the beginning of the reign of Xerxes (in the year 486) is a period of 113 years; hence, if the אֲשֶׁר is referred to Mordochai, he would, even if carried into captivity as a child by then, have reached the age of from 120 to 130 years, and as Esther was not made queen till the seventh year of Xerxes (Esther 2:16), would have become prime minister of that monarch at *about* the age of 125. Rambach, indeed, does not find this age incredible, though we cannot regard it as probable that Mordochai should have become minister at so advanced an age.⁵ On this account Clericus, Baumgarten, and others refer the relative אֲשֶׁר to the last name, Kish, and understand that he was carried away with Jeconiah, while his great-grandson Mordochai was born in captivity. In this case Kish and Shimei must be regarded as the great-grandfather and grandfather of Mordochai. We grant the possibility of this view; nevertheless it is more in accordance with the Hebrew narrative style to refer אֲשֶׁר to the chief person of the sentence preceding it, viz.,

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Mordochai, who also continues to be spoken of in v. 7. Hence we prefer this reference, without, however, attributing to Mordochai more than 120 years of age. For the relative clause: who had been carried away, need not be so strictly understood as to assert that Mordochai himself was carried away; but the object being to give merely his origin and lineage, and not his history, it involves only the notion that he belonged to those Jews who were carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar with Jeconiah, so that he, though born in captivity, was carried to Babylon in the persons of his forefathers. This view of the passage corresponds with that formerly presented by the list of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jacob who went down with him to Egypt; see the explanation of the passage in question.⁶ V. 7.

Mordochai was אֲמִן, keeper, bringer up, i.e., foster-father, to Hadassh (אֲמִן constructed as a

participle with אֲמִן). אֲמִן means a myrtle

(אֲמִן in the Shemitish), like the Greek name Μυρτιά Μυρρίνη. "That is Esther," the queen known by the name of Esther. The name

אֲסָתֶר is the Old-Persian *stara* with א prosthetic, and corresponds with the Greek ἀστήρ, star, in modern Persian *sitareh*. She was בְּתֻלָּה, daughter of his father's brother, and adopted by Mordochai after the death of her parents; we are told, moreover, that she had a fine figure and beautiful countenance. Her father, whose name, according to v. 15, was Abihail, was uncle to Mordochai, and hence Esther was his cousin.

Esther 2:8-11. When, then, the king's commandment and decree was heard, i.e., proclaimed throughout the kingdom, and many maidens gathered together in Susa, Esther also was received into the royal harem, under the keeping of Hegai. The maiden pleased him and won his favour (נָשָׂא חֶסֶד, to bear away love,

i.e., to obtain favour, synonymous with נָשָׂא

וַיְבִיֵּהּ וּגְו'. v. 15 and Esther 5:2). וַיְבִיֵּהּ, and he hastened to give her her ointments for purification, and the seven maidens appointed to her from the king's house. The infinitives לָתֵת are, according to the Aramaean idiom, placed after their objects and dependent on יְבִיֵּהּ. On תְּמָרוֹת, see on v. 3. מְנוֹת, portions, are here portions of food, as in Esther 9:19, 22, and 1 Sam. 1:4. The seven maidens (הַנְּעוֹרוֹת with the article) are the maids appointed to wait upon a young virgin selected for the king. The participle רְאִיּוֹת: chosen for a particular purpose,—in the Talmud and rabbinical Hebrew רְאִי, *dignus, decens,*

conveniens,—occurs only here. יִשְׁנֶה, he changed her and her maids into the best of the house of the women, i.e., he took them out of the ordinary rooms and placed them in the best apartments, probably in the state-rooms, where those who were accustomed to be brought to the king used to dwell.

Esther 2:10. V. 10 contains a supplementary remark. This kind and respectful treatment was shown to Esther, because, in obedience to Mordochai's command, she had not shown her people nor her kindred, i.e., her Jewish extraction; for a Jewish maiden would hardly have experienced such friendly usage. V. 11 also contains an additional notice, prefixed here to enable what follows to be rightly understood, and repeated in another connection v. 19, and on several other occasions: Mordochai walked every day before the court or enclosure of the women's house, to know the welfare (שְׁלוֹם) of

Esther and what became of her (יַעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ, properly, what was done to her). Hence Mordochai was in constant communication

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with Esther. How this communication was effected is not more particularly stated; probably by means of the maids appointed to wait on her. Jewish expositors are of opinion, that Mordochai held high office, and that having consequently free access to the royal palace, he could easily find the means of communicating with his relative.

Esther 2:12–18. Before relating the appearance of Esther before the king, the narrator more particularly describes in vv. 12–14 the preparations for this event, and how Esther behaved with respect to them.

Esther 2:12, 13. “When every maid’s turn came (i.e., at every time that any maid’s turn came) to go in to King Ahashverosh, after the time when it had been done to her twelve months according to the law of the women—for thus were the days of their purification accomplished: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with balsam and ointments of purification for women—and the maiden came to the king, all that she desired was given her to go with her out of the women’s house unto the king’s house.” תֹּר, turn in succession, used only here and v. 15. The turn to go in unto the king did not come to any maid until מִקֵּץ הַיּוֹם

וְגו', at the end of the time when it had been done to her according to the law ... This time lasted twelve months after her reception into the house of the women; and the law of the women, according to which it was done to her, was, that she should be purified for six months with oil of myrrh, and as long with בְּשָׂמִים, sweet odours and other ointments. וּבִזָּה

הַנֶּעֱרָה בָּאָה (v. 13) forms the continuation of the antecedent clause commencing with בְּהִנֵּיעַ, or, to speak more correctly, of a second antedecent with which the conclusion אֵת

כָּל-אִשָּׁר is connected. Some expositors

understand בִּזָּה, with the LXX, of the time: *illo sc. tempore*; others of the condition: *hoc modo ornata* or *ea lege* (Cler.), and therefore as

parallel in meaning with the בֵּן of Esther 4:16.

Either view is admissible and suits the sense, but the latter is more in harmony with the parallel passage Esther 4:16, and therefore preferable. All that was to be given her, can only relate to ornaments and jewels, which were to be given that each might appear before the king adorned and dressed after her own taste.

Esther 2:14. In the evening she went (to the king), and on the morrow she returned to the women’s house, a second (time) to the hand (under the keeping of) Shaashgaz, the king’s chamberlain, who kept the concubines; she came no more to the king, except the king delighted in her and she were called by name,

i.e., specially. שְׁנִית instead of שְׁנִי, like Neh. 3:30.

Esther 2:15. When Esther’s turn came to go in unto the king, she required nothing (to take with her, see v. 13) but what Hegai the king’s chamberlain appointed (hence as not concerned to please the king by special adornment), and she obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her, namely, by her modesty and humility. On נִשְׂאָהּ, see remarks on v. 9.

Esther 2:16. She was taken into the king’s house (בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ instead of בֵּית מַלְכוּת, the palace of the kingdom, the royal residence) in the tenth month, i.e., the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Esther 2:17. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; and he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. The meaning

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evidently is, that the king, immediately after their first meeting, bestowed his affections upon Esther in preference to all the women and maidens, and chose her queen.

Esther 2:18. To celebrate Esther's elevation to the crown, the king made a great feast, called Esther's feast, to all his princes and servants, and granted release to the provinces. The

verbale Hiph. הִנָּחָה is translated in the LXX ἄφεσις, Vulg. *requies*, and understood either of a remission of taxes or a remission of labour, a holiday. Although the Chald. understands it of a remission of taxes, yet the use of the verb עָשָׂה rather favours the latter meaning, viz., the appointment of a holiday, on which there would be arresting from labour. Finally, he gave gifts with royal munificence מִשְׂאֵת like Amos 5:11,

Jer. 40:5; כִּיד הַמֶּלֶךְ like Esther 1:7.—It seems strange that a period of four years should intervene between the repudiation of Vashti in the third year of Ahashverosh and the elevation of Esther in the seventh, an interval whose length cannot be adequately accounted for by the statements of the present book. Only a few days could have elapsed between the disgrace of Vashti and the time when the king remembered her; for this took place, we are told, when the king's wrath was appeased. The proposal to collect virgins from all parts of his kingdom to Susa was then immediately made. Now, if the carrying out of this proposal took half a year, and the preparation of the virgins by anointing, etc., lasted a year, Esther, even if her turn to go in unto the king had not come for six months, might have been made queen two years after the repudiation of Vashti. As she obtained the favour of Hegai immediately upon her reception into the women's house, so that he hastened her purifications (v. 9), she would not be brought before the king among the last, but would rather be one of the first to go in. The long interval which elapsed between the repudiation of Vashti and the elevation of Esther, can only be satisfactorily explained by

the history of the reign of Xerxes; in fact, by the circumstance that his campaign against Greece took place during this time.

Esther 2:19–23. Vv. 19–23 relate the intervention of an incident of great importance in the subsequent development of the narrative. When virgins were for the second time gathered together, two courtiers were incensed with the king, and sought to lay hands upon him. This thing was known to Mordochai, who sat in the gate of the palace and kept up a constant communication with Esther even after she became queen, and by him communicated to her, that she might bring it to the knowledge of the king. The matter being investigated and found to have been truly reported, the offenders were punished, and an entry of the particulars made in the chronicles of the kingdom. The words "when virgins were assembled for the second time," which serve to define the time when the conspiracy of the two courtiers took place, as is obvious from the

circumstance that בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם, v. 21, refers to

בְּהַקְבֵּץ בַּת, v. 19, are obscure. The obscurity lies in the fact that no reason for assembling virgins can be perceived, after the choice of Ahashverosh had fallen upon Esther. The

sentence וּבְהַקְבֵּץ בְּתוֹלוֹת שְׁנִית

unmistakeably corresponds with וּבְהַקְבֵּץ

נָעֲרוֹת of v. 8. This was already rightly

perceived by Grotius, who, however, wrongly infers: *est épáνοδος (retrogressio), referendum enim hoc ad illa quae supra*, ii. 2. This is,

however, not only incompatible with שְׁנִית, but

also with the circumstance that, according to the correct understanding of the sentences in vv. 21 and 22, Esther was then already queen, and Mordochai was sitting in the gate of the king's palace, and thence keeping up communication with her; while as long as Esther was in the women's house preparing for her interview with the king, under the

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guardianship of Hegai, he walked day by day before the court of the women's house (v. 11). Still less admissible is the view of Drusius, received by Bertheau, that the gathering of the virgins for the second time is to be understood from the circumstance, that after going in to the king, they had to go into the second house of the women, under the stricter guardianship of Shaashgaz (v. 14). For, being no longer

בְּתוּלוֹת, but פִּלְגָּשִׁים (v. 14), their reception into the house of the concubines could not be called a second gathering together, since as virgins they were formerly in a different house.

