

tains of joy and the wells of sorrow are not far apart. Our emotions are often mixed; we weep when overwhelmed with grief, and tears often furnish an outlet for our feelings when we are happy.

Here we have the old and the young working together; memories crowd in upon the old and their hearts are unable to express the satisfaction that they feel. The young, with no memories of the past, live in the present and in their visions of the future; their joy finds an outlet in noise. To the old it was another passover; to the young it was more like our Fourth of July—a national birthday.

The text tells us that the shouts of joy and the noise of the weeping were so mingled that those who were afar off could not separate the sounds. It was a great day, such as few have seen, for days are made by the events that are crowded into them.

At this distance we can only estimate the intensity of the feeling, but, recalling some outstanding instance of individual joy, we can multiply it by the number of the Children of Israel and then multiply that sum by the number that represents the ratio between national enthusiasm and religious feeling.

BUILDING ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN

The elders of the Jews builded the temple through the prophesying of the prophets; the men of God superintended the work and communicated with the elders as they received the direction. They were engaged in a holy work and they yielded themselves to the will of God; it was His house upon which they worked and they were faithful to His designs.

They builded and they prospered, as people always prosper when they work according to God's plans. It is when we substitute man's plans for the plans of the Creator that we meet unexpected difficulties and come up against impossibilities. There are no blind alleys on God's highways; He never leads us into any situation without providing a way out if we but trust and obey.

The house was finished and the Children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the people, kept the dedication of the house, and they did it with joy.

The Christian life is a simple life. It is built upon a definite plan and is conducted along well-settled lines that radiate from the religious center. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Christian life develops like a tree, from the trunk out. One will never find the kingdom of God by seeking first something else, but if he seeks the kingdom of God first, all other good things will be added to him. When the Children of Israel were obedient, all went well; when they were disobedient they were punished until they repented. When they returned to God and proved their repentance by their works, they were forgiven and life became a delight.

There is no reason why any Christian's life should be dark or gloomy. "Be of good cheer" was Christ's salutation. He would not that any one should be sad.

Just as with the Children of Israel obedience was followed by joy that approached ecstasy, so today and in the days to come, obedience will bring brightness into the life so that even our sorrows will be relieved by faith.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" if we are about the Master's business and willing to His will.

THE TWO GREAT WOMEN OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR AUGUST 13

(Esther iv:10—v:3)

Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer.

Go, gather together all the Jews that are in

Shushan and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.

And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.

Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

Esther is not the only heroine the the book of the Bible that has made her name immortal. She is not the only woman mentioned in its ten wonderfully dramatic chapters whose life holds a great lesson for men and women of all times and all countries.

Vashti, though her part has been considered a minor one, should not be overlooked, especially in these latter days. She proved that she possessed real nobility; she defended, not the welfare of a group, but all womanhood, and she had no guardian to spur her on by appeals to race pride and by threats addressed to her fear for herself.

We read that Ahasuerus, King of Persia, Vashti's husband, was a typical Oriental monarch, with a domain that extended "from India even unto Ethiopia." It was divided into 127 provinces.

In the third year of his reign he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants. He showed them "the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and four-score days." Then he gave a seven days' feast to all the people who were present in the Shushan palace. "Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus."

VASHTI'S NOBLE REFUSAL

On the seventh day, "when the heart of the king was merry with wine," he commanded the seven chamberlains to "bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on." But Vashti refused to exhibit her beauty before a lot of drunken revellers—"therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him."

Then the king called the wise men together and asked, "What shall be done to Vashti?"

Memucan one of the princes of Persia and Media, suggested that Vashti, the queen, had not only wronged the king, but all the princes and all the people as well. Memucan seems to have been the prototype of quite a numerous tribe of which some arguments which he employed have been repeated in modern times. Here is his suggestion to the king:

"For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported. The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

"If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, . . . that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she."

