

eye. If they had been serving God faithfully and fully they would have been more sensitive to their own faults. Self-complacency is a weed that withers in the presence of God.

V. 10. Turned the captivity. "A saying which early became proverbial among the Israelites, whose whole national history was a series of deliverances; but it may have been one of very early origin, and familiar to our kindred races."—Cook. "When he prayed for his friends." "As though that act, the crown and consummation of goodness, was the immediate cause of his reward."—Cook. Beautiful is charity in the eye of God. Love to our fellow-men is closely connected with love to God. It is in truth, part of it. Twice as much. All his substance was doubled exactly (compare Job 1: 2 and Job 42: 12). His children, however, numbered the same as before. His first children were not lost; they were still his, and now that as many more were given him, his possessions in that respect were also doubled.

REMARKS.

1. In this story, we see that Satan was foiled. Job did not cast away his allegiance to God, though tried severely. And when the history of each child of God is told, it will be the same; each one will be a trophy of grace. And when the history of the world is told, it will still be the same. Whatever the appearance of things may be now, the end will be; Satan foiled, Christ and His church triumphant.

2. Perhaps Job's redoubled prosperity was necessary at that time to prove to all men God's delight in Job; but it is spiritual, and not temporal blessings that are the measure of God's favour to us.

3. It is a good thing to pray for others; our souls are then abundantly watered. Nothing is a greater help to a kindly, charitable disposition towards any one than to pray for him.

April 20.—Queen Esther.—Esther 4: 10-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.—Psalm 37: 5.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

This book appears as if it were written by some Jew, living in the midst of the scenes he describes. The writer was well acquainted with even the private affairs of Esther and Mordecai, and would therefore seem to be Mordecai himself. This is the general opinion. There are strong internal proofs of the truth of the book,—the accurate knowledge of Persian names and the adherence to the facts of history and chronology. The feast of Purim, kept up to this day, points to the history in this book as its origin. The Jews hold the book of Esther in high esteem, describing, as it does, the great honour to which their nation was advanced. "It is a saying of Maronites that, in the days of Messiah, the prophetic and hagiographical books will pass away, except the book of Esther, which will remain with the Pentateuch. This book is read through by the Jews in their synagogues at the feast of Purim, when it was, and is still in some synagogues, the custom at the mention of Haman's name, to hiss, and stamp, and clench the fist, and cry, 'Let his name be blotted out; may the name of the wicked rot.'"—Smith's *Bib. Dict.*

It is remarked that the name of God does not once occur in this book, yet God dwells in it as the defender of His people.

INTRODUCTION.

The Ahasuerus of this book has been supposed to be Artaxerxes Longimanus, but it seems more probable that Xerxes, predecessor of Artaxerxes, is the king referred to. For the argument

leading to this conclusion see Smith's *Bib. Dict.* the article on Ahasuerus.

The third year of the reign of Ahasuerus he held a great feast, and it was then that Vashti incurred his displeasure, and was deposed. In the seventh year, he selected Esther as his wife. In the twelfth year of his reign, Haman concocted a scheme for the destruction of the Jews, a gigantic revenge for Mordecai's contempt. Mordecai conveyed to Esther a copy of the king's decree, permitting Haman to carry out this scheme. Mordecai charged Esther "to go in to the king, and make request before him for their people."

EXPOSITION.

V. 10. Esther. "A Persian word, meaning, 'the star of planet Venus.'"—Stanley. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, signified 'myrtle.' A beautiful woman, patriotic, pious, 'r'w'ays gratefully submissive to the friend of her youth, so attractive as to 'find favour in the eyes of all those that looked upon her.' Hatach, Chief eunuch. There was no more direct way of communicating with Mordecai than through the chief eunuch. This officer is generally some faithful old servant of the king. Mordecai. The name Mordecai in *Esther* 2: 2 and *Nehemiah* 7: 7 may apply to this same person.

V. 11. The king was surrounded by a circle of selected officers, and all communication with him must be through the medium of one of them. One can easily see what great evils would spring out of this order of things. "For in general, the king must see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and receive their reports, and if any one would venture to present to him a complaint, petition, appeal, or information, he must do it at the hazard of his life. By this method, the king also was excluded from liberal society and converse."—Scott. "We are made to feel the inaccessibility of the king to any but the seven councillors, the awe with which his presence was surrounded, which required all persons introduced to him to appear before him, and, on the verge of death, to cover their hands in the folds of their sleeves, the executioners standing round with their axes, instantly to behead any rash intruder."

