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THE ACTIVE PITY OF A QUEEN.*

(Reported for the Society by William Anderson.)

"For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my people?"—ESTHER 8 : 6.

THE portion of God's Word to which, in connection with the subject of Christian temperance, I propose to call your attention this afternoon, is in the Book of Esther, the eighth chapter. We had better read from the fourth verse: "So Esther arose, and stood before the king, and said If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

In conversing with a brother minister, in Canada, during the summer, upon the subject of preaching on temperance, he mentioned this text to me as one upon which he had preached It

* This sermon is printed from a very admirable report, and not from the preacher's manuscript, a circumstance which accounts for its colloquial style.

has many times been present to my mind since then, and I gladly take the opportunity of being invited by our National Society to bring this matter before the people, to introduce the whole subject in connection with the sentiment of the verses that I have now read.

One cannot preach from this Book of Esther without glancing at some of the peculiarities of the book itself. The word-critics have been at work upon the book, applying to it the child's test of a proper Sunday book, and, not finding the name of God in it, they have been ready to question its inspiration. The fact that there has been such an imputation as this is sufficient reason for our ascertaining what can be said upon the subject. We should all of us know what is to be thought generally in relation to the authority of this book, because, although we may be a long way on this side of sheer unbelief, yet we may have such a feeble belief, accompanied by so many misgivings, that it shall have but little power in regulating our conduct; and we could not have very much confidence in speaking or in hearing words about the authority of which there is some doubt in the mind at the beginning.

When we look at this book in itself, it has certain peculiarities that attract the attention. It is, for example, a very faithful transcript of the general habit and character of Eastern rulers and of Persian courts; and, in this respect, it is thoroughly borne out by all that we know regarding those kings and courts from other sources. In so far it is confirmed in every detail that it touches by profane histo

rians, and although the lights we have from history on this period are comparatively dim and obscure, yet, so far as they do shed any light, it is of such a kind as to increase our confidence in the statements of this book. The style of the book is substantially the same as that which we have in Ezra, the Chronicles, and other books written about the time which it purports to have been written. It has just sufficient flavor of the language of the Chaldee and Persian to suggest to us that the book was prepared in the region of Persia. If it be alleged that it was written by Mordecai, a Jew, away from Judea, and in the service of a monarch elsewhere, that is only in harmony with God's method in relation to other books, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel—who were all in the service of foreign kings—having been employed by the Holy Spirit to leave written memoirs of the times and of the events in which they themselves had some share. On all these grounds it is obvious enough that the presumption is in favor of this book being historically true.

But we are not left to presumptions of this kind. Many of you are aware that there is a feast of Purim among the Hebrews, observed to this day, with very great care, over the world generally. Now, that feast, it is capable of proof, has been continuously observed from the time when this book purports to have been written. There is no authorization for that feast anywhere in the Bible but in the Book of Esther; and it seems to be impossible to explain the origin and continuous history of that

feast among the people except upon the assumption that this book is historically true. We are told of the hissing, and spitting, and other indications of scorn, hatred, and contempt that are seen in some synagogues when this book is being read at the feast of Purim, showing clearly enough how real and historical the narrative is to them.

But, then, a book might be true and yet not be inspired. And so we have to look at that part of the question also. We know explicitly what constituted the Hebrew canon in our Lord's time, and he accepted that Hebrew canon as the Scriptures. He had occasion to find fault with the Hebrew people upon many a score, but he never did blame them as unfaithful custodians of the writings God had placed in their hands. We know they held this book in such high esteem that they placed it by the law; and there was a proverb among them that there might come a time when all the books would be lost but the law and the book of Esther. Now, if he put his seal upon it and endorsed it, we are constrained to receive it in precisely the same way as we receive other portions of the Old Testament record, as given us by the inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

