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HAMAN AND MORDECAI.

HADASSAH

AND

THE COURT OF KING AHASUERUS.

BY THE

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HADASSAH.

CHAPTER I.

ESTHER is the last of the historical books of the Old Testament. From this time to the birth of Christ, we have no inspired record of the affairs of the Jews. Several learned men have furnished a supplement to the sacred history, but none of them "wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

The account of the remarkable woman from whom the book has its name, is so blended with the story of others, that we cannot write of her

without making some mention of them. The wicked have always been intermingled so closely with the good, like tares among the wheat, that they cannot be wholly separated in history. Some of the most important events in the church have been brought to pass through the agency of her enemies, just as many who helped to build the ark, failed of the salvation it procured for others. Before we proceed, therefore, to the history of this distinguished woman, who looms largest in the book, we must give a brief account of some who were connected with her in many of her acts, but who were moved by a very different spirit.

The first of these, whom I will mention, is king Ahasuerus.

This celebrated prince was called Ard-

sheer, by the Persians over whom he reigned, and Artaxerxes Macrochir or Longimanus, (which means long-handed,) by the Greeks, from the fact that one of his hands was longer than the other. A third, more common, and better known name is Ahasuerus. The book of Esther tells us that his dominions extended from Judea even unto Ethiopia, and this account is confirmed by the heathen historian Xenophon.

It would be wholly out of my power to give you any just idea of the splendour in which these ancient kings reigned, and of the "white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble" in the palace of Shushan. The couches were covered with gold and silver cloth, on

which the royal guests reclined. The pavement was of a red, and blue, and white, and black marble," called by us Mosaic work, invented by the Asiatics, and borrowed from them by the Greeks and the Romans. Nor can we describe their costly feasts, the various meats and all sorts of luxuries in which they indulged, or the strong drinks by which they became intoxicated.

It appears that king Ahasuerus had a wife of remarkable beauty, whose name was Vashti, of whom he was very proud. At a great feast appointed to celebrate his success over his ambitious brother Hystaspes, after the king had drunk so much wine as hardly to know what he said or did, he commanded his seven chamberlains to go to the queen's apartments and fetch

her forth, wearing "the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty." But what woman possessing even a common share of prudence and modesty, could consent to expose herself to the view of such a group of drunken revellers? Her courage, it seems, was equal to her delicacy, and she refused to go. The disobedience, as she perhaps expected, gave her silly husband the highest offence, and the immediate penalty was not only her dismissal from the palace, but her separation from the royal household, upon the pretence that her example would have a bad influence, and make other wives disrespectful and rebellious. The account given of the selection of her successor, and of the preparatory steps of her advancement to the

vacant place of Vashti, you will find minutely told in the second chapter of Esther. It appears that, after having given free vent to his royal wrath against the offending queen by a decree which was "published throughout all his empire," "to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house," the king's indignation was appeased. To repair the breach made in his house, as well as in his court, Ahasuerus appointed officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather together at Shushan the palace, all the fair young women as candidates for the vacant place of the discarded Vashti.

This brings us to a third person who mixes in the history of Esther; a Jew whose name was Mordecai. How this

Hebrew came to be an inmate of the palace of Shushan, we do not know. He was doubtless a descendant of one of those who remained in the East at the end of the captivity, who separated themselves from the more devout portion of the captives, that constituted a minority, and who returned to their own land at the end of their seventy years' residence in Babylon. This Jew, it appears, had a cousin much younger than himself by the Chaldee name of Hadassah. The word means a myrtle, and was probably her name before she came to the royal court, when it was changed to Esther, which, in Persian, signifies a star. Her parents having died while she was young, she was adopted by Mordecai, who brought her up as his own daughter.

The removal of the offending Vashti having given occasion to the gathering together of a vast multitude of unmarried females to the palace at Shushan to provide a successor, Esther was constrained, it is supposed, to appear among them, and to her own surprise, perhaps, if not regret, was selected by the king's officer, as suiting his own fancy best. She was, therefore, recommended to his royal majesty as the proper object of his favour, and was accepted. The king loved Esther, as much, perhaps, as he was capable of loving anybody, and she obtained such grace and favour, that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. This important event is supposed to have occurred on the tenth day of the

tenth month, which falls about the end of our year. -

Her coronation was celebrated by a feast for the princes and servants of the court, which was called Esther's feast, and to do her special honour, the king, at the same time, made a release of taxes to the provinces, and gave presents to all that attended him. This elevation of Esther gave her opportunity of showing sympathy and of procuring favour for her own nation, whose captivity was just ending.

But about the time of her being brought into so high favour at court, an event occurred which served to elevate her cousin and benefactor Mordecai. Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, conspired to assassinate their master, and their plot

being discovered by Mordecai, was disclosed, to Esther, and by her to the king, who had them apprehended and put to death. This was duly noticed by his majesty, who caused it to be recorded to the honour of the faithful friend, and which, at a future time, was to be suitably rewarded.

We now come to a fifth personage in our group, and who is no other than the celebrated Haman. This man is called an Agagite, and is supposed to have been a descendant of that Agag, king of the Amalekites, who was spared by Saul, but destroyed by Samuel. He was doubtless a man of parts, popular manners, good address, and was high in favour with the king, who advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. But

being thus exalted by his royal master, he was proportionally lifted up in his own thoughts of himself, and probably supercilious in his deportment towards his inferior officers, among whom was Mordecai. As the illustrious Haman walked out and in before them, they were accustomed to bow, and none withheld this tribute of respect, but Mordecai. What was the reason for this refusal we do not know. The most plausible explanation is, that it was a matter of conscience, and that the obeisance demanded by Haman was idolatrous. The Jews have a tradition, that he set up a statue for himself, to which every one was required to bow, as an act of adoration to Haman. In a prayer ascribed to Mordecai in the Apocrypha, he is made

to say in relation to this refusal, that it was not from pride, contempt, nor a secret desire of glory, but because he was afraid of giving to a man the honour which he knew belonged only to God.

CHAPTER II.

WHATEVER may have been the cause of Mordecai's conduct, his declining such a tribute to Haman, made him very angry, and he resolved on the destruction not of Mordecai only, but of all the Jewish people that dwelt within the dominions of Ahasuerus. Aware of his influence over the king, sufficient to secure his assent to any plan he might contrive to accomplish his object, he consulted his idols by casting lots to determine what time would be most favourable. The result was that the day designated by the lot was more than eleven months distant.