SELF-RESPECT ABOVE POSITION

This pleased the king—he was just drunk enough to listen to such advice—and he issued an order that Vashti should no more come before the king, and he gave her royal estate unto another.

Vashti may be regarded as one of the earliest martyrs to the cause of temperance. Her refusal to obey her husband, when he was merry with wine, cost her her crown, but she preserved her self-respect. She deserves to be remembered now when wives have ceased to be the helpless victims of intoxicated husbands.

The dethroning of Vashti opened the way for the selection of a new queen. Mordecai, a Jew who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity, entered his uncle's daughter, Esther, whom he had raised as a member of his family, in the contest, which was open to "all the fair young virgins." After the 12 months required for their purification, the maidens were brought before the king, and the king chose Esther.

We read that "the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour 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."

AN INFAMOUS CONSPIRACY

This brings us to the lesson. Haman, who had been promoted to the chief place under the king, was enjoying the reverence of the king's servants—that is, of all except Mordecai, who "bowed not, nor did him reverence." This filled Haman with wrath and for this lack of reverence on the part of one Jew, Haman decided to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom.

He did not tell the king his personal grievance, but did as the wicked always do, viz., pretended that he was prompted by noble motives, for the king's benefit, as he put it, he asked authority to kill them. Mordecai had concealed Esther's race and the king did not know that his queen was included in the decree. (Haman probably did not know it.) The conspiracy promised to be successful; orders were sent forth to "destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day."

When Mordecai learned what was done he at once put on sackcloth and went before the king's gate. Esther, learning of his mourning, dispatched a trusted messenger to him to know the cause. He sent word to her, urging her to go in unto the king and make supplication in behalf of the people.

TWO WONDERFUL UTTERANCES

Esther sent back word that, according to the law, any one presumptuous enough to go before the king without being called would be put to death, unless the king held out the golden scepter, adding that she had not been called into the king's presence for thirty days.

Mordecai then appealed to her own interest; he sent back an answer to her. "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." And then the faith of Mordecai blazed forth, he spoke in the tone of the prophets and warned Esther that if she held her peace, deliverance would arise to the Jews from another place and that she and her father's house would be destroyed. He concluded with a wonderful sentence, often used in appeals to those in authority: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther, strengthened and inspired by Mordecai's appeal, returned an answer that ranks with the words of Mordecai. She asked Mordecai to gather together all the Jews in Shushan to fast for her for three days and three nights; she and her maidens would fast also, and then she promised Mordecai, "So will I go in unto the king, which according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

A DRAMATIC CONTRAST

Behold the contrast! On one side was the chief man of the kingdom, with a decree authorizing him to kill all the Jews, and with all the power of the kingdom to carry out the conspiracy. On the other side was a Jew condemned to death and a Jewish queen whom her husband had unknowingly included in the death sentence. What an unequal combat and what a difference in character is disclosed!

The scheming Haman, working under cover and practicing deceit, was seemingly near to a wicked triumph, but he had not numbered the unseen forces—the hosts, concealed upon the mountain top, which form the unconquerable reserve in every righteous cause. Moses declares that one with God shall chase a thousand and two shall put ten thousand to flight. Mordecai was number one and Esther was number two in the rival army that was to shatter the plans of Haman.

The Jews fasted, Mordecai and Esther with them. And on the third day Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house; she obtained favor in the sight of the king; he held out the golden scepter; the crisis was past—she had triumphed. The king asked what she desired and she invited him and Haman to a banquet with her that day. When the two guests appeared and the king asked what her petition was, Esther deferred the presentation of her petition and asked them to be her guests again on the following day.

A HUMOROUS SITUATION

Haman, in the meantime, had further occasion to be stirred with wrath against Mordecai for lack of reverence. Unaware of impending peril, he ordered that a gallows fifty cubits high be made for Mordecai.

Something also happened to the king. That night he could not sleep; he spent his restless hours listening to the reading of the chronicles.

It so happened—was it just an accident?—that they read to the king of the act of Mor-