But if the name of God be not in the book—a circumstance which perhaps might be accounted for by the consideration that it was possibly written for the benefit of people outside of

the Jewish kingdom, and that, therefore, it was thought wise to leave the being and attributes of the God of Israel rather to the inference of intelligent men than to explicit statement—it is impossible for any candid reader to deny that the hand of God is in the providences it records. It is a series of providential wonders from beginning to end; and I am not surprised that Dr. Carson, one of the ablest divines of the Baptist or any other church, when he wanted to write something about the particular providence of God, selected this Book of Esther to be the subject of commentary, statement and illustration at once of the truth he wished to present. It is strange enough that Vashti, by an assertion of her womanly independence, should have been driven from the throne; but it is stranger still that Esther, a young Jewish captive maiden, not much above the rank of a slave in the country, should have been raised to the place thus vacated; not, perhaps, to the place of first wife and equal, but to a place dignified by the name of queen. The wonder grows when we find that her cousin Mordecai becomes so implicated in her history and in the history of the king, whose wife she has become, that he should be the detector of the plot against the king's life; that he should be the means of saving the king's life from the conspirator: that he should be in such a relation to the queen as to be able to communicate freely with her when the time of danger came; that he should be, at the same time, the occasion of the scheme for the complete destruction of the Jewish people. All

these things, surely, are matters of very great surprise. Then consider how many things have to combine in order to bring about the result. Had not the king been awake on one particular night; had not the reader turned to one particular portion of the Medo-Persian record; had not attention been called at the right time to Mordecai; had not Esther been in a position to influence the king—any one of these things being wanting must have affected the great result. I admit that one combination of these things might be a coincidence; but I submit, brethren, that here is an accumulation of coincidences which it is impossible to explain upon any other theory than that the hand of God is here. I would just as soon, by the laws of my own mind, believe that one of our ocean-going steamers had made itself and furnished itself for sea by a fortuitous concurrence of atoms, by an accidental coherence of all the parts that compose it, as to believe that the events that are recorded in this book have happened in any other way than by the designing, controlling, and infinite Mind that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will; that uses all the complicated forces of human goodness and of human badness, of malice, ambition, pride, greed, and revenge, as well as patriotism and love of kind, for the accomplishment of his great purposes; that employs even the wickedness of the wicked, and yet that is not wicked, but is most holy, wise, and powerful to the end. We need not, therefore, brethren, have any kind of scruple or misgiving in our minds when considering a

passage like that which falls under our consideration.

Esther herself is the central figure through this book, and a very interesting figure she is. Timid and gentle as a woman, enduring of the repression to which her sex is subject and has always been subject in the East, and yet with strong natural feeling, capable of exerting herself in a very high degree when a strain is put upon her nature, she is cool and calculating when necessity demands. There is everything about her to surround her with interest, and attract to her much of our sympathy. But, best of all, she is not unmindful of that source whence men and women alike have to receive strength, comfort, and guidance—that God of Israel who hears the prayers of his people, and who has taught us that, if any man lack wisdom, he is to ask of God.

I. Let us look at the calamity that was before her, in the contemplation of which she makes an appeal to the king, of which this text is a part: "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" Mordecai, a Jew, sitting in the gate of the king's palace, had been less subservient and respectful than was expected toward the prime minister of the king. Why he was so we are not told. It may have been that there still remained in his Jewish heart some of that hereditary scorn with which Hebrews were wont to look upon the Amalekites; but, however it was, his act aroused the malice and revenge, and perhaps also

the greed and covetousness ultimately, of Haman, the prime minister of the king. He scorns to take revenge on one man; his burning wrath will be satisfied with nothing less than the sacrifice of a people. So he schemes and plans for the destruction of all the Jews that are captives and exiles in the land. It is no bad illustration, by contrast, of the blessings of our freedom; it is no bad illustration of the evils and powers of despotism that the order for this wholesale murder is given with such promptness by this reckless Eastern king, and that it is put with such promptness into the hands that are to execute it. Esther is made aware, through Mordecai, of what is impending, and she comprehends the whole situation. If she did not, the timely warning of her kinsman would have shown it to her. She adopts the requisite measures; she takes all the proper steps to enlist the cooperation of others; she enlists the religious feelings of her compatriots; she gives directions that all the Jews in and about the place shall fast, which was her way, and the way of the time, of supplicating Almighty God; she engages herself in all this work of calling upon the Lord: "I and my maidens will fast also." Besides, she takes proper means, after approaching the king, of influencing his mind, she elaborates with care and pains all the plans by which it may be confidently expected she will secure his approbation, and be enabled to counteract the devices of this wicked Haman. That she should have to adopt means like these, that it should be necessary to scheme and plan for getting the ear of her husband, that she should have to resort