—Stanley. Our law. Only one way of treating intruders. Golden sceptre. "In all the numerous representations of Persian kings at Persepolis, there is not one in which the monarch does not hold a long tapering staff (which is probably the sceptre of Esther) in his right hand."—Cook. These thirty days. The king may have desired to see her for so long, Esther may have thought herself out of favour.

V. 13. Esther's race would almost surely be discovered by some enemy, and she also would fall under the king's immutable decree. *V. 14.* Mordecai has no fear that God would desert His people at this crisis. His strong faith in God assures him of the contrary. From some quarter the Lord would send deliverance. Mordecai was sure of that. His anxiety is that Esther shall not shrink from the heroic duty laid upon her. "It is remarkable that these sentiments, so replete with faith and piety, are conveyed to us without the mention of God, or Providence. This seems to be done intentionally."—Scott. Who knoweth. God might have brought Esther to her exalted position for the very purpose of saving His people through her means.

V. 16. Fast ye for me. Prayer is not named here, but it is understood. The fasting was intended to gain God's favour for His people. We may be sure they did not refrain from prayer, nor did Esther fail to request their prayers, though the writer does not refer to it. Here again there seems to be intentional omission of reference to the name of God. It was owing to these peculiarities that some persons based the theory that this Book at first formed part of the Persian chronicles, and that it was

transcribed by Divine command. If I perish, I perish. Esther has made up her mind, that she will accept this mission, even though she should perish performing it. "Esther is the pattern of a truly great character; of love to her country, of compassion, generous resolution, courage and patience."—Pyle. We observe her constancy towards Mordecai and the nation she belonged to, her submissiveness to her old guardian, even when she was a queen, and her faith in prayer, and the intercession of God's people. What an ample revelation of her character is given in the few simple touches of the narrative. She was not merely beautiful in person, she possessed the higher and more enduring charm of a noble character, generous, faithful, and self-sacrificing. The subsequent narrative shows the success of her pleading. The king could not revoke his former edict, but he issued a new decree, which formed a kind of antidote for the evils permitted by the first.

REMARKS.

1. The hand of God works silently in all the history of the world. Wars, treaties, revolutions, all are only so many items in the perfect story of God's providence. In some mysterious way, the deeds of man accomplish the ends of God. There is an overruling, restraining hand, which suffers the evil, only so far as it works ultimate good, and which says to the tide of passion, 'thus far, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.'

2. How much easier to approach God than to approach one of the kings of earth? There is no etiquette to confuse one, no prescribed garment to wear, no host of officials to convey or announce us; anywhere, at any time, in any circumstances, without formality, without any claim to the privilege, we may approach our God, through the One Mediator. We may have an intimate, private interview with Him, and be sure of having a favourable hearing, and of receiving a great blessing.

3. Let us be ready for great and noble deeds, by faithfulness to the smallest duties.

April 27.—The Coming Saviour.—Isaiah 42: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.

And to a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Matthew 3: 17

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH was the son of Amos; but who Amos was, what his tribe, occupation, social position, etc., we do not know. Hence we know nothing of Isaiah apart from his prophetic work. He prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." "The ordinary chronology gives 758 B. C. for the date of Jotham's accession, and 698 for that of Hezekiah's death. This gives us a period of 60 years. And since Isaiah's ministry commenced before Uzziah's death (how long we know not), supposing him to have been no more than 20 years old when he began to prophesy, he would have been 80 or 90 at Manasse's accession."—Smith. (Manasse succeeded Hezekiah.) We know not how long Isaiah lived after Manasse began to reign. Some think it may have been ten or fifteen years, and some think that he was put to death in the first year of Manasse. So we know not the exact date of his birth or death. It is generally thought that he was put to death by being sawn asunder, and that the reference is to Him in *Heb. 11: 37*. Manasse was a wicked man; in 2 Kings 21: 16 it is said that he "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." Isaiah, being a good man and perhaps reproving the wicked king, probably suffered along with other innocent ones.

To fix the date of Isaiah in the minds of the