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THE THEBAN LEGION.

BY PROF. W. M. BLACKBURN.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BELT AND THE VINE-BRANCH.

IT was March, 292. The emperors were in council at Nicomedia. The empire was governed too much, and hence rebellions were frequent in the provinces. But they resolved to govern it more, and terrify men into submission. These two Augusti determined to appoint two Cæsars, or sub-emperors.

"I choose Galerius," said Diocletian. Thus the milder man selected a savage.

"I choose Constantius Chlorus," said Maximian. The savage man chose one of the most humane, liberal, temperate and tolerant of all his generals. Constantius was the only one of the four who had in his veins the blood of the old Roman nobility. He was now forty-two years of age. At Drepanum, it seems, he had married Helena, an innkeeper's daughter, who became the beautiful Josephine of that age, the heroic saint of the traditions.

To bind them closer to the emperors, these two Cæsars must be divorced from their wives, and marry into the imperial families. The law was made. Certain women were shocked; others

fairly shrieked. Poor Helena! It was heart-breaking to see Theodora wedded to the man whom she knew was acting from mere political interest. She retired with her son Constantine, then twenty years of age, and waited until he should overthrow the tyrants, rise above paganism, and lift her out of obscurity.

"Must it be so?" said Valeria, when told that Galerius was to be her husband. "I hated him when he was bringing us home from Alexandria." Had Maurice been chosen Cæsar she would have sung for joy. "Romans have no heart in these affairs." Nor did they teach their children to have much conscience.

Galerius, the lowest in rank, was bent upon making himself chief of the four rulers. One of his plans was to force men to enlist in the army, and then corrupt or crush the Christian element in it. Maximian agreed with him. This was the process of years; it began with the lesser tests; it ended in deathly trials. He breathed his malice at court; it slowly ate like rust upon the finer qualities of Diocletian.

The tests were two: the adoration of the emperor and sacrifice to the gods. In the one case it was to deify a man; in the other to make offerings to an

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A DAY AT SHUSHAN.

BY REV. WM. P. BREED, D. D.

TWO lines, the one running eastward from Norfolk, Va., across the Atlantic, across north-western Africa, across Palestine a little north of Jerusalem, across Mesopotamia a little south of Babylon, and on, some two hundred miles beyond—the other running northward from the north-western extremity of the Persian Gulf toward the southwestern extremity of the Caspian—these two lines would cross each other just over the ruins of Shushan. Excavations into one of those huge mounds that are found here, have disclosed, in a mine of choice architectural fragments, the position of so many bases of columns, some of the bases yet in place, as to indicate the whole ground-plan of a once imposing and sumptuous edifice. And, what is as remarkable as it is gratifying, on certain of these bases legible inscriptions are found, a portion of which is in these words: "Says Artaxerxes (Muemon), son of King Darius, son of Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, son of Darius Hystaspes, Darius (Hystaspes) my ancestor built this temple (or edifice), and afterward it was repaired by Artaxerxes my grandfather." Thus this building was in existence during the times of Esther; and respecting it, James Ferguson, Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, remarks: "There seems no reasonable doubt but that it was in front of one of the lateral porticos of this building that Ahasuerus made the feast mentioned in the first chapter of the book of Esther. Researches here and in the surrounding regions enable us to set this building thus before the eye.

First, there rises a mound of earth fifty feet high, walled up on every side, and one thousand feet square. On its northern side massive gates admit to a broad stairway of marble leading to the upper level. About one

hundred feet southward from the head of the stairs, upon this elevated platform, stands the "King's Gate" (Esther ii. 9), a hall one hundred feet square, its roof resting upon an exterior wall and four massive pillars within. Here the courtiers assembled day by day to await the commands of the king. Passing through this hall and looking out from its southern door, over a space of two hundred feet, you see the royal palace. It consists:

1. Of a central hall 145 feet square, embracing 36 pillars separated from each other by some 27 feet. These pillars are 60 feet high, and crowned with capitals elaborately carved. They are fluted, and rest on bases richly ornamented. The walls of this hall are gaudily frescoed on the inner sides, and the tessellated floor covered here and there with carpets of costly material and brilliant colors.

2. Projecting from this hall northward is an imposing portico, as wide as the main building, and 100 feet deep. Its roof is supported by two rows of pillars, 60 feet high, 27 feet apart, and resting on bell-shaped bases. Then on the eastern side of the central hall is another portico just like the northern one, and on the west side another. Thus you see the central edifice flanked and fronted by these three imposing porticos.