The only explanation of the שְׁנִית left us is the view, that even after the choice of Esther to be queen, a second gathering together of virgins actually took place; for this, as C. a Lapide remarks, is what the words undoubtedly declare. The matter itself was in accordance with the prevailing custom of polygamy, which kings carried to such an extent, that, as C. a Lapide points out, Solomon, e.g., had 700 wives and 300 concubines, i.e., *secondarias uxores*.

From וּמֶרְדֳּכַי, v. 19, onwards, explanatory circumstantial clauses follow: "The Mordochai sat in the king's gate" introduces the parenthetical sentence, "Esther had not yet showed her kindred and her people (comp. v. 10), as Mordochai had charged her; for Esther did the commandment of Mordochai as when she was under his care;" i.e., Esther obeyed, after her elevation to be queen, the command of Mordochai not to make her Jewish descent known, as she had formerly done while she was yet his foster-daughter. אֶמְנָה, care, education, is a substantive derived from אָמַן.

Esther 2:21. The definition of time in v. 19 is again taken up by the words: in those days; then the explanatory clause, v. 20, is repeated; and after this we are informed what it was that had then occurred. In those days Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's courtiers, who were the threshold-keepers (palace-watchers, LXX

ἀρχισωματοφύλακες), were wroth, and sought to lay hands on King Ahashverosh, i.e., to slay him. V. 22. This thing was known to Mordochai, and by him communicated to Esther, who told it, in Mordochai's name, to the king. V. 23. The matter was investigated (sc. by the king), and found out, sc. as Mordochai had testified. The two criminals were hanged on a tree, i.e., impaled on a stake, a sort of crucifixion,—see rem. on Esther 6:11,—and the circumstance entered in the book of the chronicles, i.e., the chronicles of the kingdom. לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, before the king, i.e., in his presence, immediately after sentence had been passed by a court over which the monarch presided.

Esther 3

Haman's Elevation and His Design Against the Jews.

Esther 3. King Ahashverosh promoted Haman the Agagite above all the princes about him, and commanded all his servants to fall down before him. This mark of reverence was refused by Mordochai the Jew from religious scruples. When intelligence of this was brought to Haman, he sought to obtain the extermination of the Jews throughout the kingdom (1–6). The twelfth month was appointed by the casting of lots for this purpose; and Haman, by exciting the suspicion of the king against the Jews as an exclusive and law-opposing people, obtained from him an edict to this effect (7–11), and sent it, by letters sealed with the king's seal, by the hand of messengers into all the provinces of the kingdom in the first month, that they might be ready to carry it into execution in the twelfth month; whereat the city of Susa was much perplexed (12–15).

Esther 3:1–6. The elevation of Haman above all the princes of the kingdom is said in a general manner to have taken place "after these things," i.e., after the matters related in Esther 2. גָּדַל, to make great, to make any one a great man; נִשָּׂא, elevated, is more precisely defined by the

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sentence following: he set his seat above all the princes that were with him, i.e., above the seat of all the princes about the king; in fact, advanced him to the highest post, made him his grand vizier. Haman is called the son of

Hammedatha **הַמֵּדָתָה**, the Agagite, or of the

Agagites. **אֲגָגִי** recalls **אֲגָגִי** kings of the

Amalekites, conquered and taken prisoner by Saul, and hewn in pieces by Samuel, 1 Sam.

15:8, 33. Hence Jewish and Christian expositors regard Haman as a descendant of the Amalekite king. This is certainly possible, though it can by no means be proved. The name Agag is not sufficient for the purpose, as many individuals might at different times have borne the name

אֲגָגִי, i.e., the fiery. In 1 Sam. 15, too, Agag is not the *nomen propr.* of the conquered king, but a general *nomen dignitatis* of the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh and Abimelech were of the kings of Egypt and Gerar. See on Num. 24:7. We know nothing of Haman and his father beyond what is said in this book, and all attempts to explain the names are uncertain and beside the mark.

Esther 3:2. All the king's servants that were in the gate of the king, i.e., all the court officials, were to kneel before Haman and bow themselves to the earth. So had the king commanded concerning him. This mark of reverence was refused by Mordochai.

Esther 3:3, 4. When the other officials of the court asked him from day to day, why he transgressed the king's commandment, and he hearkened not unto them, i.e., gave no heed to their words, they told it to Haman, "to see whether Mordochai's words would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew." It is obvious from this, that Mordochai had declared to those who asked him the reason why he did not fall down before Haman, that he could not do so because he was a Jew,—that as a Jew he could not show that honour to man which was due to God alone. Now the custom of falling down to the earth before an exalted personage, and especially before a king, was customary among Israelites; comp. 2 Sam. 14:4, 18:28, 1

Kings 1:16. If, then, Mordochai refused to pay this honour to Haman, the reason of such refusal must be sought in the notions which the Persians were wont to combine with the action, i.e., in the circumstance that they regarded it as an act of homage performed to a king as a divine being, an incarnation of Oromasdes. This is testified by classical writers; comp. Plutarch, *Themist.* 27; Curtius, viii. 5. 5f., where the latter informs us that Alexander the Great imitated this custom on his march to India, and remarks, § 11: *Persas quidem non pie solum, sed etiam prudenter reges suos inter Deos colere; majestatem enim imperii salutis esse tutelam.* Hence also the Spartans refused, as Herod. 7.136 relates, to fall down before King Xerxes, because it was not the custom of Greeks to honour mortals after this fashion. This homage, then, which was regarded as an act of reverence and worship to a god, was by the command of the king to be paid to Haman, as his representative, by the office-bearers of his court; and this Mordochai could not do without a denial of his religious faith.

Esther 3:5. When, then, Haman, whose attention had been called to the fact, saw, when next he went in unto the king, that Mordochai did not fall down before him, he was full of wrath, and (v. 6) thought scorn, i.e., in his pride esteemed it too contemptible, to lay hands on Mordochai alone, i.e., to execute him alone, for this opposition to the royal commands; for they had showed him the people of Mordochai, i.e., had told him that as a Jew Mordochai had refused this act of worship, and that the whole Jewish nation thought and acted accordingly. Therefore he sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahashverosh, the people of Mordochai. The

subject Haman is repeated before **וַיִּבְקֶשׁ** for the sake of clearness, because it was not expressly named with **עַם מְרֹדֶכַי וַיִּבֶן** is in

apposition to **כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים**: all the Jews as the people of Mordochai, because they were the people of Mordochai and shared his sentiments.

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Esther 3:7–11. To ensure the success of this great undertaking, viz., the extermination of all the Jews in the kingdom, Haman had recourse to the lot, that he might thus fix on a propitious day for the execution of his project. Astrology plays an important part among all ancient nations, nothing of any magnitude being undertaken without first consulting its professors concerning a favourable time and opportunity; comp. rem. on Ezek. 21:26.

Esther 3:7. “In the first month, i.e., Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahashverosh, they cast Pur, i.e., the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to the twelfth month, i.e., the

month Adar.” The subject of **הַפִּיל** is left indefinite, because it is self-evident that this was done by some astrologer or magician who was versed in such matters. Bertheau tries unnaturally to make Haman the subject, and to combine the subsequent **לִפְנֵי הָמָן** with

הַגּוֹרֵל: “Haman cast Pur, i.e., the lot, before Haman,” which makes Pur signify: the lot

before Haman. **לִפְנֵי הָמָן** means in the presence of Haman, so that he also might see

how the lot fell. **פּוּר** is an Old-Persian word meaning lot (*sors*); in modern Persian, *bâra* signifies time, case (*fois, cas*), *pâra* or *pâre*, piece (*morceau, pièce*), and *behr*, *behre*, and *behre*, lot, share, fate; comp. Zenker, *Turco-Arabic and Persian Lexicon*, pp. 162 and 229. The words “from day to day, from month to the twelfth month,” must not be understood to say, that lots were cast day by day and month by month till the twelfth; but that in the first month lots were at once cast, one after the other, for all the days and months of the year, that a favourable day might be obtained. We do not know the manner in which this was done, “the way of casting lots being unknown to us.” The words: from month to the twelfth month, are remarkable; we should expect from month to month till the twelfth month. Bertheau

supposes that the words **לְחֹדֶשׁ וַיַּפֵּל הַגּוֹרֵל**

עַל יוֹם שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר were omitted after

וַיַּחְדֹּשׁ through the eye of the transcriber

passing on from the first **לְחֹדֶשׁ** to the second.

The text of the LXX actually contains such words, and the possibility of such an oversight on the part of a transcriber must certainly be admitted. In the book of Esther, however, the LXX translation is no critical authority, and it is just as possible that the author of the Hebrew book here expresses himself briefly and indefinitely, because he was now only concerned to state the month determined by lot for the undertaking, and intended to mention the day subsequently.

Esther 3:8. Haman having by means of the lot fixed upon a favourable day for the execution of the massacre, betook himself to the king to obtain a royal decree for the purpose. He represented to the monarch: “There is a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are different from all other people (i.e., from the laws of all other people), and they keep not the laws of the king, and it is not fitting for the king to leave them alone. V. 9. If it seem good to the king, let it be written (i.e., let a written decree be published) to destroy them; and I will weigh ten thousand talents of silver to those who do the business, that they may bring them into the treasuries of the king.” This proposal was very subtilly calculated. First Haman casts suspicion on the Jews as a nation scattered abroad and dwelling apart, and therefore unsociable,—as refractory, and therefore dangerous to the state; then he promises the king that their extermination will bring into the royal treasury a very considerable sum of money, viz., the property of the slaughtered. Ten thousand talents of silver, reckoned according to the Mosaic shekel, are £3,750,000, according to the civil shekel

£1,875,000; see rem. on 1 Chron. 22:14. **עָשִׂי**

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הַמְלָאכָה, those who execute a work, builders in 2 Kings 12:12, are here and Esther 9:3 the king's men of business, who carry on the king's business with respect to receipts and disbursements, the royal financiers.

Esther 3:10. The king agreed to this proposal. He drew his signet ring from his hand, and delivered it to Haman, that he might prepare the edict in the king's name, and give it by the impression of the royal seal the authority of an irrevocable decree; see rem. on 8:8. "To the enemy of the Jews" is added emphatically.

Esther 3:11. Lest it should appear as though the king had been induced by the prospect held out of obtaining a sum of money, he awards this to Haman. "The silver be given to thee, and the people to do to them (let it be done to them) as

seemeth good to thee." וְהָעָם precedes absolutely: as for the people of the Jews, etc.

Esther 3:12–15. Haman, without delay, causes the necessary writings to be prepared, and sent into all the provinces of the kingdom. V. 12.

"Then were called the king's scribes in the first month, on the thirteenth day of it (בּוֹ, in it, in the said month); and there was written according to all that Haman commanded, to the satraps of the king, and to the governors who (were placed) over every province, and to the rulers of every people, to each several province according to its writing, and to each different people according to their language (comp. rem. on 1:22); in the name of King Ahashverosh was it written, and sealed with the king's seal."