The next step in his plot was to impeach the Jews before the king, as not only worthless, but as a very dangerous part of his subjects. What does he say?

He said, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand (10,000) talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries." How great Haman's wealth was, how many he aimed to destroy, we may infer from the prom-

ise to pay for the loss of taxes coming from these Jews, amounting to two millions one hundred and nineteen thousand pounds sterling, in Babylonish currency. It appears that this tempting bait was seized—the bargain was made. “The king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jew’s enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.”

Thus far the plan succeeded, and not the queen’s people only, but the queen herself, were sentenced to destruction by a decree that could not be reversed, and all this, so far, without the knowledge of Mordecai. But such a fearful conspiracy could not be con-

cealed from the courtiers long, and it soon reached the ears not of Mordecai only, but of the Jews throughout the Persian dominions. Esther's maid and chamberlains also told her. It would make my narrative too long if I were to mention all about the panic that the news caused, as it became extended. How Mordecai dressed himself in sackcloth sprinkled with ashes. How the queen herself was embarrassed, and was at last emboldened to appeal to her husband in behalf of her nation, after having enjoined it on the Jews in Shushan, to unite with herself and her maidens in a fast of three days and three nights, while she was making the perilous experiment. The occasion which she proposed to herself, for approaching the king, was a

sumptuous feast, which she had it in her mind to prepare, at which both the king and Haman were to be invited. Such an attention from Esther was very grateful to them both, and was embittered only in the case of the latter, who, on his way to the banquet, saw the stiff-kneed Mordecai, who still refused to do him obeisance, delighted as he was by the queen's compliment, yet on telling the matter to Zeresh his wife, he added, "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." A vexation, a perfect nuisance, which his like-minded wife proposed to abate by putting the insignificant creature out of the way at once, and suggested that a gallows be made for him, that should be seventy-five feet in height. Hav-

ing, as they vainly thought, thus disposed of this old annoyance, Haman betakes himself to the feast with his sovereign, when the way being fairly prepared, the queen ventures, not without serious misgivings, to unburden her heart. She was well aware of the absurd etiquette of the court, which forbade the approach of any to the throne of the monarch without some special indication of his royal wishes. But in the present emergency, her scruples were overcome by the cogency of the circumstances, and she determined to go without waiting for the usual token, and added, "If I perish" in the experiment, "I perish." The case of her people was so distressing and desperate, that the consequences of her not going, would be

probable death to her, and if she failed of receiving the royal favour, and was disgraced, and even her life taken away, as the penalty, for her contempt of the law which governed the court, the case could be no worse. She could but perish under the displeasure of the king. And should the exterminating decree against the Jews be enforced to its full extent, she being one of the nation, must certainly perish under the operation of that. It was in such a state of mind as this that the queen addressed her sovereign master and husband in the following artless and touching appeal. "If I have found favour 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." As the decree against the Jews had probably been signed by the king, when he was drunk, and did not know what he was doing, the disclosure made by the queen's request astonished him beyond measure, and he abruptly exclaims, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" To this the queen briefly replied, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." The wretched man now discovered his dreadful condition. "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return on his own head, and his violent deal-

ing shall come down upon his own pate."

"The king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath, went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine, and they covered Haman's face.

"And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai. Then the king said, Hang Haman thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai."

But although the man was dead, who procured the decree, yet the exterminating decree was in force. The manner in which it was counteracted, was hardly less absurd than the decree itself. It was by the issue of another edict, not to repeal the former, (which the immutable nature of Persian legislation made impossible) but one which authorized the Jews to defend themselves. It gave them permission "in every city, to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them." Thus when the eleventh month had come, the time appointed of Haman, for their universal assassination, they were fully prepared to re-

sist the assault of their enemies. Even the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell on them. The result of the attempted execution of the opposing decree of the king, was favourable to the Jews, who slew more than seventy-five thousand (75,000) of their foes, in the provinces, five hundred in the palace at Shushan, and among the victims were the ten sons of Haman.

CHAPTER III.

SUCH very briefly is the story of these distinguished persons. Some might think it apocryphal, were it found only in the Bible. But it is supported by as much evidence of its inspiration, as is any book in the Bible. It is, however, remarkable, that the book of Esther does not contain the name of the Supreme Being.

In the Greek or Latin translation of the Bible, which is used by the church of Rome, we find ten verses added to the last chapter. Then follow six chapters that are not in the Hebrew, but which have been ap-

pended, nobody knows by whom, in order to make the story more complete. These chapters may be seen in the Apocrypha, and are so unlike the narrative, in style, sentiment, and everything else, that their spurious character is very apparent. But although this fiction with other apocryphal writings, is received by the Greek and Roman churches, they are not admitted into the canon by Protestants. There is, moreover, traditional testimony to the truth of the story of Esther, in a feast of the Jews called Purim, which originated at the death of Haman, and has been observed from that time to the present in commemoration of their deliverance from his plot for their destruction. Every year, in the month of Adar, which

corresponds in part to our February, the book of Esther is read in their Synagogues, when, as often as the name of Haman occurs, the hearers are accustomed to clap with their hands, stamp with their feet, and exclaim, "Let his memory perish." The little children have mallets, with which they strike the benches or the sides of the wall, and make the most lamentable cries, when this execrable name is repeated. But not to enlarge upon the evidence which entitles this book to a place in the inspired canon, the main design of this wonderful story is obvious. It is to hold up for our faith, the doctrine of Providence, as exhibited,

First, in Esther's favourable reception; then in Haman's disgrace and

execution; but most remarkable of all, in putting off the period for executing the decree against the life of the Jews almost a year. The time was determined by the casting of lots, and God so ordered it, that the day fixed in this apparently accidental way, was so far in the future, that the Jews would not only be informed of Haman's plot, but could arm themselves, to resist those who should attempt to carry it into execution.

Then what an exhibition of moral courage in the intrepid Esther as she resolves to appear unbidden in the presence of the despotic Ahasuerus, saying, as she thus jeopardes her life, "If I perish, I perish." In how many conditions of life are we constrained to adopt this lofty sentiment as our in-

spiring watchword. In the case of Esther we see the reasoning of one who is in the last extremity, whose present state is almost hopeless, and who betakes herself to a doubtful alternative, as the only relief from utter despair. Like the unhappy lepers of whom we read in the book of Kings, who, being excluded by their loathsome disease from the city of Samaria, were lingering in its suburbs at a time of distressing famine, caused by the besieging army of the Syrians. Such was the extremity of these men, so urgent their need of bread, that they were compelled to use the most desperate means to get it, or die of hunger. What shall we do? say they. We cannot remain where we are, for here is certain starvation. If we go

into the city, we shall inevitably perish with the people there, who are as destitute of bread as ourselves.