3. On the top of the main building rises the *talar* or temple of like dimensions in length and breadth, and fifty feet high!

The grounds around these edifices to the edge of the plateau form "the court of the garden of the king's palace." Esther i. 5. There, between neat parterres decked with the choicest of Persia's plants, are walks and wider areas of various shapes and dimensions paved with marble, "red and blue, and black and white" (Esther

i. 6), in all manner of cunning designs. Along either side of these paved spaces are marble pillars, and in these pillars "silver rings." (Esther i. 6.) And now, by fastening to these silver rings with "cords of fine linen and purple" certain "hangings," or awnings of "white, green and blue," the marble pavement is shielded from the direct rays of the sun and the whole garden converted into a splendid banqueting hall. (Esther i. 5-6.)

Such is the imperial palace, sitting upon that plateau, fifty feet high, and a thousand feet square, that greeted the eye of the citizen of Shushan as he looked toward it from the street below; and on the other hand, conceive the view that lay before the eye of the monarch as he looked from between the pillars of his porticos, or from the roof of the lofty *talat* that crowned his palace! Groves of date and lemon trees surrounded by rich pasture grounds and golden seas of grain backed by distant mountains! Such, there is reason to believe, was the very stage on which were enacted the principal events of that memorable day at Shushan.

The chief actors in the drama were four. First among these let us name King Ahasuerus, the Artaxerxes Longimanus—the long-armed—of secular history, son and successor of Xerxes the Great. In person he was accounted the handsomest man of his times. In disposition he was a double man; in ordinary life all mildness and suavity, but when angered, a lion coming up from the swells of Jordan! The more violent phase of his character showed itself in crimson hues on his elevation to the throne. Artabanus, the captain of the royal guard, for purposes of his own, slew Xerxes in his bed, and then rushing to the apartment of Ahasuerus he told him that his older brother had killed his father in his eagerness to clutch the scepter. Blazing with passion, and without inquiry, Ahasuerus flew to the chamber of his brother, killed him upon the spot, and then put the crown upon his own head.

On the other hand many incidents in his life exhibit an almost effemina-

cy of spirit, and his whole recorded treatment of Esther is marked with the most considerate and delicate sensibility.

Like the king, and yet in many respects greatly unlike him, was that Agagite demon, Haman, his prime minister and favorite. Utterly unlike him when at rest in easy generosity and mildness, greatly like him in sanguinary ferocity when aroused. Haman was the embodiment of a proud, imperious, haughty, relentless selfishness. He was not an atheist without a god, nor a polytheist with many gods, but a strict monotheist with just one only god, and that god was himself! His one aim was to burn incense on the altar of that god, and whoever refused homage to his deity was quickly offered up as a burnt-offering to that deity.

In striking contrast with both these is the Jewess, Hadassah the myrtle, Esther the star—a young, beautiful, true-hearted, heroic woman. According to the record, she "was fair of form and of good countenance." Nor was hers that inane beauty whose charms vanish at a nearer view, but a beauty that had its seat in a "spirit finely touched and for fine issues." Amiable, judicious, faithful, pure, pious, through all the glitter of her regal glory she displayed the solid luster of that uncommon jewel, common sense. A poor orphan, a foreigner preferred before a hundred others by the handsomest man of his day to be his bride, and by the mightiest monarch of his day to be his queen, there is yet no recorded indication that her head was turned by her elevation; no sign of silly vanity, or weak-minded caprice, but a steady propriety of deportment, whether toward her inferiors, superiors or equals. The impurities of the court found no crevices in her character to lodge in. The higher atmosphere of the palace neither congealed her recollections of kindnesses bestowed upon her in her days of obscurity by Mordecai, nor chilled her affection for him. To the end, she retained undiminished respect for his judgment, and ever an awe for his authority. And the events con-

nected with that day at Shushan show her as a heroine whose courage and force of character will gain by comparison with those of any other woman of which history tells us.

The fourth of the characters whose action exerts a controlling influence through the drama, is Mordecai, cousin to the queen.

