

Mordecai by secret message urged Queen Esther to plead with the king for the lives of her people.

II. Reasonings of Faith (v. 10-14).

(a) Queen Esther's difficulties seemed insurmountable. (b) By messenger she told Mordecai that even to approach the king unbidden would forfeit her life; how, then, could she plead for her people? (c) Mordecai showed her that the dangers of *faithfulness* were not greater than the dangers of *faithlessness*; (d) that *by somebody* God would surely deliver the Jews; and (e) that the providence which had made her queen might be only the first chapter in her providential career. (f) The omission of the name of God from the narrative throughout does not indicate any skepticism or disregard of God; he is assumed to be standing

"within the shadows

Keeping watch above his own."

III. Plans of Faith (v. 15-17).

(a) Esther first asks for the prayers of all the Jews within reach (fasting was the out-

ward and visible sign of inward and spiritual prayer). (b) She also, and her maidens, will fast and pray. (c) She declares her resolution to perform her lofty and perilous duty, breaking the lower to obey the higher law. (d) This resolution is taken with a clear understanding of the risks: "If I perish, I perish."

IV. The Triumph of Faith (v. 1-3).

(a) After three days of fasting and prayer, (b) Esther began her perilous task by summoning to her aid all her personal attractions, (c) and proceeded unbidden into the presence of the king; (d) but before she had reached the forbidden precincts the king saw her, and (e) "she obtained favor in his sight" ("The hearts of all men are in His hands"). (f) The king gave to Esther a token of favor which insured her safety; (g) and asked her to state her request, promising to grant it even "to the half of the kingdom." (h) We should keep vividly in mind the rest of the story: the queen's clever statement of her request, the salvation of the Jews, and the destruction of their enemies.

The Lesson Word Studies

NOTE.—These Word Studies are based on the text of the Revised Version.

QUEEN ESTHER.—The name "Esther" is derived from "Istar," the name of the great Babylonian goddess, and was given to the heroine of our lesson story probably on her becoming the wife of the Persian king. Her proper Hebrew name was Hadassah (comp. Esth. 2. 7). She was the daughter of Abihail, a Benjaminite, and cousin to Mordecai (Esth. 2. 15). Her ancestor, Kish, had been among the captives led away from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Left an orphan, Esther was brought up by her cousin, Mordecai, who held an office at Shushan in the palace of the king (Esth. 2. 5-7). King Ahasuerus, the well-known Xerxes of profane history, having divorced his wife because of her failing to comply with his commands, caused search to be made for the most beautiful maiden of the realm to become her successor. The choice fell upon Esther, "for the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti." At the counsel of Mordecai, Esther did not make known her parentage and race to the king at first (Esth. 2. 10), but Mordecai himself at heart was a loyal Hebrew and worshiper of Jehovah. As such, he refused to do reverence to Haman, the Agagite, who was second to the king in authority and to whom all subordinates did obeisance. This independence of Mordecai, the Jew, so enraged Haman that he belonged. That his murderous purpose was not successfully carried out was due to the intervention of Queen Esther, who, at the risk of her own life, appeared unbidden in the royal judgment chamber of the king, interceded for her people, and brought about the downfall of Haman and the deliverance of the Jews. The details of the beautiful story of Queen Esther's intercession for her people form the topic of to-day's lesson.

Verse 10. Then.—After Esther had learned from messengers of Mordecai that the king had signed a decree authorizing the extermination of the Jews in all parts of his dominion.

Hathach.—One of the king's chamberlains whom he had appointed to attend upon Esther, the queen.

Mordecai.—The cousin (or possibly, as some have thought, the uncle) and former guardian of Queen Esther.

11. The king.—Ahasuerus, the Xerxes of profane history, king of Persia from 485 to 465 B. C.

The inner court.—The royal throne chamber and principal audience hall of the king.

There is one law for him, that he be put to death.—Literally, *one is his law, to put to death*. That is, the king's law or custom in this matter is one and unchangeable. Every intruder into the royal presence, whoever he be, regardless of rank or station, was put to death.

The golden scepter.—A long tapering staff, the emblem of royalty.

I have not been called... these thirty days.—There seemed, therefore, little probability of Esther having an early opportunity to