אֲחֻשְׁדָּרְפָּנִים and פָּחוֹת placed in juxtaposition, as in Ezra 8:36, are the imperial officials. Beside these are also named the

שָׂרִים of every people, the native princes of the different races. The writing was finished on the thirteenth day of the month, because this day of the month had been fixed upon as propitious by the lot.

Esther 3:13. And the letters were sent

(נִשְׁלַחַּ, *infin. abs. Niph.* instead of the *verb.*

fin.) by posts. הָרָצִים are the post-riders, the aggaroi, who were stationed on the high roads of the realm, generally four parasangs apart, to transmit with the more speed the royal letters and messages. Herod. 5.14, 8.98 (Berth.), comp.

Brisson, *de reg. Pers. princ.* i. c. 238f. לְהַשְׁמִיד

וּגוֹ, to destroy, to kill, and cause to perish all Jews from the youth to the old man, children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and to deprive them of their spoil. The three verbs are combined to give

strength to the expression. שְׁלֵלָם is their property, which is called spoil because it was delivered up to plunder. Haman having held out the prospect of a large sum as the result of exterminating the Jews, and the king having bestowed this upon Haman, the plundering of the Jews, thus permitted to all the inhabitants of the kingdom who should assist in exterminating them, must be understood as implying, that they would have to deliver a portion of the booty thus obtained to Haman.

Esther 3:14. The copy of the writing, that the law might be given in every province, was opened to all people, that they might be ready by this day. This verse does not announce a copy of the royal decree that had been prepared and sent by the posts, which would in that case be replaced by a mere allusion to its contents (Bertheau). The words contain no trace of an announcement such as we find in Ezra 4:11, 7:11, but the historical notice, that the copy of the writing which was sent as a law into the

provinces was גָּלוּי, opened, i.e., sent unclosed

or unsealed to all people. גָּלוּי is the predicate

to the subject פֶּתַח שֶׁנָּתַן וּגוֹ (comp. on this word the note to Ezra 4:14), and between the subject and predicate is inserted the infinitive clause

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לְהַנְתִּין דֵּת וּגְו' for the purpose of once more briefly mentioning the contents and destination of the כְּתָב: that a law might be given in every province. To attain this object the more certainly, the copy of the decree, which was brought into every province by the posts, was open or unsealed, that all people might read its contents, and keep themselves in readiness for the execution of what was therein commanded on the appointed day. לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה is the thirteenth day of the twelfth month named in the letter.

Esther 3:15. The posts went forth hastening (דָּחַף like 2 Chron. 26:20) at the king's commandment, and the decree was given (promulgated) in the citadel of Susa,—an explanatory clause; and the king and Haman sat down to drink while the messengers went forth with the decree, but the city of Susa, in which it was first published, was in perplexity (on נְבוּכָה comp. Ex. 14:3, Joel 1:18). The cruel measure could not but fill all peace-loving citizens with horror and anxiety.—Here the question is forced upon us, why the decree should have been so prematurely published. The scribes were summoned to prepare it on the thirteenth day of the first month. For this purpose, even though many copies had to be made in different languages, no very long time would be required in a well-appointed government office. As soon as the scribes had finished their work, the decree was sent out by the posts into all quarters of the realm, and would arrive in even the most distant provinces in three weeks at furthest. This would place almost eleven, and in the remotest parts about ten months between the publication and execution of the decree. What then was the motive for such an interval? Certainly so long a time could not be required for preparing to carry it out, nor is this hinted at in the text, as Bertheau supposes. Nor could it be intended that the Jews should suffer a long period of

anxiety. On the contrary, the motive seems to have been, as Clericus and others have already conjectured, to cause many Jews to leave their property and escape to other lands, for the sake of preserving their lives. Thus Haman would attain his object. He would be relieved of the presence of the Jews, and be able to enrich himself by the appropriation of their possessions (comp. p. 192). On the other hand, the providence of God overruling the event in the interest of the Jews, is unmistakably evident both in Haman's haste to satisfy his desire for vengeance, and in the falling of the lot upon so distant a day. It was only because there was so long an interval between the publication of the decree and the day appointed by lot for its execution, that it was possible for the Jews to take means for averting the destruction with which they were threatened, as the further development of the history will show.

Esther 4

Mordochai's Mourning on Account of the Decree for the Assassination of the Jews, and His Admonition to Esther to Intercede for Her People.

Esther 4. When Mordochai heard what had happened, he went mourning and lamenting about the city, and even to the king's gate; and the decree of Haman occasioned great lamentations among the Jews in all the provinces of the kingdom (1–3). When Queen Esther heard through her maids and courtiers of Mordochai's mourning, she sent him raiment that he might put off his mourning garb, but he refused to do so. She then sent an eunuch to him to inquire more particularly as to its cause. Mordochai informed him of all that had happened, giving him a copy of the decree to show to Esther, and charging her to entreat the king's favour for her people (4–8). The queen, however, expressed her hesitation to go in unto the king unsummoned, but upon Mordochai's repeated admonition, resolved to make the desired attempt, at the peril of her life (9–17).

Esther 4:1–3. Mordochai learnt all that was done,—not only what had been openly

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proclaimed, but, as is shown by v. 7, also the transaction between the king and Haman. Then he rent his garments, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, making loud and bitter lamentation. Comp. on the last words, Gen. 27:34. The combination of

אֶפֶר with יִלְבֹּשׁ שֵׁק is an abbreviation for:

put on a hairy garment and spread ashes upon his head, in sign of deep grief; comp. Dan. 9:3, Job 2:12, and elsewhere.

Esther 4:2. And came even before the king's gate, i.e., according to v. 6, the open space before the entrance to the royal palace; for

none might enter wearing mourning. אֵין

לְבוֹא, there is no entering, i.e., none may enter; comp. Ewald, § 321, c.

Esther 4:3. Also in every province whither the king's decree arrived, there arose a great

mourning among the Jews. מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר is an adverbial *accusat. loci* in apposition to

בְּכָל-מְדִינָה: in every place to which the word of the king and his decree reached, i.e., arrived. "Sackcloth and ashes were spread for many," i.e., many sat in hairy garments upon the earth, where ashes had been spread; comp. Isa. 58:5. The meaning is: All the Jews broke out into mourning, weeping, and lamentation, while many manifested their grief in the manner above described.

Esther 4:4-8. The matter was made known to Esther by her maids and eunuchs, i.e., by her

attendants. The *Chethiv* תְּבוּאֵינָה does not

elsewhere occur after 1 consecutive, hence the

substitution of the *Keri* תְּבוּאָנָה. The object of

יִגִּדּוּ: what they told her, is evidently, from

what follows, the circumstance of Mordochai's appearance in deep mourning before the gate of the palace. On receiving this information the

queen fell into convulsive grief (תַּתְּחַלְחֵל), an

intensive form of חוּל, to be seized with painful grief), and sent to Mordochai raiment to put on instead of his sackcloth, evidently for the purpose of enabling him to enter the palace and give her the particulars of what had happened. But Mordochai did not accept the raiment.

Esther 4:5-7. Then Esther sent Hatach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had set before her, i.e., appointed to attend her, to Mordochai to learn "what this, and why this," i.e., what was the meaning and the cause of his thus going about in mourning. When Hatach came forth to him in the open place of the city before the king's gate, Mordochai told him all that had happened, and the amount of the money which Haman had promised to weigh to the king's treasures (i.e., to pay into the royal treasury) for the Jews, to destroy them, i.e., that it might

be permitted him to destroy the Jews. פְּרָשָׁה, properly a determined, accurate statement,

from פָּרַשׁ in the sense of to determine clearly (see rem. on Lev. 24:12); here, according to the context: amount, sum. This promise of Haman is here emphatically mentioned as the chief point, not so much for the purpose of raising the indignation of Esther to the highest pitch (Bertheau), as to show the resentment and eagerness with which Haman had urged the extermination of the Jews. The *Chethiv* יְהוּדִים

is the rarer form for יְהוּדִים, and is repeated 8:1, 7, 13, 9:15, 18.

Esther 4:8. Mordochai also gave Hatach a copy of the decree published in Susa (נָתַן בְּשׁוּשָׁן),

like 3:15) to show it to the queen. The וְלַהֲגִיד

לָהּ following is more correctly drawn towards

the subsequent וּלְצִוּוֹת, as by Bertheau, than connected according to the accentuation with

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what precedes. Before this infinitive must be supplied from the context, especially from v. 7: and Mordochai commissioned him or told him (Hatach): to declare unto her and to command her (Esther) to go in unto the king, to entreat him and to make request before him for her

people. **בִּקֵּשׁ עַל**, to beg, to make request for

something, like Ezra 8:23, and Esther 7:7. **עַל**

עִמָּהּ, concerning her people, i.e., in this connection: for them.

Esther 4:9–17. When Hatach brought this information to Esther, she sent word by him to Mordochai, that she might not go in unto the

king unsummoned. **תִּצְוֶהוּ אֶל ס'**, she ordered or commissioned him to Mordochai, viz., to tell him what follows, v. 11: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces (i.e., all the officers and subjects of the king) know, that with respect to every man or woman that shall come in unto the king, into the inner court, that is not called—one (the same) law (is) for him: to put (him) to death, except him to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he

may live." **כָּל-אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה** precede as

nominativi absol.; these are followed by two relative clauses, which are succeeded by the

anacoluthic predicate **אֶחָת דָּתוֹ**: one and the

same law is for him (**דָּתוֹ**, the law concerning him, the unsummoned appearer, the matter of

which is briefly stated by **לְהָמִית**). In the inner

court dwelt the king, seated on his throne (comp. 5:1). The law, that every one entering unbidden should be put to death, was subject to

but one exception: **לְבַד מֵאֲשֶׁר וּגו'**, except him to whom the king stretches out, etc.

הוֹשִׁיט from **יָשַׁט**, appearing only in the present book (Esther 5:2, 8:4), but frequently in Chaldee and Syriac, signifies to hold out, to

extend, with **לֹו**, to or towards him. **שְׂרָבִיט**, the

Aramaic form for **שֵׁבֶט**, sceptre. Access to the royal presence had been already rendered difficult by an edict issued by Dejokes the Mede, Herod. 1:9; and among the Persians, none, with the exception of a few individuals (Herod. iii. 118), were permitted to approach the king without being previously announced (Herod. iii. 140; Corn. Nepos, *Conon*, 3). Any one entering unannounced was punished with death, unless the king, according to this passage, gave it to be understood by stretching forth his sceptre that he was to remain unpunished. It is, however, self-evident, and the fact is confirmed by Herod. iii. 140, that any who desired audience were allowed to announce themselves. Esther might, it seems, have done this. Why, then, did she not make the attempt? The answer lies in her further message to Mordochai: "and I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." From these words it appears, that formerly she had been more frequently summoned before the king. Now, however, a whole month had passed without any invitation. Hence she concluded that the king did not much wish to see her, and for this reason dared not go unto him unbidden. Evidently, too, she was unwilling to be announced, because in that case she would have been obliged immediately to make known to the king the cause of her desiring this interview. And this she would not venture to do, fearing that, considering the great favour in which Haman stood with the king, she might, if she did not provoke his displeasure against herself through her intercession for her people, at least meet with a rejection of her petition. To set aside an irrevocable decree sealed with the king's seal, must have appeared to Esther an impossible undertaking. To have asked such a thing of the king would have been indeed a bold venture.