His was one of those characters seldom appreciated at their full value in society,—that of a good man. That he was a person of tender, delicate sensibility is evident from his treatment of Esther. Present, as we may suppose, when her last parent died, he at once relieves the parental anxieties as to the fate of the orphan girl amid the possible hardships, the probable temptations and the certain loneliness of exile among heathens, by pledging himself to act the parent toward her; a pledge he kept with full fidelity to the very end. As devout as he was tender-hearted, he maintained his pious integrity amidst all the temptations of the most profligate of courts. As resolute as he was devout, neither the example of sycophants around, nor the frown of a pampered and murderous courtier, nor even the command of the King whose word ruled from Greece to the Indus, and from Scythia to the Persian Gulf, could force him to “crook the pregnant hinges of the knee” to an unworthy object. Without what men call brilliancy, that often dazzles only to deceive, he not only shows himself equal to any actual task imposed upon him, but impresses us all along with the conviction that any other and higher task would be executed just as easily and just as well; that there are stores of force within him adequate to any emergency that may befall.

Such are the characters that act the drama of that day at Shushan. But as the events of that day are but the culmination and conclusion of those of days and months preceding, it is necessary to sketch those antecedent and preparatory events.

Years before this the family of Israel had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and carried into captivity into the

regions about Shushan. Then, after seventy years of exile, the great Cyrus had issued a decree of which many had availed themselves, permitting them to return to their old home. All should have returned, but worldly ties had kept thousands among the heathen, and hence the awful sorrow that now came upon the whole nation.

And now, in the third year of his reign, King Ahasuerus gave one of those protracted and profusely extravagant feasts for which eastern kings are noted, lasting in all one hundred and eighty-seven days, to “all his princes and servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces!” From pillar to pillar on that grand and elevated plateau that lay around the palace, awnings of brilliant colors were spread, and underneath, tables of gold, laden with gold and silver vessels, constantly replenished by slaves in gorgeous robes, with whatever might awaken and gratify the appetite. Other slaves passed to and fro among the tables swinging golden censers that sent out rich perfumes upon the air. Add, now, the splendid costumes of the guests, of the king and courtiers reclining under the shade of the great northern portico, and forming a fitting diadem upon the brow of the feast, the glitter of jewels, the tinkling of the many fountains intermingled with the strains of harmony from the royal orchestras, from cornet, flute, dulcimer, harp, sackbut, and psaltery, and you have a feeble picture of the sumptuous glories of the scene!

During the passage of the golden-winged hours, the king had made large display of the riches of his kingdom, and now, toward the close, the thought flashed into his wine-excited brain to round up the display into glorious symmetry by showing to his guests his best and choicest jewel—his stately, charming queen. At once seven half-tipsy lords were dispatched to bring her from the court, where, in imitation of her lord, she presided over a feast given to princesses of the empire.

Imagine the amazement and con-

sternation of the queen at the summons! It was customary on ordinary occasions for women to partake at public feasts with their husbands until the wine began to take effect, when they were courteously dismissed, and the dancing girls and concubines sent in. And Vashti saw at once in this summons a proposed virtual degradation from her rank as queen, to that of a mere concubine and slave, and like a true woman she refused to go! She could die; she could be degraded from her rank, but degrade herself by compliance with this drunken freak of the king, she will not, come what may!

Back go the tipsy chamberlains with their message. The king is angry, of course he is. Accustomed to imperious lordship over the empire, why should he not be angry when put to shame by a woman before such a presence. Well, let him be angry to his heart's content; this will be as vain to move the queen from her purpose as to modify our judgment respecting the admirable propriety of her resolve.

What imaginable reasons were there to dictate the course she pursued other than such as became a modest woman and a faithful wife? Is it so repulsive to female beauty to be seen and admired? Are the daughters of Eve wont to be very solicitous to hide their charms under a bushel? True, in our days, some of them by occasional freaks of costume take good care to forestall an idolatrous regard for either their beauty or common sense, but this, we fancy, is a refinement in prudence unknown to the sisterhood twenty-five centuries ago. And even these do not, as Vashti did, venture martyrdom itself to escape the admiring gaze of men. True, Ahasuerus was to her at once husband and king, but he who gave this unseemly command was the king's fool; he was "merry with wine," and as such the only authority remaining to him was that to order his chamberlains to shut him up in his chamber till he became a man again.

And now follows a ludicrously solemn conclave of half-drunken lords to determine upon a fitting penalty for the woman whose example will work

such terrible results among the wives of the empire. There will be a general insurrection of the sex, and "woman's rights" with all their honors will infect the realm. Then woe unto the poor husbands! To avoid consequences so dire, this tipsy tribunal decree the repudiation of Vashti, and her incarceration in the royal seraglio to weep out her days in brokenness of heart.