to these roundabout devices to conciliate his favor, may seem to us, with our brighter light and our happier Western home-life, strange and inexplicable; but there can be no doubt that, in doing all this, she was acting in perfect harmony with the arrangements of the court in which she lived, and adopting the means, strange and, in some respects, doubtful, as it would seem to us, that were best adapted to accomplish the result and to secure a favorable reception of her request on the part of the king, whose vassal she was.

And now, brethren, should we be able, any more than Esther, to contemplate the destruction of our people and our kindred—not threatening nor impending, but a destruction that is actually going on round about us every day and every year—should we be able to look on with unmoved hearts? It is a destruction, I admit, that has come in a very different way and by a very different set of agencies from that by which it came in this narrative. For the revenge and greed of Haman, substitute that love of gain that prompts men to embark in the liquor trade; for the usages of a reckless, oriental, dissipated court, substitute the common social customs of our time; for the destruction of those thousands, be the same more or less, of the Hebrew exiles in the domain of Persia, you may substitute the destruction of the multitudes of men and women, ay, and children, that is in progress continually round about us.

When a man tries to take in all the horrid situation at a glance, he is apt to fail altogether, from the very expanse of the dreariness that is before

him. It is better, therefore, not to try to take in all the situation, but to fix one's attention upon a limited department of the great waste that is being made by intemperance over the world. Take our own city. We have here four hundred and seventy places in which worship of some kind or another is being addressed to the Almighty among our million of people. I am told—the statement is almost incredible—but I am told that we have seven thousand temples where Bacchus is worshipped with a homage quite as sincere as that we have in our churches, and far more costly to the community, for I am assured that two millions of dollars a year are paid as a simple tax in the first place upon the spirituous liquors that are consumed among us. What are the fruits of this widespread heathenish worship? They are to be found not in the thirty-four thousand people that are taken up in a year for drunkenness and disorderly conduct upon our streets—about one-half of all the arrests that are made by the police; they are to be found not simply in the eight thousand people that are being kept at the public expense in our prisons, asylums, and hospitals: but they are to be found, dear brethren, in the ruin and waste of life in many private dwellings, of which the police can take no cognizance; they are to be found in the blighting of so many hopes, in the ruin of so many prospects, in the untimely end of many lives all over the city, and all over the land, so widespread are the ramifications of the evil that has thus come to be established among us. There is a way of making this subject

practical to you, dear brethren. How few circles are there into which some loss has not come through this prevalent sin! How few families there are in this church this afternoon that have not been touched more nearly or more remotely through this vice in some one of the circles in which they themselves move, if not, indeed, in their own immediate circle!

It is impossible for us, brethren, to exaggerate and overstate the evil and mischief that are being continually done in the ruin of men and women—their ruin in soul, body, and estate—through their indulgence in the sin of intemperance. In the case of Haman and his intended victims, if he had been able to accomplish his designs, the property and the lives of those thousands would have been sacrificed at a single blow. It would have been a sharp and severe blow; it would have been a thing done and done with. But that is not so with our social proscription that issues in the destruction of such multitudes. It is a long, wasting agony; it is a slow process. The victim dies by inches, so to speak; and not merely that, but he dies amid declining regard, lost self-respect, ruined means, weeping women, and sometimes degraded children. Fires burn themselves out; but this fire has the peculiarity of finding fuel for itself; for how often has it happened that the drunken wife has driven the husband to despair and to drunkenness, and how often has it happened that the drunken father and mother have communicated to the very physical nature of their children the diseased and self-destroying appetite!

