

## The Sunday School.

## INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

## LESSON XVI.

April 20 } QUEEN ESTHER. { Esth. iv  
1879. } 10-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."—Ps. xxxvii. 5.

## HOME STUDIES.

- M. Esth. i. 1-22 ..... Vasthi divorced.  
T. Esth. ii. 1-23..... Esther made queen.  
W. Esth. iii. 1-15..... Haman's plot.  
Th. Esth. iv. 1-17. .... Esther's resolve.  
F. Esth. 5, 6..... The king's favor.  
S. Esth. 7, 8..... The plot defeated.  
S. Esth. 9, 10..... The days of Purim.

## HELPS TO STUDY.

A beautiful and romantic story is that of Queen Esther. To understand our lesson we must take a brief glance at the events which preceded it. The story begins in the third year (483 B.C.) of Ahasuerus or Xerxes. At a great feast, which he gave just before he set forth on his disastrous expedition into Greece, and which was kept up with great splendour and prodigality for 180 days, when "his heart was merry with wine," he sent for the queen, Vasthi, that he might show her beauty to the princes and nobles. This was so thoroughly contrary to all ideas of propriety in a land where women are kept exclusively guarded in the harem, that the queen refused to come, and was consequently deposed and disgraced.

Four years afterwards, upon the return of the king from Greece, Esther ("Star of Venus," a Persian name) was chosen from a number of fair maidens to be queen. She was a Jewess, whose Hebrew name was Hadasa, "myrtle," and who, being an orphan, had been brought up by her cousin Mordecai. Soon afterwards Mordecai discovered a conspiracy against the king and was the means of saving his life.

Another character now appears on the scene. Haman, a courtier and flatterer, became the royal favourite and rose to the highest power. All did him reverence except Mordecai, who, being a Jew, would not do homage to this Amalekite (see Ex. xvii. 14; 1 Sam. xv.) This embittered Haman's life, notwithstanding all his honours. He determined to have revenge, not on Mordecai alone, but on his hated race. He represented to the king the dangerous and disloyal character of this people and framed a royal edict for their destruction. Haman was, however, as superstitious as he was wicked, and cast lots to find a lucky day for this act of extermination, which was at last appointed for the 13th day of the 12th month. A whole year was thus, as many estimate, to intervene. Posts conveyed everywhere tidings of this terrible decree, and all, Persians as well as Jews, were filled with consternation. Mordecai, overwhelmed with grief and clothed in sackcloth and ashes, took his position by the king's gate. He was known by the officials to be a relative of the Queen. They told her of him and his mourning. She, in apparent ignorance of the cause of his trouble, sent him other garments, which he refused to accept. She then sent Hatach, the chief eunuch, to enquire what he meant. Mordecai sent her word of all that had happened and of the evil decree, and besought her no longer to conceal her Jewish birth, but to go in to the King and make intercession for her people. Our lesson begins with the Queen's answer.

## I. THE EXCUSE—Vers. 10-12.

The Queen reminds Mordecai of the Persian law. The King was surrounded with mystery, as one lifted up above humanity. None could enter into his presence who was not called, on pain of death, unless the King held out to him the golden sceptre, in token of his favour. Executioners stood at the entrance of the court to put to death all intruders, unless the King interposed to save them. The Queen herself appears to have felt that she was out of favour. She had not been called to come in to him for thirty days, and he may have become indifferent to her.

How different is our king? We know His grace—2 Cor. vii. 9. We are continually called into His presence, and have always "access with confidence," and "boldness to enter in."—Eph. ii. 18; iii. 12; Heb. x. 19.

## II. THE REMONSTRANCE—Vers. 13-14.

Mordecai, in reply to the Queen's excuse, makes a second and more urgent appeal. He appeals, first, to her own love of life. She herself was in danger. Could she hope to escape. There were many rivals who would be glad to betray her. No place is secure from God's wrath. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it. He urges, secondly, God's faithfulness. The Jews were His covenant people. From some other quarter He would provide for their enlargement, that is, release from danger and deliverance. The people of God's special care, in whom there centred so many promises, could not be destroyed.

Faith must still trust, where all seems hopeless. The failure of one great agent will not thwart God's plan. Even if we are unfaithful, God's work will go on, but we lose the reward. Mordecai appeals, thirdly, to the law of opportuni-

ty—Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? *Every life well-lived is working out a divine plan*, although we cannot know what that plan is, until it in God's providence unfolds itself—Gen. xiv. 7; Ps. lxxv. 6, 7; Isai. xiv. 4, 5; Acts vii. 25. Upon the smallest events the greatest results may depend. Every neglect of opportunity is as really sinful as the commission of evil.

## III. THE RESOLVE—Vers. 15-17.

The appeal had its effect. Esther made up her mind to go in to the King. Observe the *spirit* of her resolve. Her dependence is altogether upon God. She realizes the value of sympathy and of united prayer to which our Lord has attached a special blessing—Matt. xviii. 19, 20. The Jews always had prayer with this fasting, so that the mention of the latter implies the first. Our Lord has enjoined prayer and fasting—Matt. xvii. 21. Fasting was in harmony with the chastened and humbled spirit in which they sought God's assistance. The more important our work the more need is there of divine help. There is earnestness in her purpose—so will I go; and recognition of God's will, not desperation, when she adds, and if I perish, I perish—2 Sam. x. 12; Gen. xliii. 14.