Days, weeks and months now roll away, and when the councilors have come to themselves they find to their dismay that the king has not come to himself! He feels keenly the loss of his faithful wife, and curses his own folly. He is moody and morose, addicted to bursts of passion, and his courtiers never feel their heads safe upon their shoulders. The royal tiger must be soothed, and with all the shrewdness of self-interest, and with all the cunning of the flatterer, they suggest:

"Your august Majesty, is not all the wealth of virgin beauty in the empire thine, and may there not be in the homes of the realm some one worthy to be the bride and queen of the great king?"

The king assents, and now all the provinces are ransacked by his girl-hunters, each servile tool coveting the good fortune of entrapping the choicest game. See them entering every village, listening for reports of this and that bright-eyed damsel, and without so much as saying "by your leave" to father, mother or maiden, hurrying her off to the royal girl-pen at Shushan! To the dismay of Mordecai and Esther, the latter is among them. Sad, indeed, must have been their parting. The law forbade even marriage between a Jew and a heathen, and now the strong arm of despotism may compel this Jewish maiden to the condition of concubinage in a heathen harem!

Up to this time, since the death of her parents, Esther had lived with her cousin. He had instructed her in the Holy Scriptures, had discoursed to her of the historic glories of the nation, had expounded the prophecies. And

we seem to see her black eye sparkle and the crimson get the better of the darker hues on her cheek as she listens to the story of Miriam leading out the damsels to the dance as the last link in the chain of Egyptian bondage snaps with a clap of thunder; as she listens to the exploits and song of Deborah—and, perhaps, she wonders if she shall ever be called to sing like Deborah, or dance like Miriam. If so, let her be patient, for the time of the exiled girl will come!

But now she is a prisoner in the harem, and there is her cousin walking pensively day by day up and down “before the court of the woman’s house, to know how Esther did, and what would become of her.” One strict charge he had given her, a charge to closest reticence respecting her nationality. For among the Persians, marriage with any other than a Persian was mere concubinage, and hence while the fact if known that she was a Jewess would not hinder her incarceration in the seraglio, it might prevent her actually becoming queen. The latter was bad enough in the eye of a devout Hebrew, but the former very much worse.

But now at length behold her: Haddassah, the Jewish myrtle, become Esther the Persian star gleaming on the diadem of the empire! And the election of Mordecai follows close upon her coronation. He now sits with the other courtiers in the king’s gate, that great hall near the head of the stairway that leads up to the plateau of the palace.

A treasonable and bloody conspiracy now intervenes. Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s councillors, plot the death of the king. But hidden within ear-shot of the conspirators is Mordecai, who brings quick word to Esther, and she to the king. The wretches are arrested, and being convicted on the testimony of Mordecai, they are executed, and the event is fully chronicled in the records of the realm. When the king’s eyes first fell on Esther did some good angel whisper in his ear, “Take her for thy wife, and she will save thy life!”

Perhaps so. The air is full of ministering angels always at work weaving the beautiful and intricate web of Providence.

We once stood on the summit of Mt. Washington and saw the sun rise in splendor, and then after a little pass behind the clouds that soon sent down a cold driving rain. And how beautiful the day that has now opened upon these cousins. The one a queen, the other in honored place among the ministers of the realm. But just now a horrid shadow, as from an outspread demon’s wing, falls on them—the shadow of a bad man. By one of those fitful changes, so common in Oriental courts, the princes of the empire awoke one morning to find themselves overtopped by an upstart, a wealthy citizen of Shushan—Haman, the Agagite. By what arts the serpent has crept into the royal bosom we know not; but there he is, and all subordinates commanded to do him the homage becoming his high station. Esther iii. 1, 2.

Tidings of this change must have fallen like a knell upon the heart of Mordecai. For this bad man is emphatically styled “the Jews’ enemy.” Esther iii. 10. He was an Agagite, of the blood royal of Amalek, one of the doomed tribes of Canaan. The two races had ever been at war, and now Mordecai saw them, confronted in himself and Haman on the very steps of the same throne! Collision was inevitable, and in the collision one of the parties was sure to fall. As surely as Haman lived he would discover the nationality of Mordecai, and as surely as he made this discovery, he would ply all his art and cunning for his overthrow. The crisis was not long maturing.

At a particular hour each morning the courtiers would assemble in the king’s gate to await the orders of the monarch. And hardly were they gathered on the morning after Haman’s elevation when lo! the latter appears, on his way to the king’s chamber, clad in princely attire, swollen with pride, sweeping on with majestic mein, and instantly in obedience to the royal mandate, all the courtiers are pros-

trate upon their faces before him. All? No; one of them, Mordecai, the Jew, stands erect in calm, utter disregard of the magnate! Full of himself and his schemes, Haman heeds those prostrate forms hardly more than the dust beneath his feet, nor does he even see the erect, solitary statue that bends neither knee nor neck as he passes.