How often has it happened that a family of social position and attractive manners has succeeded in inoculating a whole circle—perhaps a whole neighborhood—with a love of drink! How inevitably does it happen that, when a man has once embarked his means in the trade, his interest and his prosperity will grow with the growing love and passion for drink among his hapless neighbors round about him! Our fire does not consume itself for lack of fuel; it makes the fuel by which it is sustained and upon which it feeds. Brethren, if you think that I overstate the case, you can correct my estimate; but I do not well see how you can correct it, if you have been going through life with your eyes open to the actual facts that are continually transpiring around us. I think you will be compelled to admit that, looking at it in any point of view, not only in a social but in a spiritual point of view, this evil is so gigantic that our tongue gives no words that can overstate its wicked and atrocious characteristics.

Brethren, I am not speaking of some remote and distant era; I am not talking to you about the opium-eaters of China; I am speaking here, as Esther spoke before the king, of your own people and your own kindred. These drunkards that are round about, when they become paupers, you must support them; when they become criminals, you must detect their crimes, and then confine and punish them. And to what cost you are necessarily put in protecting yourself against them! As you take up the Monday morning papers, and glance over the crimes and casualties

of the twenty-four hours that have gone before, and as you look at the poor, besotted, degraded, and animalized wretches that have been suddenly flung into eternity by the pistol or the knife of their assassin companions, you may get a momentary view of the horridness of this thing. But you see only a part of it there. You have to look at all its ramifications; you have to think how it affects homes; how it affects religion; how it affects relations to God; how it sears conscience; how it blinds human spirits to all the interests of time and of eternity—these you have to take into account in making a correct estimate of the magnitude and frightful character of the evils intemperance entails. No wonder that any good man, as he looks at this state of things, should say, “How can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people? How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”

II. Pity is a sentiment. It is a fine sentiment. Sometimes it is a mere sentiment. Sometimes it evaporates in a little sigh; or it distils in a casual tear, and falls ineffectually to the ground. Pity of that kind is worthless; it is worse than worthless, it is mischievous. To have these pities that come to nothing does us harm—they weaken our character; they absolutely corrupt our nature, and they flatter us at the time that we are being good. That was not the pity of Esther; it was active pity; it was practical sympathy. I do not need to rehearse the steps that she took, and at which we have glanced al-

ready, which you can read for yourselves, if you take interest enough in the book to follow its successive incidents. It is enough to say that her aim and object, under God, were realized; it is enough to say that the tables were completely turned; it was Haman, and not Mordecai, that was hung on the gallows; Haman's kindred, and not her own, perished. The decree that he would have to go forth against the Jews was executed against his own people, with great severity I admit, but not with more severity than was natural and common in the times. The wicked was snared in the work of his own hands.

Now, my beloved brethren, from the example of this Jewish woman I would borrow a lesson for you and a lesson for myself. I would stir up in myself, and I would urge upon you, practical sympathy and active pity, like that exhibited by Esther. First of all, let us seek co-operation in the war that we would wage with this great vice. Strong evils, many times, can be best met by associated effort. The individual is weak, where the company or the multitude is often strong. There is strength in union, and there is a manifest advantage in Christian people being banded together in societies for dealing with this state of things. Information is collected, and then it is diffused; the weak are strengthened; the zealous, who have not always wisdom, are directed, and there is concentration given to the effort put forth. The human imagination—no small matter in a case of this kind—is impressed. I say, no small matter, for in a matter of this kind it is a great thing that a

young man, for example, with principles unsettled, and too weak to stand straight up upon his own convictions, seeing these societies, their organization and results, should be able to say, "I see I can refuse drink and not be despicable. I see I can put away the glass and not be counted mean. There are most respectable men publicly banded together against this thing, and no man dare call them sneaks because they pursue this particular course of conduct."

It is something to have societies organized and maintained for the enunciation of right principles, and the organization and extension of effort in this reforming direction. Young men who are here do not despise the aid which these societies can give to you. If you think that you yourselves do not need them, recollect there are many other young men that do; recollect that there are many who have been wounded, and have fallen down, and they are trying to stand up again, and recover themselves, and they need a great deal of help. It is very hard for some of them to pass by the door of the "sample-room," the decoy that is cunningly arranged for those who have still left sufficient self-respect to keep them from going to a place that is palpably and indubitably for mere drink.