Esther 4:12–14. When what Esther said was reported to Mordochai, he sent word back to

her (**הִשִּׁיב**): "Think not in thy soul (with

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thyself) to be saved in the house of the king above all the Jews; for if thou holdest thy peace at this time, recovery and deliverance will arise from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knows if thou hast attained to royalty for a time such as this?" By the words: "Think not that thou wilt be saved in the king's house above all the Jew," i.e., alone of all the Jews, Mordochai does not reproach Esther with being indifferent to the fate of her fellow-countrymen, but rather calls her attention to the fact that her own life is in danger. This is evident from the clause: if thou hold thy peace, will not intercede with the king for thy people, help will come from some other quarter. **רָחַץ** = **רָחַץ**, Ex. 8:11, ἀναψύξῃς,

deliverance from oppressive restraint. **יַעֲמֹד**, rise up, arise, used according to later custom for

קִוִּים, as in 1 Chron. 20:4. The thought is: the Jewish nation cannot perish, its continuance is guaranteed by the divine promise. If thou wilt venture nothing for its safety, God will bring deliverance, but destruction will come upon thee and thy family. Though Mordochai neither speaks of God, nor alludes directly to His assistance, he still grounds his hopes of the preservation of his people upon the word and promise of God, and Brentius pertinently remarks: *habes hic excellentem ac plane heroicam Mardochaei fidem, qua in praesentissimo ac periculosissimo discrimine videt futuram liberationem*. The last clause of v. 14 is by most expositors understood as saying: and who knows whether thou hast not for a time like this attained to royalty? This agrees with the sense, but cannot be verbally justified,

for **אִם** does not mean whether not. The sentence contains an aposiopesis. The clause depending on the conditional **אִם** is unspoken, but understood. Besides, **הִנֵּנִי** is not in the imperfect. Hence it can only be translated: Who knows, if thou hadst not attained to royalty at

or for such a time? Then the clause omitted would be: what thou then wouldst have done.

מִי יוֹדֵעַ more frequently has the meaning of *perhaps*; and Mordochai says: perhaps thou hast attained to royalty (to the dignity of queen) for a time like this, sc. to use thy position for the deliverance of thy people. In the turn thus given to the sentence it contains the most urgent injunction to Esther to use her high position for the preservation of her fellow-countrymen.

Esther 4:15. This pressing monition produced its result. Esther returned answer to Mordochai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are found in Susa, and fast ye for me: I also and my maidens will fast; and so will I go to the king against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Esther resolves to go to the king unsummoned, but begs Mordochai and all the Jews to unite in a three days' fast, during which she and her maidens will also fast, to seek by earnest humiliation God's gracious assistance in the step she proposes to take, for the purpose of averting the threatened destruction of her people. "Though 'God' and 'prayer' are not here mentioned, it is yet obviously assumed that it was before God that the Jews were to humble themselves, to seek His help, and to induce Him to grant it. 1 Kings 21:27-29; Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:5f." (Berth.). To designate the strictness of this fasting, the words: "neither eat nor drink," are added. The "three days, night and day," are not to be reckoned as three times twenty-four hours, but to be understood of a fast which lasts till the third day after that on which it begins; for according to 5:1, Esther goes to the king on the third day. Comp. the similar definition of time, Jonah 2:1. The addition "day and night" declares that the fast was not to be intermitted.

וּבִכְן, and in thus, i.e., in this state of fasting.

אֲשֶׁר לֹא כִדָּת: which is not according to law.

אֲשֶׁר לֹא is used, like the Aramaean form **דִּי**

לֹא, in the sense of *without* (comp. Ewald, §

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222, c): without according to law = contrary to law. The last words: "if I perish, I perish," etc., are the expression not of despair, but of resignation, or perfect submission to the providence of God; comp. Gen. 43:14.

Esther 4:17. And Mordochai went his way, i.e., from the place before the court of the king, to do what the queen had commanded him to do.

Esther 5

Esther's Gracious Reception by the King. Haman's Rage Against Mordochai.

Esther 5. On the third day Esther betook herself in her royal apparel to the inner court of the palace, and was so kindly received by the king, that he promised to grant her any petition she might make; whereupon she requested the king to come with Haman that day to a banquet which she had prepared (vv. 1–8). On returning from this banquet, Haman saw Mordochai in the king's gate, and when the latter did not bow before him, was so enraged, that, upon the advice of his wife and friends, he resolved to induce the king to permit the execution of Mordochai on the following day (vv. 9–14).

Esther 5:1–8. On the third day Esther put on her royal apparel and entered the inner court of the king's house, opposite the dwelling of the king, where he was sitting on his throne before the gate (v. 1). The third day must be counted from the day of the transaction between the queen and Mordochai (Esther 4:14); the first day being that on which it took place. The fasting, then, would not begin till midday; and on the third day Esther went to the king to invite him on that day to a banquet, which would surely take place in the forenoon. Thus the three days' fast would last from the afternoon of the first to the forenoon of the third day, i.e., from 40 to 45 hours. תִּלְבָּשׁ

מַלְכוּת, she put on royalty, royal dignity, i.e., arrayed herself in royal apparel. Bertheau thinks that the word לְבוּשׁ has been

inadvertently omitted before מַלְכוּת; but such a conjecture is without sufficient support, the passages 6:8 and 8:15 being of another kind.

The expression is elliptical, and מַלְכוּת is easily completed by the notion לְבוּשׁ furnished by the verb.

Esther 5:2. When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she obtained favour in his eyes (see rem. on 2:9), and he held out to her the golden sceptre that was in his hand; and Esther drew near and touched the top of the sceptre, probably kissed it, as the *Vulgate* renders the word.

Esther 5:3. The king, concluding from the circumstance of her appearing there unsummoned, that she had some urgent matter to bring before him, said to her: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? To the half of the kingdom it shall be granted thee." A short expression for: if thy request relates even to the half of the kingdom, it shall be granted. V. 4. Esther, however, for the present requested nothing further, than that on that day (to-day) the king and Haman should

come to the banquet she had prepared. אָם

טוֹב עַל like 1:19.

Esther 5:5. The king commanded Haman to hasten thither, to do as the queen had said.

מָהֵר, hastened Haman, i.e., sent to fetch him

quickly. מָהֵר like 2 Chron. 18:8, 1 Kings 22:9.

לַעֲשׂוֹת, that the word of the queen might be done, carried out.

Esther 5:6. At the repast, and indeed at "the banquet of wine," when the greatest cheerfulness would prevail, the king repeated his question as to the desire of the queen, making the same promise as in v. 3. וְתַעֲשֶׂה, an

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abbreviated form of the imperfect **תַּעֲשֶׂה**, is optative or jussive: and it shall be done.

Esther 5:7, 8. Esther answered: "My petition and my request—if I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to do my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and to-morrow I will do as the king hath said," i.e., make known my request. Though the king had, in the midst of the gaiety, asked what was Esther's request, she did not esteem the time an appropriate one for expressing it. She begins: my petition and my request,—but then stops, and says only, if the king will do her the favour to come with Haman to a banquet again on the morrow, she will then bring forward her petition. Esther invited Haman with the king on both occasions, that, as Calovius remarks, *eum apud regem praesentem accusaret decreti surrepti contra suos populares nomine, et in os omnes cavillandi vias ei praecluderet*.

Esther 5:9–14. Haman went forth from the palace satisfied and with a joyful heart. When, however, he saw Mordochai in the king's gate, who neither stood up nor trembled before him, he was full of indignation against him. **וְלֹא קָם**

וְגו' are circumstantial clauses following the

principal clause without a copula. **קָם** and **וָעָ**

are perfects, and **וְלֹא—וְלֹא** are used in the

sense of *neque—neque*. **וְזָע** constructed with

נָ means to tremble before any one, to be disquieted.

Esther 5:10. Haman, however, refrained himself; and without immediately giving vent to his rage at Mordochai, went home and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh, that he might unburden himself before them, and take counsel with them for Mordochai's destruction.

Esther 5:11. He first spoke to them of his wealth and domestic happiness, of the "glory of his riches and the multitude of his children."

From 9:7–10 we learn that Haman had ten sons; and many sons were not looked upon as a great blessing from God by the Israelites only, but were also esteemed a signal prosperity among the Persians, the king annually sending presents to him who had the greatest number of sons.⁷ Haman next recounted to them the

great honours he had attained; **אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר**, all how the king had made him great, and how he had advanced him above the princes; comp.

3:1. **אֲשֶׁר** is a second accusative of the means by which something is brought to pass. Finally, v. 12, what high distinction had just been accorded him, by the queen having invited him alone to come to her banquet with the king.

"Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet which she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I also

invited unto her with the king." **אֲנִי** enhances the meaning: even this honour is shown me.

אֲנִי קָרוֹא-לָהּ, I am her invited guest = I am invited to her and by her; comp. Ew. § 295, c.

Esther 5:13. And yet all his good fortune is embittered to him as often as he sees the hated Jew Mordochai. "And all this availeth me not at every time when I see the Jew Mordochai

sitting in the king's gate." **שׁוֹהָ לִי** is, not being equalled to me, i.e., not answering my desires,

not affording me satisfaction. **בְּכָל-עֵת אֲשֶׁר**,

at all time when = as often as. The fortune and honour he enjoys fail to satisfy him, when he sees the Jew Mordochai refuse to show him the reverence which he claims.

Esther 5:14. His wife and all his friends advise: "Let a tree be made (set up) fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak to the king, that Mordochai may be hanged thereon (i.e.,

impaled; see on **תִּלָּה** 2:23); and then go in

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merrily with the king to the banquet." The counsellors take it for granted that the king will without hesitation agree to Haman's proposal to execute Mordochai, and therefore advise him at once to make the necessary preparations, so that the hated Jew may be hanged on the morrow before the banquet, and Haman may then go with the king to the feast prepared by the queen, free from all annoyance. עֲשֶׂה עֵץ

גב', to make, i.e., to erect a high tree. The higher the stake, the farther would it be seen.

The 3rd pers. plur. יַעֲשׂוּ stands instead of the passive: let them make = let ... be made. So too יִתְּלוּ for let ... be hanged. This speech pleased Haman, and he caused the stake to be erected.