Two or three times is this scene repeated, when at length the other courtiers amazed at the ill-breeding or temerity of the man, question him as to his course. Scorning prevarication, Mordecai answers, "A Jew may not do homage to an Amalekite." Now is the time for sycophancy to earn its reward. One of the princes discloses to the Agagite the conduct of Mordecai and its cause, and at once the demon revenge takes possession of Haman's breast. "A Jew is he—I will Jew him."

The next morning Haman condescends to look about him, and with the eye of a basilisk he gazes on the offender. And while he thus gazes let us also gaze. Let all the cowards in the world gaze on that man! It will do them good. See that Mordecai standing there, as Moses stood before Pharaoh, as Elijah before Ahab, as the three Hebrews before Nebuchadnezzar, and as heroic as the best of them! See that man in spite of universal example, that so often molds men like wax, in disobedience even to the express command of the king, and in spite of the wrath of a man who by a thrust of his sword may spill his heart's blood upon the pavement! A good man.

"A man of justice, firm in his resolve,
Whom rage of threatening tyrant ne'er can
move,
Nor the wild fury of the misled throng
From purpose strong to war with hatred
wrong!"

And from that erect son of Abraham, turn and look on that son of Amalek. If you have seen a spark dropped into a powder magazine, you have seen something like Oriental anger on fire. See it photographed in Daniel iii. 19. See the glare in Haman's eye. See his hand leap to his sword-hilt. Why

does he hesitate? A sudden gleam of intense satisfaction steals over his face, and with stately tread he passes out of the hall. Why this sudden change? Has an angel spoken to him? Yes, an angel-demon has whispered in his ear.

Drink not this thimbleful of blood! Consult the king and offer the whole Judean race in sacrifice upon the altar of the gods of Amalek."—Esther iii. 6.

Bent on vengeance he that day consults his gods. He casts the lot and lo! the lot falls upon a day eleven months away. Well, this will give ample time to mature the demoniac scheme. And now, taking the king in his cups, he secures his permission and his ring, and soon the couriers are flying on the wings of the wind to every city and village of the empire with the merciless decree—"To destroy, to kill and to cause to perish all Jews both young and old, little children and women, in one day—and to take the spoils of them for a prey."

And now a horrid nightmare lies upon the breast of Israel. From the Indus to the Mediterranean, every Jewish home is a scene of mourning, lamentation and woe! Think of those long weary months of dread. Wife and husband looked on each other and grew pale as they thought that in just so many hours the sword would be drinking their blood. The father gazed upon his eldest born and felt his hair turn gray as in anticipation he saw that boy cleft in twain before his eyes. The mother looked at her babe and sighed a fearful wish that it might die ere the awful day should dawn. Mordecai sits on the ground in the street at the bottom of the steps leading up to the king's gate, filling the air with his lamentations. The queen, startled by the report of his distress, sends him a change of raiment. Recognizing the gift as a mute request for information, he however pushes it aside and is silent. The poor queen now in deep distress boldly sends Hatach, her servant and the king's spy, to ask "what it was, and why it was?" And what a thunderbolt is the reply! Her cousin

doomed, her nation doomed, herself doomed, to massacre on one day and this at the instigation of Haman, and by the unalterable mandate of her own husband, and she charged by Mordecai to take her life in her hand and go uncalled into the presence of the king and seek relief!

"Tell Mordecai," said she to Hatach, "that it is death to go uncalled into the king's presence if he hold not out the golden scepter, and I have not been called to him these thirty day."

"Tell her," says Mordecai in reply, "that she is doomed with the rest, that though she perish, and I perish, and thousands more, yet all shall not, can not. Deliverance to some extent will come, and *'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.'*"

"Be it so, then," saith the heroine, "I will go, but gather the Jews and fast and pray three days for me, and I and my maidens will fast and pray, and so will I go in unto the king which is not according to the law, and if I perish I perish!"

Heroic resolve! Wonderful faith! Wonderful, how a sudden peril sometimes clothes even shrinking woman with a semi-omnipotence of will, a very heroism of self-sacrifice! Never did woman stand in such a Thermopylæ. The salvation of a whole nation from bloody butchery hanging upon her will, her word!