“Now therefore come,” say they, “and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die.” And you remember the result. On betaking themselves to the place of the Syrian encampment, they discovered that it had not only been deserted, but that the people had left it in so great haste, that they did not allow themselves time to take their silver and gold, nor even their provisions. The Lord had caused them to hear a noise of horses and chariots, which they imagined to be the rustling, warlike sound of the Hittites and Egyptians that had been hired to at-

tack them, and they fled in all the hurry and confusion of a panic.

The deliverance out of this dilemma proved to be far happier than they had anticipated. But even if the Syrians had not decamped, and these poor famishing lepers had thrown themselves on their tender mercies, as the only alternative from starvation, they could only have perished, and their reasoning would have been sound, like that which we here find on the lips of Esther. The queen seemed to feel in uttering it, that she was in the extremity of those soldiers in war called the forlorn hope, or "lost children," because they are usually all slaughtered. There is a post to be taken, perhaps a fort to be stormed, or a defile to be passed, which must

be done, or the cause is lost. If these "lost children" shrink from this desperate enterprise, they are sure to perish with their fellow-soldiers, and all die together. If, however, they undertake it, possibly they may succeed. But if slaughtered, they can but die, just as was felt in the case of Esther.

In the year 1813, St. Sebastian was taken from the French after a terrific bombardment, which laid nearly the whole town in ruins. When a breach was made, Sir Colin Campbell led the lost children, a little company of twenty-five, to enter it. He was severely wounded, and every man that followed him was killed, except one. Sir Colin was the gallant commander in India in 1852, who succeeded the

heroic Havelock, whose sudden death at the time, was the lamentation of all Christendom. This brave British officer led his little desperate band in the attack very much as Esther approached Ahasuerus. I will make the experiment, and "if I perish, I perish."

CHAPTER IV.

BUT what an appeal is found in this language of Esther to those who doubt or deny the salvation of the Bible. Among the disbelievers of this sacred book, there is not one who knows that he is safe in rejecting it. The ground of infidelity beneath the man's feet that seems firm while he is well, is found to tremble when he is attacked by dangerous disease.

An infidel in health, but what, when sick?

Why then, a text will touch him to the quick.

I do not know of how many I have heard that were scoffers at the Bible in youth, and when death seemed re-

mote, who have recanted on a bed of danger, and entreated the prayers of those Christian people whom they once ridiculed and shunned.

Not many years ago, a pious young man in Philadelphia was one of a ship's crew that sailed to the West Indies. On the way, he was a subject of mockery by a fellow-sailor, on account of his religion. While the vessel was in port, this scoffer was taken sick with yellow fever. So soon as he began to think his case desperate, he sent for his religious shipmate, whom he had ridiculed, confessed his sin, and asked him to pray with him.

Be assured, my young friends, such persons do not feel that they are safe. They often betray their fears unwittingly by the affected confidence and

boldness with which they deny them. Their disagreements among themselves about religion, and everything which relates to their latter end, prove that they are not safe, and do not feel safe. They are like ships at sea, without sails, rudder, or compass, drifted hither and thither, just as the current of their own appetites and passions, or the changing winds and tempests of popular opinion may chance to carry them. I could mention an infidel, who, though not yet an aged man, has changed his faith seven times already. Some of them will tell you that the soul will exist for ever beyond death, and others, that it does not exist at all. This philosopher says that at its departure from the body, it is absorbed in the divinity, and is lost in its incor-

poration with the Creator. He reasons like a Hindoo Brahmin. Another says that the soul is material, and that when the body ceases to live, both soul and body perish together. With one, death is a "plunge into the dark." With another, it is annihilation. John James Rousseau, one of the most candid among the enemies of the Bible, as well as a most attractive and popular author, says of his skeptical brethren,

"I have perused their books, have examined their opinions, and I have found them all fraud, positive and dogmatizing even in their pretended disbelief. They assume to know everything, but they prove nothing, and only ridicule one another; and this is the only point in which they agree, and in which they are right. Each

of them knows that his system is not better established than the others. Then why does he support it? Simply because it is his own; nor is there one of them who would not prefer his own error to the truth that is discovered by another."

Such is the account which one of the most eminent of the infidel fraternity, and one of their best writers, has given of his deluded brethren. He tells us that none of them have any fixed principles, they are at variance with each other, and agree in nothing but in holding one another up to ridicule. Am I wrong then in asserting that the rejecters of the Bible cannot feel safe? Do not their own admissions show that they neither know nor pretend to know what is to become of the soul,

as it leaves the body, nor whether they even have each a soul? Who among them can prove that, if he leave the world unchanged, he will not suffer this very perdition at which he jeers?

And what if I do? he will reply perhaps; and ask, can you that assail us offer any alternative that will make our condition better, or throw a ray of light on the dark valley that our departing spirit enters?

Yes, enquirer, we can. This lamp of heavenly truth, which you despise, has illumined the way of millions who have passed through that valley to the eternal world, as fully assured of a joyful existence hereafter, as they are, that they have had an existence here.

But if, for the sake of argument, we should admit that our Christian hope

might prove delusive, and we perish, we can but perish with you.

Balance, then, the skeptic's ignorance and fears with the believer's confident hopes and joys, and tell me which alternative any man in the exercise of right reason would choose? Whether with Hobbes to "leap into the dark," or with David Hume spend his last hours in playing whist, and joking about the fabled Charon and the river Styx, or with the Apostle Paul to say :

"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." "I

have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

But if disbelievers in the Bible may so properly use the queen's reasoning, how much rather they who acknowledge its truth, but have not yet felt its power! Like a man fallen from the top of a lofty precipice, who has lodged upon a projection half way down, you know that you cannot remain long in your present resting-place, and are not safe while you hold it. To leave the world in your present unchanged state, you admit, would be certain perdition, and if your applying to Christ, for salvation were, even like Esther's going to the king, a doubtful experiment, it would be worth your trial. You could but perish

should it fail. It would do you no harm, and might do you everlasting good.

But this is supposing a doubt, when there is nothing to warrant it in fact. The result is not hinged on any contingency. If you go to the Saviour, you need fear no repulse. Esther went without the royal token to invite her, and guarantee a welcome. But Christ's sceptre of mercy is always extended towards those who desire to approach him. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain. Ahasuerus, the royal despot, whom Esther sought, was a weak, capricious, and merciless tyrant. He cared for nobody but himself, and would stick at no crime, no act of cruelty, to gratify his lusts, and accomplish his designs.