Esther 6

Elevation of Mordochai and Disgrace of Haman.

Esther 6. The next night the king, being unable to sleep, caused the chronicles of the kingdom to be read to him. The account of the conspiracy discovered by Mordochai, which was written therein, was thus brought before him, and he inquired of his servants whether this man had been rewarded (vv. 1-3a). On receiving a negative answer, the king sent to inquire who was in the court; and Haman being found there thus early, he had him summoned, and asked him: what should be done to the man in whose honour the king delighteth. Haman, supposing that the king could intend to honour no one but himself, voted for the very highest public mark of respect (vv. 3b-9), and was then obliged at the king's command to pay the proposed honour to Mordochai (vv. 10, 11). From this humiliation his wife and friends prognosticated his speedy downfall (vv. 12-14).

Esther 6:1-11. An unexpected turn of affairs. V. 1. On that night between Esther's first and second banquet, the king's sleep fled, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles and to read therefrom. On סֵפֶר

הַזְכָּרֹנוֹת, comp. Ezra 4:15. The title is here more particularly stated than in 2:23, where the book is briefly called: The book of the chronicles. וַיְהִי נִקְרָאִים, and they (the chronicles) were read before the king. The participle denotes the long continuance of this reading.

Esther 6:2. And it was found written therein among other matters, that Mordochai had given information concerning the two courtiers who were plotting against the king's life. This is the conspiracy related 2:21-23. The name Bigthana is in 2:21 written Bighthan.

Esther 6:3. On this occasion the king asked: What honour and greatness hath been done to Mordochai for this? עַל־זֶה, for giving this information. And the king's servants answered:

Nothing has been shown him. עֲשֶׂה עִם, to show any one something, e.g., favour; comp. 2 Sam. 2:6, 3:8, and elsewhere. גְּדוּלָּה, greatness, i.e., promotion to honour.

Esther 6:4. To repair this deficiency, and to do honour to the man who had done good service to the king—as the Persian monarchs were accustomed, comp. Brisson, *de reg. Pers. princ.* i. c. 135—he asked, "who is in the court?" i.e., whether some minister or state functionary were there with whom he might consult concerning the honour due to Mordochai. Those who desired an audience with the king were accustomed to appear and wait in the outer court, until they were summoned into the inner court to present themselves before the monarch. From this question of the king it appears that it was already morning. And Haman, it is parenthetically remarked, was come into the outer court to speak to the king, to hang Mordochai on the tree which he had prepared.

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Esther 6:5. The attendants inform the king that Haman is in the court; whereupon the king commands: **יָבוֹא**, let him come in.

Esther 6:6. As soon as he enters the king asks: What is to be done to the man in whose honour the king delighteth? i.e., whom he delights to honour. And Haman, thinking (**אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ**, to say in one's heart, i.e., to think) to whom will the king delight to show honour more than to me (**יִתֵּר מִמֶּנִּי**), projecting before me, surpassing me, hence adverbially, beyond me, e.g., Eccles. 12:12, comp. 2:15, 7:11, 16)? votes immediately for the greatest possible mark of honour, and says, v. 7f.: "As for the man in whose honour the king delighteth, let them bring the royal apparel with which the king has been clothed, and a horse on which the king has ridden, and the king's crown upon his head, and let them deliver this apparel and horse to one of the chief princes of the king, and let them array (i.e., with the royal apparel) the man in whose honour the king delighteth, and cause him to ride upon the horse through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him: Thus shall it be done to the man in whose honour the king delighteth." **אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר וְגו'**, v. 7, precedes absolutely, and the predicate does not follow till **וְהַלְבִּישׁוּ**, v. 9, where the preceding subject is now by an anacoluthon taken up in the accusative (**אֶת־הָאִישׁ**). Several clauses are inserted between, for the purpose of enumerating beforehand all that appertains to such a token of honour: a royal garment, a royal steed, a crown on the head, and one of the chief princes for the carrying out of the honour awarded. The royal garment is not only, as Bertheau justly remarks, such a one as the king is accustomed to wear, but, as is shown by the perf. **לִבֵּשׁ**, one which the king has himself already put on or worn. Hence it is not an ordinary state-robe, the so-called Median

apparel which the king himself, the chief princes among the Persians, and those on whom the king bestowed such raiment were wont to appear in (Herod. 3.84, 7.116; Xenoph. *Cyrop.* 8.3.1, comp. with the note of Baehr on Her. 3.84), but a costly garment, the property of the sovereign himself. This was the highest mark of honour that could be shown to a subject. So too was the riding upon a horse on which the king had ridden, and whose head was adorned with a royal crown. **נָתַן** is perf. Niph., not 1st pers. pl. imperf. Kal, as Maurer insists; and **אֲשֶׁר בְּרֹאשׁוֹ** refers to the head of the horse, not to the head of the man to be honoured, as Clericus, Rambach, and most ancient expositors explain the words, in opposition to the natural sense of— **אֲשֶׁר נָתַן**.

בְּרֹאשׁוֹ. We do not indeed find among classical writers any testimony to such an adornment of the royal steed; but the circumstance is not at all improbable, and seems to be corroborated by ancient remains, certain Assyrian and ancient Persian sculptures, representing the horses of the king, and apparently those of princes, with ornaments on their heads terminating in three points, which may be regarded as a kind of crown. The *infin. absol.*

וְנָתַן is a continuation of the preceding jussive

יָבִיאוּ: and they shall give, let them give the garment—to the hand of a man, i.e., hand or deliver to him. The garment and horse are to be delivered to one of the noblest princes, that he may bring them to the individual to be honoured, may array him in the garment, set him on the horse, and proclaim before him as he rides through the city, etc. On **הַפְּרָתָּמִים**, comp. 1:4, and on the matter itself, Gen. 40:43.

רְחוֹב is either an open square, the place of public assemblage, the forum, or a collective

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signifying the wide streets of the city. כְּכָה

יַעֲשֶׂה as in Deut. 25:9 and elsewhere.

Esther 6:10, 11. This honour, then, the haughty Haman was now compelled to pay to the hated Jew. The king commanded him: "Make haste, take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said," i.e., in the manner proposed by thee, "and do even so to Mordochai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken," i.e., carry out your proposal exactly. How the king knew that Mordochai was a Jew, and that he sat in the king's gate, is not indeed expressly stated, but may easily be supplied from the conversation of the king with his servants concerning Mordochai's discovery of the conspiracy, vv. 1–3. On this occasion the servants of the king would certainly give him particulars concerning Mordochai, who by daily frequenting the king's gate, 2:19, 5:9, would certainly have attracted the attention of all the king's suite. Nor can doubt be case upon the historical truth of the fact related in this verse by the question: whether the king had forgotten that all Jews were doomed to destruction, and that he had delivered them up to Haman for that purpose (J. D. Mich.). Such forgetfulness in the case of such a monarch as Xerxes cannot surprise us.

Esther 6:12–14. After this honour had been paid him, Mordochai returned to the king's gate; but Haman hastened to his house, "sad and with his head covered," to relate to his wife and friends all that had befallen him. A deeper mortification he could not have experienced than that of being obliged, by the king's command, publicly to show the highest honour to the very individual whose execution he was just about to propose to him. The covering of the head is a token of deep confusion and mourning; comp. Jer. 14:4, 2 Sam. 15:30. Then his wise men, and Zeresh his wife, said to him: "If Mordochai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, thou wilt not prevail against him, but wholly fall before him."

לֹא תֻכַּל לוֹ, *non praevalere ei*, comp. Gen.

32:26. נָפֹל תָּפֹל with an emphatic *infin.*

absol.: wholly fall. Instead of the אֶהְיוּ חֲכָמָיו are here named, or to speak more correctly the friends of Haman are here called his wise men (magi). Even in 5:14 Haman's friends figure as those with whom he takes counsel concerning Mordochai, i.e., as his counsellors or advisers; hence it is very probable that there were magi among their number, who now "come forward as a *genus sapientum et doctorum* (Cicero, *divin.* i. 23)" (Berth.), and predict his overthrow in his contest with Mordochai. The ground of this prediction is stated: "If Mordochai is of the seed of the Jews," i.e., of Jewish descent, then after this preliminary fall a total fall is inevitable. Previously (Esther 5:14) they had not hesitated to advise him to hang the insignificant Jew; but now that the insignificant Jew has become, as by a miracle, a man highly honoured by the king, the fact that the Jews are under the special protection of Providence is pressed upon them. *Ex fato populorum*, remarks Grotius, *de singulorum fatis judicabant. Judaei gravissime oppressi a Cyri temporibus contra spem omnem resurgere caeperant.* We cannot, however, regard as well founded the further remark: *de Amalecitis audierant oraculum esse, eos Judaeorum manu perituros*, which Grotius, with most older expositors, derives from the Amalekite origin of Haman. The revival of the Jewish people since the times of Cyrus was sufficient to induce, in the minds of heathen who were attentive to the signs of the times, the persuasion that this nation enjoyed divine protection.

Esther 6:14. During this conversation certain courtiers had already arrived, who hastily brought Haman to the banquet of the queen, to which he would certainly go in a less happy state of mind than on the preceding day.

Esther 7

Haman's Downfall and Ruin.

Esther 7. At this second banquet the king again inquired of the queen what was her petition,

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when she entreated that her life and that of her people might be spared, for that she and her people were sold to destruction (vv. 1–4). The king, evidently shocked at such a petition, asked who was the originator of so evil a deed, and Esther named the wicked Haman as the enemy (vv. 5, 6). Full of indignation at such a crime, the king rose from the banquet and went into the garden; Haman then fell down before the queen to entreat for his life. When the king returned to the house, he saw Haman lying on the couch on which Esther was sitting, and thinking that he was offering violence to the queen, he passed sentence of death upon him, and caused him to be hanged on the tree he had erected for Mordochai (vv. 7–10).

Esther 7:1–6. The king and Haman came to drink (לְשִׁתּוֹת), i.e., to partake of the מִשְׁתֶּה, in the queen's apartment.

Esther 7:2. At this banquet of wine the king asked again on the second day, as he had done on the first (Esther 5:6): What is thy petition, Queen Esther, etc.? Esther then took courage to express her petition. After the usual introductory phrases (v. 3 like 5:8), she replied: "Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request." For, she adds as a justification and reason for such a petition, "we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. And if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had been silent, for the enemy is not worth the king's damage."