But the darkest hour is just before the day. The three days of prayer and fasting over, the holy angels, the while lubricating hinges and wheels, training agents, touching the mind of the king, praying now passes into action. There is a time to pray, there is a time to act. To act when one should be praying, to pray when one should be acting, each is equally wrong!

And now, she, so careless of her attire when first she approached the king, puts on her choicest robes. By this time she well knew the tastes of her lord, and whatever style or hue of dress best pleased him, that she put on that day. And there she is with death on the one hand, life on the other, and she ready for either! There she

stands in the inner court of the king's palace. The crowned king is on his throne of gold and ivory, in that hall tapestried with all the wealth of Persian art, gorgeous with all the glory of Persian decoration, pillars sixty feet high, carved with all the elaborate extravagance of Persian taste, floor sheeted with cunningly wrought mosaic, and princes, and satraps, and ambassadors from foreign courts standing round.

A gentle step, a gentle rustling of garments, and lo, all eyes are fixed in amazement on the uncalled queen! Right well have her maidens done their work upon her to-day. Never robes hung more gracefully, folding about her as if they loved her. Diamonds, like stars, twinkled among her raven tresses. The flush of a high excitement is on her cheek.

"Her eyes dark charm twere vain to tell!

Go look on those of the gazelle,
It may assist thy fancy well,
As large, as languishingly dark,
And soul beams forth at every spark!"

Fresh from communing with her God, her face aglow with the glory of a sublime purpose, see her seeking her fate and that of her nation in the eye of her husband!

But even this strain upon her nerves is not so hard to bear as that of the reaction when she descries the light of his old love kindling in his eye, the old smile stealing over his face, his fingers feeling for the scepter, closing around it, holding it forth for her to touch. In a kind of joyous dream, hardly knowing what she does, she lays her jeweled fingers on that scepter.

What a moment in the life of Esther! Let the angels fly and tell the people what they have now seen, and the name of Moses will hardly be as dear to them as hers. What a moment in the life of Israel! The fate of thousands hanging on the smile of one man!

But when she gathers breath to make her request, our spirits sink within us. Encouraged by the kind assurance that what she may ask shall be granted though it be for half of the kingdom we hear her petition:

"If it seem good unto the king, let

the king and Haman come to the banquet of wine I have prepared for him." Is that all? What shall we now say? Why, we may say that the banquet was the usual and proper place for preferring important requests—that as her accusation touched the king as well as Haman, she shrank from preferring it in open court—that Haman was absent and he must hear her accusation.

Well, the banquet follows, and lo, another invitation to another banquet! What shall we now say? Does the queen break down under the weight of her burden? Is the whole drama become a farce? Well, let us say that she lost hope when she saw, with her own eyes, the influence of that horrid Haman over the king; or that the wife got the better of the Jewess and she could not bear to shatter the idol he so loved; or, rather, let us say that as the work rose in its magnitude to her view, she felt that she must have one more night of prayer. And then, the cup of Haman was not yet quite full! He leaves the hall full of gladness. But his gladness receives a sudden stab as he sees Mordecai sitting again, and that with a calm and even hopeful brow, in the gate of the king. His steed stands champing his bit at the foot of the stairway, and taking the reins, he vaults into his seat, and rides like a whirlwind to his home. There he rents his spite in the ears of his wife, and, at her suggestion, he has a gallows fifty cubits high erected in the court of his house, and that night he dreamed that he saw the Jew hanging upon it in the agonies of death!

With the setting of this day's sun, the great day at Shushan begins. During the coming twenty-four hours the clouds so long gathering will break in lightning-flashes and thunder-peals, to the amazement and furious indignation of the king, to the amazement and ruin of his favorite, and to the salvation of the Queen of Mordecai, and of long imperiled Israel.

The first memorable event of this memorable day is the sleeplessness of the king. Though weary his frame, though soft his couch, the king can not sleep. Sleep is a capricious bird.

"Sleep, gentle sleep,
Nature's soft nurse,
Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast,
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brain
In cradle of the rude imperious surge?
Even in the visitation of the winds,
Who take the ruffian billows by the top
—hanging them
With deafening clamors in the slippery
clouds—
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny thee to a king!"