But the Saviour whom we commend, and whom you need, is compassionate and forgiving, and the only condition of pardon on our part, is to hate our sin, forsake it, and turn with faith to Jesus Christ. The Saviour asks no atonement, and it is out of your power to make it, even if he did. Were you to lie a thousand years, upon such burning coals as the fiendish Cortes used to torture the Mexican Emperor Guatemozin into a disclosure of concealed treasures, it would not compensate for a single sin. No, my troubled young friend, there is no remission of this, without the shedding of that blood which was typified in the sacrificial offerings of the ceremonial law. And when the unoffending Saviour suffered on the cross at Calvary, be-

tween two thieves, instead of calling the twelve legions of angels to rescue him, he submitted, without resistance, to death in this ignominious manner, for your sakes. It was the innocent taking the place of the guilty, so that no sort nor amount of suffering is needed on your part, beyond what is inseparable from the anguish of repentance. You need no preparation but such as a beggar wants to ask charity, a sick man to seek medical aid, or a hungry one to ask for food.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come!” was the invitation under the Old Economy. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden,” is the corresponding language under the New. “The Spirit and the Bride

say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

CHAPTER V.

THE history of Esther, we have seen, is interwoven with that of other personages, very illustrious in the eyes of the world, each of whose story is an impressive sermon to all who can discover its moral. Look first of all to the great Artaxerxes, with his immense dominions, unbounded wealth, despotic power, what a pitiable creature, as he appears in history! How debased and brutal, though decorated with his crown, and jewels, and sceptre, and royal robes, drinking himself drunk, among his courtiers! What a fool does he make himself, when he

sends his seven chamberlains to bring Vashti into their circle of wine-bibbers, for the purpose of exhibiting her personal beauty! Is it not mortifying to think of it, though shaded by the oblivion of more than two thousand years, that a splendid monarch should so belittle himself, as to be guilty of anything so childish, silly, and disgraceful? Then his horrible cruelty and impiety of signing a decree for the butchery of so many thousands of his innocent and loyal subjects. Oh, this accursed thirst for strong drink, which gives the explanation of it all! How does it convert princes and nobles into swine, a palace into a sty, and is the parent not only of all sorts of meanness, but of the most detestable crimes!

Dear children, begin from your infant years to look upon this besetting sin of these Persians with abhorrence. Do not touch, taste, nor handle the tempting thing that made such brutes of them. If you would be saved from that helper of the devil, which is causing greater misery, and doing more mischief, breaking more hearts, and sending more souls to perdition, than any other of his instruments, let strong drink of all sorts alone.

Look next at Queen Vashti. What a delightful lesson do we learn from her. A princess in her lofty principles, her self-respect, modest and rigid in her views of female propriety, who had rather lose her diadem and palace than dishonour herself, than be exposed to the gaze of a rabble of drunkards,

though decorated with the badges of nobility. I honour such a woman, and commend her example to all, especially to you who are children, who, though in humble circumstances, may sooner or later be exposed to similar temptation. You may be requested to do what is mean or wicked, or else lose your place of honour or of profit. Let the conduct of Vashti be your guide and encouragement. Who does not think a thousand-fold better of this noble-minded woman for renouncing her place, with all its coveted honours, than if she had kept it by complying with the wishes of her intoxicated husband? What became of her afterwards we are not informed, nor do we care to inquire. We are certain that all whose respect she valued held her

in higher esteem after this decision, than they did before it.

But what a display of the wonderful workings of Providence in the life of Esther! An orphan Jewess, a descendant of that degraded people, who had been seventy years in a state of captivity. What an exaltation for such a child, and how amazing the ways in which it was brought about. But as Joseph was sold into Egypt, and was raised from the low condition of a bondman to that of Pharaoh's prime minister, to be the future saviour of his brethren, so was Esther's advancement the means ultimately of saving all of her own nation that lived within the realm of Ahasuerus.

But observe that this exaltation did not result from good fortune, nor from

accident. Hence, before she presumed to make her appeal to the king in behalf of her people, she bespeaks the prayers of those who were living at Shushan, and their humiliation, with fasting and repentance, three days and nights. Thus we see how the providence of God may take the poor unknown out of obscurity, and raise them to places of honour and usefulness. Nor can any of you be brought into circumstances of so great trial, that God may not, if he please, bring you perfect relief. He can cause a change in your condition, far more desirable than that of Esther. The Bible does not say that with all the good things conferred on either herself or her cousin Mordecai, they received a new heart. We hope that they did; and

we see much in the life and conduct of both, and especially of Esther, which leads us to think that they were sincere worshippers of the true God.

It is supposed that the extraordinary favour shown to Ezra by Artaxerxes was granted at the solicitation of Esther, who had now become the king's favourite, although not yet exalted to the dignity of queen. This learned scribe received "a commission for his return to Jerusalem with all of his nation that were willing to go back; giving him full authority there to restore and settle the state, reform the church of the Jews, and to regulate and govern both according to their own laws." A similar regard was manifested by Esther for Ezra's successor in the government of the Jews,

the godly Nehemiah. It was doubtless through her influence that he was appointed one of the cup-bearers of king Artaxerxes, a post of great honour and advantage in the Persian court, because of the privilege it gave him of being daily in the king's presence, and the opportunity of obtaining favours by the petitions he should offer.

In the case of Nehemiah, it was probably a means of great wealth, for he became so rich, that he was enabled to live many years out of his own purse, and to conduct the good of the nation without taxing the people.

The true exaltation of Esther then, as we may hope, was not her high position in a proud Oriental court, but in her dignity as a devout professor

of the true religion. And let it be understood by my youthful readers, that for any of you to be raised from a place among God's enemies to a seat with his friends, is to be lifted higher than Esther, or Mordecai, or Ahasuerus, in their earthly grandeur. It is to be made "an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ." To be the child of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and to be entitled to a crown and a throne, of which you can never be deprived, in the heavens.

But a most instructive character in the group is the wretched Haman. With all his honour and riches and everything else which is thought necessary to make men happy, he was perfectly miserable. Mordecai's stiff-knee was enough to counterbalance

the whole. Nothing could make him happy, so long as this Jew refused to bow to him. His mortified pride absorbed him and wrought him up to such a pitch of madness, that he determined on the death not of this one man only, but on the indiscriminate murder of every Jew within the domains of Ahasuerus. Did ever pride meditate a more atrocious crime, or procure for itself a more dreadful retribution? Before the fumes of wine at Esther's feast had left his intoxicated brain, he is dangling by the neck, seventy feet in the air, on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. But what was the punishment of unrestrained pride and envy and jealousy and malice in his case, will, sooner or later, follow these indulged passions

in every other. We should learn then in childhood to mortify all such wicked feelings as these.