Young men! do not despise these agencies and societies, but go into them and help them along; and if it should seem to you that some of the agencies are not the best, that some of their arguments are feeble, why, do you find better agencies, and put into their mouths better arguments, and

work this thing as it ought to be worked, for the benefit and recovery of your fellow-creatures. Men and brethren, strong men, do not you look lightly upon these organizations. You may say to yourselves, quite truly, "I have no need to be sheltered and protected in such ways as this." It is true, perhaps, of you, that your characters are formed, and your habits are made; your physical system is consolidated, so to speak; your heads are strong, and you can say to yourselves with perfect truth, and you sometimes do say to others, "I can take this thing or leave it; I can do with it or without it." Then, my brethren, if you can do with it or without; if your minds and tastes are in this state of equilibrium in relation to it, do without it for the sake of those who are in danger through the means of it.

Fathers! do without it for the sake of your young sons, if for no other reason. How can you tell but that their youthful steps may trip to that destruction on this side of which your slower feet have been able to halt? Think of them; pity them; care for them. I do not say, deny yourselves, for you say there is no self-denial in the matter. Then, for their sakes, put that thing away which you cannot but see is the slope down which such multitudes run swiftly into the sea and are drowned.

I make my appeal to Christian women, to mothers and sisters. Mothers and sisters! whom our love and devotion have crowned queens in our homes, whose influence and whose tastes do so much to form our habits and to determine the

character of our lives, to whom all manly gallantry accords at least the show of respect and of devotion, I make my appeal to you. Mothers, your sons may not be in any danger, you fondly think; but there are others with hearts as tender as yours, and they are being broken, slowly broken, by the ruin of their sons.

Sisters! it seems to you as if those proud and manly brothers of yours never could be seduced to ruin; but there are other brothers as brave and as manly as yours; and to-day, while I am preaching in this church, they are in haunts of unnamable vice, and they are crushing out the lives of their sisters, because they have thus been lured to ruin. I make my appeal to you, mothers and sisters; if these poor shattered remains of humanity could be arranged in rows before you, how would you like to stand up in the presence of their mothers and sisters, and say, "I helped to produce these results. I put the wine-glass to their lips. I made it fashionable and manly for them to drink. I urged them to the beginning of their course, of which this is—God forgive me!—the melancholy and miserable result"? Nor do I plead with you simply on man's account. Mothers and sisters! this is not a man's sin only; for, as I see it, this is a woman's sin, too, and in far greater measure than many people are ready to suspect. I dare not trust myself to describe the things I have seen with women, young and tender, and sometimes beautiful, upon whose more impressible temperament and finer organization the destroyer had taken firmer hold, and

with women no longer young, but whose soul and sense were dead long before their eyes were closed. For woman's sake, for your own sister's sake, I make my appeal to you. Mothers and sisters, discourage and discountenance the usages that make it so easy to learn to depend upon the excitement that is given by the kindly glass of wine; and, when you see that wine resorted to to give lost fires to the eye, to give lustre to the cheek, and to give fluency to the tongue, let me beseech you to see in these things unconscious prophecies of the time that shall come when destructive fires shall be kindled in the soul, when the hectic of disease shall burn upon the cheek, and when the incoherent mumblings shall indicate the confirmed and helpless drunkard; and, thinking of these things, I bespeak your pity. your sympathy, your active pity, your practical sympathy. "How can you endure to see the destruction that comes upon your kindred?"