Ahasuerus can not sleep, for the mysteries of a huge sanguinary horror are thickening around him. He can not sleep, for if he do, his palace, his capital and all his wide-reaching realm will wail with woe, will run with blood. He can not sleep, for, from Shushan to the Mediterranean tens of thousands of God-souls, on their knees in sackcloth and ashes, plead with Heaven that he may wake to their deliverance. He can not sleep—well, let him call for wine and music. No, he shall call for the records of his reign. For which scroll? The angels will take care of that! And the scribe reads how, that in years gone by, bloody conspirators sought his life, and how, that but for the faithful Jew, his blood had crimsoned the marble floor of his bed-chamber.

"And what, O scribe, has been done for that man?"

"Nothing, sire!"

"Nothing! Well, something shall be done for him and that right early. Whose step is that I hear in the court?"

"Haman's, sire."

"Haman's? Faithful man—always at hand just when I want him. Bid him hither!"

"Haman, what shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?"

This is the happiest moment of Haman's life! How his black eyes sparkle! How radiant his face! Of course he is the man to receive the destined glorification! Will he not reply—

"Give him the head of the man he hates!" No; this were but a paltry price for his ambition. He will first break his fast on glory, and then sup

on the blood of Mordecai. "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown-royal which is set upon his head, and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him: Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor!"

"And now," said the impetuous king, "make haste and do even so to Mordecai the Jew!"

Wretched Haman! Had the king launched a javelin at him he had not been more amazed, had not been so distressed! In all literature we know of no catastrophe more sudden, more tragic. An eagle soaring toward the sun, an arrow, guided by a feather from his own breast, breaks his wing, and down he surges like a meteor, dashing against this and that sharp crag, and there he lies bleeding and breathless at the bottom of the chasm! Pity him not. Villainy in this world is too much pitied. Pity him not; for had he not fallen, a nation had perished at his hand.

Wretched Haman! If he be the king's friend how can he not with alacrity hasten to honor the man who saved the king's life! And soon Shushan is all astir with the bustle of a great procession moving from the king's gate. First the royal band wakens the echoes with trumpet blow, and drum, and cymbal; then the king's ministers in court apparel; then Mordecai, in the king's attire, and mounted on the king's own steed, proudly comparisoned, "his neck clothed with thunder, the glory of his nostrils terrible, he panteth in the valley, he mocketh at fear, he swalloweth the ground with the fierceness of his rage, he saith among the trumpets: Ha! ha! he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting." He is proud of his rider, and proud of his groom. Well for Haman had he never been more than an ostler.

The procession moves on, the king

waving his salutations from the portico, and the queen from her window, on through "the street of the city." Of course Haman's house is on "the street." And as the procession nears that house, why are Haman's eyes so fascinated with his sandals, why bites he those lips of his till they bleed? What mean those whispers of the crowd? Ah, that grim gallows with its lofty top peering above the walls of Haman's house!

The procession ends where it set out, and Mordecai, dismounting, puts off his trappings, and humbly seats himself again in the king's gate, and Haman wraps his mantle around him, and crawls like a crushed viper to his home, the gods of Amalek in the dust, the God of Israel triumphant.

In his chagrin, increased by the gloomy predictions of his wife and friends (*Esther vi. 13*), he utterly forgets the banquet till the king sends to summon him. Sick unto death he still must fill his face with smiles in the presence of the king and queen.

And there he is in the banqueting hall, grimly scourging up the laggard smiles, the king happy with unwonted cheer in the consciousness of having just performed a praiseworthy action; the queen, well rewarded now for her patience and her prayers, yet burdened with the weight of the crisis. Hardly has the feast begun when the king, impatient to know what the queen will ask, turns to her and inquires:

"What is thy petition, Queen Esther, and what is thy request?" And now the queen is ready, and rising from her couch, a strange fire in her eyes, a tear forcing its way to her cheek, her voice tremulous with emotion, her hands close-clasped together, she answers:

"If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish! But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage."

The king is wild with amazement

and alarm, Haman starts with a convulsive shudder as if a serpent bit him, and courtiers and servants are dumb with astonishment.

This brief address of Esther has no superior in the records of eloquence. It meets to the full the requisitions specified by a master: "Eloquence can not be brought from far, words can not compass it. It comes, if it come at all, like the outbursting of a fountain from the earth, or the bursting of volcanic fires. When the lives of men, the fate of women, children and country, hang upon the decision of the hour, then patriotism is eloquent, then self-devotion is eloquent. The clear conception, the high purpose, the firm resolve, the dauntless spirit, speaking on the tongue, beaming from the eye, informing every feature, and urging the whole man onward, right onward, to his object. This is eloquence, or rather it is something higher than eloquence—it is action, noble, sublime, godlike action."