With wonderful courage, love of her brethren, and self-sacrifice, Esther resolved to risk her own life to save others. Rom. xvi. 3, 4; and then, with great tact and foresight, she proceeded to carry out her resolve; She will not state her case in open court, lest hostile influences might be aroused. She first wins the King's favour. She then arranges for a banquet, at which she secures Haman's presence. When suddenly challenged he is speechless. He has no time to frame excuses. She identifies herself with her people, and puts her own life, as that which was precious to the King, in the forefront—vers. 16. The King's anger is aroused. Haman suffers on the gallows he erected for Mordecai and the Jews are delivered. God's name does not occur in the book of Esther, but His presence shines throughout it, while it illustrates His providence. Notice four small links in this wonderful chain:—

1. Esther preferred above all the virgins.
2. Mordecai discovering the conspiracy.
3. When Haman casts lots for a lucky day for his scheme, it falls nearly twelve months off, thus giving time for it to be foiled.
4. Most striking of all; whatever Esther's motive for the second postponement of her request (chaps. 5, 8), it was really God directing her; for that very night came the king's discovery of Mordecai's service, and the building of the gallows, and next morning the strange scene of Haman leading Mordecai in state through the city.

EUROPEAN naturalists are investigating the possibility of restocking the Alps with the ibex or wild goat that disappeared about 200 years ago. A few still remain in the Tyrol, and Victor Emmanuel had a flock of about 500 in the Piedmont Mountains, but they will not bear removal.

## THE TIDE OF YEARS.

How slowly pass the years! the maiden said;  
The tedious years, with lagging tread,  
The distant days are full of hopes so sweet;  
Why come they with such tardy feet?

How swiftly come the years! the mother said;  
With rapid steps they softly tread;  
And filled so full with toilings and with cares,  
The fleeting years pass unawares.

The years are flying! cries the ancient dame;  
We scarcely call them by a name  
Before is filled life's chalice to the brim,  
And for earth's scenes our eyes grow dim.

Yet calmly looking o'er the changing tide,  
Whose ebb and flow has been so wide;  
Upon each brilliant crested wave I find  
A different hue to cheer the mind

For mirths and pleasures, trials, griefs and fears,  
Lie mingled in the tide of years;  
And in the shining gold of purest joy  
Is found the strength of pain's alloy.

While thus I'm gazing, hoping, fearing, still,  
I'll sing, though suffering bitter ill;  
And on the ceaseless, restless tide of years  
Approach the land where are no tears.

—The Occident.

## CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER.

How it ripples across the fields and echoes along the hill side, as musical as distant church bells pealing over the grassy meadows, where brown village darlings are gathering buttercups. There are no sounds so sweet to a mother's ear, except, perhaps, the first lisping of an infant's prayer. Children's laughter! How dull the home is wherein its music has once joyously echoed, but now is heard no more. How still is the house when the little ones are asleep and their pattering feet are silent. How easily the fun of a child bubbles forth. Take even those poor, prematurely aged little ones bred in the gutter, cramped in unhealthy homes, and ill-used, it may be by drunken parents, and you will find the child-nature is not all crushed out of them. They are children still, albeit they look so haggard and wan. Try to

excite their mirthfulness, and ere long a laugh rings out, as wild and free as if there were no such thing as sorrow in the world. Let the little ones laugh, then; too soon, alas! they will find cause to weep. Do not try to silence them, but let their gleefulness ring out a glad some peal, reminding us of the days when we too, could laugh without a sigh.

## Children's Corner.

## THE SKILFUL SPINNER.

"YOU spin so fine that it is like thread, mamma. How do you do it?"

"I learned when I was a little girl, Lena, and have practised a great deal."

"Are there others that can spin so nicely?"

"Certainly. I know one, who spins such fine threads that many hundreds together are not so large as one fibre of this flax, and you know how many fibres I twist together to make this thread that seems so fine to you."

"She is surely a skilful spinner. Where did she learn to spin?"

"She never learned. As soon as she saw the light of the world, she began to spin, while other little children can do nothing but sleep, drink and cry."

"That is strange. This wonderful spinner must be very rich. How much money she must earn by her beautiful spinning!"

"She earns nothing, and possesses nothing."

"Then she is poor; and yet you have told me that industrious people who learn to do one thing well, are never really poor. Why does she not take what she spins to the store?"

"Because no one will buy it."

"Then she might take it from house to house."

"That she often does, but something bad always happens. The servant always tears the web, and it is so fine it is not very strong."

"That is very bad in the girl."

"Not so bad. We should scold Mary if she allowed her to remain here."

"That is very strange, to tear such a beautiful web when I am not permitted to tear a piece of paper unnecessarily. But why does she not carry her thread to the weaver? He could make it into nice cloth and she could easily sell that."

"The weaver cannot use it, and he drives her out the same as other people."

"Then what does the poor spinner do with her thread?"

"She weaves it herself and we call it the cobweb." Now you know who this skilful spinner is."

## A CUNNING DOG.

DOGS sometimes exhibit traits that are human; and we sometimes wonder whether Pythagoras was very far wrong in his theory that the souls of men at their death, and also before their creation, inhabit the bodies of animals.

Certainly, if so, the soul of a certain little black spaniel named "Nig" must originally have belonged to some greedy boy whose indulgent parents fed him upon knick-knacks until he died; for never was there an animal more particular in his tastes with regard to

† The writer is unknown, but he must have been an eye-witness and familiar with Persian customs. The events he narrates took place in the fifty-eight years' interval between the 6th and 7th chapters of Ezra, about forty years after the dedication of the second temple.