If we allow ourselves to be made unhappy by seeing others in a better condition than our own, or because they do not show us all the respect which we think we deserve, our whole life will be but a continuous torment. Cambyses, a Persian king, who lived before Artaxerxes, killed his brother Smerdis, because he could handle the bow better than himself. Caligula, the Roman Emperor, slew his brother, because he was so much more beautiful than himself; and Cain murdered Abel, because he offered a better sacrifice. Nor would there be any end to the quarrels, violence and bloodshed in the world, if it were common

for men to be governed by the spirit of Haman. And what a contrast between the conduct of such proud and vindictive creatures, however envied or honoured by the world, and the humble, meek, forgiving Jesus of Nazareth? Artaxerxes sitting in his palace, was arrayed in the most splendid robes of royalty, that glittered with gold, silver, and precious stones. The humble Saviour was a pattern of simplicity in his manners, dress, and his habits of living. The Persian wore a crown studded with jewels of inestimable value. The only crown that Christ wore was platted of thorns. The Persian and his Agagite minister were selfish, cruel, and revengeful. But when Jesus "was reviled, he reviled not again." They hated their

enemies, persecuted, and, as far as they were able, put them to death. The Saviour loved those that hated him, blessed them that cursed him, did good to them who did him only evil. He spent his life for them in works of love, and at last laid it down upon the cross for their redemption. Whom then should we love or delight to honour so much as this divine Helper, who, as Mr. Newton has taught us to sing, well deserves the name of friend ?

His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end.

Which of all our friends to save us,
Could or would have shed his blood ?
But this Saviour died to have us
Reconciled in him to God.

Oh, for grace, our hearts to soften,
Teach us, Lord, at length to love.
We, alas, forget too often,
What a friend we have above.

CHAPTER VI.

IN the preceding account of Esther, we have noticed her respect for Ezra, and her friendly co-operation in carrying forward his pious measures for the restoration of her nation to their land, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The time of entering on the work by Ezra has been adopted by many as the epoch from which we are to begin the calculation of the seventy weeks of Daniel's remarkable prophecy. In all the prophetic Scriptures, there is none more important in proving, to the unbelieving people of Esther, the advent of their Messiah.

It seems a befitting sequel to our account of her, to append what one of the most learned and judicious expounders of other prophecies has written concerning this. I refer to the great work of the Dean of Norwich, Dr. Prideaux, on the "Connection between the Old Testament and the New," who ended his learned earthly labours almost one hundred and fifty years ago. Those who have read the history of Esther, will be deeply interested in understanding that celebrated prophecy of Daniel, which connects the time and influence of her reign in Shushan with the incarnation and crucifixion of the Messiah. The production to which I refer is contained in a paragraph of the ninth chapter, beginning with the twenty-

fourth verse, and ending with the twenty-seventh.

“ Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy; Know, therefore, and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city

and the sanctuary ; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week ; and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

That this prophecy relates to the Jews primarily and especially, appears,

First, in that it expresses the time that was determined upon the people of Daniel, or the Jews, and Jerusalem, the whole of which was seventy weeks, for their being his peculiar people, and for Jerusalem to be his holy city.

After the expiration of which period, as an end was to be put to the Mosaic economy, so they should be no longer God's peculiar people. The worship which he had established at Jerusalem was to be abolished, and that city shall be no longer a city holy unto him.

Secondly, in that these seventy weeks are weeks of years. As among the Jews there were Sabbatical days, whereby their days were divided into weeks of days; so there were Sabbatical years, by which their years were divided into weeks of years; and this is the sort of weeks which is here mentioned. Hence, every one of the weeks of this prophecy contains seven years, and the whole number of seventy weeks contains four hundred and

ninety years, at the end whereof this determined time expired. After this, the Jews were no more to be the peculiar people of God, nor Jerusalem his holy city, because then the economy which he had established among them, was to cease, and the worship which he had appointed at Jerusalem, was wholly to be abolished.

Thirdly, all this was accomplished at the death of Christ.

Then the Jewish church and the Jewish worship at Jerusalem were wholly abolished, and the Christian church and the Christian worship succeeded in their stead. Then the time which was determined upon the Jews for their being God's peculiar people, and upon Jerusalem for its being his holy city, being fully expired, thence-

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forth began the kingdom of the Messiah, and instead of the Jews, all the nations of the world were called thereunto. Instead of Jerusalem, every place throughout the whole earth, where God should be worshipped in spirit and in truth, was made holy unto him. At this time, therefore, the seventy weeks of this prophecy must have their ending, for they were determined and decreed for this purpose; and therefore in this they must have their conclusion.

This is proved clearly by all the events which are in this prophecy predicted to be brought to pass at the conclusion of these weeks. In the twenty-fourth verse there are mentioned six of these events, for the accomplishing of which these seventy

weeks are there said to be determined; and therefore at the accomplishing of them these weeks must have their ending. They are the following,— First, to finish (or restrain) transgression. Second, to make an end of sins. Third, to make (expiation or) reconciliation for iniquity. Fourth, to bring in everlasting righteousness. Fifth, to seal up (or complete and fulfil,) the vision and prophecy; and, sixth, to anoint the most holy. Now all these were accomplished in that great work for our salvation, which Christ our Lord undertook for us, and fully completed by his death and passion, and his resurrection from the dead; for being born without original sin, and having lived without actual sin, he was truly the most holy of all

that bore our nature. Being thereby fully fitted for this great work, he was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and with power, to be our King, our Priest, and our Prophet, for the effecting and accomplishing of it. And having, as our Priest, offered up himself a sacrifice upon the cross to make expiation and atonement for all our sins, he did thereby "make an end of" them by taking away their guilt; and, in so doing, he did "work reconciliation" for us with our God. And having, as our Prophet, given unto us his gospel, the law of "everlasting righteousness," which was not a temporary law, as was that of Moses, but was to last for ever, and to be our guide unto all righteousness as long as the world should last, and also having, as our

King, sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts to influence and govern us according to this law, he hath done all for us that is necessary thereby to restrain and extinguish in us all manner of transgressions, and fully deliver us from the power of them. And, in doing all this, he hath sealed up, that is, fulfilled and thoroughly finished all that which by visions and prophecies had been before revealed concerning him. And therefore all these events being thus brought to pass and accomplished at the time of Christ's death, this necessarily determines us there to fix the end of these weeks which were appointed for the accomplishing of them.