In this request עָמִי is a short expression for: the life of my people, and the preposition בְּ, the so-called בְּ pretii. The request is conceived of as the price which she offers or presents for her life and that of her people. The expression נִמְכַּרְנוּ, we are sold, is used by Esther with reference to the offer of Haman to pay a large sum into the royal treasury for the extermination of the Jews, 3:9, 4:7. אֵלָּו,

contracted after Aramaean usage from אֵלָּו לוֹ, and occurring also Eccles. 6:6, supposes a case, the realization of which is desired, but not to be expected, the matter being represented as already decided by the use of the perfect. The

last clause, כִּי אֵין הָצָר וְגו', is by most expositors understood as a reference, on the part of Esther, to the financial loss which the king would incur by the extermination of the Jews. Thus Rambach, e.g., following R. Sal. ben Melech, understands the meaning expressed to be: *hostis nullo modo aequare, compensare, resarcire potest pecunia sua damnum, quod rex ex nostro excidio patitur*. So also Cler. and others. The confirmatory clause would in this

case refer not to הִחַרְשֵׁתִי, but to a negative notion needing completion: but I dare not be silent; and such completion is itself open to

objection. To this must be added, that שׁוֹה in

Kal constructed with בְּ does not signify *compensare*, to equalize, to make equal, but to be equal; consequently the Piel should be found here to justify the explanation proposed. שׁוֹה

in Kal constructed with בְּ signifies to be of equal worth with something, to equal another thing in value. Hence Gesenius translates: the enemy does not equal the damage of the king, i.e., is not in a condition to compensate the damage. But neither when thus viewed does the sentence give any reason for Esther's statement, that she would have been silent, if the Jews had been sold for slaves. Hence we are constrained, with Bertheau, to take a different view of the words, and to give up the reference to financial loss. גִּזָּק, in the Targums, means not merely financial, but also bodily, personal damage; e.g., Ps. 91:7, Gen. 26:11, to do harm, 1 Chron. 16:22. Hence the phrase may be understood thus: For the enemy is not equal to, is not worth, the damage of the king, i.e., not

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worthy that I should annoy the king with my petition. Thus Esther says, v. 4: The enemy has determined upon the total destruction of my people. If he only intended to bring upon them grievous oppression, even that most grievous oppression of slavery, I would have been silent, for the enemy is not worthy that I should vex or annoy the king by my accusation.

Esther 7:5. The king, whose indignation was excited by what he had just heard, asks with an agitation, shown by the repetition of the

וַיֹּאמֶר: "Who is he, and where is he, whose heart hath filled him (whom his heart hath filled) to do so?" Evil thoughts proceed from the heart, and fill the man, and impel him to evil deeds: Isa. 44:20; Eccles. 8:11; Matt. 15:19.

Esther 7:6. Esther replies: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." Then was Haman afraid before the king and the queen. נִבְעַת as in 1 Chron. 21:30, Dan. 8:17.

Esther 7:7-10. The king in his wrath arose from the banquet of wine, and went into the garden of the house (קֶם is here a pregnant expression, and is also combined with

אֶל-גִּנָּת; but Haman remained standing to beg for his life to Queen Esther (בִּקֵּשׁ עַל as in 4:8), "for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king" (בָּלָה, completed, i.e., determined; comp. 1 Sam. 20:7, 9, 25:17, and elsewhere); and hence that he had no mercy to expect from him, unless the queen should intercede for him.

Esther 7:8. The king returned to the house, and found Haman falling (נָפַל as in Josh. 8:10, Deut. 21:1, and elsewhere) at or on the couch on which Esther was (sitting), i.e., falling as a suppliant at her feet; and crediting Haman in the heat of his anger with the worst designs, he cried out: "Shall also violence be done to the queen before me in the house?" The *infin.*

לְכַבּוֹשׁ after the interrogatory particle signifies: Is violence to be done, i.e., shall violence be done? as in 1 Chron. 15:2 and

elsewhere; comp. Ewald, § 237, c. כָּבַשׁ, to tread under foot, to subdue, used here in the more general sense, to offer violence. Without waiting for an explanation, the king, still more infuriated, passes sentence of death upon Haman. This is not given in so many words by the historian, but we are told immediately that: "as the word went out of the king's mouth, they

covered Haman's face." הִדְבֵּר is not the speech of the king just reported, but the judicial sentence, the death warrant, i.e., the word to punish Haman with death. This is unmistakeably shown by the further statement: they covered Haman's face. The subject is indefinite: the attendants present. To cover the face was indeed to begin to carry the sentence of death into execution. With respect to this custom, expositors appeal to Curtius, vi. 8. 22: *Philetam—capite velato in regiam adducunt*; and Cicero, *pro C. Rabirio* iv. 13: *I lictor, colliga manus, caput obnubito, arbori infelici suspendito*.

Esther 7:9. Then said Harbonah (already mentioned 1:10), one of the eunuchs before the king, i.e., who held office before the king: "Behold also the tree which Haman made

(comp. 5:14) stands in the house of Haman." גַּם points to the fact that the other eunuchs had already brought forward various particulars concerning Haman's crime. Mordochai, who had spoken good for the king, viz., when he gave information of the conspiracy, 2:22, 6:2. On this tree the king ordered that Haman should be hanged, and this sentence was executed without delay.—"And the king's wrath was pacified." With this remark the narrative of this occurrence is closed, and the history pursues its further course as follows.

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Esther 8

Mordochai Advanced to Haman's Position. Counter-Edict for the Preservation of Jews.

Esther 8. The king bestowed the house of Haman on Esther, and advanced Mordochai to Haman's place of prime minister (vv. 1 and 2). Esther then earnestly besought the king for the abolition of the edict published by Haman against the Jews, and the king permitted her and Mordochai to send letters in the king's name to all the Jews in his kingdom, commanding them to stand for their life, and to slay their enemies, on the day appointed for their own extermination (vv. 3–14). These measures diffused great joy throughout the kingdom (vv. 15–17).

Esther 8:1, 2. By the execution of Haman, his property was confiscated, and the king decreed that the house of the Jews' enemy should be given to Esther. The "house of Haman" undoubtedly means the house with all that pertained to it. "And Mordochai came before the king, for Esther had told him what he was to her," viz., her kinsman and foster-father, 2:7. This information effected Mordochai's appearance before the king, i.e., his reception into the number of the high dignitaries who beheld the face of the king, i.e., were allowed personal access to him; comp. 1:10, 14, 7:9.

Esther 8:2. And the king took off his seal-ring which he had taken from Haman (comp. 3:10), and gave it to Mordochai. **הָעֵבִיר מִן**, to cause to go from some one, i.e., to take away. By this act Mordochai was advanced to the post of first minister of the king; comp. Gen. 41:42, 1 Macc. 6:15. The king's seal gave the force of law to royal edicts, the seal taking the place of the signature. See rem. on v. 8 and 3:10.

Esther 8:3–14. The chief enemy of the Jews was now destroyed; but the edict, written in the king's name, sealed with the royal seal, and published in all the provinces of the kingdom, for the destruction of all the Jews on the 13th day of the twelfth month, was still in force, and having been issued in due legal form, could not,

according to the laws of the Persians and Medes, be revoked. Queen Esther therefore entreated the king to annul the designs of Haman against the Jews. Vv. 3 and 4. "Esther spake again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and wept, and besought him to do away

with **הָעֵבִיר**, to cause to depart) the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he devised against the Jews. And the king held out his golden sceptre towards Esther, and Esther arose and stood before the king." This verse gives a summary of the contents of Esther's speech, which is reported verbally in vv. 5 and 6, so that we must translate the imperfects

וַתִּבְכֵּי וַתִּתְחַנֵּן—וַתִּפֹּל: She spoke before the king, falling at his feet and beseeching him with weeping, that he would do away with **רַעַת**

הָמָן, the evil that Haman had done, and his device against the Jews. The king stretched out his sceptre (comp. Esther 4:11) as a sign that he would graciously grant her petition; whereupon she arose, stood before the king, and made known her request.

Esther 8:5. The introductory formula are in part similar to those used Esther 1:19, 5:4, 8, 7:3; but the petition referring to a great and important matter, they are strengthened by two

new phrases: "If the thing is advisable (**כִּשְׁר**, proper, convenient, advantageous, a later word occurring again only Eccles. 11:6, 10:10, —in

2:21, 4:4, 5, 10 of the same book, **כִּשְׁרוֹן**)

before the king, and if I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written (let a writing be used, like

Esther 3:9), to frustrate (**לְהַשִּׁיב**, i.e., to put out of force) the letters, the device of Haman ... which he wrote to destroy the Jews, who are in all the provinces of the king." **מַחְשַׁבַת הָמָן**, the device, the proposal of Haman, is added to

הַסְּפָרִים, briefly to characterize the contents

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of the letters. On the matter itself, comp. 3:8f. and 12f. "For how shall I endure to see the destruction of my people?" The verbs **אוכל** **וְרָאִיתִי** are so combined that the second is governed by the first, **וְרָאִיתִי** standing instead of the infinitive; comp. Ew. § 285, c. **רָאָה** cons. **בִּי** denotes an interested beholding, whether painful or joyous, of something; comp. Gen. 44:34. **מוֹלֶדֶת** in parallelism with **עַם** denotes those who are of like descent, the family, members of a tribe.

Esther 8:7, 8. The king could not simply revoke the edict issued by Haman in due legal form, but, ready to perform the request of the queen, he first assures her of his good intentions, reminding her and Mordochai that he has given the house of Haman to Esther and hanged Haman, because he laid hand on the Jews (**אֶתֹּו** **תָּלוּ**, him they have executed); and then grants them permission, as he had formerly done to Haman, to send letters to the Jews in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, and to write **בְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיכֶם**, "as seems good to you," i.e., to give in writing such orders as might in Esther's and Mordochai's judgment render the edict of Haman harmless. "For," he adds, "what is written in the king's name and sealed with his seal cannot be reversed." This confirmatory clause is added by the king with reference to the law in general, not as speaking of himself objectively as "the king." **אֵין לְהָשִׁיב** refers to Esther's request: **יִכָּתֵב לְהָשִׁיב** (v. 5).

וְנִחָתוֹם, *infin. abs.* used instead of the *perfect*.