Let not the church turn away from this thing; let not any one say to himself, "This is a mere platform theme. It is a sore upon the body politic, but it is a sore that ought to be handled only by professional men, and not rudely put before us." Do not say that, dear brethren, when the ruin is so obvious and so dreadful. When men are robbed, and wounded, and stripped in their helplessness in your way, do not make your model the priest or the Levite, but the good Samaritan. Stop, my brethren; come down; do what you can to lift that robbed and wounded man

who is still your brother, and do what you can in all proper ways to break the power and to scatter the influences that culminate in results such as now claim your pity. How shall the church act about this thing? Had Esther stood still in the safe elevation of a Persian palace, in unthinking indifference about the destruction of her kindred, who would not condemn such base heartlessness? And how is it to be with the church of Christ, his spotless spouse, herself reclaimed and won and saved, and lifted up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ—how shall it be with her if she has no eye to pity and no heart that yearns to save, and no hand to stretch forth relief, when such sin, misery, and wholesale destruction are before her everywhere? So I make my appeal to you, my brethren of the Church.

There are queens of society; would that I could make my appeal to those queens of society all over these United States! I would say to them, Catch the spirit and copy as far as you can the active sympathy and pity of this Hebrew woman—this patriot of the olden time. When two weeks bring round the genial Thanksgiving Day, and when the young and old gather round the family board, ye queens of society, ye queens in our homes, do not put the wine-glass in their hands, do not put the poisonous beverage to their lips. In that clear crystal of pure water, believe me, is better far than the wine, rosy though it be; for at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. And when the New Year's Day comes round, and when

your friends are gathered in your parlors, let there be the freest interchange of all kindly good-will; let there be unhindered flow of soul; but, O woman! do not, I beseech you, tempt man again by putting the forbidden fruit to his lips. It may be good-nature and kindliness in you, but, oh! recollect it may be death to him.

I can hardly think of any one of the causes that we are in the habit of pleading from our pulpits, the arguments for which have not some application to the case of the intemperate. I can hardly think of an argument for foreign or home missions that has not some appropriateness in the connection in which I now speak to you. I would have you look with interest upon these temperance organizations, and help them. Do not trouble yourself about certain differences of opinion among those who are intent upon reform in this direction. Perhaps from some constitutional incapacity to follow it, I am conscious of a kind of impatience of minute argumentation on subjects where broad and sufficient and unquestioned views exist on which we are all agreed that we ought to act. It is here precisely as it is among men who are seeking political reform. Good men have said to themselves, and I hope will continue to say it to the end, "Why, this is not a question as between one party and another party; it is a question between men of whom we hope the best, and men who are evidently and undeniably bad." One man has one view of the method in which this thing ought to

be antagonized, and another has a somewhat modified view ; but, brethren, there is substantial agreement among us that the thing is bad, "only evil, and that continually." Let us, with such light, views, and convictions as we have, contend against it, until the causes of the waste and destruction of so many of our people and our kindred be swept utterly away.

If there is any people on the face of the earth that ought to be in earnest about this thing, it is the American people. If there is a land upon the face of the earth that ought to be intent upon having things right in society, in law, and in fact upon this matter, it is this. Only think, with our universal suffrage, your property, your liberty, and, with our elective judiciary, your very lives, may be bought and sold for rum. In view of the things that have transpired within these years past, I should not have wondered any day if I had seen an indignant and injured community spring to its feet, and say, in the presence of the nation, to these tools of corruption: ' When our fathers decided upon manhood suffrage, they meant the ballot for *men*, not for imbruted, not for ignorant men, not for savages, but for MEN. And we must take care in future that this dreadful power for good or for evil be kept only in the hands of men." But there is no use in plying with an argument like this these tools of corruption themselves. It is from a sphere to which they do not rise; it has to do with interests of which they take no cognizance. Men who are lost to all sense of what they owe to God and to

man are not likely to care about great political principles: they are above their pursuits and above their perceptions.

I leave this with you, Christian people, for, after all, you must bear the great burden and weight of this great work in the world. You know the value of immortal souls, for Christ has saved you; you know the deceitfulness of sin, for you are continually on your guard against the destroyer. Divine grace has reached you and redeemed you; divine pity awoke its echoes in your soul, and led you to trust and love Almighty God. Under the influence of that kind of pity, you, Christians, must look upon your suffering fellow-creatures; and, having a clear and distinct perception of all the issues in time and eternity, you can say with an intelligence that others do not feel, "How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" May God help all of us to be faithful in our place, and to exhibit always that active pity and practical sympathy of which the text gives us such a beautiful example!