Fourthly. The end of these weeks being thus fixed at the death of Christ,

it doth necessarily determine us where to place the beginning of them, that is, four hundred and ninety years before.

The death of Christ, as most learned men agree, falling in the year of the Julian period 4746, and in the Jewish month Nisan, if we reckon 490 years backward, this will lead us up to the month Nisan in the year of the Julian period four thousand two hundred and fifty. This was the very year and month in which Ezra had his commission from Artaxerxes Longimanus, king of Persia, for his return to Jerusalem, there to restore the church and state of the Jews. That year was the seventh of that king's reign, in which the Scriptures tell us his commission was granted. The beginning, there-

fore, of the seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety years of this prophecy, was in the month Nisan of the Jewish year, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, king of Persia, when Ezra had his commission; and the end of them fell in the very same month of Nisan, in the four thousand seven hundred and forty-sixth year of the Julian period. In this very year and very month, Christ our Lord suffered for us, and thereby completed the whole work of our salvation, there being just seventy weeks of years, or four hundred and ninety years, from the one to the other.

Fifthly. It is evident from the prophecy itself, that these weeks must have their beginning from the date of the commission granted Ezra.

Can any thing be plainer than this is made in the twenty-fifth verse of the prophecy? It fixes the time "at the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem." The language is, first, they are pinned down thereto by an express character in the text; and, secondly, they cannot agreeably to that and other Scriptures, and the authentic histories of the times to which they relate, have it anywhere else. And, first, these weeks must have their beginning from the date of the commission granted Ezra, because they are pinned down thereto by the seventy weeks very expressly; and to excite us the more to observe it, the prophet introduces it with this remarkable preface, "Know, therefore, and understand." But this

was the commandment or decree granted to Ezra in that commission with which he was sent into Judea, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, king of Persia. This proves, therefore, that thence the beginning of these weeks must commence. Nor can it be placed anywhere else, so as to make the ending comport with the intent and purpose of the prophecy, and the accomplishing of the events predicted by it.

“There were four commandments or decrees issued by the kings of Persia in favour of the Jews, and from one of which, according to the express words of the prophecy, the computation of these weeks is to begin.

“The first was granted by Cyrus, in the first year of his reign; the second,

by Darius, about the fourth year of his reign; the third, by Artaxerxes to Ezra, in the seventh year of his reign; and the fourth, by the same Artaxerxes to Nehemiah, in the twentieth year of his reign.

“ But this computation could not begin from that of Cyrus, nor from that of Darius, nor from that of the twentieth of Artaxerxes, and therefore it must begin from this of the seventh of Artaxerxes, granted to Ezra.” The numerous facts recorded in sacred and profane history, which are quoted by Prideaux to sustain the foregoing exposition of the prophet, occupy considerable space in his learned work. To extend my quotations farther, might weary the young reader, and oppress the mind not less by the weight than by the wonderful

nature of the details. The evidence which they present of the Messiah's having come at the very time foretold by the prophets, could not well be increased, or rendered more conclusive. That it fails to reach the heart of the unhappy nation of Esther, who rejected him and nailed him to the cross, is because it is still covered with a "veil." And how animating to the eye of faith are those signs of the times which betoken the nearness of the day when this veil shall be taken away. When this wonderful people still "loved for their fathers' sake," who for so many ages kept for us so sacredly the truth which themselves repudiate, shall all be enlightened. Like the blind man described by one of their Rabbis, carrying a torch in

the night for the benefit of others, these children of Abraham, in their darkness and blindness, have not only held in their hands the light of the inspired Scriptures for the Gentiles, but in their stubborn unbelief they have been an astonishing exemplification of their truth. Hasten, O Lord, the time when they shall grope no longer, but with changed and exulting hearts shall say, with rejoicing Philip, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

OBADIAH,

OR

FOUR ADVANTAGES OF EARLY PIETY.

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O B A D I A H.

CHAPTER I.

It is a little remarkable that no more should have been said in the sacred history of so good a man as Obadiah. Very many occupy a larger space whose example and character are far less worthy of being recorded. Enough, however, has been preserved to bring him before us as a man of uncommon strength of religious principle. This is apparent in the brief story before us, in which we are told that he lived a consistent, pious life in the family of Ahab, king of Israel.

The occasion which brought this excellent personage to the notice of the historian, was a distressing drought of three years and six months' continuance, predicted by Elijah, as a special judgment on the people, for their excessive sins. This prolonged suspension of rain produced a famine which threatened the destruction of beasts as well as of men. But the king, hoping that the drought had been less severe in other parts of his dominion, proposed to Obadiah, who held the high post of Governor of his house, that they should make a tour in different directions to ascertain the facts. "And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all the fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and

mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass through it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him."

As the time appointed for the continuance of the drought was nearly at an end, the prophet was instructed to come out from his concealment by the brook Cherith, and show himself unto Ahab. Thus it appears that while Obadiah was on his journey in quest of water, he unexpectedly encountered the prophet, who requests that he would report him to his royal master. But Obadiah, knowing Ahab's embittered feelings towards Elijah, begged to be excused from a service from

which he anticipated anything but good, either to himself or the prophet. And Elijah said to him, nevertheless, "Go, tell thy lord, behold, Elijah is here." But Obadiah answered, "What have I sinned that thou wouldst deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab to slay me. As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee. And when they said, he is not there, he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, behold, Elijah is here."

It seems, however, that Obadiah did not fear so much for the prophet's safety as he did for his own. He did not doubt that the Lord, who had protected Elijah hitherto, would shield

him in time to come. Obadiah's impression was, that if Ahab, on being informed of his locality, should come to apprehend him, the prophet would be miraculously carried away to some hiding-place out of the reach of Ahab, who, supposing himself imposed upon by Obadiah, would avenge himself on him. "It shall come to pass," says Obadiah, "so soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not, and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me. But I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth." This heroic prophet was as good as his word. His purpose of seeing Ahab was carried out, and the results of the conference are recorded in the eighteenth chapter of the first

book of Kings. The dignity, lofty moral courage, which the prophet displayed in his interview with the king, who was not less rebuked by his own conscience than by the prophet's address, furnish one of the liveliest and most exciting narratives in the Old Testament history. But our concern in this narrative is not so much with wicked Ahab as with godly Obadiah, the governor of his house.