Esther 8:9-14. These letters were prepared in the same manner as those of Haman (Esther 3:12-15), on the 23rd day of the third month,

the month Sivan, and sent into all the provinces. "And it was written according to all that Mordochai commanded." They were sent to the Jews and to the satraps, etc., of the whole wide realm from India to Ethiopia (see 1:1), while those of Haman had been issued only to the satraps, etc. The rest coincides with Esther 3:12. **וַיִּכְתֹּב**, and he (Mordochai) wrote. To show the speed with which the letters were despatched, (messengers) "on horseback, on coursers, government coursers, the sons of the stud," is added to **רָכֶשׁ בְּיַד הָרָצִים** is a collective, meaning swift horses, coursers; comp. 1 Kings 5:8. **אַחֲשֹׁתָרְנִים** (vv. 11 and 14) answers to the Old-Persian *kschatrana*, from *kschatra*, government, king, and means government, royal, or court studs. So Haug in Ewald's *bibl. Jahrb.* v. p. 154. The older explanation, mules, on the other hand, is founded on the modern Persian *estar*, which, to judge from the Sanscrit *aṣvatara*, must in ancient Persian have been *aṣpatara*. **רָמָכִים**, *ἀπ. λεγ.* from **רָמָן**, answering to the Syriac *remakā'*, herd, especially a herd of horses, and to the Arabic *ramaka*, stud, is explained by Bertheau as a superlative form for the animal who excels the rest of the herd of stud in activity, perhaps the breeding stallion, while others understand it of the stud in general. The contents of the edict follow in vv. 11 and 12: "that the king allows the Jews in every city to assemble and to stand for their life (i.e., to fight for their lives, comp. Dan. 12:1), to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power (**חַיִּל**, military power) of the people and province that should assault them, children and women, and to plunder their property, upon a certain day," etc. The appointed time is thus stated as in Esther 3:13. The Jews were thus authorized to attack and destroy all enemies who should assault them on the day appointed for their extermination. V. 13 coincides with Esther

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3:14*b*, with this difference, that the Jews are to be ready on this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. V. 14 also is similar to Esther 3:15, except that the expression is strengthened

by an addition to **הַרְצִים** as in v. 10, and by

that of **דְּחוּפִים**, urged on, to **מְבַהֲלִים**,

hastened, to point out the utmost despatch possible.

Esther 8:15–17. The joy experienced throughout the kingdom at these measures. V. 15. After transacting with the king this measure so favourable to the Jews, Mordochai went out from the king in a garment of deep blue and white material (comp. 1:6), and with a great crown of gold, and a mantle of byssus and purple. **תְּכָרִיךְ**, *ἀπ. λεγ.*, in the Aramaean

תְּכָרִיכָא, a wide mantle or covering. The meaning is not, as Bertheau remarks, that he left the king in the garment which had been, according to Esther 6:8*f*., presented to him, nor that he left him with fresh tokens of his favour, clothed in a garment, crown, and mantle just bestowed on him, but that he left him in a magnificent state garment, and otherwise festally apparelled, that he might thus show, even by his external appearance, the happiness of his heart. Of these remarks, the first and last are quite correct; the second, however, can by no means be so, because it affords no answer to the question how Mordochai had obtained crown and mantle during his stay with the king and in the royal palace. The garments in which Mordochai left the king are evidently the state garments of the first minister, which Mordochai received at his installation to his office, and, as such, no fresh token of royal favour, but only his actual induction in his new dignity, and a sign of this induction to all who saw him issue from the palace so adorned. “The city of Susa rejoiced and was glad,” i.e., rejoiced for gladness. The city, i.e., its inhabitants on the whole.

Esther 8:16. The Jews (i.e., in Susa, for those out of the city are not spoken of till v. 17) had

light and gladness, and delight and honour.”

אוֹרָה (this form occurs only here and Ps.

109:12), light, is a figurative expression for

prosperity. **יָקָר**, honour—in the joy manifested by the inhabitants of Susa at the prevention of the threatened destruction.

Esther 8:17. And in every province and city ... there was joy and a glad day, a feast day, comp. Esther 9:19, 22, while Haman’s edict had caused grief and lamentation, Esther 4:3. “And many of the people of the land (i.e., of the heathen inhabitants of the Persian empire) became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.” **מִתִּיהָדִים**, to confess oneself a Jew, to become a Jew, a denominative formed from

יְהוּדִי, occurs only here. On the confirmatory clause, comp. Ex. 15:16, Deut. 11:25. This conversion of many of the heathen to Judaism must not be explained only, as by Clericus and Grotius, of a change of religion on the part of the heathen, *ut sibi hoc modo securitatem et reginae favorem pararent, metuentes potentiam Mardechai*. This may have been the inducement with some of the inhabitants of Susa. But the majority certainly acted from more honourable motives, viz., a conviction, forced upon them by the unexpected turn of affairs in favour of the Jews, of the truth of the Jewish religion; and the power of that faith and trust in God manifested by the Jews, and so evidently justified by the fall of Haman and the promotion of Mordochai, contrasted with the vanity and misery of polytheism, to which even the heathen themselves were not blind. When we consider that the same motives in subsequent times, when the Jews as a nation were in a state of deepest humiliation, attracted the more earnest-minded of the heathen to the Jewish religion, and induced them to become proselytes, the fact here related will not appear surprising.

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Esther 9

The Jews Avenged of Their Enemies. The Feast of Purim Instituted.

Esther 9. On the day appointed by both edicts, the Jews assembled in the towns and provinces of the kingdom to slay all who sought their hurt, and being supported by the royal officials, inflicted a great defeat upon their enemies (vv. 1–10). At the queen's desire, the king granted permission to the Jews in Susa to fight against their enemies on the following day also (vv. 11–15), while in the other towns and districts of the kingdom they fought for their lives only on the 13th of Adar; so that in these places they rested on the 14th, but in Susa not till the 15th, and consequently kept in the latter the one day, in the former the other, as a day of feasting and rejoicing (vv. 16–19). The observance of this day of resting as a festival, under the name of Purim, by all the Jews in the Persian monarchy, was then instituted by Esther and Mordochai (vv. 20–32).

Esther 9:1–10. *The Jews avenged of their enemies.*—V. 1. In the twelfth month, on the thirteenth day of the same—the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities, etc. Several parenthetical clauses succeed this definition of time, so that the statement of what then took place does not follow till **וְנִקְהָלוּ**, v. 2. These parenthetical clauses state not only the meaning of the day just named, but also give a general notice of the conflict between the Jews and their enemies. The first runs: “when the word of the king drew nigh and his decree to be done,” i.e., when the execution of the royal decree approached. The second is: “on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have the mastery of them, and it was changed (i.e., the contrary occurred), that the Jews had the mastery over them that hated them.” **שָׁלַט בָּ**, to rule, to have the mastery over. **נִהְפֹּךְ** is *infin. abs.*, used instead of the *imperf.* **הָוָה** is

referred by Bertheau to **יּוֹם**: the day was changed from a day of misfortune to a day of prosperity for the Jews, alluding to v. 22; but it is not a change of the day which is here spoken of, but a change of the hope of the enemies into its opposite; hence we must regard **הָוָה** as neuter: it was changed, i.e., the contrary occurred. The pronoun **הֵמָּה** serves to emphasize the subject; comp. Ewald, § 314, *a*, who in this and similar cases takes **הָמָּה הָוָה** in the sense of *ipse, ipsi*.

Esther 9:2. **בְּעָרֵיהֶם**, in their cities, i.e., the cities in which they dwelt in all the dominions of the king. **לְשַׁלַּח יָד**, to stretch out the hand (as also in 2:21, 3:6, for the purpose of killing) against those who sought their hurt, i.e., sought to destroy them. “And no one stood before them (**עָמַד בְּפָנֵי**, like Josh. 10:8, 21:42, and elsewhere), because the fear of them fell upon all people (see rem. on 8:17). And all the rulers of the provinces, and the satraps and governors (comp. 8:9), and those that did the king's business (**עָשִׂי הַמְּלָאכָה**, see rem. on 3:9),

supported the Jews (**נִשְׂאָה** like Ezra 1:4), because the fear of Mordochai fell upon them.”

Esther 9:4. “For Mordochai was great in the king's house (was much esteemed by the king), and his fame went through all the provinces (**שָׁמְעוֹ** as in Josh. 6:27, 9:9, Jer. 6:24); for this man Mordochai became continually greater;” comp. 2 Chron. 17:12, where the partic. **גָּדַל** stands instead of the inf. abs. **גִּדּוֹל**.

Esther 9:5. Thus supported, the Jews inflicted defeat upon their enemies with the sword, and with slaughter and destruction. **הִכָּה** with **בָּ**, to

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deal a blow upon or against some one, to cause or bring about upon enemies a defeat; comp. e.g., 2 Sam. 23:10, 24:17, Num. 22:6. The notion is strengthened by **מִכַּת־חֶרֶב וּגו'**, literally, to strike a stroke of the sword, and of slaughter, and of destruction, in accordance with the decree, 8:11. "And did according to their will to those that hated them," i.e., retaliated upon their enemies at their discretion.

Esther 9:6. In the citadel of Susa they destroyed (in round numbers) 500 men.

Esther 9:7-10. Also they slew the ten sons of Haman, whose names are given, 7-9; ⁸ but on the spoil they laid not their hand, though this was allowed to them, 8:11, as it had been commanded to their enemies by Haman's edict, 3:13, *ut ostenderent, se non aliud quam vitae suae incolumitatem quaerere; hanc enim perdere volebant ii qui occidebantur*. C. a Lapide.

Esther 9:11-19. When on the same day an account was given to the king of the result of the conflict, and the number of those slain in Susa reported, he announced to Queen Esther: the Jews have slain in the citadel of Susa 500 men and the ten sons of Haman; "what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces?" i.e., if they have killed 500 men in Susa, how many may they not have slain in other parts of the kingdom? and then asked her what else she wished or required. With respect to the words, comp. 5:6, and 7:2.

Esther 9:13. Esther requested: "let it be granted to the Jews which are in Susa to do to-morrow also according to the decree of to-day (i.e., exactly as to-day), and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged upon the tree," i.e., their dead bodies nailed on crosses—*majoris infamiae causa*, according to Hebrew and Persian custom; comp. Deut. 21:22 and the explanation of Ezra 6:11. On the motive for this request, see above, p. 194.

Esther 9:14. The king commanded it so to be done. "Then was a decree given at Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman." The decree given in Susa does not refer to the hanging of the sons of Haman, but to the

permission given to the Jews to fight against their enemies on the morrow also. This is required not only by a comparison of 8:13, but also by the connection of the present verse; for in consequence of this decree the Jews

assembled on the 14th Adar (comp. **וַיִּקְהֻלוּ**, then they assembled themselves, v. 15), while the hanging of the sons of Haman, on the contrary, is related in an accessory clause by a simple perfect, **תָּלוּ**.

Esther 9:15. On this second day the Jews slew 300 more; comp. v. 10.—V. 16. The rest of the Jews in the provinces, i.e., the Jews in the other parts of the kingdom, assembled themselves and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes 75,000, but upon the spoil they laid not their hand. **עָמְדוּ**

עָלָם like 8:11. The **וְנוֹחַ מְאִיבֵיהֶם** inserted

between **וְהָרוּג וְעָמְדוּ עָלָם** is striking; we should rather have expected the resting or having rest from their enemies after the death of the latter, as in vv. 17 and 18, where this is plainly stated to have taken place on the day after the slaughter. The position of these words is only explained by the consideration, that the narrator desired at once to point out how the matter ended. The narrative continues in the *infin. abs.* instead of expressing this clause by the *infin. constr.*, and so causing it to be governed by what precedes. Thus—as Ew. § 351, c, remarks—all the possible hues of the sentence fade into this grey and formless termination (*viz.*, the use of the *infin. absol.* instead of the *verb. fin.*). This inaccuracy of diction does not justify us, however, in assuming that we have here an interpolation or an alteration in the text. The statement of the day is given in v. 17, and then the clause following is again added in the *inf. absol.*: "and they rested on the 14th day of the same (of Adar), and made it a day of feasting and gladness."