Such was the eloquence of Esther: "If I, a poor parentless maiden, found grace in thy sight"—the king thinks of the first time he saw her—"and if it please the king, let my life be given unto me"—her life, too, in danger as mine was—"and the life of my people"—her people, who are her people?—"for we are sold, somebody has sold, and somebody has bought us, not for bondage merely, or I had been silent, but for butchery."

Now look at Ahasuerus. The burning words of the queen have set him on fire. A moment ago all courtliness and smiles, now he seems like—

"A black cloud,
With heaven's artillery fraught, rattling on
O'er the Caspian."

And now hear the thunder:

"Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so. Who has been putting up my queen and my subjects for sale in the shambles—for sale to bloody butchery?"

But the king's surprise is only begun. As yet all is indefinite and vague. An awful storm has burst in upon the banquet, and it remains for the queen, the sublime spirit of the storm, to point the lightning where to smite. Fixing

her black eye on the monster, and pointing at him with her finger, trembling with the high excitement of the moment, she adds, with the unsparing energy and severity of truth:

"*The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.*" It were worth a long journey to look in upon that scene. Esther, in her temporary transformation; the servants and chamberlains in their amazement and alarm; Haman, in the pallor of despair, and the king, the whole truth just flashed upon him that the Jews were that people for whose slaughter this man had offered to pay those ten thousand talents of silver, and his queen among them!

Haman cowers in the dust, and the king, half frantic with rage, rushes out into the palace garden. Haman now prostrates himself upon the foot of the couch upon which the exhausted queen has cast herself, and begs for pardon. But it is too late; the king rushing back, interprets his very attitude into an intention of further crime, and his menials cover the culprit's face as one condemned to execution. And now the sycophant Harbonah pours oil on the fires of royal wrath by informing of the gallows awaiting Mordecai, and the king thunders out:

"Hang *him* thereon." And they did so. "And on that day did King Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai come before the king; and the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman."

What a day—that day in Shushan! The beginning of that day saw Haman wearing the king's ring as prime minister of the realm, and that grim gallows waiting for Mordecai; its close saw Mordecai wearing that ring and Haman hanging upon that gallows. The beginning of the day saw Mordecai in Haman's purpose, condemned and executed without trial; its end saw Haman actually condemned and executed without trial. The beginning of the day had seen the whole Jewish na-

tion—hundreds of thousands of men, women, children, gray-haired age, golden-haired infancy, smiling in the mother's arms—doomed to bloody slaughter, under an inexorable unchangeable Medo-Persian decree; its end saw measures taken for a counter decree which should deliver Israel with a great salvation.

Have you not, in years gone by, been suddenly thrilled with the feeling that there was good news on the wing? You heard a bell, or a shout, or the trampling of feet, and the hum of happy voices, and looking from the window, lo! flags everywhere waving, and now a whole chorus of bells, and men clasping hands and throwing their arms about each in cordial embrace. Yes, news, good tidings of some great and happy event! So will it soon be now in every village where children of Israel dwell in all that wide Medo-Persian empire.

There in that village, mocking suspense, in sackcloth and ashes, has dragged along the tedious hours of another day. The sun is going down, and lo! a cloud of dust in the distance above the king's highway. It approaches.

Whispers are heard: "A courier; news from the capital—tidings from Shushan." Soon the clatter of hoofs is heard as the messenger urges his sweating foam-flecked steed into the town. His dispatch is put into the hands of the magistrate. He reads, and as he reads amazement gathers on his brow. "Read it out," shout the bystanders, and he complies. A Jew hears it through, and then raising a wild shout he rushes like a crazed man

through the streets toward his home, shouting as he goes:

"Haman is hanged! Mordecai is chief chamberlain! Amalek is fallen! Jehovah is exalted! A new decree allows us to resist our foes! Esther, Queen Esther, has risked her life and saved the nation. Long live the good Queen Esther! Long live Mordecai! Hosannas to Jehovah. Hosannas in the highest!" "Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth; break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people!"

Like wildfire the tidings spread! And O! what scenes in those Jewish homes; what embracings, what tears, what shouts of joy! The stress of months of suspense has suddenly yielded; midday has thrust itself into the bosom of midnight, and terror has given place to a delirium of joy! And now the tribes of Israel sang as never before they had sung:

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, the Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord *hath* done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

Great, glorious was that day at Shushan, but a greater day is coming. A day when

"One song all nations shall employ,
Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us!
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shall shout to each other; and the mountain
 tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till nation after nation taught the strain
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosannas round."