The short account here given of this illustrious man suggests many important lessons that are worthy of imitation, but which are of special interest to the young.

In the court of one of the greatest tyrants and worst of princes that ever lived, we have an exhibition of humble, earnest, and consistent piety, which

it may be useful not merely to contemplate, but to study. That he should have been not only kept from conforming to the customs of a corrupt court, have resisted its temptations, but even have secured the high respect of his profligate sovereign, amounts to a paradox, for which we have a solution only in the short record, that he had "feared the Lord from his youth."

It was the result not of superior intellect, personal accomplishments or rare prudence, but of his piety, and a piety which had been maturing from his youth. Doubtless he was the son of some devout Hannah, or Lois, or Eunice among the Hebrews, whose faithful training had been blessed to his early conversion. By the pre-occupation of his mind and heart with

the love and fear of God, he had been raised above the fear of man. The surface thus early sown with wheat, left no space for the tares. The successful career of this inmate of Ahab's house may serve to show the special advantage of entering the service of the Lord early. In this respect, it is a case that is suited to attract the notice, less of the aged, than of the young, who will see in the case of Obadiah, who served the Lord from his youth, four characteristics of early piety, which are apt to be wanting in those who are not born again till they are old. One of the most observable in the present case is portrayed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II.

UNCOMMON VIGOUR AND MANLINESS.

THE moral courage evinced by Obadiah in some of his measures, is hardly to be exceeded. The constant peril of a man with such religious principles, in a court made up and moulded by Ahab and Jezebel, cannot well be conceived. Bad as Ahab was before his marriage, he was made a great deal worse afterwards under the influence of his wife, whose control in the kingdom was absolute. Baal's prophets were made chaplains of the household, and the king's advisers, while the ministers of the true religion

were proscribed, massacred, and would have been exterminated, but for the heroic conduct of Obadiah in saving the lives of a hundred of them, whom he hid in two caves, where he supplied them with necessary food. Some Jewish writers say that Obadiah, to support them, borrowed money of Ahab's son Jehoram, who lent it on usury. Not being able to pay the whole amount before his death, the claim was made on his widow, who, it is said, was the certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets, mentioned in 2 Kings iv. 1, that applied to the prophet Elisha for aid. The merciless creditor went on collecting the debt, determined to avail himself of a law of Moses, which, as interpreted by a common custom, permit-

ted the claimant to take the children of the debtors in payment.

“Thy servant my husband is dead,” said she; “and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.” The prophet, touched by this appeal, enquired into her circumstances, and found that nothing was left in her house, save a pot of oil. Whereupon he bade her borrow of all her neighbours, as many empty vessels as she could, when the pot of oil was so multiplied by Elisha, that all of them were filled. Thus was she furnished with means not only to pay her departed husband’s debts, but to maintain her children. This account is given by Josephus, and confirmed by some of the best authorities

among the Jews. That Obadiah, therefore, should have incurred so great expense for the sustenance of these prophets, when he was poorly able to bear it, is only another evidence of his great personal energy, and of the strength of his faith. Doubtless he knew that the same Providence which had fed Elijah through the ministry of ravens, would preserve his reputation from reproach, though he might not foresee the way in which it would be accomplished. Such, however, was not only his decision in the case of the persecuted prophets, but such was his uniform course of piety, that the marvel is, that either he did not reform Ahab, or Ahab corrupt him. But it seems they were both fixed; he that was filthy, would be filthy still, and he that was holy, would be holy

still. The reason is that Obadiah had feared the Lord from his youth. His religious principles had acquired a maturity and strength which fitted him for just such emergencies. And here, my youthful readers, is a sample of religious character, that I would earnestly commend to you. In this heroic believer, who was enabled not only to withstand the seductive and corrupting influences of the luxurious Samaritan court, but defeat some of its worst measures, we have a model saint, who has been a pattern to all subsequent ages. And what a reproof is such a man's decision, zeal, and incorruptible integrity, to the throng of formalists, who, with all their professed crucifixion to the world, are floating on its current. They are just

as covetous of its money, as fond of its pleasures, and ambitious of its honours, as if they had not proclaimed that their treasure is laid up in heaven. Such professors, had they been in Ahab's court, would have joined in all its heathenish revelries, if they had not connived at the worship of Baal. Nor is there a greater reproach to the church in the mouth of her enemies, than that the number of these her ambiguous disciples is so great. And if any serious-minded youth would join the church, and add to her numbers without increasing her dishonour, let him begin with Obadiah to serve the Lord in his youth. But a second advantage of this early commitment to the Lord's service is prolonged usefulness.

CHAPTER III.

PROLONGED USEFULNESS.

How long Obadiah's valuable life was spared, we do not know. The whole of what is said of him being comprised in a few paragraphs, we know much less of him than this little makes us desire. Of the several Obadiah's mentioned in the Old Testament, amounting to at least nine or ten, it is remarkable that, with one exception, little notice is taken of them, more than to record their name. A short prophecy of twenty-one verses is ascribed to one, who is supposed to have been a cotemporary of Jeremiah. This,

however, is only a surmise of the critics. He is introduced to the reader, delivers his brief message, and is immediately withdrawn. Nothing is said of his family, residence, age, or parentage, more than is read of the parents, birth, and death of Melchise-deck.

The opinion has obtained to some extent among both Jews and Christians, that this governor of Ahab, of whom we are writing, was none other than Obadiah the prophet; the suggestion, however, is not confirmed by any credible authority. The most that is written of any on this list, relates to the Obadiah before us, who, it is probable, did not leave his royal master during the twenty-two years of his reign, and perhaps survived his tragical end.

His acts demonstrate that both his intellect and religion had acquired a maturity which required the experience of years. He is said to have feared the Lord greatly. As Matthew Henry comments, "he began betimes to be religious, and had continued long. It is early piety that makes the most eminent piety. Those that are good betimes, are likely to be very good. He that feared God from his youth, came to fear him greatly." For many of the labours of a Christian, especially the aggressive, the vigour, elasticity, enterprise, physical strength and health of youth are indispensable. Who has not observed that among those who, by reason of their late conversion, are "born out of due time," few become active co-workers

with others who entered the Christian life before them. Those old and useful disciples, who belong to the class of Simeon, Mason, and Lois, with a few exceptions, have "feared the Lord from their youth." It was at this early period that they were imbued with those religious principles which were the rudder of their life. Nor can any human arithmetic compute the good of which they were the instruments. Look at the noble band of apostolic men, who for the past half century have been emulating Paul's zeal and devotedness in preaching the gospel to the heathen. Such as Henry Martyn, Morrison, Carey, Scudder, Winslow, Loomis, King, Judson, Duff, and an illustrious host, that time would fail me to mention, who have been

planting gardens in the wilderness, and preparing to make the moral deserts of heathenism blossom as the rose. What would these mighty men have accomplished, had they not begun their work in their youth. And how many more could we mention, who, like Urquhart, Henry Kirke White, McCheyne, Spencer, Summerfield, and McDonald, had not served the Lord at all, had they not entered his service early. It was only the morning of their life when all these were called away; some of them, old men in usefulness, although their sun went down before it had descended to its meridian. A third advantage is happiness.