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Esther 9:18. The Jews in Susa, on the other hand, who were both on the 13th and 14th Adar still fighting against their enemies, and did not rest till the 15th, made this latter their day of rejoicing.—In v. 19 it is again stated that the Jews in the country towns and villages made the 14th their day of gladness, and this

statement is appended by **עַל־כֵּן** to make this appear the result of what precedes. The *Chethiv*

הַפְּרוּזִים is perhaps an Aramaic expression for

פְּרוּזִי, Deut. 3:5 and 1 Sam. 6:18. **פְּרוּזִי** means the inhabitants of the open, i.e., unfortified, towns and villages of the plains in contrast to the fortified capital; see on Deut. 3:5. On

פְּרוּזוֹת, compare Ezek. 38:11, Zech. 2:8.

מְשֻׁלָּח מְנוֹת וּגו', and of mutual sending of gifts, i.e., portions of food; comp. Neh. 8:10, 12.

Esther 9:20–32. The feast of Purim instituted by letters from Mordochai and Esther. V. 20.

Mordochai wrote these things, and sent letters

to all the Jews, etc. **הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה** does not

mean the contents of the present book but the events of the last days, especially the fact that the Jews, after overcoming their enemies, rested in Susa on the 15th, in the other provinces on the 14th Adar, and kept these days as days of rejoicing. This is obvious from

the object of these letters, v. 21: **לְקַיֵּם עֲלֵיהֶם**

וּגו', to appoint among them “that they should keep the 14th day of the month Adar and the 15th day of the same yearly, as the days on which the Jews rested from their enemies, and as the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a glad day, that they should keep them as days of feasting and joy, and of mutual sending of portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.”

עָשָׂה יוֹם, to keep, to celebrate a day. The

לְהִיזוֹת עִשִּׂים, v. 21, is after long parentheses

taken up again in **קַיֵּם לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם**, to establish a matter, to authorize it, comp. Ruth 4:7. Both the 14th and 15th Adar were made festivals because the Jews on them had rest from their enemies, and celebrated this rest by feasting, some on the former, some on the latter day.

Esther 9:23. And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordochai had written to them. They had begun, as v. 22 tells us, by keeping both days, and Mordochai wrote to them that they should make this an annual custom. This they agreed to do in consequence of Mordochai's letters. The reason of their so doing is given in vv. 24 and 25, and the name of this festival is explained, v. 26, by a brief recapitulation of the events which gave rise to it. Then follows, v. 26b and 27, another wordy statement of the fact, that it was by reason of this letter, and on account of what they had seen, i.e., experienced, that the annual celebration of this feast was instituted for a perpetual memorial to all Jews at all times (vv. 28 and 29).

Esther 9:24. For Haman, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them (comp. 3:1, 6f.), and had cast Pur, that is the lot (see on 3:7), to consume them and to

destroy them. **הַמָּם**, mostly used of the discomfiture with which God destroys the enemies, Ex. 14:24, Deut. 2:15, and elsewhere.

Esther 9:25. **וּבְבֹאָהּ**, and when it (the matter), not when she, Esther, came before the king,—for Esther is not named in the context,—he commanded by letters (Esther 8:8), i.e., he gave the written order: let the wicked device which he devised against the Jews return upon his own head; and they hanged him and his sons upon the tree.

Esther 9:26. Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name Pur. This first **עַל־כֵּן**

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refers to what precedes and states the reason, resulting from what has just been mentioned, why this festival received the name of *Purim*.

With the second **עַל־כֵּן** begins a new sentence which reaches to v. 28, and explains how it happened that these feast-days became a general observance with all Jews; namely, that because of all the words of this letter (of Mordochai, v. 20), and of what they had seen concerning the matter (**עַל־כָּכָה**, concerning so and so), and what had come upon them (therefore for two reasons: (1) because of the written injunction of Mordochai; and (2) because they had themselves experienced this event), the Jews established, and took upon themselves, their descendants, and all who should join themselves unto them (proselytes), so that it should not fail (i.e., inviolably), to keep (to celebrate) these two days according to the writing concerning them and the time appointed thereby year by year.

Esther 9:28. And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and these days of Purim are not to pass away among the Jews, nor their remembrance to cease among their seed. The participles **נִזְכָּרִים וְנֶעֱשִׂים** still depend on

לְהִיזָה, v. 27. Not till the last clause does the construction change in **לֹא יַעֲבֹרוּ** to the *temp. finit.*

וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר is a periphrasis of the adverb:

imperishably, inviolably. **בְּכָתָבָם**, *secundum scriptum eorum*, i.e., as Mordochai had written concerning them (v. 23). **בְּיָמָם**, as he had

appointed their time. **סוּף מִן**, to come to an end from, i.e., to cease among their descendants.

Esther 9:29–32. A second letter from Queen Esther and Mordochai to appoint fasting and

lamentation on the days of Purim. V. 29. And Esther the queen and Mordochai the Jew wrote with all strength, that is very forcibly, to appoint this second letter concerning Purim, i.e., to give to the contents of this second letter

the force of law. **הַזֹּאת** refers to what follows, in which the contents of the letter are briefly intimated. The letter is called **הַשְּׁנִית** with reference to the first letter sent by Mordochai, v. 20f.

Esther 9:30. And he (Mordochai) sent letters, i.e., copies of the writing mentioned v. 29, to all the Jews in the 127 provinces (which formed) the kingdom of Ahashverosh, words of peace and truth, i.e., letters containing words of peace and truth (v. 31), to appoint these days of Purim in their portions of time according as Mordochai the Jew and Esther the queen had appointed, and as they (the Jews) had appointed for themselves and for their descendants, the things (or words = precepts) of the fastings and their lamentations.

בְּיָמֵיהֶם, in their appointed times; as the

suffix relates to the days of Purim, the **יָמִים** can mean only portions of time in these days. The sense of vv. 29–31 is as follows: According to the injunctions of Esther and Mordochai, the Jews appointed for themselves and their descendants times also of fasting and lamentation in the days of Purim. To make this appointment binding upon all the Jews in all provinces of the Persian monarchy, Esther and Mordochai published a second letter, which was sent by Mordochai throughout the whole realm of King Ahashverosh. To this is added, v. 32, that the decree of Esther appointed these matters of Purim, i.e., the injunction mentioned vv. 29–31, also to fast and weep during these

days, and it was written in the book. **הַסֵּפֶר**, the book in which this decree was written, cannot mean the writing of Esther mentioned v. 29, but some written document concerning Purim which has not come down to us, though

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used as an authority by the author of the present book. The times when the fasting and lamentation were to take place in the days of Purim, are not stated in this verse; this could, however, only be on the day which Haman had appointed for the extermination of the Jews, viz., the 13th Adar. This day is kept by the Jews as **תַּעֲנִית אֶסְתֵּר**, Esther's fast.⁹

Esther 10

The Power and Greatness of Mordochai.

Esther 10:1. And King Ahashverosh laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. V. 2. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the statement of the greatness of Mordochai to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? The *Chethiv*

אֲחַשְׁוֵּרֶשׁ is a clerical error for **אֲחַשְׁוֵּרֶשׁ**. The

word **מַס**, service, here stands for tribute. As the provinces of the kingdom paid the imposts for the most part in natural produce, which they had reared or obtained by the labour of their hands, their labour (agriculture, cattle-keeping, etc.) was to a certain extent service rendered to the king. The matter of v. 1 seems extraneous to the contents of our book, which has hitherto communicated only such information concerning Ahashverosh as was necessary for the complete understanding of the feast of Purim. "It seems"—remarks Bertheau—"as thou the historian had intended to tell in some further particulars concerning the greatness of King Ahashverosh, for the sake of giving his readers a more accurate notion of the influential position and the agency of Mordochai, the hero of his book, who, according to 9:4, waxed greater and greater; but then gave up his intention, and contented himself with referring to the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia, which contained information of both the power and might of Ahashverosh and the greatness of Mordochai." There is not, however, the slightest probability

in such a conjecture. This matter may be simply explained by the circumstance, that the author of this book was using as an authority the book of the chronicles alluded to in v. 2, and is quite analogous with the mode observed in the books of Kings and Chronicles by historians both of Babylonian and post-Babylonian days, who quote from the documents they make use of such events only as seem to them important with regard to the plan of their own work, and then at the close of each reign refer to the documents themselves, in which more may be found concerning the acts of the kings, at the same time frequently adding supplementary information from these sources,—comp. e.g., 1 Kings 14:30, 15:7, 23, 32, 22:47–50, 2 Kings 15:37, 2 Chron. 12:15, —with this difference only, that in these instances the supplementary notices follow the mention of the documents, while in the present book the notice precedes the citation. As, however, this book opened with a description of the power and glory of King Ahashverosh, but yet only mentioned so much concerning this ruler of 127 provinces as was connected with the history of the Jews, its author, before referring to his authorities, gives at its close the information contained in v. 1, from the book of the chronicles of the kingdom, in which probably it was connected with a particular description of the power and greatness of Ahashverosh, and probably of the wars in which he engaged, for the sake of briefly intimating at the conclusion whence the king derived the means for keeping up the splendour described at the commencement of the book. This book of the chronicles contained accounts not only of the power and might of

Ahashverosh, but also a **פְּרָשָׁה**, a plain statement or accurate representation of the greatness of Mordochai wherewith the king had made him great, i.e., to which he had advanced him, and therefore of the honours of the individual to whom the Jews were indebted for their preservation. On this account it is referred to. For Mordochai was next to the king, i.e.,

prime minister of the king (**מְשִׁנֶּה**, comp. 2

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Chron. 28:7), and great among the Jews and acceptable to the multitude of his brethren, i.e., he was also a great man among the Jews and was beloved and esteemed by all his fellow-countrymen (on רָצוּי, comp. Deut. 23:24), seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his race. This description of Mordochai's position with respect both to the king and his own people has, as expressive of an exalted frame of mind, a rhetorical and poetic tinge. Hence it contains such expressions as רַב אֶחָיו, the fulness of his brethren, דָּרַשׁ דְּבַר; comp. Ps. 122:9, Jer. 38:4. On טוֹב

שָׁלוֹם, comp. Ps. 85:9, 35:20, 27:3. זָרַע in parallelism with עַמּוֹ is not the descendants of Mordochai, or his people, but his race. Comp. on this signification of זָרַע, 2 Kings 11:1, Isa. 61:9. The meaning of the two last phrases is: Mordochai procured both by word and deed the good and prosperity of his people. And this is the way in which honour and fortune are attained, the way inculcated by the author of the 34th Psalm in vv. 13–15, when teaching the fear of the Lord.