

present her plea to the king without risking her life by coming unbidden into his presence. We have here a glimpse of female life in the harem of the Persian king.

12. They—That is, Hathach and others.

13. Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape—Esther had not at first made known her nationality to the king, but this being known to others, if not also to the king by this time, would make her escape impossible since even a member of the king's harem would be subject to a decree such as had been issued.

14. Then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place—It has been pointed out that the name of God does not occur in the book of Esther; still this and other passages in the book indicate the faith of Mordecai and others in Jehovah (comp. 3. 2-4).

16. Shushan—One of the three capitals of Persia, situated in the southwestern part of the empire. Its Greek name was Susa. Its modern name is Sus or Shush (comp. 1. 2-7).

Fast ye for me—This fasting was certainly a religious observance, and the purpose of the fast in this case may be assumed to have been prayer and supplication to Jehovah for deliverance of the Jews.

Three days, night or day—Compare note on verse 1, below.

Not according to the law—The law referred to in verse 11, above.

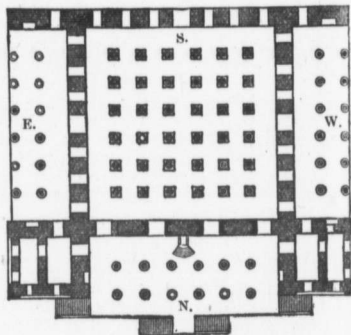
1. The third day—Counting from the day of the agreement between Mordecai and the queen (4. 14), the first day being that on which the agreement to fast was made. The fast, therefore, lasted probably about forty-five hours.

Put on her royal apparel—In chapter 2, verse 17, we are told of Esther's becoming queen and receiving the royal crown.

THE JEWS OF PERSIA.

This book of Esther must be read with a clear understanding of the historical settings of the events which it describes. To begin with, it must be remembered that the time of these events was after the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon. Only a minority of the Jews chose to go back to Jerusalem when the decree of Cyrus authorized the return. The Jews described in the book of Esther were the descendants of that less devout and religiously zealous portion of the captive population that declined to join the company of some fifty thousand, who, in the face of the greatest difficulties, returned again to rebuild the temple and the Holy City. These were voluntary exiles, therefore, who chose to remain among a

The inner court...over against the king's house—We present below a restored plan (by Fergusson) of the great hall of Xerxes at Persepolis, which may be taken to correspond in its main features with the palace of Shushan as well.



XERXES' HALL AT PERSEPOLIS.

"The great central hall has thirty-six columns, and is surrounded on three sides by great porches, each two hundred feet wide by sixty-five feet deep, and each supported by twelve columns. The porches were beyond doubt the great audience halls of the palace. There was no porch, as we might expect in that climate, to the south, but the principal one, both at Susa and Persepolis, was that which faced the north, with a slight inclination to the east. This was the throne room *par excellence* of the palace. The inner court in front of this audience room was probably so called in contradistinction to an outer court beyond it."—*Whedon's Commentary*.

3. It shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom—An example of Oriental hyperbole, the simple meaning of which was, "Thou shalt have anything thou wilt ask."

The Lesson Exposition

heathen people. They did not represent a high type of Jewish character; particularly they did not represent at its best the Jewish religion. They were narrow, with intense race prejudice and animosity, encysted rather than assimilated in the body of Persian society, socially more than religiously incompatible with the people surrounding them, and yet holding to certain traditional forms of religious faith with such tenacity as to add the spirit of acrimonious bigotry to their racial pride. They were not devout. The name of God does not appear in this book of Esther. They are represented as pitilessly cruel and revengeful toward their enemies. We must recognize that the book pictures the people as they were, and does not pretend to approve their spirit. The fact that

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