CHAPTER IV.

HAPPINESS.

THEY who fear the Lord from their youth have the prospect of greater happiness. This is the one thing studied for, laboured, suffered, and prayed for, in all states of civilization, and in all religions. And yet it would seem almost the only desirable thing which the wisdom of man is unable to discover. Any reader of moral philosophy will see as much wisdom, and as judicious counsels on the subject of happiness, in the writings of Zoroaster, Confucius, Plato, and other heathens who lived thousands of years ago, as in the best modern treatises on the same

topic, except so far as the latter have been improved by the teachings of revelation. And is not this remarkable? Look at the progress of mind in everything else. What astonishing advancement from the sewing of fig leaves together for aprons, up to the latest invention of science on earth, and the discoveries of astronomy in the heavens. And with such capacities for investigation and analysis, is it not wonderful that none could ever find out the way to be happy? But the wisest have failed, as well as the weakest. All their theories prove fallacious on trial, and the reason is because they have sought the living among the dead. The earth does not contain the essential elements of true happiness since the disastrous change

in man, caused by the apostasy. The universal mistake has been for men to seek it in objects that are out of themselves. No parts of the Bible are more fully confirmed by human experience than those which teach that earthly things alone cannot make us happy. No person ever leaves the world without finding it to be true, but too many never make the discovery till they are just leaving it, and then it is too late for any practical purpose. Hence the advantage of you who are young, who have the teachings of the Bible and of the experience of so many aged to help you in escaping their fatal errors. You have the opportunity of beginning right, in seeking to be happy in the right way, so as to make your happiness real and permanent.

Doubtless, on entering Ahab's court, he was obliged to make the same election that Moses did in the house of Pharaoh. "The pleasures of sin, for a season," were as alluring on the one hand, and "the reproaches of Christ" were as cruel from Jezebel and the Baal-serving priests on the other. But this godly man saw that wine, music, luxurious feastings, the flattery of courtiers, and the honours of royalty, did not make their possessors happy. During the two and twenty years that Ahab had them, Obadiah saw their vanity and emptiness, how they harassed the mind with cares, seared the conscience, and hardened the heart. One class of mankind seek happiness in a well regulated heart, in having it imbued with the love and fear of God,

and in being devoted to his service. The other choose the part of Ahab, are scarcely less idolatrous in their worship of money or the world, in some of its forms, than he was of Baal; and each have their reward. Both of these examples have been transmitted for our instruction. There are the life and death of one who "feared the Lord from his youth," set over against the life and death of a worldling, in whose cup of pleasure were mingled all the common ingredients of earthly happiness. The history and end of both, are presented for your consideration in this little book, and you are invited to make your choice between them.

A fourth advantage is safety.

CHAPTER V.

SAFETY.

WHILE a putting off of the decision of Obadiah is attended with increasing hazard in a thousand ways, only they are safe who make it early. I am writing to many who need not be told the dangers that beset the path of youth. What lion-like temptation, in point of strength and destructiveness, to frighten and warn their victims! In all places—the country, the village, and especially in the city, the way that Christ speaks of in which she may go, is exceeding broad. There

are no sins of which human nature is capable that are not committed there, and most of them gilded over and sanctioned by wealth and fashion, and the example of persons in the highest worldly position. We have youth of both sexes, and many of them, who were not excelled in profligacy by the sinners of heathen Corinth, nor of the cities of the plain.

But because so little of this grosser sort of wickedness is visible on the surface of society, too many of our moral and amiable youth are apt to believe that the amount is greatly overrated; an unhappy mistake which makes their own danger the more imminent in proportion to their incredulity. But whether, my young readers, you believe it or not, there is no se-

curity for yourselves against the ruin that has come upon so many others, but the choice of Obadiah. Education, moral principles, a good trade or profession, respect for yourself, or for the opinions of others, may exert a controlling influence for a season. But in the time of strong temptation they will prove as powerless as the withes around the limbs of Samson. Let him among you that thinketh he standeth while resting on any other foundation than Obadiah's, "take heed lest he fall." But if this early choice be essential to the safety of your progress in life, nothing else will sustain you when you come to its close. What your pious friend could tell you of the uncertainty of life in view of your frailty, your exposure to

disease, accidents, by which your life may be abruptly and prematurely ended, has doubtless long been made familiar to most of you. And yet how few are fully aware of what a frightful proportion of the daily bills of mortality is furnished by those who are in the morning of life. What a sermon to our youth is preached in these statistics of the destroyer, and what a boasting of to-morrow, is the postponement of religion. Every other engagement, trade, or profession, dwindles in comparison with this. What solicitude would you feel about your health, and how careful would you be in the use of means to preserve it, did you who read these remarks, believe that three out of every four of your number were never to see the

noon of life. In the cases of those who are spared, does not every observing youth see that men are less disposed to enter the Lord's service as they advance in life. What you witness in others, will probably be true of yourselves, if your life is prolonged, and you wait like Felix, for a more convenient time than youth to be religious in earnest. The question then is brought before you now, for an immediate decision. A hundred books could not give you any aid in making it, which you may not receive directly from God, if you ask it. You have doubtless often revolved the comparative claims of religion and the world, of God and mammon. They are masters you know, whose interests clash, and you cannot serve them both. You must "love the one, and hate the

other, or hold to the one, and despise the other." Choose ye then this day, whom ye will serve. "If the Lord be God," if religion be true, the soul, heaven and hell be realities, then resolve at once, before you lay this book aside, to treat them no longer as fables. But if the world, with all its proffered pleasures and rewards, for the present life and the future, be of more value, can do you more good and give you greater happiness, make choice of them. But let this hour witness the result, whether you will have your part with the enemies of God or his friends, with Obadiah, or with Jezebel and Ahab.

THE END.





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